

SOUTH WIGSTON (Blaby Road)  
METHODIST CHURCH

JUBILEE

1902—1952

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## FOREWORD

*It is a very happy duty to write the Foreword for the Jubilee Handbook. Among the many changes of the Methodist Ministry it falls to me to be your minister on the occasion of your Jubilee.*

*I am happy to be able to participate in the celebrations which mark fifty years of work and witness in our present Chapel.*

*The passing of the years has brought change to the religious life of our community in common with other parts of the Country. Since the faith and sacrifice of our forefathers erected the Chapel the religious life of our land has deteriorated. In honouring their courage and enterprise we should not be unmindful of the labours of a minority of our present generation who have maintained the work during successive years of a general ebb in religious vitality. I am confident that the future will see a reversal of this ebb, and once again the flow will more than justify the faith of our fathers. A future generation will surely remember with gratitude those who have helped to preserve the Christian faith and tradition as part of our national heritage.*

*We are indebted to the researches of the Rev. G. Clifford Hunt for the brief history of the establishment of Methodism in South Wigston.*

*This permanent record should be a constant source of inspiration to those upon whom will fall the duty of maintaining the work here in future years.*

*The history of our church goes back to the beginning of the growth of population in South Wigston. Many years before this, Methodism had spread from Great Glenn to Wigston Magna. Before a Chapel was available at Wigston the Methodists took their meals with them and walked through the country to Great Glenn for the services of Divine Worship in Great Glenn Chapel. In 1819 William Kirby, a Wesleyan layman of Great Glenn, started services in a small meeting house in Bell Street, Wigston Magna. The present site at Frederick Street was purchased in 1838. At first a small Chapel was erected which securely established Methodism in Wigston. How the work spread from there to South Wigston is told in the historical sketch within the covers of this Handbook.*

*Recent developments in our work at Blaby Road should have brief mention. We have purchased a cine-projector for sound films. This is used for occasional cinema services and to supplement the work in the Sunday School. It is proving to be of value to the work of religious education and evangelism. We believe it will make an increasing contribution to the life of our Society.*

*We are hoping to have completed the first stage of work on the frontage of our Church by the beginning of Jubilee Year. It will probably be the latter part of 1952 before the whole project can be completed. One of the aims of the Jubilee Fund is to make the scheme possible.*

*During the year we shall welcome to our pulpit many former ministers of this Church. They are remembered by many with affection and gratitude. They have made their contribution to the life and well-being of our Society. We shall also welcome the return of others who have gone out from this Church into the wider ministry of Methodism. We are grateful for the opportunity of renewing old associations.*

*I ask for the sustained loyalty and generosity of our members and adherents during the Jubilee Year. We are not only remembering the past, we are seeking to lay firm foundations for the next fifty years. If each one of our members will attend more regularly, undertake a little extra service and give a little more generously, we can be assured that our Jubilee Year will become a turning-point in the history of our Church. We can do this if we are all ready to take our share.*

*May God's Blessing attend our celebrations !*

*Yours in the service of Christ and His Church,*

*RONALD E. SOUTH.*

## A SHORT HISTORY OF THE BLABY ROAD METHODIST CHURCH

It was about the year 1882 that the foundations of the present Blaby Road Methodist Church were laid. At that time South Wigston was little more than country lanes and fields.

Most of the land in the area had been bought by Mr. Orson Wright, Builder, who saw, with the growing importance of the railway junction and engine sheds, great possibilities of developing South Wigston as an industrial area. Accordingly, houses and factories were built and people came to live in the new village.

A number of these people had Methodist associations. The nearest Wesleyan Methodist Church was in Frederick Street, Wigston Magna, though to meet the need caused by the expansion of Wigston in the area known as "the Orchards", the Frederick Street Church had opened a Sunday School in a room over a butcher's shop in Manor Street. As the Frederick Street Church was over  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles away it was decided to start cottage meetings during the winter months. These were held in Nos. 5, 7 and 9 Glen Gate, occupied by Mr. Dougherty, Mr. Collins, and Mr. Gadsby, respectively.

