

## History of the Churches



Like many other villages in the West Riding, Denholme saw a big increase in population in the 1800's. People were attracted to the area because of the establishment of a textile mill build by the Foster family, and also the building of local reservoirs and the new railway. They came seeking employment and some settled in the housing built by the mill owners. Many had belonged to a church or chapel in the area in which they had previously lived and they brought with them a desire to continue worshipping at their chose denomination. Within a very short period of time, the later half of the 1800's, six new chapels and an Anglican church were built in this small village. Four Methodist chapels, a Baptist Chapel, the Congregational Chapel known as the Independent Chapel, and the Anglican Church of St. Paul's.

Out of all the buildings of that period there is only one remaining building still in use as a place of worship. The Independent Chapel (Congregational Chapel) on Keighley Road is now home to **Denholme Shared Church**.

Below is a history of three churches involved in the partnership:

## History of the Denholme United Reformed Church (Independent Chapel)

Some of the folk who settled in Denholme belonged to the congregational movement and they originally travelled to Kipping Chapel in Thornton to worship. However that must have seemed a long way for them to walk, and they started meeting in what I think were rooms borrowed from the Methodists in the Sunday School at Lodge Gate. In February 1843 a Denholme Congregational Chapel was founded with a membership list of 9 people.

Revd James Gregory who was minister at Kipping Chapel was involved in the setting up of the chapel and led the first service at Denholme. An appeal was started for a building, money was raised and in 1844 the foundation stone was laid. Cost of the land purchased was just £100 and the building itself finished and opened on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 1845 at a cost of £1000. The costs were greatly reduced due to the labours of the congregation, they worked in the mill during the day and laboured on the building during their spare time.

These chapel folk were known as the 'Independents' a name which was frequently given to the Congregationalists because they were free from the established church, they governed themselves independently. Hence the name 'Independent Chapel'. The first minister for the chapel was called in 1848 and lived in the manse (Carr House) built in 1848 at a cost of £330. Things seemed initially to be going well, however by the 1860's things were floundering and Mr John Hill a lay pastor from Allerton came over to preach and help the church in 1868. The congregation were greatly encouraged by his presence and in 1869 numbers had grown again and a Sunday School was built at a cost of £100.

During the eight years that Mr Hill was involved, the chapel members grew from 51 to 108, and scholars from 37-216. Mr Hill was nicknamed the 'Bishop of Denholme' and his horse the 'Evangelistic horse' because they travelled so regularly to this chapel. In the Jubilee Celebration booklet it is estimated that his journeys probably covered a total of 1700 miles. Mr Hill later became Alderman Hill serving for many years in Bradford and doing other good works. The Jubilee Booklet in 1894 however records number of scholars down to 157, but things much have been going well for the chapel building was extended in 1896.

In 1948 dry rot was discovered in the timbers of the roof and after extensive repairs it was re-opened with a dedication service on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1951. In 1972 the Congregational Churches voted to create a new denomination called

the United Reformed Church, so the building became Denholme United Reformed Church.

In 1986 Denholme URC were approached by the Baptist Church members asking if they would consider the two churches joining together. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1986 the first joint service was held in the URC building, and subsequently the two churches went on to become Denholme Edge Church, a new name for a new partnership between the URC and Baptists.

In 1989 the building was extensively refurbished, the pews removed and the floor levelled. The old Sunday School building was demolished and a new meeting room, toilets and a kitchen added to the chapel building. This was at a cost of over £100,000 raised from grants, monies given from the sale of the Baptist Chapel, and funds raised by the congregation. In March 1990 a special service attended by the Rt Revd Robert Williamson, Bishop of Bradford dedicated the new extension. It was the hope of the present congregation that their ecumenical links would grow even further.

Interior of Denholme Independent Chapel as it is today



## History of Denholme Baptist Church (Southgate Chapel)

Workers at the mill also came from the Baptist faith and like those from the congregational denomination they at first travelled to the nearest chapel which was at Queensbury. They soon resolved to establish a preaching place of worship in Denholme, and began by renting a cottage at Lodge Gate. A subscription fund was started in 1845 to build their own building. In 1851 a small school building was put up on land at the bottom of what is now Chapel Street, and later became the site of the Baptist graveyard. The building cost £173 and it took the members 10 years to pay off this debt, and when they did they felt they could increase the fee paid to preachers from 1d to 2d.

In the Centenary booklet there is mention of one occasion when the baptistry was leaking so they took the baptism candidate up to Shay Clough Reservoir for the baptism service. This building soon became too small and more land was purchased enabling a new Baptist chapel to be built higher up on the site which was opened in 1867 at a cost of £1,450. In 1872 land for a new Sunday School was given by Fosters, and in 1883 the Sunday School building was added to the chapel building at a cost of £1250.

