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Church and Chapel

Church and chapel have always played an important part in village life in the Vale of Belvoir. The medieval parish churches of Bottesford and Muston are now part of the Belvoir Team Benefice in the Diocese of Leicester. At the beginning of the 19th century Bottesford also had Particular Baptist, Primitive Methodist, Wesleyan and Calvinist (Salem) chapels: another Methodist chapel stood in Muston. Since then, the Salem and Wesleyan chapels have closed (the latter following the unification of Methodism in 1933), as has the chapel in Muston. Nevertheless, both parish churches remain well used, and the Baptists and Methodists flourish in Bottesford.

St. Mary's Parish Church

Much has been written about Bottesford's Church, St. Mary the Virgin, "The Lady of the Vale". It may be the tallest village church in the country, its spire rising 212 feet. Parts of the walls date back to the 12th century as indicated by dog tooth stonework by the priest's door in the chancel. There are magnificent gargoyles particularly on the exterior. Traces of a medieval Doom painting have been uncovered on the chancel arch.

The ornate tombs of the Earls of Rutland in the chancel are some of the finest in England. Among them is "the witchcraft tomb" of the 6th Earl, Francis Manners, and his wives Frances and Cecilia. Cecilia bore him two sons, Henry and Francis, both of whom died in infancy. Joan Flower and her daughters, Margaret and Phillipa, who had worked at the castle, were accused of killing the boys by witchcraft, and convicted in 1619. The monuments to the 7th and 8th Earls are by Grinling Gibbons. The 9th Earl was raised by Queen Anne to be the 1st Duke of Rutland in 1703, and from the early 19th Century he and his successors have been buried in a mausoleum at Belvoir Castle. The Duke of Rutland is patron of Bottesford Church.

In 1711, the rector Abel Ligonier founded a school in the vestry for 28 children, but by 1726 this had moved to a new building in the northeast corner of the churchyard. Then in 1855 a new school was built on land donated by the Duke of Rutland assisted by the rector Canon Frederick Norman and his wife, Lady



St. Mary's parish church, Bottesford , 2009.

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Adeliza Norman, daughter of the 5th Duke. There are memorials to them on either side as you enter the chancel, and the magnificent east window above the altar was erected in their memory.

The tower had to be underpinned in 1867, and nine years later the spire and tower had to be dismantled and rebuilt. In 1903 two bells were added, making a peal of eight, then in 1926 the frame holding the bells was replaced and lowered by about 16 ft, lessening the strain on the tower. Restoration was completed in 1928 but less than a month later the spire was found to be swaying when the bells were rung, and the top 13 feet was taken down and rebuilt. The old gas lighting was replaced by electric lighting in 1947. Further changes in the last 50 years have included creation of the Lady Chapel, removal of the chancel gates to create an open area at the chancel steps; the pulpit and lectern exchanging places; a replacement organ and new choir vestry; toilets and kitchen installed; pews removed from the rear of the church; the church path renovated.

The church with its good acoustics and fine organ is a venue for local concerts, some involving the church choir. The gallery at the west end of the nave used by the church 'orchestra' was removed in 1846 and the first organ, built by Messrs Forster and Andrews of Hull, installed before 1859. This was replaced in 1892 by an instrument made by Wadsworth of Manchester. Then in 1994 this was replaced by a 'second hand' organ from St Hugh's, Southwark, built originally by T.C.Lewis in 1905 and modernised by Hall & Sons of Cambridge.

The churchyard is extensive, within a bend of the River Devon. There are over 1000 headstones and monuments, the oldest marked grave being the Parker stone of 1669, and burials still take place. It contains a social history of Bottesford, recording families new and



The 'Ale-Wife' gargoyle. NFO



Rev. Stuart Foster welcomes the Living History Drama, 2008. NFO



St. Mary's choir, Choir Master Paul Willcock, 1999. By permission of Judith Wells, Bottesford Vestry.

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old. Among the graves are those of local servicemen and airmen from RAF Bottesford who lost their lives in the two World Wars. The last air-raid of World War Two is documented as having taken place over Bottesford, resulting in superficial damage being caused to the east end of the church.

