

# **Celebrating 150 years**

## **The History of Wesley Chapel Harrogate 1862-2012**

### **Part 1**

**Wesley Chapel Harrogate 1862 - 1962**  
**by H S Hitchen and T E Dawson**

### **Part 2**

**The Next Fifty Years 1962-2012**  
**by Judith A Yeats**

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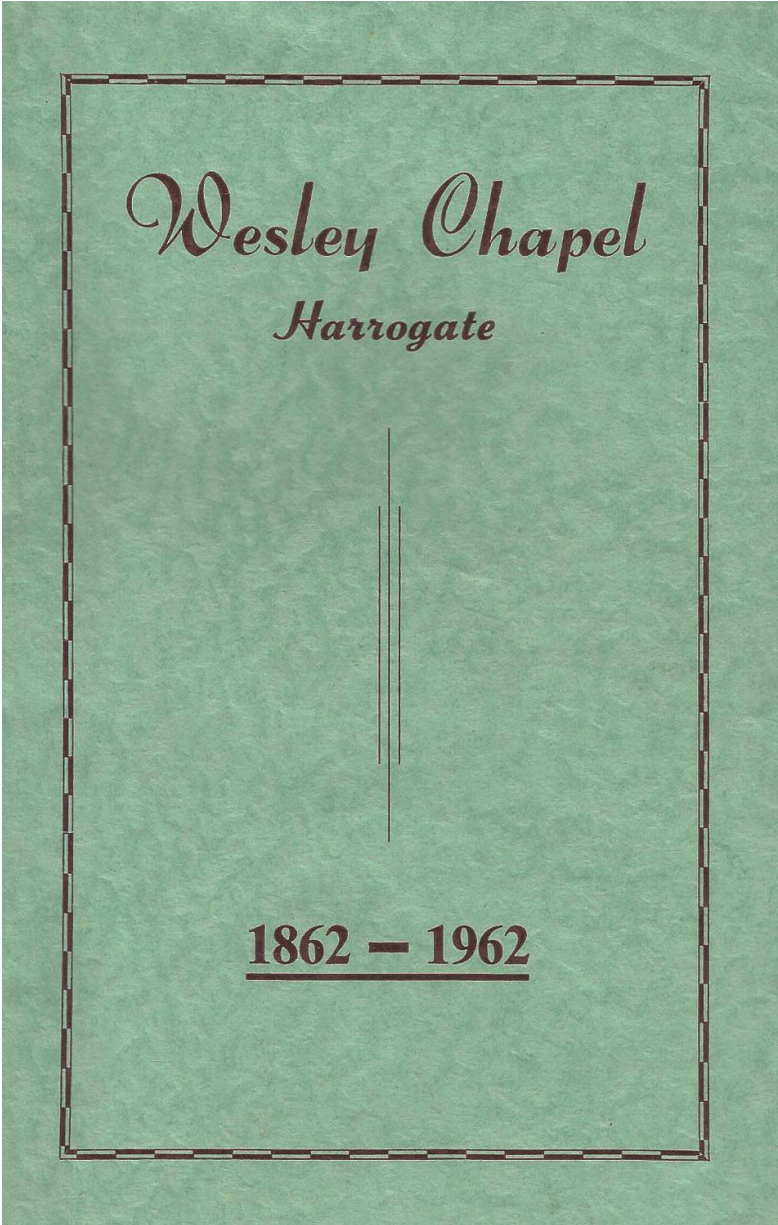
PART ONE

Wesley Chapel Harrogate 1862 1962

by

H S Hitchen and T E Dawson

First published 1962, Reprinted 2012



*Front cover of original part 1*

## Foreword

*I have been asked to write a Foreword to a book I have not seen.*

*It concerns a place called “Wesley,” not the only place of that name, but the one which the compilers of these pages know best and serve to the utmost of their ability.*

*I would be seemly, perhaps, to doubt one’s own capacity for such a task. But duty must put modesty aside, since for a little while longer I subscribe myself the Minister of this “Wesley.”*

*I think of the stalwarts I have known in earlier days and thank God for them. I testify that good men—and women not a few—are in the ranks today. I pray that God may raise up many more to maintain His work and witness here. For of the grace and power of God in our midst today I have no shade of doubt.*

*To Him alone be all the glory!*

*W. Garfield Lickes*

## WESLEY MINISTERS FROM 1858

1858-1860	Rev	Richard Hardy
1860-1863	“	Henry Pollinger
1863-1866	“	Thomas Vasey
1866-1869	“	W F Slater
1869-1872	“	Josiah Pearson
1872-1875	“	F J Sharr
1875-1878	“	G Stringer Rowe
1878-1880	“	E Jewitt Robinson
1880-1883	“	Henry W Holland
1883-1886	“	William Nicholson
1886-1887	“	W. L. Watkinson
1887-1889	“	James Morrison
1889-1892	“	J W Simister
1892-1895	“	Thomas Bolton
1895-1898	“	W B Fitzgerald
1898-1901	“	G A Guest
1901-1904	“	W C Bourne
1904-1907	“	Rev Benjamin Bean
1907-1910	“	Rev J W Lightley
1910-1913	“	Rev Samuel Boddy
1913-1916	“	Rev J R Irving
1916-1919	“	R P Lowe
1919-1922	“	J W Fielding
1922-1925	“	J Fisher Robson
1925-1928	“	J F Green
1928-1932	“	Walter J Morgan
1932-1936	“	J Henry Bodgener
1936-1939	“	W Garfield Lickes
1939-1944	“	L W Dickens
1944-1948	“	Fred W Townsend
1948-1954	“	K Vaughan Jones
1954-1958	“	Herbert Simpson
1958-1962	“	Rev W Garfield Lickes
1962-	“	W F Hewitson

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE OPENING DAY

THE PUBLIC ARE RESPECTFULLY INFORMED THAT IT IS INTENDED TO CELEBRATE THE OPENING OF THIS EDIFICE IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER. A SERMON WILL BE PREACHED BY THE REV CHARLES PREST, PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE"

So read the announcement of the opening of the new Harrogate Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Allotment Field. Besides the President there were other important people there on the morning of Friday, October 3rd, 1862. The Secretary of Conference, Rev John Farrar, the Rev. W. Lord of Woodhouse Grove, and the Rev Charles Churchill of "Eastern British America," with other notable gentlemen, all formed part of what the Harrogate Advertiser pleasantly described as "a large and highly respectable congregation."

But the day really belonged to the 234 members of the Church who, by the morning of Friday, had already cleared £3,197 of their current liabilities of £4,000. The final account, which would include the outside stone flagging, the iron palisades, and a host of small items, was to close on March 14th, 1865, at a total of £4,821, but for the moment the Treasurer, that redoubtable gentleman, Mr. Pickersgill Palliser, could rejoice that four-fifths of the debt was behind him.

The President preached from the 6th verse of the 2nd chapter of 1st Corinthians, "How be it we speak wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world." A public dinner was to follow the service but since it was not due to start until two o'clock, the President had, no doubt, ample time to develop his theme. He pointed out to his people that the integrity of the Word was their protection against false prophets, and their consciences their guide against false interpreters — a timely word to a Church already perhaps feeling troubled by the problems raised by Darwin's "Origin of Species" published only three years previously, and still selling in Mr Thomas Hollins' bookshop in Park Parade, where Messrs W D Dobson still carry on the business.

Forty-five guests walked along to the Brunswick Hotel (later the Prince of Wales), probably stopping to comment with interest on the new independent Church at the corner of Victoria Avenue and West Park, opened only two months previously. They would walk along the edge of a Stray which would have looked sadly ill-cared for to our eyes, seeing, perhaps, ahead of them the old Brunswick Station situated on what is now that portion of the Stray in front of Trinity Church. Beyond the station they would still see the exit of the tunnel which, having run under the present Langcliffe Avenue, emerged at Royal Crescent, carrying the old Church Fenton line into Harrogate. The present station had been opened on August 1st, linking the line from the South to that from the North and thus making Harrogate more accessible to the visitors who still play an important part in the life of all the central town churches.

No doubt the diners at the Brunswick Hotel would dine rather more substantially than we should today for the half crown which they paid for their lunch, and, when the table was cleared, they settled down to the serious business of the afternoon.

Mr W Holdsworth proposed the health of the President and, when the President had replied, six more speakers took up the tale. It is interesting to note that three of the eight speakers at this lunch were from Leeds — interesting because it reminds us that the friends from Leeds had contributed most generously to the cost of building both the old Chapel in 1824 and this present Chapel. Indeed the posters advertising the opening contained the following announcement, "A Special Train will leave Wellington Station. Leeds, on the day of opening, at 9-45 am, and will return from the Harrogate Station at 9-30 pm" If this return train seemed to be timed, to our modern way of thinking, a little late for an evening meeting due to start at 6 pm, we must remember that Addresses were to be given by no fewer than Seven Ministers and Two Local Preachers. We can but hope that if the good friends from Leeds had to run for their train, they did not disturb the meeting.

Let us leave these folk listening contentedly to their nine speakers and pause to consider why they had built this Church. The story related in the 50th Anniversary Booklet of 1912, tells that the Rev Henry Pollinger, who came to the Church in September, 1860,



called his Church Officers together one evening, only a few months after his arrival, and told them bluntly that unless they built a larger Church he would leave them. Henry Pollinger's ultimatum was probably not the only reason for the building of the present "Wesley" for, at the Stonelaying Ceremony in October, 1861, the then President, the Rev J Rattenbury, said that to his knowledge this project had been talked of for twenty-five years.

The Chapel to which Mr Pollinger had come in 1860 was situated at the corner of Beulah Street and Oxford Street. It had been built in 1824 to hold 550, and though the membership had doubled since that day it was still only 190. That old Chapel might well have been sufficient for the needs of the membership for most of the hundred years since it was sold, but it would not have been adequate for a Circuit Chapel. The courage with which they looked to the future in building a Circuit Chapel capable of holding nearly one thousand people may be judged from the fact that, on that day in 1860 when they decided to build, Beulah Chapel was not only the head of the Circuit, it actually was the Circuit. There were preaching places at Starbeck and at Bilton, each with ten members, but the membership of the Circuit amounted to the 190 mentioned previously. Starbeck built a Chapel in 1861 and Bar was built in 1865, and for another fourteen years these three Chapels formed the Circuit.

The ground on which the Chapel stood had been bought from the Victoria Park Estate, and a skeleton map prepared in 1864 by this Company, which owned large parts of the town centre, shows how nobly the new Chapel stood. Facing South as it does, it could look out over a Cambridge Road with open land on either side, and be seen from far across the West Park Stray. Oxford Street was built up on the South side, but except for Craven Lodge, a large house on the North side of Oxford Street, immediately across the road, there appears to have been only open fields across to the present Bower Road, so that it must have dominated the view from the East. From the North, too, since Cheltenham Mount was as yet unbuilt, it would stand out from Jinny Plain on the top of Ripon Road.

The exterior of the Chapel is described as "of plain character, with the exception of the front, which is of the Italian Style. Three

columns of the Corinthian order are at the side of the entrances." Inside, the general colour scheme appears to have been one of dark brown paint on the woodwork relieved by the crimson cloth of the pulpit and pew seats. The pulpit itself was circular in shape but small in diameter and standing much higher than the present rostrum, being reached by steps which wound halfway round the pulpit. The organ was the one brought from the old Chapel. It was much smaller in size than the present organ and must have stood rather insignificantly, for the Ladies of the Sewing Meeting did not delay long before purchasing a curtain to hide it. Downstairs were the classrooms and, at the front end, was the Chapel Keeper's accommodation. On his "front door" the letter box can still be seen. The Chapel Keeper, John Benson was, incidentally, a man of note and a power in the Church. A member of the Beulah Chapel when it was built in 1824, he became the Chapel Keeper there in 1826. He could neither read nor write, yet possessed an extraordinary knowledge of the Bible and of Wesley's hymns. He was the Leader of two classes (one of which seems to have been consistently the largest of the Society Classes) and remained the Chapel Keeper of the new Chapel until he was given a pension in May 1874, dying in the following year.

There were other men of note, too, in the congregation that night, but of the nine people who were speaking on this night, only one was a member of that congregation. There would have been no question as to who that one should be, for William Greensmith, with seventy years of Methodist life and Methodist family tradition behind him, was their acknowledged leader. His family had carried on the manufacture of hosiery in Nottinghamshire for over two hundred years and his father had been one of the first men of substance to open his house to itinerant Methodist Preachers. William Greensmith as a boy was losing his eyesight at the age of nine when there came to the house a travelling Preacher, a Mr Bramwell. Just before leaving to continue his journey, Bramwell laid his hands on the boy's head and prayed that his eyesight might be restored. It was restored - immediately - and it never failed again. He had walked "in newness of life" since the age of 22 and throughout his long life he never failed to put his resources, spiritual and financial, at the disposal of the church, however often they were called for. He came to Harrogate in 1832, either to start or to take over a retail hosiery business in

Regent Parade, and immediately attached himself to the Methodist cause in Chapel Street.

From 1855 to 1857 three men led the church in the effort to gain for themselves a Minister of their own, a struggle which resulted not only in their receiving a Minister but also in being constituted a Circuit.

If William Greensmith was the leader, he must often have had cause to be grateful for the shrewdness and the seemingly boundless energy of the Chapel Treasurer, Pickersgill Palliser, whose name is almost legendary in the history of early Victorian Harrogate. He appears in the list of Pew Sitings as early as 1825. He published a "Weekly List of Visitors" in 1835, and in 1837 he adopted for this Weekly List the title of "The Harrogate Advertiser." In an article published in the "Advertiser" of April 29th, 1861. Mr W Haythornthwaite tells us that in addition to publishing a newspaper he was also an Insurance Agent; he took in visitors and let out on hire "Piano Fortes" he became a Postmaster and acted, also, as Secretary of the Baths Hospital. But if William Greensmith and Leonard Hobkinson ever exchanged a quizzical glance as they contemplated the multifarious activities of Palliser, they also knew that they could rely entirely and without question on his loyalty to his church. He became Treasurer in 1861 and continued in that office until 1881.

Leonard Hobkinson was the third of that trio. A deeply spiritual man, he was greatly loved by the people of his day, and we, a hundred years later, have good cause to be grateful to him for he was the only one of the three to leave behind him a line of descendants with an unbroken record of service to Wesley.

And of course there were the others, the men and women whose efforts had built the church in which they sang so proudly that night. The Preface to the Methodist Hymn Book begins with the words "Methodism was born in song." But if it was born in song, the church which bears the name of Methodist has lived only because its people learned to give, and give again, and keep on giving. These people had learned that lesson. Whether they were a hardier race than we are today may be a difficult question to answer, though the fact that they were sitting there listening quite contentedly to nine speakers may, at least, give us a clue. They

were a "peculiar people," a people set apart; and the knowledge of this imposed a certain discipline on their lives and on their beliefs. They remembered the Sabbath day to keep it holy, and the holiness of the day was rigidly observed; they had their prayer meetings and their class meetings, and the Preaching Plan showed a Quarterly Fast Day. They knew, too, what they believed, for they believed the Bible. They did not interpret it nor explain it away; they just believed it. We may look askance at the rigid discipline with which their homes were ruled, but it is as well to remember that most of them applied this same discipline to their own lives. We may not accept their uncompromising beliefs and standards, but we do accept, with gratitude to God, the church which they built and left to us.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EARLY HISTORY

There is no certainty as to the origin of Methodism in Harrogate. John Wesley visited both Pateley Bridge and Otley, and, in his day, either place would have been counted as no more than a good walk from these parts. In an article on "Methodism in Harrogate," written for the May 1906 issue of the Methodist Magazine, the Rev Henry J Foster said. "But Harrogate Methodism had sprung from the village of Bilton, where, in the house of Mr J Brooks, whose family is still represented on the Circuit Plan, a simple service had been held from Wesley's time. This was continued even when the work was, by and by, brought to a room over a smith's shop, still discoverable on Smithy Hill, near the point where the Grove Road of more recent days enters the high road to Skipton. Outgrowing this, a clubroom was taken over an archway in the house at 20 Park Parade, now occupied by Mr Bernard W Evans, RA".

However, it seems certain that the Methodist chapel at Pannal was built nearly twenty years before the first chapel in Harrogate. The site of this chapel is marked by a plaque on the wall outside a cottage in Hillfoot Lane, which records also that Wesley preached there in 1788. Tradition also associated Wesley with an ancient chair which used to be in the vestry of the chapel. The chapel was built soon after the authorisation had been given by the Conference of 1778, but the old Post Office was the probable site of the early "preaching place," in the days when it was occupied by the family of Bryan Procter, himself a preacher. In that house John Pawson, later a President of Conference, preached, and Mary Bosanquet visited and preached in it in 1773. She was staying in Harrogate at the White Hart and tells, in her diary, how she preached in the great Ballroom of the White Hart and how "company came in, even from High Harrogate, and the Lord gave me some fruit."

Some force is lent to the argument that our Methodism came in via Pannal, by the fact that in 1790 Harrogate was certainly paying its quarterly dues to the Otley circuit, and Pannal was in the Otley circuit.

Perhaps the "company" from High Harrogate were those same men who twenty-three years later, in 1796, occupied the house at 20 Park Parade and made of it our first Methodist Chapel in Harrogate. The house still stands, with its archway, and at the very top of the roof one can see the triangular cornice which may be all that remains of the front of the original chapel.

Although there must certainly have been shops to cater for the hotels around the Sulphur Well, the larger shopping area was to be found at what is now Devonshire Place. There was no real residential area; for the most part the houses were built on a line which followed Skipton Road, Park Parade, York Place and West Park, with very little development at all in the large area which these roads enclose. This early chapel, then, was well situated in the Harrogate of those days, and if the builders seemed to have ignored the hotels of the Spa area, it was perhaps because the early Methodists expected to draw but few from the class of people who would be found in those hotels.

Little is known of the life of this church. It belonged to the Knaresborough Circuit and appears from the records at Knaresborough to have paid its dues regularly. At some time during its twenty-eight years of life it witnessed the breakaway of those of its members who eventually became Primitive Methodists and built themselves a chapel in what was then known as "Westmoreland Entry" at the top of Westmoreland Street.

By the end of the Napoleonic Wars the emphasis in development had shifted from High Harrogate to Central and Low Harrogate. With great courage and foresight our common Methodist ancestors turned their eyes towards the centre of the town and decided to build at the corner of Beulah Street and Oxford Street. One can still see over the businesses which now occupy the site the unmistakable windows of a Methodist chapel. They showed their belief, too, in the development of Harrogate when they built a church capable of holding 550 people, and there may also have been in their minds the thought that they would, at some time, no longer be the second chapel in the Knaresborough Circuit but be, instead, the first chapel in their own circuit.

But however long they had dreamed of this chapel, it probably only became possible through the generous loan of £500 from a Mr Samuel Broadley of Leeds. The loan was received on April 14th, and only five months later the Chapel was opened, on September 12th, 1824, by the Rev R Newton. Collections and subscriptions received on that day brought the total of money received to £840. It is interesting to note that this chapel was built by James Simpson, whose son was to build the present chapel thirty-eight years later and whose family have maintained their connection with the chapel ever since that time. The total cost of the "Beulah" Chapel was £1,011.

The picture we have of this early Society is of a people paying its quota to the Circuit and to the wider interests of Methodism, yet stoutly maintaining itself by a system of "ad hoc" collections. We find collections for candles, a collection for "foot walk maicking," regular collections for horse hire for Local Preachers, for "Woodesgrove Scoole," all of which are carefully noted by Mr Joseph Horner, Chapel Steward from 1824 until 1841.

They had no resident Minister, being served by the two Knaresborough Ministers. The financial records were carefully kept and still exist, but there is little to be found about the Society itself. The Society Steward's book, which begins in 1826, has upon its fly leaf the inscription "Let all things be done decently and in order. St Paul," and below it the words "Let us walk by the above rule until we find a better. Joseph Mercer." It appears, however, that the Society Steward had found some difficulty in keeping his records decently and in order, for on the inside cover page we find an exasperated statement, "I have found this book nearly useless to me as the Society Steward therefore I now resign it up into the hands of the Chapel Steward Brother Horner, and I resign it up with all the monies that I have upon hand as far as I know, and to this statement my friends come forward with their hand."

Only three Trustees' meetings are minuted up to 1829 but one of these is interesting for it gives, in May, 1826, instructions to the Chapel Steward to discharge the Chapel Keeper, and we then find the first mention of John Benson who was to serve the chapel so faithfully as Chapel Keeper for fifty years, until he died in 1876, having been a class leader since 1829.

Leonard Hobkinson was appointed Class Leader in September, 1834, and we find an account presented by him on April 1st, 1843, for the eggs, butter, flour and seeds, etc, necessary for the making of the seed cake eaten at Lovefeasts. This ancient Methodist service is still occasionally to be found in country chapels and consisted of a service of testimony during which the congregation sipped cold water and ate seed cake, the traditional "feast."

Twenty years after the new chapel had opened the number of members listed is still only 105, though there would undoubtedly be a number of "adherents" and many hundreds of visitors during the summer months, now that Methodism had become more "respectable." The collections during the winter months were sometimes less than £1 for the day but a special occasion could draw the crowds. Missionary Meetings never failed to produce a good collection and a visit from the Independent Minister (Congregationalist) brought a collection of ten guineas. Yet somehow a Sunday School and a Day School were supported; the poor were very regularly helped by donations through their class leaders, and the Circuit received sums varying from £15 in 1830 to £65 in 1856.

In the early days there was, of course, no organ, but music was provided by a quartet comprising violin, flute, 'cello and double bass, all seated on a rostrum just below the pulpit and making their joyful noise unto the Lord. And one sometimes wonders just how much such tunefulness (or lack of it) contributed to the rise of Primitive Methodism.

One of the most interesting aspects of the life of this early Church is its struggle to break away from the Knaresborough Circuit to form a Harrogate Circuit with Beulah as the main chapel. The desire had been strong even in the minds of the members of the 1827 Trust to have a resident Minister at Harrogate, but it was not until 1845 that the struggle began.

The Superintendent of the Knaresborough Circuit, the Rev Luke Barlow, was asked to attend a special meeting of the "Friends of Methodism in Harrogate" held in the Chapel Vestry to consider the question of the appointment of a resident Minister at Harrogate or of the break-away of Harrogate from the Circuit.



The meeting evolved two plans. The first was an ambitious plan which envisaged a Harrogate Circuit taking in Follifoot, Spofforth, Linton, Sicklinghall, Kearby and Kirkby Overblow from the Knaresborough Circuit; Dunkeswick and Harewood from Leeds; Weeton, Pannal, Rigton and Beckwithshaw from the Otley Circuit; Killinghall and Hampsthwaite from Ripon. Two Ministers were to care for it. It was a good wholesale plan and set off nicely the more modest second suggestion that there should be one Minister only to watch over a circuit taking in Bilton, Forest Lane and Follifoot from Knaresborough; Beckwithshaw and Pannal from Otley; Killinghall and Hampsthwaite from Ripon.

The meeting was held on Thursday, March 27th, 1845, and it was decided to place the two plans before the Quarterly Meeting at Knaresborough the following Monday. The good brethren of the Quarterly Meeting objected mightily to splitting the Circuit in this way but were prepared to recommend that a third Minister be appointed to the Circuit, so that their second Minister might then move to Harrogate. Honour was satisfied on both sides and the proposition went forward to the Leeds Conference via the District Meeting. September passed without either a third Minister or an explanation of his absence and Mr Pickersgill Palliser, a Circuit Steward, resigned "in disappointment and annoyance."

The following year Harrogate resumed the battle and the March Quarterly Meeting again sent a resolution to Conference for a third Minister but contented themselves with asking only for the annexation of Pannal and Beckwithshaw. Once more the resolution lay on the table at Conference and, as Mr Palliser later reported, "in many minds for many years the whole affair has remained an unexplained mystery." The collection which was taken in the September of '46 for the Third Preacher disappeared into the Trust Funds, and for ten more years the matter lapsed.

They had at least one thing to occupy their minds. Collections for Lighting show an increase in 1846. On January 18th the Oil Lamps were sold to Killinghall for 7/6 and a little later, for the first time in the accounts, there appears "the Gas Company" bill. It must have been a great day.

