

## **Foreword**

This booklet has been produced to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the building of the present Woodstock Chapel in 1906. It is acknowledged, however, that this did not mark the beginning of the Methodist movement in Woodstock but was part of its development over the years.

This brief guide will examine how the Methodist Church has developed over the last 180 years or so in Woodstock.

### **The Early History of Methodism in Woodstock**

Methodism came officially to Woodstock in 1819, when Thomas Meek registered his house for Wesleyan Meetings. Under the Toleration Act, religious activities that were not part of the established church (the Church of England) had to be registered with the authorities. Thomas Meek was still a steward of the church in 1851. This house, therefore, was the first "Chapel" in the history of Woodstock and was part of the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

In the early 1820s a man (unnamed) wanted to donate £100 to build a Methodist chapel in Bladon. The Superintendent of the circuit persuaded him to donate this money to Woodstock, saying there was not a need in Bladon for a chapel! This he did, and in 1824 a chapel was built on land on the west side of Oxford Street, Woodstock. This land was acquired by Daniel Evans, an Oxford builder, who was acting on behalf of the trustees. The minister at this time was the Revd G Cubitt, but the minister initiating

the project was the Revd R Martin. At this time the membership of the church stood at around 19, but most of these people were still attached to the Parish Church. It was never John Wesley's desire to form a separate church. There was no resident minister in Woodstock in these early days, so Local Preachers, as now, took many of the services. By 1851 attendance at morning services was about 60, and at evening services about 130.

The Methodist Church, after the death of John Wesley, was split over disagreements about ways of worship which led to different connexions being formed, although still based upon the basic views of Wesley. The biggest of the Churches continued to be the Wesleyan Methodist Church. In Woodstock, the membership of the Church was split by the formation of the Wesleyan Reformers. The membership of the Wesleyan Church was halved and did not recover during this period.

In 1868 the Olivet Chapel was built on the east side of Oxford Street, on land bought by Mr G Banbury. This Chapel was built by the United Free Methodist Church, and opened for worship on Good Friday 1868.



The picture above shows Mr Banbury, the Supervisor of the Olivet Chapel, with his helpers. (Calcutt, 1999 Wychwood Press). The Chapel cost

£978.6.6d, and a debt of £451.5s was carried forward. In 1907 the church became part of the United Methodist Church in union with other small Methodist denominations.

In June 1903 the bicentenary of the birth of John Wesley was celebrated in Woodstock by an event in Blenheim Park. People from all around the circuit came to this event, and there were special trains put on from Oxford. The gardens were open in the park until 5.00 p.m., apparently an unusual event.

### The Building of the New Chapel

The Wesleyan Methodists decided to build a new chapel, the building that is now the church, and purchased land on the east side of Oxford Street. According to reminiscences there were rows of cottages where the church now stands, with a well behind. The cost of the new chapel was in the order of £1200, with a bank loan of £765 providing much of the cost. This loan was still being paid off in 1919, when there was £350 still outstanding. Special fund raising events were held to pay off the debt, like the one shown, a Sale of Work held in Woodstock Town Hall. Private Loans were also used to

**Woodstock Wesleyan Church,**  
 Thursday, June 5th, 1919,  
 In the WOODSTOCK TOWN HALL

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**SALE OF WORK**  
 Opening Ceremony at 3.15 p.m.  
 Entrance by Ticket, 6d. (returnable in goods).

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The SALE will be opened by  
 Miss LILY JACKSON, of Oxford.

PURSES received by  
 Mrs. C. W. EARLY, of Witney.

PRIZES presented by  
 Mrs. LAY, Mayoress of Woodstock.

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The SALE OF WORK is an effort to clear off our  
 debt of £350. We earnestly solicit your sympathetic  
 support.

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President—MRS. HENMAN.  
 Secretary—MISS LEGGATT.  
 Treasurer—MR. STRONG.

help fund the project, with interest in the order of 4.5%

The old Wesleyan Chapel was sold and became a cinema and then a garage, Blanco and Young's. It is thought that this was probably the forerunner of the present Young's Garage, now on the site of the old railway station. The old chapel site is now a dress shop.

