

The Drake Family

of Uppingham Methodist Church

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by

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Uppingham Methodist Church prior to rebuilding in 1872 courtesy Uppingham Methodist Church Council

The history of Uppingham Methodist Church is probably no different from that of many other Methodist churches in small market towns in the nineteenth century, where one or two families provided the bedrock, continuity and resource for the local society over several generations. It is likely that as in Uppingham, this pattern largely died out from the mid twentieth century with increased social mobility and younger generations moving away from birth areas.

The area around Launde Abbey in Leicestershire, would have been known to the Uppingham Methodists, certainly to the circuit ministers and the local preachers. For most of its' history, Uppingham was in the Oakham Circuit which extended all over a most beautiful tract of country side, known as High Leicestershire. There were chapels in most of the villages around the Launde Abbey area: East Norton lies to the south on the A47, Knessington and Braunston are to the north in an area which is still quiet and remote.

Uppingham is in Rutland. Today it is a small town with a population of no more than five or six thousand. In the census of 1851¹ it was roughly half the size with approximately two thousand inhabitants.

It is fortunate that most of the records of Uppingham Methodist Church have been well preserved in the local record office.² Another very useful resource is a book written in 1909 by Josiah Gill, a circuit member.³ This account is mainly based on memories and therefore probably subjective but nevertheless it backs up and adds to other records including primary sources.

The first one hundred and fifty years of the history of Uppingham Methodist Church is also the history of four generations of the Drake family. The Drake family's connection with the Methodist church in Uppingham goes from its beginnings in 1819 right through till the 1950s when the Drake branch of the family died out.⁴

In researching the church history it is apparent that the Drakes were involved in every area of church life.⁵ It could be said in many cases they gave their lives to it, and it is likely that the church would not have survived, were it not for this family.

Uppingham is in an area of ironstone quarries and buildings of which there are many notable examples in the town and nearby villages. The Drake family were stone masons and came to the town from Bourne in Lincolnshire in 1779⁶ although recent research is showing that they may well have been a Rutland family for many generations before that.⁷ John Drake, the first Methodist was baptised in the Uppingham Parish Church in 1788.⁸

The first record of Methodism in Uppingham was the registration in 1817 by the Bishop of Peterborough of Charles Peach's Schoolroom as a place of religious worship⁹. Methodism probably came to Uppingham from Oakham where it began a few years earlier. John Wesley is never recorded as coming to Rutland but he of course was well known in Leicester and other cities in the region.

The First Generation

John Drake b.1788 d.1870

This first registration was fairly soon followed by the building of a chapel (as it was originally known) which opened in 1819, and this is when the Drake family is first mentioned in records. John Drake was noted as a founding Trustee and was able to sign the trust document with clear firm handwriting.¹⁰ The builder of the chapel is not recorded, but as a stonemason perhaps he had a hand in it. According to Josiah Gill John Drake had been converted in 1818 under the ministry of the Reverend John Hobson, Circuit Minister at the time, 'from which time he cast in his lot with the despised Methodists.'¹¹

By this time John Drake was a married man of about thirty-one with at least two children both of whom were baptised in the Parish Church.¹² From 1819 onwards he was to have three more children who were all baptised in the Methodist Church.¹³ From now onwards he became prominent in all aspects of Church life.

The church was never large, having thirty-seven members in 1837, rising to seventy-three by 1840 and then falling again in the middle of the nineteenth century. For most of the nineteenth century Uppingham was in the Oakham Circuit which mostly had two ministers. There is no record of a minister ever living in Uppingham. Their residence was always Oakham from where they travelled their various rounds. The Drakes were prominent in offering the usual hospitality. In about 1835¹⁴ John Drake built a good house for his family, conveniently situated round the corner from the church.

An invaluable picture of John Drake is painted by the Reverend Timothy Moxon, Circuit Minister 1849-51. Mr Moxon kept a journal in which he recorded a large part of a year in the Oakham Circuit.¹⁵ As well as his spiritual journey, he gives us an insight into the changing modes of travelling. For instance it took him all day to do the round trip from Oakham to Uppingham and outlying villages on foot, a distance of twelve to fourteen miles, whereas he also recorded journeying several hundred miles by train to Gloucestershire and back in one day.

