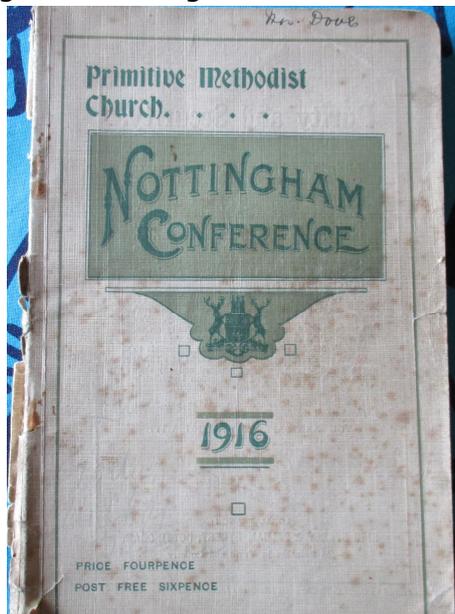


Extract from an article in the Handbook of the 97th Annual Primitive Methodist Conference held in Nottingham in 1916

Primitive Methodism in Nottingham 1816 - 1916

by Jacob Walton

A woman has the honour of being the first Primitive Methodist to enter Nottingham with a view to the preaching of the Gospel. On Christmas Day 1815, accompanied by Robert Winfield, Sarah Kirkland, barely out of her teens, entered the city. The first decision was to take a stand in the Great Market Square but possible rough treatment from a lawless crowd, led to a change of plans. A room in the Narrow Marsh was found and this brave woman expounded the Evangel to the crowd that pressed to hear her. A Mr Sutcliffe gave valuable assistance by obtaining a spacious room in a disused factory in the Broad Marsh. This was the beginning of a permanent work of grace. Though the room could accommodate a thousand people it was filled to over-



flowing. At the first service 16 persons were converted, of whom no less than 10 became local preachers. Persons of good social position were attracted: and the town authorities when persecution broke out intervened and saw that there was fair play. The first six months of 1816 gave birth to a mighty religious movement. On Whitsunday a campaign of aggression began on the famous Nottingham Forest, where a great camp meeting was held. Out of the spiritual passion of this great open-air gathering, there was born the great Revival of 1817 and 1818 and Nottingham became the base from which Yorkshire and Lincolnshire were missioned.

Success as well as failure creates difficulties and there was thrust upon the leaders of this fruitful religious movement the task of organisation. The year 1819 saw the holding of the famous Preparatory Meeting and it was held in Nottingham. The delegates were 15 in number and six of them were Nottingham men. At this meeting, Circuit Stewards and Society Stewards were given their present status. The Presbyterian form of church government rather than the Episcopal was hit upon. The first Leaders' Meeting and the first Circuit Committee of Primitive Methodism were formed in Nottingham.

As a direct outcome of the work of Sarah Kirkland, Canaan church, Broad Marsh was built. The name is significant. Whence came it? The locality has never suggested Canaan, it has never flowed with milk and honey. The conclusion is a safe one, that the inspiration came from some external source. A popular hymn, "Canaan, bright Canaan, I'm bound for the land of Canaan," gave the church its name. The story is well told by Rev. H.B. Kendall in his History. This great mother church of the Midlands is one of the historic churches of the Connexion and through all the changes of 100 years has preserved its identity. It has stood at the head of the great Nottingham First Circuit. It has been the creator of strong societies which today are grouped in separate circuits. The present handsome structure was built in 1882 at a cost of

