

## Pyotts Hill Congregational Chapel

In 1851 there was already a Congregational presence in the parish of Old Basing. The Revd Alfred Johnson, the Minister of London Street Chapel in Basingstoke, recorded that the Independents (Congregationalists) of the parish worshipped at Cottage House, Basing. This was described as a 'Dwelling House', which was 'not used exclusively for worship'. Fifty were present at the afternoon service on the day of the census.<sup>1</sup> None of the surviving records, however, indicate when the cause had been established.

Some years after the census, a permanent place of worship was constructed, but the records are unclear as to the year in which this took place. *White's Directory of Hampshire* records that: 'The Independents have a chapel, which was erected at Pyotts Hill in 1868, at a cost of £200, raised by subscription; it will accommodate 100 persons.'<sup>2</sup> While in the records of the Hampshire Congregational Union the year given for the establishment of the cause is 1872.<sup>3</sup> A further source of confusion is that in his guide to Old Basing Gordon Timmins, reproducing information from the *Hampshire Treasures Survey*, states that the chapel was built, at a cost of £200, in 1886.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the exact date for its construction, the location of the chapel is clearly shown on Ordnance Survey maps from the late 19th century (see Fig 1).

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Vickers (ed), *The Religious Census of Hampshire 1851* (Winchester: Hampshire County Council, 1993), 180.

<sup>2</sup> William White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Hampshire* (Sheffield: William White, 1878), 128.

<sup>3</sup> *Annual Reports of the HCU*, Hampshire Record Office Ref: 127M94/62/...

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Timmins, *Old Basing: A village history* (G. Timmins, 2006), unpaginated. See also *Hampshire Treasures Survey: Vol. 2 Basingstoke and Deane* (Winchester: Hampshire County Council, 1979), 21. Since the compilers of the *Hampshire Treasures Survey* indicate that their source was *White's Directory* it would seem that the last two figures of the year were reversed and nobody spotted the error!

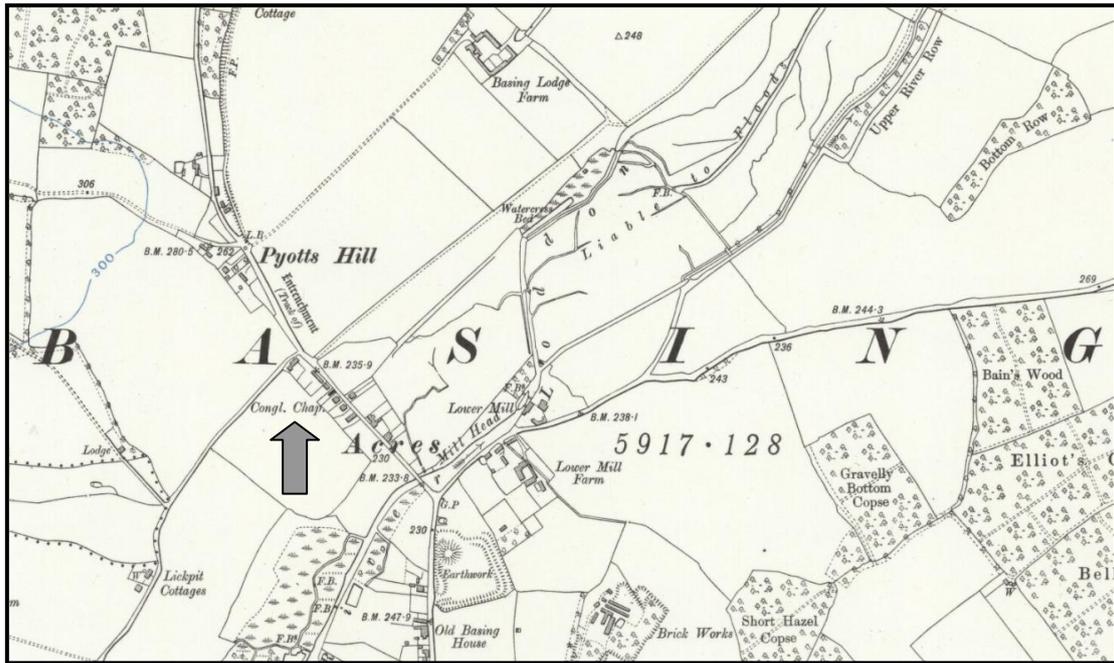


Figure 1 Location of Pyotts Hill Congregational Chapel.

