

Harrop Chapel

Grindleton, Lancashire

A History of the Chapel

Harrop Chapel has the distinction of being the oldest building with Methodist origins in the Clitheroe area, which is still being regularly being used for public worship.

The first record that can be found of Methodism in Harrop is in 1804. On December 1st a group of people met together to hold their first service. This service was held at Bay Gate Farm, about one mile away from Harrop, which was the home of John Altham. Services were held every other Sunday at 2.00 p.m., and were recorded on the plan of the Skipton Circuit under the heading of "Bay Gate".

In 1814 the Society, by then having 13 members, was transferred to the Clitheroe Circuit upon the formation of the Circuit in that year. The Clitheroe Circuit accounts for 1814 show that on September 26th, Bay Gate was required to make a quarterly contribution of fourteen shillings to Circuit funds.

By 1819 it was felt that a chapel should be built, so on May 31st that year a plot of land 14.5 yards x 15 yards was sold by Mr. Thurstan Charnley, who himself was a member of the Society, living at Harrop Fold, to 13 previously appointed trustees of the intended chapel. The land sold formed part of what was then called Halstead Meadow, but which is now known as Chapel Field.

During the building of the chapel, a period of around two years, the Society was known as "Bay Gate and Harrop", but after 1821 the name of Bay Gate disappears.

At the end of 1821 membership of the chapel had grown to 24, an increase of one third from 1819, whilst demands of the Circuit had almost trebled to two pounds eighteen shillings each quarter. It is not definitely known when the first services were held in the chapel, but the earliest known services, and possibly the first, were held on Sunday, October 14th, 1821. An announcement of these services is preserved and can be seen in the chapel. It reads as follows: "On Sunday October 14th 1821, two sermons will be preached in the Methodist Chapel, Harrop Fold,

Near Slaidburn, by Mr. Amos Learoyd, when collections will be made in support of the Sunday School. Services to begin at 2.00 pm and 7.00 pm”.

Then follow six hymns, printed in full, none of which are well known today, which were sung during the day, three at the afternoon service and three at the evening service. At the foot, again quoting, it reads: "The committee of the school consider it necessary to adopt the mode now generally pursued on such occasions, of the receiving of silver from all who go into the gallery. To this they hope no objections will be raised as their sole design in the accommodation of the friends of the charity and the benefit of the children. NB. The receiving of silver is not intended to forego the collection."

By the year 1844 membership had decreased to 5 and the future of the chapel seemed uncertain. So much so, that on January 24th 1846, the land and the cottage adjoining the chapel was sold to Mr. Elijah Helm, the younger, a cotton manufacturer from Padiham. In 1881, on July 11th, the land and cottage was sold back to the trustees at a cost to them of £18. Mr Helm never occupied the cottage.

About 1850 a Mr. James Lord moved into the cottage and in a very short time had opened a day school. Mr Lord was a local preacher and also taught in the Sunday School, the pupils learning to read and write as well as studying the Bible. Owing to the work of this great man the school, which he opened, became known amongst local people as "Lord's Academy". This continued until the opening of the school at Lane Ends in 1874. During the time of Mr. Lord membership gradually increased to 23.

Up to the year 1874 the bass fiddle and clarinet were the only musical instruments to be used in the chapel, but about this time a harmonium was acquired. In use now is a two manual electrically blown harmonium and also a piano.

The original trust formed in 1819 was renewed five times, in 1867,1896,1923,1958 and 1970.

Tea parties were held regularly until about the year 1930. These were great circuit events and were always well attended, community hymn singing being enjoyed by all. An old account book states that on June 21st 1924 a rally tea and supper was held when the proceeds amounted to

£26 16s 3d., which was to be used to help eliminate a trust debt incurred in 1922 for new flooring and other repairs.

By the year 1960 the membership had decreased to 4 and there was a trust debt of about £20. There were fears that the chapel would have to be closed, but thanks to the effort of the small but loyal congregation money was raised and the crisis averted. The next few years saw much activity and growth. Membership rapidly increased to 16.

Candles, which were originally used to illuminate the chapel, were replaced by electricity, which was installed in 1961. Up to the present day an important source of heat is the open coal fire.

On May 31st 1969 a service of thanksgiving was held to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the acquisition of the land upon which the chapel was built. This was a very memorable occasion when the chapel was packed to capacity with extra seats in the aisle and many people standing on the stone steps to the gallery. About a further 20 people were unable to gain access to the chapel and they took part in the service from outside. The opening hymn of this service was one that was sung at a previous anniversary in October 1821. The tune being "Grosvenor"

"Except the Lord conduct the plan,
The best concerted schemes are vain,
and never can succeed;
We spend our wretched strength for naught;
But if our works in thee be wrought,
They shall be blest indeed".

Harrop Chapel was in constant use as a Methodist meeting place until 31st August 1996, when the property was acquired by a group of local trustees chosen from the existing congregation. Worship continued without a break throughout the period of transition. The building was then settled on a new trust deed, the main clause of which states that the property shall be used and enjoyed as a place for the worship, praise, teaching and expounding the Word of God as contained in Holy Scripture in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, and that no other doctrine other than those of the Christian Faith shall be preached therein.

We are fortunate in having a building which is very versatile insomuch as it has a good fitted kitchen and also a bathroom and toilet. This enables us to make our premises available to groups from other churches that may wish to spend a few days here.

We believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and as such to be the only rule of faith and doctrine. We seek to spread the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We look to the future and into the New Millennium with great hope, trusting that God is with us to lead us and guide us.