

PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHAPEL, SWINSCOE

Hugh Bourne, one of the founders of Primitive Methodism, records in his journal, on the 17th April 1813, that "I called at Swinscoe, and took tea and then rode in a cart rather above three miles to Ashbourne". He was there to discuss the setting up a local place of worship. Walter Swetnam lived in a cottage, on the edge of the main road, in Swinscoe. Two months later, on the 7th June 1813, Walter Swetnam registered his home, as a place of worship, for Protestant Dissenters. Mr. Swetnam had become a member of the Primitive Methodists - a break-away movement from the original Methodists.

Methodism had developed from John Wesley's preaching and his roving style of evangelical teaching. During John Wesley's time many of the evangelists were lay preachers, and very few were ordained, notable exceptions being Wesley himself, John Fletcher of Madeley and Henry Venn. They kept their links with the Church of England, even occasionally preaching in its churches. The lay preachers were also clamouring for ordination and eventually Wesley broke with Anglican practice by, himself, "laying hands" on men who were to minister in Scotland and overseas missions. Shortly before his death, he began to make provision for areas in England where Methodists were denied the sacraments. These steps inevitably hastened the departure of his followers from the established church, although Wesley insisted that he did not aim at separation. At his death, in 1784, his authority passed to the Methodist Conference, represented by one hundred of its members. Unlike some other break away groups from the Church of England, Methodism maintained the doctrine of general redemption. They believe that salvation is available to all - not just the chosen few.

The founders of the new movement, Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, had been expelled from the Methodists, for taking part in the evangelistic gatherings, known as "camp meetings". Their new movement was named after the words of John Wesley: "Wherever there is an open door enter in and preach the Gospel: if it be two or three under a hedge preach the Gospel: go out... and bring in the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind, this is the way the primitive Methodists did it." The first meeting of the Primitive Methodists was held, on the 31st May 1807, at Mow Cop, in Staffordshire. The down-to-earth approach appealed to the men of the soil, especially those who felt that the church was too "high" for the ordinary people.

The preachers were powerful and persuasive speakers. In 1823, Samuel Heath recorded in his journal¹: "I preached at Swinsco and the power of God came down like a mighty rushing wind. Two found the Lord." The Primitive Methodists grew in number locally. In the early 1830s, regular contributions were made, towards the erection of a chapel, by local worshippers. These were collected by a treasurer, who travelled the district by pony and "tub".

The Primitive Methodist Chapel in Town Lane, Swinscoe, was built at a cost of £100:

See down the lane, beyond the well,
A country chapel, small and grey,
It has no yew tree, tower or bell,
But God is there its people say

(There is still a well down the lane,
with low walls and steps where frogs
used to sit, which provided drinking
water for the local residents until 1961)

On the 23rd August 1835, the chapel was openedⁱⁱ and the first sermons were preached by James Taylor, James Bourne and R. Jukes. The chapel was registered, for Primitive Methodists, by John Hampson of Swinscoe and Richard Jukes, on the 28th September 1836. A local builder and carpenter, Anthony Stubbs, records an amount of 2s.0d rent, for a seat in the chapel, for the year 1837. Initially, Swinscoe was part of the Ramsor circuit, but later, became part of the Ashbourne Circuit. Each Sunday, sermons were preached by visiting circuit preachers.

By 1851 the Primitive Methodists had achieved a nationwide membership of over 100,000 members.

However, the strength of the movement did not apply to Swinscoe Chapel. In 1868, Swinscoe had become "low and feeble" and was relying upon a few stalwarts to keep things going - hoping for better days. Then, a man arrived on the scene, who, through his unpopularity, indirectly contributed more to the Primitive Cause in Swinscoe, than any other individual: the forceful and dogmatic new curate of Blore Parish Church - Rev Glennie.

The Rev Glennie, was the driving force in obtaining grants and persuading the Okeovers to support the building of a school in Swinscoe. As an ex-school inspector, his views about instruction in Anglican religion and compulsory payment, were decidedly unpopular locally. The national, as well as the local, view of the non-conformists was in favour of free and non-denominational education. He also set up a Mission Service in Swinscoe School with the intent of trying to counteract some of the Methodist activity. He was accused of influencing local landowners to give "notice to quit" to two of the farmers who had joined the ranks of the Methodists. There may have been some truth in the allegations as the Church Commissioners owned a number of farms in the village. The Methodists accused "the Parson and the Devil"ⁱⁱⁱ of trying to stop their good work and the villagers became so incensed, by this apparent interference, that they burned an effigy of the parson.

