



**THE OCTAGON CHAPEL AND PREACHERS' HOUSES IN HORTON LANE,
A.D. 1766,**

Enlarged from KIRKGATE CHAPEL, BRADFORD, privately printed for J. Norton Dickons, 1903.

EARLY METHODIST OCTAGONS

James Everett described the first decade of Methodism as "the Era of Garrets and Cellars" and the second decade, which began in 1750, as "the Era of Preaching-Houses." He might have continued that the third decade was "the Era of the Octagon Chapels" which chiefly flourished from 1760 to 1770.

The general subject of Wesley's Octagons does not seem to have been treated as yet in the *Proceedings* or elsewhere, but in early Methodist literature there are some details of over a dozen octagons.

These early octagons were regular, i.e. of eight equal sides, preserving the octagonal form both inside and outside. They were also severely plain brick buildings, without turrets or towers, thus differing in many ways from some modern Methodist octagons such as Ballynafeigh (Belfast) and Dolphin's Barn, (Dublin). These octagons were also galleried, having eight windows above and eight below and had no need of skylights.

Wesley was probably aware that most early Christian fonts and baptistries were octagonal, for the number eight is, in ecclesiastical symbolism, the sign of regeneration; Wesley however, always commended the octagon shape on purely utilitarian and aesthetic grounds.

The octagon is also a familiar form in military fortifications; hence an octagon would be a doubly suitable design for a Salvation Army citadel! Such an octagon—citadel was Surrey Chapel, Blackfriars Road, S.E., built in 1783 by Rev. Rowland Hill and later used by Primitive Methodists from 1876 to 1881. It seated 1800 persons and was built in the octagonal style for the quaint reason that "the devil might not find a corner in it".

Whence did Wesley get his love for the octagon? Writing of Norwich, 23rd November, 1757, he says;

I was shown Dr. Taylor's new meeting-house, perhaps the most elegant one in Europe. It is eight-square, built of the finest brick, with sixteen sash-windows below, as many above, and eight skylights in the dome, which, indeed, are purely ornamental. The inside is finished in the highest taste

WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Curnock's note says that this Unitarian house (which is still in use—1946) cost £5,000, a rare sum to be expended in those days.

1761. ROTHERHAM.

July 30th 1761. I preached at Rotherham in the shell of the new house, which is an octagon. Pity our houses, where the ground will permit of it, should be built in any other form.

This is Wesley's first octagon; his first use of the word; and his first commendation of that design. The *Minutes* of 1763 gave the advice: "Build if possible in the form of the Rotherham house". In the *Minutes* the octagonal form is frequently commended. Wesley advised in 1770:

Build all preaching houses, if the ground will permit, in the octagon form. It is best for the voice, and on many accounts more commodious than any other.

1762. WHITBY.

In the *Journal* V11 401 is an old print showing the house opened in 1762. This octagon "had a curious roof like a pyramid surmounted by a ball". In height this building resembled an Irish Round tower, or a Chinese pagoda, (which is also octagonal) for the roof, built like a spire rose above its neighbour, a huge seven-storied warehouse. (*Proceedings*, V. 94 and XX1. 171.)

1764. YARM.

April 24th, 1764. I preached about noon at Potto and in the evening at the new house at Yarm.

This old octagon, still in use, is largely unchanged save for the addition of an organ and a vestibule.

Wesley considered this humble chapel, seating about 320, "by far the most elegant in England".

1764. HEPTONSTALL.

An illustration is published by the Rev. C. H. Gee in his booklet *Methodism in Heptonstall*. The builder being unable to construct an octagonal roof, Wesley ordered the builders of the Rotherham octagon to make a roof which was then taken across country, and hauled up the great hill by the united efforts of the Heptonstall Villagers.

1764. SNOWFIELDS.

On August 18th Wesley wrote:—

I preached for the first time in our new chapel at Snowfields. on "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, Thou Lord of Hosts".

PROCEEDINGS

This early and amiable example of an octagon in the Metropolis does not seem to have been copied in Wesley's day in the South or West of England, or in Ireland and Wales, except in Gwennap and Taunton.

