

Methodism grows and comes to East Leake.

Once John Wesley had begun his practice of open-air preaching he began his prodigious travels around the country. It's estimated that he may have covered up to 5000 miles a year, travelling every day, and often preaching four or five times. Fairly early on in his travels, in 1741, Wesley came north through Leicester travelling onwards towards Nottingham. He travelled via Markfield where he stayed with the local Anglican minister, Edward Ellis, who was associated the Anglican religious society – the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, established by Selina Countess of Huntingdon who gave respectability in the upper reaches of society to the religious revivalism of Whitefield, Wesley, and others. One of those he met, David Taylor, was impressed by Wesley and became a travelling preacher. Wesley visited local villages, Nottingham, and Loughborough. There is no reference in his Journal to him travelling through or stopping at East Leake to preach, though if he had been on the High Road to Nottingham, he would have had to come through East Leake. This might well suggest that there was at this time no evidence of Methodist activity in the East Leake area. Nevertheless, as a result of these travels Christian societies were set up meeting in private houses and visited by his travelling preachers. In 1770 on another of Wesley's journeys he was travelling in the opposite direction from Nottingham to Leicester. This time he specifically speaks of visiting the East Leake area. His Journal records:

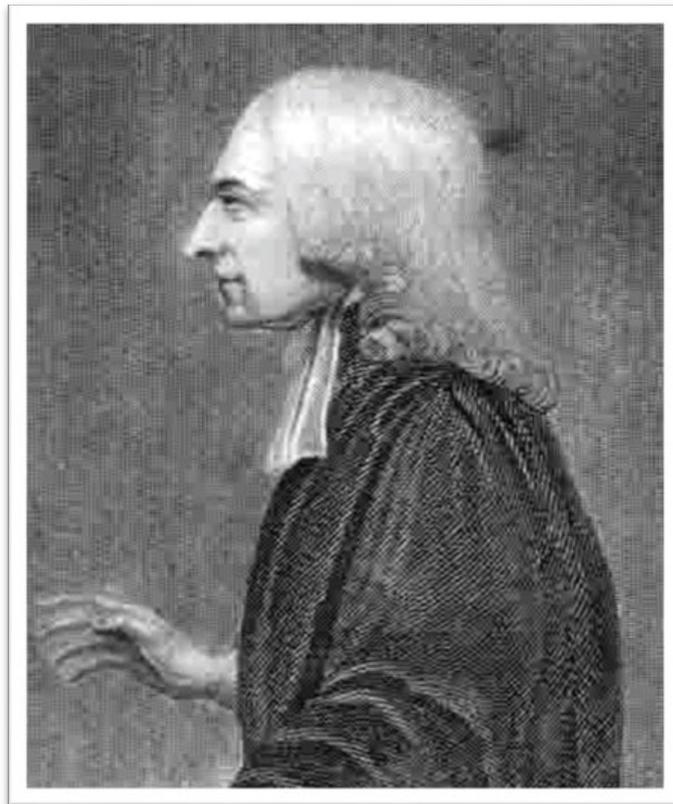
"Monday the 30th – I preached at Bingham, 10 miles from Nottingham. I really admired the exquisite stupidity of the people. They gaped and stared, while I was speaking of death and judgement, as if they had never heard of such things before. And they were not helped by two surly, ill-mannered Clergymen, who seem to be just as wise as themselves. The congregation at Hoton (spelt Hooton) in the evening was more noble, behaving with the utmost decency."

He goes on to record that he went into Loughborough where he preached in the Marketplace the next day and established a new society there. This extract from his Journal not only describes the plainness of his speaking, but also the kind of resistance that he might expect from the local clergy who were less than pleased to see him.

The reference to the congregation at Hoton refers to the Methodist group that met at the house of John Angrave a local farmer and landowner. It seems likely that the Methodist group there was largely promoted either by John's mother Elizabeth and/or his wife Mary who he married in 1770.

John Wesley was in his late 60s when he preached the house of John Angrave. In 1772 he formed a society in Loughborough and set up a meeting house at Rectory Place. Mary, the wife of John Angrave was an enthusiastic supporter. Although by this time opposition to Wesley's Methodist was becoming less strident, and he was widely admired for his activities, he was also reaching something of a crossroads for the future of Methodism.

This was the background against which the first Methodist chapel was established in East Leake. When John Angrave and his wife Mary had become keen supporters of the Methodist movement in the Society formed in Loughborough in 1772, they were still within the scope of the Anglican Church. In 1798 the enclosure of the old mediaeval three field system of East Leake began. Larger more productive agricultural fields were created from the previous Midlands mediaeval three field system with landowners owning individual strips. (The remnants of this three-field system can still be seen in the fields south of Potters Lane and that the very northern end of the village.) Although the Angraves lived at Hoton, they had rights to land holdings in East Leake. As the Enclosure took place so they received allocations of land and it was from these allocations that John Angrave gifted a plot of land to the Methodists for chapel. In doing so he was creating the first permanent building for a new church which was then in existence, and by becoming a trustee of the chapel he and his wife were throwing their lot in with the Methodist Church. Other branches of the Angrave family remained within Anglicanism and indeed subsequently became Rectors of the East Leake Parish Church.



As Sidney Potter, Rector of the Anglican Church at the turn of the 20th century and local historian records, the creation of the new church was not exactly popular with that then Rector Theophilus Henry Hastings. Appointed to the living by his relative the Earl of Moira he clearly resented the building of the Methodist Church in his parish. He preached several sermons from the revelation of St John on the iniquities of the situation, even going so far as to publish them for quite expensive price of two shillings and sixpence! The extent of his annoyance can be gauged from the following extract:

"This is the Great day of God Almighty, on which these worldly and wicked men, these Methodists, Jacobins and atheists, these branches of Popery, these popish and pagan princes with all their power, and all their forces, and armies they are able to muster, Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, the Philistines also and them that dwell at Tyre, Great Leke, Little Leke, will come forth against the Lord Jesus and against those Christian kings and princes who have been serious and studious and the professional practice of the Christian religion; and exerted all their powers to dry up these streams of corruption; Popery, Methodism, Jacobinism, and atheism."

It is perhaps instructive that Methodism is lumped together with just about every other group that was deemed to be a threat to the established order of society.

The establishment of the new Methodist Church was in part a consequence of an increase in the population of the village following the enclosure. In East Leake around the time of the enclosure Sidney Potter, Rector of East Leake records that there were around 80 houses the population of 400, but that by 1801 the census showed a population of 608. Most of this he ascribes to the growth of the cottage industry of framework knitting that was prevalent in the area. It also meant a need for additional housing and this was often constructed along the old pattern of the burgage plots in the form of closes that led off Main Street. Much of this housing was a poorer quality.

