



**THE  
STORY  
OF  
OAKRIDGE  
METHODIST  
CHURCH**

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CHURCH

by

WILFRED MERRETT

Front Cover  
The painted glass centre piece of the window  
in the front elevation

# FOREWORD

It is a great privilege and pleasure to write these words of Introduction for this booklet which celebrates 200 years of Methodism in Oakridge. The changes which have occurred during those years are enormous as we all know. Changes in all areas of our lives, family, home and domestic, schools, colleges and education, work in terms of hours and wages, leisure, travel; and so I could go on.

The pace of social and other changes shows no slackening and may continue to increase in tempo. There have also been changes in the "Chapel" both physically, and in otherways.

Within these pages you will read of the perils faced in bringing the Gospel to Oakridge and of the kind of preaching and preachers needed. The Gospel then, and now, is about to change! The change which comes into human lives when we turn in faith to Jesus. This is just as vital now as then.

We give thanks for this record and we hope that all of Oakridge and the Circuit will share with us on the 18<sup>th</sup> May for our Anniversary Service followed by Tea. We also look for the faith and financial assistance shown in the past for the "new" Chapel described within, to be shown again as we go into "the way forward".

Keith Burton  
Minister.

# THE BEGINNINGS

Oakridge in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century comprised a group of scattered hamlets mainly built high above the Frome valley. The area possessed few amenities and the inhabitants would have needed to visit Bisley or Chalford for provisions or on rare occasions to Stroud some five miles distant.

It is unlikely that the villagers attended a place of worship, the nearest church being in Bisley over a mile away and Miss Elizabeth Whiting who lived early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century recalled Oakridge as having been 'in a state of spiritual darkness with no means of grace in the place'.

Stroud, the nearest town had long been a centre for nonconformity possessing a number of chapels, one of which dated back to 1711. The Methodist Chapel in Acre Street was established in 1763 and when the Reverend William Jenkins visited the town a year later he felt impelled to go to Bisley despite being told it was such a wicked place that he would be risking his life. He appears to have survived unscathed and after preaching at the Market House was approached by a man who said 'that is just such preaching as we want in Oakridge.'

Accepting the invitation, Mr Jenkins crossed Bisley Common, was apparently well received and shortly afterwards a Mr William Davis opened his house for meetings and Bible classes. This arrangement came to an end when Mr Davis sustained serious injuries whilst working in the canal tunnel, and the idea of building a chapel or meeting room was formulated.

Mr William Pickersgill a local preacher in the Stroud circuit appears to have been the motivator and was regarded by many as the founder of the Oakridge Chapel. This building together with existing schoolroom was erected in 1797, but the legal document transferring the property from Mr Pickersgill to the trustees was dated 19<sup>th</sup> March 1798



CHAPEL MEMBERS EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

BACK ROW

John Peacey, Etta Whiting, Annie Peacey, Beatrice Alley, ?,  
Lizzie Peacey, Alice Gardiner, Sophia Wright, Livie Bateman  
John Bateman

MIDDLE ROW

Lizzie Wear, Minnie Bucknell, Nelly Gardiner, Seth Peacey (Teacher)  
Mary Ann Gardiner, Eva Alley.

FRONT ROW

Fred Gardiner, Alder Lewis, Sid Wear, Frank Gardiner.



# THE FIRST CHAPEL AND SCHOOLROOM

The Whiting family produced stalwart members of the new chapel, and the schoolroom was used by Miss Elizabeth Whiting as a day school which operated successfully for many years, attracting pupils from a wide area. A stone tablet on the wall of the schoolroom records 40 years service as teachers in the school by Isaac Whiting and William Jones who both died in 1869. Paul Gardiner licensee of the Butchers Arms was also a member and sang in the choir. The building seated 140 persons but was found to be inadequate as Oakridge, with a population of 400 adults, had no other place of worship and the Sabbath School had no less than 230 scholars! Plans were made to extend the chapel by some 20 feet but it is not known whether or not this work was carried out, however it became clear by 1870 that the original building 'old, badly lighted, inconvenient and unsafe' would need to be replaced.



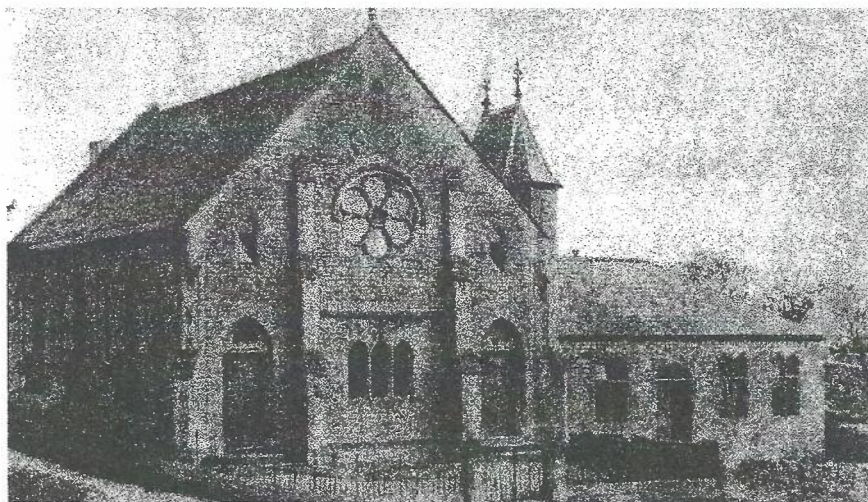
CHAPEL DAY SCHOOL (DAME SCHOOL)

## THE 'NEW' CHAPEL

With a considerable measure of faith and optimism, the members embarked on the building of the new chapel and by 1874 they were worshipping in a building capable of seating 250 persons. It was an ambitious project, but financial assistance was forthcoming from many sources outside the village, and several members were generous with their time as well as their money.