1764. ABERDEEN.

Scotland, like Yorkshire, favoured the octagon. On June 1st. 1764, Christopher Hopper set out with John Wesley, who was accompanied by his wife, for Aberdeen. He records that "this summer we laid the foundation of our octagon in Aberdeen.

1765. EDINBURGH.

In this year the valiant Hopper also laid the foundation of an octagon in Edinburgh "I collected all I could, gave all I could spare, and borrowed over £300 to carry on and complete that building."

This octagon, described by the Rev. Wesley F. Swift in *Proceedings* XVII 17, became outworn, and the Rev. Valentine Ward thus wrote in his *Strictures on Methodism* :

In Edinburgh, the most elegant city in the United Kingdom, we had a dirty, dark, dangerous hole which would seat 600 people. The approach to it and everything about it reflected dishonour upon the whole Connexion.

The Trustees, however, chose very different words when valuing the premises for sale to the City authorities at two thousand guineas!

Wesley was a realist and on September 11th, 1765, wrote :

The preaching-houses in Cornwall are miserable, even the new ones. They have neither light nor air sufficient; they are far, far too low and too small. Look at Yarm house. (*Letters* IV. 312.)

In the Yarm and other octagons there was a window, (or door) in each of the eight walls, and also eight windows in the gallery, and the roofs of some of the early octagons rose like a small spire.

1765. CHESTER.

In June 1765 John Hampson opened in Chester the largest octagon yet built. It was 46 feet in diameter and could seat 600 in comfort. In *Early Methodism in and around Chester*, by Rev. F. F. Bretherton, this building is fully described, and an account is given of the leading personalities who made it their religious home. Its fortunes

WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

after it ceased to belong to the Methodists when St. John Street Chapel was erected in 1811 are also traced.

1766. NOTTINGHAM.

Wesley writes, March 20th, 1766 :

In the evening I preached at Nottingham in the new house.

This building was called the Tabernacle and was situated near the present Octagon Place. The cost was only £128 2s. 7d., yet Wesley in 1787 described it as "one of the most elegant in England."

1766. THIRSK.

Tuesday, April 29th, 1766: I preached at noon in the new house at Thirsk, almost equal to that at Yarm—and why not quite, seeing that they had the model before their eyes. and had nothing to do but to copy after it? Is it not an amazing weakness that, when they have the most beautiful pattern before them, all builders will affect to mend something? So the *je ne sais quoi* is lost, and the second building scarce ever equals the first.

1766. BRADFORD.

July 27th: They have just built a preaching-house, 54 feet square, the largest octagon we have in England; and it is the first of the kind where the roof is built with common sense, rising only a third of its breadth; yet it is as firm as any in England: nor does it hurt the walls. Why then should any roof rise higher? Only through want of skill or want of honesty in the builder. See illustration in Stamp's *Methodism in Bradford*,

Some have thought that octagons went into disfavour because they could not be enlarged. There is no difficulty in regard to the walls though the roof might need to be remade. Any three walls can be removed and the Chapel extended in that direction. An octagon can in fact be extended in any of eight directions rather than of four. Heptonstall 'house' was extended in 1812 and thus ceased to be a regular octagon i.e. with sides of equal length and with equal angles. The stability of the octagon has also been questioned with no apparent reason. The structure at Heptonstall has been standing on a high and exposed hill side for over 180 years, and is in good condition. So also is its sister church at Yarm opened also in 1764. These two old Yorkshire octagons claim to have been longer in continuous use than any other chapel in Methodism except Newbiggin-in-Teesdale.

1770. GWENNAP (CARHARRACK).

An account book of the West Cornwall Circuit which contains entries beginning in 1774 has frequent references to

PROCEEDINGS

the Gwennap Octagon Society. *Gwennap: a Descriptive Poem*, by Wm. Francis published in Redruth in 1845 is quoted in *Proceedings*, IV page 194.

"A vast congregation Carharrack presents
On the Sabbath-day ev'ning and former events
It recalls to the mind; here, too, the wise zeal
Of Wesley shone forth for the listener's weal;
The octagon chapel that was on the spot
With his sanction first built, will soon be forgot".

The present chapel was opened in 1816 and the octagon probably demolished in the same year.