The rapid growth of Methodism and the population of East Leake seems to put pressure on the seating accommodation of the Wesleyan Methodist chapel. In 1827 the chapel was extended, and a gallery inserted at a cost of £80. It could now accommodate 120. The church was reopened in its extended form on 2 December 1827. The extension was funded by subscriptions and by public collection. This covered £60 of the cost and the remainder would come from the repayment of debts incurred by the Victorian arrangement of pew rents. There was confidence in the church that there would be no difficulty in doing this as all the pews that were available to rent had been let – suggesting that a significant part of the accommodation was used on a regular basis.

In 1851 a Religious Census took place which gives an invaluable snapshot of the state of Victorian churchgoing and religious observance at the mid-century immediately before the building of the new Methodist chapel. The census records East Leake as having a population of 1148. The Wesleyan Methodist Church had a morning congregation of 142 and an evening congregation of 200, with a Sunday School of 42. By comparison the East Leake Parish Church had the attendance of 300. There was also a Wesleyan Methodist Church at Costock with a morning attendance of 45 and evening attendance of 105; and a Wesleyan Church at West Leake which had an evening congregation of 55 which met at the house of William Mills. It was therefore perhaps against that background that at a meeting in March 1862 attended by 200 to 250 people it was agreed that a new chapel should be constructed. By that time fundraising had already reached nearly £400 with a further £35 promised, suggesting that the project had been underway for some time. By August 1862, the foundation stone had been laid by Richard Angrave, one of the

trustees of the Methodist Church. The estimated cost of construction was around £650 and by that time it was suggested that most of the money had already been raised – although a lot of it was by debt. The old Wesleyan Chapel was to become a schoolroom for the Sunday School. The role of trustees was perhaps typical of Wesleyan Methodism – three farmers, three hosiery manufacturers, a lace manufacturer, a seedsman, and a butcher.

By 1863 the building had been finished. The whole project cost £933, of which £870 was the building – significantly more than the estimated cost of construction which is a feature of building projects. The church had seating for 244, and the Wesleyan Methodists had a membership of 30. Methodism was now an established feature of the East Leake community.



The Victorian Methodist Church in East Leake.

In 1891 Methodist Church in East Leake changed its Trustees from those who had been responsible for the building of the new chapel to a new group, who were something of a new broom and intended to "sweep clean". The new Trustees showed a similar range of occupations we would expect to see from a Wesleyan Church – two brickmakers, three farmers, a basket maker (one of the Mills family), schoolmaster, land agent, shoemaker, and a Poor Relief Officer. Most of the older Trustees stepped down, and this is the last we see of the connection with the church with the Angrave family. The agenda for the new Trustees was clear. The former Trustees had incurred considerable debts in building the 1863 church; these were still outstanding, and the new trustees set about vigorously clearing them. They set out to have fund-raising special services to raise the money for the trust funds. By

1894 by a mixture of grants and fundraising they had come up with a scheme to extinguish the debts completely. The outstanding promissory notes were cancelled and the long-term finances were on an even keel again.

This was not the only immediate activity that the Trustees undertook. On assuming responsibilities they clearly were concerned about the current state and working of the Sunday School. While some repairs were carried out the Sunday School was closed temporarily, and the Trustees met in especially formed committee with the Sunday School staff to reorganise the Sunday School on "Methodist principles". The Sunday School reopened in February 1892.

There were also several problems around the heating and lighting of the chapel. The Trustees held several special events and as a result were able to modify the heating and fit two large central oil lamps and provide for a barrel of whale oil to run them. The trustees also improved the lighting by providing a large oil lamp to hang over the door – there was no other street lighting – by accepting a bequest from Mrs Mills in respect of her late husband. Subsequently the Parish Council undertook to maintain and fuel the light on a regular basis and it remained the only street lighting East Leake for some time. Generally the church was improved and redecorated and minor repair work undertaken.

However, after this burst of activity during 1891 to 1895 the financial position of the Trustees began to deteriorate, perhaps as a result of the loss of income and attendance with the general decline of the village. The Trustees also became concerned about encroachments onto their property from adjacent landowners. In September 1899 the oldest trustee Mr Burchnall, who had been one of the original Trustees dating to the building of the chapel, died, leaving a substantial legacy of £100 to the church. It was immediately invested, and the income used to build a brick wall to prevent further encroachment on the church's land and to make other minor improvements.

In 1902 the Trustees of the Wesleyan Methodist Church were suddenly presented with a proposal that they had not anticipated. An offer was made to buy the old 1827 chapel. The Trustees got round to agreeing a price of £200 but were immediately faced with the need to find a place to relocate the Sunday School. The suggestion was made that the Trustees should buy the land at the rear of the existing church from the adjacent landowners, the Trustees also discussed whether they would need to make any internal alterations to the church as well. The deal fell through, because it became apparent that the Trustees were not able to provide alternative accommodation quickly enough, but the idea of purchasing land and building a new Sunday School and selling the old building took root.

It was left up to a new group of Trustees appointed in 1912 to turn the scheme into reality by deciding to purchase land at the rear of the chapel. As with the 1891 Trustees the new Trustees group have a look at the chapel and decided on a schedule of repairs making to the chapel, had it redecorated, and a new hot water system installed. Whilst this was going on the chapel was closed temporarily the services being held in the former chapel – now the schoolroom. In September 1912 the renovated chapel was reopened following Harvest Festival. The total cost had

been £192, and £67 was still outstanding so again the Trustees borrowed the money locally against a promissory note. During 1913 and 1914 additional fundraising enable the debt to be repaid. There was still work to be done – particularly on the heating system which had proved problematic for several years, but it was decided to defer this because of plans for the bigger project. Early in 1914 the Trustees agreed terms with the Long Eaton Cooperative Society who were purchasing one of the plots at the side of the church for a new store. Eventually this became the Cooperative store until the new supermarket was built, and the old premises became the Co-Operative Funeral Service. The agreement was to buy a plot of land at the back of the existing church, the funds for the purchase were to be raised by borrowing on a promissory note of the trustees. Shortly after this deal was agreed in July 1914 the Trustees approached the landowner on the other side of the church, Mr Pidcock, who agreed to sell an equivalent amount of land to provide a continuous plot at the rear of the church. The deal was finally completed, and the deed of sale stamped on 4 August 1914 – the day Great Britain declared war on Germany which brought this country into the First World War. The deal with Mr Pidcock still remain to be completed but he agreed to accept a nominal deposit and have the deal completed within 12 months because of the peculiar circumstances following the "outbreak of hostilities". It's difficult to interpret this cryptically minuted phrase – it might indicate some uncertainty that the deal could be completed, but more likely it indicated the common thinking that "the war would be over by Christmas", and therefore the deal would go ahead once hostilities were ended. The deal was finally completed in May 1915 using funds borrowed on a further Trustees promissory note and the land was fenced off ready for subsequent use.

