

# FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE ....

## *A short history of the chapels and churches of Denholme*

### **Introduction**

Like many other villages in the West Riding of Yorkshire, Denholme saw a big increase in the population of the village in the 1800's. People had moved into the area because of the establishment of a textile mill build by the Foster family. They also sort work in the local quarries, the building of the local reservoirs, and the laying of a new railway. They came seeking employment, but many settled in the village in housing built by the local mill owners, and other enterprising builders. These people brought with them the desire to continue worshipping in a building of their chosen denomination, as many already belonged to churches and chapels in the area they had originally travelled from. So various groups started meeting at first in their own homes, and then as members grew, they made plans to build their own places of worship, new chapels and churches. Within a very short period of time, the latter half of the 1800's, six new chapels and an Anglican church were built in this small village. Below a short history of the buildings.

## Methodist Chapels

### Denholme Wesleyan Methodist Chapel



The earliest recorded presence of a place of religion in Denholme was in 1760 when a builder called Michael Ogden started Methodist meetings in his own home. Mr Ogden was probably influenced by hearing, or being with other people who had heard John Wesley speak. We know that Wesley was in this area, not perhaps in Denholme, but certainly in Halifax, Bradford and Keighley. By 1793 the number of people attending the meetings in Mr Ogden's home had increased so much that he built a small chapel, which was really a small meeting room on top of two cottages. This was located in the area know as Edge Bottom. The first meeting room soon became too small and in 1823 a new chapel building was erected on the same site.

The building has long since been demolished but the graveyard still exists, and within it you can find the grave of Michael Ogden the founder member. You can also find the grave of Benjamin Foster, the relative of William Foster who died returning home in a snow storm, after picking up pieces of cloth woven by handloom weavers. Benjamin perished on Cockhill Moor and was supposedly found alongside his horse with his dog Shep laid across his chest to keep him warm. The graveyard is now in private ownership and permission should be sought before visiting the graves.

As the Methodist cause grew in Denholme the Wesleyans were able to build an even bigger chapel on a new site located further up the road at what is now the top of Foster Park Road. Opened in 1869, it was a rather grand imposing building with seating for over 700 people.

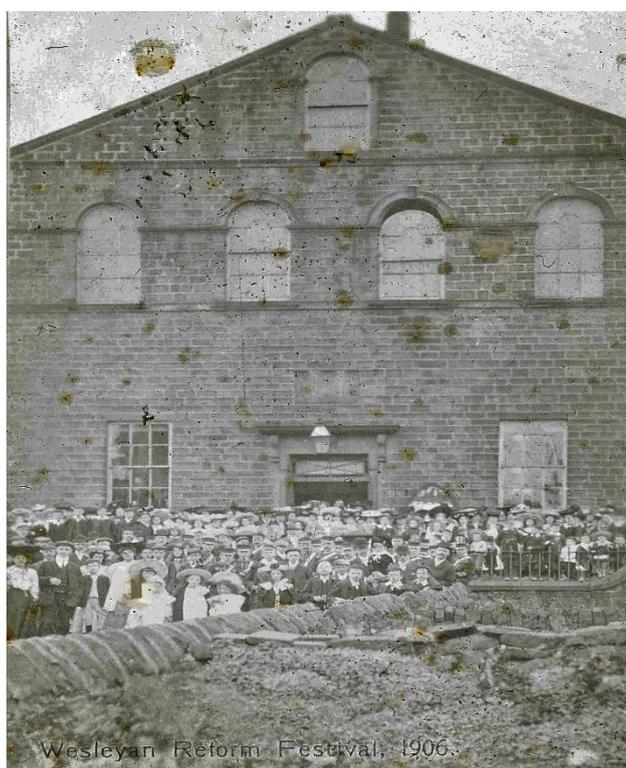
In 1899 a Sunday School was erected alongside the chapel, replacing an older Sunday School building at Lodge Gate. The Lodge Gate building dates back to 1838 and was also used for a short time by the Independents before they could raise enough funds to

build their own chapel. It went on later to become a spinning mill and is now a private house.

