



# Danbury United Reformed Church



## Church History

(1937 to 2024)



There is evidence that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century people were making the long trek (2 to 3 miles) to the Congregational Church at Little Baddow from as far away as the Old Bakery, below the Cricketer's Inn. By early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century 17 Danbury people were worshipping at Little Baddow regularly, and a bus was provided at the expense of the church at the cost of £1 a quarter. By 1935 Danbury Congregationalists felt the need for a church in their own village, and Little Baddow gave its blessing to the infant daughter church. The land in Little Baddow Road was duly purchased from Mr Baxter, a local builder. On the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1936 Danbury Congregational Church was formally constituted at a service in the garden room at Winchmore, the home of Mr & Mrs Chandler. Regular services were held there, led by ministers, theological students and laymen, until the opening of the present building. The original membership of 17 rose to 24 and the average attendance was about 30. Architect Frederic Lawrence F.R.I.B.A. of Bournemouth drew up plans for the new church, which he based on his previous work for Oxted Congregational Church in Surrey. Mr Harry Potter of Chelmsford erected the new church, which was opened under the ministry of Rev. Vaughan-Pryce on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1937. In spite of being scaled down from Oxted's much larger

version of the design, the building in Danbury is beautifully proportioned and is said to have the best acoustics of any chapel in Essex. Loans had been raised to pay for the building, but the ladies of the new congregation had formed the Women's Fellowship in 1935, and the new church was clear of debts in 18 months, thanks largely to their fund raising efforts.

The garden room at Winchmore continued to be used for the Women's Fellowship meetings and for a Youth fellowship, which met on Sunday afternoons. In order to launch the Youth Fellowship church ladies walked round the village and invited boys and girls to meet for tea and biscuits. Their efforts were so successful that the Fellowship grew until there was a membership of over 30 young people. During the 1940's and 50's it was very active in the village, meeting on Tuesday and Sunday nights – Tuesdays being devoted to recreational activities. Sadly, as with Sunday School, membership declined until the Fellowship was no longer viable. The Women's Fellowship, however, continues to thrive, meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday afternoons. They no longer restrict their activities to fund raising, although they support charities both locally and around the world.

It soon became obvious that the meetings in the Winchmore garden room would outstay their welcome, so it was decided to purchase a hut to house the extra activities. The purchase was made in 1939 – at which point the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War started. The hut was taken over by the authorities and used as a N.A.A.F.I. canteen. Volunteers from the church helped to staff it. The hut was extended twice with new kitchen and toilets in the late 1970's to become our present church hall, when the Manse was built.

The Danbury church continued as a Congregational church under the wing of the mother church at Little Baddow, until the amalgamation of non-conformist churches took place in 1972 – when the participant churches became the United Reformed Church. Danbury broke from Little Baddow and joined a new group with Howe Green (Sandon) and Great Baddow, and then with the new Church of Our Saviour in Chelmer Village. A larger Chelmsford group was formed, where the four aforementioned churches were also joined by Trent Road, North Avenue, Little Waltham and Writtle URC's. Trent Road and Writtle have since closed, and in 2018 Danbury became a church on its own. In 2024 Danbury became a mission partnership with Maldon, Burnham-on-Crouch and Southminster URCs.

# DANBURY UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

## CHURCH HISTORY

Inaugural Service - June 7th 1936  
Dedication of New Church Building - July 21st 1937  
Formerly a Congregational Church until 1973

