

## Our History **began in 1813 ... flowing from Austrey:**

According to "Deep Roots, Living Branches", "A History of Baptists in the English West Midlands" by Alan Betteridge <sup>[1]</sup>

Between 1790 and 1815 "Villages around Tamworth were new ground entered by the New Connexion [Baptist's stream] with lasting success. Austrey, like so many other places ... had both ignorance of the way of becoming a Christian through faith in Christ and a fierce rage against any attempt to change things.

"John Barnes, a well-to-do Austrey sheep farmer, had learned something of the gospel from a member of the Castle Donnington General Baptist Church (Leicestershire) and became sympathetic.

"Then early in 1802 Barnes met Joseph Goadby, minister at Packington 6 miles away. Goadby made Barnes think about the deplorable neglect of Christianity in the Austrey area and asked for the chance to preach in Barnes' house. So first Barnes went to Packington to hear for himself, he was convinced, and was baptised there on 15 May 1802.

"The next Sunday Goadby preached the first sermon at Austrey in Barnes' wool-room from a favourite General Baptist text, 1 Timothy 1 verse 15, 'This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.'

"The wool-room was adapted for services; people came both the village and more distant places, but some local farmers created a lot of opposition.

"Soon Austrey was responsible for preaching elsewhere. With their mother-church already stretched in other directions in Leicestershire, Austrey became a separate church of 15 members on 7 August 1808 ... ." with Austrey's chapel being built in 1819. Austrey Baptist church was mother to Polesworth Baptist Church, which started "in a warehouse by the canal bridge in June 1813..." with her chapel being built in 1828.

Betteridge give little more of the history of Polesworth Baptist Church, except to say that "Austrey's old daughter-church at Polesworth ... felt the tensions that new movements could bring to a small church and 15 people moved from it the Tamworth Baptist Church in 1990." <sup>[2]</sup> Sadly these tensions also led to many members splitting away, taking much of the Boys and Girls' Brigades with them to set up a Christian Fellowship in the unused Anglican St John's Church Centre.

Polesworth Baptist Church has repented of her part in these events, forgiving all who were involved and asking in the grace of the Lord that if such tensions arise in the future, we may "be completely humble and gentle; ...patient, bearing with one another in love, [and be willing to] make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." [NIV Ephesians 4:2-3] May the Lord bless us in this.

See Celebrating our 2013 200 year Anniversary

[1] Alan Betteridge p118 "Deep Roots, Living Branches", Matador [ISBN 978-1848762-770]