Rectors, 1846 to the present day



Canon F.J. Norman

Canon Frederick John Norman (1846 – 1889) was the husband of Lady Adeliza Gertrude Norman, daughter of the 5th Duke of Rutland. The couple were notable benefactors of Bottesford. They built the village school on Grantham Road in 1854 and then extended it in 1878. They were also benefactors of the Belvoir Coffee House on Market St, opened in 1881.



Canon Robert Manners Norman (1889 – 1895), his son, had the Wadsworth organ installed in St Mary's. Michael Honeybone reports that he also played for the village Bible Class football team in 1887.

Rev. Vincent-Jackson

William Vincent-Jackson (1895 to 1918) had the difficult task of leading the Church through the years of the First World War. His son, Montagu, died on military service in 1916, aged 24.



Rev. Walford

Reverend Frank Walford (1918 – 1943), a tall gaunt man, died on Easter Day in 1943. Two of his three sons went into the Army. One, Frank, was killed: his name is on the War Memorial in the Church. The third son followed his father in to the ministry. He helped his father with the Easter Day morning communion, and in the afternoon his father died. In his memory, the sheltered housing development between Queen Street and Albert Street, built in the 1980s, was called Walford Close.



Canon Blackmore

Canon Alfred Thomas Gardner Blackmore (1943 – 1958) came to Bottesford in 1943 with his wife Fanny and their four children, Robert, Nancy, Courtney and Stanley. When the Blackmores were at the Rectory it was always 'open house'. Mrs. Blackmore was a larger than life character. She used to ride round the village on a 'sit up and beg' bicycle whose wheels had wooden rims. Courtney Blackmore suffered from polio which left him quite disabled as regards walking, but it did not stop him joining the Royal Navy. Stanley was about sixteen when he came to Bottesford. In later life he published *Gone but not forgotten*, well worth reading for its insight into the Blackmore family life before, during, and after their time at Bottesford. He was commissioned to design the war memorial to the memory of the fallen in the Second World War, which he took as a great honour being still only a trainee architect. In the rectory gardens were outbuildings, including the coach house where the rector's car was kept, with

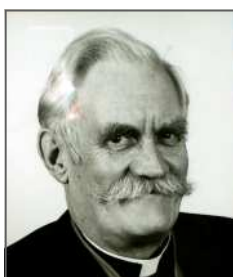
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enough room for scout meetings to be held there as well.



Canon Metcalfe

Canon William Nelson Metcalfe (1959 – 1982) came to live at Bottesford with his wife Jill and sons Nicholas, Paul and Martin, after being Rector of Bunny in Nottinghamshire. As well as being the first joint Rector of Bottesford and Muston, Bill was also Chaplain at Saxondale Hospital and Rural Dean of Framland One. Prior to their arrival there were alterations to the Rectory, mainly to the western elevation overlooking the orchard on the other side of Rectory Lane. Some rooms associated with the kitchen were taken down together with bedrooms above, but it was still a large house and difficult to heat in winter. Bill retired in 1982 when he and Jill went to live at Sutton on Sea and spent many happy years there until his death in 1998. His grave in Bottesford Church yard is marked by a stone on the lawn on the left hand side as you enter by the chancel door, next to the grave of the Rev. and Mrs. Walford.



Reverend Dyke

Reverend Kenneth Aubrey Dyke (1982 – 1992) received a well remembered induction service on November 5th 1982. It was in the same evening as the Belvoir Lions held their Guy Fawkes bonfire. The evening certainly went off with a bang, an indication of what was to follow in the next ten years! Part of his induction service was to walk round the Church opening doors and ringing bells etc. It was during his tenure that the new rectory was built in what was the old kitchen garden on Grantham Road. Mr Dyke suffered from poor health for a long time during his ministry.



East window of St Mary's, dedicated to "The Memory of Canon and Lady Adeliza Norman", Dec 1889 (left), and headstone of William Vincent, 1723 (right). NFO.

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Reverend Spencer

Reverend Geoffrey Spencer (1993 – 1998) had been a school teacher at Heckington, Lincolnshire before going into the ministry. He was an accomplished Church organist. Geoffrey was a very practical, hands-on man who soon instigated many improvements in the Church. When he had not got his dog collar on he was, more often than not, in his boiler suit doing practical jobs around the Church and was instrumental in getting the toilets and kitchen built in the vestry beneath the tower. His other main project was to move the Lewis organ from St. Hugh's in London to be installed in Bottesford Church, replacing the one in the Chancel. Sadly, he left Bottesford after his son died in a car accident. However, he has subsequently returned to the Ministry and is currently in charge of a group of parishes near Market Harborough.



