

Southgate Centenary

The story of Methodism in the Calderdale area begins in 1741, only 3 years after Wesley's "warmed heart" experience when there are records surviving of the first Methodist preaching at Skircoat Green.



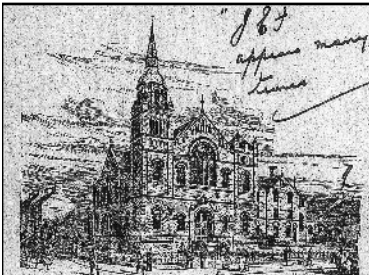
It quickly spread until 1749 when the first Methodist preaching house was opened in Mount Street in Halifax. Methodism continued to develop, particularly down the Calder Valley and surrounding hill tops, although not to Elland. The very first circuit meeting took place in October 1748 at Todmorden Edge Farm. There is no mention of Elland in records.

On 21st April 1759 John Wesley was travelling from Leeds to preach at Stainland Chapel. On the way he passed through Elland early in the morning and there is a tradition that he preached at St Mary's : he certainly did preach a few years later in Elland on 9th August 1762.

Although we cannot be entirely certain, that visit of Wesley in 1759 led to the founding of Methodism in Elland and the first Methodist society was registered on 12th June 1761 and met in the farm house of a Matthew Moorhouse. The farm house stood approximately at the bottom of Coronation Street and the site of what is now the car park. The history of the society was turbulent and there were splits and disagreements but eventually in 1807 the society built the first Wesleyan Chapel in Elland on the site occupied today by the former Elland Wesley Church.

Over the next 50 years or so the society had its high points but increasingly towards the middle of the century its difficulties; this echoed the general pattern in Wesleyan Methodism of the time. This reached its peak in the late 1840's with the advent of the Wesleyan Reform Union (basically the reform union was against authoritarianism and wanted greater powers for the laymen). This led to a great split at Elland Wesleyan Chapel, for in May 1850 a number of members broke away from the Wesleyans and took a room a Bank Bottom Mills in Saddleworth Road at the dye works which belonged to Joshua Dodgson. That was the beginnings of the Southgate (St Paul's) society. Dodgson was a very active worker at Wesley and was one of the most celebrated Local Preachers of the 19th Century. From now on, in a room that measured 33 feet by 21, two services were held every Sunday and the sacrament was celebrated. Any hope of a reconciliation was dashed in December 1850 when at the circuit meeting the Superintendent Minister withdrew Dodgson's class ticket.

The new society, called the Elland Wesleyan Reformers, eventually built its own chapel, ironically nearly on the site of the farm where the Wesleyans had first met decades earlier. This new chapel was called the Central Hall and is still standing today and was opened at Whitsuntide 1855. In 1857 the society became part of the United Methodist Free Church. (The United Methodist Free Church came into existence when various breakaway movements from the Wesleyan Methodism, such as the reform union, came together to found a “new” Methodist Church. These breakaway movements had nothing to do with matters of belief; it was all do with matters of authority).



What might have been

The artist's impression of the proposed (1891) Church

The new Church grew and by the mid-1880s they were in need of another site and after protracted negotiations with Lord Langdale, the trustees in 1889 purchased the land that Southgate Church and Christian Centre now occupies.

The plan had been to build a Sunday School and Church; however, due to financial difficulties, the trustees were unable to proceed with the Church and after modification of plans for the Sunday School, they settled on building a School - Chapel (the present Christian Centre) which was opened for public worship on 1st December 1891.

The original plans for the Sunday School and proposed Church still survive and will be on display during the centenary celebrations. It is worth considering how fortunate we are today in that a lack of money in 1891 made it impossible for the proposed Church to be built. We know from the plans that it would have been a traditional Methodist preaching house, with a gallery around, a central pulpit with the Choir behind, and would have been far bigger than the present Church. We also have an artist's impression of the exterior of the proposed building which for many years at the start of the 20th Century was the art work on the front cover of the year book published by the Church. Even though lack of funds prevented the building of this Church, (and the trust was very heavily in debt with just the building of school -chapel alone) it was the trustees' dream that one day it would be built.

The story moves forward to 1910, when the Minister of the time, Rev. J. E. Portman, told the trustees that the time was now right to fulfil their dreams of a new Church and so begins the story of our present Church building.

