

WRITTEN IN Stone

THE HISTORY OF METHODIST
FOUNDATION STONES IN SHEPSHED

DAVID STEVENSON



God IS ABLE OF THESE *stones*
TO *raise up* CHILDREN
UNTO *Abraham*

ST LUKE 3:8



Introduction

For the greater part of my life I was dimly aware that many people encountered regularly in Shepshed just might be my distant relatives. Retirement eventually brought an opportunity to research the family trees of my four grandparents and set the record straight.

It turned out to be a time-consuming and frequently frustrating exercise, but it brought the ample rewards of greater understanding and a growing circle of friends.

With the basic research tools in place it was a short step from family history to local history, which in turn led to friendship with other people engaged in a shared interest.

Local church history was an inevitable part of the process, and my most ambitious project was an overview of 250 years of Methodism in Shepshed published in 2007. This present booklet forms a supplement to that earlier venture.

Clearly this recent project like its predecessor could not have been undertaken without assistance. Later the willing help of many friends is duly acknowledged.



John Wesley

At Christchurch no less than 15 foundation stones dating from the origins of the chapel in 1877 can still be seen. A further 4 stones are in evidence at the former Methodist church in Charnwood Road together with a considerable quantity of named bricks. The latter building now accommodates the Noah's Ark Indoor Play Centre.

Some of these founders of the premises we enjoy to-day are long forgotten whilst others are barely half-remembered. Reviving their memories recalls the ancient dream of the prophet Ezekiel, who in Old Testament times envisaged dry bones astonishingly restored to life.

As the new chapel walls began to rise 100-140 years ago, our forebears in the faith gave sacrificially to create an enduring heritage. Fallible as ourselves, they strove to build a better future which they might never live to see.

Honouring their vision to-day we hear the same insistent call.

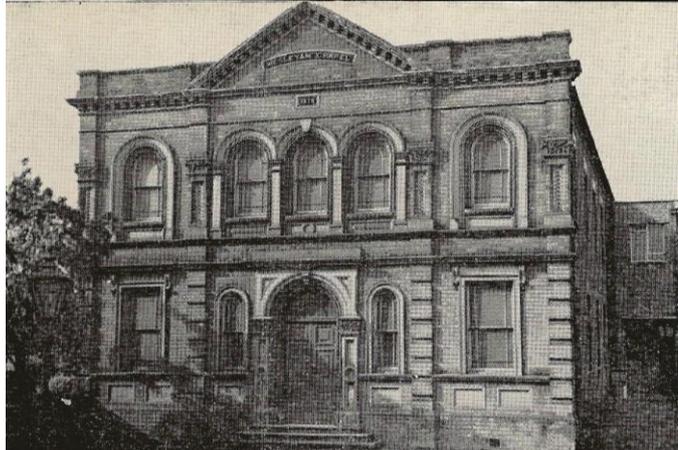
David Stevenson
July 2015

Rediscovering the heritage of our buildings

1) Field Street

Fifteen memorial stones dating from the earliest years of Christchurch's building remain on view. In those days it was known as the Wesleyan Chapel, and older townsfolk still sometimes refer to us as 'the Wesleyans' even though that name was dropped in 1932 at the time of Methodist Union.

Spacious and with an imposing facade, the Field Street chapel represented a great advance on the earlier meeting house in Hall Croft. Later known as the Institute, the latter had occupied part of the present Co-operative supermarket site.



The erection of the new chapel in 1878 needs to be set in context. Not long before, the failure of harvests in five successive years from 1837 had resulted in the grimmest period of the century.

Fr Gentili, an Italian priest invited here by the son of the Squire of Garendon to promote the Catholic faith, declared that he had never witnessed such destitution even in the back streets of Rome. Suicides were frequent.

Happily the 1870s brought a new optimism with basic education for all, improved working conditions in the new factories, the growth of the Co-operative movement and the founding of the local building society. Doubtless encouraged by the spirit of the times, the Wesleyans embarked on a project ambitious beyond their immediate means. Besides a farmer and a hosier, their leaders were mostly framework knitters and small shopkeepers.

The new venture was to cost £1800. Based on income values and economic status this was the present day equivalent of around £1.25m. (The same criteria are used for all other comparative figures contained in this account.) Accordingly the congregation was obliged to draw on the support of more affluent members of the circuit and former fellow worshippers who had subsequently prospered elsewhere. This is evidenced by the names of the stone layers.

