

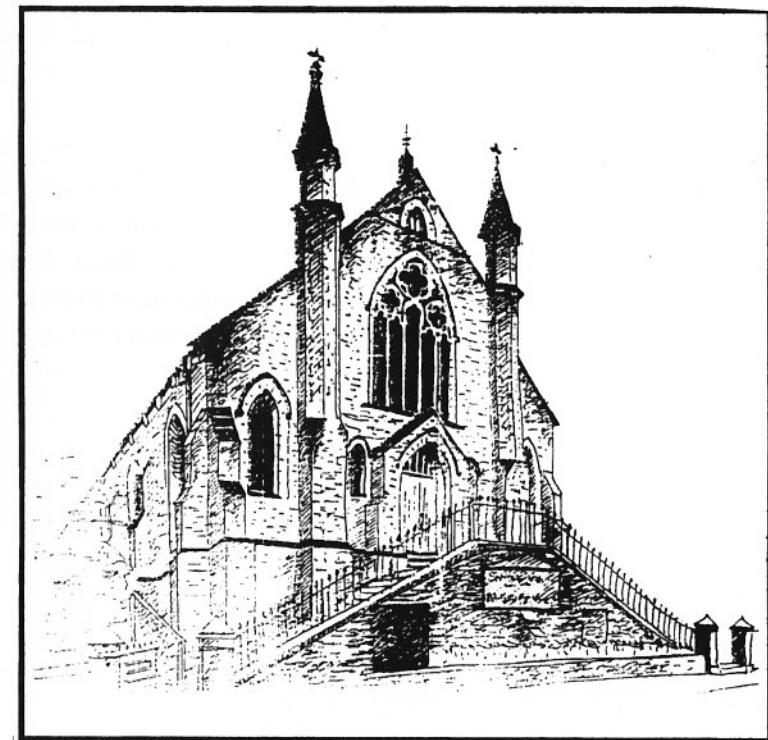
6.

Shotley Bridge Methodist Church 1894 - 2004



Photograph of Interior of Church

1963

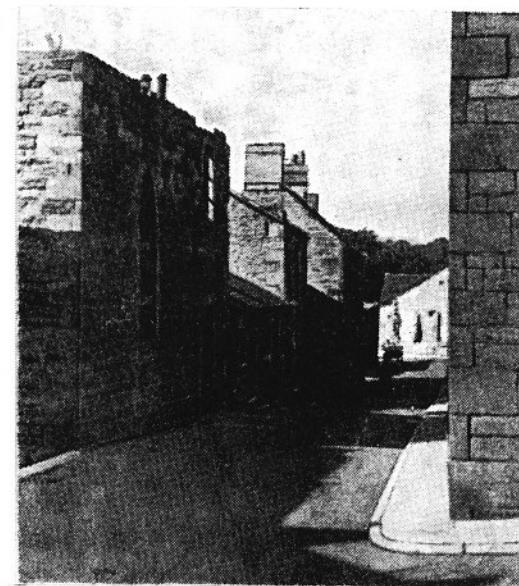


Shotley Bridge Methodist Church stands on ground which rises steeply above the bend in Front Street. Two flights of steps lead up from the pavement to the entrance at the centre of the gable wall which, high up, bears the carved inscription "PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHAPEL, 1894". This year the Church celebrates its 110th anniversary, but it was not the first Methodist Church to be built in Shotley Bridge.

The first Methodists in the village met for worship in a room near the Flour Mill. In 1814 the Wesleyans, who the year before had numbered only twelve members built a Chapel in Wood Street opposite Messenger Bank on land given by Christopher Oley, one of the German Swordmakers.

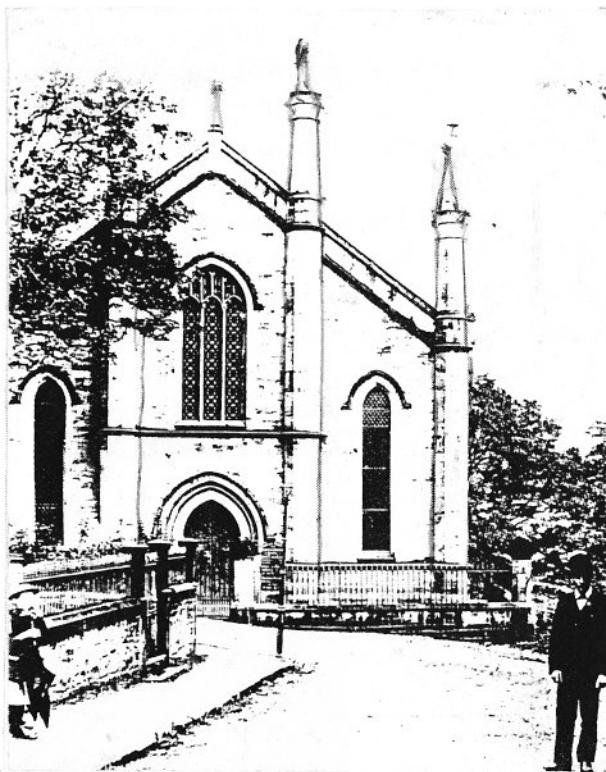
In 1953 the 'Solinger Tageblatt', the Local Newspaper of Solinger, from which the swordmakers originally came, published a photograph of the entire front wall showing the entrance doorway, the tall main window with a pointed head, and a small upper window. Later the upper part of the stonework was taken down and the empty shell of the former Chapel was totally demolished in 2002.