Over the years, their faith has been kept alive by loyal members, including John Peacey, a staunch believer throughout his 92 years, Oliver Hunt beloved in the village as a man whose Christianity was reflected in his daily life and Joe Bateman chapel organist for over fifty years.

After 100 years of Christian witness in Oakridge, with God's blessing we look forward to the future with faith and optimism.



THE 'NEW CHAPEL' SHOWING THE FINIALS ON THE TOWER

# ANGLICAN-METHODIST COVENANT

In 1991 members of the Anglican and Methodist Churches in the village drew up a Covenant which acknowledged the mutual aim of promoting the Christian faith in Oakridge and beyond, aiming for an increasing degree of unity and proposing the formation of an inter church council. Progress has been made and joint services are held twice each month, alternating in the two places of worship. In addition a successful Sunday School (known as 'The Adventurers') is held in the Methodist Schoolroom and attracts up to twenty children and parental support. More recently the two churches have become known as "The Church in Oakridge."

We rejoice that so much has been achieved in the six years since the Covenant was signed and we look to develop closer understanding.



COVENANT WALK 17<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1991  
CHRIS SHORT, REV GEOFFREY SENIOR & THE LATE REV ERIC PYECROFT



# THE OLIVER HUNT MEMORIAL TRUST

At the service of thanksgiving for the life and work of Oliver Hunt in October 1995 it was said:- "He was known throughout the neighbourhood as a Christian. Not a sermonizing or a preachifying Christian - although he had a deep knowledge of the Bible - but one whose Christian beliefs were with him every day of his life and were reflected in all that he did. He was never known to say an unkind or malicious thing about anybody and he was a major influence for good in the village of Oakridge and beyond."

In July 1996 a Charitable Trust was set up in his memory and it is hoped that money from the Trust will be used to improve the Methodist Church premises. The 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary provides an opportunity for support for the Trust. Details will be available of how gifts may be made and enhanced by reclaimed Tax. The Trust will shortly be launching an appeal for support.



COVENANT WALK 17TH JUNE 1991

# THE WAY FORWARD

Various proposals are being actively considered, with professional advice, to provide new toilets and a better kitchen and also a multi purpose area for worship.

It is expected that later in the year a decision will be taken on the option or options to be adopted, bearing in mind the primary concern to improve and upgrade the premises for present and future generations of the community in Oakridge, and particularly the Christian community. The funds expected to be available will obviously be of considerable relevance to the decisions which have to be made.

In the meantime a planning application has been submitted so that, if necessary, there can be proper access to our backland which has already been cleared and levelled.

**METHODIST CHURCH  
BI-CENTENARY  
CELEBRATIONS  
SUNDAY MAY 18<sup>TH</sup>  
1997**

There will be a special service in the Methodist Church at 3.00 p.m. on Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> May when the Chairman of the District, the Rev'd. Ian White, and the Superintendent of the Methodist Church, the Rev'd. Keith Burton, will be joined by the Vicar of Oakridge, the Rev'd Ian Farrow.

For two centuries the Methodist Church has played such a large part in the community that many people in the area - whether or not they are churchgoers - will want to join in the celebration. For this reason tea is being laid on in the Village Hall from 4.00 p.m. and it is hoped that the Hall will be full.



# The Methodist Church

## STROUD AND DURSLEY CIRCUIT

Superintendent: Rev W John Crocker, 3 Fox Close, STROUD GL5 4UP

tel: 01453 764818

3 May 1997

Mr Wilfred Merrett  
9 Hillier Close  
STROUD  
GL5 1XS

Dear Mr Merrett

### The Story of Oakridge Methodist Church

I was delighted to receive a copy of your booklet via Michael Herbert. I have read it with great interest and all the more so since I spent my sabbatical a few years back looking into 18 century Methodism in the Stroud area.

There is one error in the information contained within the section "The Beginnings". The Reverend William Jenkins was undoubtedly involved with the beginnings of the Oakridge cause and the first Wesleyan chapel to be erected. He was first admitted on trial as a minister in the year 1789. And was fully admitted as a minister in 1792. For the years 1794 to 1797 he was the Superintendent of the Gloucester(shire) Circuit which included at the time Stroud. Jenkins saw to the enlargement of the Acre Street octagonal building by 1796 and the same year visited Bisley which led to the building of the first chapel in Bisley. It is true that Jenkins' wife feared for her husband's life when he first proposed to go to Bisley.

By my reckoning it was about a year after the **enlargement** of the Acre Street premises (not a year after the **establishment** of the premises) that Jenkins made his visit to Oakridge that led to the 1797 chapel being built. William Jenkins name is one of the signatories to earlier documents relating to Oakridge. He left the Circuit in the August of 1797 to go to Bristol as the 4<sup>th</sup> minister for a two year spell.

Interestingly Jenkins became the first Superintendent of the Dursley Circuit when it was formed in 1800. He only stayed for one year. He served in northern Circuits before he came to London in 1806 where he remained until his death in 1841. For 31 years of those years he was a supernumerary. I cannot find an official obituary for him.

I am hoping to be able to attend the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary service at Oakridge.

Yours sincerely,