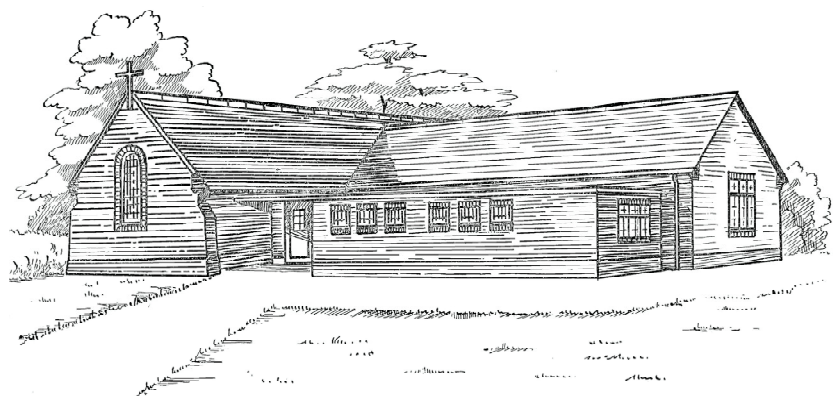


HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The Methodist Church, Corn Street – The Davenport Road Extension Scheme 1956



Some twelve or thirteen years ago a group of Methodists belonging to the Witney Circuit bought a piece of land at the end of what is now called Davenport Road, Witney.

They felt it would be a most useful site for a Methodist Church at some future date. None of them could have known so far ahead about the developments at present going on in this area; but they had 'presentiments' or urges of the Spirit, and we have here a wonderful example of the way in which the Spirit of God goes before men and leads them into His Ways.

In 1953/4 the Circuit became aware, through some of its urgent and adventurous spirits, of the opportunity and challenge that presented itself in this expanding locality with its still growing population.

The Circuit felt that Corn Street Society was admirably fitted both by reason of its vigorous missionary ancestry and its present limitations in the way of premises, to take up the challenge. The Quarterly Meeting therefore asked the Corn Street Society if it would face the new situation and carry its life and witness into a new Church at Davenport Road.

The Trustees, Leaders and Members accepted this call as a call from God, and after great heart-searching, and much prayer, they humbly but courageously gave themselves to this Call.

We have never looked back in spite of pessimists, and numerous difficulties and delays that are always bound up with any worthwhile task. But all along we have felt a sure sense that we were in God's Hands, and ways now begin to open up and light begins to break to confirm our faith. Since those days the Society has worked hard to supplement most generous giving by the Circuit, and whatever the ever the difficulties we never intend to turn back!

But we often look back!

*"Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and
to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged." Isaiah 51 v. 1.*

And we at Corn Street, at this juncture in our history, are looking back with pride because we spring from a spiritual stock that was both militant and glorious. The 'warriors' who brought Primitive Methodism to Witney were men of fighting conviction and suffered hardship a good soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first of these was a certain William Allcock, a Primitive Methodist Missioner from Leicester who came to Oxfordshire in 1823. He chose Witney 'as the most eligible locality he could find' He, and others who soon joined him, preached with great heroism both here and in the neighbouring villages, suffering much persecution. However, the work was blessed; people were converted, Societies built up, and preachers called and trained for the work.

In 1825 the first Camp Meeting in the County was held on the Downs only 1.5 miles from Witney, and so vigorous was the movement that Witney became the head of a Circuit in 1826, only three years after Allcock's appearance.

The first Superintendent was John Hallam and the Society met and worshipped in a thatched cottage until 1843 when it was superseded by a Chapel. That Chapel is our present Schoolroom and was built at a cost of 392. One report says: "That Chapel was the scene of many manifestations of spiritual power, the scene of more than one blessed revival of the work of God."

It was used for 27 years and then in 1869/70 our present Chapel was built on to it on the site of two cottages, one of which was the Minister's House.

The two buildings had cost £908/17/9 and when the new Chapel was opened a debt remained of £376/16/3. For those days these are colossal figures, but in spite of this burden the Corn Street Society subsequently enlarged the Chapel and erected a gallery, so that 24 years later in 1894 a debt of £150 remained on all these undertakings. In that year an effort was made to clear the debt by a Bazaar which was held in the High Street Methodist Schoolroom. It was opened by Mrs J. Vanner Early and generously supported by Mr Charles Early. This illustrates the good-will that existed between the two Churches, so much so that the Minister speaking on that occasion forecast Methodist Union as not far distant. That historic event actually took place only 38 years later.