1772. ARBROATH.

Here is another octagon, familiarly known as the Old Totum Kirkie. It was opened by Wesley who says:

May 5th, 1772. "In the evening I preached in the new house at Arbroath" . . . The magistrates also did me the honour of presenting me with the freedom of their Corporation.

This old house (see etching in *Proceedings* IV. 200) remains in use like those in Yarm and Heptonstall and is, after Dunbar (1764), the oldest Methodist Church in Scotland. These octagons have proved their durability though none of the three has preserved its quaint original simplicity.

After this new house at Arbroath had been in use for one hundred and ten years "in consideration of the stability of the main parts of the building it was at length determined not to demolish it" but to renovate the interior and add a vestibule.

1776. TAUNTON.

On Wednesday March 6th, 1776, Wesley says:

"I went down to Taunton, and at three in the afternoon opened the new preaching-house".

Dr. Simon, in "Wesley: the Last Phase," p.82, says that this building was an Octagon, still standing when he wrote, though no longer in Methodist hands. There is no description of this building in either the *Letters* or the *Journal*.

The *Minutes* of 1776 record the question "Why should not all our octagon houses be built like that at Yarm, all our square ones like that at Scarborough?"

The answer given is "We cannot find any better models."

In 1780 and 1789 Conference again asked "Why should not any octagon house be built after the model of Yarm?"

But in 1790 when Wesley was "in age and feebleness extreme" Conference decreed that "all preaching houses are to be built in future on the same plan as the London or Bath Chapels."

Colchester (1759) has sometimes been claimed as an octagon, but Wesley called it twelve-square; others describe it as a polygon. The diarist H. Crabb Robinson who was present here on Oct. 11th, 1790, has given a very lovely and vivid picture of Wesley's venerable appearance whilst preaching in what he calls "the great round meeting house."

C. DEANE LITTLE.

JOHN WESLEY TO MISS NEWMAN

My Dear Sister,

Portarlington,

April 22, 1775,

The contrary winds detained me at Liverpool, till the 30th of last month. We then went on board, with a tolerably fair wind. But we were hardly got out of the River before the wind turned against us, and blew harder and harder. We had likewise a rough, rolling sea, so that my companions were sick enough. On Friday morning we had an heavy storm which died away into a calm. So that we did not reach a village, five miles from Dublin, till Sunday, April 2d.

I left Dublin, April 10, where ye Work of God is in a flourishing state, and rode that day to a little town, called Edinderry. I have not for many years seen such a congregation there, either so numerous or so attentive, so ye Prince of this world was not well pleased, and was willing to be revenged. I was just fallen asleep when I was waked with a vehement cry, "The house is on fire." At ye same time there was an huge noise in the yard and a thundring on the chamber door. I rose without any hurry or emotion, knowing that ye Lord reigneth. Ye flakes of fire from ye chimney were falling largely, partly into the chamber, and partly upon the top of ye House, the thatch of wch was as dry as tinder. But not a straw took fire. I ordered them, immediately to hang, a wet Blanket, before the chimney, but a quarter of an hour, no fire was to be seen so I lay down again, and slept in peace.

PROCEEDINGS

Wherever the good Providence of God makes a way for you to help ye neighbours, you must not let slip the opportunity. You see, He does not send you a warfare on yr own cost. He gives strength to all that trust in him.

My Dear Sister,
Your affectionate Brother, J. Wesley.

This letter was presented to Mr. James Bartram (then a Wesleyan Local Preacher, now a Congregational Minister) by Miss Philadelphia Cousins, a contemporary of the Rev. John Wesley, on January the 19th, 1822.

The Miss Newman to whom the letter was addressed was a sister of Mr. Thomas Newman, a substantial Mercer, Draper and Tailor in Cheltenham, and sometime Churchwarden of St. Mary's Parish Church in that town. The family is now extinct; two sons emigrated to Australia, one of whom was a friend of the writer of this memorandum. He however distinctly remembers being told that the Newman family had entertained the great revivalist and a tree was pointed out to him in a garden (in Wesley's time a field), at the rear of the Plough Hotel, High Street, where John Wesley preached his last sermon at Cheltenham. The writer's father was for many years a foreman and manager of the tailoring department of Mr. Newman's business. The premises were near the Plough Hotel and the Post Office at that time, and from the workshop he has frequently seen the large tree.