£10,000. The commodious school premises are built on the site of the chapel of 1882 - "no place like Canaan" is the statement of many members of the church and of many who have removed from the town. Geographically, it stands on the edge of a moral desert, and probably it is true to say that it only continues its work because of the sentiment of those who revere it. There is intense loyalty and on this firm foundation a brave witness for Christ is made. The congregation is drawn from Primitive Methodist families residing in all parts of the city. As this is the Centenary year, the officials have decided to make a great Centenary effort. This resolve reveals courage and initiative, and complete success will mean much. There is a question of future policy to be faced. Those who understand the situation are convinced that Primitive Methodism must tackle The Marshes and no church in Nottingham can do it better than Canaan church. What this old time "melting furnace" of Primitive Methodism needs is the undivided labours of the minister, able to throw himself with a band of workers, upon the Marshes. As it is, in this Circuit there are some vigorous and promising causes in the suburbs and villages which cannot be neglected, amongst them Netherfield, a railway centre, and Gotham, which has the distinction of a week-night congregation of 70 to 80 people. Rev. Alfred Parkin, the present minister, with his *bonhomie* and humanness, has already succeeded in imparting a new spirit of hope into Canaan society. The names of Barnes and Allcock will long be remembered for fine service in the past and C. Ashmore still remains at Canaan as an earnest worker.

For a period of 30 years there was only one circuit in the city, but the workers were bold and unceasing in their labours. Aggression was the watchword of the day. Two town missions in the years 1836 and 1838 and in which Rev. W. Antliff took a prominent part were very fruitful. When the Wesleyans decided to vacate Hockley chapel in 1839 it was purchased by the Connexion, and in 1846 Hockley became the head of the Second Circuit. Rapid progress was made by the new Circuit. It covered ground now occupied by Nottingham Third, Fifth and Sixth Circuits, Hucknall Torkard Circuit and parts of Long Eaton Circuit. During the last thirty years the principal hindrance to the work of the Hockley society has been the heavy burden of debt. This has harassed the workers beyond measure. At one time there was a serious proposal to sell out, but the workers are reluctant to let go their hold on a piece of property rich in historic association; and even though the conditions of work are those of a down-town church, there is the feeling that much can be done despite the difficulties of the situation. Notable success has been achieved in recent years in the reduction of debt, and the present minister, Rev. Geo Baldwin, is bravely and ably handling the situation. The Forster Street church in this circuit has a fine site for a new church on Radford Boulevard and behind the site are fine schools which are worth £2,000.

The year 1877 saw the formation of the Third Circuit with Forest Road church at the head. Probably the dimensions of the Second Circuit led to the division. The membership of the new Circuit was 432; in twenty four years this had increased to 779. In 1901 it was considered the time had come for a further division. Hucknall Torkard became the head of a new circuit and Hartley Road, Stapleford and Sandiacre were formed into a branch. Stapleford and Sandiacre are now parts of the Long Eaton Circuit. Great energy has characterised the labours of this Circuit. Since 1877 new churches and schools have been built at New Basford, Selhurst Street at a total cost of £16,500. Within the area of the Nottingham Third Circuit during the last 39 years the membership has doubled. There is a fine opportunity for good work in the midst of a great artisan population at Gladstone Street, and Forest Road is virile and up to date. Rev. Christopher Tinn is travelling a second time on the Circuit and his past

knowledge of the station is an important asset. Valuable assistance is being given by the Rev. J.W. Lisle, Supernumerary.

In 1883, six years later than the formation of the third Circuit, Nottingham Fourth was formed under the superintendency of the Rev. S.S. Henshaw. A strong progressive element in the First Circuit saw the need of seizing the unique opportunity afforded by the very rapidly growing artisan district called The Meadows. A school chapel already in existence was too small for the congregations. After a protracted series of discussions it was decided to build Mayfield Grove church. The new church was soon crowded to overflowing, and as the population continued to spread towards the Trent, Radcliffe Street church was built in 1887. Here a splendid work was done, especially among the young people. Mayfield Grove church is a commodious building, accommodating 850 people. Ruddington possesses a fine block of buildings valued at £2,580. East Bridgford has fine traditions, and is the home of the Richardsons, sturdy Nonconformists of a good intellectual type. The West Bridgford cause is an infant society, three years old and is already lusty, promising to be of great strength and influence. The prophecy is that it will become one of the finest P.M. churches in Nottingham. The membership is already 80, a first class site has been purchased and paid for at a cost of £475. In this circuit the possibilities of the future are great and with wise and courageous leadership, it is felt much will be accomplished. The entry into West Bridgford is due to the fine initiative of the Rev. T.H. Kedward, the present superintendent minister who has an excellent and successful colleague in the Rev. J.M. Gunson.