It may have been in 1850 that the orchestra was replaced by an organ, for there is an item in 1852 of £3 paid for two years' organ

blowing. It was probably a small organ and equally probably sat on the rostrum. Its cost appears only in the accounts for a later organ and is shown as £42-5-0 for Old Organ and Repairs. Perhaps a large part of the sum was for repairs for they had soon set about collecting for a new organ. There had been some minor decorations in 1850 but the Trust evidently thought that, as so much alteration would need to be done to install a new organ, they might as well renovate the church completely.

So they set about taking down the old musicians' rostrum and put in more pews. Then they removed some pews from the gallery opposite the pulpit and installed their new organ. The organ itself cost £150 and was bought from a Mr Rawlings (whom Mr Barstow in his 1912 booklet describes as the "celebrated Adel Doctor"). The organ was officially opened on Thursday, July 5th, 1855, and the collection and sale of tickets realised £29. Miss Barlow, daughter of the Superintendent, became the organist, and from that time, too, collections for the Leading Singer became a regular feature. The decorations continued through that year and into 1856. The total expenditure was £697. In the subscription lists the names of Greensmith and Pickersgill Palliser appear four times with various sums, and when the total was still found to be £200 short, these same, gentlemen's names appear once more when they, together, made up this deficit.

Meanwhile they had decided to renew their demands for a Minister of their own, and a place as the head of their own Circuit, though it seems, through all the correspondence, quite certain that, had they been granted a resident Minister, they would have foregone their second claim to a separate Circuit. The subject was re-opened at the March Quarterly Meeting of 1856 but no decision or resolution for Conference was arrived at.

The officers of the Church therefore decided to take the matter into their own hands and wrote on July 24th to the Chairman of the Leeds District, the Rev George Taylor. Their letter says nothing of the difficulties they had had with the Quarterly Meeting and goes no further than to ask that "the Circuit should be provided with men of very acceptable pulpit talent." They urged that since the Independent Chapel was supplied with "the most attractive Ministers in their body" they would wish to compete in the same manner. A copy of this letter was sent to the

members of the Stationing Committee, and a further letter from Mr Palliser emphasised to the Rev Taylor that his help would be needed to improve the position at Harrogate.

So much sympathy and encouragement reached them that they were able to write to the Circuit Stewards on September 22nd, a week before the Quarterly Meeting, saying that their letter of July 24th (of which the Circuit Stewards had also been sent a copy) had "elicited an almost universal opinion favourable to our immediate provision of a Minister's Residence."

"Acting on this opinion," the letter continues, "we procured a suitable house near the Chapel, which, with a view to his better comfort and accommodation, we offered to the Rev E R Talbot, the second preacher of the Knaresborough Circuit, and have made arrangements for defraying all expenses, so that no extra burden will be laid on the Circuit."

The Quarterly Meeting decided that the Minister's house in Cheapside, Knaresborough, be discontinued as a Minister's residence and that "another house in another locality" be found. A further decision allowed, though only for a period of six months, the removal of Mr Talbot to Harrogate. Two propositions asking for a request to be made to Conference for a third Minister, or for Harrogate to be formed into a separate Circuit, were again defeated. The Trustees met again on November 24th and arising out of that meeting a letter was sent on January 7th, 1857, to "The Office Bearers of the Wesleyan Societies in the Knaresborough Circuit." The letter pointed out their "deep conviction of the growing importance of this celebrated Watering Place, containing a population of about five thousand inhabitants and providing accommodation for about fifty thousand visitors during the summer months." They suggested that if the Circuit would recommend that a third minister be appointed (a single man), the Harrogate Society would undertake to pay the full expenses of the married man who should be transferred to them, and in addition to pay, for four years, the full expenses of the single man appointed to Knaresborough. In order to do this they expressed their readiness to raise, immediately, £600 to add to a promised loan from the Chapel Committee at Manchester of £400 to pay off all Trust Debts and thus be sure of providing for this extra burden from current income.

The Circuit could hardly have been unaware of the tremendous sacrifice which this entailed, following immediately as it did on their considerable expenses earlier in the year, and the Quarterly Meeting of December agreed, subject to the promise which Harrogate had made, to send a request to the District for a third Minister.

Once more the Harrogate Wesleyans set to work. The list of subscribers shows Greensmith, Palliser and Hobkinson at the top, and when, after a Bazaar and Tea Meeting on February 10th which realised £33, the target of £600 was still £80 short, this same trio made up the deficiency. They did more. Unwilling to leave anything to chance at the all-important March Quarterly Meeting, they, assisted by the Super, the Rev J Cadman, held meetings at Knaresborough, Spofforth and Whixley in order to explain their scheme, and at every meeting it was proposed and carried unanimously ". . . that this meeting pledges itself to support this Circuit movement . . . "

After twelve years of struggling and of what Palliser describes as "irritating discussion" it must have seemed that their goal was in sight, and they approached the March meeting with some confidence.

With mounting dismay they heard that meeting turn down every suggestion. No married minister for Harrogate; no single minister for Harrogate; and finally "manifestly resolved to ride rough-shod over the Harrogate friends" - no third preacher, married or single, for the Circuit. Mr Palliser then gave notice that it was the intention of the Harrogate Trustees to make their own application to Conference through the District Meeting for a resident minister.

If the friends at Knaresborough had decided that they would put an end, once and for all, to the endless discussions on Harrogate's aims, they succeeded. In July, 1858, the Liverpool Conference constituted Harrogate a District Circuit and sent the Rev Richard Hardy to "Harrogate Wesleyan" as Minister and Superintendent. The Knaresborough Quarterly Meeting would spend no more time discussing the claims and ambitions of the Harrogate friends. So the Rev Richard Hardy, our first Minister, arrived to

find a Manse, No 2 Beulah Place, and a horse and gig in readiness for him.

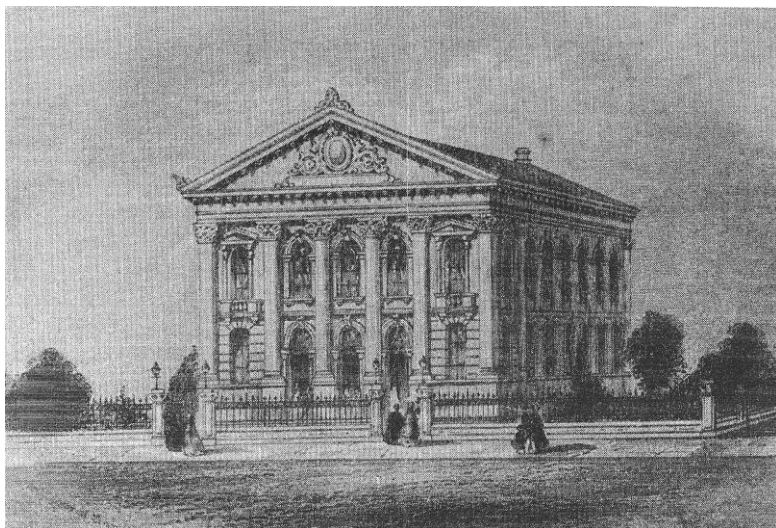
He preached his first sermon on September 6th, 1858, to a church which must have been knit into a tight and real fellowship by the difficult times through which they had passed. Only seven years previously they had seen a congregation of 135 cut down to 71 by the secession of the "Reformers," the forerunners of the United Methodists, who broke away in April, 1851, and built their own Salem Chapel on the corner of James Street and Cross James Street, leading into the Market Place. Yet, despite this blow, they had maintained their full contribution to the Quarter Board; they had installed a new organ and undertaken a complete renovation of the Chapel; they had cleared off all debts at tremendous cost, and finally they had seen their sacrifice and perseverance triumphantly rewarded. How their praise must have rung out on that September morning.

Two years later, in September, 1860, the Rev Henry Pollinger replaced the Rev Hardy. The people came in time to regard Pollinger with great affection but I should guess, if the story of his ultimatum to his Church Officers is true, that they regarded him rather thoughtfully that evening. They were being asked to build a new chapel capable of holding nearly a thousand people, yet their membership of 212 could not even half fill their present chapel on which they had spent so much. However, it seems that the Minister knew his men, and, however much one can admire his powers of persuasion, one must admire, too, those who caught the vision and set themselves to achieve the miracle.

If we ever feel disposed to regard our forefathers of a hundred years ago as the gentle and leisurely product of a slower and more untroubled day we should disabuse our minds of that idea. They moved purposefully to their task, handing out collecting books and writing to friends and sympathisers in every part of the country. A Bazaar was held in the February of 1861 and the money was raised to buy from the Victoria Park Company 1,584 square yards of land in "Allotment Fields" at 4/- per yard. £31 was paid as a deposit in March and the remaining £285 in June.

The collecting books had raised £223 by Wednesday, October 22nd, when Thomas Tombleson of Hull arrived for the stone-

laying. A short service was held in the Chapel, and at one o'clock the children of the Sunday School led the procession of "important personages" along Chapel Street to the gaily-decorated scene of the ceremony. Mr Tombleson duly laid the foundation stone with a silver trowel presented by Mr Goodall of Harlow Grange, and the gathering was then addressed by the Rev J Rattenbury, President of the Conference. The collection on the ground realised £18 and an evening meeting brought a further £43. When these were added to the £223 from the collecting books it gave a satisfactory day's total of £284.



*Wesley Chapel Harrogate 1862*

They must have watched with great pride as the building grew and took shape and the money continued to arrive. There were collections, too, in the chapel and one of these tells a story of an, anguished half hour during which the worshipper's mind must have wandered from the sermon, and a subsequent successful pleading, all of which is to be found in one line in the collection journal, which runs "to one sovereign given in mistake and

returned to person." There is no note of the corresponding shilling which should have taken the place of the sovereign.

Still they continued to give generously to their other commitments. The Sunday School Anniversary saw a £20 collection, the Overseas Missions £40, and there was, too, a collection for "Distressed Lancashire."

So the time drew near. The new President had long since agreed to perform the opening ceremony and to preach, and he was to be supported by a list of notable personages. The meeting was advertised in the "Harrogate Advertiser," the handbills were posted and the day was upon them.

The last ten years had seen tremendous struggles and tremendous changes carried through by a Society which would not be beaten by difficulties nor frightened by the need to sacrifice. William Greensmith, Pickersgill Palliser, Leonard Hobkinson, William Jeffray, Samuel Hornby, William Heigham of the College, James Simpson, Abner Thomas and Matthew Peacock were some of the men who determined that Harrogate Wesleyan should be a Church worthy of a fast-growing town and of a Circuit which would one day grow. Perhaps even, and it is a thought to ponder over, they hoped by their efforts and by their unstinted giving, to build a church worthy of their descendants a hundred years later.

## CHAPTER THREE

**1862 – 1877**

The special services did not end with that opening day, but continued through the month. Mr Pollinger had naturally planned himself for the first Sunday, and the day's collections, including a Lovefeast in the afternoon, realised almost £180. Dr Jobson of London lectured on the following Wednesday and the Rev J Farrar took the second Sunday's services to a full Chapel. Even when the Rev Richard Roberts came from Huddersfield on Monday, October 27th, the Stewards recorded a collection of £93 despite the "pouring rain" of which they made note. This first month added £600 to the building fund, to which the Ladies had contributed £100 from their Sewing Meeting.

During this month of October, on Saturday the 18th, the first marriage in the new Chapel was celebrated between "Abraham Walter Thomas, 27, Bachelor, Farmer, and Elizabeth Mary Jeffray, 21, Spinster."

Henry Pollinger departed in 1863 after the inevitable three years. He left his mark not only by reason of the Chapel which he must, at any rate partly, have inspired, but also because he introduced the Covenant Service on the first Sunday of 1863. We have good cause to remember him with gratitude.

Plan making must have presented no difficulties for the Superintendent of the Circuit, for he had but two chapels to fill, Harrogate Wesleyan and Starbeck. The latter was an offshoot from Wesley. Brother Lord had been conducting a class at Starbeck for many years and had seen, to his great satisfaction, a Wesleyan Chapel opened there in August 1861. In addition to the two chapels there were two "preaching places" (probably private houses), and for these four places there were nine local preachers. There were fourteen Society classes at Chapel Street and one at Bilton under Brother Lee. A further class conducted by the Local Preachers was started in 1865 at Harlow Hill, ran for seven years and faded out. Brothers Simpson and Exelby had also been leading classes which formed the nucleus of a congregation which eventually built themselves a chapel "at Harrogate End near



Bilton Toll Bar on the Skipton Road." It was opened on Tuesday, September 19th, 1865, by the Rev J Farrar. Mr Greensmith was able to announce that only £100 was needed to free the Church from debt and towards that sum Wesley donated a collection of £19 on October 1st and a further £19 a year later.

Not only was the Society ever ready to further the cause of Christ overseas (a magnificent Jubilee Missionary Meeting on August 1st, 1864, sent £270 to that work) but they were also alive to other needs. A collection was sent to Leeds Infirmary on August 2nd, 1868, and one on September 18th, 1870, was taken for "the Sick and Wounded of the Franco-Prussian War." They were also deeply conscious of need among their own folk. Almost every Leaders' Meeting records the sums of money given to various class leaders for distribution to those named as being "in affliction and need."

There was evidently some major scheme of painting and re-decoration during January and February of 1869 for the Chapel was closed during those months and Mr Pollinger was invited back to conduct the re-opening services on March 11th. It is interesting to note that during the following month there is the first mention of that familiar preacher, "Student from Headingley College."

In April, 1869, there passed from the scene one of Wesley's finest men, Leonard Hobkinson. It was a mark of extraordinary affection and respect in which he was held that the Leaders' Meeting requested the Trustees to have the pulpit draped in black in memory of him, and that the whole body of Leaders asked that they might sign a letter of condolence to be drawn up by the Minister. The Rev. W. F. Slater, who had succeeded Mr Vasey in 1866, paid a tribute which, although too long to quote in full, is worthy of some reproduction. "We gratefully remember," he wrote, "that Mr Hobkinson's connection with our Church - maintained for forty years - was marked by constant fidelity and integrity that his heart and his hand were always open to the interests of Christ's cause that he was as judicious as he was earnest in counsel and activity, and that he was ready for sacrifice as well as labour when the claims of the Church seemed to demand it. ... As the Leader of a Class he was full of discernment and sympathy, wise to

advise the doubting and the anxious, diligent at the means of Grace, and punctual in all his duties. ...His memory will long be cherished in this place as that of an exemplary Christian man, who served his generation according to the will of God and then fell on sleep. ...We pray ... that the family of our departed friend may be led and prospered by the Divine Hand which so manifestly guided him all the days of his life."

Fourteen months later William Greensmith, aged 78, followed Leonard Hobkinson. Before he went he had still time to make one further gift to the church he had loved and served so long. The Leaders' Meeting of Tuesday, March 20th, 1870, contains the following minute :-

Proposed by Brother Sugden and seconded by Brother Taylor that "This Meeting acknowledges the munificent gift of a valuable plot of land situate in the West End Park, for the erection of a Minister's House, by our venerable father Mr William Greensmith and would cordially recommend the acceptance of the same."

The next minute recommended that "a Memorial on Parchment be drawn up by the Minister and Society Stewards before the next Quarterly meeting and at that time presented to him."

The first Ministers' House had been at 2 Beulah Place (now Beulah Street). This had been a rented house as had been the second house, Wesleyville, in the corner of Cheltenham Crescent and Oxford Street. This house became in 1904 the residence of Mr F T Kettlewell's father, and Mr Kettlewell still retains a small east wing of the original house as his office. It is a pleasant thought that whenever he sits "a-treasuring" he does so in what used to be the Minister's study. It was decided that the Rev Josiah Pearson, who had arrived in 1869, should call his flock together and set in motion a Building Fund.

Mr Greensmith had retired to his bed on returning from the March Leaders' Meeting and never rose from it again, dying on June 4th, 1870.

At this time the Trust income was between £250 and £300.

Average collections were £7 - £10 but so many of these were for Circuit and extra-Circuit purposes that only about £40 was actually received by the Trust, and the main source of income was the pew rents of about £210 per annum. Although the decorations of 1870 had been paid for mainly by gifts, there were still loans outstanding, and by 1874 the Trustees must have been worried by the position. Just before the end of the year, the Minister, Rev F J Sharr, opened his mail to find this letter, "It being the end of the year 1874, in token of gratitude to Almighty God for His sparing mercies towards me and guidance during the past year; if you will favour me with the amount required to clear off the debt of the Wesleyan Chapel Harrogate, I shall be glad to give you a cheque for the same. Believe me, dear Sir, Yours respectfully Simeon Musgrave."

His original letter, dated December 28th, is preserved, as is a copy of the receipt. The receipt is for £477 14s. 4d. and is dated January 1st, 1875. Mr Palliser, the Treasurer, had lost no time in balancing his accounts. On June 19th this noble gift was acknowledged by the presentation of an "Illuminated Manuscript Address" presented in the Band Room to Mr Musgrave. Tea was "on the tables at half past six pm precisely."

The Rev F J Sharr deserves to be remembered in the Circuit for he could see that before long there would be a need for a Wesleyan Chapel on the South side of Harrogate and, on his own initiative, bought a piece of land, which he presented to the Wesley Trustees, in 1875. Four years later Trinity Chapel was opened on this land.

In May, 1876, John Benson died, having been caretaker of the 1824 chapel during all but a year or two of its 38 years of life and having looked after Harrogate Wesleyan for 13 years, until he was provided by the Trust with a pension in May, 1875. He had been a faithful soul for fifty years and had been the Leader of the largest class in the Church for many of those years.

Reporting on the opening of Trinity Chapel on 11th April, 1879, the local press paid tribute to the missionary zeal of the Harrogate Wesleyans in these words; "With the rapid growth of Harrogate, the extension of this important religious denomination, the Wesleyan Methodists, has kept pace, and

for some time the substantial edifice in Chapel Street, wherein they worshipped, has been wholly inadequate to the demands made upon it, and a movement was eventually instituted with the object of providing chapel accommodation in another portion of the town.

"The beautiful new Wesleyan Chapel, lately erected in West Park, Harrogate, was opened yesterday under the most auspicious circumstances which fine weather, large congregations, liberal contributions, and widely manifested interest in a great cause could conduce. And the Wesleyans of this town may be acquitted of any tendencies to shallow vanity if, in dedicating the handsome structure to the service of He alone for Whose glory it is intended, they experienced a glowing flush of pride at the thought that they had been enabled to erect so handsome a building for the advancement of His cause.

"At the time of commencing the opening service, at which the Rev W B Pope, DD, the theological tutor at Didsbury College, was announced to preach, a large and fashionable congregation assembled in the new edifice which was that day to be consecrated to the Trinity, as its name implies." Methodism had indeed become respectable.

The foundation stones for the new chapel had been laid on August 28th, 1877 one of these was laid by Thomas Tombleson of Barton-on-Humber, whose father had laid the corner-stone of the mother chapel. By the time of the opening ceremony £6,000 had been subscribed of a total estimated cost, which would include the erection of a spire, of over £11,000.

Notwithstanding the colossal effort which must have been demanded in seeking to extend the influence of Methodism in Harrogate by building another chapel, the needs of the mother chapel were not neglected. In March of 1877, when the task of raising money for the building of Trinity must have been a major concern, the Trust agreed that the sum of £550 be spent on the purchase of a new organ. Having made this decision, the meeting was adjourned to 4 pm on Saturday, March 17th, by which time it was hoped that tenders would be available. A Trustees' meeting on a Saturday afternoon! These people were

surely in earnest about the business of the Kingdom! The adjourned meeting accepted the tender of Foster and Andrews of Hull to build and erect in the chapel a new organ for the sum of £570, less a donation of £20 made by the firm. At a subsequent meeting Mr T Paley was appointed to supersede Mr Butler as organist at the rate of £30 per annum until the new organ was installed, when the salary would be increased to £40. Within a year the organ builders' account had been discharged, largely owing to a generous loan of £369 made by Mr Palliser.

## CHAPTER FOUR

**1877 – 1900**

Up to this time, the building in Chapel Street had been known as Harrogate Wesleyan Chapel. Now that Trinity was waving the banner of Wesleyan Methodism in another part of the town, it was felt that a more distinctive name should be given to the mother chapel. Accordingly, at the meeting of the Trust on September 16th, 1879, it was "moved by Mr G Exelby and seconded by Mr A W Thomas and carried unanimously that the chapel be called 'Wesley Chapel.' "

The same meeting heard the Rev E J Robinson read a resolution from the May District Meeting regretting the irregularity reported in the returns from the Harrogate Chapel and requesting the Superintendent to bring the matter to the notice of the Trustees. We are left to conjecture as to the nature of the irregularity, but the reply to the charge is certainly characteristic of the forthrightness of our forebears at Wesley : " . . the Trustees regret to receive the resolution passed at the last May District Meeting, but they consider they have broken no agreement nor committed any irregularity." No further reference is made to this matter.

At the Annual General Meeting of 1879 a resolution was passed which saw the beginning of what was to become a custom in the church. By this resolution the Chapel Stewards were empowered to present to any deserving Choir member leaving the town a five shilling copy of the Hymns and Tunes in use in the Connexion.

In 1881 it was reported that "owing to his years" Mr Pickersgill Palliser felt compelled to relinquish the office of Trust Treasurer. Thus ended the active life of one who had been an outstanding figure in the counsels of our church in this area for over half a century. He was a man of exceptional ability, selfless devotion and princely generosity, whose name, apart from its mnemonic sound, must be remembered by all who love Wesley. When, three years after his resignation, he died, he must have been happy in the knowledge that he left a strong, confident church playing a vital part in the religious life of Harrogate.

Later in the year the vigilant Trustees of Wesley, jealous of their

heritage, heard with some concern that Trinity wished to introduce a chant book for use in their services. As far as Wesley was concerned, they decided, the introduction of a similar book was "neither necessary nor desirable."

The chapel had now been standing for twenty years, and it became apparent that extensive renovations were essential. It was decided that the painting be done in the same colour as before, that the organ pipes be cleaned, that the pews in the gallery be covered in crimson cloth and the cost of heating the vestibule be ascertained. Arrangements were made for the services to be held in St James's Hall during the time the work was being done. The Trust made arrangements with the bank for an overdraft of up to £200, but it was not necessary to draw on it. Out of a total cost of £330 for the renovations, £205 had accrued from collections, a bazaar and a legacy. The ladies of the Sewing Meeting were accorded a special vote of thanks for arranging the bazaar, which had realised £81. It should be mentioned here that whenever it was necessary to raise money for Wesley the effort was usually recorded as "a fit object for the Ladies of the Sewing Meeting," and these indefatigable ladies never failed the church. Nor do their modern counterparts, but more of them anon.

The years 1884-85 saw "Chapel-keeper trouble." This began when the resignation of Simeon Walker was accepted. In response to advertisements, a number of applications were received, but after interviews had been conducted, it was given as the opinion of the Trustees present "that the appearance and answers (to questions) of the candidates present were such that they could not recommend an appointment." After further interviews Louis Clark of York was appointed at a wage of sixteen shillings per week. At the meeting where Clark was appointed, the opinion was expressed that there was a need for better accommodation for the Chapel-keeper, as the premises then in use, especially the sleeping-room, were not healthy. The premises referred to were the rooms opening off the transverse corridor in the basement of the chapel, until recently used as storerooms, but now scheduled for the use of the revived Youth Club. It may have been because of the unsatisfactory living-quarters, but certainly Mr Clark did not for long keep the chapel, for, within a year he had resigned and the post was again advertised. There were now ninety applications for the job and finally Mr and Mrs Coleburn were

appointed. All was well in this department for another ten years. Despite the reference to the poor quarters afforded the Chapel-keeper, it was not until the turn of the century that the present Chapel-keeper's house was built alongside the chapel at a cost of £498.

Methodism has always been cognizant of the value of good music, and the people of Wesley fully appreciated the fine quality of the choral tradition which had been built up in their church. Mr and Mrs Wilkinson were the first to give concrete form to their appreciation when, in 1884, they entertained the Choir to a "Christmas treat." This they continued to do for a number of years. The Trust, as a body, was not far behind the Wilkinsons in paying their tribute to the work of the Choir, for, at the Annual Meeting of 1885 it was resolved "that a treat in the shape of an excursion in summer be given to them at the cost of the Trustees, not to exceed £7." So was instituted another Wesley custom.

