

Chapter 8  
PRIMITIVE METHODISM

No record of Wesleyan Methodism in Snainton would be complete without mention of Primitive Methodism. The movement came into being as Wesleyan Methodism gradually became middle class, with the Chapels becoming more extensive and expensive, reflecting the standing of their members. The growth of small businesses in the villages, together with the farming community, brought with it the patronage of moderate wealth, and this tended to create socially divided memberships. The founders were Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, who placed great importance on open air preaching and praying at "Camp" Meetings, in the belief that they were following in the footsteps of the early Methodists. However other Wesleyans thought otherwise, and in 1812 they broke away from the Conference and formed the Primitive Methodist movement. Initially this was predominantly working class and members were given the uncomplimentary nickname, "The Ranters".

The Primitive Society in Snainton was formed in 1821 with twenty-six members, following a visit of William Clowes, when during a mission to villages in the area he preached in a barn at Snainton. The movement grew, in the main, with converts from other Churches, including Wesleyan Methodists, and early meetings were held in cottages and barns. A Chapel was eventually built in the village and in May 1867 the Rev J Wood of Louth preached to a congregation of two hundred, followed by a public meeting in a marquee. A collection of £30 enabled the debt on the Chapel to be cleared and prepared the way for the building of a new Chapel in Station Road in 1868, which cost £680 and could hold two hundred and seventy people. The Scarborough "Plan for Preaching of Primitive Methodists", covering twenty eight villages and hamlets, named four preachers and twenty-one laymen.



Fig 6. Snainton Primitive Methodist Chapel

Open air meetings remained a regular feature of the movement and the "Malton Gazette" reported in July 1869 that the annual camp meeting of the Primitives assembled on the hills above the village for a day out, and were joined by friends from Brompton, Ebberston, Filey and Malton. These camp meetings revived the missionary spirit which was waning in Wesleyan Methodism as it became more respectable and conservative. In 1889 the Church had attendances of one hundred and twenty and a Sunday School of one hundred and fourteen, with nineteen teachers.

The Primitive Church continued to prosper until the period after the First World War when things went into gradual decline. In 1932 the various sections of Methodism were united, but this had little effect on the local Churches in Snainton, which continued to function independently of one another and remained in their respective Circuits of Scarborough and Sherburn. Eventually the end came in 1955 when the Chapel ceiling collapsed and the two Societies joined together. The building is now occupied by a local builder and undertaker.

The minutes of a meeting held at the Wesleyan Church include the following entry: "On 13th January 1955 sympathy was expressed with the Trustees and Members of the Station Road Methodist Church, due to the severe damage caused by the falling roof of their Chapel. It was reported that the Trustees and Members had met and felt unable to face the high cost of repairs. The Trustees of the West Lane Church therefore extended to their friends at Station Road a most hearty invitation for them to join us with worship here".

The invitation was accepted and on the whole the uniting of the two congregations went through smoothly, although there were administrative difficulties due to the fact that the two Societies were in different Circuits. The success was brought about by the sharing of the main offices in the combined Church between members from both Churches, and by the sharing of important dates from each Church calendar. For example the date from the ex-Primitive Church calendar was used for the Sunday School Anniversary, and that for the Church Anniversary from the ex-Wesleyan calendar. However there were a few dissident voices on the ex-Primitive side from people not willing to accept that their building had to close. This was evidenced by events on the day of a United Service held to mark the amalgamation. The service was planned to be conducted jointly by the Superintendent Minister of the Sherburn Circuit, the Rev R H Blizzard, and his opposite number, the Rev Eric Ferriby, from the Scarborough Circuit. As the service started concern was shown at the non-appearance of the Rev Ferriby. However he arrived shortly after the start, accompanied by several "reluctant" ex-Primitive members, who had had to be persuaded to leave the site of their own Church.