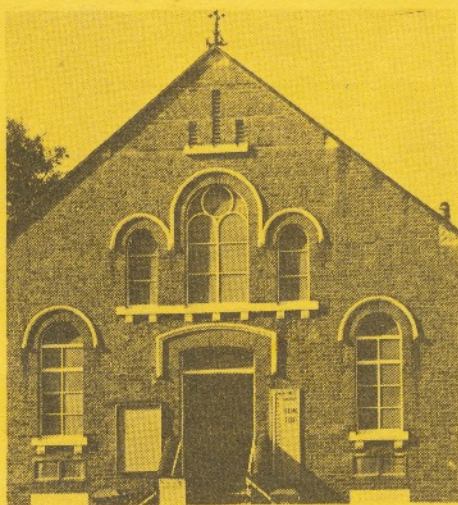


A HISTORY OF THE METHODIST CHURCH ON BUSHEY HEATH

1883 - 1983



By John M Wood

**Centenary Celebrations
June 1983 - May 1984**

Forward

100 - not out! At Lord's Cricket Ground there would be a great round of applause. We are commemorating our Centenary Year with 'Celebration 1883-1983' which reaches its climax in May 1984, when we are launched into our 101st year. 'Celebration 1883-1983' calls for our round of applause!

I am most grateful to Dr. John Wood who has researched and produced this splendid and definitive history of Methodism in Bushey Heath. It is fitting also that we record our appreciation to the Committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. Maurice Wilson, who initiated the whole scheme of 'Celebration 1883-1983'.

One fact stands out from this history of Methodism in Bushey Heath which I find tremendously encouraging for the future of St. Andrew's. During the past 25 years we have all witnessed and bemoaned the steady decrease of the church-going population. In spite of this we at St. Andrew's are experiencing growth and, numerically, this is the strongest period in the history of our Church.

As we celebrate together, above all, we must thank God for the vision of those who founded this Society, and for the tenacity of those who worked and witnessed through good times and also when times were hard and the response discouraging. The only guarantee for the future is the measure of OUR commitment to God in the present time. Given that commitment I know God will lead us on from strength to strength.

August, 1983

Rev. Alan Stafford

Introduction

In this brief account of the Methodist Church on Bushey Heath over the last hundred years, we follow the church's evolution from the embryo Primitive Methodist Connexion in Bushey to the four very different chapels and churches which followed on Bushey Heath. Before we embark on this journey, however, it is useful to consider the religious climate in Bushey in the nineteenth century, which was responsible for this development.

Early non-conformist churches in Bushey

The first records of non-conformist churches in Bushey date from 1809 when Independents, later known as Congregationalists, registered as a place of worship, No.727, the building of Jos. Keene in Bushey. In 1812 the Congregationalists were worshipping in an enlarged lumber-room on Clay Hill. This area of Bushey later became a centre of non-conformist religious activity when a Baptist church and a Primitive Methodist chapel were also built here in the mid 1800's. The population of Bushey at this time was in the region of 2,500, so it was well able to support these three congregations, together with that of the Anglican church of St. James. The Baptist church was built at the corner of Melbourne Road, opposite Professor Hubert Herkomer's 'Lululaund'. The Methodist chapel was registered in July 1952 near the Slads, which was the local name for the foot of Clay Hill. The word 'Slads' was probably derived from the words 'slush' and 'mud', which accumulated at the foot of Clay Hill in wet weather. Although this region of Bushey was not very pleasant physically, it must certainly have been a lively and spiritually active place with three churches and Herkomer's art school within the space of 200 yards.

Early Watford Methodists

Methodists were worshipping in the Watford area from 1808 when a Wesleyan Society was formed and services were held in the market place and later in Hedges Yard off the High

Street. The Watford Primitive Methodists began activities in 1840 when they also worshipped in Hedges Yard. By 1843, Watford was on the St. Albans Mission Plan and by 1865 a Primitive Methodist chapel was in use in Carey Place, Watford. At this time the Primitive Methodist Circuit also included the chapels at Croxley Green, Letchmore Heath, Bushey, Redbourne and St. Albans.