### ROLL OF MINISTERS AND LAY LEADERS

Photo: Rev. Bernard Vaughan-Pryce  
Danbury's first minister 1937



Mar. 1937 -	Dec. 1943	Rev. Bernard VAUGHAN PRYCE
Apr. 1944 -	Feb. 1945	Mrs. E.M. VAUGHAN PRYCE
Feb. 1945 -	Nov. 1954	Rev. G.W. CAMERON-PRICE
June 1955 -	Dec. 1956	Mr. G.T. ALLPRESS
June 1957 -	Jan. 1959	Rev. C. WOOLMER
Feb. 1959 -	July 1959	Mr. R.J. MINNIS
Sept. 1959 -	Mar. 1963	Rev. R. WILSON
Oct. 1963 -	June 1970	Mr. K.J. GREEN
Oct. 1970 -	Oct. 1974	Rev. Ron H. WILLIAMS
Oct. 1974 -	July 1975	Rev. Ken J. PRYOR - Interim Moderator
July 1975 -	June 1977	Mr John R. HARDY ) - Joint Pastorate
July 1975 -	May 1979	Rev. Ken J. PRYOR ) - Joint Pastorate
June 1979 -	Sept. 1980	Rev. F. THOMPSON - Interim Moderator
Sept. 1980 -	June 1987	Rev. John G. FARMER
Mar. 1985 -	Dec. 1988	Rev. John C. WADE - Auxiliary Minister
Sept. 1987 -	Dec. 1989	Rev. Roger E. CORNISH
Dec. 1989 -	Aug. 1992	Rev. Tina PINNELL - Interim Moderator
Aug. 1992 -	May 2003	Rev. John K. GARDINER
Jan 2004 -	Jul 2004	Rev. Glyn MILLINGTON - Interim Moderator
Aug 2006	Sep 2014	Rev. Jon SERMON.
Jan 2016	Dec 2017	Rev. Mark MEATCHER
	2017	No minister.
Aug 2024		Rev. Anne SARDESON

Extracts from newspaper articles in 1936, 1937, 1943 and 1946.

### **In 1936**

**NEW CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH AT DANBURY** On Monday meeting was held in the garden Winchmore, Danbury, by invitation of Mr. and Mrs. H. Chandler, for the purpose constituting a Congregational Church. The Rev. B. Vaughan- Price, M.A., LL.B. of Little Baddow, presided, and after divine worship gave account the steps which had been taken towards this end. A site had been purchased by the Essex Congregational Union opposite the reservoir the Little Baddow road not far from Eves Corner. The Rev. A. D. Martin then made a statement as to the fundamental principles of the Congregational Churches and read! resolution enrolment and of personal dedication. This resolution was signed by most of those present, others expressing general sympathy with the new church. This was followed a prayer of dedication, and the Rev. A. Halfpenny, Maldon, on behalf of the Essex Congregational Union, addressed the newly-formed church. Arrangements were made for a Sunday evening service at 6.30 to be held every week, commencing June 7th, when the Rev. A .D. Martin will conduct the worship. Mr. and Mrs. Chandler have promised the use of their garden premises, which include commodious summer house with piano, electric light, and seating accommodation for fifty people. The number those enrolled as member's warrants the expectation the committee that all these seats will soon be required.

### **In 1937**

**CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH STONE-LAYING AT DANBURY** foundation-stone-laying ceremony of the new Congregational Church being built Danbury was attended by a large gathering on Wednesday. "The Church will cost about £1,000, with an additional £300 for fitting and furnishing. Towards this, up to Wednesday nearly £900 had been raised, and an additional £100 has been promised, while gifts received at the stone-laying ceremony totalled £75/15/-.The Church, with seating accommodation for 80 people, will ultimately form a school chapel in the completed church buildings, which will be proceeded with as funds allow. The site, on the Little Baddow road, a short distance from Eve's Corner, has been given by the Extension Committee of the Essex Congregational Union, which body also contributed towards the cost of the building. The Women's Working Party and others also rendered valuable help. The local committee includes the Rev. A. D. Martin, chairman; the Rev. B. Vaughan-Pryce, LL.B., vice chairman Mr. W. H. Clark, treasurer; and Mr. H. P. Girling, acting secretary Mr. Vaughan-Pryce, who was formerly the Congregational minister at Little Baddow and is now retired, will act as superintendent minister of the church, and will conduct the services there once a month, the other services to be shared by visiting ministers, lay preachers, and students from New College. The architect is Mr. Frederic Lawrence, F.R.I.B.A., Bournemouth, and the builders are Messrs. Henry Potter (Wm. Sharp), Ltd., of Chelmsford. those present at the stone-laying in addition to those already mentioned, included Mrs. B. Vaughan-Pryce, J.P., who performed the ceremony, the Rev. F. S.

