

Village History

Local Lore has it that Catshill was named after St Chad, Bishop of York and Mercia in 669 AD, but there is no evidence in legal or parochial records that supports this theory.

The earliest traceable reference to the village in the Assize Rolls of Worcestershire is in 1221, where it is written "Catteshule", while in the court rolls of the manor of Hales (Halesowen) in 1472 it has become "Catshill Elde". Strange as it may seem, it may be that the simple meaning of Catshill is the Hill or House of the Cat.

There is very little industry in the village. Weaving and button making were earlier probabilities, but for two centuries its staple industry was nail making. This died out in the 1930's.

First "Primitive Methodists" in Catshill

It is suggested (in a booklet called "Our Chapel" written by Rev Arthur Wilkes in 1931) that about 100 years earlier, in 1831, the first Primitive Methodists met in a rented room in Barley Mow Lane in Catshill. These early pioneers, men and women of faith and vision, undaunted by opposition and often physical violence, were the founders of the church in Catshill.

From Barley Mow Lane the enthusiasts moved to Golden Cross Lane in 1851 when the first meeting house was opened in Vine Cottage, which still stands today just a few yards from the current building. It cost £95 7s 0d to acquire! However it appears there were some difficulties regarding funds (see page 3 below for more details)



First Methodists buildings

The first purpose built chapel, erected in 1866, stood at the front of the current car park (adjacent to the footpath) and cost £198 to build (see picture on left)

Soon however, there was a need for a schoolroom which was built

adjacent to the old building in 1910 and cost £884 (see picture on right)



Youth Hall

The next addition was a Youth Hall at the rear of the premises to cater for the needs of growing youth organisations. The picture here shows it looking through the alleyway between the 1866 chapel and the 1910 schoolroom.





The current church building

By the 1960's, the two original buildings had become insufficient for the congregation and so plans were drawn up for the building that stands today, which was opened in October 1968. The picture on the left shows the laying of the foundation stone by Ken Wilkes, the Rev Tony Bullock and the

architect, Don Cornfield.

The picture on the right shows the completed building.



Replacing the old Youth Hall



In the late 1980's it was decided that the original youth hall, which was really "past its sell by date" needed replacing and at the same time we should add on a first floor area to provide a few more meeting rooms. We therefore demolished the old hall (which was always meant to be a temporary



building) and opened up the rear of the church so that the new hall could be attached rather than separate and to provide an area for four new rooms upstairs. The two pictures show "work in progress" with the left picture showing the rear of the church being opened in readiness for the new hall and the picture on the right showing the new hall roof being added. The new youth hall and extra rooms were opened in December 1991.

Latest changes (to the front of the building)

When the current building was designed it was always envisaged that the front could be extended outwards as required, and in 2014 we finally achieved that ambition by building on a glass fronted porch area (seen left). This has given us more space, has made the church lighter and we hope allowed those passing to see what goes on inside (before there was just the old solid wall that meant unless you were willing



to venture inside you had no idea what went on there!)

We also created a coffee area (see right) with a new kitchen plus a toilet for those less able, and we also built a new ramp to give better access to the bottom level of the church (the original ramp was too steep)



Extract from the Primitive Methodist Magazine 1850

CHAPEL OPENINGS.

1. DEAR EDITOR,—At CATSHILL, in the Birmingham circuit, about eleven miles south of the town, we have built a Connexional chapel. It is 30 feet long; 20 feet 4 inches wide; and 12 feet high to the wall plates. It has six windows, three on each side. It is fitted up with a good pulpit, 12 pews, and plenty of forms. It is a good substantial brick building, and cost 83*l.* 4*s.* 6*d.* But by the opening collections and small donations, 20*l.* 4*s.* 6*d.* were raised, and by a donation of 20*l.* from John Wright, Esq., the debt has been reduced to 40*l.* The land is freehold. It is the first Methodist chapel built in this populous village. On sabbaths, August 4th and 11th, it was opened, when sermons were preached by Messrs. H. Leech, J. Huff, T. Calvert, and B. Blackham. The congregations were overflowing, and the services powerful. Many of the sittings are let, a good work is going on in the place, and we have a cheering prospect. We record our gratitude to God for opening our way, and our thanks to John Wright, Esq., and to all other friends, for their donations.—Yours truly,

HENRY LEECH.

Birmingham, August 19th, 1850.

2. On August 18th and 25th, a very neat Connexional chapel was

opened for Divine worship at BEARNE, in the Briston circuit. It is 33 feet long, by 20 feet and a half wide, and is 16 feet and a half high from the floor to the ceiling. It has five good sash-windows; is well ventilated; has a boarded floor; contains 10 pews and 6 rail-back forms, all lettable, and from 30 to 40 free sittings, and will seat about 150 hearers. The total cost will be nearly 140*l.*, one-third of which sum we hope to make up by a public tea-meeting and bazaar which we intend holding on the 19th and 20th of September, 1850. The ministers who officiated at the opening were—Mr. Thomas Lowe, of Rockland; and Miss S. Woodgate, of Sharrington; and on the second sabbath, Messrs. Mackell, of Dooking; and Mr. Rose, of Fakenham. We had crowded congregations, a soul-refreshing influence pervaded them, liberal collections were made, and two souls professed to obtain pardon. During the last twenty-five years our people often tried to establish a cause in this town, but as often failed, for want of a suitable place to worship in. Twelve months ago we entered it again, and gained a footing; a small society was formed, and now a good chapel is erected, and will be placed in easy circumstances. This has been a work of great difficulty and toil; but by

Extract from the Primitive Methodist Magazine 1851

Sabbath-School Services.

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BIRMINGHAM CIRCUIT.—Our new chapel at Catshill, (an account of which appeared in the Magazine for October last), was left unfinished for want of funds. Since then, a benevolent gentleman, who does not wish his name to be mentioned, has given us 10*l.* to complete it, a stove worth 50*s.*, a Bible for the pulpit, and a considerable quantity of books for the school;—besides a donation of 50*s.*, to be expended in grocery and flannel for the good of the poor. The chapel is now completed, is well warmed, crowded with hearers, and much good has been done in it. We are grateful to the reverend gentleman who so liberally aided us in our difficulties, and to Mr. Whittleford, deacon of the Independent church at Bromsgrove, and Mr. Amess, who kindly used his influence in our behalf; and to God we ascribe the praise.

Bourne Heath, is a village about a mile and a half west of Cat's-hill. A neat little chapel was erected here in 1837; but in consequence of a spring of water being under the floor, it became so damp as to endanger the health of the congregation, and prevented many from

attending during last winter. To cure it, we have excavated the ground two feet deep; laid good oak sleepers upon brick pillars, and boarded the floor. The materials and workmanship, including a new stove, and other improvements, cost about 14*l.*; the whole of which has been collected and the bills honourably discharged. Since the re-opening of the chapel, the congregation has much improved, and souls have been saved in it. We tender our thanks to all the friends who assisted us on this occasion.

Wildmoor is a small hamlet about a mile and a quarter north of Catshill. For want of a suitable place of worship, our people here have long suffered materially; but during the last summer Mr. A. Rutter built us a chapel 18 ft. by 15 ft., and let it to us for 50*s.* annually. Our friends have furnished it with pulpit, benches, free seats, stove, &c.,—which cost upwards of 10*l.*, all of which has been raised. The chapel was opened by brother Whitaker, of Ludlow; the congregations are good, and the cause is prospering.

J. HUFF.