

## **Melton - the chapel that moved**

The morning of 18 September 1861 was a momentous one for the congregation of Melton Primitive Methodist chapel.

The previous year, a plot of land had been purchased and a modest chapel erected. The cost of the building was £250. It was part of the Kelsale Mission of the Wangford Circuit.

Next to the chapel was a large house owned by a barrister. A few months after the opening of the chapel, the barrister claimed the building compromised his rights to light and began legal proceedings against the chapel trustees.

A case was heard at the Bury Summer Assizes in 1861. The trustees were represented by Jacob Henry Tillett, the Norwich lawyer who was renowned for his championship of nonconformist causes. Unfortunately for the trustees, he lost the case and they were then faced with the urgent prospect of the demolition of their newly built chapel.

Henry Collins, a Melton millwright, then made the unlikely suggestion that the building might be moved. The trustees considered the proposal and decided in its favour. They hurried to buy an additional piece of land and Henry Collins and his brother undertook to plan and carry out the operation.

A great crowd gathered on moving day to watch the procedure. A photograph taken at the time shows the chapel on its struts, ready to be moved, with a pile of rubble where the schoolroom had formerly stood. A number of men in top hats and women in long dresses can be seen standing in the sun, watching the proceedings.

A contemporary newspaper report in the *Suffolk Chronicle and Mercury* explained the details.

A mechanical operation of considerable interest took place at Melton near Woodbridge ...when the Primitive Methodist Chapel was removed in a mass 15 feet from its original foundation. The removal was rendered necessary by the verdict of a jury who, as it originally stood, pronounced it a nuisance to a gentleman's house standing on adjacent ground. The chapel, a neat and unpretending structure is of red and white bricks. Its size is 33 feet 6 inches long by 31 feet 6 inches wide and the height to the eaves 17 feet. A schoolroom and vestry adjoined the chapel, but these have been pulled down to afford greater facility for the removal and are to be rebuilt.

The removal was accomplished as follows: the base course around the Chapel was entirely cut away and beams 13 by 7 were inserted longitudinally and firmly wedged to the underside of the walls with fir needles whilst support was further gained by transverse beams placed at intervals. The former beams rested immediately upon seven fir slips 12 ins by 7 ins, which formed the way upon which the structure was to travel and which were laid to a rise of 1 in 180 so that the building had not only to be

removed in a horizontal direction, but uphill also. The walls were firmly bolted together with two sets of 1¼ bar iron running round the outside of the building and one 1½ bolt through the Chapel from side to side. The removal was effected by the application of two screw jacks to one side of the building (pushing it forward) and three pairs of double screws to the other side (pulling it in), the ways or beams on which the building travelled being well greased to prevent friction, and to ensure greater ease in transit. In three hours after commencing, the Chapel was safely lodged on its new foundation and presenting not even a scratch or the appearance of a crack; a good deal of credit is due to Messrs Collins, Millwrights, for the easy and successful apparatus by which the building was removed.

The trustees were elated that such a difficult operation had been so successfully accomplished and felt that they had performed exactly what had been required of them, but the owner of the neighbouring house still considered his right to light was being infringed and announced his intention to take further legal action. The trustees then sought legal opinion themselves and were advised that the extra four feet of land which they had intended to use as a path should, instead, be used for the chapel itself. They then organised a second moving so that, in all, the building was moved 20 feet 8 inches. Once again, no damage at all was done to the chapel; no windows were broken and no cracks appeared in the walls.

The whole cost of the moving was £31.12.6d. However, the legal expenses had been considerable and amounted to more than £750, a vast sum for a small country congregation whose chapel building had cost only a third of this sum. In consequence, and in view of the exceptional circumstances of the case, the Conference of 1862 made a payment of £280 to Jacob Henry Tillett. The remainder of the very considerable fees were paid by the chapel although no record now remains to show how this was done.

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