

An Extended History of Westcliffe Road Christian Church

The following historical information was largely researched and collated in 1984 by a member of the Church.

1814-1826 – Background on Land Enclosure in Shipley

On November 14th 1814 a petition was presented to the House of Commons by several owners of estates in the manor and township of Shipley. They set forth that “there were in the township of Shipley several commons and parcels of waste ground which might be improved by being enclosed”.

The bill received the Royal assent on 12th May 1815. The moorland was surveyed and was found to measure 277 acres. Certain tracks were set out as roads. A small amount of money and ground was allotted to the surveyors of highways as quarries for building the roads and most of the high moor between Cottingley and Heaton was then divided between J. W. Field, William Wainman and Samuel Cunliffe Lister.

The Lord of the Manor at that time was J. W. Field of Heaton. He was the grandfather of the Lord Rosse of telescope fame¹ and the ancestor of the present holder of the Rosse titles and estates, who lives in Birr Castle, Ireland. J. W. Field took one sixteenth in value of the whole moor for ‘manorial right’. Thus he secured 65 acres at the corner of Moorhead Lane and Bradford Road. He also had an additional 65 acres on Stoney Ridge overlooking Cottingley.

Beside his capacity as Lord of the Manor, he also had private land which was not less than 69[^] acres including some of the best land and it joined up with his existing estates. He also had the greater part of the land between Church Street Shipley and Saltaire. He was “encouraged to present” a small part of his land to Shipley for the site of the Parish Church, St. Pauls, in 1826.

The land which was left was divided amongst the farmers and cottagers. This land was often in tiny strips scattered here and there. The cottagers promptly sold these plots of land, and ended up with no land at all and no common for their animals to feed on.

The plot of land which Westcliffe Road Christian Church eventually was built on was called ‘Peaseland’ and at this time was in the possession of J.W. Field.

1867-1873 – SHIPLEY TOWN MISSION INSTITUTE

¹ W. Parsons 3rd Earl of Rosse 1800-1867, builder of the largest telescope of his time, the Spiral Nebulae (built at Birr castle).

In 1867, a band of Non-Conformist Christians decided to secure a piece of land and erect a small wooden chapel for their worship instead of hiring a room as they had done previously. The site they found was located at a corner in Shipley where Briggate joined Westgate and opposite the Otley Road Oddfellows, next to the railway.

The group's plan was for the place of worship to have a 'Ragged Sunday School' and to eventually expand its congregation size over time. That being the case, the building was made 60ft by 30ft long and was big enough to hold 250 persons. The cost of this wooden building with a slate roof was £150 and it was built in a style popular in America².

The wooden chapel was called the 'Town Mission Institute' and was formally opened over the weekend of the 4th and 5th of April 1868. On the Saturday evening, there was a tea which fed 300 followed by entertainments of recitals and music, both vocal and instrumental. On the Sunday, there were two sermons preached and collections taken which amounted to £26. The speakers were W. Umpleby (Prim. Methodist) in the morning and Mr Lang of the mission in the evening³. (The church didn't have a pastor but instead invited lay preachers from the local Methodists, Baptists etc.)

The mission was presented with 40 "handsome and useful seats" by Sir Titus Salt, a local philanthropist and town designer. He gave them from the 'Dining Hall' down Victoria Road⁴.

A Town Mission Institute was inaugurated in a wooden building

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ROUND ABOUT BRADFORD.

near the Oddfellows' Hall, in 1868, but the premises have been displaced by the improvements carried out by the Midland Company, in the extension of the goods yard. A plot of land for a permanent chapel in West Cliff Road having been secured, a new chapel was opened on Christmas Day, 1875, at a cost of £2000, and it will afford sitting accommodation for 450 persons.

