

Old Newton

The beginnings of Primitive Methodism in Old Newton were remembered in a poem recited by children at the Sunday school anniversary at the chapel on 1 June 1868. It began –

‘Tis three-and-thirty years ago,
At least I’m told that it is so;
Since first there to Old Newton came,
The Primitives so call’d by name.

Beneath a tree on yonder green,
These novel preachers first were seen;
Miss Hammond was the preacher then,
While many shouted out Amen.

Her voice was loud and clear and strong,
He words will be remembered long’
Her text was ‘To the righteous say
It shall be well with them alway’...

The word thus preached was not in vain,
Though sometimes in the falling rain;
But shelter was the thing much needed,
And could not be for long unheeded.

One neighbour to another said,
“I hope you’ll let them have your shed;
And screen them from the weather there
‘Till they can build a house of prayer.”

The shed was opened, truth was taught,
And many saving wonders wrought;
There sinners felt their sins forgiven,
And started on the way to heaven.

And then this chapel it was reared,
But many of the people feared
The cause would not continue long,
The opposition was so strong.

But it has lasted to this day,
While many foes have pass’d away;
Our friends grow strong, and still increase,
And often come and fill the place...

Then followed twenty-five more verses remembering the various preachers stationed in circuit.

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The *Primitive Methodist Magazine* of 1851 included a report from Old Newton. It explained that with the improved state of the society, the enlarged congregation and the newly-established Sunday school, it had become imperative that the chapel was enlarged. This work had now been satisfactorily completed.

At re-opening services, one of those preaching was the local Baptist minister whilst, after a tea for those attending the main service, amongst those addressing the assembled people was the minister from the Independent church. Clearly, and somewhat surprisingly, congregational ecumenism amongst the nonconformist denominations at least, was in good shape in this small part of Suffolk. However, things were not so harmonious as far as the Anglicans in the village were concerned.

The re-opening celebrations continued over several weeks and the report explained -

The chapel, though enlarged, was crowded at all the services and a glorious influence rested upon us...We keep toiling on, but there is joy in the conflict, as we are adding to our societies. In this place, ecclesiastical bigotries tried to prevent the enlargement of our chapel, and we were stigmatized as heretical schismatics. But we marshalled our forces, formed our phalanx, and prayerfully advanced. In due time the chapel was enlarged, the yard ornamented with gravel walks and beautiful evergreens, and so improved in appearance that even our opposers say it is an ornament to the village.

No report of a chapel opening, re-opening or celebration would be complete without a record of the money raised. During these weeks it amounted to more than £15, an excellent effort.

Norma Virgoe