The Great War in East Leake.

In February 1920 the Trustees of the East Leake Wesleyan Methodist Church were asked by the East Leake War Memorial Committee if they would agree to the erection of a Roll of Honour in the chapel grounds. The Trustees unanimously gave their approval. The existence of the Roll of Honour gives us a lot of useful evidence about the Great War as it affected East Leake.

The Roll of Honour lists 125 men who served almost without exception in the Army and on the Western front. The sole exception was Lt Roadley who served in the Royal Flying Corps having transferred there from the South Staffordshire Regiment. Given that by this time the population of the village had risen from its low point of 876 in 1901 to 973 at the 1911 census, and making a broad estimate as to the number of men who fell into the category eligible for enlistment between the ages of 18 and 40, suggest that something like 65 to 75% of the eligible group went to war. It is highly likely that the majority of them went into the two local regiments – the Leicestershire Regiment and the Sherwood Foresters (Notts and Derby) – consistent with the practice of the Army in the First World War to try and keep men serving together who came from the same local area. The vast majority of those who served did so as private soldiers, and the incidence of casualties – most were suffered during 1916 and 1917 – suggest that they were volunteers not from the very first days of the war but under the schemes of voluntary conscription from 1915 (the Lord Derby scheme) or under compulsory conscription from 1916 onwards.

The Great War casualty rate for East Leake was significantly higher at 18% than the national figure of 10%. Indeed, it was a higher percentage rate than that suffered in the average national figures of almost all the combatant countries in the First World War, with the sole exception of Rumania who had precisely tabulated 28.4% casualty rate.

Within this bald recital of statistics that are inevitably some tragic stories. The Goodacre family, who lived in some of the poorest accommodation around The Green, lost two sons; whilst the Jackson family from Castle Hill lost three sons. The most senior ranked soldier was Lt Guy Tutin, from the Hall, East Leake, who volunteered for service straight from higher education at the outbreak of the War and served throughout its duration only to die of wounds received at age 24 in January 1919 whilst at home. He is buried in St Mary's Churchyard close to the tower in a grave which is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (formerly the Imperial War Graves Commission) although not being to Commission standards. He joins two others (Private Arthur Dring, and Private Thomas Goodwin) who are also buried in the Churchyard with standard War Graves Commission headstones. Four of the 23 casualties also died of wounds, but in France in Army hospitals before they could be sent home, and they are buried in the cemeteries close to the Channel ports. Six of those who died have no known grave, four dying during the Somme offensive in 1916, and two during the Third Ypres offensive in 1917 which culminated in the attack on the Passchendaele Ridge. A war memorial plaque in the Baptist Church allows us to identify a number of those who died as coming from the Baptist congregation, but otherwise it is difficult to identify exactly the denominational allegiances of the remainder, with one exception. Private Herbert Whitby was baptised in the Methodist Church, and his father was one of the Methodist Trustees at the time. It was his parents that had already suffered the early death of their daughter Edith, recorded in the Sunday School minutes. Their son died in Greenwich in 1916, a member of the Royal Defence Corps. This was founded during 1916/17 from volunteers who had been found unfit through medical reasons to serve in the front line, but who were deployed in guarding military camps and bases in Great Britain, thus freeing regular soldiers for front-line service. (This Corps was wound up in 1921 but reconstituted again in 1937 as the Local Defence Volunteers, subsequently called the Home Guard.)

Consequences for the Methodist Church.

The shock effect of the First World War seems to be reflected in the organisation and functioning of the Methodist Church during this period and immediately afterwards. After the purchase of land from Mr Pidcock in 1915 there are no further records of any meetings or decisions until 1919, and even then there seems to have been indecision amongst the Trustees about taking action to remedy some of the immediate problems that they were facing in the heating and condition of the chapel. Meetings were held, and then adjourned without a decision being taken because of "abnormal conditions". It was not until 1920 that the Church seems to have regained some sense of purpose. At that point, a later entry in Kelly's Directory suggests that the Church could seat 350, and it was recognised for marriages in the new registration arrangements. During this period, the number of baptisms in the chapel

slumped. In the period of the Great War there were only four, and throughout the whole of the 1920s only seven, compared to an average of 12 to 15 per decade prior to this.

No attempt was made to move ahead with the project to sell the old chapel and build a new schoolroom that had been put on hold by the War. Instead throughout the 1920s only minor repair work and redecorating was undertaken, and for relatively modest levels of expenditure. During the 1920s and into the 1930s the Church began to show deficits in its accounts. From 1929 to 1936 the Church was consistently spending more than it was gaining in terms of income, largely because its income was dropping year by year. By 1934 the accumulated debt had got to a level where special fundraising events and personal gifts from Church members were being sought.