The earliest school in the district of which we have any record was

by William Cudworth 1876

1874-1875 – Laying of Foundations of Westcliffe Chapel

² The Bradford Observer March 28th. 1868

³ The Bradford Observer April 6th. 1868

⁴ The Bradford Observer 9th. July 1868

As noted previously, the Town Mission Institute was located next to the railway. The Midland Railway Company wanted the land for improvements to their line (specifically, their goods yard) and in 1874 bought the chapel and its site, planning to pull the wooden structure down as soon as the church could find suitable accommodation elsewhere.

The elders and deacons of the Institute approached the Countess of Rosse, who was the daughter of J.W. Field and overall owner of several pieces of land after her father and husband's deaths. After much discussion on the matter, the Countess agreed to donate Peaseland, then valued at £68, to the congregation. As part of the agreement, the chapel was to house two adjoining cottages and the frontage in West Cliff Road. It was thus decided to build a more permanent stone building to do this.

The undertaking of this project must have seemed a very big thing for these men at that time. Shipley consisted of a community of only 700 dwellings, which had a total assessment value of £9,000. There were also at this time established Baptist and Congregational churches as well as an Anglican church.

The foundations were laid in March complete with a ceremony for the cornerstone being laid. This took place on March 29th 1875, Easter Monday.

At 2pm, the scholars, teachers and friends (several hundreds) assembled at the old, wooden Institute and marched to the site of the new building. A hymn was sung, then the Rev D. R. Cowan (Congregational) offered a prayer. The Rev Mr Featherstone (Wesleyan) read the scriptures and Mr T. Forster, a member of the Institute, placed a series of items in the space where the cornerstone was to be laid: a number of coins of the realm, copies of the Bradford Observer and the Budget and other documents. He then presented to Mr Mark Stainsby a silver trowel from the members of the mission. Mr Stainsby, after laying the cornerstone, briefly addressed the assembly. Another hymn was then sung followed by a short address given by Rev J. Mayland (Primitive Methodist). The Rev M. Cossey (Baptist) offered the concluding prayer and benediction. Tea was then provided in the original Town Mission Institute followed by a public meeting presided by Mr Stainsby.

The total length of the stone building was 75ft, including the cottages which were built later. The cost of the site was £371 and the contract to build it was £1675⁵. The building was completed by December of the same year.

The following Shipley firms were involved in the building project:

- Architects – Crabtree & Son
- Masons – Pitt and Crabtree
- Joiners – D. Hainsworth & Son
- Plasterers – Joseph Wilks & Son
- Plumbers – S. Rushworth & Son
- Slater – R. Thornton.

⁵ Bradford Observer 30th. March 1875

1877-1902 – The Church Deeds & Beginning Years

The deeds were drawn up 18 months later on May 9th 1877, and they stipulated that should a sale of the church ever become necessary the proceeds should go to one or more of the religious denominations in Shipley. They also stated that the building should never be sold to be used as a “place of vain amusement, e.g. Singing saloon, theatre, public house or brewery”⁶.

Quote from the deeds: “upon trust that the said Chapel upon the said plot of land, West Cliff Road Christian Church, and under trust the said Chapel and all other buildings to be used for the purpose of Protestant Worship of Almighty God and upon trust that Sunday School shall be established in connection with the said Chapel.”

The founders’ names in the deeds are still names that can be found in Shipley today. They were:

- William Mosley Warp Dresser
- Samuel Weatherhead Woollorter
- Jonas Dean Warp Dresser
- John Green Quarryman
- Thomas Lord Warp Dresser
- Samuel Dawson Dyer
- James Wooler Warp Dresser
- Ezra Midgley Grocer
- Jonathan Alderson Overlooker
- Eli Midgley Joiner
- Thomas Foster Blacksmith
- George Gill Cordwainer (Old name for a shoemaker)
- Thomas Slingsby Quarryman
- David Nunn Cordwainer
- Cuthbert Shields Cordwainer
- John Coulton Woollorter

John Coulton was from the parish of Manningham, Bradford, all the rest were from Shipley. The founder member Sam Dawson acted as chapel keeper and lived at 17 Castle Street nearby.

