

The Methodist Church in Loughborough

Methodists have often been called ‘those Wesleyan renegades’ and ‘Ranters’. It has been said that, ‘where there be Methodists, there be trouble’.

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, was born on 17 or 28 June 1703, depending on which calendar was used. He was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1728. However, Wesley soon became barred from preaching in many parish churches, so he preached and converted folk to the Christian way in the open air.

The main stream of the Methodist Church was the Wesleyan Methodists, and in the early 1800s the Primitive Methodists broke away.

Hugh Bourne, along with William Clowes, was the joint founder of Primitive Methodism – the largest offshoot of Wesleyan Methodism and, in the mid nineteenth century, an influential Protestant Christian movement in its own right. It was Bourne's followers who were also called Ranters

Hugh Bourne

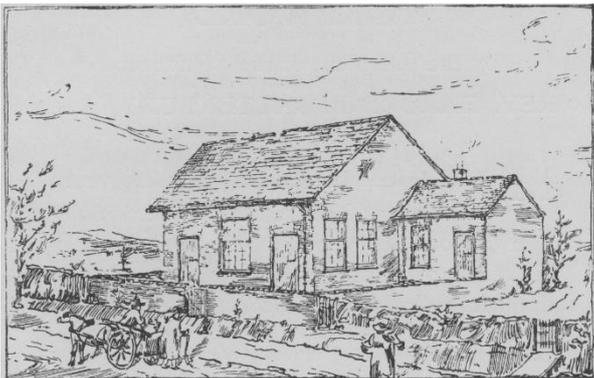


Bourne was expelled from the Wesleyan Methodists for ‘non-attendance at Bible class’ but the real reason was ‘because he had a tendency to set up other than the ordinary worship’. Ironically, this was the reason the Anglican Church gave for refusing to endorse John Wesley's mission in the mid-eighteenth century.

Bourne's Camp Meetings were all-day, open-air gatherings and the first such meeting in England was held on Sunday, 31 May 1807, between 6.00 a.m. and 8.00 p.m., and during the afternoon, the camp drew a crowd of 4,000 people.

Whilst there were no essential doctrinal differences, the Wesleyans concentrated a great deal of authority in the hands of their Ministers, and the Primitive Methodists recognised the importance of Lay folk in the proclamation of God's word.

When Hugh Bourne first came to Loughborough from the Potteries on 24 January 1818, he was surprised to find a very active group already there in the town. This inspired him to visit quite a few times.



Dead Lane Methodist chapel, Loughborough

By May 1818, a piece of land had been bought and a Chapel built in Dead Lane, Loughborough – the first Primitive Methodist chapel in Leicestershire.

Nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps show Dead Lane running from The Unicorn public house in Biggin Street to Bridge Street. It was the route taken by the funeral carts carrying the dead in the time of the plague, to be buried somewhere near to what is now Limehurst School. Dead Lane is under the Rushes development.

It isn't clear where in Dead Lane the chapel stood, but we do know that it served until 1849 when a new chapel was opened in Swan Street. This chapel was to become the Circuit Church for the Third Circuit of the Primitive Methodist Connexion.

It was enlarged in 1870 to accommodate 600 people and occupied a large site, which, by the time of its closure, included schoolrooms and cottages.



Swan Street Methodist chapel and schools.
Photo from the ‘Centenary Camp Meeting
Souvenir Handbook 1907’

A few interesting statistics:

- In 1809 the population of Loughborough was 5,000.
- In a return of chapels in 1829, there were 2,986 members.

There was a chapel for:

- General Baptists 1,050.
- Particular Baptists 300.
- Methodists 1,200.
- Primitive Methodists 150.
- Independents, together with Quakers and others 145.

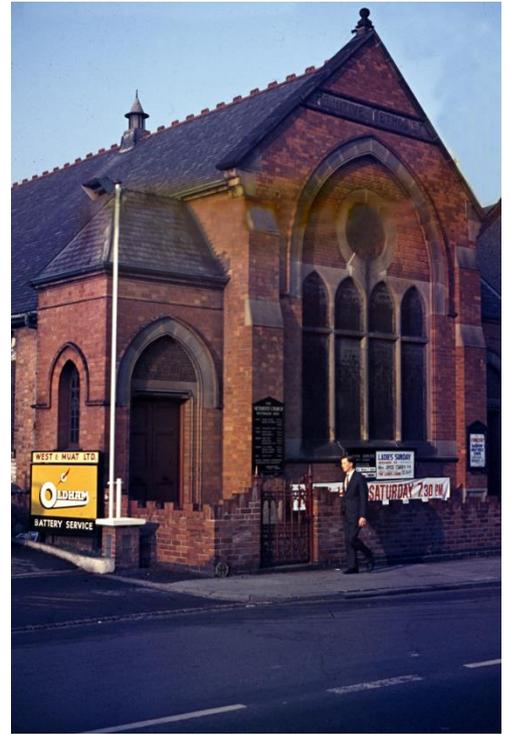
The Particular Baptists built their chapel at Sparrow Hill in 1817 at a cost of £1300. A gallery was added in 1828 (£250) and in 1846 the chapel seated 800 people.

After Swan Street's closure the congregation joined with the former Wesleyan chapel in Leicester Road and became founder members of the new society at Trinity.

When the Swan Street building was demolished by Collington and Son of Leicester, they discovered that the Woodbrook flowed directly underneath the building, covered only by floorboards. It was commented that in periods of heavy rain the noise disturbed services.