Bushey Primitive Methodist chapel

Thomas Russell, who was in charge of the St. Albans Mission in 1865, wrote in his autobiography that, 'On the south part of our station Mr. and Mrs. Butler had come to reside in Bushey and they told Caleb Vines (Mr. and Mrs. Butler were steward and housekeeper respectively to Caleb) the need there was for a place of worship at Watford and Bushey, and that kind friend generously secured to the Connexion a valuable chapel in each place free of debt'. This was indeed a generous gift, as the value of the Bushey chapel alone at this time was £500. Above the entrance to the Bushey chapel was the following inscription:

'When God makes up His strict account
Of holy persons in the mount,
It'll be an honour to appear
As one new-born and nourished here'.

Early records of the Bushey chapel are not very informative. We know that the chapel steward in 1868 was a Mr. J. Moss, that gas was introduced in 1877 and we also know something about the disciplinarian attitude of the Watford Circuit towards their Society at Bushey. In December 1871 the Watford Primitive Methodist Quarterly Meeting recorded that, 'a letter be written to Brother Hall expressing our concern at hearing from time to time that he drinks intoxicating drink immoderately, and affectionately but earnestly requesting him to desist doing so in the future'. They wrote further that, 'Brother Fox has again been found in a state of intoxication, and his name should come off the plan', and in 1877 we read that, 'Henry Spicer is expelled for robbing his employer'.

Outstanding features of Primitive Methodism at this time were the interest taken in the social issues of the day and the strong temperance sentiment in the Connexion.

We do not know how large the congregation was at Bushey, but in the 1880's there were certainly problems with dwindling numbers and in 1881 we hear about the 'Bushey chapel debts'. In March 1882 the Quarterly Meeting recorded that, 'a committee meet at Bushey on 21st March to consider the condition of the Society' and in June 1882 there was mention that, 'a special effort be made on behalf of Bushey chapel during the next quarter'. Considering these setbacks to the Connexion at Bushey, it is not surprising that in August 1882, the Financial Committee of the Watford Circuit recorded that, 'If the matter can be successfully negotiated, this committee gives its consent to the disposal of Bushey chapel on the condition that another chapel be erected on Bushey Heath and that we recommend the amalgamation of the Bushey and Stanmore Societies'. Whether the two Societies ever did amalgamate is not known, but an offer for Bushey chapel was accepted by the Trustees later in August and the chapel was sold to a Mr. Noakes for the sum of £550. In 1890 the chapel became a private theatre where Professor Herkomer produced several plays of his own composition. It later became a concert hall and by 1938, it was transformed into a film factory where Herkomer produced some of the first motion pictures.

The move to Bushey Heath

In November 1882 the Watford Quarterly Meeting recorded that, 'we accept an offer of Mr. Taylor of Stanmore and purchase from him a piece of land with two wooden cottages thereon, situated in The Rutts, Bushey Heath for the sum of £100'. During the closing months of 1882 there was a flurry of fund raising activities such as bazaars and special collections and by 30th January 1883, the land was finally secured for the sum of £122. The following nine trustees were appointed for Bushey Heath:

Robert Martindale from Watford, dealer in china;
John Moss from Bushey Heath, gardener;
William Morgan from Watford, plumber;
Richard West from Stanmore, insurance agent;
Joseph Best from Watford, mercantile clerk;
Herbert Willimon from Watford, warehouseman;
John Partington from Watford, railway clerk;
George Chapman from Watford, carrier;
Henry Hart from Watford, ironmonger's assistant.

The Primitive Methodist circuit magazine of the time recorded that 'The Rev. W. Holland (superintendent of the Watford Circuit 1881-1884) erected an iron chapel at The Rutts, Bushey Heath, which practically commenced the cause there'.

Bushey Heath in 1883

Bushey Heath in 1883 was very much different from the place we know today. Large areas of land were rough pasture and undergrowth where gipsies camped and, in earlier days, highwaymen had gone about their business. The area was over 500 feet above sea level and there were extensive views of St. Albans and Westminster Abbeys, Hampton Court, Windsor and the Thames. Bushey Heath became popular as a health resort and many large houses were built amongst the common land and farm land. The Anglican presence on Bushey Heath at this time was a chapel of ease called St. Peter's. In The Rutts, an infants' school had been opened four years earlier, which was a good indication that the population of Bushey Heath had begun to expand.

