A Brief Historical Account

of

Victoria Road Congregational Church



NORTHAMPTON

2019 – the year that
Victoria Road Congregational Church
is celebrating being 150 years old.

The current building is 130 years old this year.

The organ is 120 years old this year.

This booklet is based on previous published information in earlier documents.

1869 – The First Church



ON OR ABOUT March 1869, the Rev E. T. Prust, the Pastor of Commercial Street Congregational Church, established a Sunday School at the Co-operative Room, Wellingborough Road, to serve the area between the Kettering and Wellingborough Roads.

Every church has its history. That of Victoria Road has been full of life and incident. It began in the service for divine worship, conducted by the Rev T. C. Manton and Mr Coope, in the Co-operative Stores at the corner of Market Street and Wellingborough Road, and in the Gregory Street Sunday School connected with Commercial Street Church.

The two movements were united under the direction and pastoral oversight of Rev Edmund Thornton Prust. On the 2nd May 1869, a Sunday School was started in the Co-operative Stores, with Mr Benjamin Barton as superintendent. Eighteen children were enrolled

as scholars. In a few months the Sunday school had grown from 18 to 150; and the congregation filled the large room of the stores to overflowing.

On 1st November 1869, a farewell meeting was held and the 150 pupils transferred to the 'Iron Church' in Victoria Road, which Rev Prust had constructed at his own expense.

Mr Prust, who had resolved from the first to make these services preliminary to more extended operations, at once erected in Victoria

Road an iron church and schoolroom, which were opened on 3rd November 1869. The Rev. Baldwin Brown B.A., of Brixton, London, preached in the afternoon, and the Rev R. W. Dale M.A. of Birmingham, in the evening.



This building is worthy of note in that it was 57 feet by 35 feet, with a tower at the front of about 60 feet high. It had Gothic windows in the sides and Rose windows in the end gables. There was a gallery at the West end and could accommodate over 400 people. In addition, there was a schoolroom at the East end, which could hold 250 children.

The movement was carried out by Mr Prust from beginning to end, at his own expense. A few years later he crowned his liberality by handing over to the church, under a deed of conveyance, the whole of the property, including land, iron building, and two freehold cottages in Cyril Street.

For some years the pulpit was supplied by ministers of the district and others. On the 21st April 1874, the church was formed. 44

members were enrolled, and an invitation was given to the Rev R. S. Holmes, then a student of Cheshunt College, to become the first pastor. Mr Holmes began his ministry the following month.

He was succeeded by the Rev Philip M. Eastman of Honiton, Devon, who began his ministry in November 1877. A year and 10 months sufficed to round it off. It ended in discord and contention, which left the Church in a greatly weakened state.

On 18th October 1880 The Rev E.T. Prust, by a Trust Deed of Conveyance appointed seven men as Trustees of the Church Property. In 1882 he added the two cottages in Cyril Street and in his usual generous way, arranged that the conveyance should be made at no cost to the Church.

For some time the pastorate was vacant, but on the 20th April 1881, a unanimous invitation was given to the Rev Herbert J. L. Matson, a student of New College, London, which he accepted. Mr Matson took up his duties shortly afterwards and stayed for 40 years. During this time the Church grew in strength and influence and the Pastor became well known in the town and surrounding district.

At the Annual General Meeting on 10th January 1882, Deacons were appointed for the first time. Four in number and at the same meeting proposals were made, and later confirmed at the Special Meeting of Church and Congregation on Wednesday 18th January 1882, that a fund be set up to build a new church and schoolrooms on the present site.