Unsurprisingly, the Wesleyans remained in debt until early in the following century. The building was designed to incorporate a gallery at a later date in the manner of the circuit chapel in Leicester Road, Loughborough. In the event this development was never attempted.



Building began in 1877, with the chapel opening for worship in the following year. Symbolically the congregation walked in solemn procession from Hall Croft to Field Street for the ceremony. Amongst them aged 4 was John Arthur Mounteney (grandfather of Margaret Tomlinson and David Stevenson). He eventually lived to be the last survivor of that historic march.

This photograph of him with his grandmother and elder brother all dressed in their Sunday best may well have been taken in the old meeting house on that auspicious occasion.

As seen in the above photograph of the church taken by Eric Blood shortly before the 1960s modernisation, six commemorative stones were originally sited on the front wall. Five bore the date 8 October 1877 although the sixth is dated ten years later. The stones are known to have been preserved during the 1960s modernisation. From their dates it is clear that they were resited on the side walls of the building where they can now be seen. If the original position of each stone cannot be verified with confidence, at least the identities of the stone layers can be described in some detail.



Mr D Woollatt of Burton on Trent. Daniel Woollatt was born on Ring Fence in 1831, one of several children of framework knitter William and his wife Elizabeth. Following William's death in 1841 the family moved to Derby where Daniel found employment with the Midland Railway as a labourer. A few years later aged 30 he had risen to the best-paid job of engine driver, marrying local girl Harriet Bailey and beginning a family. Noting the railway's reliance on coal, Daniel moved to Burton on Trent and established himself as a coal merchant.

Perhaps helped by a contract to supply his former employers he quickly prospered to the extent of employing 12 men and a boy, including two of his sons working in a clerical capacity. His home in Burton was conveniently situated adjacent to a Wesleyan chapel and close to a railway station. Beside his commitment to the Methodist cause he valued education, no doubt in consequence of his own lack of opportunity in childhood. Unusually for those days his daughter Emma was still at school aged 15. Not content with so much enterprise Daniel branched into farming in later life. Upon his death in 1893 he left estate of £4,835 – present equivalent of £3.3m!



Miss F Wragg of Loughborough. Fanny was born in Loughborough in 1848. Her father George (born Ticknall 1810) was married to Eliza Willson (born Kegworth 1814). Her parents had a son George 13 years older than Fanny and a daughter Eliza born just one year after her. Father George traded as a draper in Loughborough High Street with his family initially living on the premises. Evidently business flourished and they soon moved to Britannia Villa in Leicester Road whilst employing servants. No doubt the family had close connections with the nearby Wesleyan chapel in Leicester Road.

Following his wife's death in 1852, George turned to property investment, again with obvious success. 1868 unfortunately witnessed his death as well as that of his son, leaving Fanny well provided for as head of the house which she shared with her sister and domestic staff. A few years later they moved to Holly Bank in Burton Street.

Fanny at the age of 29 was outstandingly generous in providing one-sixth of the total cost of the Field Street chapel, which she advanced by way of loan against the slender security of a promissory note signed by the trustees. She was also remarkably patient in awaiting repayment. 20 years after the opening of the chapel, the trustees applied to the Wesleyan Chapel Committee for a grant to reduce their debt. This still comprised the loan of £300 from Miss Wragg, all other obligations having been discharged at that date. The trustees added that it remained their intention to make full repayment, and the Chapel Committee's grant of £75 will have helped. Fanny died in Loughborough in 1906 leaving estate of £3,838 (about £2m). Her sister survived until 1923.



Mr John Franks of Coalville. Described as an old and tried friend, John Franks had supported the cause on many occasions. Born in Kegworth in 1806, he came to Shepshed at an early age, leading to the later assumption that this had been his place of birth.

The Hall Croft register shows that children of his relatives were baptised in the 1840s but shortly after his marriage to Esther Pritchard, John had left to seek his fortune elsewhere. As a miller and corn merchant he successively plied his trade in Castle Donington, Melbourne and Worthington during which time their seven children were born.

