

Former Non-conformist chapels in King's Cliffe

The first Non-conformist chapel in King's Cliffe was a **Wesleyan Methodist Chapel** in Bridge Street, known locally as the 'Bottom Chapel'. The date-stone of 1823 is on the original chapel building with an adjoining part dated 1909.

The original chapel (*far right*) was built on the site of two old cottages owned by Thomas Kirk of King's Cliffe, who was a Methodist sympathiser. He conveyed the cottages to the Chapel Trustees in return for an Annuity valued at £35, on which the Trustees were to pay £2 annually to him and his wife Mary for the rest of their lives.



The chapel was to be used "for preaching and expounding God's Holy Word and for all other Acts of religious worship in conformity with the principles laid down in John Wesley's Forty Sermons". Ministers of the Chapel were to serve for two years only.

PAAC 143/8

∴ KING'S CLIFFE. ∴

New Wesleyan Methodist Chapel.

Stone-laying Ceremony,

AT THREE P.M.

ON TUESDAY, OCT. 19th, 1909,
Memorial Stones will be Laid by several Ladies and Gentlemen.

An Address will be given by

The Rev. J. E. Wakerley,
OF LONDON.

Public Tea 5 o'clock. Tickets 6d. each.

At 6.30 a PUBLIC MEETING
will be held, to be Addressed by

Rev. J. E. Wakerley,
The Circuit Ministers and others.

The Tea & Meeting will be held in the Congregational Church by kind permission.

Collections for Building Fund.

Trains from Peterborough and Stamford arrive at 2.49.

F. Evans, Printer, Stamford.

The 1851 Census of Places of Worship tells us the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel had seats for 90 people and did not at this stage have a Sunday School. Attendances at the Chapel grew and by 1909 it had become too small to accommodate everyone.

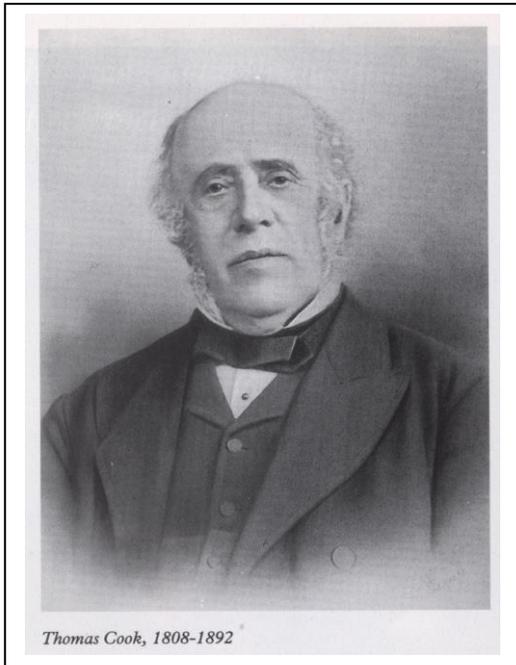
A small thatched cottage next to the Chapel was pulled down and a new chapel was built there at a cost of £465. The new chapel could seat 160 people. The original chapel building was then used as a Sunday School, connected to the new chapel by a wooden partition to allow flexible use of both spaces.

The foundation stones of the new building were laid on October 19th 1909, with the collection going towards the 'Building Fund'. The new Chapel opened in April 1910, 'in the presence of a crowded congregation from all parts of the district'.

By the mid-1900s the Wesleyan Methodist congregation was shrinking and finally the chapel closed its doors in 1989. The old chapel and schoolroom were then converted into a house but original features from the chapel have been retained, including the organ, pulpit and lectern.

A **Zionist Baptist Chapel** opened in September 1831 in West Street, in a building behind the house which is now no.94.

The chapel had its beginnings in a roving Baptist Mission to King's Cliffe in the early 1820s from the flourishing Baptist chapel at Barrowden. The Minister at Barrowden was Edward Payne and the assistant he sent to King's Cliffe was **Thomas Cook**, a native of Melbourne in Derbyshire. He walked regularly from Barrowden to King's Cliffe to preach and distribute Tracts (pamphlets) promoting abstinence from alcohol.