J. BARTRAM,
Congregational Minister,
Brassington, co. Derby.

Nov. 18th, 1870

It is curious that there should be a little uncertainty about Miss Newman's Christian name.

In the *Standard Letters* are printed a number of letters written by Wesley to Miss Newman, ranging from 1772 to 1782. A letter dated 23-10-1772 is addressed to Miss Penel Newman, in Cheltenham. The letter of 2-8-1778 concludes "I am, dear Penny". But in a letter of 13-12-1776, addressed to Miss P. Newman, Wesley says "Look up, Prizzy, look up". The explanation would seem to lie in a lapse of memory on Wesley's part or a mistake on the part of some transcriber. The *Standard Journals* mention many occasions on which Wesley wrote to Miss Newman and in referring to the letter of December 1776 calls her Miss Priscilla Newman. She is included by the same name in the Index. The letter first appeared in an article on Methodism in Cheltenham by Rev. Robert Newstead. When he came to the word "Prizzy" he inserted a footnote, "I suppose the abbreviation of Priscilla."

Miss Newman kept a bookseller's shop in Cheltenham. She was one of the first-fruits of Methodist evangelism in the town, and after her conversion she kept a strict eye on the moral and religious tendency of the books she sold.

WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

She became a class-leader, and gave herself to the work of God, visiting adjacent towns and villages to give public exhortations.

One of her converts was Jonathan Coussins (or Cousins) who became a travelling preacher in 1780. Miss Newman and Mr. Coussins were married in 1782; He died in 1805, leaving an only child Philadelphia, presumably the lady referred to in Mr. Bartram's letter above. For further details see Z. Taft: *Holy Women*; Tyerman: *John Wesley*, II 560; *Arminian Mag.*, 1785 *Methodist Mag.* 1806, 289; Bancroft Judge: *Origin and Progress of Methodism in the Cheltenham Circuit*, 1912.

This letter was printed recently in a catalogue issued by Mr. H. G. Commins, bookseller, of 100, Old Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, and is reprinted here by his permission. It is on sale and inquiries may be sent to him direct. F.F.B.

NOTES ON EARLY METHODISM IN NORTHAMPTON

The Rev. F. Beamish Saul, Wesleyan Minister in Northampton 1903 to 1906, during his stay compiled a history of Methodism in Northants for a Weekly Newspaper. The account runs into some twenty-five thousand words. The writer evidently had access to materials of first rate importance. The Notes that follow are based upon Saul's account.

The *Journal* records that Wesley was in Northampton on twenty-nine occasions. The first visit was on June 8th, 1741, and the last on November 22nd, 1790. The entry for May 21st, 1742, records his neck and neck race with a fleeing Calvinist right into the street of the town. On September 10th, 1745, he called on Dr. Doddridge to consult him about books for the *Christian Library*, and at Doddridge's Academy expounded a portion of scripture to the students. This building, situated in Sheep Street, immediately north of the junction of Bearwood Street, is still in existence, though altered and with another storey added.

It had been the town house of the Earl of Halifax. Doddridge rented it for £40 per annum. No other building now exists in Nottingham in which Wesley is known to have preached.

Wesley did not publicly preach in Northampton until 1767. The entry for October 28th of that year reads "We

PROCEEDINGS

rode to Northampton, where in the evening, our own room being too small, I preached in the Riding School to a large and deeply serious congregation." Saul is mistaken in saying that there was no Methodist Society in Northampton before 1765. There was a group of Methodists in 1762, at least, for in that year an un-named lad who had run away to sea from the village of Marske in the North Riding, and who soon grew weary of it, made his way to Northampton—a town about as far from the sea as any in England. There he fell under the good influence of the Methodists. After a few months he returned home and immediately led James Rogers, then a lad of thirteen, to Christ. Rogers later became one of Wesley's preachers. He was so powerfully impressed that he felt he must go to see the wonderful Christians at Northampton.