The 'iron chapel'

The chapel at Bushey Heath was built within a period of only five months and on Saturday 24th June 1883, the first service was held there. Most of the building material was of corrugated iron and it was locally known as the 'iron chapel'. There is no doubt about the quality of construction however, as the building is still standing after one

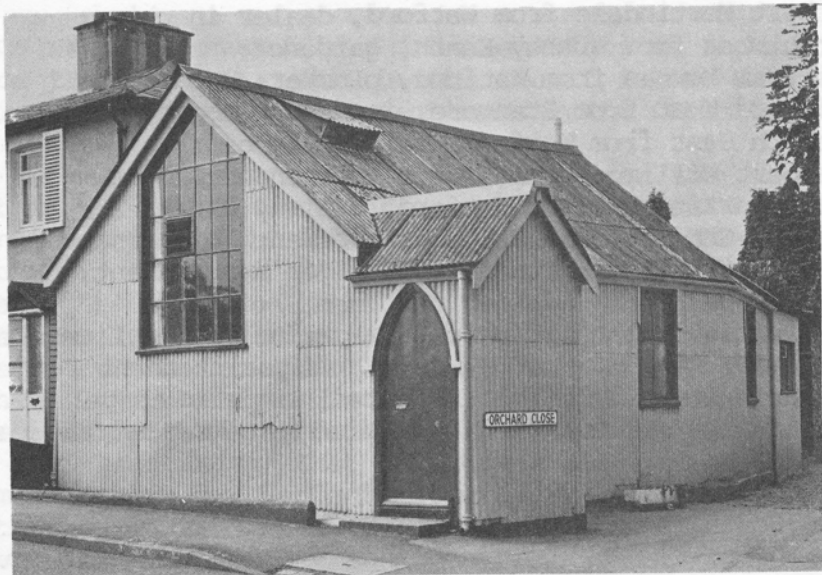


Photo 1



Photo 2

hundred years (photo 1). Rev. A. Ward from London preached on the opening day, followed by R. J. Belsher who preached at the evening service on Sunday 25th June. On the following Monday, the new Methodist Society held a celebration tea meeting. Within five months of opening, a Sunday school had begun and class meetings had been organized. By 1887 the chapel was expanding rapidly, the Bushey Heath trustees bought a harmonium and by 1891 the circuit magazine was able to report that 'the congregation at Bushey Heath had grown as to necessitate the building of a new church'. The Circuit Quarterly Meeting of September 1888 reported that, 'Brothers Button, West and Moss be appointed to make enquiries with a view to securing land at Bushey Heath'. Land was in fact acquired on the High Road in Bushey Heath for the sum of £300 and the 'iron chapel' was sold for £100 to Rev. S. Buller. Whether the building continued to be a place of worship is not known. The chapel eventually became a private residence and in 1923 it was bought by Mrs. Nimmo of Sparrows Herne Hall. The building was then generously donated to the Girl Guides Association, who have continued to meet there to the present day.

The church in the High Rd.

During the period 1888-1891, the Bushey Heath trustees began building their new church in the High Rd. This was also a time of growth for the Anglicans in Bushey Heath, as St. Peter's Church was being extended. The foundation stone of the Methodist church was laid in 1891 and we are fortunate in having a photograph of the stone-laying ceremony (photo 2). The church was completed and opened the same year and, as can be seen from photo 3, the trustees had abandoned iron in favour of brick for their new building. The total cost of building was £1,184 and by March 1892 the money raised amounted to £755. Ten years earlier, the Primitive Methodist Conference had decreed that at least half of all building costs should be raised by the local building committees within six months of opening. It is evident that the 18 Bushey Heath trustees had achieved their target.



Photo 3

At the turn of the century, the Primitive Methodist circuit magazine reported that, 'at Bushey Heath there has been great prosperity. The congregations are large, the church vigorous and marked attention is given to young people'. In 1919 the number of children attending Sunday school was 38 and the number of teachers was five. In these early days of the church, lighting was by gas and the only heating was provided by coke stoves. The interior of the church was quite austere, an impression no doubt given by the high ceiling and high backed wooden pews (photo 4). On the wall above the central pulpit was the inscription, 'Enter into His gates with thanksgiving - Worship the Lord'. Beneath the church was a basement which was used as the Sunday school and a meeting place for social occasions.

