



Former Methodist Chapel 1796

HISTORY
OF
BASLOW

METHODIST
CHURCH



Artist's impression of the restored Sunday School, first built in 1922

GELIA MILLER

THE METHODIST CHURCH IN BASLOW

Methodism, though not John Wesley himself, first came to Baslow on a stormy day in 1793. One of Wesley's preachers, Rev. James

Buckley, who was stationed in Nottingham, set off on horseback to visit his parents in Oldham. As he drew near Baslow and saw the thunder clouds, he decided to stay the night in the village. However, the toll bar keeper told him there was no one who could take him in. Greatly disappointed, he was about to ride further when he saw a lady standing in the doorway of her house. Once again he enquired for lodgings but received the same answer that there were none. Then the Preacher had an inspiration and asked if there were any Methodists about. This produced the reply: "If you are a Methodist preacher, my son Ralph will be glad to see you as he is inclined that way". So Methodist hospitality began at Penistone Cottage and continued for very many years.

When leaving in the morning, Mr. Buckley agreed to call on his way back and hold a service in Ralph Penistone's barn, the beginning of the Methodist cause in Baslow.

In 1795, Ralph Penistone bought in his name and with his money (£200), land on which to build a chapel. A house, belonging to Paul Sidebottom and a cowhouse, which had originally been a shop making felt hats, had both to be demolished. There was also a garden and a piece of ground. We have a copy of the Indenture of 1796, enrolled in the High Court, with the names of the trustees and with a declaration of the purpose they had in mind: "To preach God's holy word and no other".

The Chapel was built and opened in the same year, Rev. J. Buckley being the preacher. The Chapel would not have looked very different from today's except that it then had a gallery but no stained glass windows or vestry. In those days the road went past the back of the chapel as the present school had not been cut out then. Thus what to us is the back of the Chapel would have been the front entrance in 1796.

Twenty six years later, in 1822 the Methodists built a Sunday School on a piece of land belonging to John Lees of Beeley Hill Top. At first they probably paid a little rent for it but fifteen years later they bought the land for £7 10s, the money coming from "voluntary donations and subscriptions of well-disposed persons". The school was to be "a school for every Lord's Day for the charitable and gratuitous instruction of poor children of every sect and denomination". A committee of five persons was to be chosen annually to manage and conduct the school and only John Wesley's doctrines were to be taught. The upper room was used for Religious Instruction and the lower one for reading and writing. So great were the numbers of children attending that boys and girls had to attend the Chapel on alternate Sundays. This was the first school in the village.

No restoration nor major repairs to the Chapel were needed till 1928. The Church accounts of the years between 1835 and 1928 provide our only glimpse into the life of the Methodist Chapel. Candles were a constant expense (for instance, costing £1 4s 9d for the year 1839); coals were needed for the stove; gas first appeared in the accounts in 1867 and only cost 4/- for the year. An anonymous Chapel keeper received £1 1 0 annually during the early years and was succeeded by a Miss Elizabeth Riley who, for many years, was paid "£1 for cleaning". Mention of the organ first appears in 1876 with the charge of 19s 7d for tuning it. An item of expenditure in 1893 entitled: "Harvest Thanksgiving and opening of vestry" suggests that a vestry was added during that year. The cost for both is put down as 4/6, which cannot have referred to building costs! In 1905 an item starts and continues for several years "library books". Our records begin in 1835 with the sum of £9.17s as the annual receipts and the sum of £8.18s.7d as the annual disbursement. This word was used for the next twenty years. The

first "Receipts" simply consist of lists of names with sums of money attached. These vary from 6 pence to £1 and £1.10 from two obviously wealthier members - Mr. Gar dour and Mr. Burgoyne.

Up to 1928 the accounts show various and regular small items of expenditure but in this year considerable restoration was necessary. This included a new roof, the removal of the gallery which had never been used, a new floor, adjustments to the seating accommodation, modern heating apparatus, electric light and redecoration throughout. The complete cost of all this was £475. To the members this seemed a great task and they undertook it with much anxiety and misgiving as they learned there would be a burden of debt for several years. Their doubts were unfounded for in eleven months the whole sum was raised. The appeal which had been so successful was signed by Walter Standly, the Superintendent and George Redfearn the Trust Treasurer, who lived in Penistone Cottage thus perpetuating the devoted work of Ralph Penistone. Mrs. Redfearn was a direct descendant of Ralph Penistone and was also a relative of the two Miss Elliotts who lived at Grislow field and to whom a stained glass window is dedicated in the Chapel. The companion window bears the inscription to "Ralph Penistone, the first Methodist in Baslow". These windows were erected in 1929.

A newspaper cutting describing the re-opening of the Chapel has survived and includes many well-known names. Miss Mettam of Bakewell handed a silver key to Mrs. Redfearn and Rev. J. H. Sheriff conducted the afternoon service. The speakers at the evening service were Rev. Samuel Chadwick and Mr. Sheriff and Mr. Stead of Hathersage was the Chairman and Mr. Arthur Bramwell the soloist. The "tea ladies" were Mrs. Redfearn, Mrs. Nixon, Mrs. F. Taylor and Miss Hulley.

A glimpse into the old Baslow Society's Minute Book, kept so faithfully by Mr. F. Taylor, reveals that in 1948 the Society had 48 members, that carol singing was in full swing on Christmas Eve, that the Methodists were invited to the Induction Service of the Rev. H.H. Dobinson, followed by a reception in the Institute. The first wedding to be solemnised in the church took place in the following year, the bride being Enid Lawson, a member of the Church. Other marriages have followed during the years and each year at least two baptisms took place.

In the fifties and sixties the church life was active and fruitful with the Sunday School thriving (its membership usually around thirty or more), the Wesley Guild Meeting regularly, the Women's Bright Hour meeting intermittently, and also a Youth Club was formed. The envelope system was introduced in 1962.

By March, 1976, it was obvious that substantial repairs would be needed, both to the Schoolroom and to the Church, if they were to be retained. A great deal of prayer, thought and consultation with the experts followed as it became clear that we could not afford to deal with both premises. The options open to us were carefully considered and finally at the beginning of 1978 the decision was taken to sell the Chapel and renovate and extend the schoolroom.

This has proved a more lengthy process than was originally anticipated but in 1980 the Methodists of Baslow can confidently look forward to an attractive and modern place of worship which will also provide opportunities for service and outreach.

The financial response has been magnificent, after much devoted work by the members. Many people who had little direct association with the old chapel have shown their desire to see a continuing Methodist presence in Baslow by contributing generously. One gift has come from as far away as Immanuel College in Nigeria.

The Baslow Methodists can truly praise God for all that is past and trust Him for all that is to come.

