



The History of Methodism in Fairfield from 1844 to the closure of this Church in August 2020.

Based on the research and documents created by Mr N.E. (Norman) Brittain. Additional material by Russell Baker.

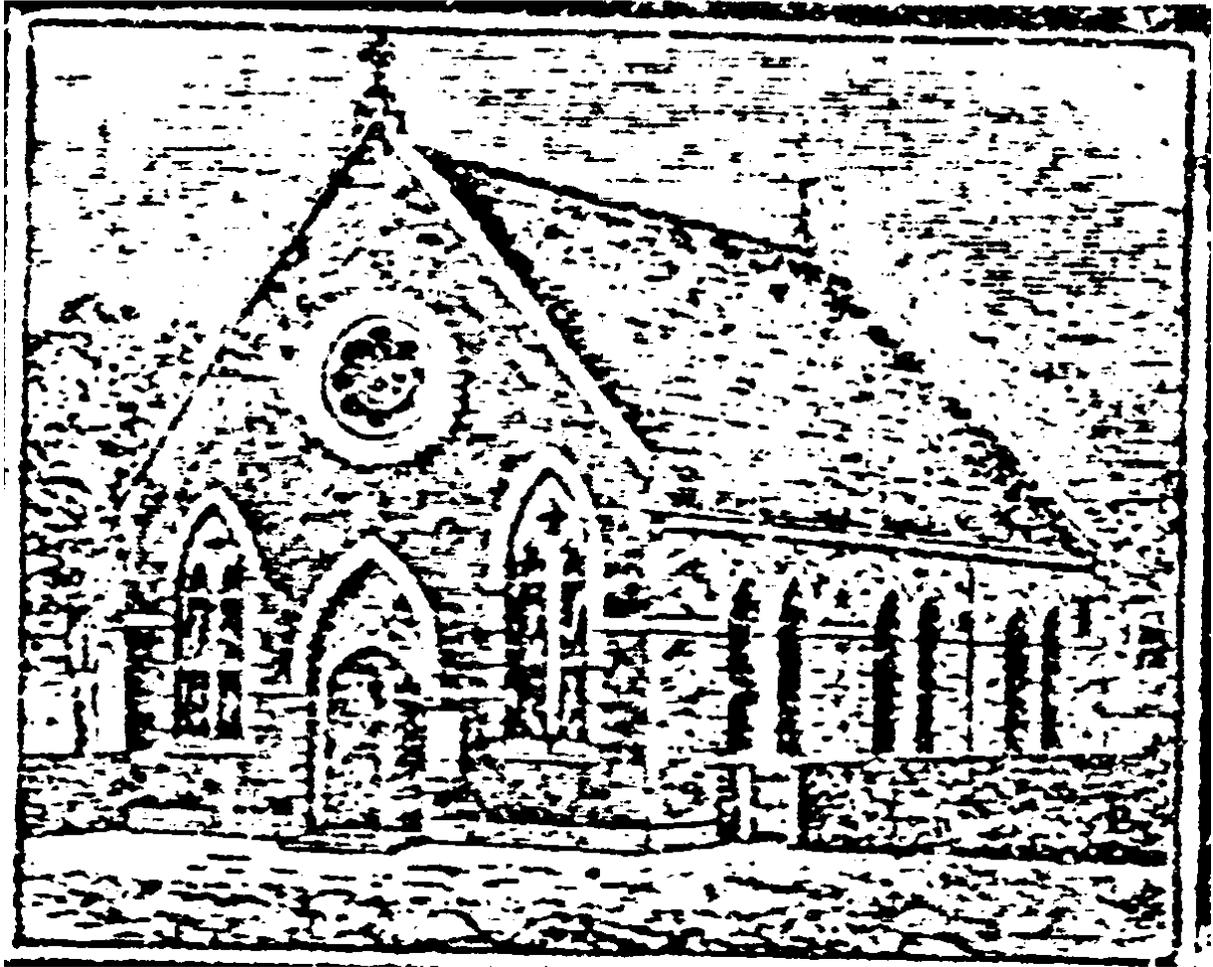
In the Autumn of 1783 John Wesley preached in St Peters Church, Fairfield, and church records state that "it was thoroughly filled with serious and attentive hearers". Tradition says that he also preached from a window at the back of Hawthorn Farm. For over fifty years Methodist meetings were held in various cottages in the local area, Joshua Cotterill led his class at his own home, Cherry Tree Farm, Fairfield.

