

Moments in Our History

(Excerpts from the Dissenting Church of Christ at St. John's 1775 – 1975)

A Sufficiency of Land (Part 1)

By 1785, the “slight house” which served as a church and school was hopelessly inadequate. That year, a Captain John Brown, owner of the ketch Hope out of Poole, Dorsetshire, took an interest in the little congregation at St. John's. On his return to Poole, Brown reported to his fellow members of Mr. Ashburner's Meeting House. In the spring of 1786, John Jones was encouraged by a letter from Mr. George Kemp, merchant at Poole, to “send a full account of the state of your affairs that some relief can be obtained for the establishing of a good place of worship.”

Accordingly, John Jones, together with Nathan Parker, Wallis Lang, Henry Phillips, Joseph Lowman, Edward Freeman and James Barnes, drew up an address to the Dissenting Churches of Poole, Plymouth, Taunton, Wareham, Woolwich, Greenock and Waterford; with copies to Mr. George Welsh, banker at London; and the Reverend Samuel Greatheed, a former member of the congregation, at Newport Pagnell in Buckinghamshire; stating the following particulars:

1. The present building was erected on leased land, the lease to expire in 5 years time.
2. The terms called for a chimney to be built before the lease expired, the chimney to cost £ 20.
3. The congregation “remains £ 60 in debt to three people who are much in want of that money.”
4. At the expiration of the lease, the society will be “destitute of any place in which to worship God.”
5. “The whole community are poor, having nothing but what they can earn by Labour and Business.”
6. There are “not above eighteen (of a total membership of sixty-four) that can afford to pay anything ... and they ... find it exceeding hard to spare from the support of their families £ 5 or £ 6 per year.”