

**FROME BAPTIST**  
**SHEPPARDS BARTON MEETING**

NOTES

2023

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## Contents

Introduction .....	1
Layout .....	6



## Introduction



The Sheppards Barton Chapel

From the *Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales* (170-1872) by John Marius Wilson, in the section on Frome:

The places of worship, in 1851, were 36 of the Church of England, with 9,925 sittings; 5 of Independents, with 1,726 s.; 10 of Baptists, with 3,209 s.; 1 of Quakers, with 250 s.; 16 of Wesleyan Methodists, with 3, 772 s.; 11 of Primitive Methodists, with 1, 381 s.; and 5 of Wesleyan Reformers, with 405 s.

The most prominent Baptist meeting houses in Frome were:

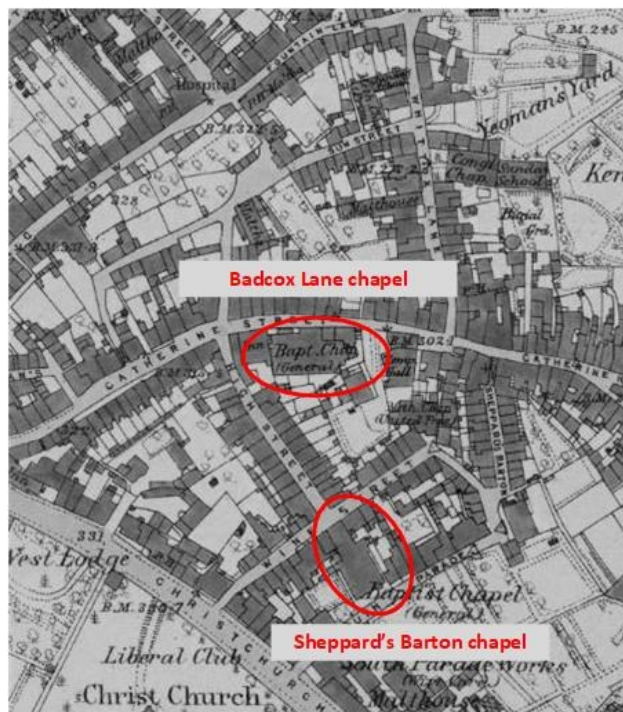
- The Badcox Lane Baptist Chapel (in Catherine Street). While there was a Baptist meeting from 1669, the first chapel dates from 1711 and the neo-classical building that survives dates from circa 1812. This chapel closed in 1962 and later served as a library, before being converted into flats in the 1980s. The building was designated Grade II listed by Historic England. The description has that it dates from 1813 and it has a Doric portico.
- Sheppards Barton (now South Parade) Meeting House from 1707 (demolished and rebuilt in 1850). The last-surviving Baptist church in the town. It existed in 1991 as there are press reports of funerals there but while the building survives, the site is now designated as 'The Old Church Hall'. In 2023 the former school rooms on the first floor of the church were on offer for short-term stays as a 'first-floor apartment in a Grade II listed former church'. The Historic England listing for the building has 'Wall monuments from former chapel, including those to John Sheppard [1806], Thomas Bunn [1775] and the Rev Edward Cooper Daniell [1828].
- Naish's Street Baptist Chapel from 1835. There is newspaper report in 1837 of this chapel in connection with a petition for the abolition of church rates, having 85 signatures (*The Patriot* Mon 13 Mar 1837 p8). Compulsory church rates were only abolished in 1868. In some press reports

referred to as 'Ebenezer Chapel'. Licensed for marriages from 1860 (*Evening Mail* Wed 1 Feb 1860 p8). Existed until 1890.

- Lock's Lane. In some reports referred to as 'Providence Chapel'. Licensed for marriages in 1862 (*London Evening Standard* Wed 22 Jan 1862 p3). Existed from 1855 to 1882.



Press reports of sermons indicate that the speaker would go to some or all of these chapels. The press report in 1962 on the closure of Badcock Lane Chapel (see below) refers to there having been seven Baptist congregations.