The Methodists had a reputation for abstinence and members were expected to sign up and be entered on the Roll of Abstainers. An annual certificate was issued if they did, I wonder what the local brewery thought of that?

I am not sure why but in 1953 a final service was held in the impressive Wesleyan Methodist Chapel building. We can only guess that it had become perhaps too commodious for the congregation to use, or that they might have been facing structural problems such as dry rot. Whatever the reason, the congregation continued to hold services in the Sunday School building until 1964 when the small aging congregation dispersed, and the chapel was closed. I have been told that this building was also used as a Baby Clinic and for preparing school meals. The Sunday School was finally sold and demolished in 1972 so new housing could be build upon the site. However nobody seems to remember the exact date when the chapel building was demolished, it could have been in 1953 or at a later date? I would be interested in finding out if anyone has a record of this.

### **Methodist Independent Reform Chapel**



Another branch of the Methodist church built a chapel at Pump Hill in 1853, it was called the Methodist Independent Reform Chapel. It was enlarged in 1873 and closed I believe in 1968. The folk from this chapel were known in Denholme as the 'Reformers'. This building was demolished in 1975, and houses have now been built on the site of the chapel building, although the graveyard still remains intact.

## **Denholme Primitive Methodist Chapel**



Arnold Whalley in his notes talks about a small Primitive Methodist Chapel, which he calls the 'Blackburn Chapel.' It was built in 1885 in the centre of Denholme on land which is now the Co-op car park. I understand this branch of the Methodist cause went on to build a further chapel at Harecroft, and the chapel in Denholme didn't survive for very long. It also had links with the chapel at the Clough. This building was later taken over by the Salvation Army for a while, then owned by the Cooperative Society, before it was acquired by the Catholic Church as St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church. The building has now been demolished.

## **Denholme Clough Primitive Methodist Chapel**



The last Methodist chapel we can trace in Denholme was up at Denholme Gate. It was opened as the Denholme Clough Primitive Methodist Chapel in 1834, and continued to function until 1982. We are told that in the early days, in candlelight, without hymn books, an elderly trustee recited the words of the hymns, two lines at a time, and did his best with an old brass fiddle. Later on they acquired a harmonium, and then in 1920 a new organ was purchased and dedicated to the memory of the lads who died in the First World War. The building still exists but is now a private dwelling.

## **Denholme Independent Chapel**



The only chapel building still remaining in use in Denholme is the Independent Chapel (Congregational Chapel) on Keighley Road. These chapel folk were known as the 'Independents' a name which was frequently given to the Congregationalists because they were free from the established church, and governed themselves independently. Some of the folk who settled in Denholme originally travelled to Kipping Chapel in Thornton to attend services, but that must have seemed a long way for them to walk, especially in the winter months, so they started meeting in what I think were rooms borrowed from the Methodists in the Sunday School Building at Lodge Gate.

In February 1843 a Denholme Congregational Chapel was founded with a membership list of 9 people. Revd James Gregory who was minister at Kipping Chapel was involved in the setting up of the chapel and led the first service at Denholme. An appeal was started for a building, money was raised and in 1844 the foundation stone was laid. Cost of the land purchased was just £100 and the building itself finished and opened on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 1845 at a cost of £1000. The costs were greatly reduced due to the labours of the congregation; they worked in the mill during the day and laboured on the building during their spare time.

The first minister for the chapel was called in 1848 and lived in the manse (Carr House) built in 1848 at a cost of £330. Things seemed initially to be going well, however by the

1860's the chapel were floundering, and Mr John Hill a lay pastor from Allerton came over to preach and help the congregation in 1868. They were greatly encouraged by his presence, and in 1869 numbers had grown again, and a Sunday School was built at a cost of £100. During the eight years that Mr Hill was involved the chapel, members grew from 51 to 108, and scholars from 37 to 216. Mr Hill was nicknamed the 'Bishop of Denholme' and his horse the 'Evangelistic horse' because they travelled so regularly to this chapel. In the Chapel's Jubilee Celebration booklet of 1894, it is estimated that his journeys probably covered a total of 1700 miles. Mr Hill later became Alderman Hill, serving for many years in Bradford, and doing other good works. The Jubilee Booklet however records number of scholars down to 157, but things must have been going well for the chapel building was extended in 1896.