In 1932 two events of significance occurred in the life of the Bushey Heath church. The first of these was the installation of electric lighting and the second was the union of the Methodist Churches by Act of Parliament. The result of this union was that the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist Churches were joined under one banner to form the Methodist Church. The Watford Wesleyans became Watford No. 1 circuit and the Primitives became Watford No. 2 circuit. The vigorous life of the Bushey Heath church and the numbers attending services sadly diminished with passing years and by the 1950's, there was often only a handful of people in the congregation and the Sunday school had ceased. By 1953, eleven of the trustees had died and five had resigned. There were now only sixteen church members and it must have been a considerable strain on the church's resources to appoint new trustees. The church became very difficult to heat during the winter months and services were often held with the preacher and the faithful few huddled together around one of the stoves.

This was only a temporary depression however, and things gradually began to improve; the Sunday school was re-started and in 1954 new social clubs for the adult and junior members of the church were established. The church



Photo 4

began to take an interest in the new people coming to live in Bushey Heath with the result that church membership had gradually increased to 24 by 1958 and the Sunday school had grown to 31. During the 1960's the Sunday school rapidly expanded to over 100, the number of church members was in the region of 50 and a youth club was started. But, as the church community became gradually stronger, the church building was beginning to show its age. In 1959 the Bushey Heath trustees asked that, 'a comprehensive scheme of improvements be considered'. Consequently plans were drawn up for installation of electric heating, improved sanitation, extensions to the vestry and modernization of the kitchen, front steps and the facade. However in 1961 the church building was inspected by Dr. Irvonwy Morgan of the London Mission Committee who estimated that the church needed £7,000 spent on repairs and he recommended that the premises be sold and a new site acquired for a brand new church. In 1964 the premises were described to the Methodist Chapel Committee in Manchester as, 'quite dreadful and an eyesore in the main street'.

At a meeting of the Bushey Heath trustees in December 1964 Rev. Hugh Temple Bone reported that, 'an offer had been made for the acquisition of the Trust premises by Highrix Investments Ltd., a local development company, and that as a result of negotiations, the property known as 69 High Rd, Bushey Heath (which the company had an option to purchase) and the sum of £25,000 (sufficient to finance the building of a dual purpose building) were offered in exchange'. This was at a time when Bushey Heath was expanding rapidly, fields and market gardens were sold for housing and shops were built on the High Rd. to serve the needs of the expanding community. In view of the dilapidated state of the church and the enormous sum of money required for repairs, the offer from Highrix Investments Ltd was gratefully accepted. The church was eventually sold for the sum of £27,000 plus the site occupied by 69 High Rd. The final service in the church was on the evening of 12th March 1967 when the preacher was Dr. Harper. The building was demolished and in its place now stands a supermarket.



Photo 5



Photo 6

St Andrew's

Meanwhile the old house at 69 High Rd. had also disappeared to make way for the new church. Whilst the new church was being built, services were continued in a pre-fabricated iron building erected on what was to be the car park of the new church. The Bushey Heath Methodists had their second 'iron chapel' (photo 5). The first service in the temporary building was on the morning of 12th March 1967. Whilst the church occupied the temporary building, the Sunday school had moved to the primary school and the Girl Guides hut (the first 'iron chapel') in The Rutts. Thus the first 'iron chapel' was used once more for Methodist worship after an absence of 76 years.

On 4th November 1967, the foundation stone of the new building was laid by Mr. J. E. Booles, who for many years had served the church faithfully in many capacities including that of Senior Society Steward (photo 6). At the ceremony, children were invited to lay bricks themselves and bricks were also offered to adults for five shillings each. The proceeds from the stone-laying amounted to £150.