As the village grew, the need for a spiritual home became more and more necessary. The Methodists of South Wigston, although few in number were mighty in faith, and, since they recognised the need for a Church, they dared to make the venture. They approached the officials of the Leicester (Bishop Street) Circuit,



which then consisted of Bishop Street, Great Glenn, Knighton, Frederick Street, King Richard's Road, Aylestone Road and Thurcaston, and as a result arrangements were made for the starting of a Wesleyan Methodist Society in South Wigston.

Mr. Orson Wright was approached and he agreed to build a room, to be used as a Mission Hall, over part of his works in Canal Street, now occupied by Messrs. W. A. Atkinson Ltd. The rent of this room was fixed at £3.15.0 per quarter. When the building was nearly finished a great gale blew the roof off and the official opening was delayed some months. However, this took place in conjunction with the Circuit Quarterly Meeting in June, 1884 ; so the Sunday School from the Orchards and the Cottage Meetings from Glen Gate formed a mission of the Wesleyan Connexion in this Upper Room.

Dr. James Denton Hulme, the son of a Wesleyan Minister and the grandson of the Rev. John Denton one of John Wesley's travelling preachers, a great friend of Methodism in the Wigstons, entertained the members of the Quarterly Meeting to dinner and to tea. The South Wigston Wesleyan Society was duly formed, Mr. J. H. Dougherty being appointed Society Steward and Mr. Gadsby and Mr. Foreman Class Leaders. This new Wesleyan Society had the first Non-conformist place of worship in South Wigston and, in consequence, the congregation was representative of several denominations.

In anticipation of the opening of the new Society a Sunday School had been started locally

the previous March. Mr. Adams was the first Superintendent, but he died within a few months of his appointment and Mr. Foreman was elected to succeed him. Mr. Larrad was the first Secretary of the Sunday School. At the first "Sunday School Sermons" held on the 27th July, 1884, the preacher was Mr. J. J. Bates, of Leicester, and the singing was conducted by Mr. Underwood.

As soon as the new Society was launched a choir was formed under the leadership of Mr. Larrad, who led the singing on his own harmonium, which he loaned to the Society pending purchase of their own instrument.

Steadily the movement grew and it was soon evident that a larger place was necessary. To this end the members worked and prayed. In 1885 the land on which the present Sunday School stands was purchased and a Trust was accordingly created. The members of this first Trust were :—Dr. J. D. Hulme (Treasurer), Messrs. H. Dougherty, W. Foreman, J. H. Larrad, J. Gadsby, W. S. Austin, W. Barratt, J. Pegg, W. H. Shipley, J. Collier, A. Tollington, J. G. Norman, J. J. Bates, R. Rowe, J. T. B. Jeffery, J. W. Smith, J. T. Proctor, J. H. Buckley, W. Newberry. The first Trustees' Meeting was held on the 21st August, 1885, and the main business of this and subsequent meetings was the building of a new Chapel.

At the Circuit Quarterly Meeting held at Frederick Street in June, 1886, permission was given to the South Wigston Trustees to proceed with the building of a Chapel. A tender from

Mr. Orson Wright to build a Chapel (the present Sunday School) for £539 was accepted. The stone-laying ceremony was held on the 23rd September, 1886. This was presided over by the Rev. T. Inglis Walsh, Chairman of Nottingham and Derby District. (The Leicester Circuits were included in the Nottingham and Derby District prior to Methodist Union in 1932).

The opening of the new Church was on Thursday, December 16th, 1886, the preacher again being the Rev. T. Inglis Walsh.

A record was kept of the actual attendance and collections during the first quarter and this shows that the morning congregation fluctuated between 50 and 78, and the evening congregation between 120 and 178. The average Sunday collections were 16/8.

The cause progressed and in March, 1889, it was decided to purchase the land upon which the present Church is erected. In the records for 1901 we read, "For years the School-Chapel has been inconveniently full morning and evening". There was an urgent need to build a more commodious Church and to enlarge the accommodation for the Sunday School.

