

OUR HOME

Our home: A history of our building through the generations.



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For more info about who we are
and getting involved, visit
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INTRO



While the church is always about people, the children of God need to come together and to gather in one place. For us, that is our home grounds at Ash Street in Southport. Formerly known as Southbank Road Methodist, that traces its story back for more than a hundred and fifty years and has a rich heritage and history. Follow us as we take you through 7 different key-points in history as the story of our church and the building we call home unfolds. Its story begins with the impact of one man standing on the street and preaching:

'ORIGINS'

Our story begins with a man named John Wesley. An English leader of the Methodist movement and is said to have come up to Southport and preached on Cemetery Road in the 1770's, although exactly where and exactly when, are still a mystery. John Wesley's first outing to Southport started a stream of missionaries and preachers travelling to evangelise in the area. Prior to 1806 names such as William Bamber and brothers Richard and James Smetham came to visit Southport and the fabric of life began to change. Wesley (Depicted in the image on the right) was fond of open-air preaching and speaking to the masses. His manifesto included bridging the gap of wealth between the rich and poor and his powerful rhetoric would gather large numbers to listen to him preach. His impact on Southport is still visible today.

Methodism started to take a more measurable shape in Southport when a Mr. Dutton allowed for Methodist meetings to take place near his home, (While he wasn't allowed to host them in his home) in a cottage chapel which was nicknamed the Cathedral. It became the first Wesleyan chapel in Southport and was eventually demolished in 1840.

In the 1860's the first Methodist meetings in Blowick were held in the workshop of the house of a Mr and Mrs Bridge, which would then turn into a place of growth and revival. 1865 saw the tea rooms established in their home and an amusing incident occurred. Where the room itself was crowded to excess, the overflow resulted in young boys having to stay on the upper workshop. One boy, who had been accidentally pushed, fell down from the upper workshop. It was at this moment that the tea room members realised that it was time to get a bigger space to have their meetings. (Fortunately, the boy had no injuries).

This led to the building of Blowick's first Methodist chapel which came at the cost of £700 and was finished by the end of the year 1865 and accommodated around 72 worshippers.

It was through the Blowick meetings expansion and over flow as well as the influence of speakers on the landscape such as John Wesley that led to the events that happened next.



'FOUNDATION STONES'

Amidst the Methodist revival in Southport. A small group of seven enthusiasts in 1865 rented a washhouse in order to start a Sunday school. The space they occupied for weekly meetings was twelve feet by twelve feet on Cemetery Road. However, within the year they were forced to move to larger accommodations due to rapid expansion. A move was made to 'Mother Blundell's Barn' on Trap Lane. However, due to rapid expansion (again), the congregation began to build a school extension to their small space, slapped onto the end of the barn the whole thing cost a grand total of £95 to build. (Mostly done through door-to-door collections) The building was finished the following year in 1866 and was known as the Trap Lane Sunday school. However, this was still only the beginning as this premises would only last them for ten years.

This was not enough and in the 1870's the move was decided that Trap Lane Sunday school would have to move to a property on the corner of Ash Street and Southbank Road. What was to follow were the foundations of a multipurpose school and chapel building. A significant event that would later be a steppingstone to greater things would be the laying of the first foundation stone on May 10th 1876 by Mr James Wood. The building itself would be finished the following year.

Yet, this proved to still be insufficient, and another build was commissioned on site. (To become the main meeting place building we have today) that would help to meet the needs of the rapidly growing community and the number of children in need of Sunday school classes. Its foundation stones were laid in 1887 by a Dr James Wood. While it is very different now, you can still see this building and several of its original features in our Main Meeting place, including the stained-glass windows and the upstairs church pews. After the building was completed, an organ was supplied as a special gift to the church.

This sketch by Percy Lancaster shows the completed version of the main meeting building built on Southbank Road which is still here today. The building itself is done in a traditional Methodist style with two main entrances but also conforms to the red brick style of the region.

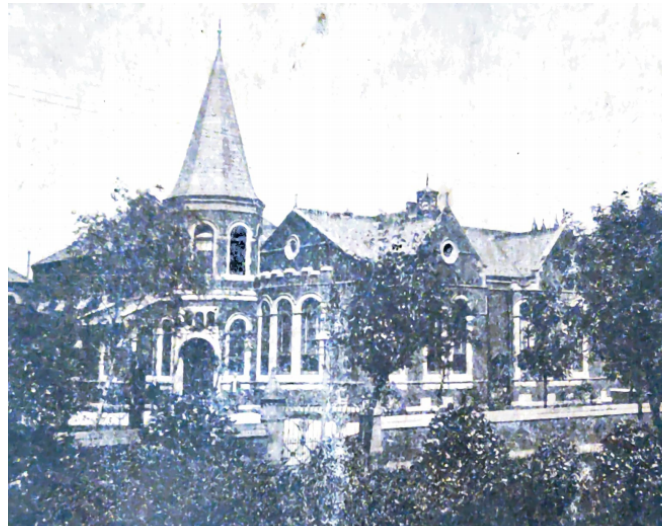


HOME

Lorne Cornish states that “Southbank Road in the Mornington Road Circuit is not a large church; but it has been for years the spiritual home of a zealous and loyal people devoted to every good work.” The congregation of the Southbank Methodist church came together every Sunday and often multiple times on Sundays for morning, afternoon, and evening services. They had different preachers and sung different hymns. On top of this, the congregation were eager and willing to play their part in seeing the church thrive and grow. This often translated to monetary sacrifice and donation for God’s cause. An example of where this money had been put to good use is through an accommodation of the enlarging population in Southport and the greater need for children to have Sunday school.

