

REMEMBERING THE BOND

The Story of the Bond Memorial Methodist Church, Benwell



Adelaide Terrace, Benwell

St James' Heritage & Environment Group

NEW BENWELL

Benwell grew rapidly during the second half of the 19th century as a result of the demand for labour in the new industries springing up along the banks of the Tyne. Thousands of terraced houses were built on the slopes above the riverside. Over a period of fifty years Benwell's population grew from around a thousand people to more than 18,500.



Extract from 1898 Ordnance Survey map showing New Benwell

METHODISM

Methodism began in the mid-18th century in Britain. Its growth was largely due to the leadership of John Wesley, often seen today as the founder of Methodism. Wesley is said to have travelled 250,000 miles in 50 years to preach the gospel. At the beginning of the 19th century, there was a split between the more evangelistic Primitive Methodists and the Wesleyans. The Primitive Methodists tended to be stronger among working class communities in the North. There were many Primitive Methodist chapels across the west end of Newcastle, as well as a number of grand Wesleyan churches such as the Bond. The 20th century saw the different branches of Methodism unite once more.



Benwell has a special place in Methodist history because it was here that John Wesley had a brush with death. He was travelling through the area on his

way to Walbottle in a horse-drawn chaise when the horses bolted at the top of Benwell Hill. They galloped for some distance completely out of control before stopping suddenly on the edge of a steep precipice. In Wesley's view both evil and good angels had a hand in this incident.

METHODISM IN NEW BENWELL

In 1877 the local Wesleyan Methodist Circuit decided that the rapidly expanding area known as New Benwell needed its own church. They rented a house on Adelaide Terrace, on a site between Cochran Street and Oak Street (later called Larch Street), and began to hold services. So many people attended that it quickly became clear that larger premises were needed. Negotiations began for an area of land on the north side of Adelaide Terrace between Bond Street and Neville Street (later Nichol Street). The site, comprising an area of 1,610 square yards, was bought in 1879 at a cost of nine shillings per yard. The first chapel to be erected here was an "Iron Chapel". This was a church supplied in kit form, made out of prefabricated corrugated iron parts, and was a way of setting up a church building quickly and cheaply which was common in this period. The opening service was held on Sunday 20th November 1881.



Handbill for the opening ceremony of the Iron Chapel.

THE BOND MEMORIAL CHURCH

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

In 1892 plans were developed to build a new church on the same site, as part of a larger scheme including a Sunday School and a Manse. The first to be built was the Sunday School, which replaced an earlier school building adjacent to the Iron Chapel. The architects were Thompson and Selby of Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, and the builders were Thirlwell's of Benwell Village. The stone-laying ceremony took place on March 1st 1893.

Beneath the south east cornerstone, a time-capsule was placed in the form of a bottle containing copies of the Newcastle daily papers together with contemporary Methodist newspapers and plans.

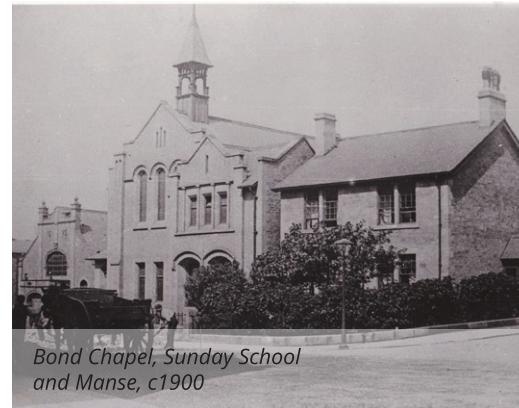
The Sunday School was officially opened on September 13th 1893. As well as classrooms, the building also contained a large hall and served as a place of worship while the congregation waited for the new chapel to be built.

THE MANSE

Next to be built was the Manse on a site to the east of where the Iron Chapel stood. This provided a home for the Minister. The Mayoress of Newcastle, Mrs Stephenson, paid for the building of the Manse. It was designed by the architect J.W.Dyson of Grey Street, Newcastle. The Rev. H.A.Hodgson was the first Minister to live there.