Following the death of Esther in 1854, John married Maria from Lutterworth and subsequently worked in Hugglescote, Kingstone (near Uttoxeter) and Sutton in the Elms (south-west of Leicester). It seems that business required him to operate in a variety of agricultural locations. In later years John Franks lived in Coalville with the family of his grandson William, a baker and grocer. He died in 1884 leaving estate of £1836 (around £1.3m)



Miss Mitchil of Loughborough. The inscription offers no initial but fortunately there are few potential candidates. Overwhelming evidence points to Sarah Mitchil. She was born into a Methodist family in Mountsorrel to parents Charles and Elizabeth née Cuffling in 1841. Charles was a master baker employing two men as well as some of his children. Both he and his elder brother were local preachers in the Loughborough Wesleyan circuit, and would almost certainly have been regular visitors to the Hall Croft chapel.

Tragedy was no stranger to the Mitchil household. The death of Sarah's two younger sisters occurred at an early age; and after moving to Loughborough her father also died in 1870 followed shortly afterwards by Sarah's elder brother John and his wife, and finally by her mother early in 1877. Sarah was thereafter left in charge of family finances, her younger brother Charles being incapable. Aged 36 it is likely that her support for the new chapel in Shepshed was by way of memorial to her lost family.

1881 found Sarah living in Dawlish in South Devon. She was variously described as being of independent means and having an income from land. In due course she was joined by Charles who was eventually committed to institutional care. Sarah died in Paignton in 1903 leaving estate of £344 (around £195,000). A Wesleyan minister and his wife were her executors.



Master J P Roberts of Hurst Farm Shepshed. Finally a member of the local congregation even if John Peberdy Roberts was barely two years old! Clearly he was sponsored by his parents William Owen Roberts born 1851 in Gretton, Northants and Mary Ann Peberdy from Houghton on the Hill. They farmed 300 acres near Snell's Nook while Mary Ann's father John Peberdy had charge of 580 acres west of Shepshed at Finney Spring.

William Roberts was a trustee of the chapel and thought to have been a local preacher. He later branched out as a corn merchant, and by 1911 he and his wife had retired to the Isle of Man.

As a souvenir of the stone laying an inscribed ceremonial trowel was presented to young Master Roberts. In due course this was returned to the church where it is now preserved. He followed his father into farming on a nearby site at Holywell Farm. 1911 found him married to Cardiff-born Laura Louise with children Nancy Augusta b1905 and John Everard b1909. He died in the Loughborough area in 1929. Martin Grimley can claim an ancestral link via the Peberdys and also a possible connection through the Roberts family.



Three commemorative stones were placed on each side of the front door of the chapel, but the sixth was not inscribed until ten years afterwards in 1887, in sad circumstances as described later.

The remaining nine stones still visible on the premises were placed on the rear wall of the building when school rooms were added on two floors in 1884. Thanks to a surviving press report, the following order of placing is known and less dependence on external sources is apparent. The initial stone laying was celebrated that year on 14th July.



Mr John Franks of Coalville. John Franks who had previously laid a stone for the chapel now gave his support to the school rooms. He was too ill to be present and William Roberts officiated on his behalf. In fact he died later in the month which came as no surprise as at 78 he was considered to have lived to an advanced age.

Mr John Parker of Sheepshed. John Parker (1823-98) was a trustee and faithful member of the Wesleyan congregation. Living in The Lant with his wife Hannah Stublely and their children, he was a hosier employing 40 people though by 1881 the number had declined to 20. It is likely that his work force would have been operating frames in their own homes or small 'shops'.



Mr Thomas Needham of Sheepshed. Thomas Needham (1845-1914) also lived in The Lant and married John Parker's daughter Jane. Their children featured regularly in the chapel's baptismal register. Living in Navigation Road (now Charnwood Road) Thomas worked in hosiery like his father-in-law.

Mr Samuel Lakin of Sheepshed. Samuel Lakin (1858-1928) married to Martha Hickling was a son of Wesleyan stalwart Henry Lakin (senior). A teacher in the Sunday school, Samuel was a self-employed ale merchant living in the Bull Ring, probably in the off-licence premises later occupied by Alf Berrisford. Evidently he saw no conflict between his occupation and his Methodist principles.



Mr Henry Lakin of Sheepshed. Henry Lakin junior (1861-1932) was Samuel's younger brother. Comments at the stone laying made clear how proud their father was that his young sons were actively involved in the occasion. Henry junior married Agnes Walker and ran a pork butcher's business in Field Street. They had no children.

Miss Anne Roberts of Hurst Farm Sheepshed. Anne (sometimes Annie) Maria Roberts was one year older than her brother John who had taken part in the chapel stone laying seven years before. Still aged only 10, she obviously relied on her parents to fund the cost of the stone. Anne and John were the eldest of 10 siblings. It appears that she did not marry, dying in the Loughborough area in 1951.