Fifteen years into the existing of what is now the Main Meeting building. The Southbank Road Methodist church replaced its then school-chapel with what is now the Family life Centre building. Its first foundations were laid on the 20th of July 1903 and was finished in less than a year, opening on the 20th April 1904. The whole construction cost £5,800 to build. The new build would accommodate larger classrooms and more space for children of different age groups. Not to mention a substantial kitchen as well. This was done to make room for the growing number of children in need and the growing population of Southport in general. All of this was largely paid for by donations to the church by the congregation.

Here is a photo, taken in the 1920’s of what the modern FLC was built as. While its interior has changed to suit the times and strains over the course of the century since this photo was taken, it still remains largely the same.



1914-18



“The war is changing everything” said a writer for the Wesleyan church magazine. “One by one the young men slipped away,” constant change became a fundamental part of life during the first world war. The church building on Southbank Road was no exception to this rule during those trying times. The decade old Sunday school premises (Now called the Family Life Centre) became an annex to the local Southport hospital. On the surface its purpose seemed quite simple, but its interior primarily became quite complex. Initially, the school premises were turned upside down and practically became a soldier’s institute overnight. It included a billiards table, a canteen where everything cost only a penny and a room specifically set aside for writing letters (there was even a shooting range, where on earth did they fit that in?). The place was lively and filled with joy. The soldiers and caretakers congregated to sing hymns and pray for people of all ages. The young men, however, left “Under canvas” to the front lines.

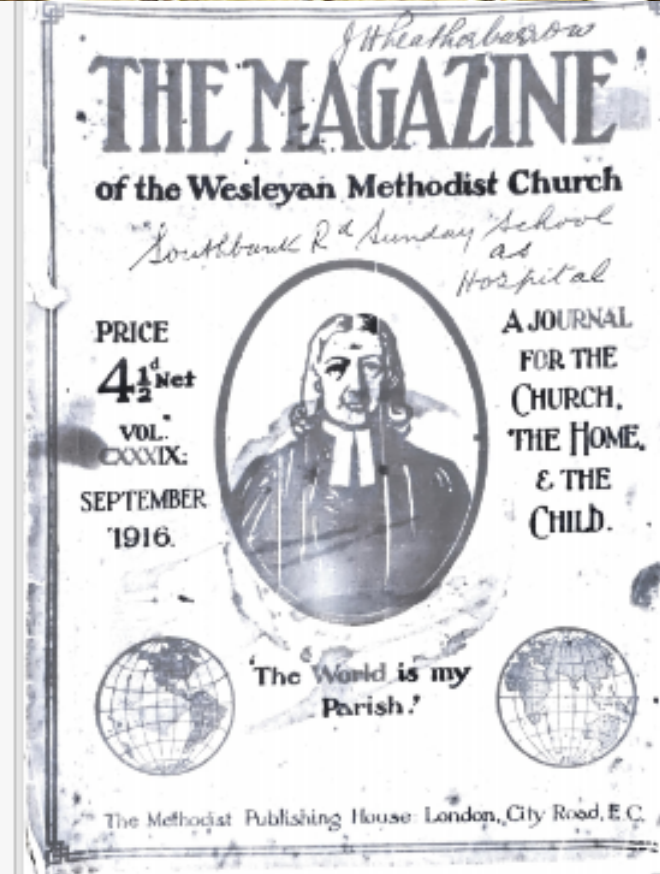


As the number of days, weeks, and months the war dragged on, so did the number of wounded soldiers increase. This left for one option only. To make more room in the school premises for more soldiers. Initially, plans and funding was laid out for 50 beds. However, this was insufficient to meet the demands of the war and so the expected total was raised to 80 beds. The cost to outfit the new beds with proper equipment increased from a manageable £300 to well over £500.

However, it was the contribution of the Southbank Road church congregation that provided the capital to accommodate the increased number of wounded. The congregation, having gone round door to door to collect, both "rich and poor alike!" donated hard earned money. (With one working woman wrapping their donation in paper carefully before gifting it to the hospital). The grand total came together at £560 to outfit the new wards and operating room with proper equipment. The building as a result was praised by both the infirmary board and military officials alike. It is always a blessing to know that people of our town came together in a time of need to help their community as well as those who had experienced violence like never seen before.

