

*GRIFFYDAM WESLEYAN METHODIST  
CHAPEL SUNDAY SCHOOLS*



*By Samuel T Stewart - February 2021*

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## **PART 1 – THE OLD SUNDAY SCHOOL**

Information recently come to light regarding the location of the old Sunday school during the period from 1853 to 1932. Prior to that, we do not know where the Sunday school was held, but the author assumes that it would have been in the chapel itself.

In 1853, a newly built Wesleyan Methodist Day School, associated with this chapel was opened in 1853 at Peggs-Green. From that date until the new Sunday school was built onto the side of the chapel and opened in 1932, we now know that the Sunday school was held in a curtained off area on the second floor of the day school at Pegg's Green which was only a short walk from the chapel. Concerts, meetings and public teas etc were also held there, some in association with the chapel and Sunday school.

A history of the Day School entitled "The Wesleyan Methodist Day School 1853 – c.1921" is included as a free to download and read publication on [griffydamhistory.com](http://griffydamhistory.com) and the author's website <https://samuelstewart940.wixsite.com/mysite>

## PART 2 – THE NEW SUNDAY SCHOOL

### THE STONE LAYING CEREMONY

*The following was based on a report which appeared in the Leicester Evening Mail dated May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1932:-*

Saturday was a great day for the Wesleyans of Griffydam, Leicestershire where the ceremony of laying a number of foundation stones of a new Sunday school created considerable enthusiasm. The Rev. S. Atkinson of Coalville presided over a large gathering.

The event was also the occasion of a visit from the president of the Nottingham and Derby district, the Rev. J. Freeman, of Belper, who, in an interesting address, said the Methodist church stood for evangelical religion – the unqualified and indestructible love of God for mankind. He went on to say how the Wesley's rediscovered this when the churches of the country seemed to have forgotten it, and while John Wesley preached on it, Charles Wesley sang about it. John Wesley preached it in Griffydam, but the people there did not accept it at first; they mobbed him, but they accepted it afterwards and built that fine old chapel which they were so proud of today.

Proceeding, the Rev. J. Freeman spoke of the importance of the class meetings and fellowship and of the part the Methodists had played in education.

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Mr. Herbert Rowell, who is aged 72, laid the first stone, for himself and his wife, and contributed £4. Other stones were laid by, or on behalf of - Mr. Walter Davies, superintendent for the Sunday School, who gave £20; Mr. & Mrs. R. Nichols, £5; Mr. & Mrs. W. Davies, senior £5; Mr. & Mrs. J. Knight, £5; the Misses E. and G. Davies, £5; Mr. & Mrs. J. Johnson, £3; Mr. & Mrs. L. Wesley Rowell, £3; Mrs. Walter Davies, junior, £3; Mr. & Mrs. Howkins, £3; Miss. A. Hodges, £3; Miss. May Johnson, for the Junior Guild, £3; and Miss H. Wilton, for the tennis committee, £3.

**Mr. Joseph Rank, a Surrey miller, sent a cheque for £100.**

After the stone-laying a public tea was held, and in the evening there was a great public meeting at which the speakers were the Rev. J. Freeman and the Rev. J. Scott, of Syston.

## JOSEPH RANK

It is thought that the following relates to the Joseph Rank mentioned in the above newspaper report who donated £100.

### Joseph Rank

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>BIRTH</b>  | 26 Mar 1854 -<br><br>Kingston upon Hull, Kingston upon Hull Unitary Authority, East Riding of Yorkshire, England |
| <b>DEATH</b>  | 13 Nov 1943 (aged 89) –<br><br>Reigate, Reigate and Banstead Borough, Surrey, England                            |
| <b>BURIAL</b> | <u>Sutton Cemetery</u><br><br>Sutton, London Borough of Sutton, Greater London, England                          |



**Joseph Rank 1854 - 1943**

Joseph Rank was a businessman who started his working life as a miller and corn merchant before founding Rank Hovis McDougall, one of the United Kingdom's largest food production and flour milling businesses. It later became RHM and was eventually acquired by Premier Foods in 2007. **A staunch Methodist for much of**

**his life**, he established several charities which were later consolidated into the Joseph Rank Trust. One of his sons was Joseph Arthur Rank, the film magnate and founder of the Rank Organisation.

**The following is taken from the Rank Foundation Website © 2018 - The Rank Foundation**

*The Rank Foundation continues as the major charitable legacy of Joseph Arthur Rank, Baron Rank (1888-1972), flour miller, film maker and philanthropist. What became the Foundation was established as the J Arthur Rank Group Charity in 1953, with its work continuing under the Chairmanship of Arthur's son-in-law, Robin Cowen, his grandson, Fred Packard, and, currently, another grandson, [Joey Newton](#).*

*J Arthur Rank's remarkable success in the fields of flour and film stemmed from his personal qualities of integrity, hard work, decisiveness and a strong strategic sense. Joseph, his father, had started work as a miller in Hull at the age of fourteen and had built a very significant business through astute introduction of new mechanisation and marketing techniques. Arthur worked in many areas of his father's company before his ambulance and signaling service on the Western Front in the First World War: after the War, he took on senior roles and became joint managing director in 1933. In the same year, he began the other great strand of his working life when he founded the Religious Films Society. Early conflicts with film distributors convinced him that he must become his own exhibitor as well as producer. By 1946, J Arthur Rank's film operation owned five studios, two newsreels and 650 cinemas, employing 31,000 people and with a turnover of £45 million. The wealth from Arthur's film companies provided the basis for the endowment which has enabled the Foundation to make charitable grants for over sixty years.*