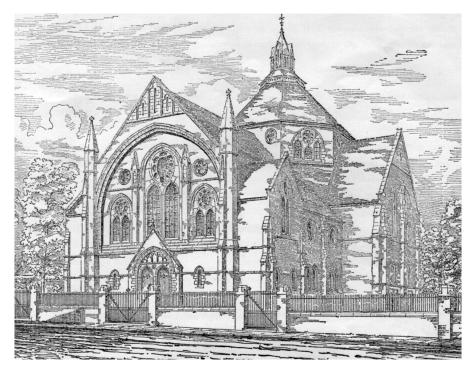
It was not, however, until the 19th March 1888, that the building was begun, the memorial stones being laid on the 17th July of that year, by Mr N. P. Sharman, J.P., of Wellingborough, and Mr W. B. Randall, J.P., of Southampton, nephew of the Rev E.T. Prust.

Mr Matson was Mayor's Chaplain on three occasions and for 33 years, was secretary to the Northamptonshire Congregational Council and its Chairman in 1921. He served for many years on the Board of Management of the Northampton Hospital and in 1922, was made an Honorary Member of The Congregational Union of England and

Wales. He died on 1st September 1928, and two years later a stained glass window in the North transept was dedicated to his memory.

The iron church was used until July 1887, when it was sold to the Episcopal Church of St. Martin's, Edinburgh for £200.

1889 – The Second Church



This is a line drawing of the New Church and Schoolrooms, which it was *proposed* to build on the site of the present iron structure. There was a pressing necessity of either renovating, at considerable cost, the iron church, or erecting a permanent and more convenient building in its place.

The actual building, the one still in use today, was a little different to the above proposal. The obvious differences being that the tower was never built and the current porch was not built then – but was added in 1907.

Since the iron church was erected, the population of the neighbourhood had more than trebled, and a more commodious Church, to meet the religious requirements of the district was needed. The average attendance of scholars was nearly 400, and could be

greatly increased, but the accommodation was not sufficient even for that number.

The Congregation, which was composed almost entirely of the working classes, had, in addition to supporting all the institutions connected with the Church, already subscribed £750 to the Building Fund, and promises of a further £300 had also been received. It is estimated that the iron church and schools would realise at least £250 – thus raising the amount to £1,300.

The land and buildings were generously placed in the hands of Trustees by the late Rev E.T. Prust, who, in a letter received from him shortly before his death, said: "I am very glad to find that the desire is so strong among the people to convert the temporary church into a permanent building. The sooner this can be carried out the better. I wish you very much success in the contemplated effort."

The project had also received the approval and support of the various ministers and churches of the town, and the Congregational Chapel Building Society.

The Church was constructed to hold sitting accommodation in the sanctuary for 650 worshippers. The schoolrooms and classrooms, which are estimated to hold 600 children, are arranged under the church, but not underground. They are entered on the level from the street at the back, Cyril Street. This is 10 or 12 feet lower than Victoria Road, from which the church itself is reached by a short flight of steps.

There are the usual vestries, storerooms, lavatories, etc. The structure is built throughout, in a most substantial manner, of local bricks and selected Bath stone, and no part has been elaborated at the expense of another.

The style of the building is a simple treatment of early Gothic.

The central portion of the interior is spanned by four wide and lofty arches, each of them some 26 feet span, while arcades of smaller arches, on each side of the nave, divide the passageways from the seats.

In the transept the seating is arranged on a series of raised levels.

The pulpit is placed at the corner on the north side, and the organ and choir platform in a half-octagonal recess or apse, the width of the nave, affording ample accommodation for a large choir.

There are no galleries, but these can be erected when necessary.

Matthew Holding, Esq, A.R.I.B.A. of Northampton was the Architect, and Mr J.T.Wingrove of Northampton, the builder. The cost of the building was £3,600. The debt was £1,280.

Work commenced on the new building on 19th March 1888 and on the 6th March 1889, the church and schools were opened for public worship. The Rev Dr. Stevenson, of Brixton, preached in the afternoon, and the Rev Dr. Clifford in the evening.

The Church continued in the new building with all branches and agencies growing and gaining in strength and usefulness.

Since the opening of the new building, the most remarkable feature in the history of the church has been the development of the work amongst the young. A Young People's Guild and a Society of Christian Endeavour have been established, and have undoubtedly prevented that leakage of the elder scholars of which formerly it was the custom to complain.