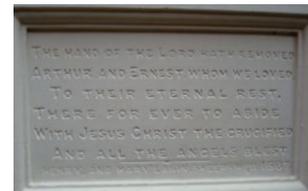
Mr Benjamin Berresford of Sheepshed. Benjamin Berresford ordered his stone too late for the July ceremony. Consequently it was set in place later in the year, probably when the school extension opened on 12th October. Two more stones were added at that stage as detailed below. Born in 1835 he married Sarah Pallett, working as a self-employed shoemaker in Hall Croft, Navigation Road and finally Kirkhill until his death in 1907. In due course his grandson Owen Berrisford worked as a draper and railway booking agent in Field Street in the building now occupied by TaxAssist. Owen sold land to the church at a nominal price when extensions to the side and rear were undertaken in 1955 and 1964.

Mr Henry Smith of Sheepshed. Henry Smith (1846-92) lived with his wife Mary Miller and family in Chapel Street. At first he was a framework knitter by trade and later ran an off-licence business. One of his daughters Lois Ada married James Henry Perkins, their eldest son James Henry Smith Perkins being the father of Robert, Rosemary and Richard. Other well-known members of the Perkins family all tracing their descent from Henry Smith include Frank, Harold, Maud, Jack (late husband of Christine), Barry & Graham.



Mr Thomas Lindsey of Sheepshed. Born in Loughborough in 1814 Thomas Lindsey married Shepshed girl Eliza Bond. They lived at first in Hathern where Thomas pursued his craft as a framework knitter, and their children were baptised in the old chapel in Hall Croft. After the death of Eliza, Thomas married Mary Rodgers from Hinckley and they subsequently lived in Church Street in Shepshed.

Henry and Mary Lakin, Sheepshed. The final stone was laid on the front of the chapel in 1887. The inscription is the longest and most poignant of all, and reads 'The hand of the Lord hath removed Arthur and Ernest whom we loved to their eternal rest. There for ever to abide with Jesus Christ the crucified and all the angels blest'.



Henry Lakin senior (1832-1905) married to Mary Gibson was a chapel trustee and traded as a grocer in Queen Street near the present exit from the Co-op car park. His shop later passed to his granddaughter Jemima Bexon. Ernest b1879 and Arthur b1885 both died in infancy. Were they born to Henry and Mary in their later years or to Henry junior and Agnes with the result that they had no surviving children? At all events their deaths were a double blow to the Lakin family.

We may note in passing that Mary Lakin was aunt to John Arthur Mounteney mentioned earlier, and great-aunt to Gerard Gibson, father of John.

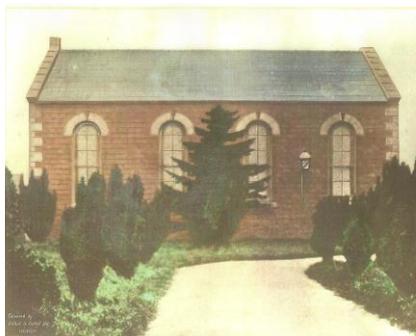


In 1955 when work to extend the school rooms began, the nine 1884 stones were moved to their present position on the staircase (left).

The photograph on the right (probably taken by Roland Johnson) shows the footings of the extended building together with the old toilet block and stokehole as well as four of the stones in their original location.



2) Charnwood Road



If the Wesleyans were far from wealthy, their Primitive Methodist colleagues were even more impecunious. For many years they had struggled to remain solvent but at last in 1877 they had a chapel of their own.

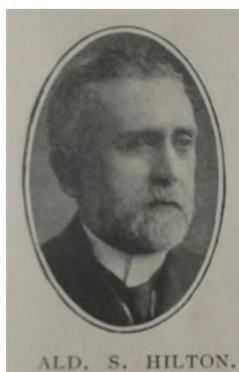
Less impressive than the Field Street structure erected in the same year, it was built towards the back of a site in Charnwood Road. The hope was that one day they would be able to construct a larger chapel in front of the existing one.

Finally their vision was realised despite being £100 in debt (around £47,000 today) at the time of deciding to proceed! They had gained a staunch supporter in John Lacey (1868-1949) who had established a hosiery factory nearby.

