

WHITCHURCH CHAPEL TRAIL



Towards the end of the 17th century the Toleration Act was passed by Parliament. This granted freedom of worship for dissenting Protestants. Therefore the 18th century was a time of change for religious worship in Whitchurch, as it was all over England. People had the freedom to meet and worship where they chose, not necessarily at the parish church. So when St Alkmund's church tower collapsed in 1711 it was important that they got it rebuilt quickly before their congregation went elsewhere.

A - Wesleyan Chapel, St Mary's Street

In 1810 a purpose-built chapel was opened in St Mary's Street. Money had been raised to construct a substantial 3 bay, 2 storey building of sandstone ashlar blocks. It had a hipped roof, arched windows and a first floor venetian window. The Congregation remained there for nearly 70 years.

B - St John's Methodist

This church, with seating for 400, was opened in 1879 to replace the earlier Wesleyan chapel. It cost £5,000 which included the building of the adjoining Minister's house. It was built in the Gothic style out of sandstone with a tiled roof. The Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodists re-merged as part of the Methodist Union between the two World Wars. Both congregations then met at St John's.

C - Primitive Methodist Chapel, Castle Hill

Primitive Methodism emerged as a movement in the early 19th century from within the Wesleyan connection. The first congregation built a small chapel further down the hill than the present building. When the congregation increased this chapel was built in 1866 and registered for marriages in 1870. A Sunday school was added in 1924.

D - Presbyterian Chapel, Dodington

This was the first licensed purpose-built non-conformist chapel to be constructed in Whitchurch. It was built in the garden of Thomas Yates' house in 1707 and Matthew Henry preached the first sermon. The chapel was burnt down by Jacobite rioters in 1715. The government of George I paid for a replacement chapel on the same site. By 1720 the congregation numbered 300 and continued in use until 1824.

E - Dodington URC (former Congregational Church)

This chapel was created when there was a split within the congregation of the Presbyterians in 1797. They converted a small currier's shop to serve as their chapel, directly across the road from their previous place of worship. This was considerably enlarged and fitted out as a chapel in 1813. The vestry was enlarged in 1815 and a schoolroom was added at first floor level. The chapel is brick-built with an ashlar façade, dated 1846, and has a gabled, shallow-pitched slated roof.

F - St Catherine's Church, Dodington

This place of worship was built as a chapel-of-ease to St Alkmund's in 1836. The widow of the seventh Earl of Bridgewater, Catherine, was the patroness of the church. It was constructed from brick, in a Neoclassical style, with a stone façade and a graded slate roof. A central portico projects from the five bay frontage and an octagonal tower from the roof. The tower clock was said to be the oldest surviving Joyce clock in England. The Congregation declined and the church was deconsecrated in 1974.

G - Baptist Chapel, Green End

A Baptist congregation existed in Whitchurch in 1798 and meetings are known to have been held in houses on Green End. Money for a purpose-built chapel was raised during the late 1820s. Between the years 1862 and 1889 considerable improvements were made. New windows were put in, gas was installed and the premises enlarged by extending towards the street and forming a lobby as the entrance with a schoolroom above.

Methodist Chapel, Claypit Street (site only)

The Methodist church was established in 1741 by John and Charles Wesley and had a strong focus on education and a conscientious approach to work. It is known that Wesleyan Methodists were in Whitchurch from around 1750. The first chapel was in Claypit Street, housed in a building reputedly behind no's 26 & 28. John Wesley preached in the town on at least 5 occasions between 1762 and 1781.

Church of the Saviour, Highgate (site only)

A congregation calling themselves the Free Christian Church was established in Whitchurch in 1877 and met in the Town Hall. Later that year they opened an iron church at Highgate which seated 350. The congregation was known as Unitarian and then nine years later the name "The Church of the Saviour" was adopted. In 1921 the chapel was closed for worship, and the building was dismantled in 1925.

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