

THE HISTORY GROUP
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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 in 1866 and had six children.

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 the early 1870's Dr Austin and his family became Baptists and arranged Bible readings, Sunday afternoon meetings for Women, Gospel readings and a Sunday school for the children. These meetings were held in Sunnyside and various houses in the village. If the weather was fine in the summer, some would be held under the old oak tree beside the village lock-up and pond.

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 and enlarged in 1901 with a Baptistry and 1922 with two large classrooms, a kitchen, cycle room and other offices.

After a long illness Dr Austin passed peacefully away at 6.30am on Monday 12th October 1925, aged 81. On the day of his funeral, as the cortege passed through the village, the shops were closed and every blind drawn. 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 has become an Abbeyfield Home. 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 providing accommodation for various groups and particularly for Meals on Wheels and Lunch Clubs.

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