

OUR METHODIST ANCESTORS by Michael Green

10. THE KIDGERS

William Kidger was born at Newbold in 1770 and his brother, Joshua, at Worthington in 1775 to William Kidger, a colliery overseer, and his wife, Mary. In his youth William had attended Anglican services but the turning point in his spiritual life occurred when, at the age of 21, he went to the Griffydam chapel in March 1791 to listen to the preaching of the sermon which followed John Wesley's death. He then became an ardent member there and played an important part in the great revival of 1794 when the Ashby circuit increased its membership from 450 to 700. As a result of his role in that revival, the then minister, Rev Joseph Pescod, appointed him a class leader.

Little is known about Joshua's early life. It would seem though that he continued to live in the area until at least 1804 as the Griffydam Baptism Register records that his youngest daughter, Ann, was baptised on 7th October 1804 having been born in Swannington. He then appears in 1811 in Lichfield at Gallows Wharf taking its name from the gallows erected nearby in 1532. All places where dissenters (non-Anglicans) worshipped had either to be registered with the bishop or the justices sitting at Quarter Sessions. Many of these records still exist and we know that one of the signatories to an application to register a house at the wharf in 1811 was Joshua



Joshua Kidger
(Courtesy David Peake)



Lombard Street Chapel
(Lichfield Methodist Church)

Kidger. Joshua was the wharfinger (wharf manager) and the house was presumably his. What had brought Joshua Kidger to Lichfield is not known. Obviously, he was one of those instrumental in establishing a Wesleyan society there which was done, we are told, with the aid of preachers from Birmingham. The society soon grew to such an extent that it was not long before there was a desire for a chapel and a suitable site was found in Lombard Street, Lichfield and, on the application to register it in 1813, the signature of "J Kedger" appears. Joshua was well enough off to be able to employ an ostler who it is said found a purse containing money. Despite extensive enquiries the money was unclaimed and it became the first donation towards the chapel.

The Lombard Street chapel opened in 1814. Interestingly, that Joshua brought with him a feature of the Griffydam which was the associated burial ground. Methodist chapels had them but the land in front of the chapel was set aside albeit on a far smaller scale! Amongst the trustees of the chapel were William, his brother, and James Burton from Swannington but there is no evidence that either had played any active role in its establishment.



Burial ground at Griffydam

it seems chapel rarely for one

It was necessary for Joshua to find further help with the work at the newly erected chapel and this time he called on another member of the family. This was John, William's son and Joshua's nephew, who was born in 1795 at Griffydam. On 27th December 1812 aged 17 he had been converted along with around 12 others at a

prayer meeting at the Griffydam chapel. It was while working at a colliery near Alfreton, where he had been appointed a class leader at a chapel nearby, that he was called in the spring of 1815. He was engaged at Lombard Street for 2 - 3 years before returning to North West Leicestershire to live with his parents in Coleorton from where he moved in 1820 to Belton to carry on a grocer's business. He opened his house to both itinerant and local preachers and, in his mid-twenties, married Mary, one of the daughters of James and Ann Burton (founder of JMA) of Swannington. Sadly the marriage was only a short one. At the age of 29 he died on 30th April 1825 of scarlet fever.

William carried on his work at Griffydam and was particularly interested in the mission field. He continued as a class leader until his death aged 55 from a stroke on 14th October 1825 which followed a period of intense nursing of his wife and other close members of the family through cholera.

Joshua remained in Lichfield and presumably with the Lombard Street cause. He left the wharf and established a grocer's and tea dealer's shop in Bird Street, Lichfield. Later, by way of complete contrast, he became a house agent and coal dealer! He died on 12th May 1861.

There is an interesting footnote. Not only were the Kidgers connected with Lichfield but there was also a link with Tamworth too as Joshua and John were parties to the lease and trust deed of Tamworth's second Wesleyan chapel in Bolebridge Street built in 1816.