An extract from Circuit records states, "In season and out of season the friends" (at South Wigston) "have urged their claim upon the Circuit and, taking the matter into their own hands, began to get together something in hard cash and promises of help in order to carry out their heart's desire". So work on

building the present Church and Primary Schoolroom was begun and from a minute for 1902 we read, "At last South Wigston has what it has long pleaded for, a new, beautiful and commodious Church and enlarged accommodation for the Sunday School".

At 3 p.m. on Thursday, the 10th July, 1902, the present Church was opened, the preacher being the Rev. W. G. Beardmore of London.

The following report from the *Leicester Daily Post*, Friday, July 11th, 1902, may interest some of our older readers:—

"New Wesleyan Church.

A new and handsome church has been for sometime in course of erection on the Blaby Road, and the formal opening services were held on Thursday afternoon. The Rev. W. G. Beardmore of London, a former minister of the Leicester Bishop Street Circuit, conducted the service which was largely attended, many friends from Leicester availing themselves of the half-day holiday. The Rev. gentleman took for his text Psalm 35, 18.

Suitable hymns and anthems were sung. The new Church is built to accommodate 650 people. The architect was Mr. Alderman Sawday of Leicester, and the contractors, Messrs. Haycock & Sons, of Great Glenn. The total cost will be £3,000, a large proportion of which has already been subscribed.

In the evening a public meeting was held, when addresses were given by Rev. W. G.



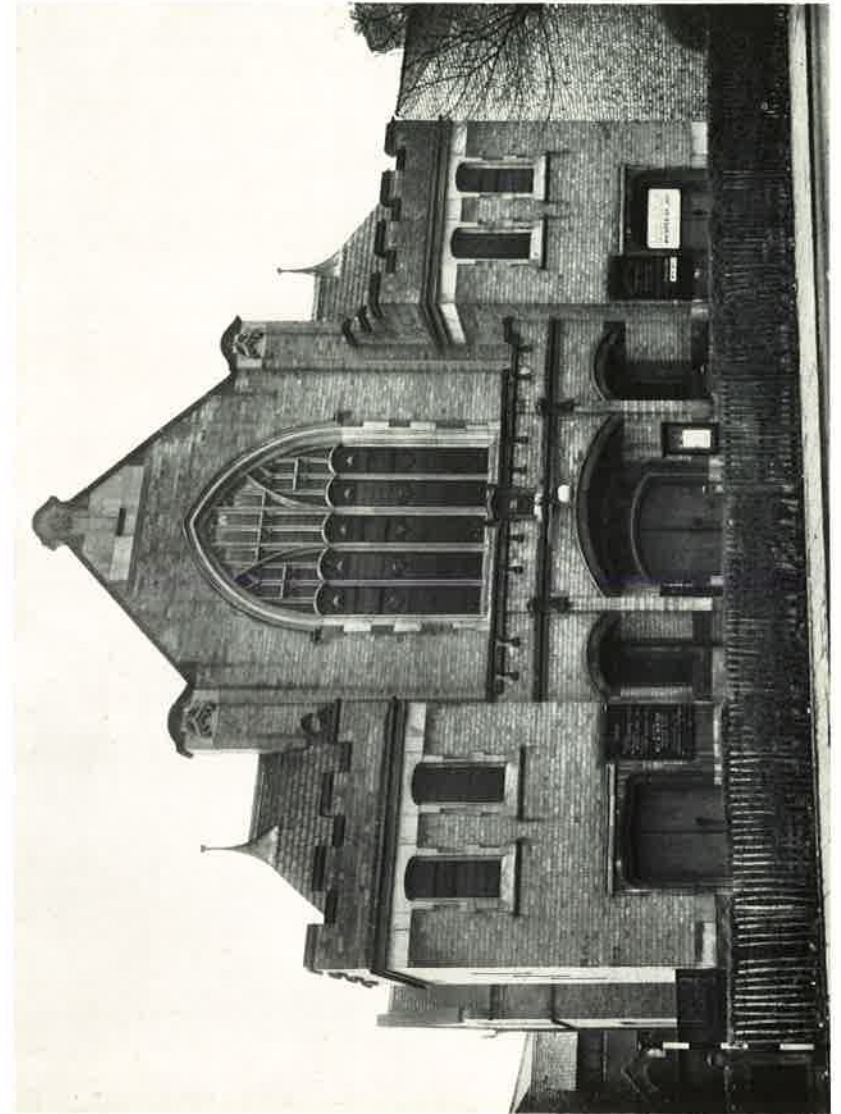
Beardmore, Mr. J. T. Jeffery, of Wisbech, the Circuit minister and others ”.