The schools are well filled every Sunday, and the members on the church roll now number 140.

1889 – The Church grows

High points during these years included the installation and dedication of a new organ in 1899. In the following year electric lighting was introduced and the Church re-decorated.

In 1907, a new porch was added. Presented by Mr F. G. Adnitt J.P. in recognition of his escape from an earthquake.

In 1910 the chairs and Communion Table were presented. Also in that year Mr Rowland Sharp founded the first non-conformist Scout group in the country.

After the Great War, a Memorial Window was unveiled, together with a brass tablet listing the names of those who died. After the Second World War a further tablet was added naming the men who gave all in the defence of freedom.

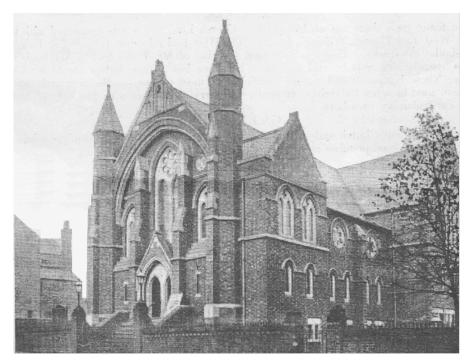
On the retirement of The Rev H. J. L. Matson in 1921, the church called the Rev D. J. Wathan to be its fourth Pastor. He accepted and continued in the ministry to the Church until 1941, being succeeded in the following year by The Reverend Norman Sugden who served until 1945.

In 1923 electric blowing equipment was added to the organ and six years later, Mrs S. Stringer completed 50 years as organist. She held this post for a further 13 years, to be succeeded by her nephew, Mr H. B. Stringer, who served the church faithfully until his death in 1982.

On November 10th, 1926 the 16th Northampton Boys' Brigade Company was formed by Mr.W.A. Tebbutt. He was a Staff Sargeant in the 1st Northampton Company and remained Captain at Victoria Road until 1932. Mr. S.W. Hardwick became Captain in 1932, retiring in 1968. Mr. F. Ager was Captain from 1968 to 1986. Mr J. Evans took over in 1986 until the company's closure in 2011.

In 1927, the chairs for the choir were donated.

In 1935, a savings scheme was organised by Mr Alfred Harrison



for the purpose of buying chairs for the Sunday School and 112 were obtained by this method. Each having the name of its purchaser carved on the back.

The sixth minister was The Rev Albert J. Herring (1946-1951), who was followed two years later by The Rev Malcolm D. Whyte (1953-1956).

The Rev William J. Brown ministered to the Church from 1957 until the end of 1962 and The Rev John Harrington for two years from August 1968.

Prior to the induction of the Rev Albert J. Herring, a manse was purchased at 63 Victoria Road. Before The Rev John Harrington joined us, this was sold and 68 Birchfield Road bought. After Mr. Harrington left, this was let to the Pastor of a West Indian Pentecostal Church, which for a number of years, shared our premises on Sundays.

During the following decade the two cottages in Cyril Street were

sold and the money invested to provide a valuable source of income for the Church.

Much re-decoration in the schoolrooms has taken place and the kitchen arrangements improved out of all recognition.

After the Rev John Harrington left us in 1970, we were led by the Rev W. L. Wooding, who acted as our part-time pastor until 1972.

In that year, we voted against the merger with the Presbyterians and joined the newly formed Congregational Federation, in order to retain our Congregational principles.

The Rev Philip Baker Morris was inducted in 1976 as our parttime pastor and stayed with us until his resignation in 1984.

Since 1980 many improvements have taken place. The Sanctuary has been redecorated and new gas heating installed. Gifts in the form of new sound equipment and new hymn books have been presented to the church.

After the untimely death of Mrs Ruby Plowman in 1986, a silver Minister's Communion Set was bought from a special fund, set up in her memory.

We invited Mr Anthony Avery to act as our part-time pastor in 1987. He accepted and was inducted in October of that year. He brought to the church new life and ideas.