When the Chapel was opened there were 26 Sunday School teachers, both male and female, and 2 superintendents. The services held at this time used to be at 10.30am and 6.00pm while Sunday Schools were at 9.30am and 1.45pm.

⁶ This is the exact wording in the deeds.



WEST CLIFFE ROAD CHAPEL.

A few earnest workers banded together about the latter end of 1867, and met in an old chamber in the occupation of Mr. Jonas Dean, at the corner of Westgate and New Kirkgate, and in a few months—having secured a site on which to erect a chapel—commenced to erect a wooden building to accommodate about 250 persons. The contract was let and the place opened for worship in fourteen days from the letting of the contract. Being of an unsectarian and undenominational character, the services were conducted by laymen from the various churches in the town and district, under the title of the Town Mission Institute. Services were conducted here from March, 1868, until about the latter end of 1875. The Midland Railway Co. requiring the land for improvements, the trustees secured a site in Hall Lane from the Earl of Rosse, and resolved to build a substantial little chapel in which to conduct services, the present structure will seat 250 people. Its erection cost £2,650, including the land, and was opened on Christmas

Day, 1875. The trustees were left with a debt of £1,250, which has since been reduced to £950. There are about fifty members. The number of scholars attending the Sunday School is 220; teachers, male and female, 26, and two superintendents.

From Shipley through the camera 1901 by MCrabtree

Bradford Observer Tuesday Dec. 28th 1875

Page 3. An account of the opening of West Cliffe Road Chapel, Shipley.

The opening services in connection with the completion of West Cliff Road Chapel Shipley were held on Christmas Day and Sunday, and will be continuing on Sunday next. Under their old name of Shipley Town Mission the congregation met in a wooden chapel near the Oddfellows hall, which the Midland Railway Company cleared away for the extension of their goods yard. The purchase money mutually agreed upon in this transaction was £1,580, which, after paying off a mortgage of £500 upon the building, left the congregation with about £1000 towards another edifice. They have much cause for congratulations on having through the circumstances acquired a substantial and commodious building in place of the wooden erection. The new chapel has a frontage of simple Italian design to West Cliff Road, a thoroughfare recently made upon a portion of Lady Rosse's estate, communicating from Hall Lane to Bingley Road. It is admirably arranged for the purpose required by the congregation, and consists of a preaching-room with entrance from West Cliff Road, and lofty well-lighted school-room beneath, having two entrances on a level with the side streets. The chapel, which is also lofty and well-lighted, has accommodation for about 450 persons. The seats are of a comfortable pattern, stained and varnished, and there is an ample platform, with projecting pulpit, which is reached from the vestry in the school-room. In the rear of the building the architect has arranged for two dwellings, which may be added to the chapel, should such a course be necessary at any time. The architects were Messrs. Crabtree and Son, of Shipley. The cost inclusive of the land, has been about £2300. Towards this the committee have the £1000 mentioned above, and they have received since in subscriptions £360. It is hoped that with the receipts of the opening services this sum will be increased to above £400, leaving a deficit of between £800 and £900. As the congregation have been generously supported in their endeavours thus far, they do not doubt their ability to grapple with the above debt. Among other helps received toward the furnishing of the new chapel, Mr H. Vernon has contributed a very handsome Bible and velvet cushion for the pulpit. Since their removal to the new chapel, although no alterations have taken place in other respects, the congregation have adopted the name of the West Cliff Road Christian Church. All the pulpit ministrations are by lay preachers, assisted by services rendered by ministers of the neighbourhood. They have a good Sunday School and an increasing congregation. Although preachings have been held for several months in the school-room, the first services in the chapel were conducted on Christmas Day morning by Rev D. R. Cowan of Saltaire. On the evening of the same day, a public tea and meeting were held, when the chair was taken by Mr T. Upton of Idle, and addresses were given by several ministers and others.

1915-1920 – Ivy Rennard's Memories of Westcliffe

Miss Ivy Rennard (later Sunderland) taught in the Sunday School, sang in the choir, and performed in the church's orchestra and concert party.

