

Methodism in Shepshed

1757 - 2007



John Wesley 1703-91

Two hundred and fifty years in overview

Foreword

Two hundred and fifty years of Methodism in Shepshed! Surely the occasion cannot be allowed to pass unnoticed. This booklet attempts, however inadequately, to trace the progress of two and a half centuries.

Methodism arrived here in 1757 – less than twenty years after the famous occasion in London's Aldersgate Street when the heart of John Wesley was strangely warmed. Many are intrigued by the past, especially when it involves familiar names and places; but does it have relevance for us to-day in the early years of a new millennium?

I believe that it does. The achievements of former times are a cause for celebration. Furthermore, life may be perceived as a constantly evolving process. We are more fashioned by our heritage than is routinely supposed. And we in our turn are currently helping to shape the future.

Albert Henderson, a much-loved Long Eaton schoolmaster, would have agreed. For many years he conducted services at Field Street chapel anniversaries. Invariably he would choose the hymn *Our Father, by whose servants* composed by Canon G W Briggs to mark the first four hundred years of Loughborough Grammar School. It speaks of the unbroken family of successive generations:

*They reap not where they laboured,
We reap what they have sown;
Our harvest may be garnered
By ages yet unknown.*

And so it may be argued that history gives us a perspective on life, a sense of continuity. Religious folk perceive in it the hand of God.

Meanwhile our church buildings are a source of endless fascination and occasional contention; yet we know that the essential church is not the buildings but the people. Unfortunately for the purpose of this booklet, available records pay substantially more attention to church premises than to the activities which took place within them. The following narrative is unavoidably skewed in consequence.

Ultimately we may assert that the Church is led, not by its administrators, but by its saints. Accordingly, whatever may be written in these pages, the true history of Methodism in Shepshed since 1757 lies in the changed lives of hundreds of ordinary people which have impacted the local community and further afield. Their names long forgotten may not be included here, but Canon Briggs has a reassuring word. *Safe rest they in Thy keeping* he declares.

Finally, I gratefully acknowledge my debt to many friends who by their help and encouragement have made this publication possible.

David Stevenson

Shepshed, December 2007



An Introduction to Shepshed

Lying a few miles west of Loughborough in north Leicestershire, Shepshed is referred to in the Domesday Book of 1089 as Scepeshefde Regis, meaning 'hill where sheep graze'. Centuries later the village changed its name from Sheepshed to Shepshed in 1888. Once considered the largest village in England, Shepshed finally gained town status in 1993. Its present population is around 15,000.

As its name implies, Shepshed was formerly engaged in the wool trade, once a vital source of the nation's wealth. In Victorian times framework knitting was its principal industry. By 1850 stockings' shops proliferated in the village, with more than half of households so employed. Numerous hosiery factories followed.



Shepshed Bull Ring c1910

Abolition of resale price maintenance in 1964, with the consequent emergence of retail conglomerates, had disastrous consequences for Shepshed's shopping centre. And its textile factories soon afterwards succumbed to cheap foreign imports, leaving the town basically a dormitory for people working in Loughborough and nearby cities.

Shepshed borders scenic Charnwood Forest as well as the new National Forest, and enjoys excellent road, rail and airport connections. Never historically noted for the splendour of its architecture nor the affluence of its inhabitants, Shepshed nevertheless enjoyed a keen sense of identity and still retains an enviable community spirit. Complex family relationships bewilder newcomers. Generally friendly and welcoming, it remains a good place to live.

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