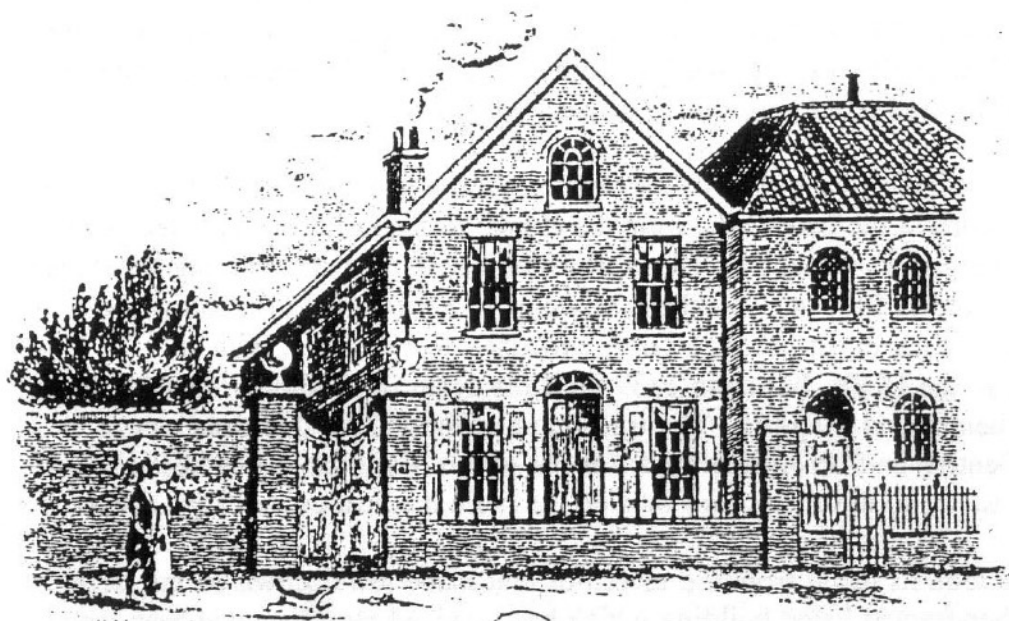


**Salem Chapel built in Globe Lane in 1812**

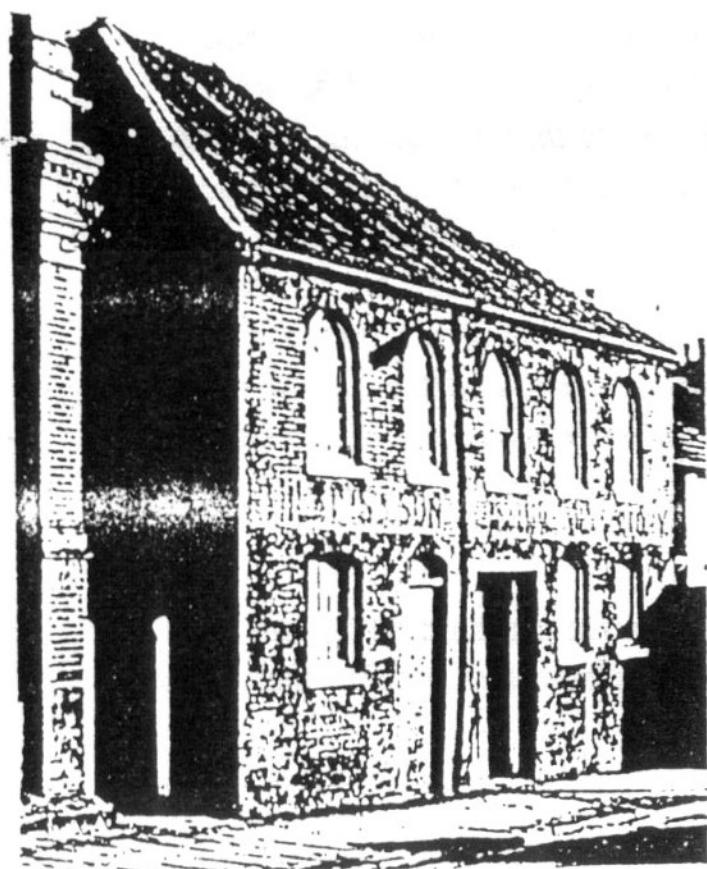


*J. CHAMBERLAIN*  
**Surgeon Dentist,**

*From Tavern Street,  
Globe Lane Ipswich.*

**Proprietor and Vender of  
the following Established Medicines.**

*Chamberlain's Restorative Pills, a certain cure  
for the Kings Evil. Detergent Ointment for  
the cure of the most inveterate Sores, Ulcers, &c.  
Rheumatic Pills. Dr. Bell's Syrup for Coughs, &  
Consumptions. Improved Analeptic Pills.  
Ophthalmic Ointment. Mason's Cordial for Infants.  
Antibilious Pills. Solvent Pills for the Stone & Gravel.*



James Chamberlain  
by Samuel Read 1837

The neat brick-built late Georgian building which in 1992 became the intimate theatre of Ipswich was built in 1812 for £1,200 at the main cost of Joseph Chamberlain, a versatile medical man, for a group of Particular Baptists who came from Stoke Green Chapel across the river to relieve the pressure of numbers there.

Salem, in Genesis Ch. 14, was the kingdom of Melchizedek, priest-king and peace-maker, who blessed Abram after his parting with Lot.

Chamberlain's trade card of the 1820s implies that he had come from Tavern Street to live and work in the house adjoining the chapel to the north. The garden, with its impressive gateway, stood to the north of the house. In the engraving the chapel roof is narrowed to fit it in. Chamberlain seems to have varied his professional activities from time to time. He certainly practised as a surgeon, with an apprentice, in the 1830s, but from 1839 until his death in 1842 he limited his trade to that of chemist and druggist. The trade card of the 1820s advertises him as 'Surgeon Dentist' and 'Proprietor and Vendor of the Established Medicines'. Something seems to have kept him outside the main medical circle of the town.