The horrors of war were not hidden away on the front lines. The hospital saw and heard all the dark tales from the war. Often dealing with soldiers from the front lines in terrible battles such as Gallipoli and North Africa. The staff and the locals were sure to see, as one writer called the 'Bronzed faces' of those who had been in that battle against the Ottoman Empire. Many of the wounded at the hospital annex on Southbank Road had been local and received a "welcome home".

Once the war was over and the school premises ceased to be a hospital, a war Memorial Cross was erected in the centre of the grounds in honour of those who had lost their lives during the first world war. A bronze tablet was also placed in the school hall as well as a mosaic of the picture 'He Is Risen' by Axel Ender is on the church grounds.



CHANGING TIMES

The Southbank Methodist church continued its former life as normal after the war. Enjoying steady lives and such over time. However, in the latter half of the century, the congregation began to age, and fewer and fewer new members were joining.

Our next keypoint takes us to 1983, when the Community Church in Southport was established after leaving their Plymouth Brethren roots at Canning Road Chapel. 12 members were hungry for spiritual growth and eagerly desired spiritual gifts. While they enjoyed and were blessed by their time at Canning Road, they wanted a closer connection to the Holy Spirit and believed that they were being led by God down this path.

These twelve would go on to become the central leaders of the growing community church, moving originally from home to home in small numbers. Fuelled by a hunger to see the Kingdom of God come to earth and to be present in their local community, early meetings were held from home to home of friends and family before residence in the old Methodist building.

These early years saw the church aided by the ministry of Bryn and Kerri Jones which linked them to other organisations such as Ministries Without Borders but also meant that the church took part in major events such as Bible week.

Furthermore, the church were active in their community doing outreach events on the streets and being involved in the march for Jesus.

When homes became too small to fit their growing number, the church hired out bigger rooms in the town, from school halls to places along the promenade. However, this still wasn't a permanent solution to their growth as these rooms and places were not designed for church meetings and had other needs, school halls were school halls after all, and the church had

equipment that needed a proper home where they can be used in the best possible way. The church ultimately needed a space that could provide them with a deeper rooted base of operations into the community and to accommodate all of their increasing community and administrative needs. The search was quickly on for somewhere that could provide all of these necessities.



NEW BLESSINGS



The turn of the century brought about so much change in the world but also change for the people in Southport. Primarily, the members attending the Southbank Methodist church were moving house and amalgamating with another Methodist community called St. Philips church, which was down the road and meant that existing members wouldn't have to travel far. This came about due to a decline in numbers and an inability to maintain the costs that the church buildings were placing on them. As a result, the building was put up for sale.

Before the Methodist's departure from the building In 1999, The Southbank Methodist church held a funeral for one of its members, a man named Edgar Raynor. Raynor's son (A member of the Community church) attended along with a few of his friends. Sue Oliver and Geoff Grice (Both also members of the community church) sat in the pew furthest back from the stage and pulpit. Geoff admired the building, looking at the features on the ceiling and scanning his eyes across the walls and the stained-glass windows. Sue, noticing his admiration, leaned in, and whispered in his ear, "did you know that this building is up for sale?"

"No, I didn't." said Geoff, raising an eyebrow. He continued to ponder on the building, visualising the potential it could have if his own church were to use the space. I wonder how much it would go for. He thought to himself.

Sensing the opportunity afoot, Geoff consulted his fellow church leaders about the building before making inquiries on its purchase. On further inspection and questions asked, Geoff and another leader Dave Gregg saw how the building could become a gigantic blessing to both the church and the wider community. After praying and fasting, the grounds were transferred to the new ownership of the community church.

Geoff Grice was one of the first leaders of the Community Church and helped establish the church in the old Methodist Building which would then undergo serious change, taking it from the 20th century into the 21st with the arrival of the community church within its walls.

THE MODERN ERA

Our last moment in history brings us to the last twenty years of the Community Church that has been continually blessed by the building and the community. While significant changes were made, the church buildings underwent considerable change upon the transfer of ownership to the Community church. Having a profoundly different understanding of what the church building should be and how it should function, the leaders of the church sought to transform a 19th century structure into a 21st century place of worship.

The first things to leave the church meeting hall were the ground floor pews. Despite understanding their usefulness, the leaders believed that replacing the old wooden pews with free moving chairs would allow for more dynamic church meetings and a variety of functions to occur in the meeting hall. On a philosophical level, the leaders believed that instead of having front facing pews, chairs that could be moved, turned around or put away could help establish relationship and community better than pews designed simply for sitting still and listening to a preacher.

While the organ was a magnificent part of the building, the church favoured a modern worship band that could bring a different dynamic to worship. It was removed and had a baptistry put in its place.

WHAT DO THE COMMUNITY CHURCH DO NOW?

The church regularly meet on Sunday mornings at Ash Street but are committed to outreach to the local community of all ages and backgrounds. We aim to advance the Kingdom of God and to bless the people around us.