Space precludes a full account of the discussions and negotiations that took place over the next few years until the building took place. Two facts though are worth

considering. Firstly, Methodist thoughts on its buildings had moved on. They moved away from the old fashioned absolute importance of preaching signified by a large central pulpit which would totally dwarf the communion table, to the great importance of the sacrament of Holy Communion as being the central act of the Church, hence the design of the building from 1891 would have been out of place in 1914 and certainly would be out of place now. Secondly, there were issues with the architect that needed resolving.

In 1890 the trustees had appointed Mr F. W. Dixon of Oldham, more renowned for building mills than Churches, as the architect of the new Sunday School and Church. When the trust decided they could not afford to complete the scheme they entered into an agreement with Mr Dixon that when they got around to building the Church he would be appointed architect. The records disclose that the trustees were less than happy with Mr Dixon's work on the Sunday School. At one point in 1891 he was summoned to meet the trustees to account for his conduct as the trustees felt that he was not giving enough attention to the project.

20 years later this was still remembered and the trustees sought a way out of their agreement with Dixon. The matter was referred to solicitors. The trustees' solicitors even sought counsel's opinion in London on their position with regard to the agreement. Unfortunately counsel held the view that agreement was binding and there was little they could do about it. It is a long drawn out story which was not finally resolved until November 1913. Eventually an amicable settlement was reached whereby Mr Dixon agreed to waive his contractual right to be architect on payment of compensation in the sum of £25.00. The way was now clear for the appointment of a new architect and a new design.

On 14th February 1914, Mr W. F. Wills of John Wills Architects of Derby, came to inspect the site and the existing plans and was instructed to draw up his own design for the proposed new Church. The architect presented the trustees with plans for the new church in March 1914 which were accepted, with slight modifications, one of which was the inclusion of a tower. Mr Wills also produced an artist's impression of the Church which was circulated to interested parties. (This has been reproduced on the poster for the centenary coffee morning). It was also at this time, after great debate over finance, that the trustees also instructed Mr Wills to draw up plans for the shops to replace the wooden shops which were on the Southgate side of the property, from which the Church has been receiving regular income from the rents.

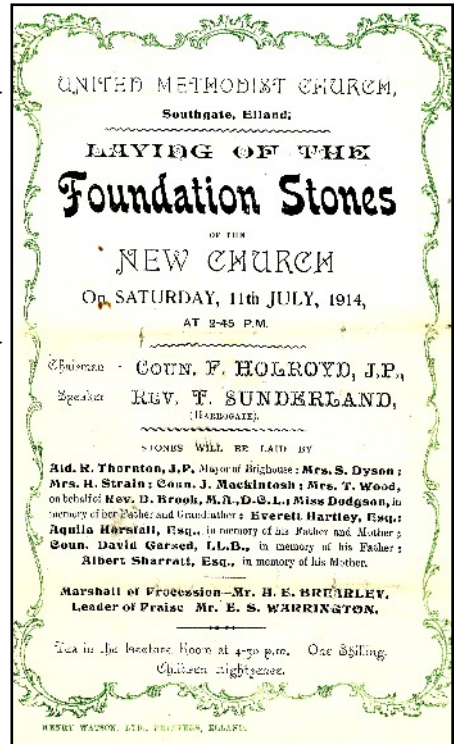
The foundation stone ceremony was set for 18th July 1914 (although for reasons not clear in the records this was changed to 11th July) and, at meeting held 2 days before the ceremony it was agreed that the Church and Society be renamed St Paul's United Methodist Church, Elland. Up until this point it had been known as

Southgate United Methodist Church. It would another 60 years before this title would reappear.

The surviving contemporary newspapers of the time (Halifax Courier and The Elland Echo) give a very full account of the laying of the foundation stones. On Saturday 11th July 1914, marshalled by Mr H. E. Brearley (trustee), and led by Elland Silver Band, a procession consisting of Ministers, teachers, scholars and officials went around the streets of Elland arriving at the site of the new Church at 2.45pm. The newspapers reported that the official party on the platform were "like an island surrounded by a sea of faces".