Lacey Court now marks the site of his enterprise and of adjacent houses formerly occupied by his family. Eventually he would complete 50 years of exceptional service to the Primitive cause. His daughter Constance (Connie) will be well remembered.



The Lacey family had close links with the Primitive circuit chapel in Swan Street, Loughborough and were well known in the town. John's younger brothers Arthur and Charles were engaged in building and dye works respectively. Arthur submitted marginally the lowest tender of £1070 (now around £500,000) for the construction of the stylish new chapel and duly set to work. The final cost was £1208.



The stone laying ceremony was held on 30th April 1913 when the first corner stone was laid by Alderman Stephen Hilton, whose grandson was to lay the foundation stone of the Field Street school room extension in 1955.

Alderman Hilton was a Leicester-based boot and shoe manufacturer who had served as Mayor of Leicester in 1904 (the office was not enhanced to Lord Mayor until 1927) and Vice-President of the Primitive Methodist Conference in 1906. By 1892 he had a factory employing 200 people and also 40 shops.

He handed over a cheque for £25 now equal to almost £12,000. Curiously neither of the two corner stones appears to have been visibly commemorated on the building, unless possibly by an interior plaque which has not survived.

The second corner stone was laid by Henry Geary Cotton (1843-1923). He was a son of William Cotton (1812-93) married to Ann Geary and employing 60 framework knitters in 1851. By 1881 William's work force had grown to 400 and a factory had been built behind his home at Charnwood House in Charnwood Road (more recently occupied by Dr & Mrs Whowell). He also acquired a large area of land known as the Cotton Field stretching from Charnwood Road to Sullington Road and now the site of four streets of prefabricated houses built after WW2.

Three of William's sons were employed in the business but Henry Geary Cotton appears to have been his natural successor. Henry encouraged the chapel under construction just down the road from his home and contributed £35 to the venture, around £16,600 by current values.

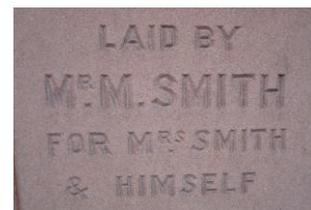
Having lived as a bachelor for most of his life, Henry at the age of 67 married Clara Hollingshead, a member of his domestic staff and 40 years his junior. Clara duly produced an heir Henry G Cotton junior the following year followed by Samuel G Cotton in 1914 and Betsy G M Cotton in 1917. If this exceptional behaviour raised Primitive eyebrows, it did not deter them from accepting Henry's generosity. His eventual estate of £88,000 would have been worth around £25m to-day.

Shortly afterwards on 14th May 1913 young people of the Sunday school and other supporters had an opportunity to lay bricks engraved with their names. At the same time four commemorative stones were added. Less imposing than their Field Street counterparts they nevertheless remain plainly visible on the building to-day.



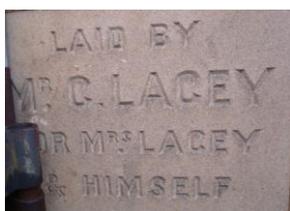
Mrs E V Holt for Herself & Husband. Elizabeth Victoria Barkley (1839-1924) was born in Coleorton and in 1861 married Josiah Holt, a Whitwick miner and later a coal merchant. They had no children and lived for a time in Nottingham but were mostly resident near their places of birth. Josiah was completely blind in later years and thus unable to attend the stone laying. He died in 1916.

Mr M Smith for Mrs Smith & Himself. Michael Smith (1859-1938) began work as a commercial clerk before experience as a grocer, draper and manager of a Co-op department. As an accountant he was appointed clerk to Shepshed Urban District Council in 1903, a post he held for more than 30 years. He still found time to train the children to sing at the Sunday School Anniversary each year. Eventually he lived at Charnclyffe House, a Georgian residence commonly known as the Red House by association with the older White House situated next to it in Forest Street.



On Michael's death, four of his children presented a handsome oak chair, carved and upholstered, to the town. It still occupies pride of place in the council chamber. Charnclyffe House was demolished in the 1970s to make way for the east wing of Beresford Court.

The Smith family has a fine record of public service across the generations. Michael's father (also named Michael) played a leading part in the founding of the British School (afterwards the Council School) in Hall Croft. Arnold, son of Michael junior, continued his father's tradition of conducting singing at the Anniversaries and was a leading councillor for many years. Sheltered accommodation in Bridge Street now bears his name in tribute. More recently Arnold's daughter Ruth continues to serve on the County Council.