Special services were held for the first three Sundays, these being conducted by the Rev. Joel Peters, (Circuit Superintendent and Minister of Bishop Street Church), Rev. J. E. Rattenbury (Minister of Clarendon Park Church) and Rev. H. G. Roberts, M.A. (Minister of Belgrave Hall Church).

The building which has been used for worship for 50 years thus had its birth. A debt of £4,000 was incurred and this was finally liquidated in 1920.

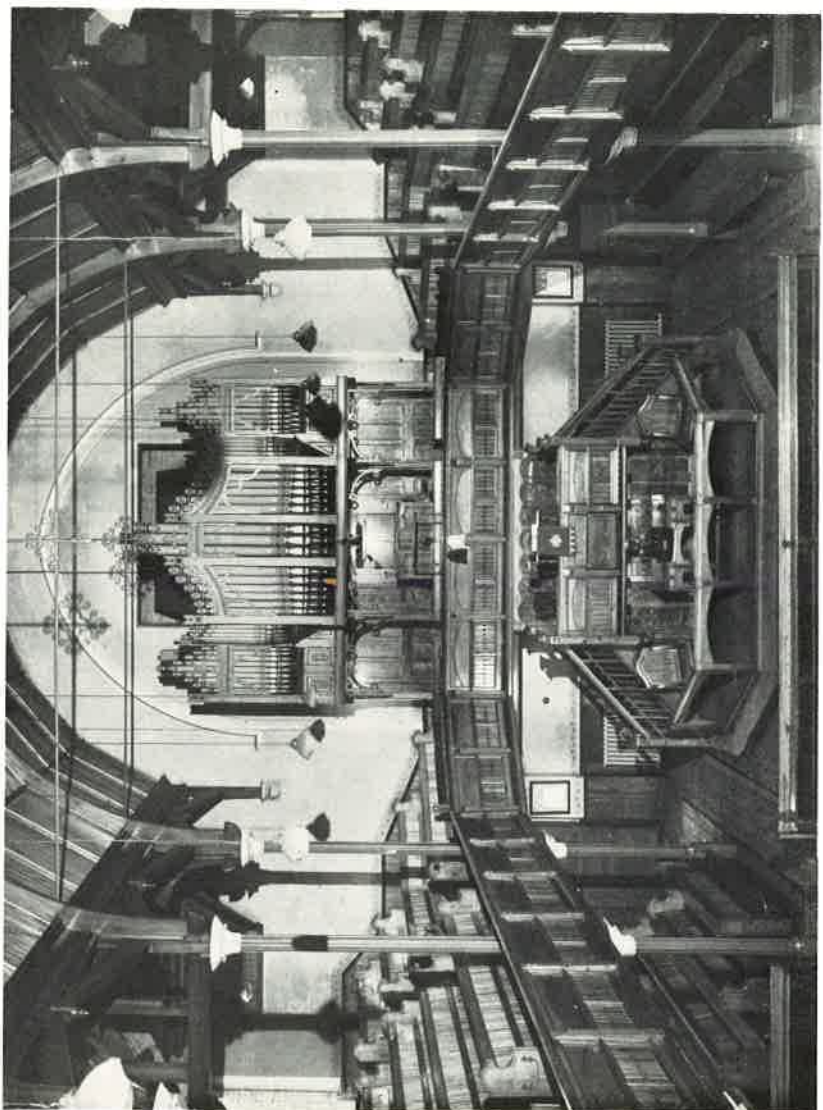
In 1905, Mr. H. W. Bates offered £150 towards the cost of a pipe organ, providing the Trustees could raise the additional sum of £100 which would be necessary. The amount was immediately guaranteed, mainly due to the generosity of Mr. Wm. Gamble, and the organ was duly built. The official opening was on the 24th January, 1906, when an organ recital was given by Mr. Arthur Pickett, L.L.C.M., of Leicester. Guest organists played on the three succeeding Sundays. The official organist at this time was Miss B. Osborne (now Mrs. Teal). She had served in this way since 1891 and continued to do so until her marriage and removal from the district in 1914.