We are grateful that that spirit persists and we are being helped and encouraged by our High Street friends in this venture.

In 1915 the Primitive Methodist Synod was held at Corn Street and the Handbook, speaking of the Corn Street Society, states: "The crying need is for better and more commodious buildings for Sunday School purposes, and all are prepared to go forward at the first opportunity."

That opportunity has tarried, but it has surely come! We must not, indeed we will not, lose it. We must pray and work and pull together as a Society and as a Circuit until the House our Fathers looked for is erected and their work and witness extended.

Do not let it be said in your own heart: "I had no part in this." Give the Scheme your goodwill and prayers and by your generosity and service make this adventure of the spirit a Victory of the Faith.

Rev J. Leslie Hall, Minister, 1952-1956

Parkside, Tower Hill, Witney, Oxon

CORN STREET METHODISM

as known by the writer

It is a story that should be told by a much abler pen than mine for it contains its laughter and its tears.

It is a far cry echoing over the Berkshire and Wiltshire Downs - from the days of Thomas Russell and John Ride in the year 1829.

In the town of Witney, Methodism has had a long and honourable life and Corn Street Circuit has played a significant part.

Humorous and humiliating experiences are on record, viz – the Minute Book, in my possession, dated 13th June, 1842, Quarterly Meeting held at Witney - "That W. Scuse, W. Weller and E. Goodwin pay one shilling or sink a figure on the Plan, for not publishing the collection", or again, 13th September 1847, Minute 15 - "That Mr Jackson has a note from this Quarter Day stating it is our opinion that he ought to have paid the last Poor Rate." Such was their standard of integrity and self-respect. The Circuit has been fortunate in its wealth of Official Life, a Ministry that has been diligent in its charge, and a Laity which has possessed a toughness of body and a

tenacity of soul.

Within the memory of many who are still with us are the great Camp Meetings on Woodgreen and Corn Street (in fields where Orkney Place is now built). The processions sang their way through the streets and powerful Messengers of God delivered their challenge against Sin and the Powers of Darkness. How they sang! How they prayed! Their songs and prayers were delivered in a Mighty Faith---the people were convicted of their sin and made conscious of being "born again" into a New Life, by the Spirit of God.

Many Evangelistic Services and Revival Meetings were held, when the "Expectant and Promised Power of God" became operative. The Evangelist's appeal met a ready response, and preacher and people "Sang" folk into the Kingdom.

The singing of the people called Methodists was an outstanding feature - the Witness of Song was powerful and still is. The old favourites, Come ye that love the Lord, We're marching to Zion; Amazing Love; For the Lion of Judah and There is a Land of pure delight, were sung over and over again. God's people were "a Happy Crowd." They expressed themselves in Spiritual Songs, and in Corn Street to-day the people still look for Leadership in Song.

On one occasion a member of Corn Street Society approached one of the famous Manufacturers of Witney Blankets for a donation to secure a Brass Band to lead the Camp Meeting Procession, only to be met with the rebuke, and request, "Let your people link arms and sing their soul-stirring songs through Witney streets - we love to hear them" adding "and let me have some of your Preachers to dinner to meet our M.P." That Sunday was a Red-Letter day – four Methodist Local Preachers and the Member for Mid-Oxon talked Politics and Religion, much to the delight of their host and hostess.

The Corn Street Methodist Society has been honoured by God to participate in this glorious work - its spiritual integrity has made many a visiting Believer feel that "warmness of heart" of which John Wesley, the Father of Methodism, speaks.

Now, having written of the days that are behind, what of the future? Surely "The coming age invokes our aid" and the past urges us on, The Challenge has been made to our Society and we have accepted that Challenge. A new community of folk in the New Building Area demands a "spiritual home." Shall the "call" fall upon deaf ears? By the Grace of God - No! It has been laid upon the hearts of the Corn Street Methodist Society to provide such a Home. The daring Faith of our Fathers presses upon us the demand for progress. It is an inevitable "forward movement". An innumerable Company of Witnesses urges us on.

