

Any history of a locality you know well has a fascination. Combine that with a study of the changing attitudes and patterns of belief of a local community and you have all the ingredients necessary for a rewarding publication. May Ayres and Keith Sanders have done Methodism a great service by setting local history in the context of a national and international religious community.

Two hundred and fifty years after the conversion of the Wesley brothers it is commonly acknowledged that Methodism has an influence in society far greater than its numerical size would suggest was possible. Its unique combination of evangelical preaching and social concern, set within the context of some of the most powerful hymns ever written for the Christian Church, gives to its witness challenge and vitality. This study of local Methodism more than adequately develops that challenge and vitality, and reveals a community of people with deep faith and a willingness to respond to change. The two combined provide us with a thrilling story which is so essential to the Methodist community today as it embarks upon yet another chapter of its history.

John S. Stephens  
Superintendent Minister of the Reading and Silchester  
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'As stupid as oxen', was the description by John Wesley, on his first visit to Reading on 8th March 1739, of the people who would not listen to his message of the Gospel. He was to preach in the town and the area many times and was able to say in 1777, 'Their children are of a more excellent spirit'. This booklet is dedicated to all the 'Children of an excellent spirit' who have served Christ through Methodism in the churches of the Reading and Silchester Circuit.

I am most grateful to May Ayres for her many hours of research into the history of the churches; to Martin Beek for his illustrations; to Miriam Wakefield for her typing of the script; and to Michael Brind of Creative Press for his help with this publication.

We trust your appetite to read more of Methodism and local church history will be aroused, and that during this year's celebrations of the 250th Anniversary of the Wesley brothers' conversion, you will come to appreciate the place which Methodism has in the One Church of Jesus Christ.

Keith J. Sanders  
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