Mr C Lacey for Mrs Lacey & Himself. Charles Lacey (1877-1952) began as a framework knitter like his elder brother John of Lacey Court fame. Sarah, their widowed mother, had been the chapel keeper at Swan Street. With his brother Joseph, Charles developed an interest in dyeing and finishing for the hosiery trade and established a successful business in Loughborough.

Miss R Else for 3rd Class Girls. If the inscription might have been more tactfully phrased, the meaning is clear. Rose Alice Else (1892-1918) was an early child of Joseph & Elizabeth Else. Joseph worked as a tailor in Matlock and his younger children included Minnie (b1895), Clarence (b1902) and Bernice (b1904).



In 1913 the family were new arrivals in Shepshed, probably attracted by the flourishing hosiery trade. Rose taught in the Sunday school and worked in one of the factories, but sadly died aged only 26. The Elses established close relationships with the Walker family by marriage and business, and together they had a formative influence on the Charnwood Road cause.

The national census, conducted at 10-year intervals since 1841, is made public only after 100 years. Hence the 1911 census is the latest available to researchers. Thus ironically more can be ascertained about people living in the 19th century than of their more recent descendants. Some of the following details are consequently incomplete, and additional information will be welcome.

No less than 30 named bricks can still be seen on the building to-day. They testify to Elsie Bond, Evelyn Bond, Olive Caurah, Hardy Chadburn, J R Chadburn, M E Chadburn, Albert M Cotton, Mrs W Cotton, Ernest Coulson, Bernice Else, Hilda Flint, Mrs C Freeman, Emma Grimley, Martha Grimley, Maurice Harvey, Annie M Hemmings, Ernest Hemmings, George L Hemmings, Gladys M Kidger, Arthur Lacey, Sydney Lacey, Constance Mountney, Dorothy Mountney, John T Newbold, Harry Thompson, Florence M Thorp, Mrs C Walker, Ernest Walker, Everard Walker and Mary E Walker.

A further 11 bricks are carved with the initials of their donors: FAA, EB, CC, DC, PF, CWH, MH, GMJ, RS, CW and DW. Most of the people specifically named can be conveniently grouped by family.



Everard Walker (1906-89) and Mary Elizabeth Walker (1900-76) were children of Jarvis & Emma Walker. Everard married Margaret Dawson, making him uncle to Peter Wood and Pat Bailey, while Mary Elizabeth married to Percy Gibson was the mother of Kathleen Todhunter.

Mrs Charles Walker (1865-1927) was the former Maria Marvin (great-aunt of Elaine Stevenson), Charles being an elder brother of Jarvis. Ernest Walker (1908-14) was the youngest of their eleven children. After laying his brick Ernest died in the following year aged only 6.

Charles & Maria's other children included Reg (councillor, Rotarian and enterprising leader at Charnwood Road) who married Bernice Else (1904-85). Among his sisters were Ethel, wife of Clarence Else and mother of Kathleen Perkins, and Sarah Ann, wife of Herbert Unwin and mother of Sidney. Reg and Clarence went into business in the 1930s trading as carriers Else & Walker before road transport was nationalised following WW2.

Mary Walker, another daughter of Charles and Maria, married Fred Cotton whose younger brother Albert M Cotton (b1901) laid a named brick, while Ernest Coulson (1904-79) was brother to Thomas Harold Coulson who married Mary Walker's sister Ellen.



The Mounteney family formed another large family group. William Mounteney (1841-1917) and his wife Ann Draper had four children Sarah, Mary Ann, John and Amy. Sarah married Samuel Kidger whose niece Gladys May Kidger (b1898) is named on a brick.

Their next daughter Mary Ann married Ben Hemmings, a railway worker from Coventry. George Lawson Hemmings (1902-72), Ernest (1907-81) and Annie Miriam (1908-96) are their children.



William & Ann's son John Mounteney, married to Constance Wilde, had daughters Constance (1902-97) mother of John and Dorothy Gibson, and Dorothy (1904-88). Dorothy senior caused a surprise by marrying late in life her second cousin, greengrocer Isaac Harrington. John Mounteney's youngest sister Amy will be mentioned again shortly.

William Mounteney had a sister Mary Ann (1845-1909) after whom his second daughter had been named. Mary Ann senior married Primitive stalwart John Harvey, their children being William, Elizabeth, Zachariah, Sarah, Benjamin and Hannah. William (Bill) Harvey was a much-loved figure at Charnwood Road. His granddaughter Doreen Morris (née Rennocks) is still a regular organist both in Birstall and Leicester.

