

## **John Calcutt (c.1794-1871)**

John Calcutt was a prominent Nonconformist. He was the second Master of the National Schools until he resigned in 1836 and became Postmaster, a position he held until he retired in 1864. At the beginning of the 1850s, he was around 56 years of age.

Calcutt was an active member of the Wesleyan Reform movement and a local preacher. For Wesleyans the early 1850s were overshadowed by the acrimonious expulsion of the leaders of the Wesleyan Reform movement, who sought less centralisation and greater local autonomy, following its Manchester Conference in 1849.

Calcutt regularly participated at meetings of the Wesleyan Reformers in Banbury, often presiding or being one of the principal speakers. He was expelled from the Wesleyan Methodists for supporting the establishment, in February 1852, of a Wesleyan Reform Society in Banbury. A 'Deddington Circuit' was established, comprising Deddington, Banbury, Fritwell, Syresham, Barford and Bodicote. Calcutt became 'Superintendent of the Wesleyan Connexion' in Deddington.

Calcutt was at the centre of the controversy in 1854 over whether to fill-in the insanitary Town Pool in the Market Place, which is described elsewhere. This brought him into direct conflict with the Vicar, the Rev. James Brodgen.

Despite being in the right, Calcutt was at the receiving end of the Vicar's antipathy towards Dissenters, leading to increasingly acrimonious exchanges. Brodgen even tried to have Calcutt removed from his office of Postmaster.

In the later 1850s, Calcutt became more active in parochial matters. In 1856 he chaired a public meeting to discuss the best mode of celebrating the Crimean peace.

Calcutt became heavily involved in the management of the relief of the poor in the parish. He became assistant Overseer in 1856. He was also one of the Deddington representatives on the Board of Guardians of the Woodstock Poor Law Union, and served as chairman of the Union 1859-1861. He unsuccessfully opposed the building of an Anglican chapel at the Union workhouse in 1860.

Other parochial offices held by Calcutt included being one of the surveyors (of highways) and a parish constable.

Calcutt's home and business premises were in New Street, opposite Deddington House. What is now 'The Old Post House' is a 1930s conversion of three 18th century cottages, one of which was Calcutt's Post Office.

During the 1850s Calcutt's son, Thomas, ran a printing business, first in New Street, then in the Market Place, providing strong competition to J.S. Hiron. In 1857 he decided to emigrate to New Zealand, where his brother had already settled. The stock and premises "of Mr. Thos. Calcutt, who is shortly about to leave England" were offered for sale in an advertisement in the *Oxford Journal* in September 1857.