To celebrate the Centenary of our Church Building, special events took place between March 1988 and March 1989, including a special service for those who had been baptised or married in the church.

The Rev William Brown M.A. and Rev Jeffrey Davison B.Sc. B.D., who attended the Sunday School and was a Warrant Officer in the Boys' Brigade, were invited to lead our worship on Sunday 5th March 1989 to mark the Centenary of the completion of the Church Building.

Many other gifts, including Hymn Books in memory of Mrs Stafford have been given and much voluntary work has been done by various Church Members. To them the Church gives her grateful thanks.

1994 was an important one in the life the Church. The format of the morning Service was changed, with the start time being brought forward to 10.30am and a Family and Parade Service started on the third Sunday of each month, followed by a time of coffee and chat after the Service.

Mr Robert Davison stood down as Organist, having served so faithfully for so many years. He was succeeded by Mr Lincoln Noel who accepted the appointment of Director of Music.

The Wives Circle celebrated their 40th Anniversary with a special Service being held on September 11th.

The most momentous event in the year was the Ordination to the Ministry of the Church of Rev Tony Avery. This followed seven years dedicated and loving service as our Pastor. The Ordination Service was held on October 15th.

On March 18th 1995 the Church was honoured to host the East Midlands Region of the Congregational Federation's Spring Assembly, when Congregationalists from various parts of the Region came together for a Service and meeting.

The Church was able to transfer from using the Congregational Praise hymn books to Mission Praise hymn books, following a generous donation in loving memory of Mrs Margaret Saywell.

In 1997 Joan and Bob Davison retired from the position of Joint Treasurers of the Church after 40 years of dedicated service in the position. They had, indeed, followed Joan's uncle, Mr Fred Wells who had served the Church in that capacity for the previous 50 years.

1998 saw the upgrading and integration of the sound system provided by a legacy in memory of Mrs Jean Arnold, who had served the Church in a great many capacities for several decades.

This was able to be linked to the recording system, installed the previous year from a legacy in memory of Mrs Doris llett.

1999 was not only the 125th Anniversary of the formation of the

Church, it also signaled the 110th Anniversary of the present Church building and the 100th Anniversary of the organ. Indeed a most memorable year in the life of Victoria Road Congregational Church.

In 2002 we added a disabled ramp access to our Big Hall. We also added a disabled toilet to our sanctuary and installed a handrail for easier access to the sanctuary.

A disabled toilet was installed in our downstairs corridor in 2010.

In 2011 the 16th Northampton Boys' Brigade sadly closed it's doors for the last time.

In 2012 Vernon Terrace School started a Sure Start facility in Victoria Road's Schoolrooms five days a week. This was a great success for both the church and the school but due to politics it was closed after just two years.

We re-decorated our sanctuary and extended the coffee area in 2013. Working from mobile towers the decorators completed this large area in just five weeks. We then re-carpeted the whole area.

Rev Tony Avery retired after 27 years service as our pastor in 2014. He still continued to give great service to the church by continuing until 2018 in the position of our pastor emeritus. That year he fully retired.

2015 was a difficult year when we found dry rot in the minister's vestry whilst having it decorated. This was caused by a leak in the flat roof above. A major job entailed as all the plaster had to be removed in the vestry, as well as the room underneath. It was then drilled to be treated with chemicals to kill off the dry rot spoors.

In 2019, with a legacy from the late James Acott, we re-landscaped our Eastern garden. The garden was dedicated by Tony Avery to Jim's memory before holding our first garden party at Victoria Road for many years.



This picture of Victoria Road in 2014 was taken by Howard Cusden from his Roofcare hot air balloon. It shows the church in the terrace streets.