In 1886 the Rev W L Watkinson, DD, came to Wesley as Superintendent of the circuit. He had already achieved fame as a preacher and writer, and was later to become a President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. He drew large congregations at both Wesley and Trinity. It was during Mr Watkinson's ministry that a noteworthy change occurred. It should be remembered that a plot of land had, twenty years previously, been presented by Mr William Greensmith, whereon a house had been built for the minister of Wesley. Mr Watkinson, "more particularly for the purpose of visitation, although Superintendent and belonging to Wesley, as the head of the circuit, attached himself to Trinity as being more convenient on account of Wesley Manse being in the neighbourhood of that church." So was the privilege of having the Superintendent Minister taken away from Wesley. It was not until 1957, when the late Rev Harold Key was translated from Harrogate to the Chairmanship of the West Yorkshire District, that the Superintendency was again vested in the minister of Wesley when the Rev Herbert Simpson assumed the office.

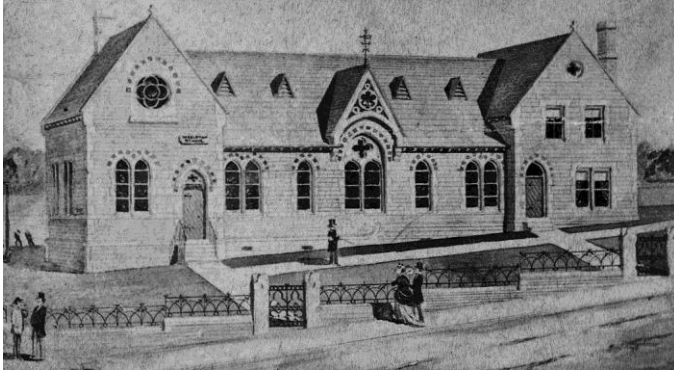
All through the nineteenth century there developed the idea of the "elementary" school, where children could be given instruction in the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, together with instruction in religious knowledge. Although the State began to look with favour upon the idea and in 1833



instituted a system of grants for school buildings, it was very slow to take over the responsibility for extending educational opportunity. As in so many other instances where a social need has become apparent, it was the church which took up the challenge. In 1811 the first voluntary school-building association representing the Free Churches was formed - the British and Foreign Schools Society. Almost immediately the Church of England founded the National Society for the same purpose. Under these two bodies school building gradually gathered momentum, and in this sphere of activity Wesleyan Methodism played its part.

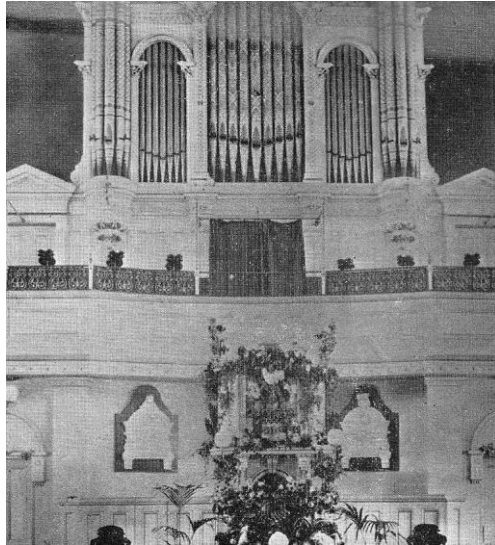
That same Leaders' Meeting which had so gratefully accepted Mr Greensmith's gift of land, noted also their satisfaction at the purchase of a piece of land for the erection of a Day and Sunday School. This was the plot on which our present School now stands. The first Day and Sunday School had been built in School Court in 1835, on part of the site now occupied by Messrs Woolworth. It was a Wesleyan School supported by the Wesleyan people. As far back as the Collection Journal goes back there had been collections after the "Day School Sermons" and the "Sabbath School Sermons," and there had been, of course, Sunday School Anniversaries. This Collection Journal begins in 1839 but the School had been built in 1835 and looked out over open land to the back of the James Street residences. Even in 1864 the children could still play on this open space up to the back of the Salem Chapel, and past this to Mr Palliser's new Post Office on the other side of James Street. The Conference of 1840 had sanctioned the building of Wesleyan Day Schools in every circuit where possible and the old Knaresborough Circuit had anticipated this decision by five years.

Mr R W Peet had been appointed Headmaster of the School in School Court and carried on when the new school was opened in August 1873, at a cost of just over £3,000. It is interesting to note that, after Mr Peet's death, the school was carried on by his daughter, who later married Thomas Kettlewell. Their son F T Kettlewell is not unknown in the Circuit, and his son John is assistant treasurer of Wesley, so that the family record will stretch back close on a hundred years. Whilst Miss Peet looked after the Day School, Messrs C H Barstow and Exelby were joint Superintendents of the Sunday School.



*Wesley Sunday School late 1870s*

In 1870 the State made its first massive intervention in the field of education. A Bill was passed requiring publicly-administered schools to be built, to be paid for partly out of the rates and partly out of taxation, and to be governed by locally-elected School Boards. In 1896 and 1897 Board Schools were built in Grove Road and Cold Bath Road and in course of time the Day School at Cheltenham Parade became unnecessary and was closed. The Sunday School, however, continued to grow and in the last decade of the nineteenth century it became necessary to extend the building. An infant wing was added, together with two additional classrooms and a library (now the Ladies' Parlour), and a gallery was built to accommodate the seniors for the opening and closing of the services. The records bear testimony to the sterling work of C H Barstow and George Exelby as Superintendents of the School and to the enthusiastic band of helpers who gave unstintingly of their time to the training of the young. It is fitting to note here that their work has been carried on to the present day by equally-devoted servants of the church - S G Hitchen, T J Forsyth, T Hobkinson, Snr, Harold Angus, Norman Varey, Bill Thompson, Tom Hobkinson, Jnr, and latterly Alex Thompson and Leslie Thorpe, to name but a few, have all recognised the vital importance of the work of the Sunday School, and through it have made their contribution to the church.



*Harvest Festival 1893*

It is sad to have to record that since the war the Sunday School has gradually decreased in numbers. Once it catered for the residential district around it, but now Wesley is a "down-town" church; it benefits from the number of visitors who attend worship, but the Sunday School has been hard hit. Fifty years ago it had flourishing Primary, Junior and Senior Departments; even twenty years ago it could provide the children for a Sunday, Monday and Tuesday Anniversary, but now the numbers are small indeed. Yet it has never been through lack of able and willing workers that the School has declined. As long as there were children to teach, the Church could provide the teachers, but over the last few years there has been an increasing tendency for children to drift away from the down-town church to the residential churches. In 1961, as an experiment, the Sunday School turned from its traditional afternoon service to the mornings only, the children taking their place in the Chapel until after their hymn and then going to their classes until 12 o'clock. It is felt that by taking part in morning worship the children will become more closely knit to the Church. Experiment is essential in every field of church work today, but particularly in the Sunday School, for of all the varied church activities none is so far-reaching in its effects. It can be said with confidence that as long as there are children to be taught there will always be loyal and

devoted workers ready to teach them and to fit their method to the needs of the time.



*Wesley Sunday school 1877*

On February 19th, 1891, a special meeting was convened for the purpose of considering the formation of a new Trust. This matter had been in mind for some time as there were only ten surviving members of the original Trust, and for the past six years the only active Trustees had been Messrs Barstow, Thomas, Hobkinson and Wilkinson. The meeting having been informed that sixteen of the original Trust were dead, and that two of the surviving members wished to be relieved of responsibility, formal permission was given to set in motion the procedure for the formation of new Trust At a subsequent meeting Mr Wilkinson questioned the validity of the Trust Deed of 1874 on five counts. He and Mr Hawkins were deputed to see the General Chapel Secretary at Manchester as soon as possible, submit the case to him and accept his advice as to the most convenient way of clearing up the difficulties so that the enlargement of the Trust could he proceeded with.

The minutes of the meeting just referred to were not written by John Hobkinson, nor was he present at that meeting. He died on

November 12th, 1892. Mr Hobkinson had been Secretary to the Trustees since 1877 and his recording of the minutes over that period bespeak his loyalty and devotion, for in the gradual deterioration of his handwriting there is evidence that he must have carried out his duties with increasing difficulty.

The Trust did not meet again until January, 1893, when it was reported that the measures recommended by the Connexional. Chapel Secretary were being carried out and it was hoped the new Trust Deed would shortly be ready. The new Trust met for the first time on February 1st, 1894, when fourteen members were present and C M White was appointed Secretary. This new body soon showed that they had the interests of Wesley at heart. A meeting in 1895 found Mr Oxley on his feet to declare that the new Post Office being built opposite Wesley was altogether too poor in style for its location and that a resolution from the Trustees would strengthen the hands of the Town Council, who were trying to induce the Government to put up a better building. The Secretary was instructed to write to the Postmaster-General expressing the views of the Trustees. Those with an eye to architectural design can decide whether the combined efforts of the two bodies met with any success!

At the same time, dissatisfaction with the work of the organist was expressed, it being stated unequivocally that "the music at Wesley was very inferior to that at most of the chapels in the town." A Choir Committee which was appointed to consider the matter met at Mr Barstow's and decided to tell the organist that the music at Wesley must be improved. Mr Paley tendered his resignation, which was accepted, and a "competent gentleman" was advertised for, a salary of £40 being offered.

It now became apparent that a standing Choir Committee was essential, and at the Annual Meeting of the Trust in January, 1896, it was resolved that "a Choir Committee be formed, to consist of the ministers of the Circuit, the Chapel Stewards and seven others." The terms of reference of this committee were defined in the resolution that "the Choir Committee shall be entrusted with full powers for the control of the Choir during the year, but the Trustees reserve to themselves the right of appointing the organist." A number of rules were drawn up, the most important being that a Choir Practice should be held at least

once a week and that no one should be admitted to the Choir without having been tested by the organist and approved by the Committee.

After careful consideration, Mr Wilkinson was appointed organist, but it was not long before the recently-formed Choir Committee were complaining that the anthems were too hard for the Choir, and that the choice of hymn tunes was hindering hearty congregational singing. The Committee met Mr Wilkinson and put their points to him, together with the request that he would give more attention to the practice of psalmody. The organist promised to do his best to improve the work of his department, but complained that he was not well-supported by the Choir, and he hoped that the new rules which had been drafted would secure a better attendance at Choir practice and thereby that better results would be produced.

It is evident that, to put it euphemistically, Mr Wilkinson and his Choir did not get on well together. A number of efforts were made to heal the breach, and finally it was decided to appoint a choirmaster. Mr Smith Bell was approached, and although some persuasion was necessary, he agreed to act as choirmaster. Mr Wilkinson stayed on for another two years, then resigned, and Mr R B Kettlewell of Grimsby was appointed in his place. The music of Wesley was in two good pairs of hands for a number of years. A note, written as an addendum to printed copies of the Choir Rules of 1906 and signed by Mr Smith Bell and Mr Kettlewell, is worthy of quotation : "Those to whom has been given love of Art and beauty of voice are earnestly reminded that He who gave these great gifts intended they should be used in His praise and for His worship; and it is urged on them as their duty to see that the Art of Music - 'the handmaid of religion' - is used in this sanctuary in all humility, and without vanity or pride, and that it is part of this duty that their service be rendered free from unnecessary conversation, and with all reverence in the House of God."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 1900 – 1919

Ever since Dr Watkinson had transferred himself to Trinity, the ministers charged with the pastoral oversight of Wesley had lived in a rented house, for the greater period in East Parade, and afterwards in Harlow Moor Drive. Towards the turn of the century there had been intermittent discussion as to the advisability of purchasing a second manse, and in September, 1900, the Circuit Stewards reported to the Quarterly Meeting that, a suitable house in Cold Bath Road having come on the market, they had anticipated the approval of the meeting and made the purchase for £1,600, the money having been borrowed at the rate of 3½% per annum interest. The meeting approved the action of the stewards and "Elmleigh" became the residence of the ministers of Wesley.

In the first two years of the twentieth century Wesley lost two outstanding figures. C H Barstow died in 1900 and at the Quarterly Meeting following his death, eloquent tribute was paid to his sterling character and unceasing devotion to the church. In tendering its sincere sympathy with the bereaved family, the meeting felt "that the removal of Mr Barstow has inflicted heavy loss upon the circuit, and it prays that Almighty God may continue to raise up others who shall be equally zealous in the work of His church." When A W Thomas died in 1902 the Trust placed on record its appreciation of one "who for a period of over thirty years rendered faithful service in various offices connected with this Trust, and especially the one of Chapel Steward."

In February, 1904, Wesley had its second face-lift. A bazaar held in October of the previous year had realised £632, and with this money the Trust were able to have done all the alterations they considered necessary. The chapel was completely re-decorated and a number of structural alterations were made. The gallery behind the pulpit was brought forward, thus providing additional seating for the choir, the small pulpit was removed and the present rostrum built in its place, and two emergency exits - one from the gallery and the other from the ground floor - were made. Electric lighting had been installed two years before, and now the

use of gas was discontinued altogether and more electrical fittings were added.

The Kursaal was booked, at a rental of eight guineas per Sunday, for the four weeks in February during which the chapel would be closed. It was decided that outstanding preachers should be invited for each of the four Sundays, and that a special effort should be made to attract people to these services. Advertising was done on a large scale. 80 three-sheet streamers, 10,000 handbills and 4,000 small cards were printed, and these, together with 8,000 hymn-sheets, cost just over £4. The task of house-to-house visitation was taken over by the ladies. The details of the arrangements for the services were put in the capable hands of Smith Bell and J R Ogden. Mr Bell reported that he hoped to have a choir of fifty voices for each of the services and would try to persuade the Temperance Band to play. In the event, the Temperance Band, with the exception of the conductor, were unwilling to play, and the singing was accompanied by a cornet, a piano and a harmonium. It is said on high authority that the recipe for success is faith and works. The members of Wesley had shown themselves deficient in neither of these ingredients, and the result was that the services in the Kursaal were singularly successful, the building being crowded each Sunday evening. The chapel, in its new look, was re-opened on March 6th, 1904.

At this time Mr J R Ogden was doing great work in the Sunday School at Wesley and it was seen that further extension to the school premises was necessary to provide classroom accommodation for the young men, who were his special concern. A room, thirty feet by eighteen feet, built over the infants' room, was made much more comfortable than was usual at that time by being fitted with a carpet and having the walls panelled. The schoolroom itself was improved and re-decorated and electric lighting was installed.

The floral display on the communion table at Wesley, always of a high standard, is further enhanced by the dignified silver vases in which the flowers are set. These vases came into the possession of the Trust in April, 1904, together with a covering letter which read: "I am given to understand that the flower vases on the communion table at Wesley are merely electro-plated. Now this ought **not to be**. Only the **real thing** should be placed on the



table of the Lord. Please accept on behalf of the Trustees the two solid silver vases herewith. An Occasional Worshipper." The Trustees resolved to accept gratefully the handsome gift and to enter the letter in the minutes.

For some time now proposals had been afoot for the formation of a new Trust. When this was formed, in May, 1904, it included Messrs Smith Bell, J R Ogden, Frederick Varey, W E Woods and Samuel Cartwright. The first action of this body was to adopt the new Hymn Book which had recently been published. There was considerable discussion as to the form of service which should be followed when the new book was introduced, for there was strong antipathy to anything in the nature of a liturgy. The suggestion that the Commandments and Responses should be used on the first Sunday morning service in each month and that the "Amen" should be sung after each hymn was voted out, and it was finally decided that the only change from previous practice should be to sing the "Amen" wherever it was written in the new tune book. Wesley had always held closely to the traditions of Methodism and it was very wary now in accommodating itself to the changing outlook of the time. For example, it was not until 1910 that Chant Books and Books of Offices were purchased, and the question of the use of individual cups for Communion evoked a great deal of discussion before they were eventually introduced in 1911. The Great War was in its third year before the major decision was made that on the first Sunday of each month either the Ten Commandments or the Beatitudes would be repeated.

One of the many little incidents worth noting occurred in August, 1911, when there seems to have been a special meeting of the Trust to consider the understandable mortification of Mr King, a Chapel Steward, to whom the Rev Mark Guy Pearce had spoken from the pulpit during the Chapel Anniversary Service asking him to sit down, despite the fact that Mr King was only fulfilling the duties of his office. A vote of sympathy was passed in favour of Mr King and he was assured of the meeting's confidence in his ability to discharge his duties.

When the renovation scheme referred to above was being planned, the tentative suggestion had been made that Wesley needed a new organ. The idea was shelved at that time, but as the fiftieth anniversary approached the matter was re-opened and in

February, 1911, Smith Bell formally proposed "that it is desirable to replace the present organ by a new one and that a scheme be formulated and submitted to the Trustees." The organist, R B Kettlewell and Mr. Naylor were asked to draw up specifications, and four firms were invited to tender. The tender of Messrs J J Binns for an organ with thirty-two stops costing £1,025, less £125 for the old organ, was accepted. The Wesleyan Chapel Committee consented to the erection of the organ "on condition that the entire expense be paid either before, or in connection with its opening, so as to bring NO DEBT upon the Trust." A Jubilee Organ Bazaar was held, and this, together with a Jubilee Gifts Scheme, enabled the Trust to comply with the proviso of the Chapel Committee.

The opening of the new organ was arranged to coincide with the Jubilee Thanksgiving Services on Tuesday, May 7th, 1912, when it was dedicated by the Rev F Luke Wiseman, President-Elect of the Conference, on behalf of Mrs Lanza, daughter of Mr. Samuel Hornby, the first organist of the Chapel. In the evening a recital was given by the eminent organist Mr J A Meale, FRCO, and this was followed by a public meeting at which addresses were given by the Rev Luke Wiseman and Wesley's own minister, the Rev Samuel Body. The special services were concluded on Sunday, May 12th, when the preacher was the Rev Dr G A Guest, a former minister of the church. The soloists for these services were Miss Nancy Bell and Mr William Bell.

A historical sketch of Wesley was written for the jubilee year; it will perhaps be salutary to quote from its survey of the position at Wesley at the time of the celebrations: "The outlook at Wesley is exceedingly hopeful; with a seating capacity for nearly a thousand worshippers and a bright and cheerful service . . . The singing is decidedly congregational and has always been so at Wesley. Fifty years ago it was the Hobkinson family who were prominent in the Choir. Now it is a merry peal of Bells, and in Mr Smith Bell as choirmaster, assisted by so many members of his family and other able and voluntary members, Wesley is particularly favoured as regards its musical service. With the new organ which is being erected, our able organist, Mr R B Kettlewell, ARCO, and the splendid band of voluntary choristers we have, we shall be able to lead the devotions of the worshippers in a manner worthy of the traditions of the Church .."

"Wesley is an active and energetic Church. Besides the two services on the Sabbath, there are twelve meetings held every week for Christian fellowship (with a total membership of 300), besides the weeknight service and weekly prayer meeting. An Adult Bible Class is held every Sunday afternoon under the leadership of Mr Gardiner and Mr W Woods.

"The Sunday School in Cheltenham Parade is ably managed by Mr J R Ogden as general superintendent, with Mr S G Hitchen and Mr T Forsyth as assistants, and Miss Smith as superintendent of the primary department. Mr Adams, also, has charge of a promising young men's class." (It should be noted here that, according to the returns given at the Quarterly Meeting, the Sunday School at this time had over 250 scholars and was staffed by 65 teachers).

"The Juvenile Missionary Association by which an average amount of £50 per annum is raised, is well looked after by Miss Horn, whilst the National Children's Home and Orphanage have their Young Leaguers' Union, by which they annually raise an amount which supports an orphan on their own account. There is also a 'Busy Bee' for the young folk who raise funds for the support of a little one in Burma.

One of the most hopeful and inspiring characteristics in connection with Wesley is the number of young people who attend the Sunday School and the services in the Sanctuary. To see the gallery of Wesley Chapel on a Sunday night is an inspiring sight, when we consider also the migratory character of the congregation, not only as regards the visitors who come for health and pleasure's sake, but the young people in situations, who come for a time and then disappear, perhaps in some cases going to the ends of the earth . . ." (The actual membership at this time was 304. The many large houses in the town were fully staffed by servants and some of these, together with many of the visitors who came to Harrogate, helped to swell the congregation).

"We look back on the fifty years and thank God for all those who in faith and patience have consecrated themselves to the work and service of Jesus Christ in this place; for the word of truth so faithfully and powerfully delivered by our pastors; for the continuous and self-denying efforts of all the labourers in this

vineyard; and for the spirit of the Master so conspicuously displayed in the love and good works in so many lives ... . "And so may we at Wesley, in furtherance of our Lord and Master's Kingdom, do all in our power to make our Church a centre of influence for that which is true, and noble, and good, in our town and in the world."

We live in a vastly different world from that of fifty years ago. The effects of two world wars, the tensions still existing between nations and the frightening progress which has been made in the invention of weapons of destruction have combined to create a climate of apathy and hopelessness and a sense of the futility of life generally. Faith burns low, and the message of the church seems to have little effect in the world. Yet, there are two constant factors which should be remembered - the needs of the human spirit are the same, and the God whom we worship is our fathers' God. As far as Wesley is concerned, this is a time when we should remember the great days of the past, and resolve that we shall not fail in the task which has been handed on to us. Wesley must remain a centre of influence for good in the town: the outlook can still, as fifty years ago, be exceedingly hopeful. It depends on us.

With the eruption of the Great War in 1914, Wesley had to accommodate itself to the national emergency. Many of her sons served in the armed forces. Some did not return and were mourned, not only by their families, but by the larger family of the Church. Some had their courage in action officially recognised: Donald Simpson Bell won the Victoria Cross posthumously, F T Kettlewell and W Lister were awarded the Military Cross, Norman Varey was decorated with the Distinguished Conduct Medal and T Wood with the Military Medal.

The Army took over the Sunday School premises for the latter part of the war, and some of the more elderly ladies of Wesley have happy memories of sledging with the soldiers down Cheltenham Parade. During the period of demobilisation the building was let to the Ministry of Labour at four guineas a week for six days a week on condition that the premises were washed and disinfected every Saturday afternoon and the furniture replaced ready for the use of the Sunday School.

As in the last war, the ladies of the Church did all they could to provide for the comfort of servicemen stationed in the area. The basement of the Chapel became a Soldiers' Club, staffed by willing helpers from among the members, and from this grew the idea of a club for the young men of Wesley. In 1919 a sub-committee consisting of Messrs Smith Bell, T Kettlewell, T B Dawson, F E Adams and T J Forsyth was set up to initiate the club, and it has continued to function up to the present day.

In 1916 a new Trust was formed which included T Kettlewell, T Hobkinson, Snr, F E Adams, T B Dawson, R N Rudd, T J Forsyth, N Varey and F T Kettlewell, many of them well-known to the younger generation of Wesley members.

In 1915 the organist, R B Kettlewell, informed the Trust that he would have to resign because of trouble in his right hand. Mr Naylor took over for a time, and then a number of gentlemen gave their services temporarily. In 1919 Mr Ernest Dawson was appointed organist: the terms of agreement which he promised to adhere to included" attendance at one WEAKLY choir practice."

## CHAPTER SIX

### 1919 – 1939

It had been hoped that the Ministry of Labour would have been able to hand back the Sunday School during 1919 but it was necessary to allow them the continued use of the School during 1920 at a rental of eight guineas per week.

Mr Smith Bell had sent in September a letter of resignation from his post as Choirmaster. The Trustees had asked him to reconsider, but he had felt obliged to repeat his request at the December Trustees' Meeting, regretfully, for Smith Bell had been a tower of strength since the turn of the century, the resignation was accepted and the Trustees put forward the names of Frank Jackson, Norman Varey and Fred Wood as possible choices. Since none of these felt able to accept, Mr F J P Drake was appointed in the New Year.

The "War Memorial" committee reported their suggestions that £250 be raised as a Memorial Fund, of which £150 was to be spent on a plaque which should contain the names of all Wesley boys who had served in the War, and which should be placed in the vestibule. The remaining £100 was to be given to a charitable institution.

It is worth noting that the Trustees frequently met (as they did at their Annual Trustees' Meeting on February 14th) on a Saturday, and twenty Trustees attended to vote that £100 be given to the Harrogate Infirmary; that the design for the Memorial Tablet be approved that only surnames and initials be recorded on the tablet without reference to rank, and that "a book be compiled giving complete information, full name, rank, and distinctions—such book to be kept as a permanent record in the Circuit safe."