Reverend Bradshaw

Reverend Charles Bradshaw (1999 – 2004) and his wife Janet came to Bottesford from the Parish of Birstall, Leicester. It was during his time here that the Belvoir team Benefice was established, consisting of nine parishes, and Charles was made team rector. While this may have looked good on paper it was rather difficult to administer practically. Charles was instrumental in having a new altar frontal commissioned which depicts the peacock which is closely associated with the Duke of Rutland. Charles was mentor to a young curate at Bottesford, Revd. Stephen Burnham.



Reverend Foster

Reverend Stuart J. Foster (2005 – 2009) and his wife Penny moved to the rectory in Bottesford in 2005. For over 15 years he had been involved in Chaplaincy roles in Hampshire, Lincoln and latterly as an officiating Army chaplain in North Lincolnshire. He then became Team Rector of the Belvoir Team Benefice, being licensed in November 2005. Stuart was also Chaplain to the Duke of Rutland. On 25th June 2006 a service was held in St. Mary's Church in celebration of Stuart being a priest for 25 years. He retired from the ministry at Easter, 2009.

The 'Dissenting' Churches

There were several groups of non-conformists (or 'dissenters') in Bottesford in the late 18th century, Particular Baptists, Wesleyan Methodists, Primitive Methodists and Calvinists. There was not, however, always a spirit of Christian co-operation between these church groups. In 1817 John Benton, a well known Primitive Methodist preacher in Nottingham, arrived to hold open-air services in Bottesford, with a view to starting a Primitive Methodist chapel, but he was "violently opposed". According to Mr Herod, in his *Biographical Sketches*, "as soon as Mr Benton commenced worship the bells of the Church began to ring, dogs

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were set to fight, a great drum was beaten and different musical instruments were played. He was assailed with rotten eggs, filth and stones, but the preacher stood unmoved ... He who beat the drum followed the preacher to other places to annoy him but was eventually brought to repentance ... A large and flourishing society was founded in Bottesford....” .

Bottesford in the National Ecclesiastical Census, 1851			
		Adults	Children
<i>Particular Baptists</i> 42 free seats plus 171 rented seats	Afternoon	51	29
	Evening	41	
<i>Calvinists</i> 66 free seats	Morning	34	
	Evening	38	
<i>Wesleyan Methodists</i> 56 free seats plus 100 rented seats	Afternoon	45	20
	Evening	39	15
<i>Primitive Methodists</i> 98 free seats plus 202 rented seats	Afternoon	168	73
	Evening	169	
<i>St Mary's, Church of England</i>	Morning	165	90
	Evening	193	

The strength and support of the chapels is demonstrated in the Ecclesiastical Census undertaken on 30 March 1851. On the day of the census it was wet, and flu was around. Even so, a significant proportion of the population attended worship. Recorded attendances totalled: Non-conformists 588 adults and 147 children; St Mary's 358 adults and 90 children, although it might have been the customary practice for many people to attend both services. Average attendances at St Mary's in 1851 were 200 in the morning and 280 in the evening.

The Methodist Church

The chapel situated on “The Green” was built in 1820 by a society consisting mostly of poor agricultural workers in the branch of Methodism called “Primitive”. It was badly sited behind a row of cottages, one of which was bought in the 1930s and demolished to make a small chapel yard. The chapel contrasted with the more middle-class, centrally placed Wesleyan chapel of 1845 (on Chapel Street). A Bottesford Primitive



Bottesford PM Methodist chapel before refurbishment - and after! JSI

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Methodist minister, Rev John Ford, who died in 1902, is interred in a well-kept Norris family grave. His daughter, a school teacher in Bottesford in 1949, is well remembered.