The Wood St.
Wesleyan
Chapel
built 1814



2.

In 1855 Trinity Methodist Church was built at the West end of The Terrace (above the present Chinese Takeaway) to house the growing Wesleyan congregation. Later, in 1905 a large Sunday School building was built alongside it, which is now the Village Hall. The Church building was pulled down in the mid 1950's leaving only an empty space now used for parking cars and the little used steps down to Church Bank.



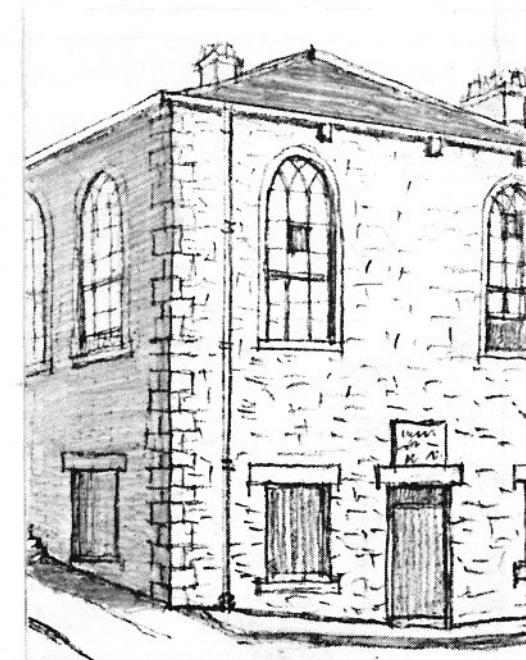
Trinity
(Wesleyan)
Methodist
Church
built 1855

The Primitive Methodists broke away, in 1812, from the Wesleyan parent body and ten years later several Missions came to Shotley Bridge. One at Newlands, on Christmas Day 1822 held a Prayer Meeting at 5:00 in the morning, a Communion Service at 10:00 a.m., a Preaching Service at 1:30 p.m. and a Love Feast in the evening. A full day indeed!

3.

A small Chapel was built in Cutler's Hall Road in 1822, followed in 1852 by a larger one at the corner of Wood Street and Green Street, near the present Webster's Garage. It had a Sunday School on the lower floor and a room for worship above it, seating 300 people, entered from steps in Green Street. The Chapel was restricted in space and lacked amenities but seems to have been well liked. It was the scene of some powerful Revival Meetings.

When the new Church was completed in Front Street in 1895, the Old Chapel was sold and converted into two dwellings, existing until the building was demolished with most of Wood Street, by the Council in 1957.



Sketch of the old P.M. Chapel
in Green Street, built 1852

Land for the new Primitive Methodist Church on Front Street was obtained in 1866. Money was readily subscribed and at Easter in 1894 a Bazaar held in the nearby Assembly Rooms (built as a Temperance Hall) raised £160 - a large sum for those days.

The Foundation Stones of the Church and Sunday School were laid on Saturday the 25th August 1894, the ceremony attended by two Circuit Ministers and the local Baptist Minister - Inter-church fellowship evidently existed then as now! The Wesleyans on The Terrace lent their Church for the Evening Meeting. The building work must have gone well as the Church was opened, although not entirely finished, less than a year later. The main door was formally unlocked on Saturday 3rd August 1895, by the English wife of John Valedemar Faber, a prominent Danish businessman and Vice Consul in Newcastle, who lived at Derwent Dene. This was a large house, now demolished except for its lodge, which stood on the other side of the bridge.

Next day Services were held in the Church, conducted by the Rev. John Atkinson of York who had started his ministry in Shotley Bridge Green Street Chapel in 1854, and later became President of the P.M. Conference. Full accounts of the foundation laying and of the official opening Ceremony, the former with a wood cut illustrating the future church designed by John Race an architect from Wearside, were printed in the "Primitive Methodist; A weekly Journal of Denominational and General News".

To meet the cost of the building the Church had borrowed £800 from the P.M. Chapel Aid Society, this was paid off during the First World War, helped by a "Grand Bazaar" held in the Schoolroom in 1915. Both Trinity (Wesleyan) and the Primitive Methodist Churches survived the war and the difficult years which followed.

The union of the Methodist Churches in 1932 did not lead immediately to a merger of the two Churches in the village, but the events of the Second World War drew them together.

In 1950 it was agreed to close Trinity Church and retain the Front Street premises as the sole Methodist Church in the village. A much needed kitchen and toilets extension on the site adjoining Derwent Place was made possible by the sale of the old Trinity Sunday School building. Improvements were also made to the church organ, now one of the best in the Circuit. Alterations were made to the Vestry and Boiler Room as the heating system for the Church changed from coke to oil and then to gas as it is at present.

Further improvements followed in 1996-7 when the kitchen was enlarged and modernized, with a rearrangement of the toilets. Since then the need to make the premises more 'user friendly', particularly for people with disabilities has resulted in handrails being provided to steps outside and inside the building, non-slip matting to the Church Entrance Porch and safety nosings to an internal staircase. *The stone finials to the Church's front pinnacles were replaced 1998.* The situation of the Church, on a steep hillside and with only a limited amount of money available to spend on such work, unfortunately restricts further improvements for access to the building.

In 2000-1 the public address system within the building was improved and an audio-loop system added to assist those who use hearing aids.

Shotley Bridge Methodist Church can look back on 110 years of Christian worship and fellowship within this building and we pray that it may go forward in the service of God and the community here into the 21st. century.