The ceremony commenced with the Hymn "Praise ye the Lord, tis good to raise" sung by the choir under the direction of the organist Mr E. Stanley Warrington. Prayers were led by Rev S. L Evans and Rev W. T. Nicholson read the scripture (1 Corinthians 3:8-17). Speeches were made by various dignitaries including one by Councillor Fred Holroyd JP who took as the title for his speech "Why build another place?" He began by remarking that the new building was being built to "enhance the best interests of the district" and "was worthy of the town and demanded the support of its citizens". He argued that people in Elland were asking the question; why build another Church when the existing ones were not nearly filled? The answer; "we build Churches in order that the individual might become a real man again. Christianity speaks to the soul of man, it exists for the soul of man and that every man who enters this new Church will benefit and be uplifted in the highest sense".

Following the singing of another hymn "These stones to thee", the ceremony took place with stones being laid by: The Mayor of Brighouse (Cllr R. Thornton), Mrs. S. Dyson, Mrs H. Strain, Cllr J. Mackintosh, Mrs T Wood (representing her brother an ex scholar and also ex-president of the Methodist conference), Miss Dodgson (in memory of Joshua and Jonathan, founders of the society), Mr E. Hartley, Mr A Horsfall, Cllr D. Garsed, and Mr. A Sharratt. The trust minute books reveal there had been quite intense debates about who to invite to lay the stones and several names had been put forward before agreeing on the final selection. Each person who laid one of the stones was presented with a silver trowel, suitably inscribed. Some of these trowels are in our possession and will be



HENRY WATSON, LTD., PRINTERS, ELLAND.

STONE LAYING CEREMONY.

Programme.

Procession from School, headed by the Elland Silver Band,
at 2 p.m. Ceremony to commence at 2.45 p.m.

Order of Procession:

Elland Silver Band, Ministers, Architects, Trustees and
Officials, Teachers and Scholars, Members of the Institute,
Members of the Church, Congregation and Friends.
Collection at Entrance to Chapel Yard.

Hymn: "Praise ye the Lord"

Prayer: Rev. S. L. EVANS.

Scripture: Col. iii. 8-17. Rev. W. T. NICHOLSON.

Chairman's Remarks: COGN. F. HORSFALL, J.P.

Address: REV. T. SANDERLAND.

Hymn: "These Stones to Thee"

Presentation of Trowels and Stone Laying:

MR. J. E. WOLSTENHOLME	MR. ALB. R. THORNTON, J.P.
Mrs. J. BROWNLEY	Mrs. S. DUFFUS
Miss S. HORSFALL	Mrs. H. STRAIN
Mr. F. HORSFALL	Coln. J. MACKINTOSH
MR. H. WATSON	Mrs. T. WOOD
Mrs. W. BRANTLEY	Miss DUNN
MR. S. DUFFUS	BRASSIER HARELEY, Esq.
MR. H. P. BUCKLEY	AQUILA HORSFALL, Esq.
MR. H. WATSON	COGN. D. GARRID, LL.B.
MR. J. E. HORSFALL	ALBERT SHARBLETT, Esq.

Statement by Mr. J. E. HORSFALL

Placing of Envelopes on the Stones.

Hymn: "O Saviour, precious Saviour"

Vote of thanks: REVS. SCOTT COATES & W. T. ANDERSON.

DURGOLDS. BLESSING.

— Dia. —

on display during the centenary celebrations.

Further speeches to conclude the ceremony were made by the Mayor of Brighouse and Councillor Mackintosh. In his speech the Mayor, wearing his chains of office, offered his congratulations to the Society for securing such a magnificent site for a Church and the grand structure which the plans showed would be built upon it. He then said, "The new Church when completed would be second to none among beautiful places of worship in the country".

The newspapers printed a list of donations received at the stone laying. All the people who laid stones made what the paper called "handsome" donations most of them were about £25. There was a general collection which raised £7 15s 6d and overall the day raised £260 15s 2d (worth about £21,000 today) which included a profit of £8 7s

on the tea that was served in the school room after the ceremony.

In the evening a public meeting was held at which various speeches were made, hymns sung, and the choir presented a couple of anthems. The newspaper reports that the choir "acquitted themselves most admirably". Perhaps the most notable speech was from the chairman of the evening meeting, Mr J. Ernest Horsfall, who spoke about this being the completion of the scheme begun 23 years ago (1891): eventually the Methodists at Southgate were going to get their Church. The paper reported that it was hoped the Church would be completed in March 1915.

It was a happy day for all concerned. Nobody realised that World War One was only three weeks away.

**Compiled by Andrew Jacobs from newspaper reports and from
'The Story of Elland Wesley' by Rev Colin Robertshaw.**