

Methodism in Bilsdale

In the 19th c the life of village folk was very much centred around their faith and nearly everyone would attend church on Sunday. At that time the new ideas of Nonconformity were developing and it was the people living hard but simple lives that were most strongly influenced by its teaching. With the news of this movement spreading from surrounding dales and villages Methodism must have been readily embraced by families living in Bilsdale. At first people started to gather together in small local groups called Societies rather than worship in their parish church.

In 1821 William Clowes tells of his visit to Bilsdale:

"I went to Chop Gate and spoke out of Doors and had a huge assembly and again at 2 o'clock. At night I met the class at Orterly, the Society now reached 23"

Out and About in Yorkshire T Burns

As Methodism became more established the Circuit Plan system was developed with the small societies being part of their local Circuit. Bilsdale became part of the Stokesley Circuit. The Stokesley Circuit Plan of 1836 shows William York of Holme farm holding services and christenings there for the Little Society of Orra.

A rift developed within the whole of the Methodist Movement due to conflict over the interpretation of John Wesley's doctrinal teachings. This was to cause the little Societies to become separated. There were now two branches of Methodism, Wesleyan and Primitive and likewise the Methodists of Bilsdale were divided.

From the 1851 Census it is clear that there were at least seven families living in the dale who supported the Methodist movement including both the Primitives and the Wesleyan societies. Notable families at that time were the Kitchings at Hall Garth, the Yorkes at Hall Garth, the Smiths of West Cote, Peacocks at the Forge, Chop Gate and the Brottons at The Green.

Before Bilsdale had a Methodist chapel these families belonging to the Wesleyan Society were meeting in farmhouses in several places in the dale. The families belonging to the Primitive Society met in a room above the shop and the Tiger Inn. This room was known as "Rolacum's Avenue". It was John Garbutt of Clay House who led the singing in this upper room and when they acquired a harmonium it was played by Jane, wife of George from Cockflatt.

The arrival of William Brotton, a young stonemason from Danby, was to have much influence on the Movement in the Dale. About the same time, John Dale came from Rosedale to live in The Green near to William. They were like minded men and together over the next two years or so started the first Sunday School in Chop Gate. John Peacock, the Chop Gate blacksmith, joined them in this venture and became a superintendent of the School.

It is thought that before the Chapel was built, the Sunday School met in the room above the Shop. Wesleyan Methodist meetings were also held there. With the growth of the Sunday School and the Chapel membership it became clear that a permanent building was needed.

The Wesleyan Chapel Chop Gate

Finding a plot of land for the building of a Nonconformist chapel in a dale where the land is owned by a landlord who is establishment to the core must have had its problems. Land was bought at 5/-

a square yard from Thomas Leng, a solitary private landowner in the village and owner of the Shop and The Tiger Inn, above which the Methodist meetings were being held.

The Chapel, built by Nelson`s of Swainby, at a cost of £250 (Bulmers 1890) was opened on Sunday morning of 8th August 1858.

The chapel is described in Bulmers 1890 “The Wesleyans have a chapel consisting of one room, with pulpit and harmonium”.

It was closed for alterations in 1879, and again for alterations, repairs and renovations during 1907/8. These were in celebration of the Golden Jubilee in 1908. New windows and a new oak door were fitted, new stone approaches and a filial to the gable end were constructed, new carpets and cushions, ceiling decorated and varnished , and walls distempered. The cost of the whole work was about £100, all raised in just four months. Money was collected by Miss Moules (later to become Mrs Nellie Allenby) to purchase the new door. The re-opening and Jubilee Services were held on Sunday and Monday 12th and 13th April 1908. It was celebrated with songs, recitations, sermons and addresses, an overflowing chapel and tea and supper enjoyed by upwards of 160 people.

Further decoration and renovation works were carried out in 1920 celebrated with a grand re-opening service on Whit Sunday 23rd May.

The building of a new School Room and Tower, at a cost of £488-12-3 began in April 1933. The Foundation Stone Laying Day took place on 13th May 1933. The memorial window was unveiled and the new Sunday school officially opened by the Earl of Feversham on Tuesday 14th November 1933.

It was during the early months of 2013 that an Insurance Inspection was to discover faults in the structure of the building. This required immediate closure. The cost of necessary repairs was too much financially for the declining membership. Chop Gate Methodists amalgamated with Carlton in Cleveland and the last service was held in May 2013. The chapel was sold to a private owner in 2017.

[St Hilda’s church](#)

St John’s church

[Chop Gate chapel](#)

[Fangdale Beck chapel](#)

Friend’s Meeting House

[Short History](#)