

Celebrations for the Methodists!

November is a special month of celebration for Methodist people here in Highworth as we share in the 181st anniversary of the founding of the church and the 20th anniversary of the re-development.

It was in 1831 that a group of missionaries visited Highworth. We don't know who they were, who sent them, or why they came to this little market town on the top of a hill or how long they stayed but as a result of their visit a group of people linked with the Methodist movement. What we do know is that by 1838 a Methodist chapel had been built. Then another Methodist chapel was built on the Lechlade Road in 1842. God was clearly at work in Highworth!

By 1850 the first little chapel was bursting at the seams so it was decided to knock it down and a new chapel was built in the Elms in 1856. And so, it continued for more than 100 years, two worshipping communities witnessing to the saving love of God through Jesus, one meeting in what is now the Silver Band Hall on Lechlade Road, the other in what is now the Silver Threads Hall in the Elms.

In 1924 the Elms Chapel had 49 members, and someone wrote at the time, "The Highworth folk know how to make the services bright and inspiring. A unique heartiness characterises them".

By the late 1950s Highworth was beginning to grow from its then population of 2,000 people and there were plans to develop housing on the sides of the hill facing the north. The Elms Chapel was proving too small for the number of people attending, and the congregations from the 2 Churches met to plan and prepare for a new building together. This was a huge step of faith and commitment. Much prayer, sacrificial giving and hard

work in raising money followed, including the running of an all-night café serving meals to folk who passed through Highworth. God blessed the people and their work and a new Methodist Church was built on the present site - a site that was previously planned to be the 'Welcome Home Field' for soldiers returning from the war. It was opened in 1964.

But again, that building became too small for the number of folks who were regularly attending worship and in 1991 a decision was taken to re-develop and extend the premises at a cost of £280,000. Moving out in March 1992, the United Reformed Church folk welcomed and supported us as they shared their buildings and services. It was a huge undertaking. Stanley Ball was project manager and under his guidance the tiny foyer was knocked down and a new one built, the worship area turned through 90 degrees and extended by incorporating the church hall, removing its stage, a second floor added for a vestry, a disabled toilet, a new back room, known as the Ball room, a larger back foyer and porch area.

Before the end of the year the work was completed. How could all this have happened when the Methodist church family was only at the most 100 people? But God was 'in' on this project. He answered prayers as we stepped out in faith being certain that He wanted the good news shared that He 'loved the world so much that He gave His only Son so that anyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life'. By the time the work was completed it had been paid for, £280,000 within the year. What an amazing time! How blessed we were. As the hymn says 'How good is the God we adore'. Thank you, Heavenly Father. Certainly worth celebrating.