From the *Wiltshire Independent* of Thu 18 May 1843 p4

**EDUCATION OF FACTORY CHILDREN.  
MEETING OF THE DISSENTERS AND OTHER  
INHABITANTS OF FROME.**

A second public meeting on this subject was held in the large Baptist Chapel, Badcox Lane, on Wednesday evening last. The public feeling against the measure is only rendered more strong and decisive by the so-called amendments of Sir James Graham. The attendance was very large, and many were unable to gain admission. The most determined opposition is felt to the Bill in this town, was shown the attention of the audience very close this protracted meeting.

JOHN SINKINS, esq. was called to the chair, and said I certainly anticipated a second meeting, but I thought it would be for different purpose than that which brings us together this evening. I thought it would a meeting of joy and congratulation, and that the general opposition which has been shown to this Bill would have consigned it to oblivion. But such not the case. We must begin anew in a spirit of greater determination. (Cheers.) We must again besiege the House Commons with petitions, and if it be necessary, go to the upper House, and if that fails, one resource is left to us—we can into the presence her Majesty. (Loud cheers ) We can tell the Rev. Hugh Manchester, who, with a feeling of indignation at our insignificance, asks “who these dissenters are who repudiate the teaching of the established Church, who affect to dictate to her who the supreme instructress the people?” We can tell him without fear of the charge of arrogance, that we are they who taught the “supreme instructress of the people” herself to teach. Yes; it was the Dissenters of England who forced her to open the sluices of knowledge. Have we toiled till now, bearing the heat and burthen of the day, and shall we allow schools to be erected, and supported by ourselves, not for the purpose of the diffusion of general and useful knowledge, but to answer the purpose of a party who are blindly endeavouring to bring back to the old fold those sheep which their former supineness and apathy have allowed to wander. (Cheers.) Education is not required for Britain alone. India, with its increasing territory, is ours, and calls for additional education to meet the demands of a dense population. Africa, and the South Sea

Islands, now subject to the dastardly cowardice of popish invasion, must be taught; and if all this work is to be done, shall we not see to it that the fountain of knowledge is pure? (cheers) . . .

Sir James Graham's Factory Education Scheme, 1843 presented to Parliament in 1843 was part of a larger factory bill provided for the compulsory education of children in factories with a schoolmaster appointed on the nomination of the (Anglican) diocesan bishop and a school-board on which there would be a practical majority of Anglicans.

From the *Bath Chronicle* of Thu 19 Apr 1849 p3:

FROME.—There was a great disturbance at Frome, on the 9th inst., in consequence of some parties having taken possession of a Dissenting chapel in Naish Street. The right the property has been disputed for some time past, but was brought to a decision at the last Somerset Assizes; and it was upon the successful parties taking possession that the “row” commenced. It lasted all day. The windows were smashed, and the iron gates in front of the chapel broken down; the door was also much damaged. Several of the parties were summoned before the magistrates, yesterday week, some for breaking windows and others for breaking heads, and were fined in various amounts.

From *The Patriot* of Thu 14 Feb 1850 p7:

SHEPPARD'S BARTON, FROME— This chapel, erected in 1707, having been for some years falling into decay, became, at length, unsafe, and, as increased accommodation was desired, it was taken down, re-built, and considerable enlarged. The new edifice was opened on Thursday, the 7th inst., by the Rev. W.

Jay, of Bath, and James Hamilton, of London. Dinner and tea were provided gratuitously for visitors, of which a hundred partook. After dinner a very interesting narrative of the early history of the Church, compiled from the old Church-books, by John Sheppard, Esq., senior deacon, was read, and addresses were delivered by the Revs. James Hamilton, C. J. Middleditch, Charles Stanford, J. Sprigg, A.M., and R. Morris, of Clifton. On the following Sabbath sermons were preached, in the morning by the Rev. Dr. Murch, formerly associated with John Foster, as pastor of the Church, and in the evening by the Rev. S. Manning, the present pastor. The collections amounted to about 50l.