Elizabeth Harvey married William Newbold. John T Newbold (1896-1956) was their son who married Mansfield-born Lucy Commons, lived in Loughborough and worked in hosiery.

Zachariah was a coal merchant who moved his operation to the Mansfield area. There Phyllis, one of his daughters, married into the Chadburn family who were already well known in Shepshed. The Chadburns had earlier links with Sutton Bonington, Hardy Chadburn (1871-1942) being employed as a railway clerk. Mary Evelyn (1897-1968) and John Reginald (1899-1973) were Hardy's children.



Benjamin Harvey married Kate Needham. Maurice Harvey (1907-71) was their son. After early training in bakery, Maurice moved to Loughborough working for Herbert Morris Ltd and afterwards Ladybird Books. His son Terence is an occasional visitor to Christchurch. Meanwhile another ramification of the Mounteney family was ensconced at Field Street.

Other relationships named on the bricks are thankfully less complex. Arthur Lacey (b1874) and later Mayor of Loughborough had gained the contract to build the new chapel, Sydney (1904-91) being his young son. The Lacey family has already been reviewed.

Elsie Catherine Bond (1901-79) married John (Jack) Jarvis, while her sister Evelyn (1905-81) married Ernest Betts, they being the parents of Brenda Newton and Margery Wilmott.

Martha Grimley (1870-1941) worked in partnership with the aforesaid Amy Mounteney as hosiery manufacturers in Kirkhill. Martha's brother John Henry was the father of Gertrude Walker (not related to the Walkers previously mentioned) and Maggie Tomlinson, and hence grandfather to Christine Perkins, Pat Ward and Philip Tomlinson among others. Emma Grimley (b1896), daughter of Martha's cousin Charles, married William E Lester whose cousin James was grandfather to Keith Lester.



Others named on the bricks are not obviously related to one another. Mrs W Cotton is likely to have been Mary (1844-1919), widow of William Cotton who had formerly served as a steward at the Primitive chapel. A connection with the other Cotton families has not been established.



Olive Caurah (1900-96) was a temporary visitor to Charnwood Road before returning to Field Street. Here she deputised as organist on occasion and served as communion steward for many years. For some time Olive ran a haberdashery/millinery shop in the Bull Ring in partnership with Gertie Johnson. Gertie was a member of a large and influential Field Street family which is represented in to-day's congregation by Keith Bailey and Rosemary Grimley.

Catherine Freeman was the wife of Frank, a railway platelayer. She was born in Kenilworth in 1879, her husband hailing from Osgathorpe. They had made their home in Morley Lane where their son Charles was born in 1905.

Florence May Thorp(e) (1901-74) was the daughter of William & Kate Thorpe. She married Harry Oswin in 1923. Florence's cousin Albert was the father of Kate Dandy (1920-2014).



Hilda Flint, born in Shepshed in 1911, was still a toddler at the brick laying ceremony. Her parents James Flint and Frances Dickinson, like the Else family, came from the Matlock area where they were married in 1910. Harry Thompson (b1907) was the son of Shepshed couple Tomorrow & Ruth Thompson. Nothing further about Hilda and Harry has yet been ascertained.



The well-proportioned new chapel was opened on 8th October 1913 – 36 years to the day since the stone laying at Field Street. At the rear the original chapel was retained as school rooms.

T R (Reg) Walker describes the new building succinctly. 'With accommodation for nearly 300 people, the chapel in plain gothic style was constructed of brick with dressings of Derbyshire stone. Corners of the building featured octagonal tapering piers, and windows had elegant glazed heads with leaded lights.'

Architects were Messrs Henry Harper & Son of Nottingham.

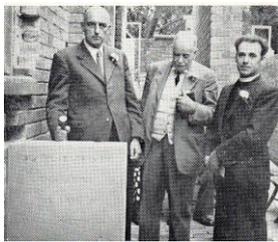
Initial proceedings began in the Bull Ring where a procession gathered, making its way to the new chapel in pouring rain. There the opening ceremony was performed by Joseph Harriman, factory owner, councillor and local benefactor. He asked to be informed of the eventual deficit and promised a contribution. The extent of Mr Harriman's generosity is not known but it was some years before the residual debt of £394 was finally repaid. However, by 1930 the installation of electric lighting was being planned.