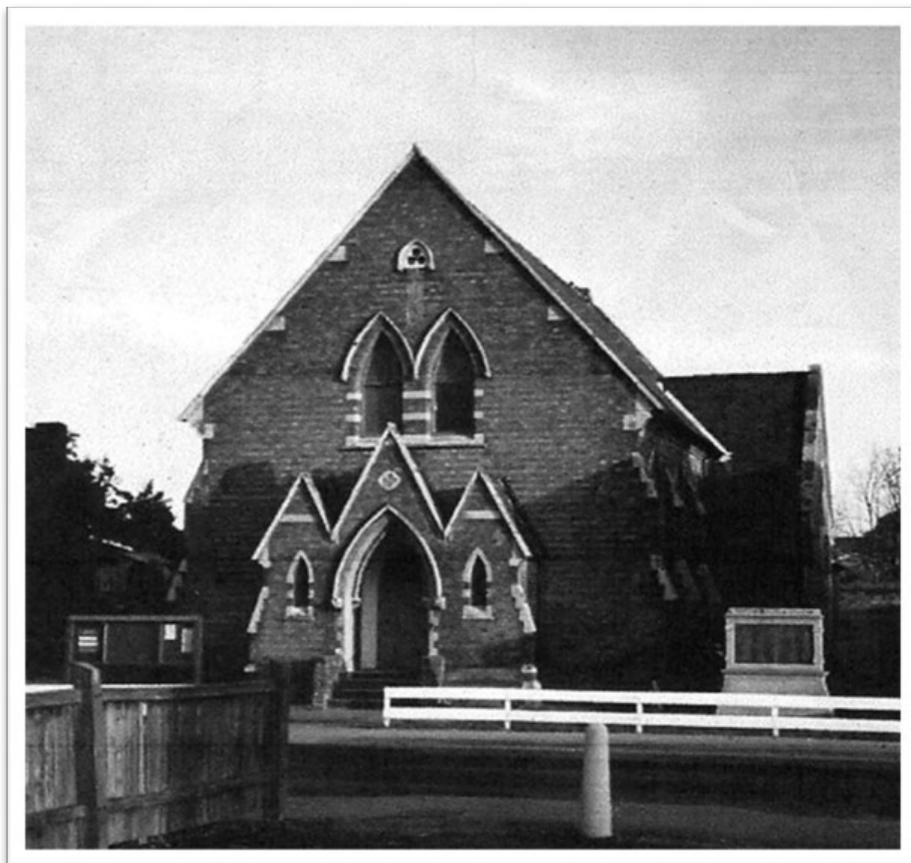
The significant structural change that took place in Methodism during this period was the union of the various Methodist groups. Early in the 20th century, in 1907, a few of the smaller Methodist groups – the Independent Methodist and Bible Christians for example – had got together and decided that they would operate instead as a single grouping to be called the United Methodists. After the Great War the United Methodists, Primitive Methodists, and the Wesleyans began discussions about coming together as a single Methodist Church. There was doctrinally little between them, but there were certain issues over Church governance and the traditional emphases on ministerial and lay leadership that need to be sorted out – particularly between the Primitives and Wesleyans. As the larger grouping the Wesleyans were less enthusiastic than their Primitive brethren, and discussions took quite some time but by 1929 enough had been agreed to promote a Bill in Parliament which became the Methodist Church Union Act. Following this work was done on a new hymn book and book of offices, and by 1932 Methodist Churches in local areas were drawn together as a single Methodist Church. That at least was the theory. In practice in several places Methodist Churches of various stripes were, often quite literally, within a stone's throw of each other and had been built with the ambition of the Victorians to a size where one Church could happily accommodate the combined congregations of all the other Methodist Churches. But resistance at a local level was often very strong. In some traditional areas of Methodism – the older industrial areas for example – separate Churches were maintained under a common Methodist framework for many years – well into the 1980s. And even now there are occasionally issues that arise within the Methodist Church where the various traditions from which people have come in which they learnt to be "the right and proper thing to do" from their childhood inform their attitudes, creating substantial differences of opinion and strong feelings.

Yet in East Leake the events of the early 1930s seem to have passed the Church by in terms of Methodist reunion. There was no break or change in the membership of Trustees as might be expected when different congregations were brought together. Nor was there any change in the underlying trust deed arrangements for East Leake Methodist Church. The clear conclusion is that no unification took place, and it could well be that by the 1930s the Primitive Methodist Church congregation in East Leake had ceased to exist. The last we hear of them is around 1910, and whether this was the result of a more general decline, or specifically the consequence of a

loss of membership and confidence following the Great War, it does not seem that the Primitive Methodists in East Leake continued into the 1920s.

After the struggles of East Leake Methodist Church during the early 30s the decision was taken by the Trustees in 1934 to reconsider the old project of selling the old chapel and building a new schoolroom. It's not clear whether this was in response to the financial situation and the burden of trying to maintain two very large buildings, or whether it was the result of a burgeoning number of young people in the village resulting in a significant increase in the number of baptisms rising beyond the pre-Great War rate to over 26 during the 1930s. Whatever the cause, the plan was effectively to use the money from the sale of the old chapel in order to build a new schoolroom on the land at the rear of the new chapel. By 1935 the decision to sell the old chapel had been agreed, and Methodist Conference approved its disposal to the Parish Church for the use of the Women's Institute. Subsequently the chapel was sold for £100 which was less than expected asking price. At this point the Church Trustees decided it was best if the project was handed on to a new group of Trustees. Again this was largely the consequence of generational change. The existing Trustees had been in place since 1912, and no doubt felt that younger more active Trustees were required for the project. A building fund was established using the proceeds from the old chapel sale and around £20 of new income.

Architects were appointed and plans drawn up for the new schoolroom. Approval needed to be sought from the local authority for the work, and since in 1934 East Leake been added to the Basford Rural District, application was made to the new local authority. The old Trustees continued with the work throughout 1936 and into



1937 as it took a considerable amount of time to draw up and agree the new trust deed and have the legal requirements completed. Almost immediately the project began financial difficulties arose. Estimates were obtained but as the work began it was realised that there had been a mistake by either the architect or the builder and further costs were inevitable. The Trustees began to cut corners in order to save money. A mound of earth which had been scraped off to level the site and left against the rear wall of the building plot should have been moved on the architect's advice, but the Trustees felt that they should not bear the extra expense and it was left there – where it remains to this day even though the architect warned that it would give a possibility of damp occurring in the schoolroom (which in fact it did.) The building was constructed as a bare shell, without independent heating or internal toilets. It was only at the last minute it was agreed to extend the plumbing system to provide one external water tap. Replacement of the fencing that had been demolished as a result of the need to get access to the site round the side of the Church was done in cheaper materials rather than the oak that the architect recommended. Nevertheless after the new trust had been formed the Trustees were faced with a completed Sunday School building with outstanding debts. They almost immediately agreed to apply for a loan from the Chapel Aid Fund of £150.

When it was completed the new schoolroom cost £570, considerably more than the original estimate, but totally in line with the traditional pattern of new Church building for the Methodists! With the loan from the Chapel Aid Fund the total income raised was £589, though of this £276 was a result of personal loans need to be repaid as well as the Chapel Aid Fund loan. However the Church accounts were turning round and now a surplus was being achieved and income had begun to rise. As with all new groups of Trustees the 1937 group started to look at the condition of the chapel. In addition the Trustees decide to look at installing electric heating in the new schoolroom – the first indication from these records that electrical supply was available in East Leake. A schedule of repairs and redecoration for the chapel was agreed, and the chapel was closed temporarily whilst the work was done, with the congregation meeting in the village hall. Eventually the work was completed and it was agreed to reopen the chapel for public worship on Sunday, 10 September 1939 – exactly one week after the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, had made his radio announcement that "consequently, this country is at war with Germany."

The Second World War period.

The impact of the Second World War on the Churches was significantly less than that of the First. In part this can be attributed to the lower casualty rate in serving forces – only one person died from East Leake, compared to the 23 deaths in the First World War. It was also the case that the objectives of the Second World War seemed more clear-cut, and as time progressed the obvious evil nature of the Nazi regime became clearer. The reaction of the Government towards engaging public support was more focused and its policies around rationing and post-war reconstruction proposals were more equitable.

