

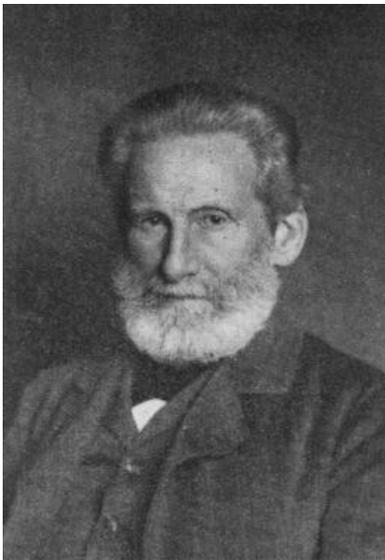
A brief guide to...

Umberslade Baptist Church

Spring Lane, Hockley Heath, nr. Solihull, B94 6QY

History & Background

Umberslade Baptist Church was opened in September 1877 by George Frederick Muntz, a prominent local industrialist and Baptist convert who had purchased Umberslade Hall, in the estate of which the chapel stands, in 1857.



G. F. Muntz, Jr.

The hall was previously leased by his father, George Frederic Muntz, a Liberal MP who had built up a successful business in Handsworth. Muntz Snr was a founding member of the Birmingham Political Union, an organisation that looked to spread the right to vote to working-class men, and one of the city's first MPs, it having been represented previously only as part of the county constituency for Warwickshire. His fortune was based on the manufacture of 'Muntz Metal',

Historic Chapels Trust, a registered charity

St George's German Lutheran Church, 55 Alie Street, London, E1 8EB

T: 020 7481 0533 E: chapels@hct.org.uk Web: www.hct.org.uk

an alloy of copper and zinc that was used to coat the wooden hulls of ships. Muntz Snr was also instrumental in the introduction of perforated postage stamp, and was known for his extravagant beard in a time when it was fashionable to be clean-shaven.

In building his chapel, Muntz Jnr sought to serve not only the needs of the estate, but also spread Baptist worship in the local village. To this end the church is built halfway between Umberslade Hall and Hockley Heath. The chapel was built by the Birmingham-based Congregationalist architect George Ingall – it is now the major extant example of his work.



The wooden church building

The Exterior

Built in a Decorated Gothic Style, on first appearance the church seems to be an old Anglican parish church. Made of Wilmcote stone with Bath stone dressings, the body of the chapel is a wide aisle-less



Tradition: Baptist

Built: 1877

Congregation active until: 1992

Listing: II*

Grid Reference: SP147721

Transport:

The nearest railway station is approx 5 miles away in Dorridge on the line from London Marylebone to Birmingham. It is necessary to get a taxi from Dorridge to the church.

By car, take the B4101 South West out of Hockley Heath. This is Spring Lane. Approx 400 yards from the junction is the small private track with HCT sign at its entrance leading to the church. If this is locked, park near the entrance to the lane and walk along the signposted footpath. The church is approx 300 yards down the track. If the gate to the track is open there is parking for approximately six vehicles near to the church.

Visits by prior arrangement with the keyholder.

Tel: 0121 704 2694

rectangle aligned east and west with shallow north and south transepts. At the apex of the gables and at the east end are hexagonal or star-shaped finials, in the place of crosses, which may have been considered unsuitable. At the west end is

the north porch, and balancing it to the south a tall slender tower with an elegantly pointed spire, visible for miles around. The tower contains a clock and eight carillon bells that originally played one of seven contemporary tunes every three hours. At the east end a range of vestries were added in 1892. Muntz had his own special entrance to access the church, which purportedly remained shut for many years after his death. Within the surrounding grounds can be found a monument over the Muntz family vault, along with a number of other graves. A wooden church that later served as a school, also built by Muntz, stands nearby.



The Muntz family vault

The Interior

The wide unimpeded chapel makes few concessions to Gothic expectations. The seating below the arch-braced timber roof has no central aisle but three ranks of pine pews facing the central pulpit, the focal point of worshippers' attention. Twin staircases rise to the pulpit desk, behind which a seat for the preacher is enclosed in a Gothic aedicule. In front of the pulpit, between it and the communion table, is the Baptistry. This is open and

surrounded on three sides by marble rails.



The pulpit (front view)

In the south transept there is a late nineteenth century organ, built by Bishop & Son. In the north transept a brass plaque can be found to Muntz Jnr, who, in his old age used to listen to the sermons from the Hall via a microphone in the pulpit. The stained glass windows depict geometric patterns.

Subsequent History

Umberslade Baptist Church was transferred to the auspices of the Historic Chapels Trust in 1999, and the first phase of restoration was completed in 2008, in which the roof was renewed and crumbling stonework in the church and tower was repaired and replaced. However, much remains to be done.

New Uses

The chapel can be hired for suitable events such as concerts and meeting and marriages according to Baptist rites. The building is also available for funerals and memorial services. The burial ground is open for burials. Contact us for details.



Umberslade Church in use

Further Reading

Alan Betteridge, *Deep Roots, Living Branches: A History of Baptists in the English Western Midlands*, (London, 2010) p. 282

E. Edwards, *Personal Recollections of Birmingham and Birmingham Men* (Birmingham, 1877)

David McKie, *Bright Particular Stars: A Gallery of Glorious British Eccentrics* (London, 2011)

I. G. Rees, *A Baptist Squire Built Church*, Baptist Times (January 24, 1957)