



Old Wesleyan Chapel  
Brook Street, Derby | 01332 203 345

## *The history of the Chapel on Brook Street*

Over its 200-year history, the Chapel on Brook Street in Derby has played a central role in the lives of the faithful; preachers rallied their flock with fire and brimstone sermons, couples were married, babies christened and the dead, buried. During this time the Chapel underwent several major expansions, was converted from General Baptist ministry to Wesley and was nearly destroyed by fire!

The original Chapel was built and paid for by the congregation of Derby's General Baptist movement. The movement was founded in the city in 1879 by Reverend Dan Taylor and operated from a hired room on Friar Gate, until the congregation outgrew these facilities.

Derby's first nine converts were baptised in the River Derwent in August 1791 and amongst these were John Etches, a one-armed sailor who had fought under Admiral Nelson and whose memorial plaque can be still be seen on the Chapel's north wall.

### **1802 – 1842**

The first service was held at the Chapel on 20 July 1802 by three local General Baptist preachers, William Felkin of Kegworth, William Pickering of Ilkeston and Edmund Whitaker of Melbourne, Derbyshire.

In 1810, Rev John G Pike came to Derby and under his ministry the congregation grew rapidly. As a result, the Chapel was first extended in 1811 although more space was still needed. In 1815, a truly ambitious expansion project was undertaken; the Chapel was virtually demolished, leaving only the two side walls standing. These were then extended and the Chapel was rebuilt to accommodate 300 people. A Schoolhouse, which could cater for 400 scholars, was also added to house the growing Sunday School.

The congregation continued to grow and in 1819, the upstairs gallery was extended down both sides of the Chapel, which allowed it to seat 750 people. Membership continued to rise and as the Chapel was at maximum capacity, the General Baptist movement purchased and converted a town house in St Mary's Gate to house the growing church. The last General Baptist service was held at the Chapel on 15 May 1842.

### **1843 – 1887**

The Brook Street Chapel continued to be used as a Sunday School and as a night school for adults learning to read and write. The premises were also let to the Wesley Reform Society, which was led by Rev William Griffith, one of three ministers ejected from the Methodist Church for criticising its leaders.

Funds were raised by the congregation and the Wesley movement finally purchased the Chapel in 1862 for £650. Over the next 18 years, both the Church congregation and the Sunday School continued to grow and the building was altered again with the addition of tiered wooden seating to house Sunday School pupils during the annual anniversary service.

### **1888 – 1975**

In 1888, a second-hand Harrison pipe organ was purchased and the building was altered again to accommodate it. By the turn of the century, however, numbers had begun to decline. This was accelerated in the 1950s, when the densely populated areas of Derby's West End were cleared and new housing estates were established on the city's outskirts – away from traditional places of worship.

In 1958, morning services were discontinued, although evening services were still well attended and the Sunday School still met, though now with only about 30 scholars.

During this time the Chapel was set alight by intruders who burnt papers in the cellar – a police constable spotted the blaze and called the fire brigade just in time to save it from destruction.

By 1965, church membership had fallen further to 34 and the Sunday School had dwindled to only a handful. The final Sunday School anniversary service was held in April 1975 and the school closed for good.

### **1976 – present**

Worship continued at the Chapel into the New Millennium, but the cost of maintaining the 200-year old property had fallen on the few remaining members and reluctantly, in March 2002, a decision to close the Chapel was taken. The final service was held in May 2002 and the property was purchased at auction by Paula and Didar Dalkic.

