

SECTION TWO

“You have been long enough in this place, move on Deuteronomy 1:6

In this second section, we move from September 1970 to March 2013. Gold Street Chapel has faithfully continued its ministry in Saffron Walden since 1870.

The last few years have seen significant changes in the life of the Church. A new Pastor, Jonathan Burton, together with his wife Joy, joined us in 2006, followed by a significant influx of new members. New initiatives have begun and have thrived: Street Pastors, Question Church, Toddler Group, Language Group, Home Groups, Sunday evening ‘specials’, Men’s Breakfasts, Ladies’ Breakfasts etc.

The growth in numbers and activities led the church to move from the chapel to the County High School for its Sunday morning services whilst continuing to worship in the Chapel on Sunday evenings. Whilst this solved some problems, it created others – not least the huge amount of work required early on a Sunday morning by the ‘Set-up’ Team who would faithfully prepare the School Hall for worship and subsequently return it to its original condition. The church were allowed to install a large storage cupboard on the premises but a huge amount of equipment still needed to be ferried to the school every Sunday morning.

Several attempts were made over the course of the years to find a larger, permanent home for the church, without success, but God had been listening to the prayers ...

“I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous for you shall put this people in possession of the land ... Joshua 1: 5-6

Gold Street Chapel Moves to Castle Street

An account of how it happened

Chapter One

At the beginning of March, 2013 the congregation of the Chapel was meeting - as they had done for some years - on Sunday mornings at the County High School and in the evenings at the Chapel in Gold Street. Recent investigations into the purchase of larger properties to provide a permanent base for the church had come to nothing and we had settled back into our usual routine.

However, God had something in mind!

It was common knowledge at that time that the Saffron Walden Methodist congregation had declined in numbers to the point where it was no longer financially viable to keep the church open. The Manchester HQ of the Methodist Church had taken the decision to close the building and encourage the remaining members of its congregation to merge with the local United Reform Church or to attend the Bishops Stortford Methodist Church. The Minister at that time, Rev. David Keeble, had been appointed to oversee the closure, and was due to retire shortly. He would not be replaced. Whilst the current members of the Methodist Church and the local Methodist Circuit preferred the building to be sold as a place of worship, the Manchester HQ were obligated to realise the maximum price for the building, meaning that it could be placed on the open market for sale and possible renovation or conversion to residential accommodation.

On 1st March, 2013, one of the last major events of the year before the premises were officially closed - the Women's World Day of Prayer - was held at the Methodist Church in Castle Street and two committee members from Gold Street went along as representatives of the Chapel. They met for refreshments at 10.30am and as more and more women arrived, and the church filled to capacity, the noise levels rose and peace and tranquillity departed!

It was against this background of noise, eating, drinking, laughing, greeting and nervously checking of scripts and costumes, that God's Holy Spirit filled that church with a great sense of His presence and with that presence came the sense of peace and tranquillity that only Christ can bring. The Service was beautiful – well organised, moving, challenging, and powerful – but it was into the chaos of the meeting, greeting, getting to know, renewal of old friendships, hugging, love and chatting, that God spoke through His Spirit, planting the seed in the minds of two Gold Street women that He was here and maybe we did not need to look any further for a place to worship Him.

At the close of the service, David Keeble was approached and asked if there were any obvious reasons why Gold Street could not view the Castle Street

premises and investigate the details of the sale. David appeared delighted at the prospect and encouraged discussion about the possibility.

On the following Sunday evening, Jim Ford, one of Gold Street's Elders, was approached and asked if he was aware of any barriers that would prevent us investigating the possibility of purchasing the Methodist Church building. Jim was very positive and encouraging, suggesting that Jonathan Burton – the Minister of Gold Street Chapel - be consulted about the proposal.

Whilst his initial reaction was less than enthusiastic, Jonathan agreed to give the matter some thought and - after consideration - he initiated a Feasibility Study into the project to include detailed measurements of both buildings, lists of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of such a move and the estimated costs involved. He also suggested the formation of a small group to consider the whole Project and make a recommendation to the Church as to whether to proceed.

So it was that the Castle Street Project got under way, with the first official meeting of the newly formed Church Development Group on **Wednesday 20th March 2013** made up of Jonathan and three members of the congregation:

- **Barry Land**, an Elder and experienced Town Planner; well versed in all the complicated rules and regulations surrounding the purchase and sale of listed buildings;
- **Nicola Richardson**, a Deacon, whose Project Management skills & hard work would prove invaluable;
- **Heather Street** whose job it was to minute the meetings and keep a detailed account of the whole process.

As a Trustee, **Bob Pledger** had been invited to join the Group to represent the Trustees but because of the pressure of other commitments at this time, it was agreed that he would be kept fully up to date with progress and decisions until he was free to join the group. Nicola would report back to the Diaconate and Jonathan to the Elders.

The practicalities of the proposed move were considered, together with the finances involved in such a project. Barry had applied to Uttlesford District Council for a Restriction Order to be placed on the use of the Methodist Church to reserve the building for community use which would mean that it could not be sold on the open market for six months – giving us time to decide on the wisdom of the purchase.

Jonathan stressed the need to keep the whole investigation confidential at this stage so as not to jeopardise the merger between the Methodists and URC.

On **Monday 15th April 2013** our second meeting took place and an impromptu investigation was carried out into the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing an existing place of worship, near to the centre of town but with very limited parking and in need of some updating and repair

work. The estimated costs and expenses involved in the whole procedure were considered along with the practicalities.