In 1841 Thomas Cook's commitment to Temperance led him to organise an excursion by train from Leicester to Loughborough, carrying 485 people to a Temperance meeting there. This was to be the first of many excursions that would later make Thomas Cook world famous for the eponymous travel company he founded.

The Baptist Mission to King's Cliffe appears to have prospered. The Stamford Mercury of 4th February 1831 reported:

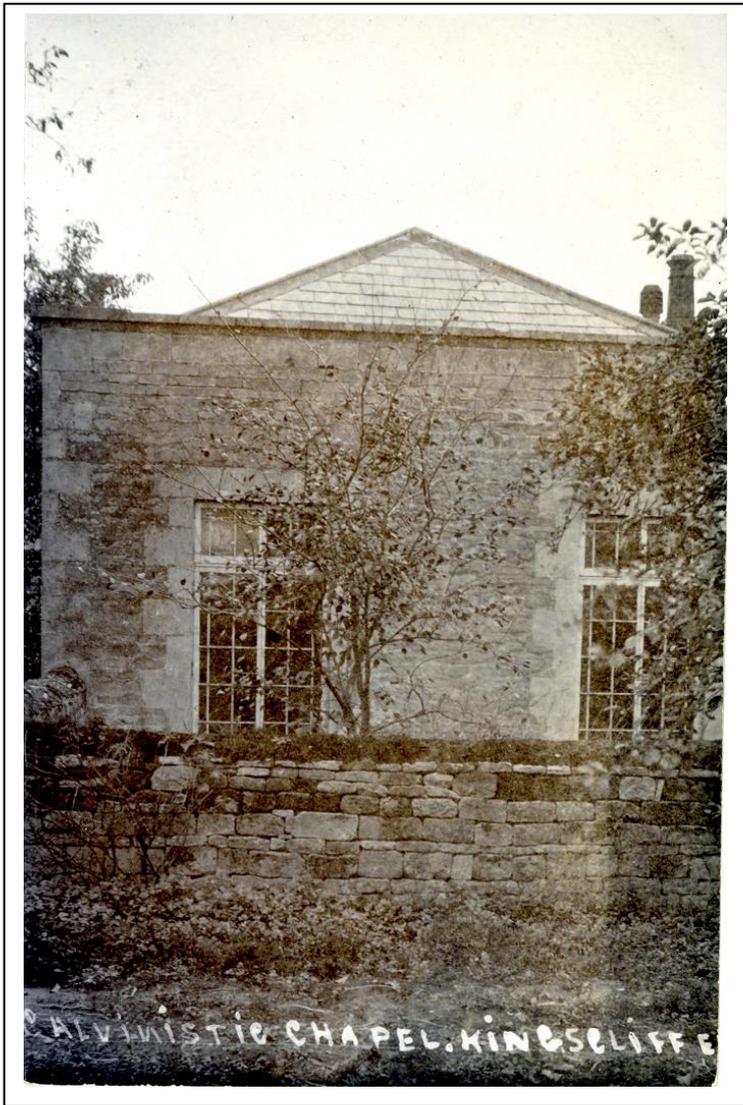
"On Sunday morning last the ceremony of adult baptism was practised at King's Cliffe, on two men of the place, who underwent immersion in the stream which runs through the village. They wore black gowns for the occasion, and the ministers who officiated were Messrs. Payne and Cook, of Barrowden. There has long been a society of

Baptists at Cliffe. They have so much increased of late, that it is said they intend to build a commodious chapel there."

The building used from September 1831 by the Zionist Baptists as their chapel did not belong to the Baptist congregation and, when the owner died, the chapel had to close c1840. The Baptists later joined with the Independents (Congregationalists) who built their chapel further along West Street.

After the Baptists left their chapel, and before the building could be used for any other purpose, two bodies which had been buried there were removed. These were the remains of two single ladies named Culpin, daughters of the chapel caretaker. They were reburied in the churchyard. The old Chapel was then used as a stable with a hay loft built inside. In more recent years it has been used as a barn and general outbuilding to no.94 West Street.

