

# Merriott Gospel Hall

## A Brief History

Text: Eric Arnold Photographs: Alan Keene

In the early 1800's Mr. Robert Gribble, a draper by trade, having been born again of the Holy Spirit was greatly used by the Lord as an evangelist in and around Barnstable, North Devon, and as a result many were led to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1846 he was led by the Holy Spirit to leave the area where he had been labouring for the previous seven years, to go to a village that he himself said was unknown by him, but from reports he had received was 'a place where many of the inhabitants were known thieves, and gross immorality abounded'. Imprisonment or even transportation for such offences was then not uncommon. That village was Merriott! He was there for eight years. During that time he faithfully preached the gospel and many souls were saved.



In 1849, together with Thomas Newberry and others, he purchased land at Broadway, Merriott, and the Gospel Hall was erected. Further meetings took place and souls were saved. An assembly, based on New Testament principles, was established with believers from all walks of life meeting on Lord's Day mornings to

partake of the Lord's Supper. The gospel was proclaimed on Lord's Day evenings and the Sunday School prospered, with many children from the village attending regularly.

During the Civil War in Spain, 1936-1938, missionaries were expelled and the assemblies there closed. The believers were caused much suffering. At that time Moorlands House, in Merriott, was obtained by Mr. Petter of Yeovil, and others, including Mr. Ernest Trenchard of Spain, and made available to Mr. Peter Biffen, a missionary to Spain. He



brought over thirty to forty women and children, refugees from the Franco regime (photo below). Many of the adults were believers and met with the saints at the Gospel Hall, Merriott, for several years. Also with Mr. and Mrs. Biffen was Mrs. Bermejo and her five

children, including the eldest, Eric, who is now a missionary in Spain where he works along with his wife.

During the 1940's and 1950's the work at the Gospel Hall increased and there were good numbers in fellowship. During those years, although there were three other Sunday Schools in the village, the numbers in the Gospel Hall Sunday School reached a total of nearly one hundred. The Women's Bible Class was held at the same time but in a separate classroom.

In the 1960's, full-time workers, Mr. and Mrs. Spender, came to live in the village and were a great help to the assembly. Also, in 1973, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Prescott, after they retired from the mission field in what was then known as Rhodesia, had a bungalow made available to them in the village and were a blessing, not only to the local assembly but also to many other assemblies in the district. They remained there until some years later Jack was called home and his widow went to live with one of their daughters in South Africa.

Since those years, the number in fellowship has declined as older believers have been called home. For several years now the assembly has been very small but it is cheered by the fact that the gospel service continues to be held on Lord's Day evenings when the unsaved who gather each week are presented with a faithful gospel message. Each Christmas a Carol Service is held and many of the ex-Sunday School children and their parents gather, with a total of around 30 being present, to be reminded of the true meaning of Christmas.

For many years now the prayer of the assembly has been that of Acts 18. 9, 'Come over to Merriott and help us'.

The above text, written by the late Eric Arnold in the late 1900s, is reproduced by kind permission of Precious Seed International: <http://www.preciousseed.org>

*The Gospel Hall today .... see below*

## Today's Gospel Hall

The photographs below were taken by Alan Keene in June 2011