A further addition to the premises was made in 1921, when a room was built over the Primary Schoolroom. This has been used mainly for recreational purposes. Electric



EXTERIOR





INTERIOR

lights were first installed in the premises in 1928, and in 1932 slight alterations were made in the Church to the pulpit and choir seats. In 1947 a number of alterations were made in the Schoolroom and adjoining rooms involving an outlay of £700.

Various kinds of midweek meetings have been held during the years, the two main features of the midweek work being the Guild which was founded about 1911, and the Sisterhood which commenced in 1924.

Throughout both World Wars the Schoolroom was used as a Canteen for members of H.M. Forces. This was open every night of the week and hundreds of young men and women came and found warmth and friendship and spiritual encouragement. As a result it is probably true to say that in every County of England to-day there are people who remember with thankfulness the loving service they found here.

One outstanding event in the history of our Church occurred on Sunday, 19th June, 1938, when the evening service of the Sunday School Anniversary was broadcast on the Midland Regional of the B.B.C.

Throughout the years our Society has been blessed by the devoted services of many Pastors and Ministers. In the early years of our Church the Superintendent Minister had the oversight of the work in the Wigstons. In 1902, when our Church was opened, the Circuit found it desirable and possible to appoint a Lay Pastor to live in Wigston and to have the over-

sight of the Frederick Street and Blaby Road Societies. This arrangement continued until 1920 when, consequent upon the closure of the Temperance Hall Mission in Leicester, a minister was transferred from Leicester to live here. The present Manse, known as "Epworth House", was purchased by the Circuit shortly afterwards.

The Society has also been blessed by the devoted services of many laymen. In matters affecting the Trust, in work in the Sunday School Guild, and Sisterhood, as Local Preachers, Stewards, Class Leaders, Organists, Choirmasters, Caretakers, and in work relating to teas and special efforts, the Society has been supported by people who loved their Lord and their Church.

So we look back over 50 years and thank God that He has blessed our Church with such loyal workers. We rejoice that He has permitted our Church to add its contribution to His work and we pray that in the years to come we shall continue to be precious to God, and be used by him in that great enterprise of building His Kingdom here on earth.

*Lay Pastors and Ministers who have served the Church :—*

1902-04	Pastor F. E. Brown
1904-05	„ E. O. Billett
1905-06	„ R. W. Winstanley
1906-11	„ H. Crowe
1911-13	„ G. Collins
1913-14	„ C. R. Keene
1914-15	„ A. J. Laughton
1915	„ R. B. Robson (only stayed 6 weeks before joining R.A.M.C. subsequently killed in action).
Jan. 1916-17 (Mar.)	Pastor C. W. Senior
1918	Pastor J. M. Murray (8 months)
1920-23	Rev. Wm. J. Kinchington, now at Risca, Mons.
1923-27	„ Wm. J. Manistre, now at Arnside, Lancs.
1927-31	„ H. J. Morris, now in the Hartlepool's Circuit.
1931-34	„ L. F. Webb, now at Dartford, Kent.
1934-37	„ H. Trevor Greeves, now at Walthamstow.
1937-40	„ J. Hollis Walker, now at Ilford, Essex.
1940-45	„ E. J. Hopkins, now in Ceylon.
1945-47	„ F. E. Lines, now at Saxby Street, Leicester.
1947-50	„ B. S. Titmus, now at Plympton, S. Devon.
1950	„ Ronald E. South.



