

Chapel Anniversary

This weekend we will be celebrating the Church Anniversary. It made me remember and think about the celebrations I have been part of in the past. The way we celebrate now differs a great deal from my memories as a young child of the celebrations I took part in the at the Methodist Church in Ashby High Street.

The Kendell Memorial Church stood on the site which until recently was the site of Ashby Market next to the Crown Hotel. It was originally a Primitive Methodist Church later it became part of the wider Methodist Church as Wesley Methodist churches and Primitive Methodist churches joined together as the one Methodist Church.

The church was built by a local family obviously quite rich in those days. Within the church they had their own pew with a small door attached to the pew which bore the name of the Kendal family. The church had a full-time minister who lived in a manse on Ashby high Street.

The church was built in the traditional style of Methodist Churches of that time. There were two buildings a worship church with four vespers which were used for sunday school groups managed by church members.

The front of the church had a pulpit on the right-hand side. Behind the pulpit was choir stalls. The main central point was taken up by a large pipe organ which required when installed a church member to pump the air to the pipes with a large wooden handle. Later the organ was fitted with an electric compressor. Mrs Nash played the organ, she also taught me as a child to play the piano. At the left-hand corner was a second group of pews for the choir.

At the front of the church was a Communion Rail which went across the full length of the church. It was made of polished wood with gold supports and a red carpet. I remember as a young child sitting on the communion rail and the congregation laughing and smiling. This is not something I would do now my mother made that clear later.

At the back of the church was the main entrance from the High Street. I carried the flag of the 5th Ashby Scouts down the central aisle at the church parades held one Sunday per month.

There was a church hall at the side where social events were held. It was also the place where the Sunday School met twice a day on a Sunday.

The Sunday School was organised by one respected elderly church member. The teaching of the gospel was carried out in small groups for the younger members. Older children had their meetings in a senior group led by two senior church members. The Minister never took part in the education of young people except in formal services.

The most important memory I have in my childhood and teenage years at this church was one of the loving fellowship family. The provision of love, support, and care necessary for the foundation of God's church.

Chapel Anniversary Celebration

The Celebration of the Chapel Anniversary took place over a week. Many hours we used preparing the church for the celebration. The church male members constructed a large stage above the choir pews. The whole Sunday School would sit on the stage facing the congregation for all events during that week. How they constructed the stage what materials were used I was too young to understand. Looking back, it must have been a Heath Robinson construction which would fail current health and safety checks. However, we felt safe, personally, you felt especially important looking down on the congregation. Sunday School members had been practising poems and readings, there were songs and hymns sung to the congregation also by the children. I was incredibly young at the time and was a soloist. However, my first attempt at the celebration resulted in me bursting into tears with the stress during the singing of Tell Me The Old, Old Story. However, the next year I was brave enough to take part in the full-service. I later became a soloist in the adult men's choir singing in local Methodist Churches in the Epworth Circuit.

Each year the church obtained a chapel anniversary songbook which contains new hymns and songs which the church members sang for two weeks around the celebration date. They were enjoyable because they were written for children and adults and were different from traditional hymns sung for the rest of the year.

At some anniversaries we were joined by Cliff College who organised daily events for the Sunday School at teatime. It was a happy rejoicing time Sunday School prizes, (books) were given out to recognise attendance at Sunday School. One of the boys was given a special award for not missing one service in five years. At the age of 12 we received our first bible.

There were competitions held at the teatime events. One of the tasks was to produce the biggest Bible that was owned by a family in Ashby. My family Bible went back three generations, but the winning Bible was four times the size of our family Bible.

We had three concerts in the week of the Church Anniversary, we had the ladies group concert. The men's choir concert, in which my father and I sang solos also my uncle played the piano. The men's choir was led by Morris Todd, who stood on an orange box and conducted the choir with great enthusiasm? His wife was later a member of Old Brumby United Church.

Finally, there would be a meal, held in the church hall. In the corner of the schoolroom kitchen was a massive gas boiler which was used to fill large enamel teapots. We were all given a sandwich and a piece of cake. The picture which accompanies this article is a blue-and-white mug used by the Sunday School at church events. It is one of my precious possession when the church closed, we were all given one of the mugs used at church events over the years. The mug has an inscription on it which says it was made in 1910 to celebrate a hundred years of the Primitive Methodist Sunday School. The church itself was established in 1810. The seeds of my faith were sown in this church. I remember when the church hall floor gave way, two members who were carpenters and the whole of the male congregation completely fitted a new floor. Such was the significance of this Ashby Church to the local community. The church fellowship loved God it was truly a Christian Community bound together by Faith.

The Kendal Memorial Church was only a short distance from the Ashby Wesley Church. The Methodist Circuit took a decision to close one of the churches. Ashby Wesley Church was kept open Kendal Memorial Church closed its doors.

The money gained from the sale of the church was used to help Yadelthorpe Methodist Church and Old Brumby United Church. The closed church's land was developed as Ashby Market.

I still miss my first church, I will always love the memories that I hold dear of my time in that Christian Community. Ashby Wesley Church was more active in outreach, they organised events for young people, so sadly the difficult choice made was the correct one.

We still live with the challenge to carry out more outreach work. We must remember the church of Jesus Christ is made up of people not buildings. The Great Commission set out in Matthew's Gospel tells us we must go out and spread the Gospel.

Throughout this pandemic the use of zoom has allowed us to reach out to people. It has allowed churches to join in worship together. It has enabled us to bring new people into the knowledge of the love of God. To understand the sacrifices made by his son so that our sins are forgiven and we can inherit Eternal Life.

Society has changed, it has become more materialistic, more selfish. Materialistic things, money and social positions don't bring real happiness or peace or hope for the future. God's love and promises have never changed, he is **the Great I Am . He holds out his arms to people in Love and Compassion.**

While preparing this reflection I came across my mother's Methodist hymn book given to her by the Rev John Romell in 1934. The hymn book itself was issued in 1933. It cost 15 shillings. My Mother worked for the Minister for many years looking after his children.

My extended family had three Lay Preachers within it, John Lingard who was a Lay Preacher for the Epworth Circuit taught me and demonstrated by his life how to work to follow Christ's example. How he lived his life in service to my saviour had a profound influence on my Christian development.

We will celebrate our church anniversary in different ways from the past because of the pandemic. I pray that next year we can sing joyfully to the Lord, help each other, shake hands and find new ways to spread the gospel.

Every blessing.

Rev Ken.



The Great Commission

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."