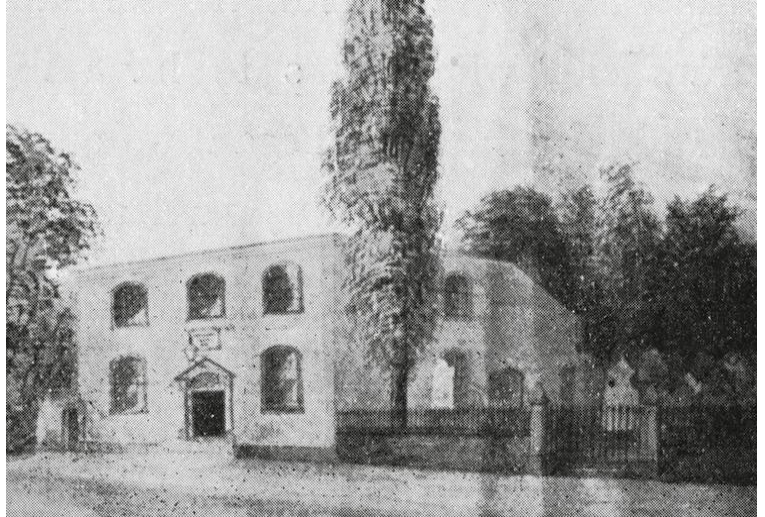


## The History of Over United Reformed Church

The origin of the United Reformed Church at Over can be traced back to 1805 when the Rev. Job Wilson, minister at Northwich, began to hold services in a registered house in the village until it was sold. In 1808 Mr. Niel, who was an itinerant minister based in Middlewich, came to Over and found a room that had previously been used by weavers.



The Cotton Room



Providence Chapel

For five years this room, known as the Cotton Room, was used to hold services after which time the owners required it for their own use. The church members were determined to build their own chapel and so the next stage in the history of the church began.

Under the guidance of the minister, Job Wilson, members of the church began to raise funds to begin building. They gave both of their time and money to complete the build.

In 1815 the Providence Chapel was opened with a debt of £700.

At this time the church had a large congregation and a Sunday school of around 200. In 1819 Nathanael Scholefield became the pastor but sadly died a year later. The church invited Mr. J Marshall to become their new minister and under his leadership the church grew. Following the death of Mr. Hitchen, the minister of Minshull Church, Mr. Marshall united Minshull with the pastorate of Over towards the end of 1834. He served as minister for fifty-five years and during that time the church became free from debt, the chapel was enlarged, new Sunday schools and a large manse were built.



A decision had also been made to build a new, larger chapel and John Douglas, a leading Cheshire architect, was appointed to design the new building. Work began in 1865 and was completed in 1867. The granite pillars at the entrance to the church were a gift from the architect.



The wheel window was also a gift but from an anonymous donor. The side windows contain the initials of ladies of the church who subscribed to put in the circular portions. In 1900 the organ was moved from the front of the church into a new organ chamber at the side, it was designed by Fordham who worked with John Douglas.

The Marshall memorial Sunday school situated on Woodford Lane, also designed by John Douglas, was opened in March 1881. Providence chapel was demolished and the graveyard was extended.

Following the end of the Great War a war memorial was erected in front of the church. It was designed by John Birtwistle.

In 1926 a cottage and land on the west side of the church was purchased. Further land was purchased in 1929. In 1930 a decision was taken to demolish the manse and extend the graveyard. The new manse was completed in 1931.

The joint pastorate with Minshull church was terminated in 1935.

By 1962 the cottage, which had been used by the church caretaker, was in a state of disrepair and was no longer fit for habitation and was demolished.

A significant moment in the history of the Congregational Church came in 1972 when it merged with the Presbyterian church to become the United Reformed church. Over became part of the Mersey Province.

An extension to the church was opened in 1981. It consisted of a meeting room, kitchen and new toilets.

A decision was taken to sell the Marshall Memorial building and to bring all church activities into the main building. A plan was drawn up to provide a new hall with stage, a small committee room and a games room. In September 1985 the final event took place in the Marshall memorial building. The new complex was opened in September 1988.



The sanctuary was redecorated in May 1995 and the decorations on the woodwork were repainted to show their original colours.

In 2001 plans were drawn up to provide a new entrance and welcome area for the church. The entrance would be at the side of the building and would lead into a large reception area with small rooms off. A subsequent Church Meeting voted narrowly against the proposals.

In October 2002, following a number of incidents where fires had been started in the porch, permission was sought to install a metal security grille and this was accepted because of the risk of permanent damage to the building. At the Church Meeting in November of that year the plans were accepted and agreement reached for the work to commence.

As the building increased in age so problems with the fabric emerged. In 2010 the Quinquennial Inspection revealed problems at a high level and brought forward the next inspection to 2014. This report stated that, were the problems to be ignored, it would only be a matter of time before water ingress would cause serious damage to the Sanctuary. A group was formed to look at possible sources of funding and after much discussion it was accepted that the only way to raise adequate funds was to apply to the Heritage Lottery Fund. A bid was submitted and was successful. The repairs were completed in 2018; the results shown in the photograph below.



In common with many other denominations the United Reformed Church has seen a drop in the number of people entering the ministry. Following the departure of the Rev. Chris Tolley to a pastorate in South Wales, Over was without a minister for five years. Fortunately, the Reverend David Spence a retired URC minister from Middlewich and the Reverend Garry Wareham a Baptist minister from Nantwich offered to provide 50% cover between them.

Although the size of the congregation has fallen over the years Over United Reformed Church continues to have a role within the local community. Links have been formed with local care and nursing homes, donations are made to the local food bank and women's refuge, a mid-week café service has proved popular, uniformed organisations for both boys and girls are thriving and close links remain with both the Adult Institute and the Over Players drama group.

The building designed by John Douglas is still in use as a place of worship and fellowship more than 150 years after it was built.

## MINISTERS OF OVER

Job Wilson	1805
Nataniel Scholefield	1819-1820
John Marshall	1820-1880
J.T. Maxwell	1880-1886
G.G. Whitfield	1886-1909
W. Gill	1910-1924
M. Stacey	1925-1927
J. Cater	1928-1929
G.G. Thompson	1930-1935
J.H. Millhouse	1936-1942
Dr. T.A. Burkill	1942-1944
J.H. Millhouse	1945-1949
H.G.Davis BA	1951-1956
Eric Carless	1957-1965
Michael Jackson BA	1966-1978
David Skitt LLB BA	1977-1987
David Lawrence	1987-1995
Tim Clarke BTh	1996-2001
Christopher Tolley	2003-2012
Joint Ministry	
David Spence/Garry Wareham	2017 -