For the last six years there had been neither the opportunity for, nor the money to spend on, decorations in the Chapel and the Trustees formed themselves into a Renovation Committee. It was decided to spend £1,035 on decorations, £130 on lighting, and (later) £900 on new carpets and cushions.

The scheme was carried out in the autumn of 1920 and the services were held in the Royal Hall whilst the chapel was being re-decorated.

At the end of 1920 Mr F J P Drake resigned his post as Choirmaster after only twelve months and Mr Ernest Dawson was appointed to take over the duties of Choirmaster in addition to his duties as Organist.

A recommendation had come from the Leaders' Meeting in the previous October, that Trustees and Leaders should meet together to consider a scheme known as "The Envelope System." The Trustees, having met with the Leaders, decided that the scheme should begin on April 10th, 1921. We can be grateful for the wisdom which caused them to agree to the use of the system, for, although it naturally did not solve our financial problems, we should have been very much the poorer without the regular and faithful giving which the system inspired.

The Annual Trustees' Meeting in February, 1923, contained at least two items which would interest us today. The North of England Horticultural Society applied for permission to hold their Spring Show in the Sunday School; they have rather outgrown the Wesley Sunday School over the last forty years. The second item was the following motion: "That . . . we approve of the Scheme of Methodist Union as submitted by Conference." The voting was 8 for, 4 against, and 2 neutral. There was also sent from that meeting a request to the Circuit Stewards that they should consider decreasing the Circuit assessment for Wesley. For some time Wesley had been paying £800 to the Circuit, but the renovation scheme had left them with a £1,500 debt, and they were no longer able to bear such a large share of the burden of the Circuit commitments. For the first and only time the assessment of Wesley was decreased from £800 to £730. Strenuous efforts were made to reduce the debt and within two years the balance due to the Treasurer had gone down from £1,500 to £13. It was at this 1927 Annual Trustees' Meeting that F T Kettlewell was first elected Treasurer, a position which he took over from his father and which he has held for 35 years - no mean record.

It is interesting to note the wide variety of meetings which catered for the interests of our people in the twenties. Although the

number of members was still only about 300 there were large numbers of girls in private service and in the many hotels, and for these Wesley, like other churches, sought to provide meetings of a devotional nature and also of simple entertainment. There were, in addition to the ordinary Society Classes, a Girls' Club, a Social Club for men, a Wesley Guild, a Band of Hope and a flourishing Sisterhood. There was a cricket team and a table tennis team which attained some fame towards the end of the decade. There was also a Social Hour after the evening service which used to pack the Sunday School.

The Sunday morning services were well attended and the gallery was filled, often to capacity, on Sunday evenings. Within ten years that Sunday night congregation would be lost, partly due to the Sunday opening of cinemas and partly due to the decrease in the numbers of girls in private service, but during the twenties the evening congregation could average over 500. No small part of this was due to the tremendous improvement in the music of the Church since the difficult days of the War. Ernest Dawson, a very personable and likeable young man, was an excellent organist, and although he was probably not as good a Choirmaster as either Smith Bell, who preceded him, or Fred Wood, who was to follow him, he nevertheless inspired the Choir with his enthusiasm and brought them to a very high standard.

In 1929 a new Trust was formed which included the names of Messrs W A Thompson and Tom Hobkinson, who, with Mr F T Kettlewell who had been elected in 1919, are the only surviving active members of that Trust. One of their first duties was the appointment of a Choirmaster. Ernest Dawson had had to resign during the summer of 1928 but had returned again to the Choir in 1929. However, at the beginning of 1930 he resigned again to take a commission in the RAF and Mr Fred Wood was appointed Choirmaster, and his daughter Mary was appointed Organist, with Mr J E Hitchen as Deputy Organist. An early measure of the success of this dual appointment is to be seen in the minute of the Annual Trustees' Meeting a year later when "the provision of extra seating accommodation for the Choir was left in the hands of the Chapel Stewards." The same meeting was also no doubt pleased to grant an application from the Men's Club seeking an extension of their membership to ladies.



Wesley had had four Ministers since the Great War : the Rev J W Fielding (1919- 1922); the Rev J Fisher Robson (1922-1925); the Rev John T Green (1925- 1928); the Rev W J Morgan (1928-1932).

To the Rev J W Fielding had fallen the difficult task of gathering together the threads in the immediate post-war years; the Rev J F Robson had endeared himself to the small cause at Beckwithshaw, traditionally associated with Wesley, by his efforts for them, whilst the Rev J T Green is perhaps best remembered for his work and support for the many activities in the Church. The Rev Walter J Morgan, though he did not lag behind the others in his work in the Church, was probably one of the most accomplished preachers we have ever had and was, in fact, the last preacher to preach to that crowded gallery.

In 1932 the Rev J H Bodgener arrived. He was not so talented or forceful a preacher as his predecessor but he had a simple character which endeared him to all. He was able to bring in to the Church new members who came because "Bodge" had a talent for friendship. He brought two ideas to Wesley, neither of which outlasted him, although their influence remained.

The first was the introduction of an "Order of Service" leaflet, on which, in addition to the Order of Service, were printed the various church announcements and notices. It may seem a far cry from the mysticism of William Blake to an Order of Service leaflet, but the Rev J H Bodgener was a student of mystical poetry and had a strong feeling for the solemnity and reverence of worship. ITV and the "Commercials" were unknown in his day at Wesley but he regarded the "Notices" much as some folk regard "Commercials." His resentment of this, to him irrelevant break may or may not have been illogical, but it was real, and since the conduct of the worship belongs to the preacher, the Leaders and Trustees acceded readily to his request.

The forerunner of Moral Re-Armament was the Oxford Group, and the formation of a Group was "Bodge's" second innovation. His "Group," like many others in many different places, attracted a large number of young folk, many of whom had no previous contact with a church. It deepened the spiritual life of some but

there were heavy casualties amongst those who could not accept that this was a way into the Church and not a way out of it.

The great event of 1933 was, of course, the consummation of Methodist Union, by which the Wesleyans, Primitive Methodists and United Methodists became one Methodist Church, and in Harrogate one circuit. The Primitive Methodists had been formed in Harrogate in the early years of the 19th century, and the United Methodists (or their "Reforming" forerunners) had left the old Beulah Chapel in 1851. Yet there seems to have been little of the ill-feeling in Harrogate which there had been in some parts of the country. The people of Wesley had taken a collection for the stone-laying of the 1875 Primitive Methodist Chapel, just as they had raised funds by a special effort for the building of the United Methodist Victoria Park Church. Wesley was, after all, the Mother Church and if she had been hard hit by the secession of some of her family, she recognised and understood their motives. Because of this understanding on both sides, friendship remained constant between the three churches and their eventual re-union was accomplished without strain.

The new hymn book was introduced to the Church both by a lecture by the Rev F Luke Wiseman and by an evening of hymn-singing given by the Choir. Naturally it did not receive complete and universal approval, for in the attempt to gather together the best of the hymns used by the three branches of Methodism; many hymns had to be omitted. Harrogate Wesleyan and Wesley had used three hymn books - the old "Large Hymn Book" of John Wesley was used up to 1875; a thorough revision of this book lasted until 1904, and this 1904 hymn book took us up to the present 1933 edition.

In 1936 J R Ogden was granted the Freedom of the Borough of Harrogate. The feeling of Wesley was expressed by the Trustees in the following letter: "The Trustees of Wesley wish to express to Mr Ogden their unfeigned pleasure and gratification on the occasion of his receiving the Freedom of the Borough of Harrogate, having in special regard his many services to the church both by his lectures and, in former years, his instruction to the Young Men's Bible Class, and his beneficial influence upon its members, as also his unfailing kindness and generosity to the

Church." As the honour itself had been well earned, so the words of the letter quoted are a memorial to a great man.

During this same year a comprehensive scheme of decoration was undertaken in the Sunday School, and one of the first meetings to be held afterwards was a farewell tea to the Rev Horace and Lucy Ibbotson before they went to the Mission field in Rhodesia. The occasion was the Overseas Missions Anniversary at which the Rev Percy Ibbotson was the Deputation.

A sign of the difficult economic times through which the country was passing is to be seen in a record of a special meeting of the Trustees in November, 1936. With the departure of the Chapel keeper, Mr A Dawson, the vacancy was advertised. In 1927 there had been twenty applications for the post of Caretaker. In 1936 no fewer than 439 applications were received. It was a happy choice which gave us Mr and Mrs Jim Dodd.

The Rev W Garfield Lickes followed the Rev J H Bodgener in September, 1937, and found himself plunged into the midst of a major scheme for re-decoration. Seven meetings of the Trust are recorded between October and February. There was a partial lightening of the interior as most of the woodwork, other than the pews, was painted with a light graining. The permanent results of this particular scheme are to be found in the making of one gate entrance into the forecourt in place of the original two side gates and in the steps to the gallery. These originally descended in a curve with the steps broad on the outside but dangerously narrow on the inside of the curve. The alteration which produced the present pattern of two straight and regular flights was a wise decision. Another feature of the scheme was the inclusion of gowns for the Choir, which were generously provided by Mr and Mrs J M Wade, and which have proved to be a real contribution to the dignity of the service.

During the month of February, 1938, when the decorations were in hand, the Sunday services were held in the Regal Cinema. A Gift Day was held on March 12th and brought in £1,371, against the sum of £1,515 expended on the scheme. However, in early 1939 Mr Lickes was able to announce that the Rev H Wadsworth had generously offered to pay the last £50 of the outstanding debt if the members could raise the first £150.

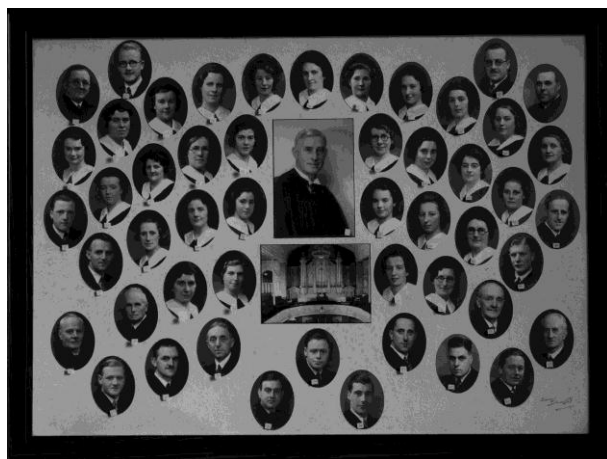
In July, 1939, Mr Fred Wood resigned his position as Choirmaster owing to ill-health. He had, in his nine years as Choirmaster, brought the Choir to a high standard of excellence. He had a fine voice himself, but was, above all else, a brilliant teacher. It was perhaps because he was a hard and demanding taskmaster that he won the utmost loyalty from the Choir.

During 1960 he was kind enough to set down for us his own story of those years. "It was quite obvious to me," he wrote, "that our first effort must be to improve the standard of hymn singing, and the Choir were very surprised when I insisted that the first half of Choir practice was to be devoted to the hymns for next Sunday. They soon realised that it really was necessary." After he had brought the Choir to the point at which they were achieving two new anthems every Sunday, he goes on to say, "We then began to think of Oratorio performances. We could not afford the time out of our weekly practices, but the Choir were sufficiently keen to take on an extra night's work each week. .. Our first effort was Dvorak's "At the foot of the Cross." and I remember with gratitude the Rev Walter J Morgan saying in the vestry afterwards that he had been deeply moved by the beauty of the singing, and by the fine playing of Miss Wood at the organ. In succeeding years we sang, besides Stainer's "Crucifixion," which was our annual event each Passiontide, various Oratorios (one each year) including Brahm's "Requiem," Handel's "Messiah." Mendelssohn's "Hymn of Praise," and "St Paul" (which we repeated in St Peter's Church at the request of C L Naylor, Esq.) We were invited by Dr Moody to join the Minster Choir to sing Brahm's "Requiem" in Holy Week, after having already sung the "Stabat Mater" in Wesley Chapel, and "The Crucifixion" in the Salvation Army Citadel during that week."

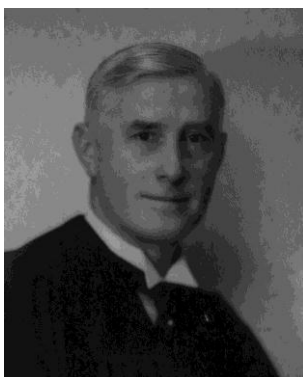
Mr Wood goes on to tell of the many honours won by the Choir during his latter years with them. They took First Place with an Honours Certificate at the Harrogate Musical Festival in 1937, and, after splitting the Choir into two halves for the 1938 Festival, Mr Wood had the pleasure of seeing his two Choirs take First and Second Place. In the solo class, Miss Lorna Wood took First Place in the Sopranos; Ernest Wrather took Second Place in the Bass, and Fred Thomas had also a First Place in the Duets. It was hardly to be wondered at that with such a Choir and such a Choirmaster, the musical side of our worship in those days was

something to remember. But Fred Wood had given unstintingly of himself during those years and he finishes his story by saying, "And so on doctor's advice I very reluctantly offered my resignation after completing nearly ten years of very strenuous work, which was the most enjoyable period of my life. I had never been in charge of such a splendid body of singers, whose loyalty and co-operation were an inspiration."

We wish that Fred Wood could have been with us to read his own words and to see how his work fitted so worthily into the pattern of our history.



*Wesley choir in the 1930s under the leadership of Mr Fred Wood (below)*



We had already had word that the Rev W Garfield Lickes was to be taken from us to be stationed at Brunswick Chapel, Leeds, and in his place we were to have the Rev Leonard W Dickens, whose difficult task it would be to guide Wesley through the days which lay ahead. One burden had been removed, for there is a Special Minute in the Trustees' Minute Book which reads: (Sept 2nd, 1939) "The Methodist Chapel Committee, acting on behalf of the Methodist Conference, having paid a grant of £20 to aid in the extinction of the debt on the Wesley (Oxford Street) Methodist Chapel in the Harrogate Circuit, hereby declares that, after payment of the aid aforesaid, there remains no debt on the Trust, on any account whatever."

The Gift Day on March 19th had been successful. That, at least, was behind, but what was ahead no one knew.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**1939 – 1962**

When the Rev Leonard W Dickens announced to the congregation at Wesley, on the morning of Sunday, September 3rd, the news that we were now in a state of war with Germany, the thoughts of many of the older men must have gone back to the time, twenty-five years before, when they had marched away to a very different kind of war and left the affairs of Wesley to be carried on by their fathers. Now it was the turn of these same men to watch over the Church whilst their sons, one by one (and, soon, their daughters too), marched off into the unknown.

They had already met on the previous Monday to receive an application from the Harrogate Corporation for the use of the Schoolrooms as a Food Control Headquarters "in case of National Emergency," but had decided that, since the Post Office had already been granted the use of the lower rooms at the Chapel for use as store rooms, it was essential, for the time being, to keep the use of the Sunday School. They had met again on the Saturday to hear that the Post Office was to exercise its claim on the Chapel Basement, and to re-iterate its refusal with regard to the Sunday School. It had also decided to black-out the Chapel and the Sunday School. A further special meeting was held on the 11th of September which decided that the evening services would begin at 6 o'clock, an arrangement which lasted until the end of the year only, after which the service was moved back to 6.30.

After further pressure, the Trust reluctantly agreed to the Sunday School being taken over, only to find that it was being used and advertised as a Recruiting Centre. After heated discussions lasting over a month, the Trustees regained the use of the Sunday School on December 19th.

The first four months of the war had had their difficulties, and the departure of so many young people, coupled with the effects of the black-out had brought the collections down to the point at which a drop of £4 per week was reported at the Annual Trustees' Meeting in January, 1940, below the corresponding months of the previous year. Fortunately the influx of "billetees" from London brought in a number of members who were to prove of immense

value in every way during the coming years, and by the middle of the year the financial position began to look more promising. A note of the purchase of Stirrup Pumps and Fire Buckets in August, 1940, reminds us that the Battle of Britain was taking place, but Harrogate was to remain almost untouched. Other large cities were not so fortunate, and the result was an influx of evacuees into the town during the Autumn. Many, of course, found their way to Wesley and the December Leaders' Meeting decided to hold a Welcoming Meeting for our own evacuees.

At the end of April, 1941, the organist, Mr Mason, accepted the post of Organist at St Mark's, and, in July, Mr Harold Uttley was appointed as Organist with Mrs Uttley as Choir Librarian. In September the Trust received a request from the Harrogate Corporation asking for the use of the Sunday School as a British Restaurant. This was a type of subsidised restaurant, valuable, and, indeed, almost essential in helping to eke out the meagre rations at a time when so much food was going to the bottom of the Atlantic. The terms were finally agreed in April, 1942, when the District Valuer fixed a rent of £175 per annum for the ground floor of the Sunday School.



*Wesley Chapel 1962*



During this year a valuable and helpful legacy of £500 was received from the estate of J W Worsnop, and was invested in 3% War Bonds. In February, 1943, there retired from office in the Church Samuel Cartwright, and the Trust noted, with great appreciation, his many valuable years of service.

The war pursued its weary course with all its attendant difficulties in the shape of rationing of food and clothes, and the blackout which made coming out in the evening a real ordeal for the elderly. Twenty-five years previously only the men had gone, but now both the young men and the young women were serving and the life of Wesley, as of every church, was carried on only by great effort on the part of those who were left.

The usual Society Classes, though greatly depleted, were at least kept going, but a most useful service was performed with the turning of the main Clubroom under the Chapel into a Forces' Canteen. During the early part of the war this room had been used as a storeroom for sandbags; indeed, the floor had had to be strengthened to take the weight of the quarter of a million sandbags. Amongst the young men and women who crowded nightly into the Canteen was Ronald Atkinson, who was to return to the circuit later as an ordained Minister, at Bar Chapel.

Naturally there was not, during the war, much opportunity to carry out needed improvements and repairs, so that, when the war in Europe ended in April, 1945, there was much to be done. A quotation was accepted for a new boiler and for new radiators in the vestries and corridors, and a committee was appointed to examine the Sunday School, for there was news of its impending release by British Restaurants. Certainly there was one permanent improvement which resulted from the use of the Sunday School as a restaurant, for it left us with a well-fitted and usefully-sited kitchen.

During this first year after the war, Wesley lost two outstanding men in Samuel Cartwright and Harold Angus, and the Trustees recorded their sorrow at the passing of two men who had always been "full of zeal in the performance of their service to Christ and His Church."

Of the twenty-seven Trustees nominated for the Trust in 1929, there were only seven effective members in 1946. It was decided to form a new Trust, calling into service many of the men and women who had, by now, returned from active service.

Four ladies were elected to this Trust - Mrs. Dolly Angus, Mrs Ella Johns, Miss Bertha Buckle and Miss Freda Whitton. Probably none of them knew that it was something of a historic moment when they took their places at the first meeting of the new Trust, for it was just 150 years since the first Wesleyan Chapel had opened in Harrogate, and for 150 years there had been no woman Trustee. They had played their vital part in almost every other activity of the Church, but, whether by accident or design, they had never been on the Trust.

One duty which had become traditionally their own, and which added greatly to the beauty of the chapel, was that of arranging the flowers on the Communion table. Yet, in thirty-three years, there had only been one change of Flower Secretary. In 1912, Mrs A W Woods accepted the responsibility of providing and arranging the flowers. She continued to do so until 1930, when Mrs Tom Wood took over the task. Mrs Wood continued until 1945, so that these two ladies had, between them, given thirty-three years of service. Miss Freda Whitton and later Mrs Mary Kettlewell performed this duty which is now in the hands of Mrs Allie Hitchen, Mrs Ruth Dawson, and Miss Joyce Simmons. How greatly the work of these ladies has been appreciated over all these years.

The Rev F W Townsend had been faced, at Wesley, with the challenge of building up both the spiritual and the financial life of the Church when he had arrived in September, 1944. He started the Men's Fellowship in 1945, and the Church was challenged and strengthened by his forceful preaching from the pulpit. A gift day held in September, 1946, realised £1,070 and cleared off the outstanding debts, but the fact that the year ended with a deficit of £34 emphasised the pattern which had developed over the past years.

The Rev Kenneth Vaughan Jones arrived in September, 1948, to place at the disposal of the Church his very real and varied talents. It was hoped that, as a rather younger man than was

usual for Wesley (and as a bachelor) he would have the time to devote to youth work. Within a few months he had started a Youth Club which ran with increasing success throughout the six years of his ministry. "KV" had the genius which not only attracted young people but gave them a sense of service. Although many will remember the Youth Group from their brilliantly directed concerts, it should be remembered too that attendance at Worship was an obligation of membership of the Club.

It is the almost inevitable lot of a Methodist Minister to have to formulate some plan for dealing with the finances of his church, and, to the Trustees' Annual Meeting in February, 1949; the Rev K V Jones outlined his plans. He suggested that each of the various organisations in the Church should plan to raise money during the year in the hope that Gift Days would not be needed. He expected that, in this way, not only would the gap between income and expenditure be bridged, but the church would gain by the fellowship engendered by this sort of effort.

The Youth Group, as has been said, contributed greatly by their concerts, which used to run for three nights. When a scheme of decoration for the Sunday School was put in hand, the young people offered thirty chairs. There were numerous small efforts by individual ladies, or by two or three combining, and in the Autumn the men of the church put on a Lord Mayor's Banquet. All of these things did what was expected of them; they produced money and knit the people more tightly together.

The Rev Fred Townsend had started a Men's Fellowship to take the place of Mr S G Hitchen's class, which had ceased during the war, but there was a need for some such meeting for the younger married couples, and in November, 1951, the Wyvern Club was formed to meet this need.

In 1951 the Sisterhood celebrated its Silver Jubilee and the Rev Kenneth Waites was invited to preach. At the tea which followed the afternoon service, fourteen of the original Committee members sat at the top table, and the two oldest members, Mrs Gregson and Mrs Morrith, had the honour of cutting the three-tiered cake which Mrs Harry Jackson had baked. The Secretary, Mrs H S Hitchen, made special mention of the fact that during the Sisterhood's twenty-fifth session, both Miss Horne and Mr S

G Hitchen had each given their twenty-fifth talk to the Sisterhood.

The Sisterhood had been started in 1926 by Mrs J T Green to serve the needs of the many women who, often unable to come to the Sunday services, found in this meeting a fellowship and a message, which they would otherwise have missed. It seems to have started when the old "Busy Bee" ceased. The "Busy Bee" had been started by the Rev Benjamin Bean in 1904, but, whilst the Busy Bee had had a Missionary aim in that the members had worked to provide funds to support a child in Burma, the Sisterhood has catered to the needs of the immediate neighbourhood for the last thirty-six years.

The Sisterhood is, then, comparatively recent, but the Women's Work for Overseas has been in existence under different names for over 100 years. The name, of course, suggests the missionary aim, and the whole missionary work of Methodism is dependent on the devoted work of the Methodist women. Mrs Ella Johns has been the Secretary of the Wesley branch of the Women's Work for fifteen years and that branch has played its part faithfully in maintaining the work of the Church overseas.

KV's hope that Gift Days could be avoided went awry when, at the end of 1951, the main chimney at the Chapel was found to be in a dangerous condition. The estimated cost of repair was put at £250, but the finished job used up most of the £407 brought in by a hastily called Gift Day.

For sixteen years Wesley had been particularly well and happily served by Mr and Mrs Jim Dodd, the Chapel keepers, and it was therefore with something of a shock that the news of their resignation was received at the Trustees' meeting in July, 1952. We were most fortunate in our choice of Mr and Mrs Eddie Scanlan, who replaced Mr and Mrs Dodd when the latter left to devote their time to Berwick Grange.

During 1952 the various special efforts raised £438, but there had also been time to prepare for the 1953 Forward Movement in Methodism. The Rev K V Jones outlined to the June Leaders' Meeting his suggestions for Wesley's part in the movement. There was to be a Local Swanwick at the Beechwood in September of

1952, and a Circuit Covenant Service at Wesley on January 1st, 1953. The Church was filled to capacity for this moving service in which the Methodist people of Harrogate came to renew their vows. A Festival of Praise was held in the September, and there followed, in October, a week of special services with a further Swanwick weekend in the December of 1953. To the December Leaders' Meeting the Rev K V Jones was able to announce an increase in membership from 270 to 289.

