

"Keach's Chapple"



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HISTORY

According to Sheahams, the building was erected in 1625, the date which is embossed on the wall over an entrance doorway, which, when preservations were made in recent years, was sealed off. This would make it amongst the oldest dissenting chapels in the country. A later date would be ruled out through various changes in our monarchy and church establishment.

The date 1695 inscribed on a stone inserted in the porch on the North side of the burying ground with the initials W. M. G. is the date of the porch with the initials of the founder and giver of the land, William Gyles and his wife Mary. The land for the chapel was given by William Gyles, a local baker, who divided his "Home Close", "to erect thereupon a house or building (called a Meeting House for such people who are or shall be called or distinguished by the name or names of Baptists dissenting from the Way and Communion of the Church of England and Presbitery to meet in for to worship and serve God". A deed of 1722 reveals an interesting cross-section of local society connected with the chapel. In addition to William's son, Daniel, who had been associated with his father in the original donation, and who was a draper, we find local gentlemen, yeomen and bricklayers.

THE BUILDING

The building is one of the few surviving Dissenting chapels of the 17th century and one of the very few to survive in a virtually unaltered state. In Buckinghamshire only Jordans can stand comparison with this building in both historic and architectural interest. Situated by the market down a lane known in the 17th century as Pillar's Ditch the chapel stands built of red brick, 24 ft. by 16½ ft. On the



Door to Keach meeting house. Entrance to Chapel is through a small graveyard.

North side is a small graveyard, enclosed by a brick wall of the same date as the chapel. The chapel is entered through the graveyard by a small tabled porch bearing a stone inserted in the gable inscribed W. M. G. 1695. This refers to the founder of the chapel William Gyles and his wife Mary (see beginning of "HISTORY"). The side walls of the porch contain spirally turned balusters of late 17th century style. The interior contains fittings dating from the 17th to the 19th centuries and though they are not all in their original positions they constitute perhaps the most interesting feature of the building. The floor is partly paved with 18th century graveslabs. From its wood the two posts were made as also "the Window Lineings Pulpitt Stairs Back to table Pew and Box to put the Books in". The total cost was 12 pounds of which 4 pounds 9s 6d was raised in Winslow by subscription "and the other William Matthews Deacon went a beggar for". In 1824 the two windows were put in over the pulpit.

No further expenditure on the building is recorded until 1916 when sundry repairs were carried out. Further repairs followed in 1919 and 1934 but it is clear both from the church-book and old photographs that the building was in urgent need of substantial repairs and this was finally carried out in 1957 with the aid of funds from the Buckinghamshire Historic Churches Trust, the Baptist Union and the Baptist Union of Bucks.

The names of many of those commemorated on the graveslabs and the gravestones are contained in the church-book referred to above. The pulpit is not in its original position, as can be seen by the blocked window behind its present position—it is probable that the original position was along the south wall opposite the porch. Whether the pulpit is of an earlier date than 1821 is uncertain, as we do not know if the use of the old tie-beam in the pulpit was for a new fitting



Pewter communion plate box on communion table contains communion cup. Pulpit in background. Note boxed in congregational seat to right of pulpit.

of merely for repairs. The fine and elaborate communion table with its turned legs is however original—on it rests a box containing the old communion cup and plate. The benches are of primitive construction and probably date from the 18th



Sharon and Frank seated on bench seat in Keach Chapel. Staircase leads to balcony. Most of the primitive pews (benches) have no backs.

century. Beneath the narrow gallery of 1827 there is a range of hinged desk tops complete with their lead ink wells. These were presumably provided for the use of the Sunday School scholars (the Sunday School began in 1824 with 14 children).

The chapel still retains much of the "prayer-soaked atmosphere of puritan simplicity" as John Betjeman so aptly describes it. The chapel stands as a reminder of the simple faith exercised in worshipping God in unadorned buildings. In the report of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments published in 1913 the building is mentioned as being "especially worthy of preservation." ■