

Nonconformity

There was a strong Nonconformist tradition in the parish.

On 30 March 1851 a voluntary religious census was undertaken at the same time as the national decennial census. This recorded the following Nonconformist places of worship:

Deddington: Independent or Congregational

Wesleyan Methodist

Clifton: Wesleyan Methodist

Hempton: Independent or Congregational

(See summary below.)

On the face of it, and disregarding Sunday School attendances, there were on average 547 Nonconformist worshippers (51.5%) and 516 Anglican worshippers (48.5%) on Sundays in Deddington. Anglican attendance in Clifton (61%) was stronger than the Wesleyan Methodists, while in Hempton the average Independent attendance (68.5%) was stronger than the Anglican. Overall, the average attendances for the whole parish were Nonconformist 53.5% and Anglican 46.5%.¹

The 1851 religious census data should, however, be interpreted with caution. Amongst other things, there was probably a significant degree of double counting. Anglicans tended to go to morning services, while Nonconformists preferred afternoon or evening services. It is not known what proportion of worshippers went to church twice, or even three times, on Sundays. It was also common practice for some Nonconformists also to attend Anglican services, especially if they were low church.

In the case of the Wesleyan Methodists, 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.

At the beginning of the decade, John Calcutt, a prominent local preacher, was Steward of the Wesleyan Methodist chapel in Deddington. He also 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.

In April 1852 the old Wesleyan chapel in Chapel Square, which had been undergoing enlargement and repairs, was re-opened under the control of the Wesleyan

¹ The Wesleyan Methodist returns for Deddington and Clifton give attendances on census day, but do not give average attendances.

Reformers.² The Conference Wesleyans claimed to have been denied the use of the chapel. A dispute concerning liability for the cost of the improvements came before the Woodstock County Court.

Inconsistently, there is a stone plaque over the entrance saying "Wesleyan Reform Chapel 1851", which does not seem to accord with the above sequence of events.

The first annual tea meeting in the re-opened chapel in June 1853, "now in the hands of the Wesleyan Reformers", attracted over 180.

A report in the *Banbury Guardian* in November 1852 refers to alternative accommodation being fitted up for the Conference Wesleyans courtesy of Cornelius Davis. The collections from the opening services and letting of sittings were to go to the formation of a 'sinking fund' for the erection of a new Wesleyan chapel.

In November 1854 there was a well-attended two-hour lecture on Slavery in America in the Wesleyan Reform chapel. A resolution condemning slavery was unanimously passed at the end of the meeting. Press reports of meetings in the Wesleyan Reform chapel in the later 1850s refer to attendances of around 200.

In June 1859 the Wesleyan Methodist Reform chapel in Deddington was registered for solemnising marriages.

Whilst the Sunday services at the Independent, or Congregational, chapels in Deddington (morning and evening) and Hempton (afternoon) were well supported according to the 1851 religious census, their activities in the 1850s attracted little attention in the local press. The Minister was the Rev. Obed Parker.

Both the Nonconformists and the Church of England organised Sunday Schools (see 1851 census summary below).

The letter from Charles Faulkner to the *Banbury Guardian* in November 1855 decrying the collapse of day schooling for the poor in the town, noted that the Anglican National Schools Sunday School, which used to teach 250 children, superintended by the master and mistress, with 20 "gratuitous" teachers, had also effectively collapsed. In contrast, attendance at the Nonconformist Sunday Schools was Wesleyans c.50, 'Reformed Methodists' c.100 and Independents c.80.

Attendance at the National Schools Sunday School was inflated, and numbers at the Nonconformist Sunday Schools were reduced, by a requirement by the National Schools that those children who were educated there, free of cost, during the week, should attend there on Sunday also. This was a major bone of contention for the Nonconformists.

² A letter to the Bishop of Oxford dated 5 July 1800 made application to register a chapel "lately built" in Deddington for religious worship (Oxfordshire History Centre, MSS. Oxf. Dioc. Papers c.644, f. 55). The 1851 religious census return states that the chapel was erected before 1800.

Religious census 1851

Summary of Nonconformist returns for the parish of Deddington³

DEDDINGTON Population 2,178 (parish 1851 census)

Independent or Congregational chapel

Free sittings 50; other sittings 150 [200]

Average (15 months) morning general congregation 110; Sunday scholars 30

Average evening general congregation 130; Sunday scholars 20

Wesleyan Methodist chapel

Free sittings 40; other sittings 130 [170]

30 March 1851 afternoon general congregation 160

Evening general congregation 147

CLIFTON Population 277 (1841)

Wesleyan Methodist chapel

Free sittings 24; other sittings 55 [79]

30 March 1851 morning general congregation 50

Afternoon general congregation 40

HEMPTON Population 305 (1841)

Independent or Congregational chapel

Free sittings 60; other sittings 90 [150]

Average (15 months) morning general congregation 110; Sunday scholars 30

Average evening general congregation 130; Sunday scholars 20

³ Transcripts of the census returns for Oxfordshire are set out in '*Church and Chapel in Oxfordshire 1851 - The return of the census of religious worship*', ed. Kate Tiller, The Oxfordshire Record Society, Volume 55, 1987. The returns include attendances on census day, 30 March 1851, as well as average attendances (for varying periods). The Wesleyan Methodist returns for Deddington and Clifton do not give average attendances.