However, he must have been very thankful for the Drakes, as many times he records staying overnight at their home, or taking breakfast, or supping there. Mr Moxon described John as 'a simple but honest hearted man'.¹⁶ When John's wife Mary died later in the century her obituary in the Methodist Magazine recorded their service thus:

'...Mr and Mrs Drake opened their house to the Circuit ministers during their visits to Uppingham: and many who have been entertained there, can still call to mind the unaffected kindness with which she ministered to their comfort...'¹⁷

John's name always appears in the records of various meetings: classes, trustees, missionary meetings etc. Both Gill and Moxon mention the mid century Reform Movement as weakening Uppingham. Gill notes that several trustees and leaders left, but John Drake is described as one of two loyal leaders who remained.¹⁸

All this time John Drake was bringing up his family to be good Methodists. Three children survived into adulthood. John's eldest, and only surviving son Henry, was to follow his father into the stonemason business and become a notable builder in the town. The girls were obviously given some education as they were able to sign their names in the marriage register, and all generations produced the usual samplers, examples of which are owned by their descendants.

John Drake died in 1870 aged eighty-two. [It was said by Gill that](#)¹⁹ he had never missed a service until the year of his death.

The Second Generation

Henry Drake b.1813 d.1890

By the time of John's death, Henry, his son had taken over the mantle of prominent Methodist. He was a trustee, class leader and held all the usual offices. He and his wife Ann had taken over the responsibility for Minister's hospitality. It is quite amusing that the Ministers often slept at one house, and breakfasted at another etc. Father and son often seemed to share it out in this way e.g. from Moxon's account: 'Monday the 10 Dec 1849 half past 3pm started for Uppingham called at Preston Good congregation Baptised Mr Henry Drakes daughter 'Mary Ann' May parents and children live before God. Supped at Mr H D's Slept at Mr Drakes Senior'.

Henry became a prominent builder in the town and built a fine house for himself. In 1872 the church was largely rebuilt with a Victorian frontage. It is likely that Henry was the builder, certainly records show he was very involved. He built cottages next to the church and in 1887 built a new schoolroom. He was married twice, his second wife Ann Bricknell coming from Shoreditch and almost certainly a Methodist there as she leaves money in her will to various London Methodist churches. Henry had two children both by his first wife

Mary Drake/Bell/Field b.1815 d.1901

John Drake's eldest daughter Mary had an eventful early life. In 1837 a new Circuit Minister arrived, the Reverend John Bell junior. No doubt he was given the usual Drake hospitality at which Mary, aged twenty-two would have assisted her mother. She was also in the Preacher's Class. Things obviously developed quickly as in October 1838, only a year after Mr Bell's arrival, the couple were married and by the end of that month they had set sail for Nevis in the West Indies where John had been called to the mission field. Mary immediately fell pregnant and gave birth to a son, John Henry Bell. Sadly within weeks of the birth and only a few months after arrival, Mr Bell died of Yellow Fever. Mary and the child survived to return to Uppingham by early 1840. She lived with her parents until their deaths and until her later remarriage was always noted in records as Mrs Bell, Minister's widow. She remarried much later in life and carried on being [active in the church until her death in 1901](#).²⁰

Frances Drake/Curtis/Morgan b.1823 d.1903

Frances, the second daughter of John Drake married twice. Her second marriage was into the Morgan family who had arrived in Uppingham from Wales by the middle of the century. From this branch came another family of Methodists, descendants of whom moved on to London and became notable in the [Bow Mission and the East Ham Congregational Church well into the twentieth century](#).²¹

The Third Generation

John James Drake b.1845 d.1886

John James, son of Henry, was sent to school in Warwickshire He became a Class Leader in the church and was, like his father a builder. He had a large family of six children some of whom died young.

It is not known why some time in the 1880s (annoyingly for the family historian between censuses) he moved away to Bristol where he and his wife both died leaving six orphan children.