This building has stood the test of time but there have been repairs needed over the years. In 1948 dry rot was discovered in the roof timbers, and the cost of putting it right around £1,800, a large sum for a small congregation. As with the original building, some of work was done by members of the congregation to save costs. The building was closed for a time, but re-opened with a dedication service on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1951. Mr Jack Whitaker chapel secretary gave the key to Mrs Clara Stow, the oldest member, to open the doors for the service. Afterwards a special chromium plated key and plaque to commemorate her part in the proceedings was presented to her by the youngest member present, Mr Godfrey Bancroft, a descendant of one of the earliest members.

In 1972 the congregation at Denholme voted to join in with a new partnership between the Presbyterian Church of England, and the Congregational Church in England and Wales, this subsequently became the denomination called the United Reformed Church. So the name of the chapel was then changed to Denholme United Reformed Church. This wasn't the last name the church was to have, for in 1986 members were approached by the Denholme Baptist Church asking if consideration could be given to a partnership of the two churches. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1986 the first joint service was held in the URC building, and subsequently the two churches went on to become Denholme Edge Church, a new name for a new ecumenical partnership between the URC and Baptists.

During 1989 the building was extensively refurbished, the pews removed and the floor levelled. The old Sunday School building was demolished and a new meeting room, toilets and a kitchen added to the chapel building. This was at a cost of over £100,000 raised from grants, funds received from the sale of the Baptist Chapel, and donations from the congregation and community. In March 1990 a special service attended by the Rt Revd Robert Williamson, Bishop of Bradford, dedicated the new extension. Maybe it was the hope of the congregation that their ecumenical links would perhaps grow even further?

## Denholme Baptist Chapel



Workers at the mill had also come from the Baptist faith, and like those from the congregational denomination they at first travelled to a nearby Baptist village chapel at Queensbury. They soon became tired of the journey and resolved to establish a preaching place of worship in Denholme. They began renting a cottage at Lodge Gate, and a subscription fund was started in 1845 to erect their own building.

In 1851 a small school building was put up on land at the bottom of what is now Chapel Street, at a cost of £173. It took the members 10 years to pay off this debt, and when they did they felt they could increase the fee paid to preachers from 1d to 2d. In the Centenary booklet there is mention of one occasion when the baptistry was leaking, so they took the baptism candidate up to Shay Clough Reservoir for the baptism service. This building soon became too small and more land was purchased enabling a new Baptist chapel to be built higher up on the site which was opened in 1867, at a cost of £1,450. In 1872 land for a new Sunday School was given by Fosters, and in 1883 the Sunday School building was added to the chapel building at a cost of £1,250. I have copies of a hand written script from 1883 buried in a bottle deposited under the

memorial stone of the new school. This was retrieved when the building was demolished in 1989. It gives an interesting account of the village, putting the population at 4,000 inhabitants, an increase from today, as well as giving information about the chapel itself.

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For many years the singing in the chapel was accompanied by a harmonium, but in 1904 a two-manual organ was installed at a cost of £400. A gift of £175 towards this was received from Mr Carnegie. Electricity was installed in both the chapel and Sunday school building in 1929. Presumably before then the building was lit by gas or oil lamps.

Sadly this building also fell victim to the dreaded dry rot. In October 1979 the last service was held in the chapel building, but services continued in the Sunday School until November 1980, when the Baptists found alternative accommodation in the former Council offices at Maine Villa in Longhouse Lane. (This had become a community building).

After discussion with the United Reformed Church (Independent Chapel), the story of which we have already heard, the Baptists came to join in a new ecumenical partnership in 1986.

## **St. Paul's Church, Denholme**

The last building to mention is the impressive 'minister on the hill' - the name given to St. Paul's Church by the Bishop of Ripon, Bishop Langley at the Consecration Service in 1846 when Denholme became a separate Parish. Previous to that we can trace Denholme being part of the Chapelry of Thornton in the Parish of Bradford, which lasted until 1826 when Denholme became part of a new Parish of Wilsden and Denholme.