News had reached us that St. Mary's Church had expressed an interest in purchasing the Methodist Church building and it was decided to discuss this with them to avoid a bidding war between the two churches. Discussions concerning Estate Agents, Surveyors, Funding sources etc. then took place..

On **7th May 2013** a site visit was made to the Methodist Church and a number of the queries raised at the previous meeting were resolved. Following this, a further meeting was held on **9th May 2013** to review and discuss the outcome of the site meeting. During this meeting the news was shared that St. Mary's had publicly announced their interest in purchasing the Methodist Church as they had been refused permission to adapt their existing Parish Rooms. Barry's application to restrict the sale of the Methodist Church to community use would be discussed by the Council on that same evening. A ***"Report of the Church Development Group into the Suitability of Purchasing the Methodist Church, Castle Street, Saffron Walden"*** was prepared, considering all the advantages, disadvantages, necessary procedure, costs etc. and the following recommendation was made: **This Group recommends that, as long as the valuation of the building and its structural condition are both reasonable, then the move to the Methodist Church building should be pursued.**

At the next meeting on **Monday, 21st October 2013**, Jonathan and Barry informed the Church Development Group that St. Mary's proposed to withdraw its interest in the Methodist Church in order that Gold Street could pursue its purchase unhindered. This gracious decision was received with amazement and thanksgiving to God but it also increased the pressure on the Group to determine, as soon as possible, the reaction of the congregation to the Group's recommendation to pursue the purchase of the Methodist Church. Jonathan would meet with the Elders that evening, and if their response was positive, two site visits would be arranged to allow Gold Street members to view the Methodist Church. The Development Group would then make a presentation to the Elders/Deacons followed by a recommendation to the members.

Following the site visits on **3rd and 4th November 2013** and the recommendations of the Church Leadership at the QFM on 13th November 2013, a further Church Development Group meeting was held on **Wednesday 18th December 2013** at which Jonathan announced that the members had voted 84% in favour of the move to Castle Street. Details of the agents acting for both parties were confirmed and two sub-groups formed – the first to handle all finance/Trustee/legal matters and the second to be responsible for the Refurbishment of the Methodist Church when the time came. Sourcing of loans and finance were also discussed.

At this point – after all the frenetic activity of the previous months – everything went quiet again while the Methodist syndicate went slowly about their business.

The Methodist Church had officially closed on Palm Sunday 2014 but the various groups using the church had been allowed to continue for the time being. The Church Development Group stood back for a while – we still had no firm price for the Methodist Church, nor an up-to-date valuation for Gold Street. This was a time when we just had to wait patiently and trust in God for His leading.

Chapter Two

The first indication that things were moving again came, nearly ten months later, on **1st October 2014** when we were informed by the Agents acting for the Methodist Church that they were now ready to go ahead with the sale of the building. A meeting of the Church Development Group was called for **6th October 2014**. Fortunately, **Bob Pledger** was now able to attend to represent the Trustees.

Barry reported that Richard Roberts of Mullucks Wells – the Estate Agent acting for the Methodist Church - had contacted him to say that Gold Street Chapel had been given first refusal by the Methodist Church. A meeting was arranged for **13th October 2014** when all those present would meet with Richard Roberts at the Methodist Church for an informal meeting to discuss the sale price. If this was confirmed, the church members would be consulted to ask if they wished to proceed with the purchase/sale.

The meeting went ahead as planned – an informal get together to determine our commitment and ability to meet the asking price. No notes were taken and no decisions made. The Restriction Order that Barry had imposed had long since expired and we were informed that we were being given first refusal on the purchase of the Methodist Church at market value before it was placed on the open market. The price was “in excess of £375,000”.

Following the meeting, our own Agents, Cheffins, were asked to carry out a valuation of the property. They quickly confirmed that £375,000 was a most conservative valuation and that we needed to act promptly to secure the deal. The Church Development Group got together on **10th November 2014** to consider what price to put forward. The Chapel was currently valued at £225,000, slightly lower than in 2010 because the previous valuation had been based on the assumption that permission for ‘change of use’ would be granted, allowing for the chapel to be converted to a residential property – this permission had not been sought as the sale had not gone ahead and could take up to three years to obtain – time that we did not currently have at our disposal. After some discussion concerning our available finances, it was agreed to make an initial offer of £360,000. Meanwhile, Bob pointed out that things were moving at such a rate that to try to pass matters over to the alternative groups recently formed, would be a difficult and possibly confusing thing to do at this point in time. The existing group currently dealing with the sale and purchase were up to date with all the details and complications of the Project and passing these over in such a short space of time was not considered possible or fair in the time available.

It was agreed that separate ‘finance pots’ be established to keep the sale and purchase of Gold Street and the Methodist Church separate – and clearly explainable – from the general running of the Chapel. Nicola was appointed Treasurer for this Project, liaising with Gordon Scott – the Church Treasurer. Gifts would be invited from members of the Fellowship.

It was also agreed that the Church Development Group would now meet fortnightly unless an emergency necessitated an additional meeting.

As the meeting was drawing to a close, Barry received a text message saying that the Methodist Church required a definite offer by 6pm that evening!!

Suddenly things were on the move again.....!

Cheffins were asked to approach the Methodist's agents with our offer of £360,000. This was (unsurprisingly!) summarily dismissed – calling for a quick reaction by Barry to take responsibility and offer the full asking price before we lost favour and the property was placed on the open market. He had previously been given authority by the Church Development Group to do this if necessary. At this point, we had no guarantee that even this offer would be accepted as a much higher price could possibly be realised if the property was offered on the open market and purchased by a developer.