After the turn of the century, to combat what was then seen as the attractions of the 'world' (an unusual example being bicycle riding) and the growing popularity of Darwinism, churches and chapels became more social to try and keep up their numbers. Thus, clubs, classes and other interests began to be held under church roofs.

Westcliffe was one of these churches developing new social activities and interests. A choir had already been in existence for some time and it often joined choirs from other chapels to perform Handel's Messiah, including at Windhill Mission.

The first new social group was an orchestra. The orchestra consisted of 4 first violins, 4 second violins, 1 cello, 1 flute, 1 oboe and a double bass.

Orchestra members included the violinists Bert and Gladys Ryall, Mr A. Slingsby and Miss I Rennard. George and Alfred Guilds played violin and cello while Herbert Parker played Oboe. Other orchestra members are named as Harold Halton, Joe Sutcliffe and Arthur Sunderland (who sometimes played double bass when the normal player was absent). Mr Lightfoot played the organ alternatively with one of the Mr Sutcliffes.

The orchestra used to visit Baildon Green Chapel and Wrose Hill Chapel to play at "Stand-ups". These were often anniversaries and were nearly always followed by a ham tea.

Westcliffe also had a concert party called the Comedy 8. This included Ivy Rennard and May Ogden who sang as "Bobbie and Billie" and other players named as Harold Home, Fred Ives and Arthur Sunderland.

The "Comedy 8" was under the control of Mr Jennings (whose main job was the Co-op manager at Thackley) and they had rehearsals every Wednesday. It was a light-hearted group who went around performing at the churches and chapels in the area. Such things as 'Paddy McGinty's Goat' and 'If you were the only girl in the world' were hot favourites and often had an encore was called for.

The church services at this time were Sunday School 2pm-3pm followed immediately by a main service at which the orchestra played. There was also a service in the evening.

Ivy Rennard's memoirs make note of a few characters amongst the congregation. Mrs Emmott collected "doctors' money"⁷, a kind of insurance to pay for the doctor when you were ill. Mr Dawson was fond of shouting "Praise the Lord" and "Amen" and requesting the last verse of a hymn to be played again. Laud Midgley for an unknown reason always sat separately to his wife.

During the four years of the period when Ivy Rennard attended Westcliffe chapel there was a tragic incident involving Ivy's sister, Annie Gerrard. She was the caretaker of the chapel and lived in the cottages at the back of the church with her husband and three-year-old daughter. On an unknown date, Annie sent for the chimney sweep to clear out the soot in the cottages and he found a soot-box in the attic. When the chimney sweep showed this to Annie (presumably from a height), he unfortunately dropped the soot-box on her and she inhaled a large amount of soot. Within three weeks she died from resulting lung difficulties, leaving her small child motherless.

⁷ 'Doctors' money' was collected until 1947 when the NHS came into being. Before the NHS, the 1911 Insurance Act provided for part of the cost of patients' medical care but doctors still had to collect the rest of their fee.

At this time there was no minister or pastor but speakers came from different churches and chapels in the district. There were no marriages performed there either.

1941-1954 – Connie Pitchforth’s memories of Westcliffe Chapel

A large group of people came from Rosse Street Baptist Chapel (Rosse Street Rebels) after a misunderstanding at their church.

Westcliffe was struggling to keep going at this time, although the orchestra and choir were still active. When the War broke out, the Sunday School room downstairs was used as a barracks and as a postal sorting office, so the Sunday School was held upstairs during this time.

Three ladies led the Sunday School. They produced the Sunday School Anniversaries “Cantatas” which they were very professionally done and had rehearsals twice weekly from the first week in March until the dress rehearsal in May. Every child in the Sunday School took part, from the babies to the senior scholars (3-16 years).