In the late 1880s a group of men met in Mr Wheatley's Carpenters shop and resolved to open a Mission in a factory building in Duke Street, and out of the Duke Street Mission grew Nottingham Road Methodist Mission. It opened in 1892.

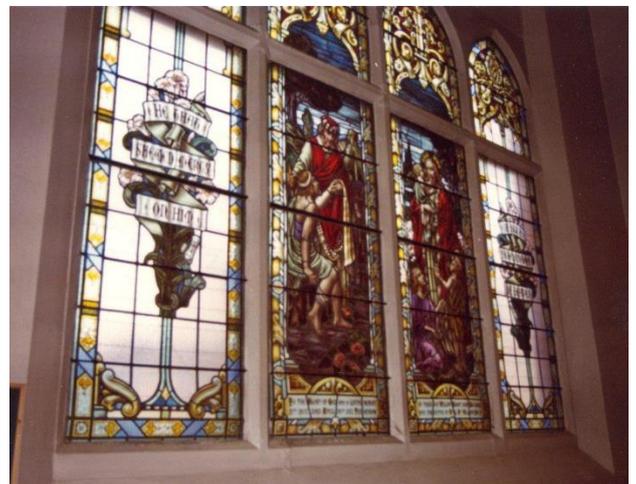
After the Great War one of the Church's benefactors presented three stained glass windows in memory of his fallen sons.



Nottingham Road Methodist Church in 1990. Photograph by Geoff Buckley.



Inside Nottingham Road Chapel. Photographs by Geoff Buckley.



There was a panel that showed Jesus and the children around his knee, and another of the Good Samaritan. Above these two was a smaller, round one of an angel holding a crown – the Crown of Life.

After demolition of the building the two panels were installed in the Prayer Chapel at Trinity Methodist Church – but they have now been removed for safety reasons and placed in storage. The Crown of Life Window was also removed and it went to a private house where it remained for almost twenty years.

In 1915 a Primitive Methodist Mission was opened by a small group who had previously met in the home of one of its members. This is now the main body of Knightthorpe Methodist Church – a product of the Mission in Swan Street.

In 1939 an entrance porch was built.



Photograph by Karen Ette



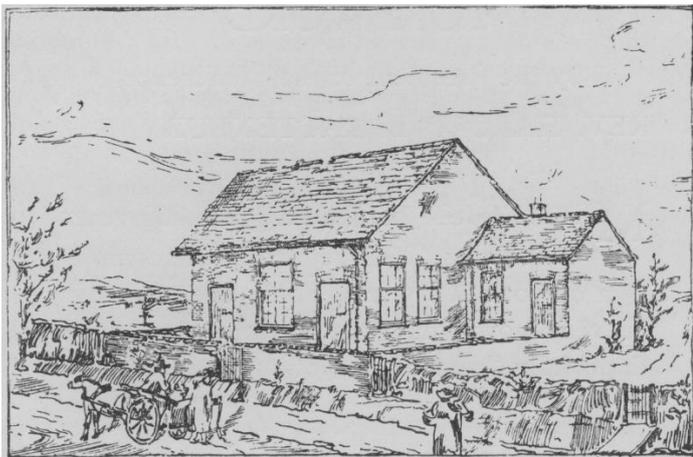
Photographs from Knightthorpe Methodist Church archives

In the 1960s, the allotment at the rear of the church was bought and an ex-army, Banbury prefabricated building was purchased with help from the sale of Ashby Road Methodist Church.

In recognition of this it was named the Ashby Hall and it is still in use today. In addition, the portable kitchen and toilets came from Shelthorpe Church and were rebuilt at the rear of the church.



In December 1993 a major project was completed. This saw the old porch replaced by the current front extension.



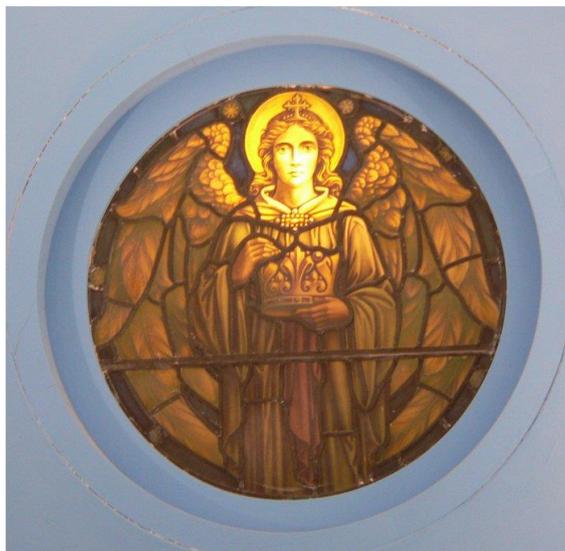
When we look back at the Dead Lane Chapel, this one is not dissimilar.

In 2002 another building project began and in November 2004 the latest extension and refurbishment saw the building take its current form. A new community room was added at the rear of the church to replace the portable units added in the 1990s. As well as this new room, a new kitchen, vestry and cloakrooms were added.



Photograph by Karen Ette

Links with past Methodism continued when the owners of the Crown of Life moved to a new house. They offered the window back to the Loughborough Circuit to be displayed in the only surviving Primitive Methodist Church in Loughborough – Knightthorpe.



The Crown of Life
Photograph by Rob Newton

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