Following a further meeting on **24th November 2014** our offer was taken to the local Methodist Congregation; the local Circuit Committee (whose responsibility it was to manage local properties) and to the Manchester HQ of the Methodist Church. We heard very promptly from the local congregation that they had accepted our offer. On **6th December 2014** the Circuit Committee confirmed that decision. Despite frequent promptings from our Agents and solicitors, we had still not received a decision from the Manchester HQ.

Despite this delay, things began moving at an amazing speed.

On **8th December 2014** yet another meeting of the Church Development Group took place. Three Trustees – Bob Pledger, Peter Graves and Jim Ford would sell Gold Street Chapel and two additional Trustees – Paul Martin and Barry Land – would join Peter and Jim in buying the Methodist Church on behalf of the members of Gold Street. Valuation reports would be commissioned for both properties. These were required to prove that the Trustees involved in the purchase and sale were making realistic offers and not wasting money.

Meanwhile, Barry had been informed that – should the purchase of the Methodist Church go through – all fixtures and fittings not required by any other local Methodist Church would be donated to Gold Street. Although, at this time, we were not sure exactly what was involved, this turned out to be yet another confirmation that God was going before us.

A detailed building survey had been carried out on the Castle Street property and the results were generally favourable with no major concerns about the state of the building. It was recognised, however, that at least £2,000 per year would need to be set aside for the upkeep and general care of a building of this size and age.

Nicola had been working incredibly hard in the background meanwhile, liaising with our hard working Estate Agent representative – Remi – concerning the sale of Gold Street. The Chapel had only just gone on the market but to everyone's delight Nicola announced at this meeting that several potential buyers were waiting eagerly to view the property.

On **Monday 22nd December 2014** after the viewings had taken place, the Church Development Group met yet again. We were still waiting for a formal acceptance of our offer from the Manchester HQ but Nicola distributed copies of three sealed bids received in relation to the sale of Gold Street. These were the three highest and most suitable bids received by our Estate Agents following a number of viewings. After some consideration, the Group selected the highest bid, which was in excess of the valuation of Gold Street Chapel and which also indicated flexibility about the length of our continued occupation. Obviously this would be subject to negotiations on an agreed Completion Date and further negotiations to continue occupancy for a period after Exchange of Contracts to allow for some refurbishment to take place at the Methodist Church before we moved in. Jonathan would inform the church members as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, pledges for gifts and loans were coming in together with increased regular giving from some members of the congregation. It was agreed that a Gift Day would be arranged early in January to allow members to donate anonymously to the Project if they wished.

On **Monday 12th January 2015** our meeting was not nearly so positive. Having waited months for a decision from the Manchester HQ we finally heard from them that we needed to agree to the inclusion of an 'Overage Percentage & Duration Clause' in the sales contract before they would agree to the transaction.

We had been informed at the very beginning of the process that if Gold Street chose to be treated as a 'preferred bidder' certain conditions would be imposed on the sale of the Methodist Church. This was to prevent a church buying the property at a reduced price and then quickly selling it on to a developer and reaping the profit. Whilst we fully understood the reason for imposing these restrictions and had no intention of trying to make a quick profit from the transaction, the Group had felt that it would be more sensible to purchase the property at the market price and be free from any restrictions. Then, if our church grew in numbers and we ultimately needed to move to a larger property, we would be free to sell to the highest bidder. No application to be considered as a 'preferred bidder' had been submitted to the Methodist HQ and, when the sales details were published, we had offered the asking price. Although a higher price could possibly have been achieved from a bidding war with developers, we certainly did not feel that we were buying below the asking price.

The relevant section of the Overage Clause states "The sale is subject to a 100% uplift in value (upon change of use) for the first ten years, 50% for the next ten years and 25% for the following five years." After some discussion

as to what “uplift in value” included or what could be offset against that ‘uplift’ it was agreed that we should take some professional advice before deciding whether to progress with the purchase. The Methodist Circuit had been aware of our interest in their property for nearly two years and no mention of the inclusion of an Overage Clause into the sales details had been made during that time. Gold Street had agreed to pay the publicised market value for the property to avoid any such restrictions.

On a more cheerful note, Barry had met with Julian from the Methodist Church who had detailed all items to be donated to Gold Street. These included 130 upholstered chairs and a number of other items with an estimated value of £10,000.

However, bad news was still on its way. The sale of Gold Street Chapel had appeared to be going through without problems. Bob had been busy investigating a query relating to the rear access to Gold Street Chapel raised by our Agents, Cheffins. A document dated 1888 indicated rear access to the Chapel and adjacent houses in the area through a pair of double gates at the top of the main section of Gold Street. However, because of the age of the property there appeared to be no official, legal ‘Right of Way’. Recent purchases of nearby buildings should confirm that right of access but there was nothing on our Land Registry Document that, under current day legislation, would give the new owner legal and unquestionable rights of access to the rear of the property. Historical documents stated that the ‘Right of Way’ had been used since 1889 and, at some time, Gold Street had improved the access path but proof was needed that we had used the ‘Right of Way’ for at least 40 years before we could apply for legal documentation, safeguarding this benefit for the new owners. If no legal ‘Right of Way’ existed, our current buyers would withdraw from the purchase of Gold Street Chapel. Bob would check with other members of the congregation with long connections to the Chapel to see if they could throw any light on the matter.

This caused a heavy cloud to descend on the group and it was decided to bring the whole situation to God in prayer. In doing so, we remembered the number of times when God had clearly blessed us and encouraged us to investigate the purchase of the Methodist Church. Were the current problems a sign that He was leading us elsewhere or were they a test of our faith and our trust in Him?