1844



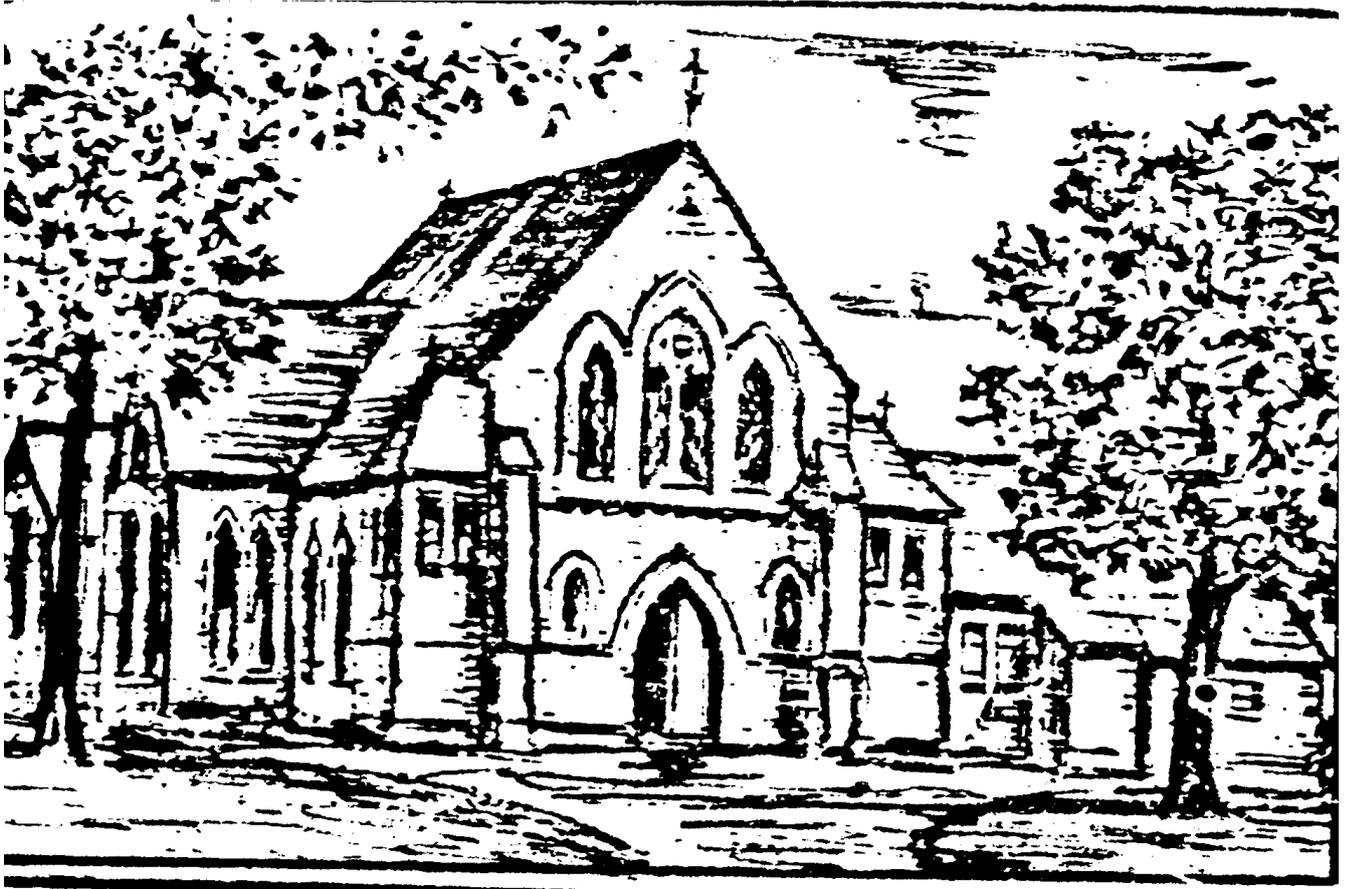
The First Church

As the numbers of members grew, so did the desire to build a chapel, and when Mr. Samuel Birch, though not a Member of Society, left £50 for the purpose, the building was commenced on the site on Waterswallows Road, occupied for many years by the Scout Headquarters. Costing about £150, this chapel was opened in 1844. Mr. Samuel Barker, of Brook House Farm, who had helped in various ways and especially with his team of horses, was allotted a pew on the left of the pulpit. On the other side sat the singers and violinists. As so many of the older people could not read, the hymns were given out two lines at a time, and the last two lines were always repeated.