Sunday, July 18th, 1954, was a day of peculiar importance in the life and in the history of Wesley, for the Rev William Russell Shearer, newly-elected President of the Methodist Conference, preached to us on that day. He was an "old boy" of Wesley, and though not the first to pass through our Sunday School and eventually enter the ministry, he was the first to attain to the highest honour which Methodism can bestow. It was at his own request that his first service as President should be in the Chapel in which he had been brought up, and amongst his own people. It will be our hope that he will conduct our Centenary Services on October 3rd, 1962, and that with him will be his lifelong friend and colleague in the Ministry, the Rev Horace Ibbotson, another Wesley boy.

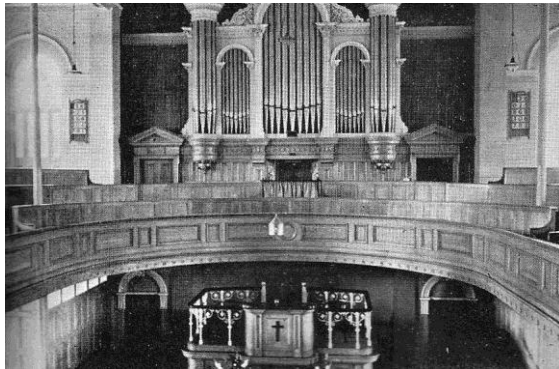
The Rev K V Jones was due to leave in August, 1954, and it was a pity that he had to spend so much of his last year in the Royal Bath Hospital with a slipped disc. However, it is probable that neither he nor Sister Jean Mary Locke (who nursed him through his illness) would consider it any pity at all, for, on September 20th, 1955, they were married at Wesley.

The Rev Herbert Simpson came to us in September, 1954. If he had a genius, it was a genius for friendship, and the spiritual life of the church took another step forward when he and Mrs Simpson became part of our life.

The hope that numerous congregational efforts would make Gift Days unnecessary had not been realised in addition to the special gifts of £407 for the repair of the chimney in 1952, there had been further Gifts Days in 1953 and 1954, totalling £253 and £762 respectively. Mr Simpson arrived to find the double threat of a report that the Chapel fire escape was in a dangerous condition, and an increase in the Circuit assessment of Wesley from £700 to

£960 per annum. It seemed impossible to bridge the gap of £500 a year between income and expenditure and a small economy committee was set up at the Annual Trustees' Meeting in February, 1955. By the time the committee made its report to the Trustees in September, the Treasurer had been able to offer the heartening news that the collections during the first year of Mr Simpson's ministry had reached a record total. This was fortunate, for the committee, having examined every aspect of trust expenditure, had only one recommendation to make. They suggested that a considerable saving on fuel could be effected by the installation of an automatic stoker using coal. The initial cost would be £400 but a saving of £100 per annum could be expected.

In December, 1955, the Leaders learned that a memorial was to be erected in Rhodesia to the late Rev Percy Ibbotson, who had left Wesley to serve as a missionary in Rhodesia for many years. It was decided that his brother, Horace Ibbotson, who had served with him on the mission field, should preach in Wesley during the following summer, and that the collection should be devoted to the memorial.



Wesley Chapel Interior 1962

At the same Leaders' Meeting a letter was received from the Rev Canon Roger Baines suggesting that, in response to the Archbishop of Canterbury's appeal, members of St Peter's and Wesley should meet to discuss the problems connected with Union. The Leaders expressed their pleasure at the invitation and a meeting was arranged. Actually, two meetings were held, both extremely interesting and informative. In a most friendly atmosphere it became clear that the difficulties, whatever they were, were more apparent and urgent to the clergy than to the layman, but the experience of meeting with the friends at St Peter's, and the increased understanding of the problems involved made the meetings well worthwhile.

At the Trustees' meeting in February, 1957, Mr F T Kettlewell was complimented on his thirty years' service as Treasurer. The Economy Committee, which eighteen months previously had recommended the expenditure of £400 on a new automatic stoker for the chapel were doubtless relieved to hear that nearly £100 had been saved in the cost of fuel in the first year. Mr Kettlewell was also able to report that the inspiring ministry of the Rev Herbert Simpson was reflected in the satisfactory state of the finances.

More than one church in the town makes special arrangements to bring down worshippers from the Yorkshire Home and other similar institutions and a committee of the Leaders reported that the best way of bringing our friends from the Home was by taxi and, further, recommended that a fund should be started to keep this service going. We still had need, like other churches, for "pushers", and a splendid job the "pushers " have done over these past years.

The question of the coming Centenary had occupied the thoughts of the Trustees for some time, and in June, 1957, they met to consider the first estimates for the painting of the Chapel and the Sunday School. The work began in the Autumn of '57 and the first £200 of a sum which was eventually to total upwards of £8,000, was spent on the first repairs. We heard with some dismay that Mr Simpson was to be "posted" to the Chapel Committee at Manchester. Both he and Mrs Simpson had endeared themselves to us over the four years they had been with us and it was with infinite regret that we had to let them part from us.

We were fortunate in being able to welcome the Rev W Garfield Lickes again for the final phase of his ministry, and to have his sure wisdom to help to guide us through the four years of intensive preparation for our Centenary.

In April, 1959, a review of all work needing to be done in both Chapel and Sunday School was prepared for a joint Leaders' and Trustees' meeting. There were two main aims of the Centenary Committee. The first was that the entire fabric of our property should be renovated the second was that in various ways the accommodation should be so altered that, whilst it would still be capable of holding over 800 on special and circuit occasions, the congregation could be brought a little more together during the ordinary Sunday services.

The schemes for outside and inside decoration were approved in principle at an estimated cost of £6,000, to include the necessary electrical work, and the various alterations to the seating consisting of the removal of the pews at either side of the pulpit and the construction of a large screen to cover the back pews in the gallery.

It was realised that a scheme as ambitious as the one visualised would need the utmost co-operation of all members, and a Society meeting was called for June 1st, at which Mr W A Thompson was able to explain the whole scheme in great detail, and, what was more important, to communicate to the Church his own enthusiasm for the scheme.

A Gift Day was held on September 5th, 1959, which realised cash gifts of £2,187 and promises of £2,050, to which were added £900 of interest-free loans. There have been, of course, many small individual efforts in aid of the Centenary Fund, but by far the most important effort has been the Coffee Morning organised by the Ladies every Wednesday morning. It has been running for just over two and a half years and has enabled the ladies to give just over £800 by May, 1962. At this date the whole total of contributions had reached £7,963, but some hundreds are still needed to complete the original scheme, and to this there has to be added a further £1,000 for repairs to the roof and to the steps, so that we have still some way to go.



It was decided that certain work on the gallery pews should start in November, and that the complete decoration should start after Covenant Sunday in January, 1960. Looking forward, the Trust also decided that the Rev W Russell Shearer should be asked to conduct the services on the Centenary Day, October 3rd, 1962, and arrangements have also been made for the Sunday Services in October when it is hoped that our new Minister, the Rev W F Hewitson, will preach on the 7th, the Rev Herbert Simpson on the 14th, and the Rev K V Jones on the 21st.

The detailed work involved in this important renovation had involved the Trustees, and particularly the Trust Executive, in a large number of meetings. Before the actual work began an important alteration was suggested in the construction of vestries in place of the pews at the North end of the Chapel. This has undoubtedly given a cleaner and more dignified appearance to each side of the Chapel and the result has been most satisfying.

When the Chapel was re-opened in March the transformation was startling. The whole appearance of the interior had been lightened by the restoration of the woodwork to its natural colour; the blue of the ceiling and the pastel shades of the walls and pillars all combined to produce a refreshingly modern yet quiet and restful atmosphere. That such a distinct change could win such unanimous approval was a great tribute to the imaginative planning both of the Trust Executive and of Messrs Tophams who carried out the work. Messrs W Dobson, the Chapel Steward, W A Thompson, F T Kettlewell and J E Hitchen, who formed this executive, would all pay tribute to the quiet wisdom of their chairman, the Rev W Garfield Lickes, who, by an ironic twist of fate, has, on both his terms of ministry at Wesley, arrived just in time to be concerned in the two major renovations of Wesley over the last twenty-five years.

One could not finish the story of Wesley without further mention of the part played by the Choir, and by our organist, Harold Uttley. We have probably never had in our history an organist of his calibre; his music is an unfailling delight to all, and we can but marvel that total blindness seems in no way to affect his complete mastery of the organ. On the rare occasions when he and Mrs Uttley, herself a most accomplished pianist, have played together on one, or on two pianos, it has been a joy to hear them. The

Choir have had a struggle to maintain their numbers during some of the years since the war, but they have never failed to lead the singing, and tradition and training have kept the music on a high level, despite the smallness of numbers. Fortunately, for some years now, the numbers have slowly but steadily increased. The return of former members gave the Choir the support they needed, and helped, in turn, to bring in the greatly needed younger members. Now the Choir is strong in every section and follows worthily in a great tradition.

One of the oldest members of the Choir was Norman Varey, whose sudden and unexpected death in March, 1962, left us all with a sense of loss. He had completed fifty faithful years of service as a Sunday School Teacher and Superintendent, and as one looks back through the history of Wesley, and notes, from time to time, the record in the minutes of the passing of one and another of men and women who have given a lifetime of service to their Master, one recognises that Norman was but one of a great company. Miss Horne with fifty years of service as a Class Leader, Mr S G Hitchen with sixty-two years of Local Preaching, and many others, are part of that same company who have served God through their allegiance to the Methodist Church in general and Wesley Chapel in particular.

For 100 years Wesley has been part of the life of the town. It has provided three Mayors and countless men and women who have served the town in different ways, but most important of all, it has been a place in which, for those 100 years, God has been worshipped. When it was built it stood alone in Allotment Field now the busy life of Harrogate presses around it and this is right for it was built to be in the world, though not of it. It takes its standards from One who is changeless, and seeks to meet those human needs which do not vary from age to age.

There will always be those who say that there are better Christians outside the Church than in it. It may be, though that is a judgement more safely left to God. But Wesley, like any other church, draws its people not from those who come because they are better than their neighbours, but rather from those who simply seek to be better men and women. It is no fault of the Church that it can so much better meet the needs of those who seek the answers, than of those who know all the answers.

So, for this 100 years, Wesley has opened its doors to welcome all who seek the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and there have been families which have worshipped in Wesley for all that time. Probably there will be on October 3rd at least one member of the Simpson family which built the church; there were two Hobkinsons who were members of the first Trust, and there will be more than two Hobkinsons present on the Centenary night; there were Jeffrays and Thomases at the opening ceremony, and their descendants will also be there. The Chapel will not look quite as it did when our forefathers gathered on that Friday a century ago, and these same forefathers would be rather shaken to hear that the scheme of decorations, alterations and repairs has cost twice as much as it cost to build Wesley. But they would feel at home amongst us if they could recognise in us the same loyalty and devotion which inspired them.

We shall thank God on that night for the Grace and Power which kept them, and we shall pray that that same Grace and Power will keep us, and those who follow us in Wesley.

H. S. HITCHEN.  
T. E. DAWSON

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*The Trustees gratefully acknowledge the help given by:-*

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J Harmston Esq  
The Methodist Recorder*

*In the compilation and production of this booklet*

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## REPRINT OF OPENING SERVICE BILL, 1862

### **NEW WESLEYAN CHAPEL, HARROGATE.**

The Public are respectfully informed that it is intended to celebrate the Opening in the following manner:—

ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3rd, 1862,

#### **A SERMON**

Will be preached by the

**REV. CHARLES PREST**  
(President of the Conference).

Service to commence at Eleven o'clock in the morning.

#### **A PUBLIC MEETING**

will be held in the Evening at Six o'clock. Chair to be taken by

W. B. HOLDSWORTH, Esq., of Leeds,

when Addresses will be delivered by the President of the Conference; the Rev. JOHN FARRAH (Chairman of the District); the Rev. W. LORD; the Rev. CHARLES CHURCHILL, A.M. from Halifax, Nova Scotia; the Rev. W. T. RADCLIFFE; the Rev. R. N. YOUNG; ROBT. PLUMMER, Esq., of Leeds; the Rev. H. POLLINGER and Mr. GREENSMITH, of Harrogate.

On the following Sabbath, October 5th, TWO SERMONS will be preached by

**The Rev. H. POLLINGER, Resident Minister.**

Service at half-past 10 in the morning, and at half-past 6 in the evening.

In the afternoon a LOVEFEAST will be held to be presided over by Mr. Greensmith, to commence at TWO o'clock.

Doors open at Half-past ONE.

On Sunday, October 12th, TWO SERMONS will be preached by the

**REV. JOHN FARRAR,**

Service at 10-30 a.m. and 6-30 p.m.

On Sunday, October 19th, TWO SERMONS will be preached by the

**Rev. W. B. POPE, of Leeds.**

Services at 10-30 a.m. and 6-30 p.m.

Collections at each service in aid of the Building Fund.

On the DAY OF OPENING, Friday, October 3rd.

#### **A PUBLIC DINNER**

Will be provided at the Brunswick Hotel.

Tickets 2/6 each may be had of Mr. Greensmith, Hosier, Regent Parade, at the Post Office, High Harrogate; Mr. Hobkinson, Chapel Street, Mr. Hornby, Draper, Post Office, Mr. Stephenson, Grocer, Parliament Street, or the Pump Room, Harrogate Wells.

The attendance and support of all Wesleyan Friends is respectfully desired.

T. Hollins, Printer.

**PART TWO**

**The Next Fifty Years : 1962-2012**

**by**

**Judith A Yeats**

## **FOREWORD**

*“I have been asked to write a Foreword to a book I have not seen,” were the words which were used by W. Garfield Lickes fifty years ago when he wrote a foreword for a book outlining the History of Wesley Chapel.*

*The book to which he referred, which I have read, was the account of the first hundred years of the Wesley Chapel in Harrogate. Now we are fifty years later and I can echo his words because I too have not actually seen the document of which this is the Foreword.*

*The document which you have in your hands is an amalgam of that original document and material to bring it up to date. The manner of presentation between the two parts has varied. The first was an attempt to bracket the history in a series of time slots, although sometimes the time slots were a little elastic. There were numerous mentions of particular people who impacted on the life of the congregation on many ways.*

*The second part sets out to span the whole period in a number of distinct categories although I am certain that there will again be mention of the particular contribution which individuals have made in these groups within the life of the church.*

*The reality is that the church is people. We celebrate people; we give thanks to God for people of vision and imagination. We are grateful to individuals who have sought to work with God to bring some part of the kingdom of God to the life of Harrogate.*

*Thank God for people. We believe that God is not finished with us yet and there is still a work for Wesley and its people in the life of the church community and the community of Harrogate and beyond.*

*We have been here for 150 years and God has blessed us. May God continue to show us where there is need for us to be and may we walk in the way of God.*

*To Him alone be all the glory!*

**J Trevor Dixon**

## INTRODUCTION

The difficulties I have encountered in writing this history about the 'next fifty years' have been twofold. Firstly how could I follow that thorough and excellent 100 year history written by Harold Hitchen and Ted Dawson in 1962? I solved the problem by taking a different approach. Rather than a chronological account, I have divided the chapters into various sections of the life of the church, namely: 100 Year Celebrations 1962; Ministers; Buildings; Worship; Church Family, Music and Outreach. In reality the final chapter is still to be written. Whilst members and congregation remain optimistic about the future of their beloved church, at the time of writing news is awaited regarding permission to go ahead with renovations that will bring this town centre church well and truly into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Secondly the history of Wesley Chapel is primarily about its people. Over a fifty year period there have been countless dedicated, hardworking people, many of whom I never knew and are no longer talked about or remembered. Furthermore there are numerous people who have worked behind the scenes and of whom there is no mention in the records and minutes. Various groups have been started by enthusiastic leaders in answer to the needs of the times, and have been closed down when no longer required. I would have loved to have written about everybody and to record everything that has happened. This is, of course, impossible and the following chapters in the history of Wesley are merely a snapshot of the past fifty years.

I would therefore like to dedicate this history to the incalculable number of people who have devoted their time and energy into making Wesley Chapel the success it has been over the past 150 years.

**Judith Yeats**

CHAPTER ONE

**100 YEAR CELEBRATIONS 1962**

WESLEY CHAPEL  
HARROGATE

+

**Centenary Day**  
Wednesday, 3rd October, 1962

+

**DIVINE WORSHIP 4-30 p.m.**  
Rev. W. RUSSELL SHEARER, M.A.

**CENTENARY MEETING 7-30 p.m.**  
Rev. W. RUSSELL SHEARER, M.A.  
Rev. HORACE IBBOTSON  
Rev. EDWARD J. PRENTICE  
(Chairman of District)



‘CHAPEL CELEBRATES ITS CENTENARY TODAY’. This headline in the Harrogate Herald on Wednesday 3rd October 1962 continued with: ‘*Wesley’s 34 ministers in 100 years.*’ The article gave details of the day’s events and some concise details about the history of Wesley Chapel, and makes a fitting introduction to this 50-year history.

‘Wesley Methodist Chapel, Oxford Street, celebrates its centenary today. A former President of the Methodist Conference, the Rev. W. Russell Shearer, will conduct a special service at 4-30pm. Dr Shearer, the Rev. E. J. Prentice, chairman of the district, and the Rev. H Ibbotson will be present at a centenary meeting this evening.

During the centenary year extensive redecoration has been carried out inside the chapel. Alterations to the forecourt are in progress, and it is hoped that soon the flags will be replaced by a garden.

A 53-page booklet has been prepared for the occasion by Coun. H S Hitchen and Mr T E Dawson, recording the history of the chapel and of Methodism in the area generally.

It was October 3rd 1862, that the chapel was officially opened before a large gathering of local clergy and laymen, which included the then president of the Methodist Conference, the Rev. C Prest who preached at the opening service.

The chapel was built on a site known as Allotment Fields, which was purchased in 1861 for £316. At that time there was comparatively little development in the area, and the new chapel is reported to have commanded an impressive view of the surrounding countryside.

Described as being of plain character at its foundation, but with column heads and other frontal work in a rather ornate Italian style, the chapel holds more than 1,000 people.

There have been 34 ministers at Wesley, the most recent arrival being the Rev. W. F. Hewitson, who succeeded the Rev. Garfield Lickes earlier this year. Mr Lickes had been superintendent of the circuit since 1958, and had a previous term in Harrogate from 1936 to 1939.'

Rev. Lickes had been tireless in his work during the build-up to the Centenary and tribute was paid to his quiet wisdom in his chairing of the Trust Executive. Ironically Rev. Lickes had presided over major renovations in his previous ministry at Wesley Chapel. Unfortunately he was not present at the 100 year anniversary. Although he had been invited to share in the celebrations, he had declined, as is the custom in Methodism, because he had only recently finished his period as Minister.

Extensive refurbishment had been carried out during the three-year period before the Centenary was due. This involved the setting up of a Centenary Committee, whose two main aims were that the entire fabric of the chapel should be renovated and the accommodation should be so altered that, whilst it would still be capable of holding over 800 people on special and circuit occasions, the congregation could be brought a little more together during ordinary services. The membership stood at 290 at that time.

It was an ambitious scheme. The alterations consisted of the removal of the pews at either side of the pulpit; the creation of two vestries in their place and two side chapels. A large screen was made to cover the back pews in the gallery. There were also necessary repairs to the roof and steps. Whilst work was going on in the chapel services were held in the school building, which also had its own facelift. The cost would eventually come to almost £10,000. Funds were raised by cash gifts, interest-free loans and many small individual efforts. In particular coffee mornings organised by the ladies every Wednesday morning were singled out for appreciation by the Trustees.

The renovations made a great impact. Present day members remember the stunning difference from a dark and dismal building to a light and airy one. The whole appearance of the interior had been lightened by the restoration of the woodwork to its natural colour; the blue of the ceiling and the pastel shades of

the walls and pillars all combined to produce a refreshingly modern yet quiet and restful atmosphere.

It was in this new-look building on Wednesday 3rd October 1962 that the 100th anniversary celebration of Wesley Chapel took place, beginning at 4-30pm with Divine Worship conducted by the Rev. Russell Shearer, MA, who had been President of the Methodist Conference in 1953/54. More pertinently, as a boy he had been a member of Wesley Chapel Sunday School where he had been taught by the grandfather of one of our present members, Jenny Goodwin.



*Rev. W Russell Shearer*

*(photograph courtesy Muswell Hill Methodist Church)*

The service began with the hymn *Stand up and bless the Lord* (MHB 685). The other hymns, all very relevant for the occasion were: *God is the refuge of His saints* (MHV 705); *Let earth and heaven agree* (MHB 114 ) and *Christ from whom all blessings flow*, the words of verse 3 being particularly apt:

‘Move, and actuate, and guide:  
Divers gifts to each divide;  
Placed according to Thy will.  
Let us all our work fulfil.’

The choir sang *Holy Holy* by Handel.

Tea was served in the school rooms at about 5.45pm and The Centenary Meeting in the evening began with an organ recital by the chapel organist Harold Uttley, FRCO, LRAM, ARCM. Conducting the service at 7-30 were Rev. Russell Shearer, Rev. Horace Ibbotson and the Chairman of the District Rev. Edward J Prentice. There were some rousing hymns beginning with *O for a*

*thousand tongues to sing* (MHB 1), followed by *For the might of Thine arm we bless Thee*. Particularly meaningful was *Saviour we know Thou art, In every age the same* (MHB 269), and the service finished with the rousing Charles Wesley hymn *Captain of Israel's host and guide* (MHB 608). The choir sang *How lovely are Thy Dwellings* by Brahms.

The celebrations continued the following Sunday, 7th October 1962 with the minister, Rev. W. F. Hewitson conducting the service with His Worship the Mayor of Harrogate and Members of the Council attending the service. The following week Rev. Herbert Simpson, Minister at Wesley from 1954-1958 and now of Manchester preached and on the weekend of 20th and 21st October more celebratory services were held and conducted by Rev. K. Vaughan Jones, Minister at Wesley from 1948-1954, and now of London.

This was an exciting time in the history of Wesley Chapel and also a costly one in terms of finance. Although £8,545 had been raised for the refurbishment, mainly through the gifts and efforts of the members, there was still an outstanding sum of £1,250 to be found. Members were urged to 'give again', be generous' and 'ensure that your church is OUT OF DEBT on Centenary Day October 3rd 1962.'<sup>i</sup> The deficit was in fact £70.

Celebrations were also held at the 125th anniversary in 1987 at which the Rev. H Morley Rattenbury conducted the service, in place of Rev. Philip Blackburn who was sick at the time. It was noted that when the foundation stone of the Chapel was laid 125 years before, it was by the then President of the Conference who was Mr Rattenbury's Great Grandfather

## CHAPTER TWO

### **MINISTERS AT WESLEY CHAPEL 1962-2012**



*Rev Trevor Dixon and Rev Tim Boocock 2012*

## **Ministers at Wesley 1962 - 2012**

### **Presbyter Ministers**

1962-1969	Rev. William F Hewitson
1969-1975	Rev. Reginald Hopper
1975-1982	Rev. Geoffrey Jones
1982-1988	Rev. Philip Blackburn
1988-1994	Rev. Gordon H Lister
1994-1999	Rev. Ronald W Dale
1999-2010	Rev. Shaun Swithenbank
2010-	Rev. J Trevor Dixon
2011-2012	Rev. Timothy A Boocock

### **Diaconal Ministers**

2000-2001	Deacon Ian Cooper
2001-2008	Deacon Keith Gough
2008	Deacon David Hunt

During the first 100 years in the life of Wesley Chapel, the customary period a minister would serve was three years. Only one minister served for longer and that was the Rev. Walter J Morgan from 1928 to 1932. However, times change, and it has become more usual for ministers to serve for six or seven years and longer. Rev. Shaun Swithenbank was minister for a record eleven years

### **Rev. William F Hewitson, Minister from 1962 to 1969**

When Mr Hewitson took up the position of Superintendent at Wesley Chapel, his first major duty was to preside over the centenary celebrations at the beginning of October. He, his wife Grace, and their children John, Barbara and David, lived in the Wesley Manse, which was at the time situated at Westcliffe Grove. Grace took part in many activities at Wesley as well as holding a full-time position as a primary teacher at Wedderburn School. Barbara was married at Wesley during her father's ministry here.