Strangely enough, the remainder of our time together was surprisingly positive. A meeting would be arranged with our Estate Agent to discuss the problems outlined above.

The Church Development Group then met at the offices of Cheffins on **Friday 16th January 2015** and, after long discussions with the Director, Philip Woolner, the dreaded Overage Clause did not seem quite so threatening. However, we were told that trying to negotiate time restrictions or other alterations to the imposed Clause with the Manchester Methodist Head Office could take a number of years and the outcome could still be a “no”.

Philip agreed to discuss the matter with the Methodist Agents and pass on our concerns about the timing and content of the Clause. We should expect to hear from them in about one week.

Regarding the lack of legal evidence of 'Right of Way' to the rear of the Gold Street property, this would be taken up with our Solicitor and an effort made to prove that Gold Street had used this access for at least 40 years. The possibility of insuring our 'Right of Way' was raised but this would only ensure compensation in the event that it was blocked and we would not necessarily regain the 'Right of Way'. A Statutory Declaration was needed.

On **22nd January 2015** Nicola spoke to our Estate Agent, Remi, who informed her that the potential buyer of Gold Street Chapel had offered, on exchange of contracts, to lend Gold Street the money we needed to purchase the Methodist Church so that we could start on the refurbishment at Castle Street while still using Gold Street premises. The buyer was willing to delay completion for six months to allow us to carry out this work and then would pay the balance of the purchase price on this date. This appeared to be an extremely generous offer but it would be passed by our Solicitors before acceptance.

On **23rd January 2015** Nicola, Bob & Jonathan met with our Solicitor to discuss and hopefully clarify a couple of points - our 'Right of Way' to the rear of Gold Street Chapel; and the implications of the proposed Overage Clause on our purchase of the Methodist Church.

On **Monday 26th January 2015** the Church Development Group met once more to share the outcome of the above discussions and decide on our next move.

Regarding the implications of the Overage Clause on our impending purchase of the Methodist Church, letters were passing between solicitors for both parties to settle the matter satisfactorily. We would await the outcome of these discussions.

Meanwhile – a further complication. Saffron Walden Food Bank was to be removed from the local Police Station at short notice for security reasons and would be using the Methodist Church as temporary storage for eight weeks until a permanent home could be found. Jonathan made it clear to those concerned, that vacant possession of the premises upon completion was essential in order that the refurbishment could be carried out before completion of the sale of Gold Street Chapel. There was some concern that Gold Street might be perceived to be 'evicting the food bank' when the time came.

A snippet of good news relating to the 'Right of Way' was that the requirement for proof of use had now decreased from 40–20 years. Other complications still existed, however, and a number of people who had been members at Gold Street for many years had offered to get involved and attempt to clarify the situation. This willingness and eagerness to share in, and take ownership

of, the project was seen as a further indication that God was with us and would guide us through the minefield of legal complications. These complications were having another affect in that our Solicitors were warning that the extra work and searches involved in solving the problems would result in a significant increase in legal fees – possibly as much as 100%.

The offer of the loan and delayed completion from the potential buyer of Gold Street had been considered by our Solicitors who could see no problem, so it was tentatively agreed to investigate this further, although there were some expressions of unease. If, ultimately, the loan was accepted, it was to be regarded as an additional deposit which would be repaid if the sale fell through and we were forced to begin negotiations with another interested party or sell by auction.

Confirmation of the internal promised loans would be set in motion and the whole matter would be discussed in more detail with the members at the coming QFM.

Chapter Three

On **2nd February 2015** some incredible news was shared with the Development Group. An anonymous person from within the Fellowship at Gold Street had expressed their willingness to support all the financial needs of the Fellowship relating to the purchase of the Methodist Church by providing a loan to cover the amount needed to complete the transaction, which would mean we did not have to accept outside help. If this incredibly generous offer was accepted, it would mean that the Methodist Church could be purchased relying entirely on existing savings, loans and gifts from those within the Fellowship. This would allow us to arrange completion on the purchase of our new home to coincide with the departure of the Food Bank from the premises and enable us to carry out some essential refurbishment before completion of the sale of Gold Street and repayment of this and other loans. Unsurprisingly, the team was much more inclined to accept this offer than the previous one and expressed their delight and thanks to God for His continued involvement in the project.

At the Quarterly Fellowship Meeting of the church on **Wednesday, 4th February 2015** the members were brought up to date by Barry with the progress (and problems!) of the proposed move to Castle Street and the sale of Gold Street Chapel. Paul Martin gave an excellent presentation to the meeting of the proposed change of name from Gold Street Chapel to Saffron Walden Community Church, which would be adopted once the move took place. Siobhan Rouse thanked the members of the Church Development Group for all their hard work so far.

Meanwhile, Bob was busy trying to prove the legality of our 'Right of Way' to the rear of the Chapel so that this could be registered in legal documents which would form part of the package of documents relating to the sale. Two members of the Chapel were required to legally swear that they and others had used this path on a number of occasions for at least twenty years and sign legal documents to confirm this. Bob and Gordon Scott, both long standing members of the Chapel, would do this as soon as possible.

The Church Development Group met again on **Monday 9th February 2015** to bring the records up to date on both the progress on the sale of Gold Street and the purchase of the Methodist Church. The Heads of Terms document had been received from the Solicitor acting for the Methodist Circuit. This was examined and some alterations would be requested to the small print of the Conditions of Sale through our Solicitor. Heads of Terms relating to the sale of Gold Street would be prepared once an insurance policy was issued to guaranty the continued use of the Right of Way.