A **Calvinist Baptist Chapel** was built in 1841 behind the house now no.36 West Street. Access to the chapel was by a narrow passage-way with a door onto the street. In the Religious Census of 1851 it was described as "Christ's Chapel" with 100 wholly free sittings and an average congregation of fifty in the mornings and forty in the evenings. There was no Sunday School. The Resident Minister was Richard Hubbard Ireson, who died in 1860. By 1907 the congregation had dwindled to only two: James Elderkin, a shoe-maker who died in 1907, and Robert Little, a boot maker, who died in 1917.



After James Elderkin's death, the sole Trustee of the Chapel, Robert Green of Park Street, decided that it should be closed. He hoped that the congregation could be increased, but this did not happen and 'Christ's Chapel' was destined never to re-open.

When Robert Green himself died in 1928, he was still the sole Trustee of the Calvinist Chapel. The Charity Commissioners then offered the trust and its property to the Trustees of the Congregational Church in King's Cliffe: Mr James Elliott, Mr George Close, Mr Frederick Edgson and Mr Charles Stanyon. They accepted the offer. The property was sold by the Charity Commissioners for £108 and invested in War Stock for the benefit of the Congregational Chapel.

The old Calvinist Chapel building (pictured left) was demolished some years later.

The **Congregational Chapel, West Street**, locally called the 'Top Chapel', was built in 1846 by the Independents (also known as Congregationalists). The Independents had established a "cause" in Nassington in 1835 and opened a chapel there on 21st May 1839. They then adopted Nassington and King's Cliffe as one of their "stations".

This view along West Street c1910 shows the chapel on the right.



The Revd. George Amos became the official Independent Minister in June 1844 and he moved from Nassington to King's Cliffe in October of that year.

At first, the Independents used the old Zionist Baptist Chapel until 1846 when they built their own Chapel on ground given to the Chapel Trustees by Mr William Henry Wyles junior. Two

houses and a stable had previously stood there, belonging to Jane Mason, a carrier to Stamford twice a week. The first service was held in the Chapel on the 29th September 1846.

In October 1846, the Stamford Mercury reported that the Independents proposed to build a room for a day-school, on the principles of the British and Foreign School Society (so greatly needed in the neighbourhood), "if the friends of unsectarian education will render adequate assistance." The British & Foreign School Society promoted "the Education of the Labouring and Manufacturing Classes of Society of every religious persuasion". Schools run under the aegis of the Society were usually known simply as 'British Schools'.

The schoolroom was built adjoining the back of the chapel. The cost of both buildings was £500. The local Independents had very little money to support the school themselves, and before the school opened, Minister George Amos wrote to the British & Foreign Schools Society asking for a £5 grant for books as they were 'a very poor people'; and seeking their help in finding a suitable Master for the school. He must be a 'man of sterling piety and an Independent'. The Independents could afford to pay the Master only £50 – which George Amos said would be the equivalent of £60 paid elsewhere, as 'provisions and lodging are cheap'.

The school opened as a 'Day School' on 27th September 1847, teaching religious knowledge and the elementary subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic to boys and girls who had no other school to attend in the village. The school closed as a 'Day School' in 1877, four years after the Endowed School in Park Street opened to all village children. The Congregational Chapel continued to run a Sunday School well into the mid-20th century.

In 1851 the Congregational Chapel had 84 free sittings and 120 other sittings. Average numbers attending were: Morning 50, Afternoon 120. Its Golden Jubilee in 1896 was celebrated with a splendid tea to which reportedly 180 people sat down in the chapel schoolroom – quite a squash!

The Chapel was thoroughly renovated in 1906, inside and out; with new windows on the sides and front and an extra window over the entrance doors.

In April 1936, the Northamptonshire Association of Congregational Churches were appointed Trustees of the King's Cliffe Chapel in place of three retiring Trustees: Frederick Edgson, Charles Stanyon (II) and George Close. Charles Stanyon and George Close were Deacons who served the Congregational Chapel for over 50 years.

The last marriage service was conducted in the Congregational Chapel in 1972 and the final service was held there on 28th September 1980 after which the chapel closed.

Subsequently, the chapel building was sold and converted into a house. In very recent times the owners have reinstated iron railings at the front of the old chapel, in similar style to those which were removed, along with others in the village, to help the war effort during the Second World War.

Sue Trow-Smith, August 2020