### **The First Fifty Years**

Just after the First World War, a wooden hut was built at the back of the chapel and was used by the Sunday School. This was rented out for use by a school during the week. The hut continued to be used until the present hall was built in the 1980s.

From around 1910 Mr Charles Strong was the Organist and Sunday School Teacher. He was a prominent local businessman, and ran the "Cheap Boot and Shoe Warehouse",



pictured alongside, (Calcutt, 1999 Wychwood Press). His shop supplied the working people of the town with affordable footwear, particularly boots which were worn by most men as they were employed in manual jobs. Another prominent family was the Henmans, who ran the Henman law firm. Albert Henman, who died in recent times, attended the Sunday School and

was tennis player Tim Henman's grandfather. The Henmans were related to Adolphus Ballard, who was the Town Clerk of Woodstock. He and his son are commemorated on a plaque in the church.

In the times before Methodist Union, there appeared to have been some dissension among the members of the church, and some resigned and transferred to the Olivet Chapel. When Olivet closed, some members re-joined the Methodist Church and some joined the Baptists.

In 1932, after much high level discussion, the three main Methodist Churches, The Primitives, The Wesleyan and The United, joined to become the Methodist Church. At this time, it was decided to close the Olivet Chapel and use the present church as the Methodist Church in Woodstock. The Olivet Chapel was sold and became a private house.

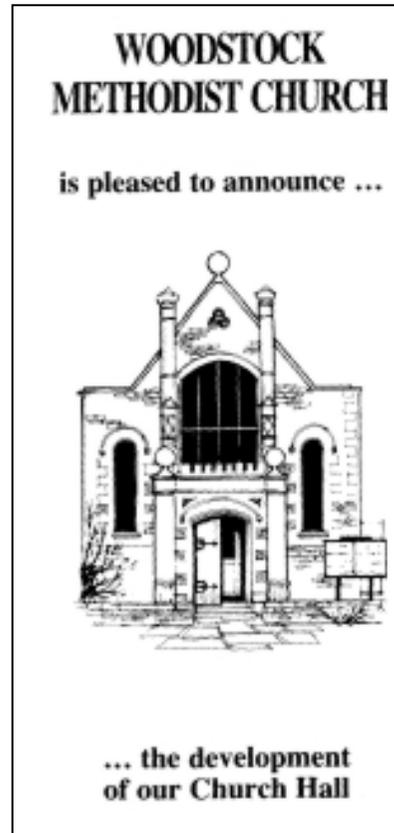
### **Up to the Present, and Beyond?**

During the war years, the railings outside the church, mounted on top of the wall, were removed as part of the war effort for iron. It is interesting to think that it took about sixty years for railings to be placed on the wall again! It was also during the war that blackouts were placed over the windows. The brackets can still be seen today.

Woodstock continued to be part of the Oxford Circuit and for many years had its own minister, who lived in the manse in New Road. When a new manse was built in Kidlington in the 1960s, this manse was sold, and Woodstock's minister lived in Kidlington. This was the cause of some disquiet at the time, as Woodstock had had its own minister for many years.

After this, Woodstock Methodist Church became part of the Northern Section of the Circuit, with the minister residing in the new manse adjacent to the church at Kidlington.

During the time of Brian Spencer's ministry, a Supernumerary Minister retired to live in Woodstock. The Revd Michael Skinner offered his help to Brian Spencer: "consider me your assistant!". Michael became a very popular minister and provided an invaluable ministry for Woodstock, particularly when the next minister, Revd John Searle, became seriously ill.



Around this time it was decided to replace the wooden hut at the rear of the church with a new purpose built building. The hut had gradually become dilapidated over the years, and had reached the end of its life. The Church Council decided to raise funds for the new building, and produced the document shown to advertise the campaign. The reasons for building the new hall were written on the back of the leaflet, and details the groups using the premises as well as the Church itself. The cost of the building was about £70,000 and the church needed to raise around £8,000 locally.

The Hall was opened on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1989 in the presence of Revd Michael Skinner, Revd Philip Beuzeval, Dr Mike Gorrige, the Mayor of Woodstock and Revd Brian Spencer. The Hall has been well used over the years, and has enhanced the ministry and outreach of the Church.