It is a mighty task, but not mightier than the power of our God. Exercise of mind, body and soul is demanded if a Church and Schools are to be erected to the Glory of God.

Davenport Road Methodist Church is intended for all comers make it your Church, the Church for you and your children.

Something more than a "building" is needed.

Members of the Committee are anxious by their activities to provide something other than money, namely an Active Live Fellowship with spiritual vision, working together to create the permanent good of all, a Church and People, worthy of its high purpose, which is nothing less than the Glory of God.

We earnestly hope that this "House of God's People" will receive the enthusiastic support of all our friends. Your gifts, careful thought, and especially your prayers, will help to bring to a triumphant issue this Spiritual Adventure.

Percival Viner

Barn House, Woodgreen, Witney

We recall with humble gratitude, the following Minsters and Laymen who have worthily served since the tragedy of the First World War, 1914-18:

Ministers:

Rev. Richard Cowie
Rev. J. L. Pritchard
Rev. Luther Wareham
Rev. Thos. Bates
Rev. J.H. Watkins
Rev. W. E. Lead
Rev. N. G. Brundred
Rev. F. C. Searle
Rev. Le Cato Edwards
Rev. L. J. Hopkins
Rev. Cliiford Sutton
Rev. J. Leslie Hall

Laymen:

Mr Turner Gentle
Mr C. Viner
Mr Edwin Baker
Mr Albert Ham
Mr Geo. Willinms
Mr Hy. Gammage
Mr C. A, Viner
Mr C. W. Wilkins
Mr Ed. Quarterman
Mr Hy. Embling
Mr W. G. Lord
Mr T. D. Gammage
Mr Percival Viner
Mr Harry Wright
Mr J. Brookes
Mr W. Miles
Mr W. Limmer

We are also indebted to the leadership and work of a fine Company of Ladies, who, through the years, have given loyal service, and who today are making an invaluable contribution to the "Davenport Road Scheme.'

A SALUTE TO THE PAST

We at Corn Street belonged to the Ex-Primitive Methodist Church and we are proud to have contributed to Methodist Union in 1932 a tradition of strong and joyous faith.

The Missioners from Leicester in 1823, mentioned already by the Rev. J. Leslie Hall, soon had 135 members who met in homes until a Chapel could be built. In May 1826 they held a Fellowship Meeting one Sunday morning at 5 a.m. prior to a Camp Meeting at 8 a.m., when their waggons were overturned and they were pelted with eggs and other missiles.

As Trustees Treasurer I have access to old accounts and have been impressed by the way in which our forbears gave their money and service without stint. One list of subscribers in 1869 totals £299/4/8d. a truly magnificent sum for those days.

So from the earliest days and down through the years the spirit of loyalty to the Lord, and sacrifice for the "Cause" have been and still are at the centre of our Church life.

For example, our present organ was the gift of Mr and Mrs P. Viner in memory of their parents; and we are gladly playing our part in the erection of the new Church at Davenport Road costing £12,000. This demands constant and generous giving - but we shall not fail.

I am proud to pay my tribute in this Brochure to the great souls of the past, and to express the hope that we shall go to Davenport Road with their spirit and faith.

Of one thing I am sure - we shall go with the Blessing of the same Lord and Saviour.

James W. Embling.

The Davenport Road Extension Fund

Statement of Account to 1st March, 1956

	£.	s.	d.		£.	s.	d.
To Grants:				Estimated Cost of Church and			
Joseph Rank Trustees	3,000	0	0	School	12,000	0	0
Connexional Chapel Committee	750	0	0				
Sale of Lowells Place	320	0	0				
Cash in Bank	2,229	8	0				
Promises unpaid	550	0	0				
Stonelaying and other efforts pending	500	0	0				
	7,349	8	1				
Amount still to be raised	4,650	11	11				
	£12,000	0	0		£12,000	0	0

P. Viner, A.E. Butler, *Treasurers*

May we appeal once more to all our friends not to relax their efforts either in raising money for this Scheme, or in personal giving. You will see from the above statement we have still a long way to go; but we are undaunted. We know our friends will not fail us.

Please do whatever you can, and send whatever you can to the Treasurers. We are thankful to God for your generosity and service.

Thomas Leach Ltd., Abingdon-on-Thames