Nottingham Fifth Circuit has shown energy and resourcefulness during the last 19 years. Mr. G.B. Gooch, Mrs. Gooch, Mr Elijah White, Mr Singleton and Mr Richardson were deputed by the Hockley society to hire Blue Bell Hill Board Schools. In two years they gathered together 350 scholars, 25 teachers, and 50 members. The year 1899 saw the erection of Blue Bell chapel during the ministry of the Rev. T. Granger. The cost was £5,000. Special difficulties have beset the progress of this cause, but with generous promises of aid from Sir Wm. Hartley and the late Alderman Hilton, also from the General Chapel Fund and the Insurance Company, it is believed the financial redemption of the Blue Bell Hill is within sight. The membership of the Circuit has steadily grown, and though there has been a transference of 280 members to the Sixth Circuit and an inclusion of 92 members by the incorporation of the Hartley Road society, it stands today at 297. The Circuit possesses good property at Calverton, on the best site in the village. Hartley Road society worships in a beautiful sanctuary, and possesses a spacious schoolroom with a good suite of class rooms. The Rev. W.H. Wright is at the present time rendering very efficient service on this Circuit.

The Sixth Circuit is the latest born of the Nottingham Circuits. It has only had two years of existence as a station. But Bulwell, the head of the circuit, was entered by Sarah Kirkland in 1816 and from that day a Primitive Methodist society has continued to flourish. Today there is a loyal membership and a Sunday evening congregation that averages 500 people. Altogether the Bulwell society is one of the most vigorous churches in Nottingham. The Rev. J. Prince is rendering good service here.

Amongst the men who have impressed themselves upon the religious and social life of the city, the Rev. James Flanagan occupies a position of honour. The Albert Hall, standing just off the Derby Road and the finest hall in the city, was the scene of some splendid work by Mr. Flanagan in the years 1887 - 1891. Tributes to this day are paid to the abiding worth of the soul-stirring evangelism of our beloved brother. During his four years at the Hall as special missioned, huge crowds attended the services and often not a vacant seat could be found in a building capable of holding an audience of

two thousand. During these memorable years the famous Nottingham P.S.A. at that time the largest in the world with a membership of 2,500 came into being, and Mr Flanagan played an important part in making it a live and vigorous religious organisation. It is fitting that our brother should now be spending the evening of his life in Nottingham in the home of his life in Nottingham in the home of his daughter Mrs Brack.

There are two friends living in Nottingham today who can recall hearing Hugh Bourne at a camp meeting on the Forest in the year 1851 - Alderman Wm. Ward, a highly respected official of the Fourth Circuit, and Alderman Robert Mellors C.C., a well known and highly esteemed Christian worker of the city and the author of some valuable works on Nottingham. Mr. Mellors says, "There were a number of ministers in a wagon: among them being the Rev. Hugh Bourne, He was in extreme old age, and when he stood up to speak he was supported by a minister on either side. He spoke from 'Little children love one another.' He addressed all the people as his little children and talked of the beauty of kindness and helpfulness and of the reward in a heaven of love."

This article already has trespassed beyond its intended limits. Attention is drawn to the fine Centenary hymn, written specially for this Conference by the Rev. James Flanagan and to the tune composed by Mr. C.H. Saxton. Nottingham Primitive Methodism in this year of grace 1916 humbly acknowledges the goodness of God during one hundred years, it rejoices in the privilege of Christian service and would consecrate itself afresh to the Great Leadership of our common Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Jacob Walton

Transcribed from the collection at Englesea Brook Museum of Primitive Methodism by Christopher Hill In March 2016