*J Arthur Rank's strong simple faith echoed that of his father, who was a committed Methodist. He walked round his garden every morning of his life, saying his prayers, and he declared "I am in films because of the Holy Spirit". His daughter, Shelagh, wrote of "one of the clearest memories of my father, during the War, seeing him set forth, come rain or shine, his overcoat streaming behind him as he bicycled to Sunday School in Reigate Methodist Church School". His faith lay behind his concern to help others, especially young people, whom he regarded as "the seed corn of the future and the leaders of tomorrow.*

## THE OPENING CEREMONY

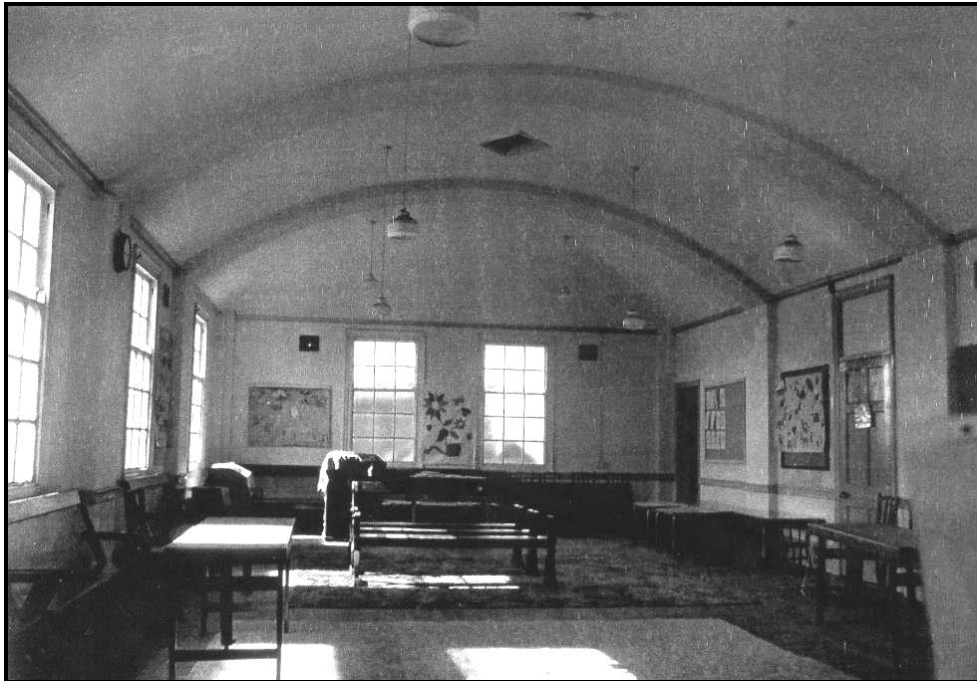


### Left to Right :-

- Walter Davies - Local Preacher and Sunday School Superintendent
- Frank Rowell
- Herbert Rowell - Local Preacher and Trustee (grandfather of Herbert Eric Rowell).
- John Johnson (Miss Florrie Johnson's Father) - Local Preacher and always first up to speak at the "Love Feast"
- Leonard Wesley Rowell (Steward for 40 years) with his son Herbert Eric Rowell

## THE BUILDING

Construction of the Sunday school adjoined the left side of the chapel commenced immediately following the stone laying ceremony by the chosen contractors' "Ramsdens of Castle Donington". The building, windows and roof line which can be seen in the following photographs, was sympathetically designed to compliment the chapel architecture. The construction was completed before the end of 1932. Altogether, prior to construction starting, the sum of £736 had been raised towards the cost of the building and the contract price had been quoted at £816. However, according to a 1935 report of the Methodist Synod at Derby, in the Burton Observer & Chronicle – May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1935, the cost of Griffydam Sunday school was £1,070 with a debt of £130 remaining



The above internal photograph was taken following the closure of the chapel in 2005 and is the only internal photographic record we have of it.

According to the Derby Telegraph dated May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1933, Councilor Albert Ramsden (presumably the contractor for the Sunday school) opened a new tennis ground in connection with the chapel. The author assumes this would have been at the rear of the new Sunday school where the new burial area is now. Presumably, that is why Miss H. Wilton, donated £3 at the stone laying ceremony on behalf of the tennis committee.

When the author's wife Sheila Stewart (nee Bannister) was at the Griffydam infant school on the top road in the 1950's, during which time Miss Florrie Johnson and Miss Kitty Wright (headmistress) were the teachers, all the children used to walk down in a double line to the schoolroom for their lunches which arrived in hot aluminium containers from an outside source. These were then dished out by Mrs. Silverwood and Mrs. Wilton.

After the Christmas party at the school, they would also go down to the Schoolroom for their Christmas tea. Happy days.





**Photographs taken 2020**

**Surprisingly, there is no evidence of any of the plaques around the Sunday school having been engraved with the contributor's names**