SIGNIFICANT DATES IN THE HISTORY OF VICTORIA ROAD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

1869	Sunday School commenced in Market Street			
1869	Iron Church and Schools erected in Victoria Road			
1874	Rev R. S. Holmes, First Pastor			
1877	Rev P. M. Eastman, Second Pastor			
1880	Site presented to the Church by Rev E.T. Prust			
1881	Rev H. J. L. Matson, Third Pastor			
1882	Two cottages in Cyril Street presented by Rev E.T. Prust			
1889	New Church and Schoolroomss completed			
1899	New organ installed			
1900	Church re-decorated and Electric lighting installed			
1907	New Porch at entrance to the Church erected and			
	presented by Mr F. G. Adnitt J.P.			
1910	New Communion table made and presented by			
	Mr Jonathan Tarry			
1910	New chairs for Platform presented by the Minister and			
	Deacons			
1919	War Memorial window (1914-1918) unveiled			
1921	Rev H. J. L. Matson resigned Pastorate			
1921	Rev D. J. Wathan, Fourth Pastor			
1923	Electric blowing apparatus for the organ			
	presented by the choir			
1927	New chairs for the Choir Stalls presented by the Choir			
1928	Death of Rev H. J. L. Matson			
1929	Mrs Stringer, A.L.C.M. completes 50 years as Organist			
1930	Memorial window to Rev H. J. L. Matson unveiled			
1931	New Screens for the Choir, presented by the Choir			
1931	Four small memorial windows presented by the family in			
	memory of Rev H. J. L. Matson.			
1935	One hundred and twelve chairs presented to the Sunday			
	School, each named by scholars and friends			
1941	Rev D. J. Wathan resigned			
1942-1945	Rev Norman Sugden, Fifth Pastor			

Second World War Memorial Tablet unveiled
Rev Albert J. Herring, Sixth Pastor
Rev Malcolm D.Whyte, Seventh Pastor
Rev William J. Brown, Eighth Pastor
Oil-fired heating apparatus installed
Rev John Harrington, Ninth Pastor
New teak floor laid in the large schoolroom
Victoria Road Church joined The Congregational
Federation
A new kitchen was fitted out in a larger room to replace
the old one
Rev Philip Baker Morris, part-time Pastor
The Sanctuary was redecorated and new Radiant Gas
Heating installed
The Minister's Vestry was refurbished
New Sound Equipment was presented and new carpeting
laid in the Sanctuary
A Minister's Silver Communion Set was presented in
memory of Mrs Ruby Plowman
Mr A. Avery was inducted as part-time Pastor
New Mission Praise Hymn Books were given in memory
of Mr and Mrs Frank Southern
28th October – Celebration Service of Thanksgiving for
25 years of service by The Rev Anthony Avery
Rev Tony Avery retired
Garden was re-landscaped to the memory James Acott

SUCCESSION OF MINISTERS

Robert Stratten Holmes	1874-1877
Philip M. Eastman	1877-1879
Herbert J. L. Matson	1881-1921
Rev D. J. Wathan	1921-1941
Rev Norman Sugden	1942-1945
Rev Albert J. Herring	1946-1951
Rev Malcolm D.Whyte,	1953-1956
Rev William J. Brown	1957-1962
Rev John Harrington	1968-1970
Rev W. L. Wooding	1970-1972
Rev Philip Baker Morris	1976-1984
Mr A. Avery	1987-1994
Rev A. Avery	1994-2014
Rev A. Avery (emeritus)	2014-2018

2019 – The Church today

SUNDAY 10.30am Family Worship Service

including Communion on the first Sunday of each month

SUNDAY 3.15pm Summer Afternoon Worship

including Communion on the third Sunday of each month

TUESDAY 7.15pm Wives Circle – fortnightly

THURSDAY 7.00pm Church Meeting – Bi-monthly

THURSDAY 10.00am Monthly Coffee Morning – 3rd Thursday

SATURDAY II.00am Theze Guyz drama group - Every Saturday

SATURDAY 10.00am Monthly Coffee Morning – 1st Saturday

Other regular users of our church:

St Mary's Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church
— Saturday mornings, twice monthly

Freedom House Ministry – Sunday afternoons

Faith City Church – Sunday evenings

Gamblers Annonymous – Friday evenings