Over the next two weeks emails went backwards and forwards in an effort to resolve the final issues relating to the sale and purchase. On **Monday 23rd February 2015** the Development Group met again and found that, whilst the revised Overage Clause could be accepted in principal some fine tuning was still needed to safeguard Gold Street's interest. Issues still existed regarding our 'Right of Way' and parking at the side of the Methodist Church and also

regarding the 'Right of Way' to the rear of Gold Street Chapel. However, despite these niggles and the ever increasing legal costs, it all seemed to be coming together.

Sadly, this was not the case! At the following meeting on **Monday 9th March 2015** it became apparent that enquiries relating to the Overage Clause; Right of Way and Parking at the Methodist Church and Right of Way to the rear of Gold Street Chapel were all still ongoing. It became clear that more pressure needed to be placed on the solicitors handling these matters and they would be informed that resolution on all these aspects of the sale and purchase should be treated as a matter of urgency as we wished to exchange contracts by the end of April 2015. Once contracts were exchanged, the County High School would be informed that we no longer required access to the school hall after the move to Castle Street.

The very next day, Jonathan emailed the news to all members of the Development Team that the Food Bank would be moving to New Life Church on 25th March. This was good news as it would mean that the building would be clear when we finally moved in and we would not have the unpleasant responsibility of asking the Food Bank to find a new home.

A Prayer Morning was held on Saturday **14th March 2015** at St. Margaret's, Wicken Bonhunt and thirteen members of Gold Street congregation attended. One of the main focuses of prayer and discussion was the move to Castle Street and what effect it would have on the body of our Fellowship. There was a strong feeling that the move may lead to a time of testing for all of us – indeed, some felt that the testing had already started with the current frustrations being faced, particularly by those dealing with the process. Others felt that God would use this time to expose and challenge our weaknesses as people. We would have to consider what good things we can take from our past at Gold Street Chapel and what needed to be left in the past. One of those attending remarked that we needed to prepare for these challenges now, in our prayers, and not just wait for them to happen.

On the evening of **17th March, 2015** Bob emailed every member of the Church Development Group together with the Trustees. The pressure put on the Solicitors had resulted in a tidal wave of activity and documents. There were eleven attachments to Bob's email – including – finally – full details of the Overage Clause. This alone was twelve pages long and needed to be read and responded to urgently by all members of the team as our Solicitor was setting off on his holiday at the end of the week. The remaining documents would be dealt with in detail at the forthcoming meeting in a few days. One of these was a communication from the person responsible for the sale of the Methodist Chapel suggesting that we put pressure on our Solicitor to "process the contract so that we can recover confidence that the sale will indeed go ahead, and don't have to consider other possible avenues". Luckily, we were one step ahead in this respect. Also included was correspondence between the two Solicitors and several H.M. Land Registry Documents indicating ownership of the various properties adjacent to – and near to – the Methodist Chapel. It appeared that several residents of adjacent

houses shared the Right of Way through the Church's entrance to gain access to their gardens/garages etc. - a matter on which the Team had been seeking clarification for many, many months. The Solicitor's solution to one section of this potential problem was that we purchase the house next door to the Church (No 69 - which was currently up for sale) and then re-sell it without the 'Right of Way'. This was summarily dismissed as unwise stewardship of the Charity's money – even if only for a short period. If the Church had access to unlimited funds it may have been the solution to several problems but, unsurprisingly, we did not. The Team were stretched to the limit by the existing transactions without complicating matters further.

At the next meeting on **Monday 23rd March 2015** (approximately two full years after the very first official meeting of the group!) things finally began to come together. Regarding the **purchase of the Methodist Church**, the final queries and alterations to the Overage Deed were being dealt with via the Solicitor acting for the Methodists. Ancient sworn affidavits protecting our right of access to the church would be updated and Indemnity Insurance obtained to cover these matters.

Meanwhile, the buyer of **Gold Street Chapel** had agreed to submit his plans for the proposed development of the site and arrange his own indemnity insurance relating to the Right of Way to the rear of the property once these plans were approved by the Authorities which was the only realistic way it could be done as he was (understandably) not willing to share his detailed plans with us and the insurance could not be obtained without those plans. This meant that he was ready and willing to exchange contracts as soon as possible. The Contract for Sale of Gold Street Chapel had finally been drawn up and was considered and approved by the Group subject to one or two minor corrections.

The finances for the whole project were looked at yet again and arrangements set in place to ensure that all funds needed to ensure a smooth transaction, would be available when required.

A date was set for the Gift Day – **3rd May 2015** – when all Pledges and Loans from members of the Fellowship would be called in, provided that an exchange date for contracts on both purchase and sale had been agreed sufficiently prior to this.

A six month 'window' to carry out essential repair and improvement work on the Methodist Church before we moved in had been agreed and Barry outlined the priorities that would be shared with our Architects.

At the close of the meeting, several dates were agreed by members of the Team for confirmation by the two teams of Solicitors: Exchange of Contracts on both Sale and Purchase; Completion on the Purchase of the Methodist Church; Completion on the sale of Gold Street Chapel; the move to the Methodist Church. Bob would take these dates to the Solicitors and we would await their response.

Chapter Four

Things started to move again when Bob emailed all members of the Development Group on **11th April 2015** with the news that the deposit on the purchase of the Methodist Church had been paid. Plans were being put in place to ensure that investments were withdrawn in good time for the completion of the purchase, now planned for **28th or 29th May 2015**. Completion on the sale of Gold Street was set between **15th and 30th November 2015** with four weeks prior notice needed once completion date was agreed. A number of attachments arrived with Bob's email, resulting in a flurry of activity prior to the next meeting of the Church Development Group on **13th April 2015**.