We have copies of a hand written script from 1883 buried in a bottle deposited under the memorial stone of the new school. This was retrieved when the building was demolished. It gives an interesting account of the village, putting the population at 4,000 inhabitants, as well as information about the chapel including numbers attending as well as financial information.

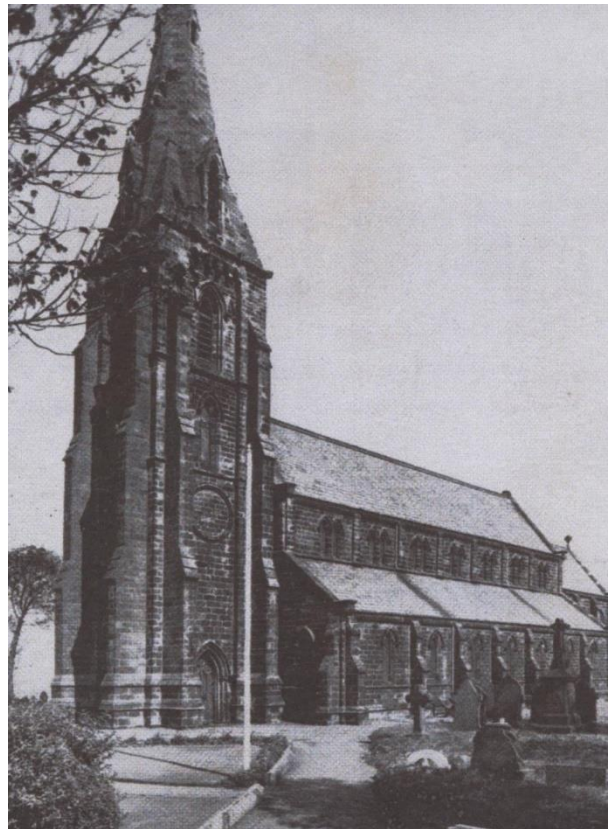
For many years the singing in the chapel was accompanied by a harmonium but in 1904 a two-manual organ was installed at a cost of £400. A gift of £175 towards this was received from Mr Carnegie.

Sadly this building fell victim to dry rot and needed extensive repairs. In November 1980 the last service was held in the building and the Baptists found alternative accommodation in the former Denholme Council offices at Maine Villa, Longhouse Lane. After discussion with the United Reformed Church (Independent Chapel) they came in October 1986 to join in a new partnership.



Southgate Baptist  
Chapel

St Paul's Church



## History of St Paul's Parish Church

Denholme was part of the Chapelry of Thornton in the Parish of Bradford whose records began in 1678. In 1826 the Church of St. Matthew, Wilsden was built and Denholme became part of this new Parish. It became a separate Parish in 1846 when St Paul's Church was built at Denholme Gate, between Denholme and Denholme Clough.

Why you may ask was it built so far away from the centre of the village? It was to serve both areas and it was thought that they would grow towards each other, with the new building at the heart. But after the building of Denholme Mills by the Fosters, Denholme expanded and left Denholme Clough behind, with the Church in an undeveloped area between.

The land for the Church was given by William Buck, the largest landowner in the area. The building, which was completed in 1846, was designed by J B Cantrill and is Early English style with a gothic tower.

It cost £3,700 which was raised partly by subscription but also by grants from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Incorporated and Ripon Diocesan Societies. The east window, of beautiful stained glass, was presented by Mr Jonathan Knowles. The Fosters were also generous benefactors of the church throughout the time they remained in the village. William Foster was one of the first Church Wardens and Wm. Garnett Foster (his great grandson) was also Warden for many years.

In 1997, soon after the 150th Anniversary, it was found that the ceiling and roof were unsafe. The church closed quickly for repairs and the congregation met, temporarily, in the Mechanics Institute. The repairs needed were found to be extensive and with great reluctance, the building and part of the churchyard were put up for sale. A final Open Air Service of Farewell was held in the new graveyard on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> September 1999. After meeting in the temporary premises of the Mechanics Institute, in 2001 the Bradford Diocese purchased a property on Longhouse Lane, a former doctors' surgery. Despite its limitations, the building was lovingly put to use and adapted as a church.

The congregation continued to meet there until August 2008 when they found a new home as part of the Shared Church.

If you are interested in the history of this church - Terry Hanson has written a very full account in his book *'The Minister in the Hills'* published in 2011, a copy of which can be found in the Denholme library.