It is possible that these early Methodists had come under the influence of Whitefield, who was in Northampton frequently during the lifetime of Hervey and Doddridge. On May 23rd, 1739, he preached to about three thousand people from the weighing chair, on the Horse course (Racecourse), and next morning to a far greater concourse. In 1743 he preached at the Cale Hill Meeting House and the north windows were removed in order that the crowd outside might hear. Whitefield speaks of "the glorious opportunities" which Northampton afforded him. In 1750 he preached to the household at the Academy, and to two thousand persons in the afternoon, when Doddridge and Hervey walked with him in the streets. On his final visit, in 1767, he again preached in Castle Hill Meeting House, by permission of Rev. William Hextall.

Another possibility is that the earliest Northampton Methodism was inspired from the nearby village of Whittlebury, which had received the preaching soon after 1760. Wesley speaks very highly of this little society.

The rise of organised Methodism in the town owes much to a soldier named Captain Scott of 'The Blues', a regiment of the Royal Horse Guards, which was stationed in Northampton in the spring of 1766. It was owing to his importunity that Wesley sent Richard Blackwell, a young itinerant from London. Scott's good account of Blackwell's work led Wesley to lengthen the preacher's stay. In October of 1766, during violent bread riots, Captain Scott was ordered to

Leicester, and his removal led some of the Society to offer to contribute towards getting a preaching place. Hitherto the Regimental Riding House had been used. On October 15 Scott wrote to Wesley "As long as our regiment stays at Northampton we can contrive to let them have our riding house. The persons that came to me hope that you will continue to send them a preacher. Indeed there seems to be the prospect of much good being done. I therefore trust you will take this affair into serious consideration and send another preacher into the Bedford Circuit who can take Northampton and two or three villages I know would receive you. The Lord has opened you a door in Northampton, at last." Wesley had evidently been seeking an opening. An account of Captain Scott's conversion and preaching is contained in the *Life of the Countess of Huntingdon*.

Saul's account of the Methodists' 'own room' runs thus:

This meeting place is supposed to have been in the South Quarter, near to the lower portion of Bridge Street, and is stated to have been near a slaughter house. In the latter part of the previous century a company of Protestant Dissenters had been accustomed to meet in the South Quarter of the town in premises belonging to Lady Fermor. In an old plan of Northampton, published in 1746, a small meeting house is marked as then existing in this neighbourhood, and there is still to be found in Dickin's Court, behind 109 Bridge Street, a building answering to this description. This may have been the first meeting place of the Methodists.

The Riding House referred to was in Fish Lane, being part of a large establishment. It had stables, coach houses and a riding yard. The actual Riding School was capable of accommodating a large crowd—Glassbrook, the preacher from Bedford, is said to have preached there to two thousand people. It was also used for performances and sales. It had a pit and two galleries. It changed hands during its use as a Methodist preaching place, and finally came under the hammer in 1771. It seems likely that Blackwell's ministry in the Riding School made a lasting impression upon John Ryland junr., who succeeded his father at College Lane Church. He notes in his diary for September 23, 1766 "My first lasting convictions began." Certainly the wide appeal of the Methodist preaching formed a notable contrast to the low state of Dissent in the town. It was not until 1770 that Francis Oakley, a Moravian Minister well known to Wesley, drew his crowds, and these were from the influential and

wealthy classes. There was need for sustained effort in the town, and it is noticeable that after 1768 Wesley visited it practically every year.

Local tradition has it that during one of his visits, perhaps that on November 24th, 1770, Wesley visited a man in gaol under sentence of death, and rode with him through the town on a cart, both sitting upon a coffin, to the place of execution on the Racecourse, Wesley ministering to the condemned man until he was hanged.

The *Journal* for October 24, 1769 reads "between six and seven I preached at Northampton; and it was an awful season- This evening there was such an Aurora Borealis as I never saw before; the colours, both the white, the flame colour, and the scarlet, were so strong and beautiful. But they were awful too; so that abundance of people were frightened into good resolutions."