This meeting opened with the news that the content of the Overage Clause had been revised and modified so that the Clause was now able to be accepted. Details of the Rights of Way to the Methodist Church had been sorted and this was no longer a problem. Unfortunately, our buyer had not prepared and submitted his plans for the redevelopment of the site as agreed and was therefore unable to apply for Indemnity Insurance to preserve the Right of Way to the rear of Gold Street Chapel. Amazingly, our Solicitor applied for, and was granted, the right for Gold Street to purchase the Indemnity Insurance even though no redevelopment plans had been submitted or approved. Even our Solicitor admitted that this was unusual. Although the cost was high this meant that almost the last major obstacle in the way of Exchange of Contracts had been removed.

Over the next few days Bob forwarded to the Group yet more copies of legal documents to be read, checked and approved. Among these was the Indemnity Insurance Certificate securing the 'Right of Way' to the rear of Gold Street.

When the Group met on **Monday 27th April 2015** there was very much a sense of pulling everything together at last. All essential documents relating to the purchase of the Methodist Church and the sale of Gold Street had been submitted to the Solicitors with the final tweaks and were waiting to be signed off by our Trustees, our Buyer and the Methodist Head Office in Manchester.

A Charities Act Valuation Report had been carried out on Gold Street Chapel to ensure that the Chapel had been sold at a fair price. This was a requirement of the Charities Commission and, having obtained a price well above the initial valuation, we were confident of the outcome of the Report.

Although Contracts had not yet been exchanged, it was decided to go ahead with the Gift Day as planned, as members of the Chapel had been informed of the date and all the arrangements were in hand. Exchange was expected at any time and hopefully would be before the Gift Day.

Towards the close of the meeting arrangements were put in place to contact all current users of the Methodist Church to discuss with them the possibility of their continued use (or not) of the premises during the refurbishment period

and after our occupation. Obviously, some would be refused as it would be impossible to accommodate all the current users of the Methodist Church and our own groups from Gold Street. These decisions would be in the hands of our Deacons and the matter would be referred to John Richardson to discuss with them.

The Gift Day was looming and all those making loans for the purchase of Castle Street had to be informed of the procedure, security checks etc. that they needed to go through in order to satisfy the legal requirements covering such loans. An emergency meeting was called for **Friday, 1st May 2015** to see what could be done to expedite these matters and remove some of the burden from Bob.

At this meeting, the alternative of Exchanging Contracts and then Completing on both properties on the same date (rather than allowing for a six month delay on our sale for refurbishment of the Methodist Church) was discussed. The Church Development Group had previously agreed to the six month delay but it was becoming very obvious that very little would be achieved during that time. Architects had been engaged and had visited and assessed the property but no reports had yet been received. Others had been contacted but had declined the invitation due to pressure of work. Concerns had been raised about the possible dangers of a six month delay in Completion. Completion on the same date for both properties would eliminate the need for any loans, and the possibility of our buyer reneging on his agreement to buy Gold Street. Our buyer had apparently, at the eleventh hour, informed our Solicitor that he would insure the Gold Street property during the six month delay before completion but that Gold Street would have to foot the bill – this, despite knowing that we had already agreed to take out comprehensive insurance during our continued use of the premises. John Richardson advised that having two insurance policies on the same building was very unwise and could result in no compensation being paid in the event of a claim. Our Solicitor was advised accordingly, but the whole matter increased the unease of the group.

Three members of the Development Group had expressed their view that completion of the sale and purchase on the same date would be their preferred route. Obviously it would mean that the planned refurbishment and redecoration of the Methodist Church would have to take place while we were using the premises which would not be ideal but could be an exciting way to involve more of the congregation and draw us together as a Fellowship.

Others held strongly to the original agreement of the six month refurbishment delay on the grounds that it was the view of the Elders and a commitment made to the members of the church which had influenced their voting on the original decision to purchase the Methodist Church. **It was agreed** that we would wait for the response of our buyer on the insurance issue of Gold Street Chapel whilst keeping open our option to go back to the Elders and the Church members in view of the change in circumstances.

The Gift Day took place on **Sunday 3rd May 2015** when all those who had pledged gifts for the project and others who had joined the church in recent months, could contribute towards the costs involved.

Meanwhile, contracts were finally sent off to the Manchester Methodist hierarchy by the solicitors for agreement and signature. Our previous experience of dealing with them meant that we did not hold out much hope of a speedy response.

The attitude of the church members during this very stressful time was, on the whole, very supportive and understanding, as they had begun to realise the complexity of the whole process of buying a Grade 2 listed building and at the same time selling one. Criticisms and expressions of exasperation were heard from some but, fortunately, they were in the minority. The sheer frustration at the tedium of the whole process and the lack of proactivity by the Solicitors and the Manchester Methodist Headquarters was taking its toll on members of the team.

On Sunday 10th May 2015, Barry outlined to those attending the service the advantages and disadvantages of delaying completion on the sale of Gold Street Chapel for six months after completion on the purchase of the Methodist Church. He then asked all those present to feed back to the Development Group their feelings on the matter. Would they prefer to move in to the new property as soon as possible and work around the proposed refurbishment or would they prefer to stick to the planned six month delay? Significantly, the County High School had recently given Gold Street notice to remove its storage from the School, making it difficult for us to continue our Sunday morning worship there.

