

## Who are we?

The faith and philosophy shared in this Chapel, as throughout the Unitarian Church, is far broader than that of early reformers; it is one which recognises the deeply personal nature of belief.

There are many people who cannot accept religious dogma (authoritarian teachings), or creeds (statements of belief), and yet they have faith arising out of their own experience. This faith longs to be acknowledged, developed, strengthened and expressed in some outward way - and it is in this celebration of individuality that we find our unity of purpose.

In asserting personal spiritual freedom, we would hold that:

- There are many sources of truth
- Belief may change over time; it evolves
- Whatever God may or may not be, we need not settle for a purely secular society
- No single scripture contains all truth

The Oat Street congregation is made up of people from a variety of backgrounds - from a liberal Christian outlook, through an openness to all the world's religions, to a spirituality which feels no need of a God. They are drawn to an open-minded environment, and the company of people who are always ready to listen and learn, and who will treat all views with respect.

This liberal spirit of freedom has been celebrated on or near this site for over 300 years, and we continue to gather every Sunday at 11am. Anyone is welcome to join us at that time, and you can expect to find the unexpected!

There is no set pattern to our services, and the readings, songs and meditations might come from all manner of places! Even though our historical roots were in the emerging Christian tradition, we now draw upon a much wider range of traditions for inspiration and guidance, as we journey our different roads together, listening to life.

The high value which we place upon diversity will sometimes be particularly evident - perhaps at a service on a special occasion, or in alternative times for worship during the week.

Please do not hesitate to follow up any interest you might have in our approach to life and truth and meaning - we would like to welcome yours!

## How to find out more

Consult...our Notice-board,

Prospectus

Group Calendar & Newsletter

Web-site:- <http://welcome.to/OatSt.Chapel>

or the Minister:

Rev. Don Phillips

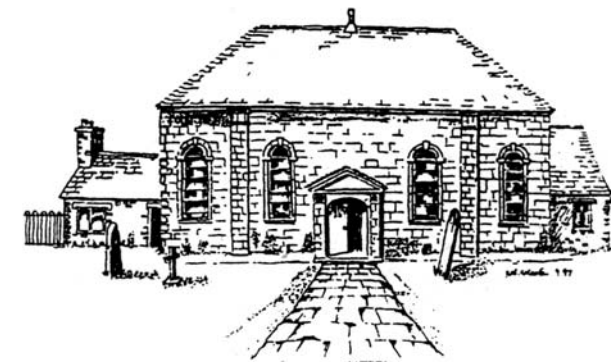
Telephone:- 01455 636602

The Minister will always be delighted to talk about Celebrations of Life - unique and personal services to mark special occasions in life; be it Birth, Marriage, Death, or any other milestone.

The Oat Street Congregation  
is a member of the  
Cotswold Group of Unitarian and  
Free Christian Churches -  
"a community of all ages  
that sings its songs,  
tells its thoughts, asks its questions,  
and searches together with courage and with love."

(Patricia Shuttee)

## Welcome to Oat Street Chapel



### From George May's History of Evesham - 1845

*"This place of worship is very properly placed back from the public street - from whence we pass through a gardenlike enclosure spread with turf that here and there swells gently over the remains of those who sleep beneath.*

*While flowering shrubs shaded by the drooping branches of the mournful willow, that waves above the lettered stones, stamp order, quietitude and seriousness upon this house of prayer.*

*There is something, too, appropriate and time honoured in the aspect of the building. It lacks the prim and staring frontage which modern meeting houses usually possess.*

*There is a repose and mellowness in the tincture of its walls and sedateness even in the leaded lights that occupy its window frames.*

*We enter: and the character of the interior harmoniously corresponds; it tells us that the fathers of the living generations worshipped here. The place is well proportioned; airy; not smothered in galleries but roomily pewed with oak.*

*The organ loft, the pulpit, with its characteristic sounding board, and even the dial, with its ancient face, are all in unison and speak to us of by-gone years."*

## How we began ....

Oat Street Unitarian Chapel is one of Evesham's most attractive dissenting meeting houses.