In the late 1930s, following the unification of the Methodist Church in 1933, the former Wesleyan and Primitive societies chose to use the chapel on The Green. The minister in the late 1930s was Rev Joseph Dowell, a brilliant forceful preacher and writer. Rev Philip Foster followed him into the early war years. He encouraged servicemen from the Army and RAF camps to find friendship and support at his chapel "Canteen", a break from the grim business of war. Captain Moss was one of these men still remembered by Joy Simpson, née Baggley. He was the engineer who set up the Army petrol "Jerry Can" filling facility and railway sidings adjacent to Long Hedge Lane and later worked on the famous PLUTO (D-Day's PipeLine Under The Ocean). Joy also remembers RAF navigator Harry North, a

Methodist local preacher. He, sadly, died over Germany on the night of April 3rd, 1943. His preaching appointment that Sunday was taken by Frank Baggley, Joy's father.

The last minister of the small three church Methodist circuit of Bottesford, Redmile and Long Bennington was Rev Frank Sorrell. The circuit quarter year running costs were only £86.00. In 1944 the Bingham circuit of Methodist Churches absorbed Bottesford and Redmile and appointed Rev Alfred Tennant, as minister, living at Bingham.

Post war years - The Rev Edward Bonar followed in 1947, the new Bingham circuit providing a manse "Sunnycote" opposite Bottesford station. He was very bald, and rumoured always to have worn a hat in bed! Sunday School primary classes met on Sunday afternoons in the wooden school room built in 1926 by Horace Doubleday, and older pupils met in the chapel. In all about 50 children attended the 1940-50s Sunday School. Anniversaries were big affairs with specially invited speakers, the children in best attire, on tiered platforms delivering their songs, solos and poetry. Each child received an annual prize for good attendance, usually a book signed by the minister and the Sunday School superintendent (Mr Harry Whitmore in 1940s and Mr Tom Simpson in 1950s).

Rev John Morrison Lawrie came in 1951. He was Scottish, single, and played tennis and football for Bottesford. Although his sermons could be dour, he had a wonderful sense of humour when out of the pulpit. Just after John left in 1956, the chapel boiler and heating system froze and burst: the resulting mess closed the chapel for weeks. The water heating was removed and new convection



The old, traditional, chapel interior JSI



The new interior - and something going on!

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heaters, lighting and complete redecoration undertaken before a grand reopening by Rev John Lawrie (then minister at Sandiacre). Rev Herbert Mountford was now the minister, well remembered for his Bingham Circuit Youth Fellowship, which met mostly at his Bottesford manse. It continued for many years, being responsible for more than a few marriages!

In 1960, Rev Arthur MacGregor Brown arrived, travelling around the circuit on a motor scooter until it expired and a type LE Velocette motor cycle was bought for him in Grantham Market. He joked that it had compartments in the spacious frame from where he “could dispense his holy water”. 1965 saw the arrival of Rev John Price who used a car. His wife was a teacher and a great help in the Sunday School.

During 1969, the congregation sank to single figures at some services, but new minister Rev John Flintham’s enthusiasm appealed not only to the young married people but also to the influx of newly retired. The ‘Davis’ housing estates were taking shape, bringing many new people into our village. We saw a welcome increase in the congregation and Rev John quickly involved us in pantomime, school room refurbishment, and an art exhibition (which gave rise to the Vale of Belvoir Art Society).

A new organ - One of the newly retired was Fred Wright, a keen organist, who had broadcast on American Forces Network during WW2. He felt that we should have a proper pipe-organ instead of the reed-organs we had been using. In 1972, Mr Cantrell of Castle Donnington agreed to rebuild the ex-Bingham Methodists’ Compton pipe-organ very cheaply. He installed it on the west wall of the chapel, necessitating removal of the large central twin stair pulpit, which was remodelled in cut down form and placed in the East front corner. The three sided wood and metal communion rail, similarly, had to go. A large illuminated wooden cross was placed on the wall centrally over the communion table. A lot of this work was done by our own members, particularly Jeff Parr, who built the organ casework and remodelled the pulpit. Rev John saw us through all this and stayed here for nine years. Then a young minister Rev Alan Wright arrived straight from college. He loved playing guitar and introduced lots of lively new songs to young and old. John Simpson was chapel organist during 1954 – 1961 and 1967—2009.



Organist John Simpson at the Compton Organ JSI

Our first lady minister arrived in 1980. The Rev Jessie Cobb was a retired teacher who came straight from training at Wesley College, Cambridge. Always full of ideas, she wanted us to build a new school room and start a luncheon club.