The 'Rev W Jay' referred to was Willam Jay (1769-1853) who was the minister at the Independent Chapel, Argyle Street, Bath. This chapel was later designated as 'Congregational'. The term 'Baptist' was used rather loosely and included various nonconformist congregations.

From the *Frome Times* of Wed 1 Feb 1860 p1  
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that a separate Building named Ebenezer Chapel, situate at Naish's-street. in the parish of Frome Selwood, in the county of Somerset, in the district of Frome, being a Building certified according to Law place of Religious Worship, was, on the 24th day of January, 1860, duly registered for Solemnizing Marriages therein, pursuant to the Act of 6 and 7 William IV. c. 85.  
Witness my hand this 25th day of January, 1860.

GEORGE WALTER BRADBURY,  
Superintendent Registrar.

From the *Frome Times* of Wed 17 Apr 1861 p4  
BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY. The annual services in connection with the Frome Auxiliary to this the oldest of the Missionary Societies were held on Sunday. Sermons were preached in Badcox-lane and Naish's-street Chapels, by the Rev. S. Green, of London, and the Rev. A. Maclaren, of Manchester. The public meeting was held on Monday evening, in Badcox-lane Chapel. P. Le Gros, Esq., presided, and the deputation and several other ministers delivered addresses. Collections behalf of the Missions were made.

From the *Frome Times* of Wed 22 May 1861 p4 which gives an indication of the relative sizes of the nonconformist meetings:

BADCOX-LANE CHAPEL.

The annual tea-meeting of the teachers and others connected with the Sunday-school Union took place in the School-room adjoining the Chapel, Monday afternoon. The room had been most tastefully decorated for the occasion with flags, evergreens, and mottoes. The attendance was large, about 330 partaking of the repast. In the evening, the public meeting was held, and the room was filled to overflowing. The chair was taken I\*. Le Gros, Esq., the President of the Union. In opening the proceedings, Mr. Le Gros adverted to the unanimity which had existed among the Union during the year and to the gratifying fact that the Union had made great progress. The secretary then read his report, from which it appeared that the following are the schools now composing the Union;— Town Schools.—Sheppard's Barton, 231 scholars; Zion, 310; Badcox, 185; Rook-lane, 166; Wesleyan, 210; Primitive Methodist, 106;

Methodist Free Church, 81; Naish's street, 124. Total, 1449 —being increase of 75. Total teachers, 224, being a decrease eight. . . .

From the *Frome Times* of Wed 6 Nov 1861 p4:  
Sheppard's Barton Baptist Chapel was reopened on Wednesday evening, having been closed for two or three weeks for cleaning and alteration. the new arrangements, several additional sittings have been obtained. At the re-opening service, the Rev. Haycroft preached an appropriate and eloquent sermon.

From the *Warminster Herald* of Sat 30 May 1868 p5:  
Frome

BAPTIST MISSION, The anniversary services of the local auxiliary to the Baptist Missionary Society, were held on Sunday and Monday last. On the Morning and evening of the former day, sermons were preached at Sheppard's Barton. Badcox Lane, Lock's Lane, and Naish's Street, and Beckington Chapels, by the lie., J G. Gregson. of Portsmouth, formerly missionary in India; the Rev. J. Kingdon, late missionary in Chins; and the Rev. J. Campagnac, a native of Calcutta.

From the *Frome Times* of Wed 19 Nov 1873 p1:  
SHEPPARD'S BARTON BAPTIST CHAPEL. The organ in the above place of worship having been improved, enlarged, and revoiced throughout (by Mr. Vowles, of Bristol), was re-opened last (Tuesday) evening. Mr. H. Millington, of Trowbridge, presided at the instrument with his wonted ability. Appropriate music was selected for the occasion. The vocal parts were rendered a combined choir of about sixty singers, who kindly volunteered their services, from

the various churches and chapels in the town. The attendance was very large. . . .