The Sunday School teachers and their roles in the cantatas were:

- Miss Edith Copley Organised speaking parts
- Miss Nellie Riddiough Played the piano
- Mrs. Clair Beaton In charge of the singing

These cantatas took the form of a story and used large props with the songs. Examples include:

- The Lighthouse – a cardboard lighthouse was built in the pulpit and the performance finale saw a light at the top switched on to depict the Light of the World.
- God’s Word a Picture – a large flannelgraph was set up and each child added their piece of the picture after singing a solo or reciting.
- The Crown – a large crown was built up over the performance with different jewels added.

A special platform was erected for these performances during the war but after the war the Sunday School and their performances returned downstairs.

The Sunday School also did a pantomime every year, which involved most of the congregation. Fathers helped with the scenery, mothers made the costumes, and other ladies of the chapel provided refreshments.

During this time, a new pastor came to the Chapel: Mr Stanley Meredith. No pastor had been appointed to the church prior to the second World War but Mr Meredith was extremely popular and took the time to support the congregation’s teenagers. He started a group called ‘The Concert Party’ which put on sketches which toured around many of the churches in the Shipley and Bradford area, raising funds for each hosting church.

The group consisted of:

- Producer Stanley Meredith (Pastor)
- Stage Manager Charles Beaton
- Choreographer Claire Beaton
- Pianist Joyce Partington
- Cast Harold Giles (Sunday School Secretary), Jack Cockerham, Arthur Simpson (Assistant Pastor), Dorothy Smith, Connie Pitchforth.

In 1951, Stanley Meredith left Westcliffe Chapel. Mr Arthur Simpson took over but was reportedly never as popular as Meredith. He linked Westcliffe Chapel with the local Eccleshill Baptist Church and changed the tradition of babies being christened to the Baptist practice of dedicating them. He also introduced the young people of Westcliffe to a similar youth group at Eccleshill Baptist Church. During this time, Westcliffe Road was a typical thriving Chapel. There was a Parents' Association, Sunday School trips, choir trips, Saturday afternoon Jumble Sales, and Bazaars.

- Monday evening Sunday School teacher preparation classes
 - Tuesday Bible class
 - Wednesday Choir practice
 - Thursday Gang Show rehearsal
 - Friday Youth club
 - Saturday Social Evening
 - Sunday Church services
- (Concerts and garden parties were also held.)

This period of time where pastors led the church was unusual in Westcliffe's history and the church only had full-time pastors for a span of about 26 years.

Known Pastors:

- 1946-47 Mr Stanley Meredith assisted by Mr Arthur Simpson
- 1951 Mr Arthur Simpson
- ? Mr Brookes
- ? Mr Brown
- 1959 Mr Arthur Simpson (returning)

1955-1961 – Mr & Mrs Bray's Memories of Westcliffe Road Chapel

Westcliffe had always classified itself as a Non-conformist church but did use the Methodist Hymn Book and often had preachers from Methodist churches. These included Archie Vickerman of Windhill Methodist Mission, Mr A. Unwin, and Rev S. Wilson.

Whitsuntide in the 1950s was quite a festival. New clothes were worn and the congregation went round the streets and to hospitals singing. After this, they returned to Westcliffe Chapel for “long bun” and tea, followed by games.

The Sunday School Secretary in these years was Jack Cockerham and the assistant was Mr Bray, who also pumped the organ (the organ was motorised in 1956). There was a very large Sunday School and it had two meetings: morning at 9.30am-10.15am and afternoons at 2.00pm-3.00pm.

When Pastor Arthur Simpson left Westcliffe for the second time, member numbers began to dwindle. In 1961 a Brethren congregation from Salem chapel (in neighbouring Otley Road, Shipley) joined themselves to the very small group of people still attending Westcliffe Chapel. The church building was shared for a time until the last few members of the original congregation handed over the deeds to the thriving membership of the Brethren church. Around this time, the Brethren church introduced adult baptisms and removed many of the social activities.

1961-Present – Changing Times

When Westcliffe Chapel was originally built, it was almost hidden by rows of streets and back-to-back terrace houses. These were demolished in the 1960s when a tax computer centre was planned to be built. However, due to changing governmental plans and delays, the church building ended up stood on its own surrounded by beautiful parkland for several years.