Rev Glennie's actions, and interference, were so highly unpopular that he created a great deal of opposition. In doing so, Rev Glennie also caused an unusual solidarity among the local population which, unwittingly, furthered the Methodist cause. Similar solidarity was shown, one hundred years later, when the County Council unsuccessfully tried for two years to close Swinscoe School. When Rev Glennie left the parish, in 1869, the absentee rector, Rev Hugh Wood, also resigned. The Rev Glennie moved to Croxton where, even there, he obtained a reputation as "a man of earnest and strong convictions which under all circumstances he never shrank from maintaining"^{iv}.

The society decided to hold a special camp meeting to support their members and try to revive the old enthusiasm. Preachers came from far and wide and preached powerful sermons. In all, twenty two people were persuaded to join the Methodist faith, among them were several farmers, their wives and children and their servants.

With the absence of a permanent incumbent, there was a virtual vacuum at Blore Church, during the next six years, which gave the chapel the opportunity to consolidate its own position. The Sunday School was set up to counteract the influence of the church-run school. The number of children, who attended, rose to a high of fifty, which is more than the thirty six pupils ever achieved by the school.

The Chapel continued to grow in strength and became an important part of the social and cultural life of the community. At Christmas and at New Year special efforts were made. The Camp Meetings on Whit Sunday and Love Feasts on Whit Monday were annual events and the numbers of people that attended them was often very large.

On New Year's Eve 1893, a service of song was arranged entitled "Gems from the life of Squire Brooks"^v. The Chair was taken by W. Austin Jr. The choir was under the leadership of Mr. J. Twemlow, soloist Miss Phillips, harmonium Mr. J. Phillips, clarinet Mr. C. Twemlow, violins C. Philips and G. Moss, and violoncello Mr. S. Clowes. On Whit Monday, 1893, the Chapel organised a Camp Meeting. There were addresses by T. Harrison, P. Needham, J. Bates and Rev W.H. Mason. Afterwards the Annual Tea Meeting was arranged by Mrs. Tomlinson, Mrs. Lees, Mrs. Twemlow and Mrs. Moss. There were recitations by Mr. Twemlow, Mr. Phillips and Mr. Bott's children. These were followed by solos from Miss Stannah and Mr. Phillips and a trio Misses Moss and Miss Phillips. Under the leadership of Mr. Twemlow, the choir, and all those present, enjoyed one of the most successful meetings ever held at Swinscoe.

In 1896, at the Camp Meeting and Tea Party on Whit Monday, the proceeds of the collection were used to provide the paint and varnish for Mr. T. Ratcliffe of Waterhouses to decorate the Chapel. On the 11th June 1897, over 130 people sat down to tea presided over by Mrs. Moss, Mrs. Lees, Mrs. Twemlow and Mrs. Thurman.

The camp meetings continued for a further twenty years. During the Great War, the number of those attending decreased and the meetings gradually died away. Efforts were made to resurrect the meetings during the Twenties but they never achieved anything like the success of earlier years.

The rift between the chapel and the church slowly began to heal. Swinscoe School was used by both groups, for special occasions, especially during the winter months. In the case of the chapel, it was impossible to hold open air meetings during the hard winters of Swinscoe.

One important national and local issue continued to cloud relationships. The Methodists felt that they should not have to pay for educating their children at a school that was biased towards Anglican education. This matter was finally solved by an Act of Parliament, in 1907.

The Rev John Young, Rector of Blore, during his 45 year ministry tried to heal some of the old wounds between the Church and the Chapel. In 1914, he offered his "dissenting brethren" the opportunity of taking confirmation from the Bishop "All who have been baptized according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England (and many dissenters have been so baptized)" come to ratify the Covenant made with God but it does not follow that they become any more a member of the Church than they were before.^{vi} He assured them that he did not wish to proselytize, or gain

converts. He wished to provide the privilege, that John Wesley never intended his followers to neglect, or forgo - to attend Communion.

The chapel was well supported by a number of families and particular individuals. Mr. John Phillips was the secretary and steward for many years from 1911 to 1920s. He was ably supported by Mr. W.C. Twemlow as treasurer for much of the same period and Mrs. Tomlinson was the organist for many years. Local residents were trustees of the chapel.