Hopkirk, rector of Danbury; Mr. Henry Rumsey, J.P., treasurer of the Essex Congregational Union; Mr. D. Marven, of Little Baddow Congregational Church; Mr. Wm. Sharp, Chelmsford, and many others. Members of the choir of London Road Congregational Church, Chelmsford, conducted by Mr. C. Hart, F.R.C.O., rendered the anthem, "God so loved the world." After prayers the Rev. B. Vaughan-Pryce said that for a long time the need had been felt for Free Church in Danbury, where the population was rapidly increasing. They acknowledged with deep gratitude the gifts already made, and especially the help and encouragement of the Essex Congregational Union. Their church at Little Baddow had also expressed approval and sympathy. Regular Sunday service 'was already being held at Winchmore, Danbury, by' the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. H. Chandler, and much assistance had been given the services there by students from New College, "We need the prayers and sympathy of all our friends," added the rev. gentleman. "We believe this is a work on which the blessing of God rests, and in that faith we are going on with the scheme." Mr. H. P. Girling gave a brief account of the financial position, and said best wishes had been sent by the Chairman of the Essex Congregational Union (Mr. Herbert Sadd, J.P., of Maldon), and Mrs. Sadd, who regretted they were unable to be present. Mrs. Vaughan-Pryce, having been presented with a silver trowel by the committee, then declared the foundation-stone well and truly laid." She congratulated the Congregationalists of Danbury and district upon a noble undertaking, which had evoked the admiration of their friends all over the county, who hoped every blessing would rest upon that place of God. The foundation-stone was inscribed: This House of Prayer is dedicated to the Glory of God and the extension of His Kingdom, 7th April, 1937." The hymn, "Immortal Love, for ever full," was sung, and the service concluded with the Benediction

## In 1937

**DANBURY CHURCH DEDICATED** The new Danbury Congregational Church in Little Baddow Road was dedicated on Wednesday by the Rev. B. Vaughan-Pryce, former minister of Little Baddow. The foundation-stone was laid on Feb. 7 by Mrs. Vaughan-Pryce. The building is a handsome edifice in red brick, built in a modern but dignified style, costing about £1,400. The seating capacity is for about 100, although over 150 persons were present at Wednesday service, many standing in the "porch and vestry. If the district grows a larger church will be built, and the present building used for children's services. Mr. Vaughan-Pryce was assisted by the Rev H. Ross Williamson (moderator of the Eastern Province), the Rev. J. Gurr Reid (chairman of the Essex Congregational Union, and the Rev. F. S. Hopkirk (rector of Danbury). Mr. Cecil Hart, F.R.C.O., was tn. organist. Following the singing of suitable hymns and the recitation of dedicatory prayers, an address was given by the Rev. John Bevan, of Balham. He said it was a great act of faith in these days to build a Christian church, because conditions and the life of the country were anything but tending to the direction of the Christian faith So many people seem to be giving up the habit of public worship, some relying upon mere good feeling; but the problems of the world would not be solved by that sort of worship, unharnessed to

any faith. Their act in building the church was testimony of their belief that in this difficult world the only solution to their problems was the application of the spirit of Christ. Their church was a sort of "power house," through which that spirit would go out into the world. After tea in the Village Hall a public meeting was presided over by the Rev. H. Ross Williamson, and addresses were given by the Rev. J. Bevan and the Rev. J. Gurr Reid. Music was by the choir the London Road Congregational Church, Chelmsford. Collections during the day amounted to £99.

## In 1943

### **LIGHT FROM CHURCH WINDOWS**

Willie Swain Hope, of Little Baddow Road, Danbury, was summoned in respect of unobscured light during the black-out at the Danbury Congregational Church, of which he is secretary. – P.c Fitch said he saw "a blaze of light" coming from the church, which is in Little Baddow Road, Danbury. Seventeen windows were unobscured.- Mr Hope told the Bench that the door of the church had been damaged by wind. Three other members of the church and himself managed to force the door to, but they forgot to turn out lights burning in an alcove by the altar. – The Chairman : If there had been a raid on someone might have got hurt, even if the church was not hit. The fine is £2.