Like many other rural chapels it was a simple building, with no embellishments. It can just about be seen in a photo of Pyotts Hill (Fig 2).



Figure 2 Pyotts Hill Congregational Chapel.

By the early years of the 20th century the chapel was described as having 'good congregations and an all-alive appearance'. There was an afternoon and evening service every Sunday and 'a midweek preaching service.' The Chapel also had a 'flourishing' Sunday school and a branch of the Band of Hope, the leading temperance organisation for young people. Moreover the choir was sufficiently well regarded to be invited to lead 'services of song' in other chapels.<sup>5</sup> Such buoyancy meant that the premises needed to be kept in good repair. In 1912 they were renovated, thereby presenting 'a very pleasing and comfortable appearance.' Since much of work was undertaken on a voluntary basis by 'friends' of the chapel, it was, in the words of the London Street Church magazine, 'a splendid testimony to their devotion to this little Church.'<sup>6</sup> Later, in 1914, an additional room was added to the chapel to facilitate its provision for young men.<sup>7</sup>

During the inter-War period the rhythm of church life remained relatively undisturbed, with regular Sunday services and special events, such as New Year parties for the children; celebrations to mark the anniversary of the Sunday school and services of song. There were also fetes and teas for adults. Even as late as 1937 there are references in the London Street Church magazine to the revival of Women's Own<sup>8</sup> and the 'considerable interest' in the Sunday School and a newly established Children's Hour.<sup>9</sup> However, perhaps indicative of the challenges to come, reference was also made to the lack of funds preventing the Sunday school scholars having their usual summer outing.<sup>10</sup>

Initially the outbreak of War did not adversely affect the situation beyond making it more difficult for preachers to get to the chapel due to petrol shortages. Nonetheless, a service was held every Sunday until the winter of 1941 when it was decided to suspend services for three months, a sign that all was not well. That said, following their suspension services were resumed with a statement being made that there was no intention of permanent closure. However, by mid-1943 it was clear that

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<sup>5</sup> *Basingstoke Congregational Magazine* Vol. 1 (New Series), No.1 (January 1908), unpaginated.

<sup>6</sup> *Basingstoke Congregational Magazine* Vol. 5 (New Series), No.7 (July 1912), 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, August 8, 1914.

<sup>8</sup> *Basingstoke Congregational Magazine* Vol.30 (New Series), No.4 (April 1937), 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Basingstoke Congregational Magazine* Vol.30 (New Series), No.12 (December 1937), 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Basingstoke Congregational Magazine* Vol.30 (New Series), No.7 (July 1937), 7.

with dwindling numbers this was to be the ultimate fate of the chapel. Accordingly, as Revd Wilfrid Salmon, London Street's minister, regretfully pointed out after 71 years it was necessary to close the chapel with the last service being held in September 1943. At the time it was felt that the Methodist Church in the centre of the village was in a better position to meet Free Church needs.<sup>11</sup> As Anne Pitcher records most of Congregationalists 'joined the worship at the Methodist Chapel in the Street.'<sup>12</sup> The Congregational chapel building was subsequently used as a warehouse and in the mid-1950s converted into residential accommodation, which continues to be the position in 2015.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Basingstoke Congregational Magazine* Vol.36 (New Series), No.10 (October 1943), 1. In referring to the chapel being opened 71 years earlier, the minister was using the year shown in the Hampshire Congregational Union records as the basis of his calculation.

<sup>12</sup> Anne Pitcher, *Old Basing* (Author, 1978), 75.

<sup>13</sup> *Hampshire Treasures Survey: Vol. 2 Basingstoke and Deane* (Winchester: Hampshire County Council, 1979), 21.