Over the next few days a number of people in the Fellowship shared their feelings with the Group concerning the timing of Completion on the Sale of Gold Street Chapel.. These responses were well thought through, understanding and very helpful. Not everyone felt the same way but no-one was intent on forcing their opinion on the church. On Sunday 17th May 2015, Jonathan shared with the congregation that God had led him to read Psalm 133.

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard,
Running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes,
It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life for evermore.”

It also transpired that someone from outside the Fellowship – who had no idea of the current situation – had brought this passage to our notice. Several other members of the congregation had experienced the same guidance to that particular Psalm and, as Barry led worship and the service progressed there was a tremendous sense of God’s presence. The worship resounded and there was a wonderful realisation that God would give us the guidance we needed to make the correct decisions.

On the following morning **Monday 18th May 2015** the Development Group met to discuss progress and map out the way forward. From the very start of the meeting, it was clear that God had taken control.

It would be fair to say that all members of the Group had, at some time or another, felt overwhelmed and burdened by the huge responsibility of being involved in the project and making decisions on behalf of others in the Fellowship because of the impossibility of sharing every detail and complication with every church member as they arose during the progression of the project. For some, if not all, members of the Group, this burden had increased as time went on and the frustration increased. But not this day!

From the very outset as the Group prayed for God's presence and guidance there was a real sense of peace and agreement and a feeling that those burdens had rolled away. The helpful and thoughtful response of many church members regarding the timing of Completion on the sale of Gold Street enabled the Group to make a clear recommendation which would be shared with the members at the Quarterly Fellowship Meeting in just two days time on **Wednesday 20th May 2015**.

In Barry's absence, Jonathan had asked Nicola to present details of the current situation to those attending the QFM. and make a recommendation on the way forward. A number of people were away or otherwise engaged, and sent their apologies, but a good number were there to enable the Team to assess the overall response of the Fellowship following Nicola's presentation and recommendations. There was no verbal objection to the proposal of the Church Development Team that Exchange of Contracts should take place as soon as possible (this now depended upon the Methodist Head Office in Manchester) and completion on both properties as soon as possible following Exchange. There may need to be a delay in Completion on the Sale of Gold Street Chapel due to existing commitments but this delay would be reduced as far as possible to minimise any risks of our buyer reneging on the agreement.

Following Nicola's presentation, Paul Martin led some group discussion on various matters relating to our new church life in our new home.

The Church Development Group met again on **Monday 1st June 2015** to iron out a few minor wrinkles in procedures and begin to make tentative plans for forming a Refurbishment Team from members of the Fellowship and making sure we were geared up to move forward immediately contracts were signed. Queries regarding this had been raised with our Solicitor and we were informed that Manchester Head Office were still considering the contracts. The point was made that the very first official meeting of the Church Development Group had taken place over two years earlier. Points were double checked; arrangements put in place for after Contracts had been exchanged but still we waited.....

On **Sunday 7th June**, Barry announced to the congregation that contracts on both sale and purchase had finally been prepared to everyone's satisfaction

and were awaiting signature. This procedure was carried out on **Monday 8th June**, followed by several emails from our solicitor concerning Exchange of Contracts which would take us beyond the point of no return. Several attempts were made by the Solicitors to exchange contracts over the next few days but these attempts were thwarted, mainly by the Methodist hierarchy who always seemed to have one more check to carry out or one more person's approval to gain.

Finally, on **17th June 2015** Bob emailed the group to say that contracts had finally been exchanged! Completion on the Methodist Church would be on 15th July (in just 28 days time) and completion on the sale of Gold Street Chapel would take place on 2nd October 2015. It had been hoped to complete on the sale and purchase at the same time but our buyer, having originally been told he could have a delay of six months before completion, insisted on a delay of three months.

Chapter Five

But now – at last – we could begin to make plans to move into our new home.

Jonathan sprang into action and prepared a schedule of activities throughout July and August ensuring that all necessary work would be completed in good time. Meanwhile John Richardson, who had worked incredibly hard to ensure that all necessary insurance cover was in place, would finalise these arrangements and also contact all users of both the Methodist Church and Gold Street Chapel in an attempt to sort out who could still be accommodated and who would have to find new premises for their activities.

Obviously, the fact that our move to Castle Street would take place during the school holidays would create a number of problems – not least that a number of members would be away on holiday and others would be heavily committed to VBS at Newport. Responsibilities for certain activities were allocated to different members of the congregation and volunteer helpers would be requested.

At last, the move to our new home was becoming a reality.

Over the next few days a great deal of work went on behind the scenes to make sure that, when the great day arrived, Gold Street Chapel would move smoothly to become Saffron Walden Community Church.

On **15th July, 2015** our Solicitor, Anthony Marris, wrote to Bob, his main contact throughout the whole process, to confirm that he had completed the Chapel's purchase of the former Methodist Church. The Chapel's title to the land would be registered and we could begin to liaise over keys, services, meter readings, etc.

One would have thought that, when the Church Development Group met again on **Thursday 16th July 2015** there would be very little left to do but in fact there was a mountain of things to organise. The Moving Out/Moving In Plan was finalised and Groups formed to carry out these tasks. One by one these essential jobs were ticked off or allocated to those who had offered to help. This group was growing steadily as church members began to take ownership of their new home. One of the biggest problems was finding space to accommodate all the various activities based in the former Methodist Church and Gold Street. This was a huge task for John Richardson on top of all the insurance arrangements he had been coping with.