Mary Ann Drake b.1849 d.1936

Mary Ann was Henry's daughter, noted above as being baptised by Mr Moxon. Any family would be proud to have 'Aunt Polly', as her descendants remember her, as an ancestor. She held every office in the church and was involved in every area of church life: society steward, presiding over teas at the opening of the Sunday school, a founder member of the Sisterhood etc. When her brother and sister in law died in Bristol, four of the six children were sent back to Uppingham where [this maiden lady took them into her home and brought them up](#).²²

Mary Ann probably held the church together in the early part of the twentieth century. In 1909 she was described by Gill 'One of the oldest members alive today is [Miss Drake who has held office of chapel stewardess since her father's death](#)'.²³ She was to live until 1936 and was lovingly remembered by descendants of her niece. She had a big funeral, reported in the local paper. [It is clear she was held in high esteem in the town](#).²⁴



Sampler worked by Mary Ann Drake courtesy Roger Almond

Of the same generation as John James and Mary Ann is their cousin **John Henry Bell (b.1839 d.1911)** the son of the missionary, born on the island of Nevis. He was sent to the [Woodhouse Grove School](#)²⁵ and was perhaps expected to follow in his father's footsteps and become a Minister. However, he followed neither his father, into the ministry, nor his grandfather into the stonemasons business but had a variety of occupations including a draper's assistant, newspaper reporter and at the end of his life Town Crier - perhaps after all he inherited a fine preaching voice. He moved away and married into the Carven family a notable [Methodist family in Nantwich](#).²⁶ He had a large family but appears to have separated from his wife in later years and come back to live in Uppingham. He was obviously an eccentric character as he was imprisoned for not having his children vaccinated. He died alone in Uppingham in 1911.

The Fourth Generation

Florence Drake /Almond (b.1872 d.1925)

Florence was the elder daughter of John James Drake and brought up by her Aunt Mary Ann Drake. She married Arthur Almond from a family of Methodists from a nearby village and moved away. Descendants of this family continue as Methodists until the present day.



The Drake Family c.1917 - Left to right
Back row: Lily Drake, Arthur Almond, Florence Almond nee Drake
Front row: Kenneth Almond, Mary Ann Drake
courtesy Roger Almond