The Second Church 1868

A Second Chapel was built on the same site and the Secretary of the Building Fund was Mr. John Lomas, whose portrait hung in the vestry for many years. This Chapel was opened in 1868 but was soon too small for the rapidly increasing population, and, unable to extend those premises, the trustees undertook the building of a new Chapel on Fairfield Road



The Third Church 1886-1983

1887 saw a triumphal procession from the old to the new, for the opening by the Rev. Charles Garrett, whose text was "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea the work of our hands establish Thou it."

By 1897 it was recorded in the local newspaper that at the Anniversary Services conducted by the Rev. H. Colwell, of New York, the Chapel was crowded and many had to be accommodated in the adjoining schoolroom. The Superintendent said that the Wesleyans were unable to take in any more children because of the scarcity of room. The proceeds of the Sunday School Anniversary Services in 1904 were £50.7s.

The work of enlarging the premises was greatly helped by members of the Sunday School, who gave £50 for the Foundation Stone, laid by Mr. Matthew Thorpe, and a further sum of £35 for Schoolroom furniture --- the children foregoing their treat to make the gifts possible. The following year, £60 was given to the building fund. It was thought fitting that the new schoolroom should be opened by the children themselves.

The enlarged Chapel was re-opened by Mrs. Chambers, and the new organ by Miss Mollie Wright. Mr. George Slater, the organist, was also the generous treasurer of the Church and the Sunday School. During all this time, the tea meeting contributed greatly to the support of the growing Church, under the capable leadership of Mrs. Martin. The President of the Conference (Rev. Robert Bond, D.D.) preached at the opening services of the memorable Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1937.

In 1939 many young people left to join the armed forces, and although depleting the church of its younger members, it provided a challenge to those who remained at home to work and provide comforts for the troops stationed at home and abroad. Several young people were drafted into the town to do Government work and some of those became members and were a great help in the work of the church. 1947 saw the Diamond Jubilee of the Fairfield Road Church and was celebrated with a week of special Services and Activities. The preachers and speakers for that week were the Rev. J. Bernard Sheldon, Rev. Francis J. Gould, Rev. Granville S. Smith, Rev. William Wallace and the Rev. G. Robinson Myers, and the Souvenir Programme cost 6 pence.

1947 also saw many young people return from the forces, and there was a concentration on Youth Work. The Sunday School was strong with Beginners, Primary, Junior and Senior Departments, all being well staffed. During the week there were the Girls' Brigade, Life Boys, Boys' Brigade, Youth Club, and the Wesley Guild. Church and Sunday School members together numbered over 200. The Women's Fellowship (Sisterhood) was strong, and well attended at their weekly Wednesday Meetings. A Young Wives Group was formed and became very active.

There were Church concerts, Ladies concerts, Men's concerts, Children's concerts, and Pantomimes. The church building was altered to accommodate all the activities. The November Chapel Anniversaries were celebrated each year with many well-known preachers and speakers.



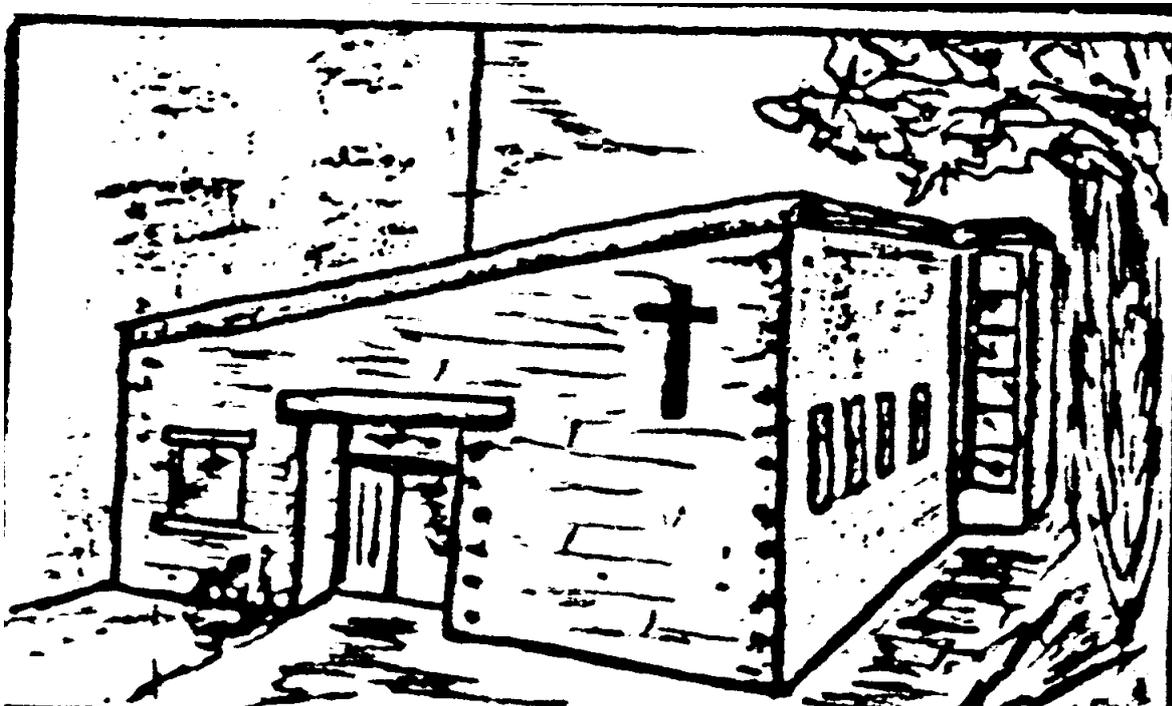
The picture is of the Primitive Methodist Church which was on Queens Road affectionately known as the "Tin Chapel"