Mr Hewitson is remembered as a very able minister. He was a real inspiration to Wesley, initiating the appeal fund for the organ restoration in 1969, and played a large part in its success. Unfortunately he did not see the target achieved. Although he was due to stay at Wesley until 1970, he was appointed by The Methodist Conference to be Chairman of the Oxford and Leicester District. He preached his last sermon in Wesley Chapel in August 1969. Sadly he died shortly after leaving Harrogate.



*Mr Hewitson officiating at the Christening of Sarah, daughter of Geoff and Peggy Roberts in 1964 (photo courtesy Wesley Chapel)*

Grace went on to live to a grand old age. She died peacefully aged 95 in January 2010 in the Kings Norton area of Birmingham.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Rev. Reginald Hopper, Minister from 1969 to 1975**

Mr Hopper took his first service at Wesley Chapel in September 1969, when he replaced Rev. Hewitson as Superintendent. He was by all accounts an excellent Superintendent Minister. He was very organised, and used to insist that all his ministers sat on the front row at circuit meetings and were properly dressed in their full clerical robes.

Concerned about a lack of total church fellowship, Mr Hopper was responsible for starting off house fellowships, and through this came the pastoral-visiting scheme which is still in place today and in which everyone associated with Wesley Chapel is allocated a pastoral visitor, to ensure that each person feels part of the Church Family.

It was during Mr Hopper's period of office that The Methodist Conference came to Harrogate, in 1971 although at that time he was not well and, other ministers in the circuit took over the organisation.

Mr Hopper had been a member on the Board and Executive of the Methodist Homes for the Aged (MHA) since 1958, and after retiring from Wesley and the ministry, became the charity's first Pastoral Director. He retired from MHA in 1978 and died in 1980.

### **Rev. Geoffrey Jones, Minister from 1975 to 1982**

Reverend Geoffrey Jones is remembered by some of our present members with great affection. He and his family arrived in September 1975 and went to live in Wesley's new manse at 3 The Grove. This house had previously been the Woodlands manse and had stood empty for a year since Rev. Michael Wearing and family had left in 1974. By that time the garden had become overgrown and the Sunday-night group from Wesley took on the job of tidying it all up before the Jones's moved in.

Geoffrey Jones was the first minister at Wesley who was on Christian name terms with his congregation. His wife Margaret



was very involved in the church. They had three children, Graham and Christine who were away at university and Sheila who was in sixth form. When the family were all at home they socialised with members of the church. They once gave a short drama presentation during a service, dressed up as clowns, which was unheard of at the time.

Jenny Goodwin remembers one occasion when she attended a function at the manse and, looking at Geoff's bookshelves, found a copy of the controversial *Honest to God* by John A. T. Robinson. He discussed the book with his guests and thereafter he would introduce further books, sometimes saying 'here's some more heretical reading'! He was somewhat radical at the time and his ideas have been described as 'a breath of fresh air'.<sup>iii</sup>

Geoffrey Jones had a broad and expansive mind, and was at the forefront in encouraging the congregation to start looking outwards and thinking of Wesley as being mission orientated. He recognized that few people now lived within the vicinity of the church, and had to come into town from further afield. As a result of his foresight, a stewardship campaign was implemented. He also became President of Harrogate Council of Churches in 1980.

### **Rev. Philip Blackburn Minister from 1982-1988**

Reverend Philip Blackburn was a great favourite with the Wesley congregation and he is still spoken about with huge affection. Through his preaching and his evangelical outreach he influenced thousands of people over the years. He had travelled widely, one of his posts was as headmaster of Wesley Junior College in what was then British Honduras, now Belize. He had a remarkable memory for people. When a former pupil from more than thirty years ago came to worship at Wesley Chapel, Philip Blackburn not only remembered his former pupil, but he also recalled the names of all the rest of the family. It has often been joked about that he even remembered the name of the dog of someone from a former church.

It is told that on one notorious occasion – it was an Easter Sunday – Philip Blackburn stood in the pulpit and ate a daffodil.

The message being – if one had not seen it, one would not have believed it.

At his last Church Council meeting at Wesley Chapel the senior steward paid tribute to the minister's preaching and evangelical outreach which had influenced thousands of people over the years. He referred to 'Philip's leadership in the management of the chapel':

'There is a truism that people like what they are good at and Philip likes meetings! In the Methodist church one has plenty of opportunity to participate in meetings and committees. However they do present a challenge in channelling sometimes divergent views towards commonly agreed goals. Philip has always excelled both in chairing and participating in meetings. His success has been in part due to his lively mind and experience but also his assiduous preparation and his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Methodist 'big black book'. However above all else Philip is good with people and gets the best from them'.

It is recorded in the minutes that 'Mr Blackburn responded modestly'.<sup>iv</sup>

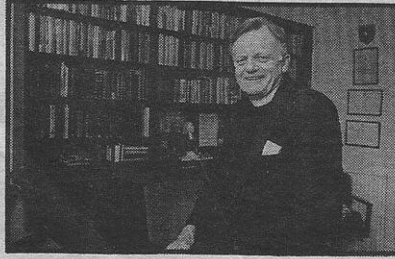
Following an illness, towards the end of his ministry Philip Blackburn expressed his gratitude to his colleagues and church stewards who had so ably carried on the work of the Church and in particular to Rev. Kenneth Bounds who had been pastoral visiting and conducting house communion services. Perhaps it is a tribute to Philip Blackburn that during his ministry membership grew from 207 to 282 and the community roll from 583 to 652.

## Minister's farewell

LAST WEEK marked the retirement of one of Harrogate's most popular ministers after 40 years of church work throughout the world.

The Rev Philip Blackburn came to Harrogate's Wesley Chapel in 1982 after time spent preaching around the world and later in Leeds.

Tony Hitchen, Church Council Secretary, praised the minister's work: "Over the six years since he came to Wesley we have seen signs of real growth. The membership has increased 25 percent and there are increasing signs of an



● PICTURED in his study as forty years of preaching come to an end. Rev Blackburn is retiring to a bungalow in Horsforth, Leeds, to relax and possibly do some writing. (A1957)

outreach from Wesley into the neighbourhood of the chapel."

Mr Tom Booth, who succeeds Philip as Superintendent of the Harrogate Methodist circuit said: "Whether in Jamaica or the Bahamas, in Leeds or in Harrogate, he always had a concern for people."

Frank Secker, Circuit Steward said: "As circuit steward I have the privilege to speak for over 6000 people. What would 6000 people wish me to say to Philip on their behalf?"

Can anyone really

improve on a simple heartfelt thank you?

Thank you Philip."

Mr Blackburn said: "I've had such a rich life, a life of diversity, it's hard to say what the best times have been. I owe a great deal to my wife Anne, she has given me a great deal of support and encouragement in my work for the past 31 years."

Mr Blackburn added: "I still have one ambition left. I would like once more before I die to go round the world and visit all my old friends."

*Cutting from Harrogate Herald August 1988*

### Rev. Gordon Lister, Minister from 1988 to 1994

In the autumn of 2011, Gordon Lister received congratulations from the Methodist Conference for completing fifty years as a Methodist Minister. For twenty-three of those years Gordon has been at Wesley Chapel. Members were delighted when, after six years as minister, Gordon decided retire to Harrogate and continue to be part of the Wesley Chapel family.

During Gordon's ministry many people have been inspired by his preaching and comforted by his pastoral care. His early

intervention for the homeless in Harrogate was partly responsible for the founding of the Harrogate Homeless Project (HHP).

The Junior Church interviewed Gordon Lister for the December 1993/January 1994 edition of Focus magazine in which he answered some questions about himself and in which he said that his favourite hobbies/pastimes were 'music, painting, reading and drama'.<sup>v</sup>

At his last Church Council meeting Gordon said that his six years at Wesley had been very enriching and felt that Wesley had a great future in three directions, 1) the renewal of music in Wesley, 2) Wesley had a place in the heart of the town in a mission situation, 3) We should open the doors wide.<sup>vi</sup> This visionary statement has proved to be spot-on, given the situation that now exists at Wesley today.

Sadly Gordon's wife Jean died at home on 30 September 1993 after a long illness. Tribute was paid to her memory in Focus by Superintendent Minister Rev. Jeffrey Sharp, who wrote of his admiration for the way in which she had faced and coped with months of weakness and treatment. With her natural sense of humour, and the devoted care of Gordon and their daughters Gillian and Angela, they not only coped well but added so much to each other. By not wasting a minute or opportunity, what an example they gave to many.<sup>vii</sup>

Towards the end of his ministry Gordon Lister suffered ill health and once again Rev. Kenneth Bounds came to the rescue by chairing meetings and taking over other ministerial duties. Gordon's last service as minister at Wesley Chapel was at the end of July 1994, and was followed by a farewell lunch in the Lower Hall.

Gordon found happiness again when, in October 1995, he married Barbara Uttley, whose late husband was Harold Uttley.

Together Gordon and Barbara, with their combined love of music, spent a lot of time with the Junior Church, ensuring that Gordon's prophetic words about the renewal of music in Wesley, did indeed come true.



*Left to right: Rev. Ronald W Dale, Rev. Philip Blackburn, Rev. Gordon Lister  
1994 (Photograph courtesy of David Bunting)*

*Extract from Minutes of a General  
Church Meeting*

*23 April 1989*

*'The Secretary thinks that Mr Lister was  
thanked at the conclusion of the meeting  
but his pen ran out and there is no note'*

**Rev. Ronald W. Dale, Minister from 1994 to 1999**

At his last Church Council meeting in 1999, thanks were expressed for the leadership of Ron Dale, and some of the changes that had taken place during his ministry, in particular the launching of the Open Door policy. His contacts with the

police and Stray FM had been seen as positive and valuable. One important feature of Ron's ministry at Wesley was his pastoral care of the sick and housebound.

During his time at Wesley Chapel Ron was also very much involved on the ecumenical side of things. In particular, he helped form an evangelical house group together with nuns from the Catholic Convent which continued for several years.

Ron conducted his last service at Wesley on 11 July 1999, it was also to be his last service before his retirement. Ron and his wife Margaret decided to retire in Harrogate and Ron has taken his place in the pulpit at Wesley on many occasions since his retirement, as a supernumerary minister in the circuit. His pastoral visits also continue, much to the appreciation of some members of his former congregation.

In retirement Ron has published several books including three on the Gospels: *Windows on Matthew* in (1998), *Windows on Mark* (1999), and *Windows on Luke*, (2000) with Helen Elliot.

### **Deacon Ian Cooper, from 2000 to 2001**

At a Circuit Meeting in March 2000, the decision was made to move Deacon Ian Cooper from the work he was doing at Woodlands and Starbeck, to the town centre with a base at Wesley Chapel. The proposals included ministry and pastoral care of Forward Together; establishing firmer links between the church family and users of the building; developing relationships for mission opportunities with other town centre churches; the development of a possible chaplaincy role at Victoria Shopping Centre, Debenhams, Tourist Information etc. and the development of a circuit resource and training centre.

Ian was in this post for less than a year, before he moved to take up a new appointment on Tyneside. He swapped appointments with Deacon Keith Gough who left Tyneside to come to Harrogate.

The question is often asked, 'what is the difference between a presbyter and a deacon?' The Methodist Conference maintains

that ‘the differences are not rigid divisions, since both orders of ministry are of the people of God’.

Presbyters and deacons are ordained ministers. However the emphases are different. The ministry of a presbyter focuses on :

- Word – including preaching, evangelism, theological and prophetic interpretation, teaching and the formal and informal sharing of faith and human experience
- Sacrament – including presiding at acts of celebration and devotion, especially Baptism and Holy Communion
- Pastoral Responsibility – including oversight, direction, discipline, order and pastoral care

The ministry of a deacon focuses on:

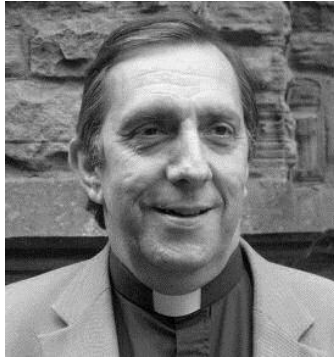
- Service – including pastoral care, acts of mercy and acts of justice, and being or acting as a prophetic sign
- Witness – including the formal and informal sharing of faith and human experience, teaching, proclamation in words and action, and theological and prophetic interpretation; and leading worship which for some includes preaching

Deacons are also members of a religious order living by a Rule of Life.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Rev. Shaun Swithenbank, Minister from 1999 to 2010**

When Shaun Swithenbank left Wesley he spectacularly broke one record, by virtue of his being Minister for eleven years. Previously, a seven year period was the longest that any minister had stayed at Wesley.

Shaun’s great strength was in the ecumenical work he became increasingly involved in during his time in Harrogate. He made links with many other denominations in the area, and in particular the ever-growing relationship with St. Peters.



*Shaun Swithenbank (courtesy of Edwin Stanger)*

During Shaun's ministry Wesley hosted a meeting of the Methodist City Centre Network (MCCN), a country-wide organisation that meets twice a year and whose aim it is to develop and promote the role of city/town centre ministry. The connections Shaun and Deacon David Hunt made with the MCCN would prove to be significant later in our history when a member of that organisation assisted in a full review of the mission and ministry at Wesley.

Throughout his ministry at Wesley Shaun introduced new hymns and songs, and always promoted his particular interest in Taizè songs and his love of the Iona Community and its music. Shaun's vision of a new song book at Wesley, a collection of favourite hymns that were not in *Hymns and Psalms*, came to fruition in April 2009. *Songs for Worship* (perhaps more correctly referred to by a subsequent ministers as *Songs for Wesley*) proved very popular not only with Wesley people, but with visiting preachers.

It was not only Shaun who was a vital part of the Wesley community over the eleven years. His wife Jane, and children Sam and Sarah were very much part of the church family. Jane played a crucial role in the Sunday school and became Junior Church Leader. She was also secretary to the Church Life team and was responsible for introducing Traidcraft to Wesley. Sam and Sarah were very young when they first came to Wesley and members and congregation watched with great affection as the family grew up into young adults.



During his period of office at Wesley Chapel, Shaun was also minister at Harlow Hill Methodist Church until 2008 and then at Grove Road Methodist Church, where, working with Rev. Roberta Topham, saw the bringing together of the two congregations of Grove Road and Bar, now called Bilton Area Methodist Church, in the existing site at Bar Place.

Shaun left Harrogate with his family in August 2010 to take the position of Superintendent Minister at Elvet Methodist Church in Durham.

### **Deacon Keith Gough in the Harrogate Circuit from 2001 to 2008**

Keith and his wife Margaret were much loved by people at Wesley and beyond. Margaret was a local preacher and a member and steward at Starbeck Methodist Church. The following is extracted from a tribute that was paid to Keith in the autumn edition of Focus in 2008 and sums up the high regard in which he was held.

‘Keith and Margaret will be missed not only by Wesley and Starbeck where they worshipped but also by all the churches in the circuit where they preached. More widely they will be missed by the whole Harrogate town community.

Keith’s community work extended way outside Forward Together and other Methodist based projects. His work with the Harrogate Homeless Project in particular was an example to us all.

Keith’s preaching became more and more thoughtful and challenging as the years went by. His pastoral care was always full of humanity and compassion.

Keith saw his diaconal work with those outside the church community as a reflection of God’s love. The purpose was not to bring people into church – we cannot make God’s love conditional. Service must be freely and unconditionally given without wanting anything back.

When we act out of humanity and compassion we give a fuller life and wholeness to those we serve, and this was the purpose of his work with us”ix

Keith worked closely with Shaun Swithenbank and often took over pastoral visiting on Shaun’s behalf.

### **Deacon David Hunt based at Wesley Chapel from 2008 until the present.**

Deacon David moved from the south coast to Yorkshire in 2008 to take up his first ministerial appointment. He was assigned to the Harrogate Methodist Circuit and the focus of his appointment was the town centre, one of his objectives being to help Wesley understand and develop its role as a town centre church and to continue the work of his predecessors and the ‘open door’ policy which had been spoken about at Wesley for some time.

He quickly established links with the Harrogate Homeless Project and became a trustee, working with them to establish Springboard, a day service for homeless or vulnerably housed people in the district. He also developed strong links with Wesley’s ecumenical partners through Churches Together and in particular St. Peter’s.

Deacon David was actively involved in the Circuit wide review of mission in 2009/10 which resulted in a detailed review by the Circuit and District concerning the mission and ministry of Wesley Chapel and the Methodist presence in Harrogate town centre.



*Deacon David Hunt 2011*

David worked closely with his presbyteral colleagues Tim and Trevor and 'Team Ministry' evolved at Wesley to the benefit of the church.

Part of Deacon David's work has involved co-ordinating the work to bring together the circuits of Knaresborough and Harrogate. David was particularly well placed for this role as he lives in Knaresborough with his wife Gail who is a presbyteral minister at Gracious Street Methodist Church.

Diaconal ministry tends to be flexible in order to react to changes and current needs, and it is expected that Deacon David's role may change with the development of the 'Wesley Centre' project and the formation of the new Nidd Valley Circuit.

### **Rev. Trevor Dixon Minister from 2010 to the present**

When Rev. Shaun Swithenbank was due to leave Wesley and in view of the closing of one of the churches in the circuit, the decision was made that a full time minister was not feasible and Wesley Chapel would have the services of a part-time minister. The position was offered to Rev. Tim Boocock, who was not able to take up the appointment until 1 May 2012. It was then that Rev. Trevor Dixon, a supernumerary minister, living in the area, was employed on a temporary basis for an eight month period between September 2010 and April 2011.

Trevor had worked as a minister in diverse environments: a mining village in Durham; a tourist village in Derbyshire, and a commuter and urban town in Essex in which part of his time was spent with local industry, local authority and local police service. Before retirement he worked as a full-time Workplace Chaplain. Since retirement he has also worked in the Tadcaster Circuit on a part-time basis, supporting the ministers in pastoral visiting of the congregations and preaching on the Circuit plan.

It was thought for a while that another record was to be broken – this time for the shortest serving Minister on record at Wesley Chapel. However, following his temporary appointment at Wesley, Trevor did not retire, but stayed on to become part of a

three-minister team, with Rev. Tim Boocock and Deacon David Hunt. Trevor's specific role was to develop external links in the light of the Circuit Review and the opportunities which were being explored concerning the future of Wesley Chapel. When Tim Boocock left to take up a full-time post, Trevor was again appointed Minister to Wesley Chapel.



*Rev. Trevor Dixon 2011*

**Rev. Tim C. Boocock, Minister from 1 May 2011 – August 2012.**

Rev. Tim Boocock may have only been minister at Wesley Chapel for 15 months, but he made a large impact. His energy and enthusiasm played a vital part in taking the chapel forward following a circuit review on the future of Wesley. Together with the other members of the ministerial team, he put forward a proposal to the Harrogate Circuit for a redevelopment of the worship area and a proposition that the Harrogate Circuit take over as Managing Trustees of the Wesley, creating a Wesley Centre, at the same time allowing members of the chapel to continue to worship and to maintain its community service in the centre of Harrogate. The proposal was accepted by the circuit and in the short period of time that he was minister, Tim worked tirelessly to promote the proposed redevelopment.

Tim's pastoral care within the Wesley family was also very much appreciated.

Tim preached his last service as Wesley's minister on Sunday 12 August 2012, and left to take up the position of Superintendent in the Leeds Headingley and West Circuit.



*Rev Tim Boocock, 2012*

### **Rev Kenneth Bounds**

Although the Rev. Kenneth Bounds was not appointed as a minister to Wesley, he played an invaluable role in supporting the ministers and congregation through times of difficulty, and this chapter would not be complete without a tribute to him. As a supernumerary minister in the Harrogate circuit he continued his preaching which was always firmly grounded in holy scripture and Methodist doctrine. He also took his non-preaching duties very conscientiously, taking Communion to the housebound, being a class leader, attending Church Council meetings and Synod. He attended morning worship at Wesley together with his wife of 64 years, Doris, until her death in 2006. They were also regular worshippers at Killinghall on Sunday evenings. He died in July 2008.



*Mrs Doris Bounds and Rev Kenneth Bounds, 2002*  
*Photograph courtesy of David Bunting*

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**BUILDINGS**



*Wesley Chapel Harrogate*



*Wesley school building, now rented to Jinnah's Indian restaurant*

Following the extensive renovations carried out for the centenary anniversary, it was to be a further thirty two years before another major building project was undertaken. In the meantime there was plenty to occupy the Trustees in maintaining both chapel and Sunday school buildings.

The garden at the front of the chapel, replacing the flagstone, mentioned in the Harrogate Herald in 1962, was eventually built two years later. Ninety floribunda roses were purchased by the Trustees at a cost of five shillings each. The Corporation provided and prepared the soil, and planted the bushes. It also assumed responsibility for all future maintenance of the rose garden, and this arrangement continues today.

An unexpected problem arose when on the evening of 26<sup>th</sup> January 1965 a fire broke out in the basement under the front entrance. No-one was hurt and the cause of the fire was unknown. Fortunately it was confined to the front of the chapel, though considerable damage was done. The flooring in the front porch way had to be entirely rebuilt, all the interior of the building was washed down to remove smoke stains and a coat of paint applied. The pews were re-waxed and carpets cleaned or renewed as necessary. Virtually the whole of the cost of this work, £935, was met by the insurers including all professional fees. A donation of £5-5s-0d was duly sent to the Fireman's Benevolent Fund in appreciation of 'their fine efforts in dealing with the fire'.<sup>x</sup>

A longer lasting problem which was not so easily solved was that of damage done to the building by pigeons. Steps were taken to lay pigeon repellent at the front of the chapel, to no avail. The official authorities were not helpful. Although requests were made to the Corporation to help solve the problem, nothing was done and the Methodist Property Office in Manchester was unable to help. However, towards the end of 1969 it was reported that the pigeons had become less in number because the caretaker disturbed them twice daily!

The problem of the pigeons was eventually solved in 1994 when an environmental company was employed to install wire mesh to make the area inaccessible to the intruders.



In 1971 the Methodist Conference came to Harrogate and the Trustees of Wesley Chapel set about making ready for this prestigious visit. It was necessary to carry out some improvement to the chapel basement with the provision of additional toilets, new kitchens and renovation of the main room. The cost was to amount to £3,800 which would include some improvements to the school building on Cheltenham Parade. Then of course there were extras like crockery and cutlery to be purchased. It was thought inappropriate, in view of recent projects, like the organ restoration appeal, to make a request to members for finances on this occasion. A grant of £3,000 was made from the Methodist Property office in Manchester, as well as a grant from the circuit. The remainder was financed from rental from the school building.

Wesley Chapel stands in a prime position in the middle of the town centre and it is inevitable that over the years speculators have taken an interest in redeveloping the church premises and adjoining land. Such was the case in 1984 when a scheme for a major redevelopment plan was introduced by a consortium of local architects and surveyors. The plan was for the construction of a shop unit on the vacant land adjoining the church and development of ground and below ground levels, with the upper part of the church being developed for the continued use as a church. The rental income from the shops on the ground and lower ground floors would be shared between the church and the development company. The church would continue to own the building but not the shops on the adjacent land, which would be sold. It is possible that the revenue for the church could have amounted to £25,000 per annum.

The matter was discussed by the Church Council over a period of several months. There were many issues to be dealt with, for example: substantial work would need to be carried out to the gallery of the church bearing in mind that this had to accommodate the pulpit, organ and seating; access to the church on the first floor would have to be by way of a lift, which would have to be large enough to accommodate a coffin; and not least, these were Methodist Church premises and 'suitable restrictive covenants would have to be inserted in the shop leases'.<sup>xii</sup>

Opinions were divided between those who were satisfied with the *status quo* and that there was no need for change, and those who felt that as trustees of very valuable Methodist property the matter should at least be considered fully.

The outcome was that the *status quo* be maintained and the development scheme went no further. The proposals had cost Wesley Chapel nothing since the development company had assumed all the expenses involved in producing the plans. It is impossible to say whether or not it was the right decision to abandon this ambitious plan. It would be too easy, with the benefit of hindsight, to criticise the seeming lack of drive and aspiration. The decision was no doubt made for the best reasons at that time. However, thirty five years later, with declining human resources, the present Church Council might have been grateful for such a development to have gone ahead. In 2009 considerable time, effort and significant financial cost went into consideration for a similar plan. This time there were no developers on the horizon, fewer church members to carry the burden and such ambitious plans turned out to be nothing more than a pipe dream.