Two posters from the Second World War perhaps typify the approach of the Methodist Church during this period. The first which has currently gained a popularity

in our current difficult times was "Keep Calm and Carry on", which was prepared for release following the anticipated German invasion in 1940, but which was never actually issued. Nevertheless it seems to sum up an attitude of calm continuity. The other poster was "Make Do and Mend", and that seems to have been a theme of Methodist Church activity at least in respect of the buildings during the War. The Church declined to do what they consider to be unnecessary repairs, and when the boiler broke down in 1940 rather than try and replace it the Trustees bought some spare replacement parts from one of their number and "carried on". During the War period the finances of the Church continued to improve, largely as a result of reduced levels of expenditure, to the extent that by 1945 the Church had managed to repay all the outstanding debts on new schoolroom.

At the end of the War there was some changes in personnel as those who had continued in office throughout the War moved away from East Leake and newer, younger, members were appointed to Treasurership positions. What had been noticeable throughout the 1930s period and up to and including the Second World War was the increasing influence of women in the lay leadership of the Church. During Victorian times the Trustees and Stewards were universally men, and women who were active in the Church tended to serve through the Sunday School. With the change of Trustees in the 1930s women had become involved more directly as Trustees, though in the period when the new trustee arrangements were being finalised it was clear that the old Trustees invited some of those who will be the new Trustees, which included the women, to attend their meetings and take part in the discussions.

The challenge to Methodism 1945-84.

With the end of the Second World War the documentary records of the Methodist Church come to an abrupt halt. Bits can be pieced together from ancillary documents, and from the annual accounts of the Church, but the minute books and other records are missing. From the accounts it seems that the period from 1946 through to the early 1960s was one of stability. There was little variation at all in the annual turnover of the Church, the size of its collections, or its contribution to the Circuit system through the Assessment. There does not seem to have been any significant projects or developments. The overall structure of the church, and its internal arrangements to pews, pulpit, and organ remained substantially unchanged. Two things only stand out. First, in 1951, nearly 20 years after the new arrangements had been introduced to unite the Methodist Church groupings together, the Trustees at East Leake decided to adopt the Model Deed from that unification, to replace the Wesleyan style Model Deed which they had adopted back in 1891! Second, in 1958 the Trustees changed, for the last time. In line with the practice of the new Trustees group they looked at some of the significant outstanding physical problems of the chapel. The heating had been an issue for many years – since the early 1920s attempts had been made to improve it. The Trustees in 1958 decided to get rid of the solid fuel system that had existed and introduce electrical heating in the form of tubular radiators at pew level, and radiant heaters above. The Church and the Sunday School were both equipped at a cost of £408, with £100 being spent immediately as a down payment, and the rest spread over the following two years.

It was the rapid growth in the population of East Leake during the 1960s and 70s that created the greatest challenge to the Methodist Church. The impact can be seen in the record of baptisms. In the 1940s and 50s baptisms had averaged the same sort of rate has experienced in peacetime of around 15 or so per decade. In the 1960s the figure grew dramatically to 28 and in 1970s to 35 – the highest level it had ever been. But the influx of population, and the children that followed, also brought with it some challenges to the resource base of the Methodist Church. The pattern of the village had changed dramatically. From being a small and relatively stable community, with a significant number of "Methodist families" often spreading across the generations, it became a much more mobile and larger community, but one whose focus was often split. When people worked and lived in the same place, the focus tended to be on the local geographic community. As people lived in one place and worked in another so that communities became more functional and less geographic. Whilst the number of people who were members of the Methodist Church grew during this period to a maximum of around 50, from the long-term average of 30 in the times of the historically more stable community, Methodism on the whole was not increasing proportionately to the growth of local population. Such resources as the Church had were stretched more thinly, and those who were committed to the Methodist Church and its principles found themselves with increasing levels of personal commitment of time. Nationally, Methodism, along with many mainstream Churches, was in a period of steady decline. The numbers of Methodist nationally began to drift down from 800,000 in 1939 towards 500,000 in 1974. In part this was the lack of new people, following the blow to morale created by the First World War, to replace those who were dying. In part it recognised that the level of personal commitment to Christianity as opposed to social commitment to the Church had also been undermined. The 1960s which saw a highpoint in the modernist radical attitudes towards faith also served to undermine the confidence of many Christians in the mainstream Churches in the validity of their faith.

There was one further feature that came with the shift of East Leake to be a commuter community and its rapid growth. In the 19th century Methodism had occasionally seen losses of its more committed members towards the Anglican Church. This followed a pattern that sociologists have identified as "lift and drift". The attitudes and behaviours that were part of the Methodist tradition often enhanced the personal circumstances of its adherents which improved dramatically. However, certainly in the early part of the 19th century, and culturally for much longer thereafter, there could be considerable personal, social, and economic advantage from being seen to be a communicant member of the Established Church. The Methodist Church had therefore tended to "lift" its members, who then "drifted" to the Established Church. The post-Second World War generations improvement in economic circumstances, particularly from the 1960s onwards, created another "lift and drift". The opportunities afforded by increased further education would result in young people within the community finding their personal circumstances and prospects considerably improved, but they tended not to return to the communities in which they had been brought up and educated, because there was no longer the link between employment and where you lived. Society became socially and geographically much more mobile from the 1960s onwards, so young people brought up in East Leake moved away, and because of the type of local housing and the

increased cost of housing through successive house price booms, they tended not to be replaced by young people. Increasingly East Leake saw a pattern developing whereby young people moved away, and it was older people who moved in – sometimes to be close to their family – and it was their commitment to Methodism that enabled the Church to renew its membership.

The overall situation therefore began to develop of a proportionately smaller older membership, with increasing levels of personal commitment, facing a situation of a very much larger community with whom they wish to communicate their presence and faith. Traditionally, the way the Church has often communicated is through the provision of personal help, companionship, and social activities. So it was with the rapid expansion of population in the 1960s and 70s. In 1965 a youth club was established at the Methodist Church – the ELKS (East Leake Klubs). The youth club began in a small way cadging what it could to get started, yet rapidly acquired equipment. It formed part of the wider Methodist Association of Youth Clubs (MAYC) which linked it into a national organisation, and to several supporting national and local activities. The membership grew rapidly to around 60, of whom 30 would attend on average. It met twice a week, and that was in addition to the LEA youth club that met in the pavilion on Costock Road. The youth club attended the national MAYC events, but also ran a few local events – most famously a sponsored bike ride in 1969 to raise funds for a disco unit that got some press coverage. The leadership team expanded as the membership did. The youth club ran until 1975 when an unfortunate practical joke backfired badly, leading to the involvement of the police, and the club was closed and never reopened.

There was also established a playgroup again with about 60 or so children attending, which split its location between the Methodist Church and the Costock Road pavilions. Two members of the Methodist Church were significant in starting it up and it ran at least into the early 1980s when changes to the Church arrangements brought to a premature halt its arrangements for meeting at the Methodist Church.

