

# ASTCOTE METHODIST CHURCH



A Brief History

The present Chapel was built in 1874 but Methodism in Astcote and the surrounding area can be traced back to the start of the 19th century. There is a record of a Wesleyan Chapel being built in 1811 where a congregation of 15 met for worship in the afternoons. In 1822 there was a membership of 27:

Edward Stamp	Hannah Bird	Arthur Heel
Mary Stamp	Susannah Bird	Elizabeth Pell
Hannah Stamp	Elizabeth Bird	William Pell
John Stamp	Sarah Bird	Hugh Ashby
Ann Stamp	Sarah Jones	Mary Ashby
Sarah Stamp	Jane Jones	Ann Lucas
Elizabeth Kingston	Hannah Waters	William Palmer
Sarah Gardiner	Thomas Waters	Martha Palmer
John Marriott	Thomas Evans	

The Methodist Society in Astcote belonged to the Towcester Wesleyan Methodist Circuit.

The Society of Primitive Methodists met for Worship as early as 1845 and belonged to the Northampton Primitive Methodist Circuit which points to the fact that there must have been two Methodist Societies in Astcote from 1845-1851 and maybe for a longer period of time than this. The Wesleyan Chapel was disposed of by the trustees on account of the few that attended in March 1851.

The Primitive Methodists in Northampton originated in 1834 as part of the Home Missions work. James Hurd was the first Missionary but found people 'difficult to get at, hard to move and unimpressionable'. For many years Missionaries carried on with little success. John Petty, a very devoted worker had to confess at the end of two years' work 'never did I labour in soil so unfruitful or see so little good resulting from my labours'. In 1852 it was said 'to a great extent that Northamptonshire was barren soil for Primitives'.

However, at length, earnest work and patient faith had its reward. Astcote was a much more fruitful area because there is a record of membership in 1845 of 12, and 11s 10d was paid to the Northampton Mission. Between 1845 and 1850 the Membership fluctuated between 12 and 21. This would indicate that a Society of Primitive Methodists were meeting regularly as a House Church, which is thought to be in the house next door to the Old Stores.

There is mention of an 'Auxiliary Chapel Opening' on 9th April 1854 with a Tea Meeting. Tea Meetings and Camp Meetings were held quite regularly as well as Revival meetings which were held every two years. In 1864 there was a Revival Meeting on 17th April and on 24th April a Missionary Sermon was given by Rev W. Durance.

The Society Steward in 1861 was Mr E. Ashby. In 1863, as well as Mr Ashby, we have the name of Mr. W. Steel as a Society Steward. A Circuit Plan of 1872 states that there

Note: Pre-decimalization our currency was shown as:  
£'s, shillings, and pence—shown as £ s d  
The UK was decimalized on 15th February, 1971

were two services on Sunday at 2pm and 6pm, and a monthly Class Meeting at 7pm on Thursdays 28th April, 19th May, 2nd June and 7th July with the Sunday School Anniversary on 19th May. The Society Steward was E. Clark and the Revs J.T. Brown and S.J. Wallis were the Circuit Ministers. A Local Preacher by the name of H. Cox lived in Astcote at that time.

The first baptism recorded is of a Thomas Skerry in 1844, which was conducted by Joseph Thomason. In 1874 Mary Steel, daughter of John and Ellen Steel, was baptised by Rev. J. Ashworth. Also a Thomas Ashby, son of Frederick and Phoebe Ashby, was baptised in the same year. Here we have the names of Ashby and Steel once again. These two families were later joined together when Kate Ashby married Ernest Jeffrey Steel, Other names recorded in the baptismal register from 1844-1878 were—Clark, Foster, Carter, James, Furniss and Hornsby.

In 1866 a list of Trustees were as follows:

William Steel	Sam Bird
John Harvey	? Nightingale
John Judkins	

All this was before 1874 when the present Chapel was built.

The builders were Hintons of Silverstone, another Methodist family. There is no record of the cost but in 1875 the building was insured for £250 with the Primitive Methodist Insurance Company. The premium was 2s 9d. The renewal premium for the following year was 7s 6d. The building was heated by a stove and grate, and lit by lamps and included a copper house and water closet.

Even from 1941-1949 it was only insured for £350.

In 1886 the Trustees were:

Ambrose Judkins	Thomas Whitfold
Thomas Cox	Joseph Whiting
Joseph Gibbs	Charles Howard
Thomas Singlehurst	

They had cause to seek a loan of £105 from Mr Longhurst of Reading, Berks. This was promised to be paid back with interest. There were annual payments of £5, £10, £20 and in 1914 there was still a balance owing of £60. It was 3rd September, 1916 before this last £60 was finally paid by Mr Judkins on behalf of the Astcote Trustees.

It was during this time that the Circuit had the Chapel locked and a chain put on the gate so that no-one could get in, because of the debt. Mr Arthur Pinkard recalls hearing how his grandfather, Ambrose Judkins, went down to the Chapel with a hatchet and cut the chain. It was said that it took longer to lock the place than it took for the people to get back in.