## In 1943

**CLERGYMAN THANKS POLICE** To-day, at Chelmsford Session, the Mayor in the chair, the Rev. Bernard Vaughan Pryce, Sunningdale Road, Chelmsford, pleaded not guilty to showing an unscreened light from his house on Nov. 21. Thos. F. Wilton, air raid warden, said at 10.30 p.m. on Nov. 21 light came from a side window of the house. The window was open and the curtain was flapping backwards and forwards. Mr. Vaughan Pryce said he was not aware that the light was on. Mr. Vaughan Pryce: The only person who used that bathroom was wife, who is adjudicating in the other Court. P.c. Young, who visited the house, said that when told he would be reported, Mr. Vaughan Pryce said his wife entered the bathroom and was only there for three minutes. Mr. Vaughan Pryce said could not have been direct light. Mrs. Vaughan Price left Bench in the other Court to give evidence on her husband's behalf. She said that on the night of Nov. 21 she used the bathroom twice, for only two minutes each time. She could not swear that she put the light out the first time, but was positive that she switched it off the second time. When the warden knocked, there was no light.—Mr Vaughan Pryce: I have taken every precaution, but the strong wind must have moved the curtain. Fine of 15/-, with 51- costs was imposed. Mr. Vaughan Pryce paid tribute to the " kindness and decency " of P.c. Young, which he very much appreciated. "He did not thunder at my door and put a finish to what is left of my nerves/" he said. "He also removed from my mind any impression that I was one of the Fifth Column, as I had been given before. He went with great patience over the house."



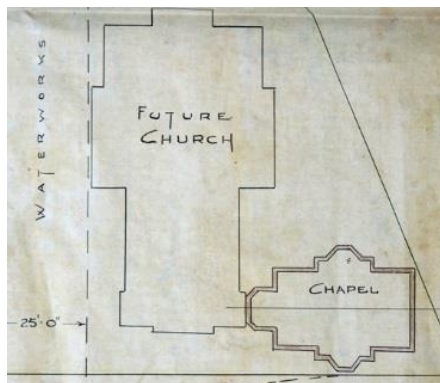
From Chelmsford Chronicle Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June 1946.

**CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.** Anniversary services on Sunday were well attended. The Rev G.W. Cameron-Price based his addresses on “The need for the Church” and “The Place of the Church in the Life of To-day.” The mid-week service was conducted by the Rev. Elsie D. Chamberlain R.A.F. late of Friern Barnet, who also spoke at the evening gathering, when Mr H. Paterson was chairman. The church was again full. Mrs Beryl King delighted with two solos. At tea time friends gave greetings from other churches. A helpful address was given by Rev. E. Chamberlain.

John Knott has uncovered an amount of archived history documents while clearing the Coal Hole.

There is a very old and faded document with the original plan of the church.

There were obviously grand plans for the future, with a future church being about 3 times larger, and attached to the existing chapel. But that was 80 years ago. It is now our church hall.

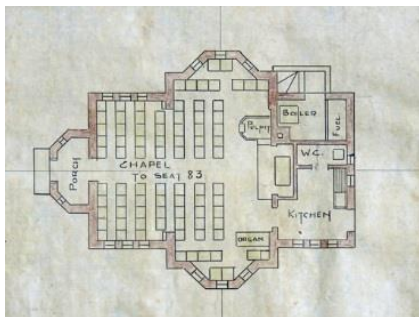


The water main, under the church car park, upon which we cannot build, would seem to be about 25 feet wide.

On this plan you can see that the vestry was originally planned as a kitchen and WC.

### **CHURCH HALL.**

The hall was opened in June 1939 and cost £425, extended in 1963 for £3,000. At the outbreak of war the hall met a pressing need of men in the forces and the canteen and friendly contacts with the men were much appreciated.



### **THE MANSE**

There is a letter from the First Congregational Church in Danbury, Connecticut dated 1956 referring to a gift they had given towards the manse. We must have made another appeal to them in 1972, which was refused due to their own difficulty in meeting their yearly budget. It did say that if in the future they had excess funds they would keep us in mind.

# Information about the Church Architect

## FREDERIC W. LAWRENCE F.R.I.B.A.

He had offices in Bellevue Road, Southbourne, Bournemouth, and/or 53 Southbourne Road, Bournemouth.

