

A SHORT
HISTORY
OF THE
Ridgeway Methodist
Church.

JUNE 1955.

CHURCH OFFICIALS, etc.—1935.

Trustees : Rev. T. Holden (Chairman), Messrs. J. Ed. Rippon (Secretary), W. A. Fox, H. Bolsover, W. Rippon, G. W. Crookes, A. E. Hall, H. Stables, C. F. Webster, J. W. Atkin, H. Vardy, J. L. Crookes, F. Stables, F. Rodgers, R. J. Howard, W. Mallender, J. Mundy and E. Peat.

Chapel Steward : Mr. J. Ed. Rippon.

Society Stewards : Messrs. C. F. Webster and J. L. Crookes.

Poor Stewards : Mrs. C. A. Turner, Messrs. J. W. Atkin and C. R. Rippon.

Organists : Messrs. F. Stables and J. S. Rippon.

Choirmistress : Miss E. M. Fox.

Choir : Misses B. Nicholson, B. Wilcox, M. Nicholson, N. G. Rippon, G. Woolley, A. Hall, F. Horrocks. Mesdames G. Havenhand, G. Noden, C. H. Bolsover, R. Nicholson, F. Nicholson, E. Slater. Messrs. A. Newbold, J. Ern. Rippon, J. W. Atkin, E. Newbold (Secretary), H. B. Robins, C. H. Bolsover, J. S. Rippon, J. Wilcox, C. R. Rippon, A. Newbold and A. V. Cooke.

Organ Blower : Mr. P. Robins.

Sunday School Secretary : Mr. F. Rodgers.

S.S. Superintendents : Messrs. J. Ern. Rippon, J. L. Crookes.

S.S. Teachers : Messrs. J. Ed. Rippon, F. Rodgers, C. F. Webster, A. V. Cooke, H. B. Robins, J. S. Rippon, W. A. Fox, A. Newbold, C. R. Rippon. Mesdames C. A. Turner, C. F. Webster. Misses N. G. Rippon, L. Rhodes, E. Taylor and I. Havenhand.

Class Leaders : Messrs. W. A. Fox, J. Ern. Rippon & F. Rodgers.

Caretaker : Mrs. C. Havenhand.

Sexton : Mr. J. A. Robins.

A short history of Ridgeway Methodist church June 1935

It is the imperishable glory of John Wesley that he restored Christianity to its place as a living force in the personal creed of men and in the life of the nation and in few places were his doctrines more eagerly welcomed, his followers more sincere, and the comparative results more tangible than in Ridgeway.

Of all the fair spots of England, none may better it. "Hanging upon the shoulder of the moor which leads up to the desolate hillsides of the Peak, it is lifted above the mists which sometimes envelope the valley below, and though cold in winter is protected by the hillcrest from the northern blasts sweeping down the Yorkshire dales, and the air, which during the greater part of the year blows from the western hills beyond Chesterfield, is pure and bracing." The continuous woods, the hillsides clothed in all shades of colour, the nestling houses and farms dotting the landscape here and there only serve to make one more certain that a fairer stretch of field and village none will find.

In England, the year 1739 saw the adoption of the system of open air preaching which was to carry the message of the gospel to hundreds of thousands of people and in this manner were the seeds of Methodism sown in Ridgeway.

Throughout his life, Wesley remained a member of the Church of England but gradually the movement he initiated became independent of that church, and after his death, the Wesleyans formed themselves into definite and separate organisations.

Methodism in Ridgeway followed the general trend and in no wise were Wesley's local followers disturbed by the lack of a chapel. Cottages were gladly thrown open to preachers and congregation and others were used as Sunday Schools. Eventually, the old School House, at present tenanted by Mr. J. Unwin but at that time by Mr. Dawes, the village pedagogue, and also at that time the only house on Ridgeway Moor, became recognised as the centre of Wesleyan life in the village. Preaching services were held in the house on Sundays and the Sunday School was conducted by Dawes himself.

One can well appreciate the desire of those early stalwarts and their incessant efforts and tremendous sacrifices before a temporary' chapel came into being at Ridgeway. It stood either very near or on the site of the present chapel, "on a piece or parcel of land (being part of a close of Land situate in Ridgeway and called or commonly known by the name of the 'Acre') which piece or parcel of land adjoins to the West upon the road leading from Ridgeway to the Ford."

The trustees of that old sanctuary were Messrs. Joseph Hutton, John Staniforth, William Webster, Thomas Boulsover, and Samuel Havenhand, all sickle manufacturers of Ridgeway. Messrs. Henry Frogatt (white metal manufacturer), Jonathan Beet (cutler), Thomas Smith (factor), Thomas Fentern (mercier), Samuel Owen (mercier) and Thomas Holy all of Sheffield. Mr. Thomas Hutton of Northwich completed the number, but they were by no means satisfied with their temporary structure and in 1806 the building of the present chapel commenced. The first trustees of the new building were Messrs. James Broomhead, John Story, John Morton, Thomas Slagg, George Thompson, John Gray, Thomas Hutton, Joseph Hobson, Robert Woodruff, Luke Staniforth, Roger Belk and Stephen Webster.

The new chapel was a plain rectangular building and with the burial ground occupied a plot of land twenty eight yards long and twenty two and a half yards wide. Ridgeway was included in the newly formed Chesterfield Circuit in 1806 and the visiting preachers usually came from Chesterfield on horseback. A stable, demolished some thirty years ago was erected by one of the chapel members for the minister's horse.