In 1862 a report on the annual meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society refers to only three Baptist Chapels: Sheppard's Barton, Naish's Street and Badcox Lane,

From *The Nonconformist* of Wed 7 Feb 1866 p7:

On Lord's-day, January 21, the Rev. Archibald G. Brown, of Bromley, Kent, preached two impressive sermons in connection with the anniversary of Lock's-lane Chapel. On Tuesday a tea meeting was held; after which a public meeting, when the newly-chosen pastor, the Rev. Percy F. Pearce, late of Pastor C. H. Spurgeon's College, occupied the chair.

From *Sherborne Mercury* of Tue 17 Jul 1866 p8:

#### FROME

The services in connection with the ordination of the Rev Percy F. Pearce, of the Metropolitan Tabernacle College, to the pastorate of Providence Chapel (Baptist) Lock's lane, were held Thursday afternoon last.

BADCOX LANE CHAPEL.--The fifty eighth anniversary of the Sunday schools connected with this place of worship was celebrated on Sunday last, on which occasion the Rev C. E. J. Middleditch, the former pastor of that place, preached two sermons. The collections amounted to £8.

In 1852 the Baptist meetings were caught up in the contentious proposal by the Rev William Bennett, vicar of the St John the Baptist, Frome that marriages not performed according to the rites of the Church of England were invalid. One couple were even persuaded to marry again in an Anglican

church. Signatories to a petition objecting to this included C J Middleton, Pastor of the Baptist Church meeting in Badcox-lane and Samuel Manning, Pastor of the Baptist Church meeting in Sheppard's Barton. (*Bristol Mercury* Sat 20 Nov 1852 p2).

There are references to a Dissenters' Burial ground at Wayland's Close which opened in 1745 but no records of this have been found. As highlighted by the investigations into the provision of burial grounds for nonconformists in the 1850s, the chapel-based burial grounds were exclusively for members of the particular congregation and general provision for nonconformists usually didn't occur until the establishment of ward-based burial boards as a result of the Burial Act of 1855.

From the *Somerset Standard* of Fri 13 Apr 1962 p1:

### **Baptist Church to Close Its Doors**

#### **Decline in Membership Forces Badcox Lane to Decision After Nearly Three Hundred Years**

Badcox Lane Baptist Church, which was founded in 1[6]69, and which would have celebrated its tercentenary in 1969 - seven years' time - is to close its doors on June 24th next.

This decision - to close the church- was reached at a recent annual Church meeting when it agreed that the following statement would be released to the Press:

"In view of the general decline in church membership it was decided at the Annual Church meeting of Badcox Baptist Church should close with effect from 24th June 1962 in order that the assets might be used more advantageously in Christian work elsewhere."

The Baptist witness will, of course, continue at the church of Sheppard's Barton in Sheppard's Barton and Wine Street.

Since the resignation of the Rev. Roy H. Johnson - who entered the probation service - the church has been in charge of a student at Bristol Baptist College— Mr. J. Graham Smith — who has resided with his wife and family at 21, Somerset Road, Frome.

#### **First Minister**

One of the first ministers was the Rev. John Sharpe from 1690 to 1740; and between then and 1760 there were three ministers— the Rev. James Roberts, the Rev. Thomas Hurn and the Rev. Abraham Larwill.

From 1762 until 1806 Rev John Kingdom was minister; and in 1807 an invitation was extended to the Rev. Samuel Saunders of Penzance. He stayed 19 years.

The Rev. Thos. Fox Newman remained eight years; the Rev. John Dyer, junr., three years; the Rev. Chas. Jas. Middledith twenty years— 1837 to 1857; the Rev. Maclaren Stalker remained four years and the Rev. William Burton, of Berwick from, 1861 to 1894.

In the latter year the Rev. James Somerville Paige of Truro was appointed minister and remained in office for 33 years— until his death in 1924.

He was succeeded by Rev. H. H. Pewtress, B.A., B.D.,—now charge of Western area. He in turn was followed by the Rev. George S. Woodeson the Rev. Patterson, the Rev. Cotton and the Rev Roy H. Johnson.