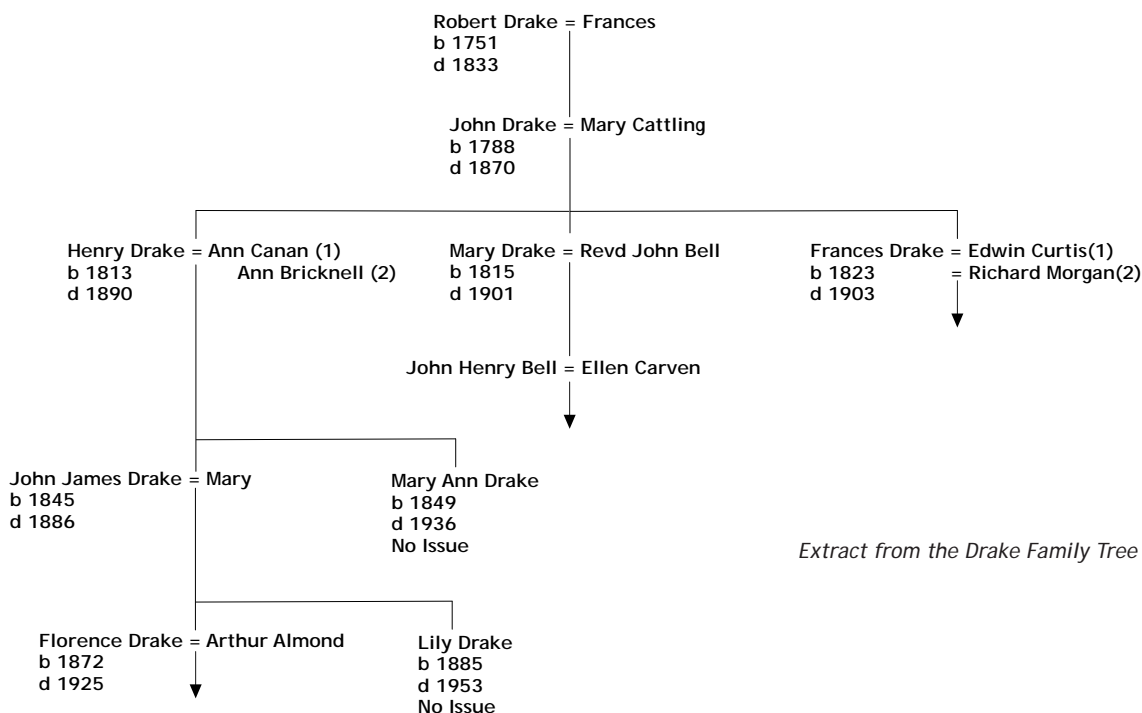
Lillie Drake b.1883 d.1953

The male line of the family had died out with the death of Henry and his son John James, but Lillie, second daughter of John James, was the last of this family in the Uppingham Methodist Church. Like her sister, she was brought up by her aunt Mary Ann and lived with her in the big house her grandfather had built. She never married. In some ways she seems a more shadowy figure than other members of her family. It may be that records are sparse, or that the church was at low ebb. But she was faithful in her service being noted as missionary secretary and organist. Lillie and her aunt are remembered in 2011 by the oldest member of the church as *'two ladies in black silk, summer and winter'*.²⁷ Lillie remained in the large house (or part of it) during World War II. When Kingswood School was evacuated to Uppingham in 1939, the house was used by the Headmaster A.B. Sackett and his family for the duration of the war. The Kingswood staff with their Chaplain the Reverend Rupert Davies played a full part in the life of the church and [brought some notable preachers to the pulpit](#).²⁸

Lillie left the big house and moved into a cottage her father had built next to the church. She died in 1953, the last of a faithful Methodist family.

As well as being stonemasons, the Drakes were also monumental masons so they had good gravestones, grouped together in the Parish Church graveyard, the inscriptions on the later ones still being legible.

Mary Field is buried with her second husband and has the simple inscription 'Peace Perfect Peace'. After becoming a successful builder Henry Drake's stone has a verse from Psalm 107 'So he bringeth **them** unto **their desired haven**'. 'She lived her life for others' is the inscription on Mary Ann Drake's stone This could be an epitaph for the whole of the Drake family who played such a large part in ensuring the survival of Uppingham Methodist Church.



Extract from the Drake Family Tree

References:

- 1 UK Census Collection <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> (Ancestry) accessed 2011.
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- 4 See Margaret Stacey The Story of Uppingham Methodist Church 2002 Uppingham, for most of the early history quoted in this paper.
- 5 ROLLR and Gill.
- 6 Uppingham Poor Law Settlement Certificates in ROLLR ref DE1912/30/105.
- 7 ROLLR and written information received from Drake descendants in 2010-11.
- 8 Uppingham Parish Registers at ROLLR (UPR).
- 9 Meeting House Certificates in the Northamptonshire Record Office.
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- 11 Gill Page 239.
- 12 UPR.
- 13 ROLLR.
- 14 Unpublished research by members of Uppingham Local History Studies Group (ULHSG).
- 15 Manchester, John Rylands Library, manuscript journal of the Wesleyan minister Timothy Robert Moxon , Methodist Collections, ref MA1687, accession 1981/005.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 The Methodist Magazine 1868 page 671 in WHS Library Oxford.
- 18 Gill p.239.
- 19 Gill p.239.
- 20 See Stacey Margaret , Mary Drake and The Missionary, Uppingham 2010.
- 21 Information provided by David Morgan , descendant, 2010-11.
- 22 Information provided by Roger Almond, descendant.
- 23 Gill p.240
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Information from Kingswood School archivist 2010 and 1851 census Ancestry.
- 26 Information provided by Gill Channon, descendant, 2010-11.
- 27 Verbal information from Norah Stones of Uppingham in 2011
- 28 See Stacey Margaret, The Story of the Twin Boards Uppingham Methodist Church and Kingswood School 1939-1946 Uppingham 2005.