

THE PRIMITIVE METHODISTS

The Primitive Methodist Church began as a series of cottage prayer meetings in the Staffordshire/Cheshire border region. Two members of the Wesleyan Church, Hugh Bourne, a carpenter, and William Clowes, a potter, eager to bring about a religious revival in North Staffordshire, held a series of prayer meetings in 1807 praying for a revival. Inspired by the American evangelist, Lorenzo Dow, who told them about American Camp Meetings, the two men decided to hold a camp meeting on Mow Cop, a well-known landmark. Thousands of people attended coming from Congleton, Knutsford and Macclesfield and many were converted. This led to a Bourne and Clowes organising further open air camp meetings which were considered “improper” by the Wesleyan Conference, and eventually led to both men being expelled from the Wesleyan Church.

They continued to hold prayer meetings and open air services and continued to attract converts. A Chapel was opened in Tunstall in 1811. Within a few months this evangelising movement had eight societies and 200 members. In February 1812, a meeting to decide on rules and regulations and to find a suitable name was addressed by James Crawfoot, a Methodist evangelist from Delamere Forest. “If you have deviated from the old usages, I have not; I still remain a Primitive Methodist.” This was the name that the meeting adopted as it sought to restore the primitive enthusiasm and zeal of Wesley’s ministry.

The first Primitive Methodist Circuit was based at Tunstall. The second circuit was established at Derby in 1816 and a third circuit centred on Loughborough was created in 1818.

The Primitive Methodists held their first Annual Conference in 1820. In the same year the first issue of the Primitive Methodist Magazine was published with Hugh Bourne as its editor – a post he was to hold for the next 20 years.

Thanks to William Clowes’ missioning a fourth circuit based on Hull was created which rapidly grew into a circuit of 3772 members.

By 1824, the Primitive Methodist Connexion had grown to 33507 members with 72 “stations.”

By 1842, membership had grown to 85000 largely due to the extraordinary preaching of travelling preachers such as William Garner, Hugh Bourne, Jeremiah Gilbert, Robert Key, Robert Eaglen, John Oxtoby, William Braithwaite, John Ride and Thomas Russell.

In 1860 at the Jubilee Conference, the Primitive Methodists claimed a membership of 132000 and saw 80 young men received as preachers on probation.

When Methodist Union was achieved in 1932, the Primitive Methodist connexion brought to the United Church 222021 members, 1131 ministers, 12896 Local Preachers, 277792 Sunday School scholars and 4356 Church Buildings.