

SLIP END METHODIST CHURCH

Where's that ? You could be easily forgiven for asking that question if you haven't lived very long in the Village. In 1975, Slip End Methodist Church amalgamated with Pepperstock Baptist Church to become Pepperstock Free Church, and the building was sold to become a private house. It is still recognisable as a Chapel, just below the Frog and Rhubarb in Church Street, and even parts of the inside of the house are still unchanged (deliberately).

The Methodist Church was first built in 1868. It was linked with the "Primitive Methodists" as they were known then, - a branch of Methodism which believed in open-air preaching and prayer meetings, very much as John Wesley had done. The Church was built at a time when Methodism in the South Bedfordshire and Luton area was in its heyday, and Slip End was only one of several chapels built in the vicinity during that decade. It cost £216. 15s. 3d to build and was opened on August 17th 1868 followed by a Tea at Pepperstock Baptist Chapel. Slip End was a



working class village, and thus the plan to build a chapel to seat 200 was perhaps not over-ambitious. Attendance, activity and membership grew very quickly and this in days when commitment was strictly defined. If you became irregular, fell into debt or did not pay 'class fees', your membership would be terminated!

Something may have gone amiss with the construction of the building, because after five years, there began a series of repairs, which by 1882 had cost more than the original building. To build a new Sunday School room in 1880 (which is still retained in the present building) the chapel was mortgaged to a Mr. Smith. By 1886 the membership stood at 66 which was over 10% of the population and nearly 200 attended the regular services of Worship. There were nearly one hundred in the Sunday School with twenty teachers. In 1887 they raised £61 with fund-raising to pay off the building debt.

It was decided to rebuild the front of the chapel in 1902, which accounts for the date on the plaque which you can see to this day. At the same time they reordered the plan to give more flexibility to its use during the week as well as Sundays. By the turn of the Century membership had decreased - 28 out of an average attendance of 70 (though still good by St. Andrew's standard at that time).

It is difficult to say why this decline occurred. There was a slump in work in the Luton area at the end of the century, and that certainly affected family incomes. However, the children and youth work remained strong, with a 'Christian Endeavour' class for young people and a 'band of hope'. For the first time, a class was set up for very young children in 1910 (a first in the district also). The Anniversary occasions were still very popular, and the church not being large enough Pepperstock Chapel was used - even as late as 1941.

The rest of the story is, sadly, one of decline. Whereas in the 1890s all but one trustees lived locally, by 1930 there was only one resident trustee, Mr. Percy Groom and membership was down to ten. Closure was talked about shortly after the war, but thriving Youth Work forestalled this even though, at one time, they even ceased to hold services at Slip End. In 1968 the chapel held its Centenary with a weekend of celebratory services, two in the Chapel, two at St. Andrew's and one open air.

There was a lot of Anglican input that weekend - those were days of talk about possible Union between the C of E and Methodism. It was thought that the Methodist Chapel might have amalgamated with St Andrew's. One important point to remember is that the Methodist Church always fostered good relations with its neighbours - in

the early days with Pepperstock Baptist, in the latter days also with St. Andrew's and there are families in the village today who still hold the chapel with very fond memory and a sense of loss at its closure.

Sadly, Pepperstock Chapel was closed for worship in the mid 1990's and a new Baptist "plant" from Luton Central Baptist, now meets in the Lower School; the *New Life Christian Fellowship*.