Back to 1985, and a much easier decision was made to replace the roof. In 1987, the year of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, ideas were mooted to carry out more extensive renovations to the church, although it was not until 1992 that plans for the latest major refurbishment were properly formulated. This work was desired in order to improve access, enhance the facilities for the Wesley congregation and extend its outreach to the local community. An Appeals Fund had been set up in 1990 and discussions were held then as how to best raise funds for a major project. In 1992 a referendum was carried out and 400 survey forms sent out. There were a variety of issues raised, the key question being: 'was it right to spend £170,000 on refurbishing Wesley'? Only thirty-four forms were completed. Although this response appeared disappointing, it was explained that several of the replies had been from families and they probably represented the collective views of about 100 individuals. The result was that four said 'yes', ten said 'no' and the remainder did not wish to express an opinion. Based on the response it appears that there was little support for the refurbishment in spite of the fact that there was £24,270 in the Wesley Appeal Fund.<sup>xiii</sup>

At a Church Council meeting held in April 1993, called solely for the purpose of considering the proposed development it was resolved that the 'scheme for the renewal of the Church premises ...at a revised figure of £300,000 be approved and implemented'.<sup>xiii</sup> So, in spite of the seeming lack of enthusiasm plans went ahead.

The fund-raising activities that ensued had the added benefit of binding the congregation together and included a Gift Day, the largest source of the appeal, and many other fund-raising efforts. Letters were sent out to over 100 grant-giving trusts and several companies. By the end of December 1993, the appeal fund had received £92,000.

Renovations were carried out in continuous phases. Phase 1 saw alterations to the church vestibule and the creation of a meeting area in the rear of the church. The cost for this was £62,000. In the second phase, costing £68,000, a lift was installed between ground and lower floor; the entrance access was improved with a ramp leading to the front doors to attain disabled access to the church; a glass partition was installed at the rear of worship area; rear pews removed and a kitchen fitted in the Foyer. Front pews were removed and the communion rail was made portable in order to provide increased area for the stage. Dual-level moveable staging was purchased and the public address system upgraded. Services were held in the Lower Hall during this refurbishment. The Lower Hall itself was then refurbished at a cost of £91,800. The total cost of refurbishment was eventually £225,697.

The completed refurbishments were celebrated on the weekend of 8<sup>th</sup> of October 1994, which included a 'Celebration of Flowers' which had been planned as an integral part of Wesley's 'thanksgiving and praise to our Lord, who has given us the will to accomplish so much in such a short time'.<sup>xiv</sup> A brass plaque, to commemorate the rededication of the building was unveiled at 10.25am on 8 October. The next day was the rededication for the refurbished chapel. A few minutes before the service began Matthew Sudron cut the ribbon to mark the official opening of the entrance ramp. The service was conducted by three Wesley ministers, Rev. Gordon Lister, Rev. Ron Dale and Rev. Philip

Blackburn. A video was made of both the flower festival and the service.<sup>xv</sup>

## WESLEY CHAPEL, HARROGATE



Order of Service for the Re-dedication of the  
Refurbished Church

Sunday, 9th October, 1994  
at 10.45am

Preacher:  
Rev Philip Blackburn, M.A.

Service led by:  
Rev. Ronald W Dale.  
Rev. Gordon H Lister.

Official dedication of exterior wheelchair ramp  
will be at 10.30am  
and will be opened by Matthew Sudron.



*Matthew Sudron cutting the tape at the official opening of the ramp  
(photograph courtesy of Christine Sudron)*



*A display from the flower festival 1994  
(photo courtesy of David Bunting)*

During the past fifty years the premises on Cheltenham Parade, both the old school and the schoolmaster's house next door, have been rented out almost continuously, firstly on a private basis and since the early 1970s by larger organisations. The rental of this property is, today, the biggest single revenue earner for Wesley.

The first organisation to rent the building was the West Riding County Council, for use by the College of Further Education. (North Yorkshire County Council was not formed until 1974). Since then the buildings have been occupied by the Mental Health Association, Minds Matter, Solarbo Fitments Ltd; an African Curio Shop (Masai Mara), and a bridal gown shop. Today the old Sunday school is inhabited by Jinnah, the Indian Restaurant chain, and the old schoolmaster's house by HYPeR, a club for young people between the ages of 13 and 18, a registered charity supported by Churches Together.

Not only is the Wesley community proud of its building, it has over the past two decades had reason to be pleased with the church grounds. In 1999 Wesley Chapel won the Harrogate in Bloom award for the 'Community Centre or Church Grounds category' thanks to Philip Parish, who was the caretaker at the time, and his wife Dorothy.

Wesley House, has, since it was built, provided accommodation for the caretaker. However, in 2008 the incumbent caretaker no longer wished to live on the premises and the house became redundant. It stood empty for several months until Springboard was launched in early 2009.<sup>1</sup>

Eighteen years after the extensive renovations carried out in 1994, resulting in the Wesley Chapel we know today, plans are afoot for another redevelopment scheme to enable yet more flexibility. Approval is awaited to carry out work which will involve the removal of the pews, levelling the floor and addressing the heating and electrical questions arising from these alterations.

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<sup>1</sup> See p123 for more about Springboard

## CHAPTER FOUR

### WORSHIP



*Wesley Chapel Harrogate, 2012*

In 1962 the Church Council resolved to put an advertisement on the front page of the Harrogate Advertiser stressing the need for attendance at a place of worship. Such was the concern at that time about diminishing congregations. The downward trend has continued throughout the past fifty years. The membership at Wesley at the beginning of 1962 was 295. In 2012 the community roll stands at 188, which includes 81 members and a further 107 adherents. However, it is not just Wesley Chapel, not just Methodism. Nationwide, church attendance in traditional churches has declined over the past 50 years.<sup>xvi</sup>

Wesley Chapel therefore finds itself very much part of the modern trend of ageing and declining congregations in spite of many attempts over the years to rectify the situation. The minutes of Church Council Meetings since 1962 are filled with suggestions and ideas for trying to improve the situation and encouraging more people to attend Sunday worship. ‘Away Days’, ‘Renewal Campaigns and more recently ‘Back to Church Sundays’ have been held with some regularity, with little or no long-term consequence. The slow realisation that modern day life – Sunday shopping and sporting activities – is taking the place of Sunday Worship is at last dawning, and is a problem that will be facing the Wesley community in the coming months and years.

Wesley Chapel has mostly enjoyed traditional services throughout its 150 year history, and continues to do so, though natural progression has always been made with new service books, hymnals, up-to-date translations of the bible, and ministers and preachers introducing fresh informed thinking.

There has been some resistance to change, which, on the odd occasion has almost caused a schism in the church. A consultation group on Worship recommended in 1976 that the start of the morning service be brought forward from 11am to 10-30am. It was felt that to bring the service forward would leave more time at the end for fellowship. A one-year trial was recommended. Such were the differences of opinion that in a Church Council Meeting it was minuted:

‘before this item was discussed the Minister led the Council in prayer that we might arrive at the right decision’.<sup>xvii</sup>



The Minister's prayers were clearly answered because at the end of the meeting an 'almost' unanimous agreement was made that 'from the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in November, the morning service should commence at 10:45am, this would still allow time for fellowship after the service'. xviii

Some thirty years later, the time of the morning service was successfully brought forward again, this time to 10-30am, with little or no comment from members and congregation.

At one time the Sunday evening service was considered to be the main event of the day. However over the past fifty years evening congregations have gradually declined. Many schemes were introduced to encourage better attendance including, in the late 1970s, holding occasional services in the Lower Hall, sometimes preceded by a 'family tea', which proved successful for a short time. These alternated with a more formal service for those who preferred a conventional approach. Further modern expressions of worship were introduced in the late 1980s and for a while this encouraged the younger generation to attend. However, by 1992 the regular evening attendance was down to an average of sixteen people. In 2009 numbers had dropped even lower and the decision was taken to put an end to regular Sunday evening services. An occasional circuit service is held at Wesley on a Sunday evening, otherwise evening services are no longer a regular feature, as is the case with four out of the nine churches in the Harrogate circuit.

The welfare and integration of the Junior Church has always been a matter for great consideration throughout the fifty year period. By 1962 there was a change over from afternoon school to morning, with the children joining the service for part of the time. The presence of the children at morning worship was considered to be a 'real blessing'. It was in 1973 that the idea was mooted and enthusiastically supported by the Church Council that the minister Rev. Hopper should visit the junior church once a quarter by leaving the service with the children. A local preacher was organised to continue the service.

In 1977 the decision was made to incorporate the children more into morning service, and this resulted in Junior Church meeting in The Lower Hall on the main church premises. It was then that

the Sunday school building was leased for charitable and commercial purposes.

Inevitably the subject of children's hymns became a matter for discussion and it was felt that 'the children's hymn' should be chosen by the Junior Church, 'with due notice to the Organist and choir'<sup>xix</sup> and this should not be limited to hymns from the Methodist Hymn Book that was in use at that time. A book of Christian songs for juniors had been published in 1971 entitled *Sing to God*. It contained 172 songs with piano accompaniments and also guitar positions and chord letters using 28 chords and included many well-known hymns and carols and some other songs intended only for junior use. Whether it was because of the inclusion of guitar chords, or some other reason, there was dissension from some members of the choir about the use of *Sing to God*. Some felt that the morning service was losing much of its reverence, and many of the hymns chosen were not suitable for congregational worship, being more suited for use in Sunday school. A conundrum perhaps for a church council that wished to encourage the integration of young people into Sunday morning worship and at the same time trying to keep those happy who wanted to keep to old traditions.

It was eventually agreed that *Sing to God* be used. Later in 1988 a small orchestra and junior choir was formed and they performed a rock musical during a morning service which celebrated Easter.

Family services became a regular feature, taking place at least once a quarter. These services were introduced to Wesley long before a resolution was passed by the Methodist Conference in 1984, designed to bring younger people more into the life of the Church. Until the early 2000s the Brownies used to parade into church at Family services. Bunnies who were not allowed to parade, were still invited to attend. Family services are still part of Wesley's worship today with the children continuing to take an active part in some of the services.

In 1962 Wesley Chapel was using the Methodist Hymn Book which had been published in 1933, following the formation of the Methodist Church in Great Britain from The Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist Churches. It was, according to Dr Andrew

Pratt 'the visible symbol of the Methodist Union...a start for a new church...a book full of new hope. It became inseparable from what is meant to be Methodist'.<sup>xx</sup> Hymnologist, Professor J R Watson remarks that for 'those of us who were brought up with it, it was the rock on which our faith was built'.<sup>xxi</sup> For Wesley Chapel it was arguably the best loved hymn book ever and apart from a supplement published in 1969, entitled *Hymns and Songs*, it had served the Methodist Church well for fifty years. There was a huge outcry therefore, when in 1979 a committee was formed to compile a new hymn book. The thinking behind this was that times were changing rapidly and the Victorian patterns of religious behaviour were very much a thing of the past. In his book *O for a thousand tongues. The 1933 Methodist Hymn Book in Context*, Andrew Pratt put forward the case that MHB 'did not sufficiently engage with the world around it, and that it was preoccupied with the needs of the Methodist Church'.<sup>xxii</sup>

The full title of the 'new' hymn book, was *Hymns and Psalms, A Methodist and Ecumenical Hymn Book*,<sup>xxiii</sup> and was published in 1983, having been compiled with the help and participation of many denominations, including the Church of England. It was designed to recognise the many changes that had taken place, both inside and outside the Christian church in the intervening years since the publication of MHB, not least that "we live in a global village, linked instantaneously to our brothers and sisters in other countries..."<sup>xxiv</sup> Wesley Chapel took ownership of the new hymn book in May 1984, very soon after its publication to the consternation of many members. Rev. Philip Blackburn organised for the old hymn books to be transported to Belize where he had worked at Wesley College in the 1950s.

Over the years those who had decried the 'new' hymn book, eventually came to love and appreciate it, in particular the inclusion of a considerable number of hymns written in relatively modern times.

New hymns are constantly being published and with present day technology can be downloaded from the internet easily. In an initiative started by Rev. Shaun Swithenbank, Wesley Chapel produced its own supplement song book, *Songs for Worship* which includes modern choices and occasional favourites that had been excluded from *Hymns and Psalms (H&P)*.

In 2011 another hymn book was published by The Methodist Church, *Singing the Faith*, succeeding H&P. The aim was to 'produce a collection for congregational use that retains the best of the old and includes the best of the new, reflecting a diversity of theological and musical traditions in keeping with our Methodist heritage 'Born in Song'.<sup>xxv</sup> The members of St Peter's church kindly presented Wesley with ten choir copies of *Singing the Faith* as a thank you following their nine month tenure at Wesley in 2011 whilst extensive renovations were being carried out in their own church and this is used to complement *Hymns and Psalms*.

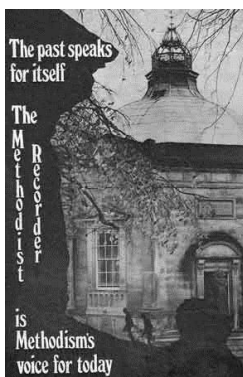
The 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the King James Bible was celebrated nationwide in 2011. Since its publication in 1611 there have been many different translations. The Good News Bible, a modern translation published in 1976 was purchased for Wesley in 1982 with a legacy from Mr H S Hitchen and a pulpit copy presented to the chapel from Rev. and Mrs Ken Bounds in memory of their daughter. This was used until 2009 when it was replaced by *The New Revised Standard Version*, a pulpit version was donated by Mr Doug Hay in memory of his wife Muriel

The Methodist Worship Book used by Wesley Chapel today was published in 1999 and purchased immediately it was available. It is the latest in a succession of Methodist service books which can be traced back to John Wesley's *The Sunday Service* in 1784. The orders of worship take account of liturgical and ecumenical developments throughout the world as well as distinctively Methodist traditions of worship. Like its predecessors, this book is authorised by the Conference as a standard for Methodist worship.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Wesley Chapel has been the venue of many and varied services during the past fifty years. One momentous occasion was when the Methodist Conference came to Harrogate in 1971. Wesley was an integral part of that occasion, the minister, Rev. Reginald Hopper being appointed to the overall task of organising the event. Unfortunately Mr Hopper was taken ill at that time and other ministers, Rev. Michael Wearing and Rev. Jim Stringfellow took over the reins.

## The 1971 Methodist Conference comes to Harrogate

Members from Wesley who remember the 1971 Conference, recall that it was really hard work. Meetings were held in the Royal Hall, with offices in the Royal Baths and Wesley Chapel and Schoolroom. All the stalls and exhibitions were in the Exhibition Hall, which was not as extensive as it is now. The catering was distributed around the main hotels, with teas being served in various churches, including Wesley, and staffed by volunteers from circuits and churches around the whole District. The arrival of the conference was used as an opportunity to do a great deal of work on the premises at Wesley.



In September 1989 Wesley hosted a service that was televised by ITV which included the enrolment of cadets into the Air Training Corps and was conducted by Rev Gordon Lister, who received many letters and phone calls from all over the country regarding its success.



*One of many banners made by the ladies of Wesley over the years. Several are in place permanently some are brought out on special occasions like Christmas, Easter and Holy Communion. All are designed to enhance the worship.*

As well as its own special services, Wesley Chapel has also witnessed a variety of services: the annual Ashville College carol service; Saturday evening celebrations-style services; World Church celebrations; midweek healing and prayers; informal services for 'Forward Together' and mum and toddlers as well as

more reflective services on special days such as Good Friday and Christmas Eve. Every two years the civic Remembrance Day Service is held at Wesley and there have been many occasions when members have shared the joy of baptisms and weddings, and the sorrows of funerals.

On two occasions Rev. Gordon Lister has taken part in six-week exchange visits with ministers from Glenwood Springs, Colorado who fulfilled duties at Wesley and in the remainder of the circuit. In 1991 Dr Jim Garner visited with his wife Garner, and in 1999 Rev. Keith Watson and his wife Mary Ann.

In 2011 Wesley's neighbour, St. Peter's, was required to close its building for several months because of major building work and extensive renovations. During this time St. Peter's came to Wesley for its weekday meetings and held its services in the chapel. This was an enriching experience for members of Wesley Chapel who welcomed members from St. Peter's to their morning service and shared the worship. A long-lasting friendship was forged between the two churches which seems fitting as we conclude another fifty years of worship in the town centre and look forward to the future.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CHURCH FAMILY



*A Church Family Weekend at Grange-over-Sands in the early 2000s  
(Photograph courtesy of Margaret and Alan Stangroom)*



Worship is and has always been the cornerstone of Wesley's existence. However the importance of 'church family' has long been recognised. Whether bible studies, pastoral care, youth clubs; young wives; family outings, or Sunday morning fellowship after the service – the chapel community has during the past fifty years been at the heart of Wesley.

Within the life of the church the role of the pastoral visitor is one of great significance and taken seriously in the life of Wesley. Following a stewardship campaign in 1980 the Pastoral Committee received offers of help to fulfil the role of pastoral visitor, which resulted in there being 34 'class leaders'. 'Classes' originated in the early days of Methodism when it was thought desirable to work in small groups, and people were divided into 'classes' which met weekly. The 'class system' gradually disappeared and to a large extent has been succeeded by the pastoral system. Pro rata, the number of members and adherents to pastoral visitors has remained constant and the twice yearly Pastoral meetings continue to be a mainstay of Wesley.

During the fifty years since the hundred year anniversary, many groups have sprung up within the church; some have endured, some have been replaced by alternative groups, others, like Brownies have ceded to modern day living which has seen a decline of uniformed organisation within the church. As trends and needs have changed, then Wesley has responded.

Bible study groups have played a large part in the spiritual life at Wesley throughout the past fifty years, and only in recent years, through a gradual decrease in the number of members have these groups ceased to meet.

The Journey Group, in operation since the mid-2000s, is an ecumenical discussion group hosted by Wesley and meets on a monthly basis. It is attended by ten to fifteen members of several denominations including Methodist, Anglican, URC and Baptist.

One group that was going strong at the time of the centenary was The Wyvern Guild. A popular and sociable group within Wesley that met regularly, the members would meet to go on summer outings. Wesley members today recall meeting at the river in Otley, and walks at West End reservoir (before it was a reservoir).

It has been described as a 'go-ahead' group which produced plays and oratorios written by its members. The group also had its serious side. In the mid-1960s it arranged a series of six meetings which were held in the chapel during the winter session when speakers from the Anglican and Free Church would talk on the subject of church unity. The meeting was open to Anglicans and Methodists and created much interest.

In 1975 the Wyvern Club ceased to meet and it would be another two decades before a similar group was formed. It was announced in 1995 that 'providing we can 'get it off the ground' we hope that we might be able to run a Wesley Guild during the coming winter months'<sup>xxvii</sup>

It did 'get off the ground' and was at first called 'Thursday Night at Eight'. However, this proved to be too much of a mouthful and it simply became 'Guild'. Originally Guild met in the autumn and winter months. It became associated to *The Wesley Guild*, which was initially established by the Methodist Church over 100 years ago when concerns were raised about retaining young people in the Wesleyan Methodist Church.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Today *The Wesley Guild* is a mid-week fellowship for men and women of all ages meeting at regular intervals for a programme of diverse interests, devotional, cultural, Christian service and social.<sup>xxix</sup> Guild at Wesley Chapel now meets during the summer months, usually in an afternoon, and is well attended not only by Wesley folk, but is joined by friends from other churches in the circuit.

The ladies have throughout the past fifty years enjoyed a Christian-based fellowship at Wesley in the form of 'Ladies Fellowship', which eventually became 'Network', and is now 'Methodist Women in Britain' (MWiB). When Grove Road Methodist Church closed in 2009, ladies from that Network decided to join with the Wesley group, and at the present time a membership of between twenty five and thirty enjoy a varied selection of topics from visiting speakers and seasonal services at Easter and Christmas. MWiB was formed in 2011, and seeks to connect with, listen to and resource women in Methodist and ecumenical churches around Britain and throughout the world.

This is an indication that the ladies fellowship has grown into a much wider, more encompassing organisation.

It was recorded in the minutes in 1985 that ‘A faithful group of ladies have kept our church coffee morning functioning over last year. £250 (was) handed over for church funds for Bunnies and Brownies to start them off with equipment’<sup>xxx</sup> This particular ‘faithful group of ladies’ were those who ran the long-time established Wednesday coffee morning which came into existence in 1959, as a means of raising money toward the Centenary Fund which paid for the re-decoration of the Chapel and the stripping of the pews ready for the Centenary in 1962<sup>xxxi</sup>. It has over the years provided funds for many items and activities in the church. This group eventually ceased to open in 2010 because of a shortage of people to run it.

Still in existence however, and still providing healthy donations to the church, is what was known until recently as The Welcome Club. It was started in February 1974 and only six people were served on the first day. However, numbers gradually increased and it became a popular meeting place. For a number of years, as well as serving hot drinks and biscuits, there was also ‘nearly new’ clothing for sale, as well as bric-a-brac and books. Gradually, with the large number of charity shops opening up in Harrogate in recent years, there has become little demand for such a stall at Wesley and the Welcome Club concentrated on serving tea or coffee.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The Welcome Club provided a worthwhile service for members, most of whom had no link with the church. At the beginning seventeen helpers were listed. Today ‘Tuesday Coffee’ as it is now called, has a list of four regular helpers and four casual helpers. Whilst the number of customers has dropped considerably, there are still a few regulars and often visitors ‘pop-in’ for a quiet coffee and to appreciate the ambience of Wesley Chapel whilst having their refreshment.

Throughout the 1970’s several groups were formed to cater for the needs of the younger church family members and to adapt to changing times and needs. A ‘Young Wives group’ was formed in 1974, changing its name in 1976 to ‘Young Women’s Group’. At the same time a Toddlers and Baby Club was started– mothers

had a choice whether to leave their children whilst they went shopping, or to stay around and help. The toddlers club, which became known as the Jack and Jill club met a great need for young mothers and was organised by a team called 'the Social Responsibility Group.

Bunnies, Brownies, Rainbow Guides have all played their part in the church family and on several occasions youth groups have been formed to cater for the needs of the young people at Wesley. When a group of youth leaders met in 1981 plans were put into operation, splitting the groups into different age groups, 7-10s, 11-13s and 14 upwards. For the older ones it was a discussion group on Sunday evenings which met at the home of Rev. Blackburn. In 1983 Mr Blackburn reported that there had on occasions been as many as 15 young people present, although he added that generally the numbers were small.

Since then much effort has been put into working with the young people and through the 1990s and early 2000s several youth groups and clubs were formed – some only lasting about two years, but each adapting to the needs and ages of the Wesley youth at that time.

Church outings and family parties have always been a popular feature of Wesley, although these events have not been so common over the past few years.

An important communication tool within the church family is the quarterly magazine *Focus* which came into being in 1970. This replaced the existing newsletter and has been a popular way of interacting with congregations and existing members and keeping in touch with those who have moved away from Harrogate, or are unable to get to services. Producing the *Focus* has become immensely easier since those early days when the editors also had to print and distribute their own publications, using the, then innovative Gestetner machine, which together with a typewriter were the primary means of reproducing documents. In this digital age and with superior software available, the job of the *Focus* editor is so much easier.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MUSIC



*Binns organ at Wesley Chapel, built in 1912*

During the fifty year period of this history Wesley Chapel has only had two resident organists. However, it can boast an ever more impressive record. There have only been two occupants of that position at Wesley in 71 years. When the present organist Dr Graham Bunting took over the post in 1984, he replaced Mr Harold Uttley who came to Wesley as organist in 1941. Two other amazing facts are that during his career Mr Uttley had held only two musical appointments. Prior to coming to Wesley in July 1941 he was organist and choirmaster at Northgate End Unitarian church, Halifax. More remarkable still, he was blind.

Harold Uttley was educated at the School for the Blind in York, and at the age of 16, studied at the Royal Normal College for the Blind at Upper Norwood London until he was 19. His outstanding musical gifts there bore early fruits and at the age of 16 he became an Associate of the Royal College of Organists. One year later he was elected a Fellow of the same college, a qualification recognised by the musical world as the highest obtainable. He studied under the leading London professor of his time, H.L.Balfour, who was at that time organist at the Royal Albert Hall, and a leading performer and teacher of his day.'

