**The Story of Pheasants Hill Church**

**Thanksgiving service for 206 years serving Christ in the community**.

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*As told by Jeanne Keene, descendant of William Keene, who owned the land on which the church has been built. Members of the Keene family have been stalwarts of the church since 1800.*

“Written records give 1810 as the formation of the church although the building was built in 1807 and prior to this, church meetings were held in houses and barns. There had been a history of discontent with the Puritans in the area and in 1662 under the Act of Conformity, the Rector of Hambleden was ejected. He carried on services in private houses and he could well be regarded as the father of non-conformity in this area.

With the Toleration Act and the evangelical revival, many independent churches were started. The Village Association was formed which was subsequently associated with Hackney College. Deeds dated 1807 list four men acting for the society who built the church at their own cost as a place of worship for protestant dissenters on a piece of land that they bought. Later deeds show that the land had belonged to William Keene. The gospel was introduced by the founder of Hackney College, the Rev. John Eyre whose wife was the sister of William Keene. Students from the college had student pastorates and the first minister was one of these, William Eastwood.

The Congregational Magazine of 1818 states that it was Calvinistic Methodist but by the end of the century it was firmly Congregational and remained so until 1972 when the United Reformed Church was formed.

There are no records of the early years but a small notebook survived, listing donations for the building of a Chapel House and £322-19-00 built the solid Victorian Manse in 1832. In 1870 a Sunday School was built for £134-5-1d.

In the early years of 1820 in addition to the Sunday School there was a library and a Band of Hope. A splendid centenary celebration was held in 1910 and to mark it the organ was installed for £110. Previously a harmonica had been used.

In 1919, the pulpit rostrum was bought from another church for £25. New windows were installed in the 1920’s and a stove for the chapel. Electricity and water were installed in the 1930’s. There are no records during the second world war and after the war a local memorial fund committee raised money and Pheasants Hill was given the communion table and three chairs.

In 1954, the Rev Myfanwy Wood became the first woman minister and was probably the first woman to preach in the Parish church.

In 1960’s the newsletter was started and continued till the present day.

In 1966 we held the first Garden Party and the school room had its lean-to converted into a kitchen.

In 1969 the pre-school playgroup was started and grew and continued into 2015. In 1957, catastrophe struck in the form of dry rot in the schoolroom and a local appeal raised £3,500 which was the exact figure needed to fix it.

In 1992 the boys from Finnamore Wood camp redecorated the church. In 1993, new regulations needed us to renovate the kitchen and toilets and once again an appeal was made to raise the money. By this stage we were also dependent on lay preachers to whom we owe a debt of gratitude.

A women’s group was started and ran for a number of years before being amalgamated with the Mother’s union that ceased after a few years and so the tea afternoons started and continued to this year.

Closer relations with the Parish Church developed and members joined in many services and events. Rev. Pam Richardson was a part-time minister for several years until 2005 when she retired. Christ Church in Henley offered Pastoral care and Pheasants Hill church struggled on. Finally, in 2009, it amalgamated with Henley who took over the administration and finance. The events continued but Sunday services were reduced to two per month. However, our numbers were so diminished that it is with great regret this last service is being held.

Secretaries, treasurers and organists have come and gone, many with long years of service. The Keene family name runs through that list but there have been many others who have played their part during the years. Their service, attendance and prayers have made what the chapel has been –

**A true house of God.**”