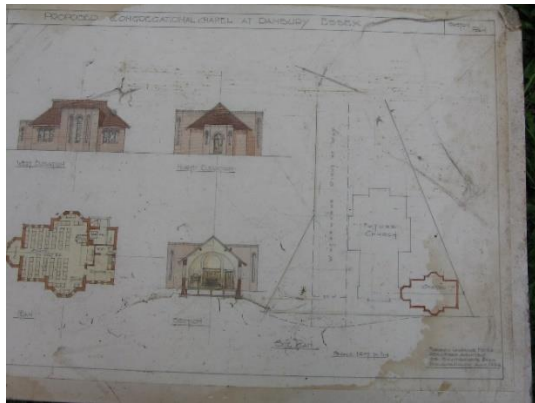
Described as a Midland Methodist of psychic sensitivity, who had found a home among South Coast Congregationalists.

Architect of Immanuel Congregational, Southbourne, Bournemouth(1929), Oxted Congregational (built 1934), Ewell Congregational (1935), Danbury Congregational (1937). Invited to be architect of the City Temple but died (in 1948) before taking this on. Also prepared drawings for Methodist Central Hall.

Architectural features: Lily pond with a statue of St. Francis. Arches inside church. Colour blue used within archway.

It would appear that the founding minister of Danbury in 1937, the Rev. Bernard Vaughan-Pryce, was previously minister of Oxted in 1903. This is probably the link that brought Frederic Lawrence into Essex.

*Information has been supplied by Aimee Whitbread of Danbury URC, and Chris Bruce-Jones of Oxted URC.*



Original plans of Danbury URC

These show that the church was planned as a chapel, and that the hall was to be the church.



## Little Baddow United Reformed Church

A few words of history about our founding church in Little Baddow.

There was semblance of 'dissent' in Little Baddow in 1626 to 1630 when Thomas Hooker and John Eliot attended meetings in a farmhouse "Cuckoos Farm" (still there). These two became 'Pilgrim Fathers' and sailed to North America, where Thomas Hooker became the founder of the state of Connecticut. In 1662 Thomas Gibson was one of the 'ejected' priests who refused to accept the "Act of Uniformity" and he formed the fellowship at Little Baddow. The church itself was built in 1707 of red stone.



## The history of the United Reformed Church.

The URC was created in 1972 by the unification of the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches. The Churches of Christ joined in 1981.

**Congregationalism.** The Congregationalists, or Independents, have origins during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and there were persecutions and several martyrs under Elizabeth. Many of them sailed to Holland and then on to North America, where they founded the Congregational Church in New England. In 1641 many exiles returned to England, became increasingly active, and under Oliver Cromwell held positions of eminence. The advent of King Charles II was a disaster and the "Act of Uniformity" was the first of a series of efforts to destroy them. In 1662, under this Act, the Church of England introduced the Book of Common Prayer. 2,000 priests refused to accept it and were 'ejected' from their churches. Thus forming the fellowship at Little Baddow.

**Presbyterianism.** This was developed in Geneva by Jean Calvin, and refers to the basic structure of the church. Having made little headway under the reign on Elizabeth I and James, in 1640 events moved towards control of England by the Presbyterian Parliamentary Party, and Charles was driven to accept a bill removing Bishops from all temporal office and depriving them of power. In 1648 the army of Oliver Cromwell purged parliament of all 140 Presbyterians and left there 60 Independents. Presbyterianism never regained power in England, but was revived by Scottish people settling in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

Danbury United Reformed Church, Essex  
Built in 1937.



Exterior View



Interior View

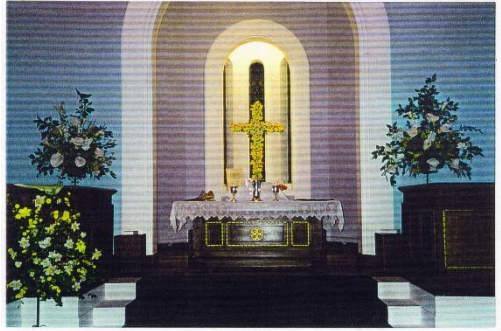


Rear and Side Views



Other churches by Frederic Lawrence

Oxted United Reformed Church, Surrey (1934).



Ewell United Reformed Church, Surrey (1935).



Immanuel URC, Southbourne, Dorset (1929).



*Document compiled by David Whiteing, Church Secretary, 19<sup>th</sup> May 2018,  
Revised 30<sup>th</sup> August 2024.*