Post-war development of the chapels

So ended a period of fervent Methodist chapel building in Shepshed. The people named in this overview were prominent in creating the basis of the church building we have to-day, and do not deserve to be forgotten.

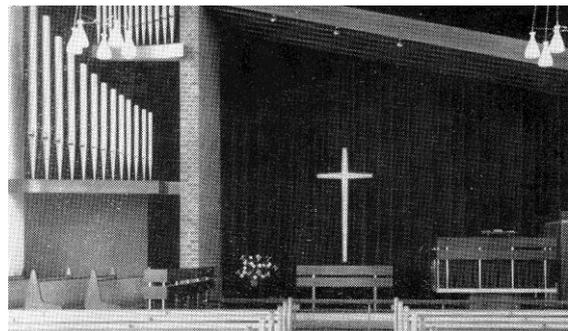
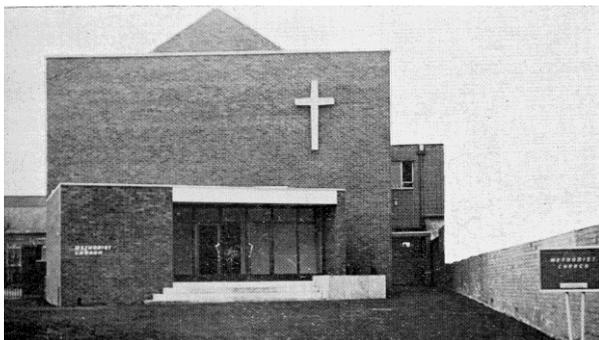
Inevitably two world wars inhibited further progress and the buildings remained largely unchanged for several decades. Meanwhile the 1932 Deed of Union had brought both Wesleyans and Primitives into a new united Methodist Church.

But the two Methodist societies in Shepshed continued to meet in their former buildings for the time being. After WW2 Charnwood Road was the first to update its accommodation. In the early post-war years a new organ was installed followed shortly afterwards by improved kitchen facilities.



Field Street soon followed suit, substantially enlarging its rear premises in 1955. The foundation stone was laid on 27th August by Alderman Alan Hilton JP (left), whose grandfather had laid the first corner stone of the new Primitive chapel in 1913. Also shown in the photograph are architect Francis C Haynes and the Rev James Douglas-Hunt.

The next decade witnessed a complete interior and exterior modernisation of the church, undertaken in two stages in 1964 and 1967. Watchword for the scheme was Charles Wesley's line 'To serve the present age'. Keith Bailey played a pivotal role in association with architect Roy Hardy of Messrs Allcock & Grieves. The entire upgrade of the building cost approximately £20,000 (around £800,000 in to-day's values).



3) Christchurch

The union of 1932 had created a surplus of premises, but not until the 1960s was there a national rationalisation with congregations increasingly joining together. In Shepshed this occurred in 1969 when the former Charnwood Road and Field Street societies finally joined forces. This was not the absorption of the smaller congregation by the larger one, but the creation of an entirely new church based in the Field Street buildings and taking Christchurch as its name.

The sale proceeds of the Charnwood Road church funded the cost of further improvements to the rear accommodation and surrounding area.

Early in the new millennium an ambitious project was conceived to revitalise the entire building. The first phase in 2007 to upgrade the rear downstairs premises attracted County Council funding in preparation for the arrival of the New Fields day centre. Shepshed adults with learning difficulties comprised the centre's predominant focus.



At the time of writing, the second phase is planned including a major remodelling of the church interior. Besides overdue maintenance work this will bring the church into line with contemporary access criteria whilst incorporating modern technology. Aesthetic considerations will be of obvious importance and continuity with the past will not be overlooked.

Installing a lift and creating level flooring across the upstairs rooms will provide access for everyone to the whole of the rear premises. Importantly the completed project including extended capacity of the present vestibule area will make the building more attractive for community use. Value to the wider community is now a key consideration for the approval of Methodist building schemes as well as for external grant funding.

The finished project will comprise three modules: the sanctuary, the ground floor rear rooms and the upstairs suite. Each will have its own kitchen facility and accessible toilet.

Some years ago the Rev Kenneth Street, when serving as Secretary of the Methodist Church Property Division, observed that every generation must make the buildings its own. Evidently this has been the case in Shepshed from the 19th century until the present day. Predictably the process will continue while ever the Methodist people remain in good heart.

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