

CROWTHORNE METHODIST CHURCH



The first documented evidence of Methodism in Crowthorne is an Indenture dated 14th August 1869 when John Walter Esq. MP of Bearwood (owner of The Times Newspaper) agreed to sell the present Church site for £5 to Joseph Webster of Aldershot, Wesleyan Minister and 16 other trustees. Aubrey Vaughan, who wrote a history of the Methodist Church in Crowthorne in 1988, is of the opinion that the first church built on the site was a brick one located in the North-West corner. He says this was 38' 6" long by 18' wide with four fixed windows in each side and one in the North gable end. The cost was £173-11-2. It was registered for public worship on 24th March and officially opened on Good Friday, 15th April 1870. He believes that the roof was boarded felt and it soon started to leak so that a quote to slate it was obtained in November 1872. To avoid adding the extra cost of £20 to the existing debt for the original building the trustees agreed to fund the new roof themselves.

The present church was built in 1898 and celebrated its 125th anniversary recently. The foundation stone was laid by Miss Spear, daughter of the builder Mr William Spear, on 2nd February 1898. The architects appear to have been a young man recovering from an illness whiling away his time sketching out a plan while William Spear, the builder, developed his ideas in the present church. The new church was ready to be opened by the Circuit Minister, Rev W C Williams on 21st September 1898. The cost came to £1,500 plus £30 for fences and gates. The new building was not attached to the old one which remained as the Church hall cum School Room. The interior of the church has been somewhat altered over the years. In 1913 a new organ was needed and Mr Andrew Carnegie, the American philanthropist of Scottish descent agreed to match funds already raised to the tune of £100 by 31st August in that year. The organ needed refurbishment in 1922.

In 1924 it was agreed that the old church building/Sunday school needed major overhaul to make it workable. However it was not until early 1930 that a quote for £805 to adapt the old chapel was accepted. By May the builders found that there was dry-rot in the old schoolroom floor and quoted another £50 to install new joists and flooring. A year later there was a problem with the roof and the trustees called in an independent architect, Mr Stedman, of Farnham for his opinion and advice. One of the queries was whether the existing foundations were sufficient to carry the new gable etc. Mr Stedman's plans were accepted and the new building went ahead at a cost of £842-16-0. However by 1931 the western wall of the old building had begun to fall outwards. The professional advice was to fix ties and plates to strengthen the wall but this did not prevent further movement .and in July 1931 Mr Stedman advised taking off the roof and reducing the walls to windowsill level. Work was started when it was realised that there were no foundations to the old building so it was all demolished and the whole church hall re-designed and built and apparently ready for use by the end of 1931.

The Church porch was taken down and replaced by a new reception room in 1984 and recently the church hall has been extensively renovated to provide an enlarged kitchen and toilet facilities.

For many of the earlier years of its existence, Crowthorne Methodist Church has been part of the Camberley circuit and shared a minister with up to 11 other churches. A similar situation is arising again with the Rev Sharon Gardner also having the care of Sandhurst, Bracknell and Bagshot churches while living in Crowthorne. With thanks to Aubrey Vaughan and Martin Prescott's "The Crow on the Thorn".