In 1917, it was suddenly realized that the trustees of the chapel had dwindled from fourteen to three. It was necessary to call an emergency meeting, and make special efforts, to persuade members of the congregation to replace all those who had died. A list of trustees is attached in the appendix^{vii}.

The Sunday School was held at the chapel and children came from all parts of the district to attend. Up to fifty children attended each Sunday and each year the local community organized a Sunday School Treat, sometimes to places as far afield as Trentham Gardens. During the wartime, the visits were more local. In 1917, they were entertained at Calton Moor House by Mr. J. Phillips and his wife. After tea, games, and other amusements, were organized and the children sang hymns. Just before departure, they loyally sang the National Anthem.

Music was always an important part of worship, and local and visiting soloists made their contribution. For the Anniversary Service of the Sunday School, in 1917, the visiting preacher, Rev. W. Carrier of Sheffield, brought along his sister. She sang "Beyond the Dawn" and "Nearer my God to Thee".

When a member of the committee left, or died, it was necessary to find a suitable replacement. On the 13th June 1933, it was necessary to call an emergency meeting of the committee to find a replacement for the treasurer, Mr. W.C. Twemlow of Forest Farm. Mr. Twemlow had made major contributions to all the chapel's activities and would be sorely missed. A plaque was installed on the wall beside the pulpit in the chapel, in recognition of his work

In his place, Mrs. Wilson was elected as Trust Treasurer and Mrs. Twigge as School Treasurer. These ladies were also entrusted with the task of collecting for the erection of a new entrance porch. In 1935, in celebration of the centenary of the chapel, the porch was built. It cost nearly as much as the cost of the original building of the chapel.

The ladies of the parish made major contributions to the chapel activities and held meetings of their own. The sound of their voices, accompanied by a harmonium, could be heard all over the village. As at church, it was the custom, for the ladies of the chapel to cover their heads and this resulted in the wearing of the magnificent creations to be seen in the group photograph taken around 1930:

During the Thirties and the Forties, the children of the parish looked forward to the annual Sunday School treat which went by coach to Alton Towers. Long before it became a theme park; Alton Towers was a popular destination for visitors, with its gardens, parkland and boating lake. Ken Twemlow recalls an incident during a Sunday School visit when he and his friends, Arthur Hayes and Geoff Morris became marooned in their boat and had to be rescued by the attendants. On one

occasion, however, Miss Annie Morris remembers going to a farm, near Uttoxeter, owned by Mr. Prince - a staunch Methodist.

The chapel was registered for baptisms, weddings and funerals. A register containing, only two baptisms, is held in Matlock Record Office:

"July 21st 1963

Elaine daughter of Joan Irene and Thomas Frederick Clewes

of Green Farm, Swinscoe

Born July 1st 1963

12th September 1965

John Antony daughter (sic) of James David and Margaret Rose Bradbury of Calton

Born 27th June 1965"

The register containing the rest of the baptisms, including all the Morris family, cannot be traced.

The Register of Marriages^{viii} for the period 1921 to 1954, contains only ten marriages.

Weddings were always important events within the community and especially welcomed by the children. If the wedding took place on a school day, the children were allowed to leave school to go and watch the event. They were also eager to attend because of an old custom. Part way down Town End Lane (previously known as Chapel Lane) there were two large wooden farm gates. The local children "roped" the entrance to stop the wedding car and would not let it pass until coins had been thrown to them. Miss Sheila Allen recalls the wedding of Miss Phillips of Ellis Hill to her cousin, Mr. Stanley Phillips, from Calton Moor House, when pennies were thrown to the waiting children. Jean Thompson, daughter of the Licensee at the Dog & Partridge, was married, at the chapel. Graham, her husband-to-be, had to come by bus, from Manchester but the bus was late. He had to run down the lane to get to the chapel in time.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Mr. Charles Phillips used to run the Sunday School with fifteen or twenty regulars. Among the families, whose children attended Sunday School, were: Allen (Marton Hill), Bailey, Bradbury (Waterings), Bridden, Lees and Phillips. He was not averse to giving a little tap, with a light cane, to those who fidgeted, or allowed their attention to wander. Later, Frances Appleby (Mycock) carried on the good work and walked from Woodhouses, up the Cliff, every Sunday morning. At Whitsuntide, the children used to give little recitations and were rewarded with a book. Those who attended regularly were given a better book than the rest, but everyone got one.