The start of Fairfield Methodist Church.

In 1962 the Queens Road society who had previously worshipped as Primitive Methodists joined with the Fairfield Road society and the two became known as Fairfield Methodist Church. This uniting of the societies proved to be a success. But gradually in the late '60's a number of the younger members moved away because of their employment and as the older members died the membership decreased. In addition to this decrease the building was getting older and more costly to keep in repair. Each quarter a Budget was prepared of the costs for the next quarter, and all efforts were put into fund raising, just to keep the building usable. The church heating was inadequate, although in the early fifties an oil-fired boiler had replaced the veteran coke fired unit. Each Sunday it cost more to "heat" the church than was received in collections. One Friday in 1980, because

of snow the regular supply of fuel oil did not arrive, the fuel ran out, the boiler stopped during the night, and that night there was a very severe frost which resulted in many of the church central heating pipes being cracked. An estimate of the damage was £4,000, but thanks to Mr. Harold Lomas (the Property Steward), and his helpers a condensed system was soon operating.

After this it was accepted that the building was too big for the needs of the day, and was in need of much repair. In 1983 it was decided to go for a new building, and after consultations with the District and the "Johnnie" Johnson Housing Trust an agreement was made for the Housing Trust to build a block of flats for sheltered accommodation for the elderly on the site of the church provided they built a suitable building for a modern church. During the building of the new church which took about eighteen months, morning services were held in St. Peters Anglican Church, the church John Wesley had originally preached in in 1783. This provided an opportunity for the members of both churches to get to know one another, and resulted in closer links between the Methodists and the Anglicans. Evening services were held in members' homes and were a great success in keeping the congregation together.



The last Church

The new church was opened on the 15th. May 1985 by Mrs. Agnes Goodwin and Mr. John Meddins, who were the two oldest members of the Society. The dedication service was conducted by the Rev. Ronald

Hoar, the Chairman of the Manchester and Stockport District, and assisted by the Fairfield based minister, the Rev. Peter Baiden.

Much credit for this and researching the story of Fairfield Methodism must go to Mr N.E.Brittain who is at age 103 years (as the Church closes in 2020) is thought to be the oldest Church Treasurer in Methodism. Norman and his wife Mary before Covid 19 attended church most Sundays. Mary who is just a few years younger than Norman attended Fairfield from being a baby.



Mr N.E. Brittain celebrating his 100th birthday at a party held in the Church.

With the new church which was designed to be used as a multipurpose building came a new lease of life to the Society, congregations improved and a weeknight "Sunday School" was started, and for four years was very popular. The Women's Fellowship and Tuesday Club (previously known as the Young Wives Group) continued. A Mother and Toddlers Group was formed and ran until 2003. A monthly meeting for everyone was started in 1989 called the Pilgrim Group this ran until December 2016.

In 1990 Circuit finances were in a poor state and unable to support two full time ministers and the circuit agreed to become a one minister circuit, and the Fairfield based minister was not replaced. This was a great loss to the Fairfield Church, and also to the circuit. There was also a shortage of Local Preachers and services were in danger of being cut, so the members of Fairfield offered to arrange their own evening services every other week, these services were called Praise and Fellowship and included Bible Studies; Talks; Concerts with

Fairfield Band; Songs of Praise, in fact any way in which people could praise God and have fellowship with Him, and with one another.