The following Monday, **20th July 2015** had been set aside as an evening of celebration, thanksgiving and prayer in our new home at Castle Street with champagne and nibbles for all. This was a wonderful evening attended by a good number of the Fellowship. Many commented on the fact that the building was much larger than they had anticipated, and a good deal of exploration was done in between the eating and drinking.

On **Sunday 26th July 2015** Bob Pledger and Rod Tuck – two longstanding members of Gold Street Chapel - led a service of Farewell to Gold Street. Although services would still take place in the Chapel until the final service on 23rd August, it had been decided to arrange the official farewell before large numbers of the Fellowship left for their summer holidays and others became heavily involved in the work of VBS. Both Bob and Rod were able to share their feelings on leaving a much loved place of worship with so many wonderful memories of past blessings. However, it was also a time of celebration of what God would do for us in the future in our new home. Many past members of Gold Street Chapel attended the service, bringing a wonderful sense of 'family' to the occasion.

Obviously a great deal of work would be needed over the next few weeks to prepare for the official move to Castle Street on Tuesday 25th August 2015. This was complicated by the fact that the Vacation Bible School would take place during August and would involve a large number of those from Gold Street Chapel. On top of this, it was the holiday season and a large number of Gold Street members would be away during August.

The Church Development Group met again on **Monday 10th August** to sort out a number of outstanding details relating to the move – the ongoing struggle to find Architects to advise on the refurbishment work at Castle Street; the formation of a Refurbishment Group to oversee this work and prioritise the essential alterations/improvements; planning the actual move from one building to another; publicity for the neighbourhood and deciding which of the existing users of both premises could continue to be accommodated.

On **Thursday 13th August** there was a skip-filling evening at Castle Street when anything left on the premises that was not needed would be cleared from the premises to make ready for the 'Castle Street Big Clean'! This took place on **Saturday 22nd August** – officially registered as the hottest day of the year so far!

A small group initially met at Gold Street on that day to pack up all the remaining articles for transportation to Castle Street on removal day. Pretloves Removals had been booked to do the actual removal but had left innumerable large cardboard boxes to be filled with everything that was to be transported to our new home. Deciding what should go and what should be discarded proved to be a hilarious time but the work was finally completed and the boxes stacked in readiness for removal day. Some of the group then moved on to Castle Street to join the cleaning brigade. A huge amount of work was carried out throughout the day – rubbish removed, floors scrubbed, walls washed, toilets cleaned, carpets hoovered and windows polished.

On **Sunday 23rd August 2015** the final service took place at Gold Street Chapel. Although a number of members were still on holiday, the Chapel was almost full. Completion on the sale of the Chapel would not take place for another few weeks but this was the last time that we would meet to worship God in the home that He had given us for so many years. It was a time of

thanksgiving and praise – but also a time to reflect and prepare for what was to come.

On **Tuesday 25th August 2015** – a full two years and one hundred and seventy-eight days from the moment God had planted the seed, the move from Gold Street to Castle Street actually took place. A small group initially met at the Chapel whilst equipment, furnishings and boxes were stacked into the removal lorry by the efficient Pretloves team. Everybody then transferred to Castle Street to join those already working there. Boxes were unpacked, furniture unloaded, equipment stored, curtains hung – and gradually over the course of the day, Saffron Walden Community Church emerged.

On **Sunday 30th August** at 10.30am the first service at Saffron Walden Community Church took place – a time of great celebration, praise and thankfulness to God for His faithfulness in bringing us to the end of one journey and the beginning of another. The work was just beginning – not only the practical work of refurbishment and decoration of the building but the work of reaching out to the local neighbourhood and establishing the church in the local community. But God had led us on this path and God would undertake and lead the way if we were faithful to Him.

A move and a change of name for Gold Street Chapel

GOLD STREET CHAPEL completed its acquisition of the former Methodist Church in Castle Street last week with the handing over of the keys to the building.

The Chapel, which has been looking for larger premises for many years, has been holding services at Saffron Walden County High School on Sunday mornings for the past eight years because the Gold Street building was too small for their needs.

Said a spokesman for the Chapel: "Obviously, we can't continue to be known as Gold Street Chapel so we have chosen Saffron Walden Community Church as our new name since we are a community of believers who help each other and the general community as we can.

"We have run a Toddler Group for many years and in the past year have opened language classes teaching English to adults and at an international toddler group. The chapel was also the originator of the Vacation Bible School that caters for between 400 and 500 children every year. Street Pastors, who walk the streets of the town on Friday evenings to provide a friendly presence on the streets and help to any who need it, was also started after an idea by a member of the Chapel.

"The larger premises in Castle Street will provide more opportunity for activities to serve the town. We hope we can build on the long tradition of Christian presence in Castle Street together with the nearby Roman Catholic Church and St Mary's Parish Church.

"We will be looking to make some alterations to the old Methodist Church but are aware that it is a listed building so any alterations will be sensitively designed and carried out."

Both churches have had a long history in Saffron Walden.

The old Methodist Church was built in 1864 and the last service was held there at Easter 2014. The Methodist congregation now meet as part of the URC Church in Abbey Lane.

Gold Street Chapel has been in the town since 1870, first meeting in a lecture hall in Hill Street and moving into the present chapel building in 1888.

The first service of Saffron Walden Community Church is planned for Sunday August 30 at 10.30am.



● Left to right: Julian Nettle and Rev. Stuart Veitch of the Methodist church handing over to minister Jonathan Burton and Barry Land of Saffron Walden Community Church.

SAFFRON WALDEN COMMUNITY CHURCH IS BORN!
Praise and thanks to God for His faithfulness!