These changes were brought about in the face of the deteriorating physical infrastructure of the Church. In 1969 an inspection team appointed by the Loughborough Circuit reported on the condition of the Church following a report from the Trustees that proposed its demolition. The report concluded that the Trustees' proposals to demolish the Church should be supported, "as soon as funds permit". The support of the Circuit was conditional on funds being available, and the state of the accounts at the time suggests that balances were not sufficiently strong to begin to undertake the work. In any case the role of the Trustees was about to dramatically change. In 1972 the Methodist Conference, having considered since 1968 proposals to change the administration of the Church to bring it more in line with its falling membership, agreed proposals that completely reorganised the administration of the local Methodist Church and replaced the Victorian model that had existed hitherto. Trustees ceased to exist from 1973 and instead the responsibilities were vested in a new body – the Church Council – which brought together in one place the appointed Stewards of the Church, the Church officers such as the Treasurer and Church Secretary, together with the Sunday School Superintendent (where applicable) and the lay membership of the Church. They would consider any issue to do with the Church and the old arrangement would cease to exist. There was to be an Annual

Church Meeting in which Church members and any others who are associated with the Church will be free to attend which would appoint the Church officers. Larger Churches would have a pattern of committees and subcommittees, but smaller Churches would have a very much slimmed down set of meeting and decision arrangements.

Following these changes the new Church Council began to look at some of the longer-term issues that had previously been the responsibility of the Trustees. There was clearly a need to raise funds to do anything new. As a result an Efforts Committee was established that ran between 1974 and 1981 to organise fundraising events on a one-off and a regular basis. One of their initiatives was to develop a pattern of a late autumn November Fair and Gift Day, and a summer June Fair as major fundraising events. The Church Council also regularised the playgroup arrangements with a specific licence, which set out mutual responsibilities. During the period of the late 70s the number of community organisations using the Church began to expand to include a Drama Group, a Battered Wives Group, Mums and Toddlers Group, and a Sunshine Club.

In 1979 the problems of East Leake Methodist Church – the state of the chapel, and the small and increasingly older membership, set against the growth of the village as a population centre – came to a head when the Loughborough Circuit decided to look at the future of Methodism in the village. A report commissioned from structural architects looked again at the state of the building. The report concluded that the style and nature of the building, though it had inherent difficulties, was not necessarily out of line with problems experienced in mid-Victorian buildings, but the principal difficulties were a result of poor maintenance. It noted that the roof needed considerable amount of work doing on it, and that the standard of the guttering was often poor. Over the front of the Church the repeated blockage of the gutter consequent on the design of the porch meant that damp was a continuous problem. The store at the side of the Church needed to be demolished because it was pulling away from the wall allowing damp to enter. The brickwork would need significant renovation at a lower level as it began to crumble. Some of the architectural details allowed birds to get access to the roof area and this was also creating difficulty. The cause of the main problem appeared to be the result of consistent damp getting into the building. This had been a long-term problem suddenly going back to the turn of the 20th century. The subsequent discovery of farm wells in the vicinity leads one to speculate of the possibility of such a well or spring line close to the eastern boundary of the Church which might have contributed significantly to the problems.

The Circuit Commission was asked two questions:

1. "Should the Circuit continue to support East Leake Methodists, or should the Church close?"
2. Should the Circuit continue to station a Minister at East Leake?"

The second of these questions was relatively new development. The historical pattern of Ministerial appointments at East Leake shows a close compliance with the pattern of Methodist Ministerial appointments generally. Throughout the 19th and early part of the 20th century the Methodist Church had followed the

recommendations of John Wesley and tended to stick to 3-year appointments. However, in respect of East Leake, its position within the Loughborough Circuit had meant that the Ministerial oversight at East Leake had always been given by Minister based on Loughborough. After the First World War there had been an increasing tendency to Ministerial appointments to get longer than the three years stipulated by Wesley, and 5 to 7 years became more common. Although there were several Ministers in the late 1940s and early 1950s that had longer appointments at East Leake, on the whole East Leake tended to see a very regular turnover of Ministers with pastoral responsibilities. However, the rapid growth of the village to a population of around 6000 by the late 1970s meant a decision had been taken to locate a Minister at East Leake, and not cover the pastoral responsibilities from Loughborough. A manse was bought and the Rev Cliff Warren who served from 1967 to 1973 became the Minister for East Leake, located in East Leake. His successor, the Rev Henry Padley, was also based in East Leake but his appointment was due to come to an end in 1980. Clearly the answer to the second question was dependent on the answer to the first. If the Commission recommended that the East Leake Methodist Church should close, then the question about stationing a Minister at East Leake was clearly redundant.

The Commission examined the current situation in order to answer the first question. As with the previous Commission in 1969 this Commission found that the state of the building at East Leake was a considerable drag on the worship of the Church. The building was big, cold, and was in a poor physical state. Its very size meant that the congregation was often scattered around the building, and although the Minister was located in the village, there was limited Ministerial coverage and inconsistent local preacher appointments so that a sense of the Methodists being drawn together with some form of supportive pastoral arrangement was not there. As a result worship was cold, lacked warmth and involvement – it was not an encouraging environment into which new people could be invited. Further, the Commission confirmed the developing issues around the lay leadership of the Church. The small number who were actively committed felt that they were being overcommitted, and there tended to be an undue reliance on the role of the Minister – a continuing feature derived from the Wesleyan background.

Against that some Methodist presence in a large and expanding population centre was valuable, and relationships and links with the wider community, though not strong with a lack of pastoral coverage, were positive, with a feeling of general goodwill. In terms of the other Churches, there was a positive engagement, though the strongest link was between the Methodists and the Anglicans, particularly in the operation of a joint Sunday School. In part this positive ecumenical association was a result of the close historical links between the Methodist and Anglican Churches, and in part it was the very positive response that the Methodist Church had made to the developing ecumenical movement, particularly after the Second World War. From the mid-1950s onwards the Methodist and Anglican Churches had held joint discussions on the possibilities for reunion. By 1969 a possible plan for reunion had been drawn up, and although deeply contentious, had received enough backing from the Methodist Conference to go ahead. The response in Anglican Synod was less encouraging, nevertheless in 1972 the proposal was put at a local level to Methodism, and a positive vote obtained. Again the opposition within the Anglican

Church meant that the proposal did not go ahead.

At a local level the East Leake Methodists had shown the same support for the principles of Church unity that had been shown at the higher levels of the Methodist Church. From the first the Methodists were founder members of the local Council of Churches, and latterly of the grouping now known as East Leake Churches Together. But during the period of the 1960s through to the mid-1980s the most tangible expression of this joint working was the local joint Sunday School. This reflected the relatively weak resource bases of both Churches. Neither felt that he had enough capacity to run a Sunday School on its own, so a joint activity was clearly the next best option. As we have seen already the existence of a Sunday School was an integral part of the Methodist Church from its earliest days. However, the role of the Sunday School had changed somewhat. In the earliest times it had been a means of both religious education and improving the general literacy and numeracy of village children. As the State took over responsibility for general education so the Methodist Church relinquished its control over the denominational Schools that it ran, and instead concentrated on religious education.