One hundred and fifty years of Methodism in Fairfield

The Sesquicentennial Year began with a Special Anniversary Weekend in May 1993, with Special Services conducted by the Rev. Ronald Hoar and special services with a former minister, the Rev. Peter Brant. In July we held our first Flower Festival; in August, a Sankey Songs of Praise with Fairfield Band; in September special Harvest Festival Services and a superb concert by the Dalesmen Male Voice Choir. October brought special services to remember the old November Tea Days. For the rest of the year there were special services and events ending the year of celebration with a Special Anniversary Service, conducted by the Rev. Dr. John Taylor, later president of the Methodist Conference but also a past member of the Sunday School. These services closed the Sesquicentennial Year and 150 years of Methodism in the Fairfield area.

Below the church set out for a sale of goods to raise funds.



Toward 2000. The Fairfield Project

One of the biggest changes for the Fairfield area started in 1996 when one of our local preachers started training for the Methodist Ministry. During her training she became more aware that fulfilling God's will was not just by being an ordained minister but being one to involve herself in the Fairfield Estate . So, at the end of her training she was appointed minister in charge of "The Fairfield Project". Things did not exactly work out as envisaged but God's will led another local preacher Margaret Crawshaw going into the Ministry and during her 2 years up to September 2005 she greatly contributed to the life of the Church and also to the Anglican Church St Peter's which was without a vicar for a

considerable period.

During early 2004 it became obvious that after only 19 years we would have to replace the roof of our Church. Various fund raising events were organised including concerts and sponsored events and with the promise of matched funding from the Circuit we set about planning to replace the roof and improve the ceiling and lights in the church and foyer.

By February 2005 the project was completed with a new roof on and the ceiling and lighting also completed all within budget . We raised all the money to pay for the work and the Church was by May 2005 back to its original condition.

In September 2005 our Circuit welcomed Rev Colin Smith as the new Circuit Superintendent. As the only full-time minister Colin had some part time help dedicated to Fairfield area. It was possible thanks to this extra support to convince the District that Fairfield and its estate justified having a Methodist Deacon full time .

On 1st September 2009 we welcomed Deacon Janet Heys to the Circuit especially around the Fairfield Estate. Janet gave resolute service until her transfer to Bordon, Hampshire in September 2014 and she was not replaced .

In December 2010 to make our Church more energy efficient we installed a new gas heating boiler.

Our minister Rev Andrew Parker came to our Circuit in 2012 initially working alone with seven churches and from 2019 working with a colleague with fourteen churches.

By March 2016 Fairfield had two weekly events "New Beginnings " drawing in older people for social purposes and "Comfortable with Computers " as well as a monthly "Pilgrim Group".

Our Mission was towards older people which fits with the age of our membership.

Our two new weekly groups "Comfortable with Computers" (CWC for short) attracted a lot of attention both local and national. CWC fulfilled

a need which is bringing people into Church who say they only go to Church for funerals.



“Comfortable with Computers” coffee morning to raise money for Christian Aid



The Pilgrim Group share a meal in Church

August 16. The "Comfortable with Computers" computer group ceased meeting as the project came to an end but the members of CWC still keep in touch and the organisers still provide ad hoc support. The meeting is much missed by many for the social interaction it provided. In total more than one hundred and fifty people attended this group.

December 16. The Pilgrim Group which has met monthly between April and December for about the last 25 years or so came to an end. The

reasons being the difficulty in getting speakers and the reduced numbers of people attending. Soon after this our "New Beginnings" Group closed .

Between 2017 and 2020 although numbers declined Church members continued to help people to safely use computers. We have also helped to build websites for people or groups. The main difference is that we do not charge for our time. It is hoped even with the Church closure that will continue. More details go to russb.org.uk

While working hard to maintain the gospel of God's love in Christ our membership was reducing and now in 2020 is 11 and with a very high age profile but it does what it can and supports a number of local and national charities.

We have been aware for some time that with increasing building issues and the small number and age of our congregation (85+) that we were unlikely to be able to continue for much longer. Unfortunately, the Covid 19 Pandemic brought issues to a head with all our members in lockdown as a result of age and medical issues. It is as a result of this that in June 20 with sadness but accepting the reality of building issues and Covid 19 and its effect ,with all our church members being over 70, that we have unanimously voted to close immediately.

We are, however, certain that Fairfield Methodist Church will have followed John Wesley's wishes to:

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”