

WOODSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH

Woodside Baptist Church was the oldest church in the area, but has not been in use since the early 1990s. Records show that there was a Baptist fellowship in Woodside as far back as 1828. At that time there was no Slip End, but there was some housing in Woodside. On February 2nd that year permission was granted to hold a "Dissenters meeting" at the house of William Bigg of Woodside and the license registration was made in the names of Ebenezer Daniels, William Bigg, William Clark and Francis Harrison. All we know of these people are that Francis Harrison was a draper and a trustee of Union Chapel in Castle Street and Ebenezer Daniels was the Baptist minister of Park Street. Mr Daniels was responsible for starting a number of village chapels, and was an active preacher. In 1830, Daniels went to Ceylon as a missionary.

It was in 1862 under the ministry and direction of Rev. J. Malcolm of Wellington Street church that a chapel and vestries were erected close to the two junctions of Woodside with a seating of 100. The cost was £200. One of the notable things about the history of Woodside chapel has been the continuity of its membership. It has been common, right down to the present age, for members to have been loyal for as long as 30 - 40 years.

When the chapel celebrated its own centenary in 1962, there was then alive, a Mrs Clark who could link back to the earliest days. She had been in Sunday school since she was five, baptised at thirteen, and became a member in 1887. How's that for loyalty? Mrs Clark must have been taught by the first Sunday school teachers at the chapel. Of course, in those days, there was no school as we know, but on Sundays the children came to the chapel, were taught throughout the day, which was interspersed with services. She recalled that the teachers who came up from Luton used to eat their dinners in the chapel, vegetables supplied by a Mrs Burgoyne whose cousin was Sir John Burgoyne. His parents, her aunt and uncle lived in Woodside.

In the early days there were two empty cottages at the rear of the chapel for men's meetings. The weekly diary began with a Sunday prayer meeting at 7am, followed by services and Sunday school. On Mondays the 'Band of Hope' met. There was an evening service on Tuesdays and a prayer meeting on Thursday evenings.

Times have changed - and yet, not so completely. Woodside Baptist Church still kept many of the important highlights of the early period right up to closure: the Good Friday Tea and meeting, Sunday School Anniversary, Harvest Festival and Christmas social.

How should we conclude? Perhaps with these words which were written when the church had its centenary in 1962. They are words which presumably not only the Baptist congregation would like to say "Amen" to again. But which are equally apt for St. Andrew's.

"Encouraged by the past, we who are connected with Woodside church today, look confidently to the future, believing that in the purpose of God, the witness which Woodside church seeks to give, will be an essential factor of the life of the community".