During the late 1960s, plans were made to pull down Westcliffe Chapel and build a modern church building at the back of the local swimming baths. Fortunately for the original building, a change of Local Authority from Shipley to Bradford led to a cancellation of the new chapel building. After that, extensive alterations took place inside the Chapel and the organ was rebuilt to a cost of approximately £20,480. The work was completed and the building reopened on 1st March 1980.

On 30th April 1982, Westcliffe Chapel became a listed building and was protected from demolition. It was noted at the time that the building was still being used for its original purpose despite the passage of 109 years.

The church’s previously sparse surroundings gradually disappeared as the 1980s continued. In 1983, a large Asda supermarket and car park were commissioned and then built behind the chapel, opening in the summer of 1984. Sheltered homes and a senior citizens’ activity building were then built at two sides of the chapel in 1986. The chapel stood surrounded by homes once more, as it had done in previous years.

An application to the Charity Commission for charitable status was submitted in 2013 and was granted at the beginning of January 2014 with the registered charity number 1155190.

Building Work & Renovation History

The following renovation history was researched and collated in 2019 by a member of the Church.

Westcliffe Road Christian Church is a grade II listed building. See references below:

- <http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-337564-westcliffe-road-methodist-chapel-shIPLEY>
- <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1133529>

An extract from a booklet produced to celebrate the Centenary of the church building is accessible via [“Centenary 1875 to 1975”](#).

Internal Renovation

Originally, the upstairs main hall had pews and choir stalls on either side of its pipe organ. In November 1978, internal renovation took place to remove the pews, dismantle the organ and replace plaster on the walls. The organ was then re-built (mainly by two members of the church) and a new floor covering added before new plastic chairs and other furnishings were added. This work was finished in March 1980 and celebrated with an opening service.

The three photos below show the hall before and after these renovations.





Towards the mid-2010s, leaking water was noticed to have damaged the internal walls of the church building and in 2016 external repairs were undertaken to the roof and guttering to prevent this continuing. Early in 2017, after the internal plaster had dried out and it was certain that rainwater was no longer affecting the internal décor, new work began to refurbish the entrance foyer and the upstairs main hall was commenced. In February, the foyer was fully re-plastered and painted while the main hall had smaller plaster repair work done.

Shortly after this work was completed, the old pipe organ (that had not been working since 2013 when dust from replacement windows had got into the works) was removed and a prayer room created in the space where the organ pipes had resided. The stage at the front of the main hall was removed along with the slightly raised floor area used for seating. Carpet tiles were laid in the newly level space and new furnishings (including chairs, a lectern, and a communion table) were purchased. New internal doors for the main hall were also added.

Photo of the main hall before 2017 renovations.



Photos taken after 2017 renovations.



Further internal renovations were undertaken between June and August 2019, this time to the ground floor rooms. The main room, known as the Schoolroom, had several alterations made, most prominently to the platform housing the baptistery. This was lowered to ground level and the storage room to the side of it was reduced in size to expand the size of the Schoolroom and remove the narrow hallway leading to entrance foyer. At the same time, the ground floor kitchen was extended and had new fittings. Further alterations for other parts of the ground floor are planned as funds allow.

Photos of the Schoolroom before and during the renovations. Note the raised stage of the baptistery.





Photo taken after most of the Schoolroom renovations are completed.



External Renovation

The following photos were both taken prior to 1974. This first photo was taken before the back-to-back terrace houses were demolished in the 1960s.



This second photo was taken after the church building was sandblasted but before Westcliffe Medical Centre, Asda supermarket, and 'The Anchorage' housing complex were built in 1974 (and later).



In 2013, major external renovations were undertaken. All the window frames, glazing and most external doors were replaced while some masonry repair work was also carried out. This was at a cost in excess of £48,000 all funded by the Church members and existing funds. In accordance with the building's Grade II listing, the design of the new window frames was in keeping with the original frames.

In 2016 repairs were made to the roof after a leak had caused damage to internal plasterwork.