

## August 2023 - Walkabout



In 1840 Carver Chapel was built in Sheffield. I walked past it the other week. The Chapel has long since closed for worship. It is now 'Walkabout' – a pub/club where hundreds attend every weekend to drink designer gin, bottled beers and overpriced pop.

I was with a group of girls on a 'day out' to a Sheffield Museum as part of Girl's Brigade Camp. We were walking past 'Walkabout' on our way to a Video Game Museum. Times have certainly changed since the opening of the Chapel in 1805.

The girls didn't notice the building, and I reflected on just how many closed chapels the girls would walk pass in any given week. Indeed, how many I drive

past on my travels. Chapels re-modelled for a different 'secular' purpose – whether it be a carpet warehouse, a gym or a pub/nightclub.

As I walked about 'Walkabout', I noticed the grave markers, still present in the grounds of this 172-year-old building. I thought about the lives, the dreams, the hopes and fears of those who had found a spiritual home in this huge building over the years.... and now, their resting place – in the grounds of an 'Australian' themed pub. In 1805 it was titled 'The Cathedral of Methodism'. Even the building design was covered in prayer - the architect was also a minister in the Sheffield Circuit, so at every stage, the buildings' purpose was carefully considered - to glorify God.

The foundation stone was laid on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1804, and the next year, on completion, the Annual Conference was held on these new premises, filled with 300 preachers - and having a seating capacity of 1100 – the largest of its kind at that time.

When it was built there was some opposition, that it was too far from the town centre - one of the Preachers said the town would soon swallow up the surrounding fields and it would not be a problem - He was absolutely right. Not a field in sight.

Those buried there over the decades, whose lives were entwined with that of the Chapel would have attended to hear the Word of God, and sought to learn more from our Lord Jesus – in a pursuit of scriptural holiness - just like us today followers of Jesus today.

The graveyard was extensive.... It isn't now, but it is still present... visible... uncared for... defiled. Does this matter? Does anyone actually care? I care!!!

In 1993, Sheffield started building its new tramway network – the 'Supertram' – this involved the exhumation of numerous saints from the locality. One blogger states, "And if matters couldn't be worse, the opening of Walkabout inside the Grade II-listed chapel meant that a new beer cellar had to be built outside. This meant that a further 101 individuals were excavated from the old graveyard to allow its construction, finally, most modern-day revellers, taking advantage of the external beer garden, will be alarmed to find they are standing on top of old graves" ....

I often look at old chapels like this and feel depressed. But I mustn't.

What can we learn from those who went before us? Something of their faithfulness, and the call for us to also be faithful – even in difficult times? What can their story teach us? That what is precious should never be bricks and mortar?

*Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you.* (Deuteronomy 32:7)

That even though our buildings may crumble or be no longer fit for purpose, there is joy because if *“you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* (Romans 10:9)!

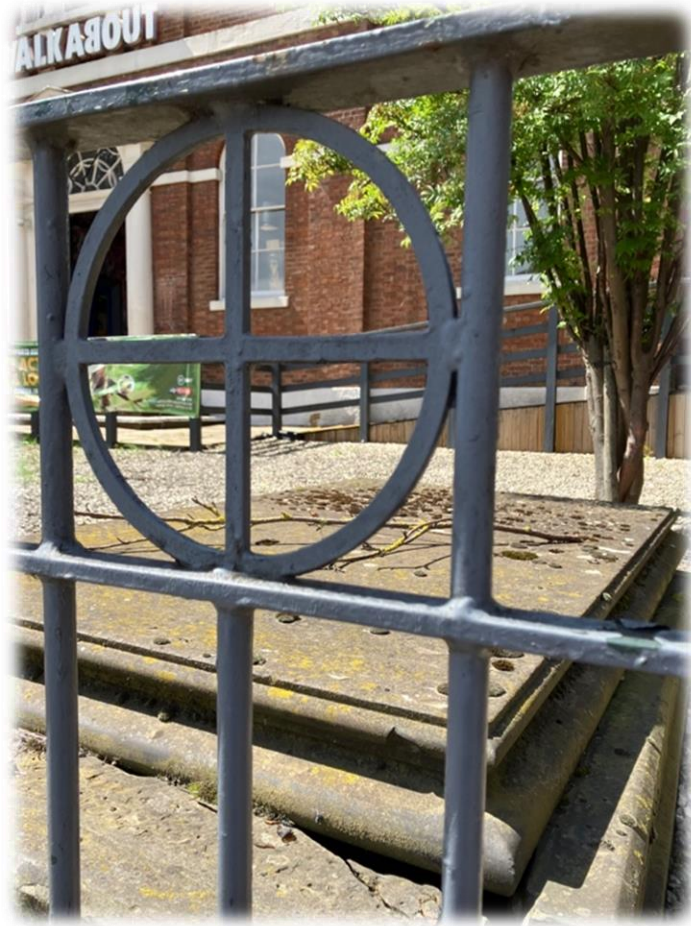
Indeed, those faithful brothers and sisters lying in the grounds of Carver Street – have an eternal home, and for that I must rejoice. It is so easy to get disillusioned and fed up – and perhaps when we do, we should simply look to scripture and to Paul’s words: -

*“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:38-39)

It helps to shower ourselves daily with Holy Scripture – .... The next time I walk past a repurposed chapel, or one boarded up – or one for sale – I am going to lift my head up high – honouring the brothers and sisters who went before me – remembering the words of Paul -

*“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 3:13-14)

Are you with me?







REF - <https://sheffielder.net/2020/02/06/carver-street-methodist-chapel/>