

OUR METHODIST ANCESTORS by Michael Green

9. JOHN HALL



John Hall was born at Tonge on 17th February 1732. At the age of 25 we are told that, while he had had a Christian upbringing, he realised that something was missing from his life and so he began a search for this involving attending Anglican and Baptist services. However, it was with the coming of Rev Walter Sellon as curate to Breedon in 1759 that his life was changed. Rev Sellon had been the first classics master at Kingswood School Bristol and was sometimes referred to as a “Methodist clergyman”. We are told that his ministry was “attended with uncommon power” and, during one Holy Communion, while the hymn “Thou Shepherd of Israel and mine” was being announced, John Hall became filled with the love of God and “knew not whether he was in the body or out of the body”.

Following his conversion, along with his brother in law and sister, Mr and Mrs Skirmer, who also lived in Tonge, he went to Long Whatton to listen to George Hudson, a Methodist preacher and native of Keighley who so impressed them all that he was invited over to Tonge to preach to them and others from the village at Mr and Mrs Skirmer’s house. Other preachers followed and it was not long before a Methodist society was established. John Hall was appointed its leader, a position he held until his death. Following the establishment of the Tonge society it soon became a mother church. Being committed and filled with evangelistic zeal and fervour, John Hall saw it as his mission to spread the gospel to neighbouring villages and before long societies were established in Breedon, Worthington and Diseworth where for several years he was also class leader at them.

Of the many who preached or came to worship at Tonge were Rev Walter Sellon himself, who also lodged with John Hall, the Rev John Fletcher of Madeley, John Massey, the collier converted by John Wesley, Thomas and Henry Smith and John Farmer of The Pilgrim’s Lodge in Ogasthorpe. A particularly colourful one was John Hallam, another brother in law of John Hall. He was described as being “of highly eccentric habits”. He had white hair which flowed onto his shoulders and was known for the unconventional clothes he wore. He regularly fasted and, in prayer, he would often prostrate himself with his face close to the floor.

John Hall was one of the trustees who purchased the land for the construction of the chapel at Griffydam in 1776. In the deeds he is described as a yeoman (a farmer). He is also mentioned in the deeds for the purchase of the garden land in 1792 for the first Wesleyan chapel in Ticknall where he is now described as a gent. Whether he was involved in establishing these societies or was asked to be a trustee because he was prominent in the Circuit is not known.

In his study of the Bible he was “an object lesson to all”. It is said that there was little in it that he could not recall. His house, to which the Tonge society had moved following Mrs Skirmer’s death, was always open for prayer. Towards the end of his life it seems he may have suffered some sort of stroke as we are told he was no longer able to converse or pray aloud. He also became quite frail since, when

attending prayer or class meetings, friends needed to lift him from his chair. He died on 17th September 1813.

(John Hall's house now forms part of Brookside Farmhouse Tonge, a Grade II Listed Building, and in the picture*, which is from a colour photograph, is to the right of the 19th century addition.)

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