James Woods

A mission was conducted at the Chapel in March 1881; as a result of skilful organisation this was a great success, and on the last Sunday evening of the Mission, says Mr Nix, the Chapel was so crowded that, soon after it opened “No Room” notices were displayed. There were a number of converts, and a large young men’s class was formed under the leadership of Mr J W Woods. Many of its members became Local Preachers, and under Mr Woods’ guidance a great deal of open-air evangelistic work went on. Most appropriately, at this time Conference stationed Rev Hugh Price Hughes as Superintendent Minister at Oxford, his first experience of a superintendent’s position.

Local preachers also did a good deal of open-air work. Mr Woods had a class of young men who were particularly interested in dong this, and in October 1887, he was given permission to hold open-air services at 6 o’clock on Sunday evenings. Strangely enough, this work got Mr Woods into trouble. At the Leaders’ Meeting in February 1889, he read a notice from the Police stating that if he held another service in Broad Street a summons would be issued against him. He asked what course he should adopt, and Rev J Martin (Superintendent Minister) and Mr J H Salter said they would take the advice of Mr Laker, Chairman of the Local Board. Unfortunately, Mr Laker’s advice is not known, but next month Mr Woods reported that he had held open-air services in Broad Street on the preceding Sundays, and the Police had taken his name, as well as those of Mr J E Salter, Mr Colegrove and others, but he had not yet heard of what action the police intended to take. No action seems to have bee taken, but Oxford newspapers of the time are full of complaints about disorderly conduct in the streets on Sunday evenings, owing to open-air religious and political meetings.

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