

ZION INDEPENDENT CHAPEL, MORLEY, NEAR LEED

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In the last decade of the 18th century, during the ministry of the Rev thomas Clough at the Old New Congregational Chapel, as it was called, a section of the worshippers resolved to withdraw and worship in a private house at Churwell, just outside the town. After meeting for a while the house proved too small to accommodate the people and a resolution was passed to build a chapel, each member of the small band engaging to exert himself to the utmost of his ability. In the year 1804 they erected a chapel near the top of Churwell Hill at a cost of little more than £300 and, from its proximity to Daffil (or Daffield) Wood, it was called 'Daffil Chapel.' The first and only stated minister who ever occupied the pulpit was Mr Nathaniel Dickenson, a native of Morley, and one of their own number. He was a man of eminent piety and, though possessed of few scholarly attainments, was distinguished by a strong and active mind. He was never ordained to the pastoral office as the ministers in the district refused him the rite on the grounds that "he was self-taught, and would not hold on in the work of preaching for more than a year or two." Nevertheless, he preached for the space of forty years with great acceptance and his labours were rewarded with success. He finished his course on the 16th May, 1846, in the 73rd year of his age. His loss was long and deeply felt and his memory still fragrant in the recollection of subsequent generations.

One can only conjecture as to why a section of worshippers left the original chapel in Morley but, knowing by report the forthright candour of Zion's founding fathers revealed in the *Articles of Faith* (which are still adhered to today), one can state with reasonable assurance that the matter related to God's Sovereignty. The Church was never hyper-Calvinist but it must be remembered that, in its formative years, it was not considered as pressing to practise the 'great commision' – it was necessary but not pressing. In those days materialism was less visible and faith was more in evidence. To the casual observer, except in the

doctrine revealed in the preaching, there would have been little to have distinguished the various nonconformist churches in the area but, Daffil Chapel at Churwell (and later Zion at Morley), were essentially different from others as is revealed in its *Articles of Faith*.* These consisted of twenty-three closely-worded articles bearing upon the Calvinistic faith and the doctrines of grace. The church, like all fledgling bodies, took time to be led as to what they should believe and the *Articles* consequently took ten years to formulate. The original church members also entered into a church covenant and some fifty or so, led by Nathaniel Dickenson, solemnly bound themselves to a further nine articles of pious duty.

There was always a forthright candour present in the church, which at times revealed a certain likeable piquancy. Two of the 'folk lores' handed down by word of mouth from Churwell illustrate this. It came to the notice of the church that a well known evangelist was soon to come to nearby Morley and it was stated, moreover, that he would convert the whole of the town. One of the congregation at Churwell had a wayward daughter, the nature of whose shortcomings one can only guess at. The father, on hearing of the evangelist and the associated claim, stated, "If this evangelist can convert my daughter 'Effie,' I will give him a cow" (pronounced then as 'coo'). Probably in the prevailing domestic system this offer would have been easy to fulfil. The statement no doubt brought smiles to the faces of the hearers but the smiles of those at Churwell would also have reflected the biblical truths regarding the elect and reprobate, which were seemingly secondary to the claims of the evangelist.

The second story concerns a midweek meeting at Churwell. After the meeting a new attender – a complete stranger – announced to the congregation that the Lord had sent him to preach to them. Not taken aback in any way and displaying an equal candour, the elders stated that they were puzzled because the Lord had not revealed this to them! "Try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1).

In 1850 the congregation, who chiefly resided at Morley, determined to build a new chapel at Morley and to this end bought a suitable plot of land in the centre of the town. On this they erected the new Chapel seating 600 persons and laid out a burial ground and this was later followed by an equally commodious Sunday School building and Manse for the minister. The cost of the Chapel was £1200 and the opening services took place in

* Copies of these are available for perusal on request – Ed.

1851.

The church prospered numerically – or rather was blessed by God – up to and including the First World War. During this time the horizontal straight lines of pews were superseded by a tiered arrangement of fine quality oak pews. Zion thus became a "preacher's chapel" where the occupant of the pulpit could with ease survey all the assembled congregation. During this period also, the church saw a need to have its own hymnal which, as the preface states, would accord with those blessed truths held dear by the church from its formation. Such a hymnal was in fact produced having over 1100 compositions faithful to the Calvinistic character of the church.

In more recent times the old Sunday School was removed and in 1991, owing to structural defects, the Chapel itself had to be demolished. However, the original oak pews, pulpit, communion and other artefacts were retained, thus acknowledging the debt to previous generations. Zion now has a new modern church building with conventional seating for fifty and, with the completion of the new facilities, accommodation for fifty more. It is therefore comfortably placed to accommodate a large increase. The church has also retained the land on which the original Chapel was situated and is thus well placed for future spatial extension. The church's confidence in the future is further evidenced in the fact that it has been thought desirable to enlarge the Trust which has the oversight of Zion's affairs. There are seasons when the Lord does bless His church. This is not yet the time but Zion, adhering to the Lord's precepts, is waiting with quiet confidence for such a season.

A need is felt at the present time for a minister or under-shepherd. The church is blessed by a number of itinerant preachers who willingly minister the Word but for many years the increasing burden of organisational and preaching duties have fallen upon the shoulders of the Church Secretary.

This short account of Zion Chapel, Morley, and Daffil Chapel, Churwell, could be extended indefinitely as many of the church archives have yet to be examined.

We would solicit your prayers for this Free and Sovereign Grace cause in Morley.