Its history can be traced back to 1696 when a congregation, of no set denomination, met in a barn in the High Street. They became known as Presbyterians about 20 years later and Unitarians shortly after.

At this time to question church dogma was an offence and when the chapel was built, in 1737, it was set back from the street, behind a row of small cottages, to avoid drawing attention to its unorthodox worship.

Since then the external appearance has remained virtually unchanged. In 1875 the interior was reconstructed; the box pews were cut down, the organ resited and the apse and vestry were added.

The school rooms were built in 1759 and enlarged in 1862 as children of dissenters were not allowed to attend Anglican schools. Earlier this century as many as 200 children attended Sunday School.

One of the Chapel's most well-known members was the historian George May. He printed and sold books in Evesham, on the corner of Bridge Street (now WH Smiths) and wrote his History of Evesham in two editions - 1834 and 1847 - along with a Guide to the Birth Town of Shakespeare and a manual of prayers for use at sea.

Many generations of the New family (a family of considerable influence) were great supporters of the Chapel.

In 1820 John New bequeathed £100 to start a bread

charity. Every Christmas morning for more than 120 years bread was distributed to the poor from the downstairs schoolrooms. A gallery was installed in the Chapel in his memory by his son Alderman Anthony New (removed in 1875) who also paid for the organ and a beautiful silver chalice and flagon which is now housed at the Almonry Museum.

Herbert New, President of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, solicitor, historian and sonnet writer gave the land for the apse, vestry and graveyard. His sons, the famous book illustrator Edmund H New and local solicitors Oliver and Geoffrey New; Alderman of the Borough, Honorary Freeman and several times Mayor of Evesham all worshipped here - as many of the gravestones and memorials can testify.

William Gill Smith, justice of the Peace, for the county and Mayor of Evesham, was Unitarian as was his son William Gill Smith - founder of the Evesham Journal. Electric lighting was installed in his memory.

In 1930 the Chapel fabric was strengthened and more recently the schoolrooms have been refurbished.

Our volunteer gardener cleared out rubbish from a room at the rear of what was a small cottage (adjacent to the gatehouse) and discovered an early Victorian wash house complete with iron range, water pump and a Dickensian copper boiler.

The 'repose and mellowness' of the Chapel, described by George May, is as tangible today as when he wrote his History of Evesham over 150 years ago.

Now he lies, in the garden, beneath one of the 'lettered stones' but the Chapel's deep sense of peace and tranquillity remains timeless.

## Things to see ....

1. The oak pulpit and sounding board - built in the days of grand oratory. Note also the sloping floor which gives the congregation a good view of the Minister.

2. To the left of the pulpit, and in the vestry, are original water colours by Sarah and Jane Davis painted in the 19th Century. Some are of the old barn in the High Street where Unitarians used to worship. Sarah and Jane were the daughters of the Rev Timothy Davis - see memorial stone above.

3. Photographs, in vestry, of the Alcester Unitarian Chapel taken just before its demolition in the early part of the 20th Century. The Latin memorial tablet in the vestry was brought from the Alcester Chapel.

4. Plan of cemetery above vestry door.

5. Some of the original leaded lights of the chapel were replaced with stained glass memorial windows to members of the congregation - Dr Anthony Martin, Surgeon, his wife Maria and their servant of 48 years Mary Dunn and the infant son of Alderman Geoffrey New. It is unusual for a dissenting meeting house to have such beautiful windows.

6. The brass tablet above the font was installed in memory of Private Parry of the 42nd Royal Canadian Rifles, killed at Courcellette, September 15, 1916. (Robin Parry was the son of Dr Martin's daughter who married the Rev Edward Parry.)

7. At the back of the Chapel are fine oil paintings of the Rev. and Mrs Paul Cardale. The Rev. Cardale was at the High Street barn and then at Oat Street from 1733-1775. These portraits used to hang in the schoolrooms.

8. The historian, writer and publisher, George May, and his wife and daughter are buried in the church yard - see memorial at end of wall to the left of the Chapel.

9. The Victorian wash house by the schoolrooms is another facet of the fascinating history within this small corner of Evesham, once surrounded by small cottages and cobbled streets.