The seats of the new chapel were arranged on either side of a central aisle and on one side sat the men and the women on the other. Lighting was by candles which cost 1/- per lb. and it was the duty of the chapel keeper to snuff all the candles during the sermon. A stove fixed in the centre of the chapel provided the heating, the coal costing 4/- per ton, including carting.

The place was free of debt by about 1820 and in 1823 the trustees were able to build the present Sunday School. Those helpers who could not give money gave labour, some as much as thirty days, and the success of their efforts is manifest by the present appearance of the school. Until the present Council Schools were built in 1874. the Sunday School building also served as the village day school.

In 1846 the chapel seats were replaced by free sittings in front and high straight backed pews behind, at a total cost of £40. The chapel was reopened on October 2nd, 1846 by the Rev. W. Barnes, the collection amounting to 13/6/6. The reopening services were continued on the following Sunday and were conducted by the Rev. T. H. Walker, the collections on this day amounting to £7/2/10³/₄.

The great movement of '49 and '50 passed over the church and left it as it found it. The circuit of which it formed a part was shaken to its foundations but the little society stood like a rock and when the local preachers' plan showed but a remnant of unaffected men, all too few to fill the pulpits, the little society furnished more than its quota to stop the gap and their after work showed they were more than emergency men.

The chapel went on from strength to strength. Various bequests - Thomas White £43, Thomas Hutton £50 (1850), Mrs. Mary Hutton £18 (1857), John Turner £10(1865) helped to keep the finances healthy and Methodism in Ridgeway became unassailably established.

There was no bell to call the worshippers together but to be late was an offence against their own innate sense of order. Silently, and with bowed heads, men and women in the quaint costume of that time entered the chapel and knelt to pray; then sitting up in their hard, uncomfortable seats reverently waited for the announcement of the opening hymn. Those were the days of two lines at a time, and many a man has had to thank that old custom for his knowledge of the Methodist hymns. They impressed themselves on his memory by repetition. All sang and funny were the sounds that were heard because funny were the tunes. It took a long time to learn some of them. Many are living today who remember "old Joseph Needham who with rocking body and sweep of fiddle bow led the high praises of God in that sanctuary. And, of Mark Cartwright, as, with becoming sedateness he passed his bow over the strings of his big bass." Such was the musical accompaniment until a second-hand organ, costing £40, was installed about 1880.

"What a staff of local preachers the Society had. It had more in proportion to its membership than any other Society. There was Peter Bingham whose knowledge of the bible was perfect; his sermons were built up of quotations from it. There was George Fox, the hair splitter as he was called, the sleep giver to the young for they could not understand, but he was the opener of truth to the man who thought." Charles Bolsover, and Mark Bolsover were others who put iron into the blood of their listeners.

In 1883 new seating was again installed in the chapel, this time on the two aisle plan, and it remains even now. In the year 1891 plans were afoot for adding a vestry to the chapel and enlarging the burial ground. Not only was this done but a grant of £50 was made towards the minister's house at Eckington. In 1896 the chapel porch was erected.

The Society marked its centenary in 1906 by accepting a tender from Mr. Keats of Sheffield for installing a new organ at a cost of £170 and by thoroughly redecorating the chapel.

In 1907 the plot of land at the back of the Sunday School was purchased for £85 and a monster bazaar was held in the Ridgeway Council School on Easter Monday and Tuesday 1909 to pay the debt standing against the Trust, as a result of the above purchase. On May 26th the trustees received £85 from the bazaar committee.

Land adjoining the chapel was purchased for £285 in 1911, a subscription of £85 by Mr. W. A. Fox giving a splendid lead towards paying for it. In 1912 the question of building a new Sunday School arose. The Great War intervened and of necessity large church undertakings became impossible.

The Trust was reorganised in 1920 and right nobly has the work of the early pioneers been continued. Faced with a debt of £100 when they took office, the trustees have not only been able to put their house in order but to further beautify and extend it. Alterations to the organ in 1923 and 1927 cost £77, sanitary improvements cost £34/10/0 in 1926, carpets and seating £15 and a new boiler £22 in 1931. Numerous smaller amounts were expended but the outstanding event of the last decade has been the extension of the Sunday School. From 1927 onwards the trustees did all possible to make the long cherished idea of a new Sunday School, an accomplished fact, but this was found impracticable. Undaunted, the possibilities of extensions and alterations to the existing schools were examined, and finally, in 1934, the scheme was completed at a cost of approximately £300. The anonymous gift of £100 to be invested and the interest to be used to keep the chapel grounds in order, came about the same time.

In February 1933 the trustees decided that the future name of the church should be The Ridgeway Methodist Church; the long talked of Methodist Union had arrived.

One last note and our story is complete; it could not be complete without reference to those four latter day, lifelong pillars of Methodism, Messrs. W. A. Fox, V. Rippon, J. Atkin and S. Atkin. No detailed account of their work is needed here, indeed they would not wish it. Four of nature's gentlemen, widely known and highly respected, nay loved, they held for a life time almost every office in the church. Although stricken in health, no service today finds Mr. Fox absent, Mr. Rippon and the Mr. Atkins have passed over.

And so "each in his narrow cell, forever laid, the rude forefathers of the village sleep," their work well and nobly done. ' That it was not in vain is the responsibility of those who are left behind. The torch must be carried, most certainly must it be handed on, for, as truly as today is the harvest of yesterday, it is as surely the seedtime of tomorrow.

CB

Taylor, Eckington, Printer

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Booklet provided by Kathryn Hindmarch

Transcribed July 2024 by Chris Hill