Why you may ask was it built so far away from the centre of the village? It was built to serve both Denholme village and the Clough area as it was thought that both these areas would grow towards each other, with the new church building at its heart. However after the rapid expansion of Denholme Mills by the Fosters, Denholme village left Denholme Clough way behind.

The Fosters were generous benefactors of the church throughout the time they remained in the village. William Foster was one of the first Church Wardens and William Garnett Foster (his great grandson) was also Warden for many years.

A little more about the building - the land for the Church was given by William Buck, one of the largest landowners in the area. The building, which was completed in 1846, was designed by J B Cantrill and is Early English style with a gothic tower. It cost £3,700 which was raised partly by subscription but also by grants from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Incorporated and Ripon Diocesan Societies. The east window, of beautiful stained glass, was presented by Mr Jonathan Knowles. When the church was built in 1846 it only had one bell, but in 1870 a full peel of eight bells were installed.

In 1997, soon after the 150th Anniversary, it was found that the ceiling and roof were unsafe. The church closed quickly for repairs and the congregation met temporarily, in the Mechanics Institute. The repairs needed were found to be extensive and although efforts were made to raise the funds, it was estimated repairs could cost over £200,000.

It was with great reluctance that the building, and part of the churchyard were put up for sale.

A final Open Air Service of Farewell for the building was held in the new graveyard on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> September 1999. Eventually a property was bought by the Bradford Diocese

on Longhouse Lane (former doctor's surgery) for the congregation to use as a church, however in September 2008; the congregation of St. Paul's found a new home as part of a partnership at Denholme Edge Church. (Now Denholme Shared Church)

If you are interested in the history of this church – Terry Hanson has written a very full account in his book *'The Minister in the Hills'* published in 2011, a copy of which can be found in the Denholme Community Library.

## **Chapel and Church Life**

In the past chapels and churches were very much a part of the social life of the village. There were mid week socials, women's groups, men's fellowship groups, Bible classes, Whit Sunday processions, chapel outings by omnibus, 'at homes', bazaars and garden parties, Boy's Brigade, Girls Fellowship meetings, in addition to services held both morning and evening.

Music was important and all the churches and chapels had their own choirs. Special occasions would always include a rousing rendition of a popular anthem by the choir, and a performance by a renowned soloist. Amateur dramatics also played a part, and the Independent Chapel had a reputation for its concert group in the 1940's.



*Moonlight and Magic 1949 Denholme Independent Players*

St. Paul's Church also entertained full audiences at their many productions in the 1960's, and there were never any seats to spare. The Sunday School Anniversaries particularly in the chapels was a great occasion when former scholars would return to meet up with past friends. It was often a time for new clothes and shoes for the children. The building would be full, and there was always competition between the different chapels and the church, to see who could raise the most money in the retiring collection. The service was then followed by a tea. Chapel and church teas were renowned for their laden tables with homemade goodies, 200 people attended St Paul's Church Jubilee Tea in 1896. Often these teas were of the knife and folk variety with plates of ham, tongue and beef. Even in wartime, they would do their best to put on a good spread.

On a Sunday services were held both morning and evening, with Sunday School for the children in the afternoon. Before the introduction of the Board School in Denholme in 1875, Sunday School provided the only teaching in reading and writing that many young people received.



*Sunday School Class Independent Chapel*

Preaching at local chapels was always done with zeal and enthusiasm, often by lay preachers who travelled some distance from Keighley, Halifax and Bradford, often walking on foot, or catching the tram to Thornton or Causeway Foot. Often they preached both morning and evening, and then they would be provided with a meal by one of the chapel folk, and sometimes even a bed for night if the winter weather permitted them returning home that day.

### **On the Move**

Christians in the village of Denholme over the years have been constantly on the move, building and rebuilding their spiritual homes. Sadly the six church and chapel buildings have now been reduced to just one! Today we have a Local Ecumenical Partnership of three denominations, the Baptists, Church of England, and the United Reformed Church who meet and worship together in the old Independent Chapel. Chapel and church life today may be very different, but there is still a Christian presence in the village at Denholme Shared Church.

