

Little chapel's keys returned to Church

President Hinckley accepts deed to Gadfield Elm Chapel — Church's oldest building

Church News, Saturday, 5 June 2004

ELDERSFIELD, England — President Gordon B. Hinckley received on May 26 2004, the deed to Gadfield Elm Chapel, the oldest existing building in the Church.

In a ceremony in the small chapel located in the quiet countryside of Worcestershire, President Hinckley stood where other luminaries in Church history must have stood as they preached the message and doctrines of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, including missionaries who are among his predecessors as presidents of the Church.

The chapel's history goes back to 1836, when it was owned by the United Brethren, the membership of which joined the Church en-masse. The little chapel, which had a seating capacity of just 100 people, was given to the Church in 1840 by John Benbow and

Thomas Kington. It served as the focal point of Church activity for thousands of Latter-day Saints until the majority immigrated to the United States. The chapel was sold in 1842 to finance immigration. In 1994, the Gadfield Elm Trust bought the chapel at auction and began immediately to restore the building. Although it was not then owned by the Church, the chapel was dedicated on April 23, 2000, by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve.

During the ceremony at the chapel on May 26, Wayne Gardner, a representative of Gadfield Elm Trust, turned over to President Hinckley the keys and deed to the chapel. Receiving the chapel on behalf of the Church, President Hinckley said, "I'll look after it as long as I live."

He recognized Rowland E. Elvidge, recently called as president of the London England Temple, as the one who saw the for-sale sign, which led to the trust purchasing the chapel. "To those who had the foresight to acquire it and to restore it, I wish to say that you will have the unending gratitude of the people of this Church," President Hinckley said. "This is the oldest chapel we have anywhere in the world. . . . This chapel was in use by the Church before we had built anything in America."



The deed to the historic 1836 Gadfield Elm Chapel in England, oldest existing building in the Church, was presented to President Gordon B. Hinckley May 26. The congregation of this chapel heard Wilford Woodruff preach, and many were baptized.

Photo by David M.W. Pickup



Gadfield Elm Trust representative Wayne Gardner presents chapel deed to President Gordon B. Hinckley.

Photo by David M.W. Pickup

in the thousands as a result of the harvest that occurred here at the Benbow Farm and in this general area. How grateful we are . . . for the faith of these men, the faith to leave their homes, the faith to travel to this distant land, the faith to dedicate themselves without any reluctance of any kind to the work. They worked night and day, unending, in carrying forward and building the kingdom on this part of the earth.

"And it was the effort that was made here that in reality saved the Church. The Church was in difficulty in Kirtland, and later in Nauvoo. The Church was in serious difficulty, and the converts who came from England, who came with faith and determination and love for the work, bolstered it in a way that was really a miracle to behold. We can all, every member of the Church throughout the entire world, be grateful for the infusion of faith and strength and integrity which came from the converts who came out of these British Isles. God be thanked for their strength, their power, their goodness, their capacity, and many of them for the terrible price which they paid. It was not a pleasant journey from here to America."

President Hinckley acknowledged that the chapel had been dedicated "as a building, which was owned by the trust," and that now that the Church owns the chapel it ought to be dedicated as "a property of the Church."

In dedicating the chapel, President Hinckley expressed gratitude for "these good brethren to create a trust under which this property has been purchased and restored back to its original condition."

Further, in the prayer, he said: "This is a place where the early leaders of this dispensation have spoken. Here they bore testimony that the angel mentioned in the Book of Revelation had flown and that the gospel had been restored. Here they bore witness of Thee and of Thy Beloved Son and of Thine appearance with Thy Son to the boy Joseph, parting the curtains and ushering in this, the dispensation of the fullness of times.

He spoke of "the tremendous work that occurred here in the early days, when Wilford Woodruff came down here and met with the United Brethren and baptized so very, very many of them. (They) cleaned out the little pond which we were able to acquire and that was the place of baptism.

"Brigham Young came here, preached here, as did Wilford Woodruff. I think Heber C. Kimball preached here. The great moving doctrines of the Church were taught in this small little building where the hearts of many, many people were touched for their everlasting good. I don't know the consequences of the numbers who were baptized, who are members of the Church today. But they must number



The day before going to the chapel, President Hinckley spoke at a member meeting in the Preston England Stake. He also went to France and Spain.

Photo by David M.W. Pickup

"Here they spoke with power and faith and touched the hearts of many people who went into the waters of baptism and joined the Church.

"Here in this hall they gathered together, partook of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, in remembrance of His sacrifice, His great Atonement wrought in behalf of all men. Great have been the occurrences in this place where we now meet. We are so thankful to be here and again express our gratitude to those of foresight and unselfishness who have worked together to restore this beautiful structure.

"May it stand now forever. May Thy watchcare be over it. . . .

"Father, we pray Thy blessings upon Thy work here in this great and beautiful land, the United Kingdom and Ireland. Touch again the hearts of the people as Thou didst once touch them in the past, that thousands more may embrace the gospel, and that the Church may grow and flourish and become strong and well known in this part of the world. There has been a falling away from the established churches in this area. We pray that as that has occurred, that there may be a strengthening of Thy work."



President Gordon B. Hinckley raises a spadeful of "tough soil" while planting an English oak near the historic Gadfield Elm Chapel. He was joined in the digging by Wayne Gardner, holding pitchfork, and Peter Gardner, right of President Hinckley

Photo by David M.W. Pickup

Elder Harold G. Hillam of the Seventy and president of the Europe West Area, conducted the ceremony in which the deed was transferred and the chapel was dedicated. Joining President Hinckley in speaking at the small gathering were Bishop Gardner and Simon Gibson, also of Gadfield Elm Trust.

After the handing-over ceremony, President Hinckley took part in planting an English oak near the building by digging two spadefuls of what he called "tough soil," clay rather than loam. He was joined by Peter Gardner, Wayne Gardner's father, who had done a lot of work on the property.

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Church News 25 December 2004

2004: Year in review

May 25, 28-29: After dedicating the Copenhagen Denmark Temple, President Hinckley traveled to England, France and Spain and spoke at member meetings in Chorley, England, on May 25; Paris, France, on May 28; and Madrid, Spain, on May 29. The Madrid meeting was attended by 7,935 from Spain and Portugal, which President Hinckley said was probably the largest gathering of Latter-day Saints ever held in these two countries.

May 26: The deed and the keys to the oldest existing building in the Church, the restored Gadfield Elm Chapel, located in the quiet countryside of Worcestershire, England, were turned over to the Church and dedicated as "a property of the Church" by President Hinckley. The chapel was sold in 1842 to help finance Church emigration.