THE CHURCH

In 1898 the builder Thomas Hutchinson of Elswick Road started work on the new stone chapel on the site between the Sunday School and Manse where the Iron Chapel had stood. A row of foundation stones were laid at a ceremony on the afternoon of Saturday 24th September 1898. The first stone was laid by Miss E.M.Stephenson, daughter of Sir William Haswell Stephenson. The east cornerstone was laid by the architect J.W.Dyson. Their initials and those of Councillor H.Crawford Smith, Mrs Towns on behalf of the people of New Benwell, Mr Rowell, Mr Kirton, Miss Hanks, Mr Davis, Mr J.B.Bowes, Mr William Bramble, Mr W.H.Scott and Mr Mark Frampton were carved into the stones. These stones stood at the front of the church for almost 120 years until they were rescued during the demolition of the building. Ten of them were placed in the new commemorative garden in front of the former Manse.



Bond Chapel, Sunday School and Manse, c1900

The chapel cost £4,000 to build, and was designed to provide seating for 800 people on the ground floor and in two galleries. It was officially opened on Saturday 16th September 1899. The following day, more than 1,600 people attended the first Sunday services.

THE END OF THE BOND

By the end of the 20th century the membership of the Bond Church had fallen to just under 150, and the congregation was struggling to maintain the large and ageing building. The original Manse and Sunday School were by that time no longer part of the church but were used by other organisations. These buildings still stand today. The main church building in the middle of the site stopped being a Methodist Church in 2008 and the building itself was demolished in 2017.

WHY WAS IT CALLED THE BOND MEMORIAL CHURCH?

Sir William Haswell Stephenson was a prominent Tyneside businessman. During his long career he played a leading role in several important companies, including Spencer's steelworks in Newburn and Throckley Coal Company, and was also Chairman of the Newcastle Commercial Exchange and the Tyne Improvement Commission. He was a dedicated Methodist, serving as a local preacher and holding many offices in the Church. Stephenson was active in local politics, serving as Mayor of Newcastle seven times as well as Lord Mayor. He was knighted in 1900 and given the Freedom of Newcastle in 1911. Stephenson was a generous philanthropist. His gifts to Newcastle included three local libraries – Elswick, Heaton and Walker. He contributed towards the building of several Methodist churches, including Park Road, Elswick Road, Newburn and Blucher – of which Blucher Church is the only one remaining today.

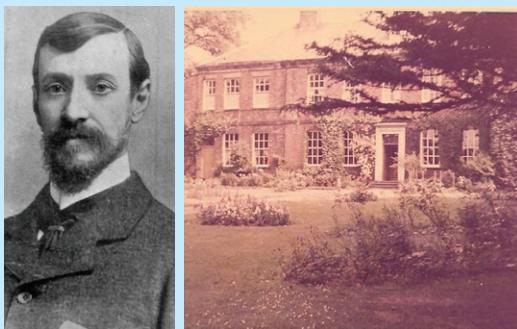


W H Stephenson

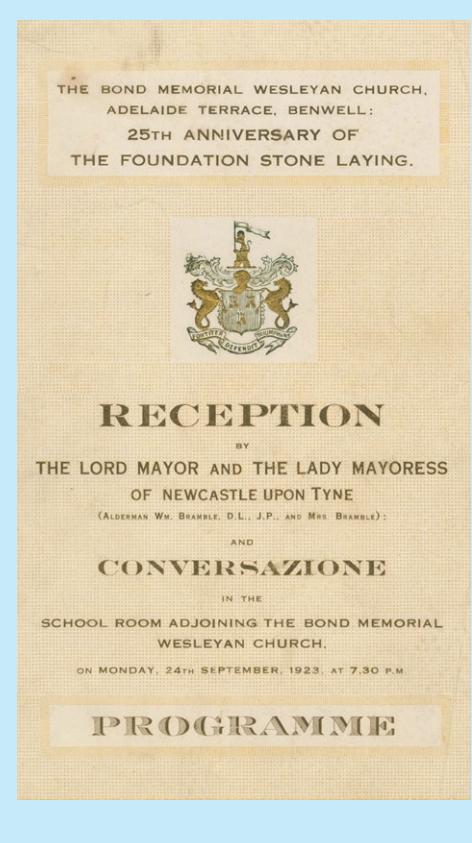


Miss Charlotte Bond

Stephenson married into a family of devoted Methodists. His mother-in-law, Mrs Charlotte Bond, had broken from the strict Anglican tradition of her family, and her own children shared her commitment to Methodism. It was Stephenson's sister-in-law, Charlotte Bond, who paid the entire cost of the land where the Bond Church and associated buildings were built. This gift was in memory of her mother, also called Charlotte Bond. After Miss Bond's death in 1890, Stephenson offered a large sum of money towards the cost of building a stone chapel on the site in memory of his sister-in-law. As he explained in a letter: "I do this because of my indebtedness under God to Methodism."