During the periods March, 1917—Sept., 1918 and April, 1919—Sept., 1920, no Lay Pastor was stationed at the Wigstons. The South Wigston Society came under the oversight of the Superintendent Minister and Pastor S. C. Lambourne, of Aylestone Park.

### THE CHURCH'S ACTIVITIES

SUNDAY :

Divine Worship 10-45 a.m. and 6-0 p.m.  
Sunday School 10-15 a.m. and 2-0 p.m.

MONDAY : Junior Guild 6-30 p.m.

TUESDAY : Sisterhood 3-0 p.m.  
Youth Club 7-30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY : Guild 7-45 p.m.

THURSDAY : Fellowship 7-45 p.m.  
Choir Practice 7-45 p.m.

FRIDAY : Youth Club 7-30 p.m.

*There is a place and a welcome for you.*

#### Sisterhood.

The history of our Blaby Road Methodist Church would certainly be incomplete without some fuller reference to the great part played by the ladies under the title of the Sisterhood. It was surely a red-letter day when, on September 9th, 1924, the ladies assembled themselves together and decided to inaugurate a women's meeting. On September 23rd, 1924, under the Presidency of the residing Minister's wife, Mrs. Manistre, the Sisterhood was born.

Throughout the years its work and witness have been exemplary and a tower of strength through differing circumstances. The years, too, hold sacred memories to staunch Christian women who have weathered many a storm for the sake of the Trust and the upkeep of their much beloved Church. A few of the stalwarts still remain with us to Witness, Advise and Guide. Thanks be to God.

Its doors stand open wide, and a very pressing invitation is offered to all. Should any read these lines and feel the urge to join this fellowship—Come along, try the atmosphere for yourselves, you will be sure of a smile and a place.

The programmes are varied, though always subjects which enlighten and instruct and from which one can surely find those finest qualities which go to make up a true, happy and peaceful life.

Welcome to all ladies !

Every Tuesday at 3 p.m. in the Schoolroom.

#### The Methodist Guild.

The Guild meets on Wednesday evenings. Since it was first founded in 1911 it has played a great part in our Church life, being one of the main winter activities. Like most regular meetings it has had its years of prosperity and its times of adversity. However it has survived for many years and once again it is a well-attended regular feature of our week-night meetings. We are grateful to the officers who provide so many

different speakers, and to the speakers who have addressed us on so many varied subjects.

Each winter's programme is so arranged as to give a share of the available nights to each of the four sections—Comradeship, Consecration, Culture and Christian Service. The Guild serves the Church well as the meeting place of our folk of all ages and varied interests. After the meeting the friendly cup of tea and a chat do! much to bring and keep us together.

### **The Fellowship.**

The fellowship is quite a small meeting. Its only purpose is to help us develop our spiritual life. The meetings are quite informal and frequently we derive great benefit from discussion among ourselves. It fulfils an essential function in the Church as an aid to building up in our Faith.

Whilst the meeting is sparsely attended it is by no means exclusive. It welcomes all who will come. The meetings are held on Thursday evenings throughout the year.

## **YOUNG PEOPLE'S WORK**

### **Sunday School.**

Our Sunday School has decreased in size over the past few years, but at the moment the attendances are almost steady. In the Junior School the morning attendance varies from thirty to forty boys and girls. Morning school

which begins at 10.15 a.m., is held as an open school addressed either by the Superintendent or by one of the teachers. Following the school, usually between 15 and 20 scholars voluntarily attend the morning service.

The Primary Department is also taken as an open school in the morning and the leader generally gives the address.

Afternoon school, commencing at 2 p.m., takes the form of classes in both departments and sees an increase in the number of scholars.

The Sunday School has in recent years taken up Juvenile Missionary Collecting. About 12 of the scholars hold collecting cards and have attained striking achievements in their work. Several of them are holders of the Juvenile Mission Collectors' D.S.O. and some a bar to it.

The Annual Outing once more sees us in distant parts, as, since the war, we have resumed our trips to the sea.