In the early 1990s it was found that the organ needed renovating, and this would prove to be very costly. There was a proposal that the organ should be removed and a new electronic organ bought. The front of the church was to be redesigned and the new organ re-sited at the rear of the church. This proposal caused some



controversy, with some members against the proposal. The Church Council did agree to the re-development of the front and a new organ was purchased. The views of the front of the church before and after the renovation are shown. The pulpit, once in the centre at the front of the church



is now placed on the left, with the Communion Table in the recess where the organ once stood. There have been many comments in the visitors' book about how good the church looks, especially with the cross illuminated, as shown in the photograph.

The next major event in the life of the church was the discovery of erosion



of the stonework at the front of the church at a Quinquennial Inspection. There was also the requirement to provide easier access for wheelchair and other users of the church. This involved removing the steps by the front door and installing new paving slabs with a gentle incline. The

work was achieved in 2003 through the support of the members of the church and benefactors. After the work was completed, it was suggested

that, to protect the top of the wall at the front of the church, railings which had been recycled during the war be replaced. It was also decided that handrails should be positioned by the doors. This was agreed, and the work carried out in 2004. The photographs show before and after the steps were removed, and the railings installed.



After the national signing of the Anglican Methodist Covenant in 2004, it was decided to produce a local covenant between the Methodist Church and St Mary Magdalene Parish Church in Woodstock. The signing took place in

the Methodist Church on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2005. The picture shows the Methodist Minister, Revd Jonathan Todd, signing the covenant with the



Bishop of Dorchester, the Methodist Superintendent Minister, Revd David Cooper and the Rector, Revd Canon Roger Humphries at the rear. The relationship between the Methodist Church and the Parish Church is very good,

with ecumenical events such as the Joint Church Council and Parochial Church Council Meeting and United Palm Sunday Services happening regularly. As well as the covenant, Churches Together in Woodstock and Bladon, which encompasses all denominations, work together well with four united services each year.

As well as reflecting over the presence of Methodism in Woodstock since 1819, and the building of the present chapel in 1906, we also need to look forward. We are blessed with a fine, well looked after building, good relationships within the town and our fellow Christians which bode well for the future. The number of members of the church has bucked the national trend of reduced membership in having 65 members, with many more having a connection with the church. The church is, of course, the people who worship there. As we progress into the new millennium, let us hope and pray that the church will provide a witness to Christ into the future.

M J Trinder, August 2006

## Woodstock Methodist Church Ministers

1890-1892	The Revd A. Martin
1892-1894	The Revd R.M. Rees
1894-1897	The Revd T.F. Nicholson
1897-1898	The Revd Campbell Jeffries
1898-1901	The Revd J. Pellow
1901-1904	The Revd F.C. Wright
1904-1907	The Revd W.H. Soper
1907-1910	The Revd C.W.J. Parry
1912-1914	The Revd C. Burrow
1910-1912	The Revd T. Evans
1914-1916	The Revd N.E. Dando
1916-1917	The Revd H. Tyler Lane
1917-1919	The Revd V.A. Little
1919-1921	The Revd J. Mackay
1921-1922	The Revd R. Tooth
1922-1924	The Revd E. Odell
1924-1927	The Revd J. Edgar Noble
1927-1931	The Revd Cyril Gwyther
1931-1934	The Revd H. Hillman
1934-1936	The Revd J.L. Smith
1936-1937	The Revd W. Trinder
1937	The Revd G. Hall
1938-1939	The Revd G. Harrison
1939-1944	The Revd A.A. Jones
1944-1949	The Revd G. Crosby
1949-1953	The Revd G. Wakefield
1953-1957	The Revd S. Frith
1957-1962	The Revd G. Allcott
1962-1967	The Revd D.M. Dobell
1967	The Revd F. Hepworth
1967-1968	The Revd H.G. James
1968-1974	The Revd A. Shrimpton
1974-1981	The Revd G. Hunter
1981-1991	The Revd B. Spencer & The Revd M. Skinner
1991-1996	The Revd J. Searle & The Revd M. Skinner
1996-2005	The Revd J. King
2005-	The Revd J. Todd

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