Globe Lane took its name from the tavern of that name lower down on the same side, a timber-framed listed building which has survived clearance and been well restored for use as offices. Near the Globe, Henry Davy the artist and etcher printed and published his many fine views of the antiquities of Suffolk in the first half of the 19th century.

### **Earlier forms of dissent**

Salem Chapel was not, however, the first chapel in the area, for there was a much earlier (probably Norman) predecessor, as the present street name reminds us.

St George's Chapel was just across the road from Salem, the scene of dramatic dissent in the mid-1520s when the itinerant Protestant preacher Thomas 'Little' Bilney spoke against images and pilgrimages here, and was twice dragged from the pulpit by those of his hearers whom he offended.



He was eventually arrested by order of Thomas Wolsey, and burnt for heresy in the Lollards' pit at Norwich in 1531. The remains of St George's Chapel were in use as a barn when they were demolished in 1825 to clear a site for St George's Terrace. In the 1880s the house above the Chapel, then in the occupation of Revd F. Pollard, Baptist Minister, was called Bilney Cottage.

### **Baptists at Salem 1812-1865**

Nothing comparably exciting occurred at Salem during three pastorates and the half century of its main function. Mr Weare served from the opening in June 1813 until John Hartnall arrived in 1819; self-educated, he left widow and children when he died at the age of 40 in 1825. Thomas Middleditch (a good Suffolk name) came from Biggleswade to rescue the congregation after the chapel had been closed for almost seven years, but after eight at Salem he departed for Stoke Green taking others with him. In 1844, the Revd. John Gay, a West Country man who was intended for the Wesleyan ministry, broke with that denomination and took on the Salem pastorate, at which point the stricter Baptists in the congregation withdrew, but so great was the growth of the Salem following under its fourth minister over the next two decades that a new and larger chapel had to be opened at the corner of Crown Street and High Street in 1865 for John Gay and his flock.

Yet another group of Baptists from Stoke Green took over Salem in the late 1870s, but when it was converted to its present use, it had not been a place of worship for over a century. Until the brickwork was cleaned, large black painted letters advertised PHILLIPS & SON FURNITURE DEPOSITORY. The inscription had worn well, for the warehouse or mart here, outpost of a cabinet makers, upholsterers and undertakers business in St Matthew's Street, was only at Salem from 1881 to 1915. From then on the building was only a store, latterly for Ipswich Museums.

### **Sketches of the Ipswich Pulpit at Salem Chapel**

From 1857 to 1861 preachers of all denominations in Suffolk dreaded the arrival, incognito, of two *Suffolk Chronicle* journalists, Richard Gowing and Herbert Wright who posed as casual members of

the congregation. (Innocent strangers to churches and chapels would often have been surprised to be greeted with suspicious looks.) The *Suffolk Pulpit* column would describe everything from the state of the building, the size and condition of the congregation, the appearance, manner and vocal talents of the preacher but, worst of all for him, his sermon would be subjected to close analytical criticism. The two men were never detected in over 170 visits and, even when at the Woodbridge Friends Meeting House, not a word was spoken; 3,000 words were printed. The series had begun with the Ipswich churches and chapels, and John Glyde junior, who himself attended the Friars Street Unitarian meeting, was the spy in the pew. He visited John Gay and the Salemites on 22 September 1857 and here are excerpts from his Sketch:

*The congregation... which consists chiefly of members of the working classes, is at the present time a numerous body, desiring and seeking a larger chapel for worship. [At every visit but this one Glyde named a few prominent Ipswich citizens at the service.] Gay... is a preacher who appeals to the feelings, the emotional tendency being extremely predominant in his teachings. [He] is a fresh-looking man, about 33 years of age, with none of the priestly air about him. Mr Gay is all sunshine. He greets you with a warm smile and a fervent shake of the hand, and he looks sometimes as if his heart was a fountain of joy and gladness playing as spontaneously as the song of a blackbird. To judge him fairly, you must take his heart rather than his head, ... his composition... is of more practical use with the class of persons he has to deal with, than the most polished manners and cultivated intellect.*

*Mr Gay is by no means a tame preacher. His gesticulation is liberal, his manner exciting, and his language plain. What the rev. gentleman deems truth is ceaselessly proclaimed, and he gives but little formal reasoning in favour of it. The emotional tendency is so much in the ascendant, that the passions are strongly moved, and occasionally become so excited, as to scarcely bear control, and in his endeavour to adapt his instruction to the popular comprehension, he is apt to descend to bad taste. As a preacher, his most conspicuous trait is strong memory, and his great failing diffuseness. He hammers out an idea until it is as thin as gold leaf, and is fond of using an abundance of phrases expressive of the same idea. He preaches extemporaneously and... is not always successful in the choice of words.*

*The congregation under the rev. gentleman's ministry is too large for the building, and the want of good ventilation makes it very uncomfortable on a summer's day. The numerous attendants... join in the singing very heartily; and the Sunday School is in a very flourishing condition. The reverend gentleman's stipend is, we believe, only moderate; with so large a congregation, surely more could be awarded to their minister. Mr Gay has for many years been a staunch teetotaler.*

On the subject of ventilation, not the least of the improvements made during the conversion of Salem Chapel to The Wolsey Studio has been the introduction of air-conditioning for the benefit of patrons and performers alike.

**John Blatchly 1994**

[These texts and images come from a leaflet published when the Wolsey Studio was established in the Salem Chapel building.]