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Closure of Langley Methodist Church

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Langley Methodist Church just before closure 2004. Photograph © Jacqueline Cooper.

The final service at Langley Methodist Church on Sunday 18 July 2004 marked the end of over 142 years since the chapel was opened in 1862.

The two lady preachers who founded Saffron Walden Wesleyan Methodism, Miss Berger and Mrs Webster, did establish a cottage meeting earlier in the 1820s, but it was the Primitive Methodists 30 years later who had more impact. They allegedly found most of the villagers 'living in total ignorance of saving religion, and the greater portion of them were basely wicked and as wild as heathens'. The 'powerful and plain preaching and praying' of Clavering preacher, Sam Cole resulted in a cottage meeting

with 41 members, 'and the moral condition of the inhabitants of the village is greatly improved'.

In 1860 the Saffron Walden Circuit minister, John Moore approached the landowner Woodham Death Esq. of Langley Hall for a piece of land on which to build a chapel. Hearing about the history of Primitive Methodism 'so affected and astonished that gentlemen that he... generously measured and gave us ten rods of good freehold land from one of his meadows, and he also gave us a donation of ten shillings and one of his daughters £1'.

The chapel, costing £135 with pews for 80, opened on Sunday 24 May 1862, being 'most pleasantly and eligibly situated, and is a most substantial and beautiful little edifice, built after the Norman style, with red white and blue bricks and stone, and is an ornament to the village'.

Membership fell after the great farm-workers' lock-out in the 1870s, as many poor people migrated to find work, but the chapel kept going and, right up to the war, was known as one of the strongholds of local Methodism.

Times change, however, and the stalwarts had dwindled to four, so it was no longer tenable. The final service saw Langley chapel packed to the doors as in days of old, its roof raised with hymns sung with typical Methodist gusto.