#### **Seven Congregations**

At one time there were no less than seven Baptist congregations in Frome. At



Badcox Lane – the oldest—they started in 1669 or even earlier; at Sheppard's Barton (which will be the last Baptist congregation in the town), 1705 or earlier; in Catherine Hill from 1726 until 1765; in Starve-acre from 1726 to 1741; in Milk Street about 1751; in Naish's Street from 1785 to 1890; and at Lock's Lane from 1855 to 1882.

There were "causes" in Cross Street (now part of Trinity Street) about 1858 and at The Mint about 1880.

The highest membership of the Church was in 1845 when there 372 members; 76 Sunday School teachers and 306 Sunday School scholars.

The Baptists now operate from The Key Centre, Feltham Lane, Frome.

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The surviving documentation consists of copies of burial registers and a grave register for the Sheppard's Barton Meeting House. These were made in 1831 prior to the registers being surrendered to the General Register Office in 1837 but have some later additions. The entries are of variable detail. While some have ages, the majority do not. Children are not usually given forenames but referred to as 'child of'. There are some discrepancies in the spelling of names between burial and grave registers. Many early burials just have a year rather than a date. For 10 entries there is an annotation 'dug up again' (some in Greek letters!), these dating from the 1760s to 1780s, presumably due to a rearrangement of the ground, although for one it

was the reburial inside the meeting house. Some of these reburials are explicit, for example '1806 Isabella Sheppard wife of Henery Sheppard senr taken out of their vault and put in with her father Mr Wilson' and 'John Sheppard senr taken out of their vault at the same time & put into a vault in the meeting opposite the pulpit'.

Burials occurred in the meeting house's yard and also inside the building. A map shows that arrangement of 42 coffins/plots within the yard. The records are for 1753-1833. As reported in the *Bath Chronicle* of Thu 17 Mar 1836 p3 in a list of deaths:

March 9, at Frome, Mr. Richard Biss; for many years the sexton of the Baptist chapel in Sheppard's Barton.

There are a couple of references to burials actually being elsewhere. In 1782 'buried Badcox Lane meeting' in 1793 'new single vault at Mr David's meeting', in 1815 'in the burial ground on Catherine Hill'. The 'Mr David' may be Job David but he was at Sheppard's Barton until 1803 when he resigned having lost some of congregation due to his Unitarian views.

The establishment of the Frome Dissenters Cemetery in Vallis Road in 1851 would have lessened the need for burying grounds in the individual chapels. This new cemetery was instigated by the Baptists and Congregationalists. A press report in 1864 has the body of Mrs Sarah King brought by rail from Bristol to Frome, taken to Sheppard's Barton

chapel and the following day the burial taking place at 'the Cemetery, in Vallis-way' (*Frome Times* Wed 14 Sep 1864 p2).

### Burial Registers

At Somerset Heritage Centre:

DD/LW/22 Burials 1763-1831

D/N/frm.b/3/3/3 Burials 1768-1837

D/N/frm.b/2/4/2 Plan of burial ground  
copied from Sexton Whiting's plan.

D/N/frm.b/2/4/3 Plot listings of burials in  
the Meeting House and Meeting Yard,  
with plan of graves.

DD/LW/22-3, 33 and D/BR/bp/3/3/3-6.

