



Devon Family History Society
Joint Project Publication with
Devon Record Office



DEVON RECORD OFFICE

ASHBURTON INDEPENDENT CHAPEL BAPTISMS BOOK

1777-1837

DRO Reference – 5103D/1

DFHS Book Reference - D036

Ashburton Independent Chapel [also known as Ashburton Great Meeting] was founded as an English Presbyterian meeting in 1665. It was licensed in 1672, and was continuous thereafter. It was Ashburton's earliest nonconformist congregation, and is believed to have met in a converted barn, which stood where the chapel was later constructed in North Street, Ashburton in 1739.

It became an Independent Chapel and later a Congregational Chapel, finally becoming part of the United Reform Church. The chapel in North Street finally closed in the 1980s and is now an antique fireplace emporium, but still retains many of its features, including stained glass windows and memorials on the walls.

The baptism register is in the form of a small paper notebook. It includes baptisms from June 1777 to October 1837. However, recording of baptisms was rather disorganised in the early years. Although the earliest baptisms date from June 1777, these were recorded inside the back cover of the notebook. Many of the baptisms appear to have been entered later by the minister and are therefore not in chronological order – in a few cases, they were obviously recorded from entries in prayer books held by the parents of the children baptised.

A note written in 1828 and pasted into the front of the baptism register records that “*Mr Sparke [a chapel member] has in his possession a Baptismal register prior to this commencing in the year 1763*”. This earlier register has disappeared.

From 1817 baptisms were also entered in another register. This other register, which covers the years from 1817 to 1837, was surrendered to the Registrar-General in about 1837, and is now held in the National Archives at Kew, near London. This register can be seen on film [film ref: RG 4/951] at the National Archives, at the Family Records Centre in London, in the DCRS collection at Westcountry Studies Library in Exeter, at any Mormon Family History Research Centre and at some other family history society libraries overseas.

A copy made by minister the Reverend Lavington Evans of the entries in the surrendered baptism register, 1817-1837, is held at Devon Record Office [DRO ref: 5103D/2]. This copy register also includes entries added from 1837 until December 1881.

Other records of the chapel are found in collections 5103D, 4080D and 4157D at Devon Record Office.