

A Slice of History of Catshill Methodist Church
by Mr. Russell Luckock (written in 2024)

I have been asked in recent times to put on paper my recollections in relation to the continued evolution of Catshill Methodist Church from 1963 to 1968, and as I am now in my ninety-first year, perhaps I should get on with the job! Additionally, I think that I am the only surviving member left of the original Building Committee.

When my wife and I arrived at Walton House, Lydiate Ash in April 1963, I was asked by the late and very talented Rev. Jim Hutchins, if I would, as an individual and stranger, attend all the churches in the then Bromsgrove Circuit. I was asked to report as to how I was received and impression gained, such as the degree of welcome, my impression of the state of the buildings, and what I thought should be done to enhance the experience of worship in the future. I was also asked as to what I would suggest should be the future development of Methodism in the Bromsgrove area in relation to places of worship.

This took some three months to accomplish and a report duly written and submitted to the Quarterly Meeting. That report is possibly now in the county archives in Worcester, but there were a few suggestions that actually saw the light of day.

Before coming onto Catshill in particular, perhaps it would be useful for me to precis my suggestions. I attended each chapel/church for their advertised service, all taken by local preachers. I was fascinated by the way in which I was received which varied from warm welcome to being total ignored. The congregation attendance varied from five to over a hundred.

My basic recommendations were that the three Bromsgrove churches, New Road, Birmingham Road and Ebenezer Sidemoor should be closed together with Aston Fields and amalgamated into one new suite of buildings in the centre of the town. I proposed that Madeley Heath and Dayhouse Bank should be closed and that a new church should be built at Catshill to cover for Methodism in the area. I also proposed that there should be just one church at Bournheath and that consideration should be given to whether a new church should be considered for Chaddesley Corbett with the future of Bluntings considered carefully.

The closure of Dayhouse Bank was fairly swift as I felt that the building was structurally unsound, a view confirmed by an architect. There was no chance of it being rebuilt due to cost and lack of local support.

With regard to Bromsgrove, the present site was acquired due to the good offices and contacts of one of the leading Bromsgrove Estate Agents of the time, namely A Victor Powell. Birmingham Road and New Road were ultimately sold off, whilst Ebenezer elected to continue in their then form, ultimately to close in 1988.

Turning back to Catshill, then a developing area, the general opinion of church members was that the possibility of a new church should be seriously explored. For some years, there had been in existence an approved outline planning approval, but no detail. These outline plans had been periodically updated to ensure that if a church was to be built, we would not have to start from square one.

A building committee was formed which regularly met at Walton House. We decided to select an architect with no previous experience of designing ecclesiastical buildings, such that a completely

fresh mind would be brought to bear. Donald Cornfield was ultimately chosen, who incidentally went on to build new churches at Bromsgrove and Aberystwyth.

Grant aid was explored and a fund-raising committee was formed to look after this side of the project. Our appointed architect drew some initial sketches, and a design was ultimately chosen after lengthy consideration.

Then the “fun” began. Our initial set of plans was thrown out immediately by Bromsgrove Council on the grounds that they had no record of outline plans having been approved, and in any case, no such building would be allowed, due to rights of light of the neighbouring development that they had given permission and had been built.

Our Architect furnished them with the hard copies of permissions granted and ultimately, they confirmed that our records were in order. However, they took the view that they would not grant permission for a new church due to adjacent properties.

We advised them that this was not a problem as we would require them to provide us with an alternative site within the centre of the village free of charge, plus compensation for the work that we had already undertaken. This caused a storm within the Council planning department and there were a number of “interesting” meetings. The upshot was that as they could not find an alternative site, that they would grant permission, but that the height was to be restricted to 12ft or thereabouts!!!!!!

Again, there were some difficult meetings during which we had to use the word “sue”. Finally, they granted permission to the height and width as on our original outline plans, BUT, advised us that we would have to build a pumping station to move our sewage up to the main sewer in the main road. They thought that this trump card of theirs would scupper our plans, for the cost of such a building and plant would be prohibitive.

Then we had a stroke of luck, for one of the church members of the day, one Percy Robinson, who had considerable building experience, confessed to the fact that he had committed a small sin. He advised us that when the adjacent housing estate ground works were being put in, for the price of a box of cigarettes, he had come to an arrangement with the site foreman, known to him, to insert a “T” section into their sewer leading to our mutual boundary!!!!

A sub-committee went to see the developer, John State to confess our sin, and ask for his blessing. He roared with laughter and said that if we would extend said “T” section across our land leaving a similar section on our boundary, as he had ideas for developing land next to our site, he would get his staff to draw up the appropriate paperwork.

Needless to say, Council Planners were less than pleased, but reluctantly gave the go ahead. The result is the basic church which has since been extended both front and rear.

Fortunately, our neighbours in the adjacent estate did not protest themselves for which we were thankful. The buildings were completed and church opened in 1968.

Catshill now has a Methodist Church of unique design that it can be proud of, available as a place of worship for all.