The joint Sunday School continued the tradition of religious education, but increasingly sought to integrate this into the worship of the Church rather than treating it as a separate activity which it had historically done – even to the extent of being separately operated and funded. The thinking began to develop around the principles of the "Junior Church" where an element of Sunday School religious education took place as a parallel activity during the weekly worship of the Church, with the young people being present at the beginning and/or the end of adult worship. However this meant that the two Churches running the joint Sunday School had to integrate more closely their pattern of adult worship and this was not achieved. A pattern of alternation was adopted which meant although there could have been joint teaching plans and educational syllabus, the pattern of integration was very partial.

Loughborough Circuit considered the Commission's analysis. It concluded that given the significance of East Leake as a developing population centre the Methodist Church ought to be represented, and the East Leake Methodists should be supported. It therefore gave a positive answer to the first question. However, although it proposed no immediate change it was clear that the Methodist Minister would no longer be located within East Leake, and consequently when the Rev Henry Padley moved on, the incoming Minister Rev John Payne was based at Shepshed, and the East Leake manse was sold.

Now that the local Church had the support of the Loughborough Circuit in its continuation, plans began to be developed quickly around the project of building ancillary accommodation on to the Schoolroom, and the demolition of the 1862 Chapel. In the light of the comments made by the Commission, proposals were made to improve pastoral visiting, to improve communications by a newsletter (jointly with Shepshed) and setting up a midweek religiously based meeting. A car rota was established to help get less mobile members of the congregation to Church, and decision was made to move the morning service from 10:30 AM to 10:45 AM. By the end of 1980, the new pastoral arrangements were beginning to get underway,

though the distance and separation of requirements with the Church at Shepshed meant that joint work there was proving impractical. Most importantly however the decisions were taken about the demolition of the old chapel, and the funding sources were beginning to be identified. The Efforts Committee was reconstituted to lead the fundraising.

The project moved forward during 1981/2. The plans were approved in detail at an estimated cost of £9000. The Church had £4300 in balances towards this, and contributions from Circuit, District, and Connexional level were being sought. A bequest in 1982 of £4950 came at just the right time. However, the logistical arrangements around the Sunday School continued to create problems, particularly when its size (20 or more children attending on Sunday morning) meant that the village hall had to be hired whilst the building works took place. Local financial support was agreed by the Church, but the essential underlying problems of the joint Sunday School remained. The Playgroup had to meet elsewhere during the building works, and these began shortly after Easter 1982. Almost immediately the building scheme began to run late, and the cost began to rise. Some materials were stolen and there was a delay while an insurance claim was made and paid. Finally, the building work was completed, and the building was first used in April 1983, with the Church being open for the first time at a dedication service in July 1983. Church Council then proceeded to plan for the demolition of the old building at a cost of £4000 (to include landscaping). Demolition took place during the last half of 1984 and during the first half of 1985 the landscaping of the grounds took place.

While the building work was underway the Methodists continued to experience problems associated with some of their underlying, and yet unresolved, issues. Arrangements for a door-to-door visit of all the new properties in East Leake proceeded very slowly because of lack of resources, and the dependence on the Minister for pastoral work meant that his workload became unmanageable. Arrangements to improve communications through a newsletter did not work out – a joint newsletter with Shepshed turned out to be too costly to produce, and proposals to integrate with the Anglican "Compass" newsletter failed. Most importantly the Sunday School problem continued. Previous attempts to solve the problems had proved unsuccessful and suggestions were made for more radical alternatives. However no decisions were taken immediately on this matter, nor on issues to do with the use of the new Church building, pending its final completion. So, towards the beginning of 1984 the East Leake Methodist Church had finally achieved a resolution of the long-standing problem associated with the 1862 Chapel, but faced key decisions on how it would now tackle some of the underlying issues that had arisen within the changing environment of East Leake.

The impact of change 1984- present

The impact of the economic changes during the 1980s did not seem to impact East Leake particularly strongly. There was no significant manufacturing base, other than gypsum mining, to be affected and the growth of service industries meant that the impact on East Leake as a commuter settlement was less than if it had had a significant manufacturing base. As the asset price bubble of the housing market

began to develop in the early years of the 21st century East Leake saw more housing growth with new estates being developed on sites along the Gotham Road, and infill of new buildings within the old pattern of the enclosure fields. The population grew past the 10,000 mark to exceed 12,000. The increase in house prices, together with the increased focus on housing development reinforced the tendencies towards "lift and drift", and all the issues associated with that in terms of retention of young people, and the reliance incoming families to renew the Church congregations.

Immediately after the demolition of the 1862 chapel the East Leake Methodists were also faced with a unique situation. Hitherto there had been a specific Church building available for worship. Now they had a much smaller, more easily maintained building but it was multipurpose. Used as a Church on Sunday morning, it was available for other use during the week. There was a feeling within the Church Council that it was important to mark out the new building as a Church. External lettering and a cross marked it out as a Church building from the street, and a sanctuary area was clearly delineated by a large cross and Church furniture, albeit that this could be moved aside. During the late 1980s the Church made strenuous fund-raising efforts to provide a new organ.

Although the Methodist congregation put a Church stamp on the multipurpose building, many of the underlying issues that they faced and had put on hold whilst the old schoolroom was being extended and the old chapel demolished, were still there and still needed resolution. The shortage of candidates to take the more senior roles of Steward, Treasurer, and Secretary still existed. Increasingly the Church began to operate with the minimum numbers possible, and well below the recommended levels without any realistic possibility that they would be rotated through individuals as the 1972 administrative arrangements required. The lack of staff for the Sunday school got the point where there were no Methodists involved, and the Sunday school arrangements with the Anglican Church drifted to a close with the remaining Sunday school being unambiguously Anglican. The overall financial position of the Methodist Church remained relatively weak.

Early in the 1990s several new families within the Methodist tradition moved into East Leake bringing with them children. As a result a new Sunday school was established, or rather a Junior Church. The congregation were pleased with this development, and backed it by a willingness to provide resources, extending to the building of the additional annex to provide a schoolroom, and changing worship arrangements to reflect Junior Church needs. The children were much more closely integrated within the worship life of the Church, and this was a significant change from the traditional pattern which emphasised separate education and teaching.