It was in 1898 that the name of Pinkard is mentioned when a Thomas John, son of Thomas and Ellen Pinkard was baptised. In 1907 a Charles William Tester was baptised by Mr David Pinkard who was a Preacher and the father of Mr Arthur Pinkard, who also became a Preacher. Once again two well known families were united in marriage when Arthur's sister, Lucy Annie, married Ernest Cyril Steel.

In 1917 the Chapel and School room were renovated and repaired, inside and out, by E.D. Sharman & Son, builders, at a cost of £60 18s 2d with other work costing £37 4s 6d.

This included:

- Coving round floor of church,
- Stencilling round windows, frieze and dado,
- New coal stove,
- New furnace door,
- Ornamental cresting above entrance lobby,
- A new access door to the roof.

This door is on the end of the Chapel and is still there today in the roof of the new extension. It was at this time that the pulpit was altered.

The original porch has also been altered. There were two doors, one on either side of the lobby leading into the chapel and there were big pews up to the front with smaller ones at the side. (There is now just one door leading to a central aisle). This work was paid for by the Pearce family, a well known Methodist family in Northampton.

In 1916 enquiries were made about purchasing a piece of land adjoining the Chapel. A Mr Pearse of Wood & Co, Estate Agents of 2 Dergate, Northampton dealt with this. In a note dated 21st October, 1916 it states 'willing for you to have the land for £5 providing you pay expenses should the amount be above £1 1s'. It wasn't until 25th September, 1918 however that this land was eventually purchased.

In 1939 Mr Pinkard paid £1 4s 6d for floor covering.

In 1944 12s 5d was paid for cementing the gable end of the Chapel.

In 1945 more renovations and repairs:

New Doors,

3 Oak sills,

Painting windows, door and all wood work

At a cost of £15 2s 6d.

In 1947 Mr F. Heeler carried out work at a cost of £2 12s He was the caretaker. During the Second World War 5 shillings was paid annually for War Damage Insurance in case of bombing.

The railings in front of the Chapel were removed during the war for munitions. It is not known whether the insurance covered this or not. In July 1946 the American organ was overhauled for 10s by Maurice Frost of Kislingbury, Piano-forte and Organ Repairer.

In 1993 Moulton Methodist Church closed and their organ was put up for sale. Mr David Rowden of Eastcote bought it and had it installed at the Chapel.

In 1899 the baptism of Amy Elizabeth Gowen, daughter of James and Annie Elizabeth Gowen was recorded. Amy went on to be one of the organists at Astcote. Other organists were Sidney Dean, Stan Reynolds, Sidney Hinton (whose grandfather built the chapel), Stella Evans, and John Quick who came from Northampton with Mr Harold Starsmore when he was Lay Pastor in charge of Astcote.

Harold Starsmore is remembered with great affection for the wonderful work he did at Astcote. It was in 1967 that Astcote Chapel was about to be closed when Harold Starsmore said to the Circuit 'let me have it and we'll keep it going'. This he did for 17 years until he retired in 1984. Together with a full-time job, he took over as Lay Pastor and brought Astcote back to life. He visited members regularly and preached on Sundays. Annual Flower Festivals began around this time on the Church Anniversary weekend in August. The first Festival raised sufficient money for an electric organ.

At one time there was a Women's Bright Hour led by the Minister. Before the Second World War young people from Towcester Road Methodist Church would often visit Astcote to give concerts. After the war young people formed Witness Groups or Mission Bands and took the Sunday Services. They came from Park Avenue and Harlestone Road Methodist Churches. Guild Meetings were held in the week when people enjoyed singing. Speakers also came to week-night meetings.

A Local Preacher, Ted Gascoyne, came to live in Astcote in the 1980's and helped to start a monthly Family Service. Sankey Evenings during the summer months also became popular which Ted Gascoyne led.

In the early 1980s a new floor was needed, when a floor board gave way when Harold Starsmore was preaching. Rev Bill Tabarn had just taken over as Minister and services were held at Eastcote Baptist Chapel while the work was carried out.

A Methodist Sunday School was started in September 1990



at Eastcote Baptist Chapel while more suitable facilities were built at Astcote. The Sunday School moved to Astcote in March 1995 where the old kitchen/schoolroom and toilets had been demolished and a two-storey extension had been constructed over two years, mainly by voluntary workers.

In 2006 the pews, pulpit and communion rail were removed to make the Chapel a more flexible and useable space, with upholstered chairs purchased with the proceeds of the sale of the pews. The Chapel was also decorated.

Around this time the electric organ, which had been purchased from the proceeds of the first Flower Festival, was no longer being used and was donated to a Chapel in South Wales where Ted Gascoyne had moved to.

In 2015 the Chapel windows were replaced with upvc double glazing.

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The Chapel continues to be a place where a small band of committed Christians continue to meet and work out their faith in the community by holding weekly services at the Chapel, running Christian Clubs and taking assemblies at Pattishall School, running Messy Church and children's workshops at Christmas and Easter as well as supporting the Christian Motorcycle Association, and Street Pastors in Northampton. One recent member has gone on to become a Methodist Minister, while others who have moved away continue their Christian journey.

The witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ is continuing after more than 140 years in Astcote.