

SPRING LANE, HOCKLEY
HEATH, NR. SOLIHULL
B94 6QY

UMBERSLADE BAPTIST CHURCH



TRADITION: BAPTIST
BUILT: 1877
CONGREGATION ACTIVE
UNTIL: 1992
LISTING: GRADE II*
OSGRID REFERENCE:
SP147721

PARKLAND CHAPEL BUILT BY A
RICH INDUSTRIALIST



TRANSPORT

There is parking at the foot of the access track on Spring Lane (B4101) to the chapel, and a large sign marks the entrance. Unless prior arrangements have been made the track to the church is gated and locked. Three public footpaths pass through the burial ground and by the church.

The nearest bus services are in Hockley Heath (½ mile) and the nearest station is Dorridge (5 miles)

VISIT US

Group visits are welcome by prior arrangement with the keyholder, whom you can contact via www.hct.org.uk or chapels@hct.org.uk

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.

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', an alloy of copper and zinc that was used as anti-fouling cladding for 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 more 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.



G. F. Muntz Jnr. Within the surrounding grounds can be found a monument over the Muntz family vault, along with a number of other graves.



Umberslade Church in use.

**VOLUNTEERS
LOOK AFTER THE
CHAPEL AND THE
BURIAL GROUP
SURROUNDING IT.
IF YOU WOULD
LIKE TO BECOME
INVOLVED PLEASE
GET IN TOUCH
WITH US**

To find out more visit www.hct.org.uk or contact chapels@hct.org.uk

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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 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 south a tall slender tower with an elegant spire, visible for miles around. The tower contains a clock and eight-bell chime that originally played one of seven 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. Within the burial ground can be found a monument over the Muntz family burials. A wooden church that later served as a school, also built by Muntz, stands nearby.

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.

*Above: the wooden church, 1876.
Below: the pulpit (front view).*



This is open and surrounded on three sides by alabaster rails and lined with marble. It is permanently exposed to view and a very noticeable feature of the interior.

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 infirm old age used to listen to the sermons from the Hall via a microphone from the pulpit to his bedside. The stained glass windows depict geometric patterns.

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)

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.