One notable person who attended the stone-laying ceremony was Miss Annie Goodwin, aged 93 years (arrowed in photo 6). Miss Goodwin was born in Stanmore in 1874, but moved to Bushey Heath in her childhood. She worshipped at the 'iron chapel' in The Rutts and, as a girl of 17, she was present at the stone-laying ceremony of the church in the High Rd. in 1891 (arrowed in photo 2). Miss Goodwin was an active member of the High Rd. church throughout the 77 years of its existence and she continued to worship at the new Methodist church after its opening.

The new church which rapidly grew alongside the temporary building was strikingly modern, in contrast to the Victorian appearance of the previous church. The building was designed to combine under one roof the spiritual and secular facilities for the growing community of Bushey Heath. Important features of the church were the coffee

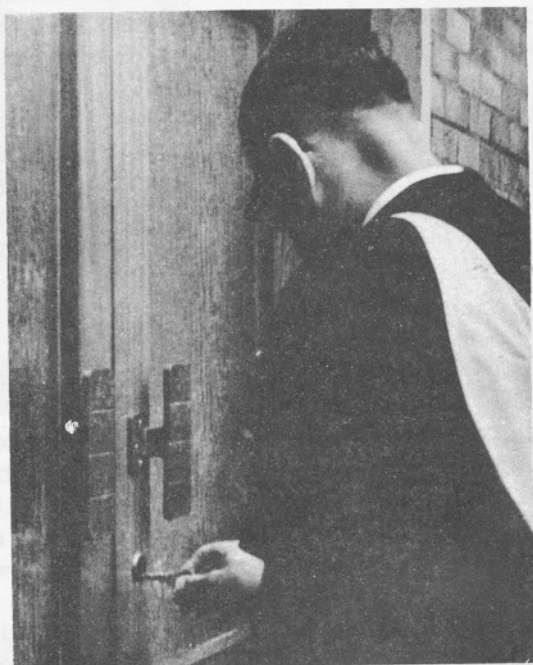


Photo 7

lounge area, the large hall with stage, central heating and the promise of inexpensive maintenance. The cost of building and furnishing the church amounted to £39,650 which was provided by Methodist central fund (£20,000), a grant from Joseph Rank Benevolent Trust (£9,000), the London Mission Committee (£4,000), the General Chapel Committee (£1,500), Highrix Investments Ltd. as a supplemental agreement to the sale of the High Rd. church (£1,500), with the balance of £3,650 being found from church fund raising activities.

The opening ceremony of the new church took place on Saturday 14th September 1968. Rev. Hugh Temple Bone formally opened (photo 7) and consecrated the church, which was packed to capacity by 350 people. Rev. Donald M. Eadie, the resident minister at the time, led a very moving service in which Rev. Myles Raikes from St. Peter's and Father Chadwick from the Church of the Sacred Heart in Bushey also played their parts. The opening ceremony was followed by an exhibition of photographs of the transition from one church to another; a buffet tea, when a presentation was made to Miss Goodwin; and in the evening, a dinner, cabaret and dancing.

On the morning of Sunday 15th September, Holy Communion was celebrated for the first time in the new church followed by breakfast in the church hall, a family service later in the morning and an evening service. For five years the new church did not have a name, but in 1973 as a result of popular opinion, the church was named, 'St. Andrew's Methodist Church' (photo 8).

St. Andrew's has grown steadily since 1968, when membership was 56 to the present membership of 107. The Sunday school has also thrived and the number of children attending at present is 52. The youth club, wives club and sisterhood were transferred from the old church and new ventures have included the Scouts and Guides and the badminton club. St. Andrew's is now a very active church with a thriving congregation and a busy social calendar. The church hall provides excellent facilities for many



Photo 8

outside organizations as well as for church social gatherings. In the words of Rev. Hugh Temple Bone in 1965, 'the new premises.....enable the church to meet the needs of Methodism in Bushey Heath today, and to contribute to the maintenance of Christianity in our community'.

As we reflect over the past hundred years, it is important to realise that this description is, of necessity, superficial. Many records of significant events may not have survived and those remaining are often very brief accounts. However, what remains is sufficient to observe the changing fortunes of Methodism on Bushey Heath and we become conscious of the church's evolution in order to serve the needs of the community. May these events serve to stimulate us to continue and strengthen our church fellowship and its Christian influence on Bushey Heath in years to come.

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