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Jessie served her full ministry at Bottesford. The new school room was built in 1991, a brick, two storey building costing £57,000, designed by architect Mr David Atkins. Jessie's idea for a luncheon club in the new school room was fulfilled in 2004, when the ever popular 'Litebite' was started, and currently attracts up to 50 guests fortnightly. Among the regular users of the school room are members of 'Trefoil', Friends of Chenobyl's Children, Vale of Belvoir Art Society and Special Interest Groups of the Vale of Belvoir U3A.

Chapel alterations in 1999 were overseen by Sister Kathy Lamb (Deaconess 1998 – 2004) and undertaken by W.J. Roberts. In 1993, Rev Ronald Dyer had convinced us to bring the chapel itself up to date, and once again David Atkins produced the design.

The pipe-organ was now physically too big and had to go, after 27 years service. The Church Council opted for a purpose-built electronic Church "Viscount" organ, together with new soft chairs to replace the pews. Chapel alterations greatly changed both the outside and the inside of the chapel. The external covered staircase was removed and the pebbledash front stripped, all the old bricks cleaned or turned around for re-use. The three front windows were re-positioned. A lower yard wall and lowered gates and railings were installed. A new porch with oak doors was added, the date-stone centralised on the wall and the word "Primitive" almost painted out. The new entrance then led into the new Vestry, cloakroom and entrance hall below the gallery. New stairs were built into the gallery. Spotlights and up-lighters were installed, together with a new 'hearing loop' and public address system.

The Chapel is now, deliberately, multi-purpose, and excellently serves for seminars, music performances and art shows, all in addition to being a place of worship. The total refurbishment cost over £70,000, most coming from sale of other Vale Methodist church buildings. We were now virtually the "Vale Methodist Church". In 2003, before Sister Kathy left us, the Bingham Circuit was incorporated into a new, enlarged "Grantham and Vale of Belvoir Circuit", overseen by only three full-time ministers. In 2004, Rev Christine Perry led our church, though living in Bingham, then in 2007 Rev Lesley Taylor was appointed and lives in the Bottesford manse (in Bowbridge Lane since 1990).



Local Methodist preacher, Tom Clayton's last service, 1999.

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It has been found that the Bottesford chapel is one of the earliest purpose-built Primitive Methodist Chapels still in use for its original purpose in the whole of the UK. In 2009, the chapel is only eleven years away from its 200th year of unbroken Christian witness, years of events of which we have described so few. What will happen here in the next 200 years?

Bottesford Baptist Church

Opened in 1789 - Permission for worship in a chapel community was only granted by issue of a licence. On November 13th, 1777, John Scarborough applied for a licence as a Particular Baptist to worship in his dwelling, and in 1789 this group opened its chapel on Queen Street. The commemorative plaque is now on the wall inside the Church over the baptistry, and there is also a memorial to William and Elizabeth Lane, suggesting that they were a



Bottesford Particular Baptist chapel, 1789. NFO

great influence at that time. 19th Century ministers included Robert Middleton (1851). By the beginning of the 20th Century, the chapel was under the wing of the Grantham Baptist Church. Rev. Bowler from Grantham, himself baptised in Bottesford, undertook much of the work at the church, but after his retirement the inadequacy of train services from Grantham caused Sunday services to be discontinued and the Church closed.

The Church re-opened in 1908 - with support from the Woodborough Road Baptist Church in Nottingham. Special services marked the occasion, a return ticket from Nottingham costing 1/6 (7½ p), and tea for 6d (2½ p). The speakers were Rev. Carrington of Nottingham, and Rev. Bowler from Grantham. The building needed renovation at a cost of £55, and visitors to the special services were encouraged to add to the £20 already raised. However, in 1915 the East Midland Baptist Association announced that Bottesford had been taken off the plan "... there being no longer a cause here." Mrs Pearson Vale (née Smith) refers to the chapel as a "war casualty".

From this point its history is unclear, any documents having being lost by fire at a Nottingham Church. In May 1930 it became the village school cookery and woodwork room, then the school dining room during WWII. The serving hatch area can still be recognised. It once again stood empty after the opening of the Secondary School, in 1958-60.