One rather recent venture of our School has been the purchase of a 16 m/m Sound Film Projector. With a great effort and whole-hearted support from other branches of the Church and friends, we were able, by means of a Bazaar, to raise the sum of over £200 and so clear the debt. We hold a Film Service once a month and are finding it a great help to us in our work.

### Junior Guild.

At the beginning of our present winter season, 1951-1952, a Junior Guild was started. The purpose of the Guild, which meets on Monday evenings, is to prepare younger people for entering the Youth Club at the age of 13 years.

The Guild, which caters for children from 10 years to 13 years of age, has been quite successful so far and it is hoped will continue so.

### Youth Club.

The Youth Club meets on Tuesdays and Fridays from 7.30 p.m. to 10 p.m. and membership is open to those above the age of 13 years. At present there are about 30 names on the books and the average attendance is about 20. The Institute has been re-opened as a home for the Club and the members have busied themselves in re-decorating it. The activities vary from general games (Darts, Table-tennis, etc.) to film shows twice each month in which we see films of an educational nature from the Central Office of Information. Recently a sewing class and a handwork class have been started and each evening the members work in the small vestry. Light refreshments are provided at each session.

On the occasion of our 1st Birthday Party other Youth Clubs were invited to join us at a Social Evening and the event was celebrated by

a large birthday cake made by an absent member. Progress in the work is very hopeful.

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*Methodism in South Wigston has had its vigorous physical side too.*

Many of the older members will remember the cheerful days of the old Cycling Club. The Club met on Saturday afternoons, often in conjunction with the Frederick Street cyclists, and went to the villages around the county. Tea would be arranged and after tea an open air meeting would often be held to the benefit of the visitors and the visited.

Then there was the Physical Training Class founded by Pastor F. E. Brown. The gymnasium at the Glen Parva Barracks was at its disposal once a week and the Class gave several displays.

Another activity dating back to 1888, was the Cricket Club, which, for some years, was very successful in the South Leicestershire Mutual League.

For many years prior to the war the Church Tennis Club enjoyed many happy summers on the courts then owned by a member of the Church.



We are looking forward to the time when some of these activities can be re-born and become, once again, a part of our Fellowship.

This story has told of the birth and the development during the last fifty years of the Blaby Road Methodist Church. It is a tale of faith, of vision, of courage, which we hope will enable the reader to capture some of the same spirit and journey courageously forward.

Names from our living generation have been studiously avoided as we realise that each one is, with varied talents, carrying the light onward.

*The Handbook Committee thank all of the friends who have helped in any way in the preparation of this book.*

O.J.K., EDITOR.

## SPECIAL JUBILEE ARRANGEMENTS

- Jan. 6 Covenant Service. Rev. R. E. South.
- Feb. 3 Rev. R. E. South. Holy Communion.  
Feb. 9 & 10  
Rev. L. F. Webb.
- Mar. 2 Rev. R. E. South. Holy Communion.  
Mar. 8 & 9 Rev. J. H. Walker.
- Mar. 20 (Thursday) Rev. Dr. Donald Soper, M.A.
- April 6 Rev. R. E. South. Holy Communion.
- May 4 Rev. R. E. South. Holy Communion.  
May 10 & 11  
Rev. F. E. Lines.
- June 1 Rev. R. E. South. Holy Communion.
- June 15 S.S.A. Rev. H. W. Eames.
- July 6 Rev. R. E. South. Holy Communion.
- July 10 (Thursday) "Jubilee Day". We are hoping to have Rev. G. A. Wayne, B.A., Rev. Dr. J. F. Butler, M.A., and Rev. G. C. Hunt, all of whom have been intimately connected with our Church.
- July 13 Rev. H. J. Morris. Flower Service.
- Sept. 7 Rev. R. E. South. Holy Communion.
- Oct. 5 Rev. R. E. South. Holy Communion.  
Oct. 11 & 12  
Rev. H. T. Greeves.
- Nov. 2 Rev. R. E. South. Holy Communion.  
Nov. 8 & 9 Rev. B. S. Titmus.
- Dec. 7 Rev. R. E. South.
- Dec. 31 (Wednesday) Watchnight Service.

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