During the 1920's and 1930's Mr Uttley broadcast regularly, giving organ and pianoforte recitals and on occasions music for two pianos with his first wife. During the Second World War the couple performed a series of piano concertos with organ accompaniment in place of the orchestra. Mr Uttley also gave extensive organ recitals throughout the North of England. In his obituary in Focus it was noted 'he was the master of the technique of accompanying congregational singing – which is quite different from the art of accompanying a choir.'<sup>xxxiii</sup>

There was a special celebration in October 1981 in honour of Harold Uttley's 40 years at Wesley. Many members of Wesley today still remember Mr Uttley and have said that he could run up and down the winding, steep back-staircase of Wesley Chapel quicker than any sighted person.

It became necessary to appoint a new organist/choirmaster early in 1984 following Mr Uttley's resignation due to ill health. The task of organist had already fallen to Mr Edmund Hitchen who took over for a period of about nine months, and who continued

as an assistant organist until his own ill health prevented him in the early 1990s. The new position had been advertised in the Methodist Recorder and the Yorkshire Post. Eventually two appointments were made and the position of organist was offered to Dr Graham Bunting and Mrs Margaret Righton was to become the choir mistress. Both were members of the Wesley congregation.

Graham Bunting had started his music career at the age of five when he began studying the piano. He began to take organ lessons at the age of sixteen. During the intervening period he had won many competition prizes as a solo pianist at several amateur festivals and performed regularly in local concerts.

Graham's career was in Physics, however he would always become involved in musical activities wherever his employment took him, continuing organ studies, taking up positions as organist, accompanying choral societies and choirs on organ and piano, as well as fulfilling solo engagements



*Dr Graham Bunting*  
(Photo courtesy of David Bunting)



*Mrs Margaret Righton*  
(Photo courtesy of David Bunting)

Margaret Righton had come to Wesley from Lidgett Park Methodist Church in Leeds where she had been choir mistress. She was ambitious in getting the choir at Wesley to perform

complicated anthems and conducted two performances of the *Messiah* with an augmented choir in 1985 and 1988 respectively. When Margaret Righton resigned due to ill health in October 1995, Graham Bunting became both organist and choirmaster.

In this same year that Wesley Chapel is celebrating its 150 years, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the organ is also being observed. The organ had been built by Messrs J J Binns in 1912, with thirty-five stops costing £1,025 less £125 for the old organ. The Wesleyan Chapel Committee had consented to the erection on condition that 'the entire expense be paid either before, or in connection with its opening, so as to bring NO DEBT upon the Trust'. <sup>xxxiv</sup>

Not surprisingly after more than fifty years, during which time the organ had never had a major overhaul, it was decided in 1968, after a great deal of discussion, that major work was due. Time had taken its toll and had accumulated a vast amount of dirt and dust over its fifty years of use, not made any better when the interior of the Chapel was cleaned and redecorated during the Centenary Celebrations in 1962.

To go ahead with restoration was a difficult decision for the Trustees. The instrument appeared to be playing well and it was not apparent to church members that extensive work was required. However technical advice suggested that it would be foolish to put off the work indefinitely because of the danger of the organ suddenly collapsing. Restoration, including the installation of a new motor which had also started to fail, was £2,500. As had happened in the past, it was decreed that Wesley was forbidden from starting work until the money had first been raised. The possibility of scrapping the existing instrument and putting in an electric organ was suggested, but quickly rejected. Mr Uttley advised that it would be folly to replace the present organ which was still of very good quality and could be made top class with major overhaul.

The problem of which company would be appointed to carry out the work was discussed at great length. When Mr Uttley's advice was sought with regard to the two alternatives suggested, he remarked that 'his crystal ball was no better than that of the Trustees'. <sup>xxxv</sup>



The well-known Leeds-based organ builders, Wood Wordsworth and Co were granted the contract and the work was to be carried out in three stages. Each stage was started once the funds for that phase had been realised.

The task of collecting such a large sum of money, so soon after members had raised £8,000 for the Centenary Celebrations was a formidable task. However, members from all sections of the church responded 'magnificently'.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The Organ Fund was established, and monies from the weekly Wednesday coffee mornings were transferred to the Organ Fund, donations were received from numerous activities such as the Sisterhood, Women's Work, Wyvern Club, Men's Effort, the choir. A Summer Carnival was held and a cash appeal launched. A Men's Effort which raised £211-11-0 was singled out particularly when it was recorded that 'the spirit engendered had made this one of the most moving and successful social events ever put on at Wesley'.<sup>xxxvii</sup>



*From the Programme of the Rededication Service 30 November 1969.*

The organ was rededicated in November 1969 and a recital given by Mr Uttley and the choir. One of the hymns chosen, *Angel Voices Ever Singing* was particularly appropriate. The tune

*Angel Voices* by E.G. Monk had been written especially for the dedication of a new pipe organ at St. John the Evangelists, Wingate, Lancashire in 1861.

The Organ fund raised £90 more than was required for the restoration and a new gown was authorised for Mr Uttley out of the organ fund. It was to be ten years later, in 1979, that the choir were given new gowns.

In 1986, once again costly repairs were required for the organ, this time, thanks to inflation the costs were estimated to be in the region of £33,000. Again it was suggested that the renovations be undertaken in two phases during 1987 and 1988. The option of replacing the pipe organ with an electronic organ was also considered and a delegation visited Ripon Cathedral which had both an electronic and pipe organ. The organist at Ripon demonstrated both organs. It was a difficult decision, as the electronic organ was of a very high standard and quite a few of those who visited were very impressed. However, the decision was eventually made to repair the pipe organ, although not to the full extent of spending £33,000, but something in the region of £8000. Since then the organ has received several major overhauls, in 1994 and the latest in 2010.



*Wesley Chapel Choir 2010 in front of the choir from the late 1930s. Back row from left: Barbara Lister (formerly Uttley), Betty Bratley, Graham Bunting, Eileen Temple, Judith Yeats. Front row from left Christine Bunting, Jenny Goodwin, Malcolm Woods, Anita Woods*

In this day and age when organists are difficult to come by, there are three Wesley members who occasionally act as relief organists: Philip Goodwin and Judith Yeats, who can often be found lending out their services to other churches in Harrogate and beyond; and Barbara Lister. The number of choir members has decreased gradually and significantly throughout the fifty years. Only eight members remain, but steadfastly carry on.

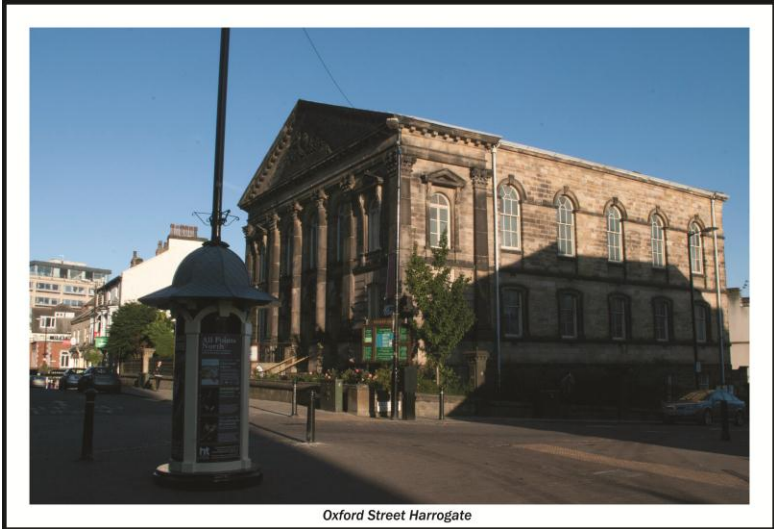
Music has always been an important feature of worship at Wesley Chapel. Coupled with this fact, is that during the past fifty years mention has constantly been made that Wesley has a place in the heart of the town and should open its doors to the wider community, not only with charitable works, but in art and music. The perfect opportunity presented itself when, in 1993, a long-serving member of the church and choir, Miss Olive Dobson, bequeathed a very generous legacy to the Church. £9,000 was spent immediately on essential organ repairs. Following that, in 1995 it was agreed to purchase a grand piano to enable more concerts to be held at Wesley, and a possible Olive Dobson Memorial Concert.

Advice was sought and a Yamaha grand piano was purchased for £33,000. A stage was also bought and in October 1995 the inaugural Olive Dobson Memorial Concert was performed by Kathryn Stott. These concerts have become an annual event, together with many other performances featuring well-known, international artists.

A concert season was also set up and each year between October and June a series of lunchtime recitals take place once a month, usually featuring students from various music institutions including The Royal Northern College of Music and Chetham's School of Music.

Thus Olive Dobson's generous gift together with a long-held desire of members at Wesley to open wide the doors to the wider public have combined to accomplish these wishes.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
OUTREACH



Oxford Street Harrogate

*‘Wesley Chapel plays a vital  
role in the religious, artistic  
and intellectual life of  
Harrogate’*

In an article entitled *Sacred Structure at the centre of town*, local historian Malcolm Neesam wrote in the Harrogate Advertiser in 2001:

‘One of the great benefits of the recent pedestrianisation of Oxford Street has been that it enables people to stand safely at the junction of Cambridge Road and Oxford Street, and view the magnificent building erected in 1862 by the Wesleyan Methodists.

Such inspection repays the viewer, as Wesley Chapel is one of Harrogate’s finest sacred structures, although its location at the heart of the town’s commercial area means many may pass without giving it a second thought.’

‘.....one of the most admirable actions of the Church Council in recent years has been to encourage members of the public to step inside and enjoy events other than the regular services.’<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Neesam finishes his article with this sentence

‘All in all, Wesley Chapel plays a vital role in the religious, artistic and intellectual life of Harrogate, and for this, the Church Council is to be congratulated.’<sup>xxxix</sup>

Wesley’s vital role in the town centre had not always been in evidence. In spite of the efforts of several ministers during the early years of this 50-year period the Chapel seemed somewhat inward looking. In 1983 Rev. Blackburn told the Church Council that he detected reluctance for the property to be used. The Property Committee looked into the matter and in October of that same year it was reported that the number of lettings had been increased but, the secretary requested that it be noted: the opening of the premises on Thursday and Saturdays were the responsibility of members because these were the caretaker’s free days.

Discussions continued over the next two years as to how the church could be put to better use to cater for the needs of Harrogate. At a General Church Meeting in April 1985 an in-depth discussion took place taking into account the ‘depth of

need' like 'rootless children' and a 'substantial drug problem'.<sup>xi</sup> Several suggestions were put forward. One was that the church be open 6 days a week as a drop in centre and engaged the services of a social worker/counsellor. Another was that a resource centre be created. The Neighbourhood Committee and co-opted members were asked to look and identify the needs of Harrogate.

It was suggested that the Lower Hall be opened on Thursday mornings for the serving of coffee, and that was to be the most productive and prophetic of ideas. At a special meeting in November 1985 a sub-committee was set up to organise a weekly 'Leisure Day', beginning January 1986. Mr Ken Dransfield was to organise and supervise the leisure day and would be paid an *honarium* of £20 per week. This was the start of Forward Together which in 2011 celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in style, and was honoured with a visit from local dignitaries including the mayor of Harrogate and Mr Andrew Jones, the MP for Harrogate and Knaresborough.

Ken Dransfield quickly relinquished his stipend, preferring to be a volunteer and a deputy caretaker was appointed to supervise the premises on Thursdays and Saturdays.

Forward Together has kept its format throughout its 25 years. Coffee is served from 10am, a lecture at 11am followed by lunch and then poetry and readings. In the early days there were also other activities like Scrabble, Keep Fit and Beetle. The organisation involves a host of volunteers, particularly in the kitchen where much of the work is done. On special occasions, like Christmas and Easter, services are held in the church. In the early days, between 75-80 lunches were served. It is more like 35 today, however it was reported at the General Church Meeting in April 2012 that numbers were beginning to increase.

Not only Thursdays, but Christmas Day. Another success story is the provision of Christmas dinner for anyone who finds themselves alone on Christmas Day, and this has been on-going from the outset of Forward Together until the present day.

Wesley members were very much involved in the founding of the successful Harrogate Homeless Project. In 1989 when it became

evident that young men were sleeping rough on the Stray, the minister, Gordon Lister was alerted and in a plea from the pulpit, collected £1,500 in donations from the congregation, money that went towards securing a deposit on flats and bedsits. Other churches soon took up the challenge and at Christmas that year the Baptist Church opened up a temporary shelter for the homeless, providing a bed, a bath, food and advice. In 1990 others joined Wesley in realising that homelessness was a serious issue affecting Harrogate and 'Churches Together', under the presidency of Doug Baker, established a Housing Aid Group.

The Harrogate Homeless (HHP) was established by Churches Together as a limited company and registered charity in March 1991, and liaised with other agencies to become part of a growing network of support for the homeless. The acquisition of a house at 7 Bower Street in 1992 provided new overnight emergency shelter for the homeless. During the first two years, HHP continued to provide shelter, food, clothes and support to many homeless men and women, and the six available beds were rarely unoccupied. Another house was acquired at 8 Bower Street in 1994, which meant more people could be accommodated. Accommodation has been updated and present day provides accommodation 365 days a year and not only offers a bed for the night, in a single room, but also helps clients secure suitable independent accommodation and offers advice and guidance, working with other agencies for the support and well-being of its clients.

In 2009, Wesley was approached by HHP about the possibility of using Wesley House, which had traditionally been the home of caretakers, but was now standing empty and becoming neglected. In partnership with the Harrogate Borough Council, HHP was planning to open a day-time Drop-in Centre. Wesley House was in the ideal location. Not only would this benefit HHP, but it was the answer to Wesley's prayers: a chance to use its building in a meaningful and useful way for the benefit of the town. So Springboard was conceived. During the harsh winters of 2011 and 2012, Springboard has also provided overnight accommodation. It is doubtful whether the members present at that meeting in April 1985, discussing their part in the needs of the local community, could have possibly envisaged the role they

would play in the creation and success of the Harrogate Homeless Project.



*Dr Nancy Stuart, Rev. Gordon Lister and Mr Doug Baker Founder members of the Harrogate Homeless Project*

Wesley Methodists and St. Peter's Church of England, located within a couple of hundred yards of each other in the town centre, have shared a cordial relationship throughout the past fifty years, and services and pulpits have been shared throughout this time. A close relationship with St. Wilfrid's was also forged and the two churches shared a bible study and discussion group in the early 1970s. However in spite of the success of this liaison, it was agreed in 1975 that a joint service with St., Wilfrids would create problems and was not a possibility. Presumably this was because of the distance between the two churches.

The association between St. Peter's and Wesley has become more prominent as time has advanced. Since 1990 Wesley has had a representative on St. Peter's Parochial Parish Council and St. Peter's a representative on Wesley's Church Council. The relationship between the two churches is constantly being reassessed, although a Local Ecumenical Partnership was felt unnecessary when the idea was mooted in 2011. The relationship was strengthened in 2011 when St. Peter's Church was closed for



nine months for a major refurbishment, and shared the Wesley premises for both its weekday events and Sunday services, even joining together for Wesley's 10-30am Morning Worship.

In 2000 'Churches Together in Harrogate' was re-established, 'an interdenominational grouping of the churches in the town and neighbouring villages' and aiming to make sure that 'our differences are diminished or utilised beneficially in worship, witness and work together'<sup>xii</sup> and in which Wesley Chapel played its part, having previously been well represented on Churches Together forerunner 'Harrogate Council of Churches.

Wesley's 'vital role' in artistic and intellectual life referred to by Malcolm Neesam, has also been in much evidence during the past fifteen years. Apart from the music concerts, discussed in the previous chapter, a lunchtime public forum entitled 'Spotlight' was formed in 1997 and continued to be well attended and popular with the general public for some years. The programme dealt with a wide range of subjects featuring current affairs and social issues both local and national, each led by experts in their field. Since the mid-2000s audiences began to diminish and in the present day only two Spotlight events occur, at Easter and Christmas. Since 2011 Wesley Chapel has been used extensively as a venue for both musical concerts and literary events. This is a trend that will hopefully continue.

In 1999 a part-time Administrator was appointed to oversee and co-ordinate the many and varied activities that were by then taking place. In Wesley's 2011 Annual Report, 67 organisations were listed as having used the premises during that year.

As well as other churches and charities who run coffee mornings every Saturday, the premises have been used by Blood Donors and Town Pastors who since 2006 have used the Lower Hall as their base on Friday evenings, and occasional Saturdays, when they go out into the streets looking out for the vulnerable and helping keep Harrogate a safe place to be at night. Wesley continues to host civic services of worship for Remembrance Sunday and other community events including hustings for general elections; public meetings like the one held during the Foot and Mouth epidemic in 2001; Radio 4's Any Questions and numerous; art exhibitions. The church was open for prayer on

the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE day in 1995. These events have ensured that Wesley Chapel has become a firm presence at the centre of life in Harrogate.

Many members from Wesley Chapel have, over the years been heavily involved in outside charities, like Save the Children, Traidcraft, Happy Wanderers Ambulance Organisation, Red Cross, Action for Children, Methodist Homes for the Aged and further afield. For the past fifty years attention has routinely been paid to Overseas Missions, Christian Aid, Junior Missionary Association (JMA), and other charities supported in Africa and Asia.

A history about Wesley Chapel would not be complete without a mention of the Harrogate Circuit in which the town centre church plays an important role. Combined circuit services are an important feature and people from Wesley have habitually taken part in circuit events. A sponsored Pilgrimage was held in 1991 and was carried out in two stages. The first stage in May, involved walking from Trinity to Starbeck via Harlow Hill, Pannal, Oatlands, and Woodlands. Suitably refreshed, the second stage was in September and went from Hampsthwaite to Wesley via Killinghall, Bar, and Grove Road. Devotions were held at each church on the way.

The Harrogate Circuit has seen remarkably little change during the past fifty years. Some discussion took place in 1966 regarding a reallocation of churches when a plan was formed showing the location of churches in the circuit, which showed an over-lapping of population between Dragon Parade and Grove Road churches. This prompted a reappraisal by the churches concerned and in 1967 Dragon Parade was closed. Grove Road itself was closed in 2009 and the two congregations from Grove Road and Bar amalgamated and became Bilton Area Methodist Church, continuing to worship in the Bar premises. Oatlands closed in 2006

However after circuit-wide consultation, from September 2012 the Harrogate and neighbouring Knaresborough circuits joined together and became known as the Nidd Valley Circuit. The aim: to support the growth of discipleship and identified mission opportunities within various communities through responsible

use of the resources which the Circuit has available.<sup>xlii</sup> Over the next three years the new circuit will concentrate on enabling each church to identify and implement its mission within their own communities and to review regularly; establishing effective forms of communication between all the churches and encouraging members to get to know each other better.<sup>xliii</sup>

The commissioning of the new circuit was held on Tuesday 4 September 2012 at Gracious Street Methodist Church when members of all fourteen churches were present. They promised to ‘work together and pray for each other, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the new circuit develops’. Rev. Brian Hoare, a past president of the Methodist Conference wrote a new hymn especially for the occasion, giving us hope for a ‘brand new tomorrow’. It begins:

‘A new day is dawning – the time is at hand;  
God’s called us together – united we stand.  
A brand new tomorrow is starting today:  
We’re joining together to serve him.’



*These hands were made by a child or adult from across the new circuit who were not able to be present at the service. Each member of the congregation received a hand and was asked to pray for the person who made it.*

The advent of the new circuit at this particular time is not without its irony. In the chapter entitled *Early History* in part one, of Wesley's story, we read about the struggle to break away from the Knaresborough Circuit, which it did in 1858. One hundred and fifty four years later there was overwhelming accord amongst Wesley members to unite with the Knaresborough circuit.



## CHAPTER EIGHT



As Wesley Chapel prepares to celebrate its 150th anniversary, it does so knowing that there are going to be many changes occurring in the near future.

The ball started rolling when a questionnaire was initiated by the Harrogate Circuit for all its churches entitled Reshaping for Mission. As far as Wesley was concerned this survey highlighted the difficulties it was facing with a declining membership, and an ageing congregation, finding it difficult to cope with the cost and maintenance of a large, grade II listed building. On the positive side members were anxious to remain together for worship, to continue the 'open door' policy and develop the town centre mission.

In response to the Reshaping for Mission campaign a Review Group was set up by the circuit to consider whether there was a continuing need for a Methodist presence in the centre of Harrogate, and if so, what form this might take. The Review Group, under the chairmanship of the superintendent minister Rev. Mark Godfrey, consisted of four representatives from other churches in the circuit, the District Development Enabler of the Leeds District, Mr Michael Noble, and a representative from the

Methodist City Centre Network, Rev. Luke Smith from Hull Methodist Central Hall.

The review group concluded that there is a place for a continuing Methodist presence within the town centre of Harrogate, as a part of the overall Christian presence and that this should exist in partnership with other churches, particularly St. Peter's'.

Following conversations with the leadership team of St. Peter's it became plain that a formal Local Ecumenical Partnership would not be forthcoming in the short term, however, there was clear support for Wesley's continued town centre presence. Under the leadership of Rev. Tim Boocock, Wesley put forward a proposal to the Circuit 'to enact a three to five year exploration to see whether mission and ministry (was) sustainable on the current Wesley Chapel site in Harrogate town centre'. The experiment would be called 'The Wesley Centre'. This would require the Circuit Meeting taking over as Managing Trustees of the Wesley site and buildings and as employers of the staff team. The takeover would take place in autumn 2012 following the 150th anniversary celebrations.

The proposals also included the possibility of sharing the building with a new, fast-growing church, of a different denomination, that was looking for premises to grow even further.

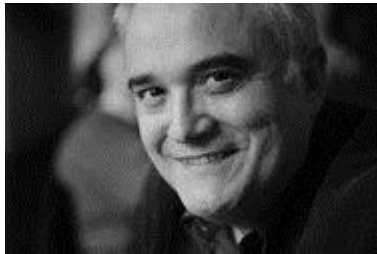
In addition, an architect had been appointed to draw up a redevelopment scheme for the Wesley site. The minimum number of changes would be made to allow mission aims to be achieved. The proposal included the removal of the downstairs pews, levelling the floor and addressing the heating and electrical questions arising from these alterations. The pulpit would be left in place, it being the central focus of a preaching house design and architecturally ties the upper and lower floors of the building together. Modifications to the layout of the Lower Hall were also included.

The proposal was accepted by the Circuit Meeting which met in March 2012. Applications were made to the appropriate authorities for the alterations and it was proposed that after the 150 year celebration service planned for 7th October 2012, a new Management Committee would be formed to include a Chair,

(Rev. Tim Hurren), Treasurer (Rev. Trevor Dixon) and Director of Mission (Deacon David Hunt), the current diaconal profile being changed to reflect the changing nature of the appointment.

‘God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform’ and it seems fitting that the vast new changes that are going to take place, do so at the same time Wesley celebrates its 150 years. Members and congregation, whilst apprehensive - this will be the biggest change in its history – are optimistic for the future of Wesley Centre. They remain hopeful that Wesley Chapel, by whatever name it will be called in the future, will still retain its worshipping congregation and offer its services to town centre mission.

To celebrate the 150th anniversary year Wesley has organised music concerts throughout the year, and an exhibition of the 150 years will be held on the four days preceding the anniversary date. However, we end this 50 year period of history, as we started, with a celebration service. Sunday the 7th October the Rev. Mark Wakelin, President of the Methodist Conference will conduct the anniversary service and afterwards a lunch is planned in the Lower Hall, followed by an after-lunch talk by the President.



*Rev. Mark Wakelin, President of the Methodist Conference 2012/13  
(Photograph copyright Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, with permission).*

## **Acknowledgements and References**

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the following people who have so generously shared information and lent out their precious documents and given up their time to talk to me.

Molly Blades, Graham Bunting, Ruth Dawson, Jennifer Goodwin, Rosemary Green, Mary Harris, Lynne Harvey, Mary Hutchinson, Barbara Lister, Margaret and Alan Stangroom, Christine Sudron, Betty Taylor, Rev. Michael Wearing

A special thanks to Rev. Trevor Dixon and Deacon David Hunt who have shared the reading through and proof reading of the draft and made encouraging comments and useful suggestions.

Photographs by Judith Yeats unless otherwise stated

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