Sometime ago I was given a copy of a poem about a character called 'Old Mark'. It shows that there will always be disputes, even religious folk can fall out, in this case it looks as if it was over the wording on a gravestone. Did it really happen or was it a just a story? Well we do know that his burial caused a lot of controversy to break out in the village. The inscription on the headstone bore doubt about the hereafter, and so it was tipped on to it's face by some angry villagers. A plot was then hatched to remove the remains, whether this was done with full approval or not we don't know. What we do know is that records show Mark Illingworth was interred in Southgate Baptist Chapel graveyard in August 1877, and that he was reburied in the Wesleyan Reform Graveyard in 1880.

## The Full Account of the Removal of Old Mark's Remains – 21<sup>st</sup> Oct 1880

On the twentieth of October Jonas and his men,  
They went to the Baptist Chapel to see the Denholme Ten.  
They went to the front gate, but admittance could not find,  
So Jonas took his men and they all went in behind.

“I’ve come to take me father up as you are all aware”,  
But the Denholme Ten, they all declared Old Mark we  
cannot spare.  
“It’s not Old Mark that troubles us, as you can plainly see,  
It’s the stone that’s down upon his face that does not with us agree.”

“I’m fully bent to have him up before the break of day,  
Commence my men, get hold the stone and put in on the dray.”  
They all obeyed the orders, with others to their aid,  
And the men commenced to dig with mattock and with spade.

During the time the men were digging,  
The yard was filled with men and women.  
Some were standing, and some were sitting,  
Waiting to see the old Doctors flitting.

About 2.0am Old Mark was found,  
And brought once more upon the ground.  
You’d have heard a pin drop on the floor,  
When Old Mark’s coffin was seen once more.

They laid him down upon the ground,  
And all the people came clustering around.  
While Jonas, for some men did search,  
To take him to another church.

Jonas had no trouble, some men to find,  
They took him up and went out behind.  
These men did carry with right good will,  
Until they were going up Pump Hill.

Of course these men, they did their best,  
But they had to put him down to rest.  
It seemed rather strange for a dead man to talk,  
But I understand he wanted to walk

“No” said one of the bearers, his name was Old Barb,  
“You must lie still Old Doctor till we get thee in yard.  
We, like brave men, our work we’ll perform,  
You shall go the chapel they called the Reform.”

“Now my men, make another formation,  
I want us to get to our destination”.  
And very soon their efforts were crowned,  
When they landed Old Mark in the delfoil ground.

As they went up the yard the moon did shine,  
They buried Old Mark for a second time.  
He was buried first where they did not fancy,  
So they brought him here by Old Will and Nancy.

Here lies Old Mark, he died in Christ,  
Only lived once, but was buried twice.  
First time he was buried where he wasn't wanted,  
He was reburied here when the licence was granted.

May Old Mark rest and remain in the ground,  
Until the final trumpet shall sound.  
I hope and trust the sound will be,  
“Arise Old Mark and come unto me”.

### **Acknowledgements**

This is only a brief history which I have compiled using archives collected over the years, and stories that other people have shared. I chose the title “From Cradle to Grave” as for many people their first visit to a chapel or church in the area would have been when they were brought for baptism as a child. Their final visit would perhaps have been for their funeral service.

I am grateful to those who have shared memories and photographs, but I am sure there are many stories still out there, waiting to be told. In particular I would welcome information and memorabilia relating to the four Methodist chapels as little seems to be written or known about them.

My thanks go to Maurice Green for sharing photographs and also to Janet Ackroyd for her drawing of Denholme Independent Chapel on the front cover.

Judith Drake July 2023

### **Resources used:**

Cudworth, William - Round about Bradford. 1876

Denholme Independent Chapel Jubilee Celebration Booklet 1894

Denholme Independent Chapel Centenary Celebrations Booklet 1944

Denhome Baptist Church Centenary Souvenir 1946

William Driver - Methodism in Denholme (A paper read to the Centenary Meeting 1893)

Hanson, Terry - Denholme the village, the people and the ‘Minister in the Hills’