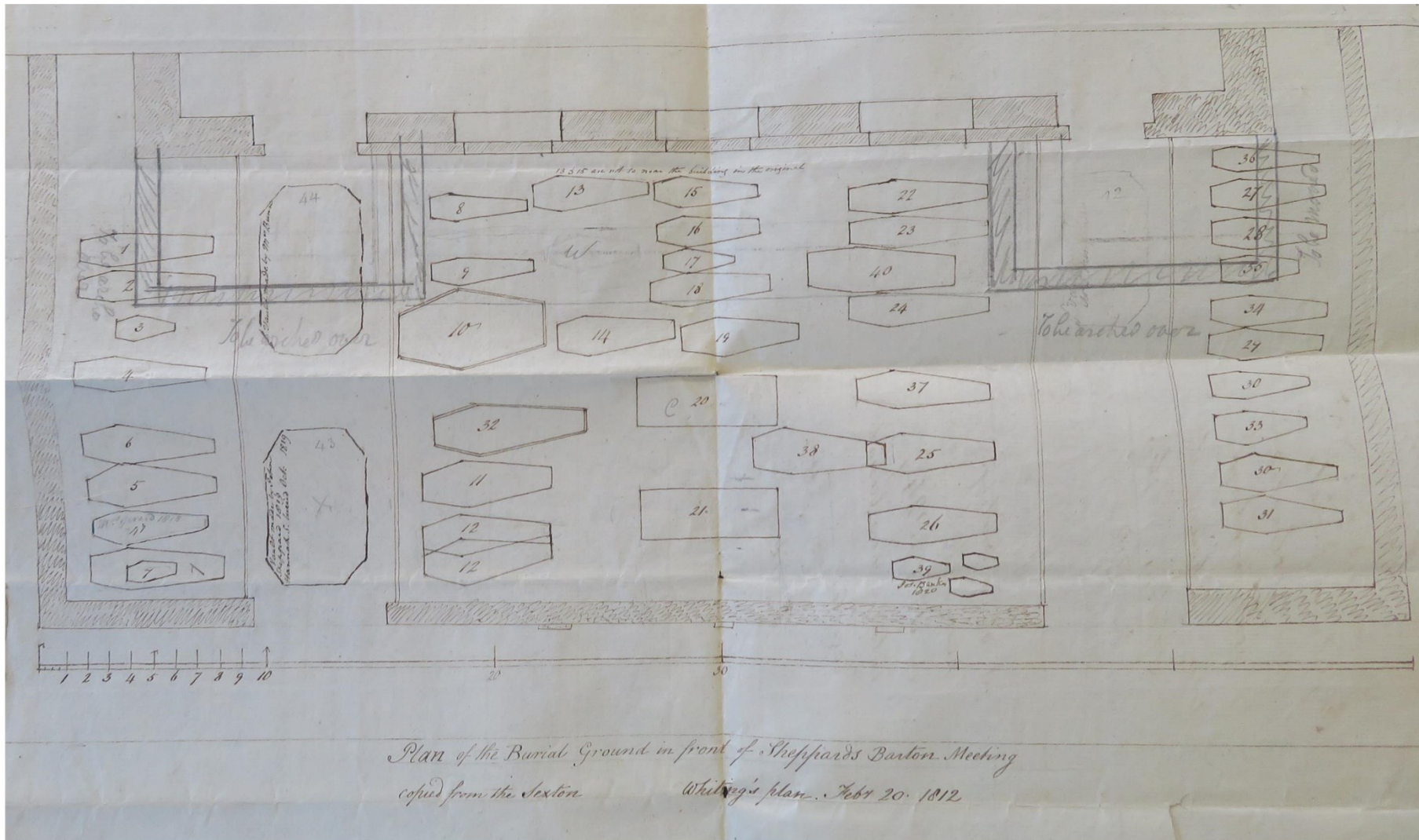
### Other Documentation

A History of Badcox Lane Baptist Church, Frome. With Some Account of its Relations to Other Neighbouring Free Churches by Arthur H Coombs (Frome: Harvey & Woodland, n.d.). Somerset Heritage Centre L228-21

Sheppard's Barton Baptist Church, Frome by Ernest G Fortune (n. p., n. d.). [typescript at Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford].

Somerset Heritage Centre D/N/frm.b/7/2/1 with additions by Reverend M.I. White (1976-1989) and Reverend M.J. Cook (1989-c1990).

## Layout



Somerset Heritage Centre D/N/frm.b/2/4/2 Plan of burial ground copied from Sexton Whiting's plan.