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## DR SIDNEY CHARLES AUSTIN



*Dr. Sidney Charles Austin and his wife*

Dr. Austin was born in Luton on 9th January 1844, and educated there. He went to St. Mary's Medical School, Paddington and qualified to practice in 1868. He married Sarah Susan Caley in August 1866 in Norwich and had six children, 4 girls and 2 boys.

In August 1868, Dr. Austin came to Lingfield as assistant to Dr. George Chapman at Sunnyside, Town Hill. Soon afterwards, Dr. Chapman died and Dr. Austin bought the practice from his widow and carried it on until his retirement in 1919. As well as dealing with the usual ailments, he also extracted teeth. Gordon Jenner, in his memoirs, recalled his father holding his legs to stop him kicking whilst Doctor Austin extracted the offending tooth!

The practice was wide and scattered and Dr. Austin became well known as he rode his horse around the area. Later, he used a dog cart and a Victoria dressed in a black cloak and round-brimmed hat. A faithful coachman, who worked for him for over 40 years, drove the vehicles.

In April 1874 Dr. Austin and his family became Baptists and arranged Bible readings on Friday evenings in the drawing room at Sunnyside, Sunday afternoon meetings for Women, Gospel readings and a Sunday school for the children. If the weather was fine in the summer, some Sunday evening services were held under the old oak tree beside the village lock-up and pond, with preachers from East Grinstead and elsewhere.

In June 1874 Mrs Austin "had it much laid upon her heart" to help the considerable number of deaf people in the village. Obtaining the consent of the Vicar, she and Miss Rice began a little meeting in the Infant School on the Sunday. However, the Vicar

sent word to Mrs Austin after only two meetings that she could not use the room again. Mrs Agent, who lived in a cottage in Plaistow Street (now no.1 Rose Cottages) consented to let them meet in her kitchen the next Sunday. Everyone had to bring their own chairs.

In August 1874, Dr and Mrs Austin were baptised at Hildenborough, Kent, but continued to attend the Parish Church.

Eventually, he gave a piece of his own land behind the Day schools in the High Street, for a Mission Room and this opened on 9th June 1875. The Room was licensed for marriages in 1892.

Pastor Henry Grigg of Dorman's Land Baptist Chapel lent the use of the Baptistry for all the years from 1875 to 1893. In 1893 a large iron tank was sunk in the field belonging to Dr Austin, adjoining the Mission Room. 52 people were baptised there at different times, in the open air. The Room was enlarged in 1901 with a Baptistry which was built in the Mission Room by members of the brethren. Dr Austin noted:

“as many of our number [are] mechanics the work should be done freely in the evenings..... one offered to cart the materials, two to do the brickwork, another to do the excavation...another the carpentry, another to give the bricks, and so on.”

*(The outline of the Baptistry can be seen under part of the kitchen and main hall of the Day centre)*

The Mission Room was further enlarged in 1922 with two large classrooms, a kitchen, cycle room and other offices.

In June each year an Annual Conference, or 'Anniversary', was held in the Mission Room. Supporters came from a wide area around Lingfield and filled the hall. The Victoria Memorial Institute, built in 1901, was hired for the occasion from that year onwards.

After a long illness Dr. Austin passed peacefully away at 6.30am on Monday 12th October 1925, aged 81. As the cortege passed through the village, the shops were closed and every blind drawn. The first part of the service was held in the Mission Room and was attended by most of the village folk. The cortege was followed to the churchyard by a large concourse of people along with the Lingfield and District Silver Band. He was an extremely popular village figure, loved by all. At the time it was said that his death had removed one of the best friends that Lingfield ever had.

Sunnyside continued to be used as a Doctor's practice for a while after Dr. Austin's death. In recent years it became an Abbeyfield Home and now a private dwelling. The Mission Room was destroyed on 9th February 1943 when a German bomb hit the School. A new building was erected on the site and is now used as a Day Centre, recently renamed the Jennings Hall, providing accommodation for various groups and particularly for Meals on Wheels and Lunch Clubs.