During the 1990s and into the first decade of the new Millennium the Methodist Church experimented with several different forms of worship that were more closely adapted to the needs of the congregation. The next step after the Junior Church arrangement was establishment of family services where the children remained with their parents throughout and the pattern of the service was adapted in content and form to engage the children. The logical development from that was all age worship which tried to steer a difficult path between "dumbing down" for the children and

failing to engage the adults, and pitching an act of worship which met adult requirements but which was boring and incomprehensible for children. These approaches towards inclusive worship formed part of the pattern at East Leake Methodist Church during the period of the 1990s when the Junior Church was operating effectively. Subsequent innovations such as praise services using modern music forms which engaged young people more effectively, and Messy Church arrangements which did away with the traditional seating and patterns of worship towards a more interactive learning and sharing fellowship service, both of which were aimed specifically at meeting the needs of individual groups rather than trying to be comprehensive, have not formed part of East Leake Methodist Church practice so far. In part the reason for this was that the Junior Church operated successfully throughout most of the 1990s, but as the children of the families became teenagers and moved into secondary schooling the demands of education, other interests, and the inevitable tendency towards independence meant that they increasingly were not present at the Junior Church. There was a short period when the Junior Church was working with children of families who were not associated with the Church. When the impact of increasing child protection requirements demanded higher levels of staffing, it proved impossible within the resource base of the Church to get sufficient people in order to continue the Junior Church effectively and by the turn of the Millennium it had ceased to function. The one service that continues annually to specifically reflect children and family needs is the Christingle service each December.

Engagement with the community.

During the 1990s and early part of this century East Leake Methodist Church seemed to get over its worries about operating out of the multipurpose building and engage more closely with the community. Most importantly, as it subsequently turned out, the Church began to be used by an increasing number of community groups across the whole spectrum of ages and interests – from the Brownies to lunch clubs for the elderly, and from religious meetings to art groups and keep fit. Use of the Church grew to such an extent that it is now in use every day of the week and almost every time of the day, with the sole exception of Friday which is utilised to clean the Church for weekend use. Although the Church did not set out to achieve it as a policy, the practical outcome was one of sharing. Effectively the Church and the community groups that use the Church building share between them the costs of maintaining, heating and lighting and meeting the day-to-day costs. The Church congregation, as well as paying their share of the building costs, use their resources to pay for the costs of the Circuit Assessment which provided for the worship and pastoral arrangements of the congregation. This arrangement meant that the Church did not seek to make a profit from its community users, and the increasing strength of its financial position over the 1990s meant that it built up a significant level of balances against future maintenance expenditure that it was felt would surely follow the building development that taken place in the 1980s.

Increasingly the Church saw this community engagement and use of its building as part of its mission to the community. During the 1990s the Methodist Church nationally experienced a continuing drop in the number of members towards around 250,000 at the present-day. With this drop in numbers there also came the

retirement of a significant cohort of Ministers that had come into the Methodist Church ministry after the Second World War, and numbers of new Ministers in training had not been enough to replace them. The Ministerial coverage at Circuit level was progressively decreased and continues to be under pressure. Since the 1990s East Leake Methodist Church saw a fairly rapid turnover of Ministerial staff that had pastoral responsibility for the village. In some cases this was the result of ill-health and personal circumstances, but it also reflected the general pressure on Ministerial resources at the Circuit level. Increasingly East Leake needed to rely on the lay leadership of the Church and that was a relatively narrow resource base.

On several occasions during the 1990s the Methodist congregation tried to develop further both its own internal fellowship and to provide an opportunity for others to join in its activities. The proposals for improved communications through a newsletter and the midweek fellowship meeting that had followed the Circuit Commission's findings in the early 1980s had fallen into desuetude by the early 1990s. During the 1990s attempts were made to revive both, and a newsletter/magazine was successfully reinvigorated and is circulated to a wide range of individuals within the village who have links to the Methodist Church. Social events are successfully run, and in more recent times, the midweek meetings for both social and religious objectives has been restarted as the Foursquare Group, and an informal Events Committee has been established to coordinate and run the social activities of the Church reaching out to the wider community.

Firm foundations for the future.

During the 1990s the Church finances had become more stable and a significant level of balances had been built up. The original thinking behind this was that the Church had had unnaturally low levels of expenditure on property throughout the decade as a result of the building work that had taken place in the mid-1980s, but the expectation was that at some stage more significant repairs would be needed beyond the normal day-to-day maintenance and funds would be required. This proved the case in the first years of the new Millennium. The flat roofs built with the extensions to the old schoolroom that created the new Church reached the end of their operational life and began to show signs of needing repair as they began to leak. Rather than do patch job the Church Council consider options to undertake a reroofing scheme for the whole of the Church to replace not only the flat roofs but also the older slate roof that had been installed when the schoolroom was built in the 1930s. Before new tenderers could bid for the work the Church cleaner reported to the Stewards that superficial cracks which had appeared in the plasterwork were in fact much more significant. The use of tell-tales to assess the damage revealed a serious problem. The 1980s extensions had been built to 1980s building standards, and with only half the depth of foundations of the 1930s original schoolroom. Periods of alternating dry and wet weather had caused the substrata of the foundations to shift, and as a result the 1980s extensions were pulling away from the 1930s schoolroom and significant subsidence was occurring. With no insurance cover available to meet the cost, the Church faced a significant new bill for digging down underneath the foundations and underpinning them to prevent further subsidence. At the same time, the building no longer met the required standards for disabled use and access, and with an increasing number of community users it needed to be

improved to meet modern standards.



Once again, the Church faced a dilemma of whether to attempt to raise additional funds and undertake the work or to recognise the current limitations it faced within the community and to close. It decided to attempt to do the work but recognised that it lacked the financial capacity to service a significant level of debt, requiring it to finance the project by way of grant aid from number of bodies. Support at Circuit and Connexional level was available, and the Church could add to this the significant level of reserves that it had accumulated. Applications were made to a number of grant aiding bodies, and it was the extensive community use of the building which resulted in a significant number of those applications being successful so that the costs of subsidence work and bringing the building up to meet current standards was wholly funded without incurring debt. However, as in all major building schemes in Methodism in East Leake across the years, the project ran into additional costs. One was the cost of remedying a farm well was found to be underneath the foundations of the 1980s extensions. Its existence have not been suspected, but it gave further credence to the possibility that a well or spring now under the garden but then in close proximity to the east wall of the 1862 chapel might have been as contributory factor to the persistent problem of damp in the chapel. A second was the need to make sure that emergency exits for disabled use were effective. The original planned exit, following a trial run by disabled member of the congregation, proved to be barely adequate, and further alterations needed to be made in order to secure a safe emergency exit. The cost overruns were met by running down still further the reserves of the Church so that the end of the project all available sources of finance, short of debt, had been utilised. Since the completion of the project in 2009 the Church's finances have been put into recovery mode to give a cushion against further unexpected maintenance needs.