In those days, long before unification of the churches, it was common for the young people to go to both Chapel and Church. They would go to Sunday School at the Chapel at 10.30 am, the Service at Blore Church at 2.30 pm and the Service at the Chapel at 6.30 in the evening.

In August 1954, it was again necessary to review the trustees and this list is also shown in the appendix.

The chapel badly needed renovation and redecoration. Mrs. Salt of Calton Moor House worked very hard to collect over £50 towards the cost. On the 11th April 1955, after the renovation had been carried out, the chapel was filled to capacity for its reopening. This was an opportunity to unveil a plaque in recognition of lifelong service of Mr. Charles Phillips. He died in 1955, and his wife Annie Phillips died in 1953. They both lived at Ellis Hill Farm. The plaque was unveiled by Mr. William Walker of Alton, the oldest local preacher who had been closely associated with Mr. and Mrs. Phillips for over fifty years. Mr. Fred Cotton of Waterhouses spoke of the good work of Mr. Charles Twemlow, Mr. Charles Clowes and Mr. Charles Phillips. The members of the church gave an oak communion table, and holy communion vessels, as a sign of their respect for Mr. Phillips.

The population of the parish had reduced, over the years, from 299 in 1841 to half that number in 1951. It was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain local support. Special efforts were made to increase the involvement of those members of younger generation, who were still around. On the 12th May 1957, the chapel was well filled. The local young folk took a prominent part in conducting the service. Mr. Arthur Twigge was the chairman, the Rev Barker gave the address, Miss Margaret Clowes and Mr. Ernest Allen read the lesson and Miss Beryl Cotton of Waterhouse was the organist. The chapel was also used for the Women's Mission Service, on the 15th August 1957, when Mrs. Wilcocks of Mayfield made an eloquent address.

Over the next few years, the attendance at the chapel dwindled even further. The good old stalwarts, Mr. and Mrs. Twigge, Mr. and Mrs. Phillips, Mr. and Mrs. Shaw, Mr. and Mrs. Salt, Mrs. Bradbury kept Methodism alive in Swinscoe. In 1962, it was agreed to install electricity and a fresh water supply. However, it was agreed to postpone appointment of preachers, for the following Whit and Harvest Festivals, because of poor attendance.

The small band of the faithful was further reduced, in 1970, when Mrs. J. Phillips died. In 1964 the organist, and member of the chapel, Miss Lizzie Phillips, was taken to hospital, never to return.

Both St. Bartholomew's Church, at Blore, and the Methodist Chapel, at Swinscoe, were experiencing poor attendance. In 1965, Rev Laurie of Blore Church asked permission to hold a church service in the chapel once a month to which the trustees agreed unanimously. Rev Laurie was appointed as the preacher for Whit Saturday and Whit Sunday 1966. In 1972, the new vicar of Blore Church, Rev Tittensor, and members of the Parish Church Council, began discussion with the trustees of the chapel. They discussed, and agreed, to hold united services. Rev Tittensor would take the first service and the Methodist Minister would take the next. It was, also, agreed to hold alternate services, in the summer months, in Blore Church.

Mr. David Shaw died in 1975 and two years later Mr. J. Phillips also died. This left Mr. and Mrs. Twigge, Mr. and Mrs. Salt and Mrs. Shaw to soldier on. In 1980 Mr. and Mrs. Twigge decided to move to Ashbourne and this effectively meant that the chapel would no longer remain.

The final service was held on Sunday 28th June 1981.

The chapel was closed and bought by Mr. Tom Clewes of Green Farm, Swinscoe for use as a storeroom. The Methodist Bible and other items were returned to members of the Phillips family and the communion sets were distributed to other chapels.

The Primitive Methodist Chapel, its leaders, trustees and congregation made a significant spiritual, moral, cultural and social contribution, to a small Staffordshire community over a period of 150 years. The chapel building still stands - as a memorial to a dedicated band of people.

Version June 2017

- i 1 Primitive Methodist Magazine 1823
- ii 2 Primitive Methodist Magazine 1836 p 318
- iii 3 Primitive Methodist Magazine 1868 p 40
- iv 4 G.H.O. Burgess 28/8/1996
- v 5 Ashbourne Telegraph
- vi 6 Deanery Magazine
- vii 7 Matlock Record Office
- viii 8 Stafford Record Office