The 1980s - Local business man, Mr Ian Jesson, bought the property in 1973. The chapel re-opened in 1981 under the administration of Hose Baptist Church, with Mr John May as pastor. Members considering purchasing the chapel were amazed to learn of money held in trust specifically for the use of Bottesford Baptist Church. £11,500 was available and the building was bought for the sum of £13,000. Sleeves were rolled up, the interior cleaned and painted, carpet laid, and again it turned into a place of activity with meetings for all ages

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most days of the week.

John May worked faithfully from 1981 to 1991. In March 1986, a gift of 85 books by authors ranging from John Bunyan to Cliff Richards, Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Frank Topping, was given to Bottesford Public Library from the Baptist Church. Mr Ray Smart was the pastor from 1991 to 1997, and the number of church members increased, with a thriving Mums and Toddlers group. During Mr Smart's time, two local ladies, Margaret Waudby and Anne Garratt, asked to use the premises for Friday coffee mornings, known as 'Pop-Ins,' which continue to this day. The church is ideally situated for this purpose, and the people who come in week by week really appreciate the chance to just sit and chat.

In 1986, it became clear that the building required major improvements. The kitchen was cold and draughty and rain dripped on to light fittings, not a good idea! The outside toilets were used only in emergencies as the lights were temperamental and the locks did not fit properly. A decision to extend the building and incorporate the toilet facilities was taken, with costs met by members and a loan from the East Midlands Baptist Society. It was "all hands on deck" as members painted and cleaned the interior, putting in a kitchen area and laying new carpets. Major building work was done by Grantham Manpower Services. During this work, the original doorway with its handsome 18th century surrounds was uncovered.

Coming up to date - Rev. Richard Lane was minister from 1997 until January 2009, during which time the membership of the Church fluctuated as families moved in and out of the community. A successful Holiday Club has been held for a week in the summer for children of primary school age. Many parents intimated that they would have liked it to last for longer, but for the volunteers, one week with upwards of 40 exuberant children was just long enough. The Church continues with varied activities. The Sunday morning service includes a time for children known as the "BBC Kids" (by kind permission of the British



The chapel in use as the school dining room. DCA



The original doorway exposed during renovations (DCA), and the front of the chapel after addition of an access ramp in 2007 (NFO).



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Broadcasting Corporation). BBC6 is for Year 6 students. Mums and Toddlers meet on Wednesday and Thursday mornings, and there are the Friday morning 'Pop-Ins'. A house-group meets midweek in members' homes for Bible Study. On the 3rd Saturday morning each month 'Dads Allowed' is a chance for fathers with their young children to enjoy coffee and a bacon buttie. An access ramp has been built for wheelchair and pushchair users. The Baptist Church, centrally positioned on busy Queen Street, is now firmly established as a place of worship and for the community as a whole.

The Wesleyan Chapel

The Wesleyan chapel opened on Chapel Street in 1845, replacing John Cragg's house as a place of worship. However, after less than 100 years it ceased to be used, following the unification of Methodism in 1933 and adoption of the former Primitive Methodist chapel as the joint chapel. In the 1950s it became the domestic science classroom for the village school. After 1960 it again fell silent, and in 1988 was converted into two private houses.

Salem Independent (Calvinist) Chapel

The earliest mention of the Calvinist chapel in Bottesford may be an application in 1807 for a licence to worship "at Thomas Pickering's house with twenty perches of land". Further applications were made in 1810 to worship at John Kirke's barn and in 1837 for a barn occupied by Sarah Parnham, then in 1837 an application to worship in "a warehouse occupied by John Nixon & Sons of Bottesford, grocers and drapers". It is unclear whether these applications all refer to the same premises, but we do know that the Salem Independent chapel, variously referred to as Calvinist and Congregational, was established in the upper part of a barn at 5, Albert Street. Directories of 1888 and 1899 record that the preacher was Josiah Lamb. Wright's Directory for 1900 records the Salem Congregational Chapel at 5, Albert Street, above a stable and cowshed. The chapel was referred to in directories up to 1922, but not from 1925 onwards, suggesting that it ceased to

f u n c t i o n
between these
dates.



Village Methodists preparing a theatrical show, outside the old wooden schoolroom at the rear of the PM Chapel, Bottesford, during the Second World War.

JPA