In 1923 William Bramble, who was then Lord Mayor of Newcastle, held a special civic reception at the Bond to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the stone laying ceremony. Bramble was among those who laid the foundation stones for the new church on September 24th 1898. This stone with the initials WB carved into it can still be seen in the new garden in front of the former Manse. William Bramble, an influential local resident and regular worshipper at the Bond for many decades, was known as the Dick Whittington of Newcastle. He had arrived in the town as a penniless young man and went on to become a successful businessman with a chain of shops and extensive property interests. He was also an active local politician. The Bramble family lived on Adelaide Terrace and later at Benwell Hall, a grand house just to the west of Old Benwell Village.



This 1959 wedding photograph shows the choir gallery in front of the large stained glass window set in the north wall of the church. The window was designed by Kate Bond Stephenson in memory of her aunt Miss Charlotte Bond, and paid for by Charlotte's sister Eliza Stephenson, wife of Sir William.



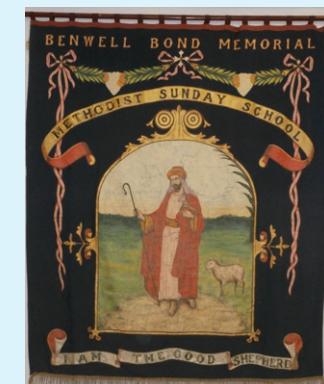
This beautiful Dove window was restored and installed in the Bond when Paradise Methodist Church closed in 1983. Sadly it was lost during the demolition in 2017.



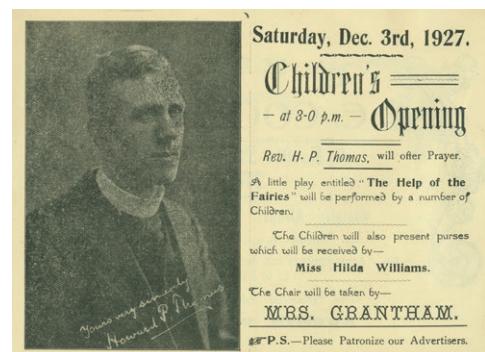
As well as being a place of worship and for baptisms, weddings and funerals, the Bond was also home to many different groups over the years, contributing to the social and community life of the area. Among them were youth clubs, scouts and guides groups, the Senior Citizens Friendship Club, the Men's Fellowship, the Sisterhood and the Young Wives.



Sunday School concert, 1936



Banner carried on Good Friday procession around Benwell



Extracts from programme for Japanese Fair, 1927



Bond Church bible class



Old Time Music Hall concert by Bond Young Wives, 1976

The Bond Memorial Methodist Church was one of the most imposing buildings in Benwell until it was demolished in 2017. This booklet tells the story of the Bond from its 19th century origins.

It was produced as part of a project to create a community garden on part of the site to celebrate the history of the Bond. This project was a partnership between the Bond Guild, St James' Heritage & Environment Group and Action for Children. It was supported by Tyne and Wear Community Foundation's LEAF fund and the People's Postcode Lottery.

THE BOND GUILD

The Bond Young Wives group began in 1964. The name was changed to the Bond Guild after their 25th anniversary in 1989. Although the church has closed and the group's membership has decreased, the group has continued to meet weekly. In 2017/18 its members designed the garden in memory of the Bond and chose the words to be carved into the flagstones to represent what was important to them about their 50 years of friendship.



Bond Young Wives group pictured in July 2008 at the final meeting held at the Bond

St James' Heritage & Environment Group

St James' Heritage & Environment Group is an independent voluntary organisation committed to encouraging people of all ages to explore and celebrate the history of the west end of Newcastle through a programme of events, projects, exhibitions and publications.

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Front cover image: Adelaide Terrace c1900, courtesy of West Newcastle Picture History Collection.