In the autumn of 1770 a building described by Wesley as 'a more commodious place to preach in formerly used by the Presbyterians', which had been built about 1730 by a small sect of Strict Baptists, became the centre of Methodist activity. "It was a building of moderate dimensions, and apparently had a burial ground attached to it. An old Bill of Mortality of the parish of All Saints notes one burial from this Meeting house on the Green." During the first five years of its use as a Methodist preaching place it was also used by Rev. William Hextall, and the large part of the Doddridge Church which had followed him upon his dismissal. When Wesley visited Northampton in 1785 this minister, who now had a new Meeting House in Kings Head Lane, offered it to him. Wesley calls it 'a large and elegant building'.

The chapel on the Green remained the home of the Methodists until February 9th, 1793, when a new chapel was erected in Kings Head Lane, upon land which had once belonged to John and Mary Clark. The conveyance of the land was executed on December 7th, 1790 by a deed between Edward Cox and John Drayton, of Northampton of the first part; Thomas Angrave of Irchester, of the second part; and Benjamin Johnson of Northampton, of the third part. The chapel remained in the hands of Angrave for fourteen years. The *Northampton Mercury* for February 9th, 1793 advertised the opening services thus:—

WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Whereas the chapel for many years past belonging to the Methodists in this town, situate on the Green, near St. Peter's Church, being very old and in a bad situation—a new building is now erected in Kings Head Lane: It is large, decently and commodiously fitted up with Pews, and in a good situation, Notice is hereby given that it will be opened for Divine Worship on Sunday, the 17th inst. Several Preachers will attend, and services will be at nine in the morning, at Half Past One in the Afternoon, and at Seven in the Evening.

It will be noticed that Church times were avoided.

The membership in the chapel on the Green had never risen above 55. In spite of the labours of such men as Francis Asbury and Richard Whatcoat, up to 1793 there were no more than 73 members within a radius of seven miles from Northampton. Wesley's last appointment to the town was that of John Leech, in 1790. He had been very successful in reviving and extending Circuits, and the appointment is a good example of Wesley's care in stationing. For, two years before, an energetic class leader named Currie had written to him about buying another, and better, chapel. Wesley replied "I doubt whether the time has come for laying out so much money in building at Northampton. Four hundred pounds, where should they come from? Stay till Providence opens itself." Currie's address is given as 'At Colton End' in this letter, and as 'Cottam End' in an earlier letter. This district is now known as 'Cotton End'. The building that Currie wished to buy was never bought, but but the Kings Head Lane Chapel, described as 'A neat building with side galleries and seating three hundred persons', doubtless owed a good deal to his initiative. But during the first six years in the new Chapel, the society declined by half, and at the end of the century the membership stood at twenty eight. Eight only were men. James Boone and his wife were sole leaders.

Until May 30th, 1806, the Kings Head Lane Chapel was held by Thomas Angrave, and £300 was still owing to him. In that year the building was transferred by deed to eleven trustees, only two of whom lived in Northampton. The town society was probably composed of people of moderate, and even humble circumstances—the men of substance were found in the country societies. Of these trustees three were tailors, one a saddler, two were woolcombers, another was a miller, another a cordwainer, yet another a grazier, and one was 'esquire'. Thomas Angrave was a gentleman farmer

PROCEEDINGS

who had large estate in Irchester and Great Houghton. Though not a member of society, he was a friend of Methodism and generously contributed to its funds. Charles Boone, brother of the faithful Class Leader, was probably the first local preacher produced by the circuit, and its first gift to the itinerancy. He began to travel in 1771.

During the first thirteen years of the Nineteenth Century the membership of the town society grew from twenty seven to two hundred. John Simmons, appointed superintendent in 1813, found that of that number sixty-two were meeting in band. Such had been the growth that a new chapel was required, and a site in Gold Street was purchased in February 1815. Daniel Evans, of Eagle Street, Red Lion Square, London, built a model chapel to the design of William Jenkins, the popular architect son of a Wesleyan Minister. The opening services were held on Thursday 11th, and Sunday 14th of January 1816. Robert Newton and Samuel Woolmer were the respective preachers. Each received five pounds ten shillings for expenses out of the collection of £114. Other interesting items of expense in connection with this chapel-opening were tenpence postage for a letter to Adam Clarke, five and sixpence for a bottle of wine and biscuits, and one pound two shillings and tenpence, for eight pairs of brass snuffers for the tallow candles. James and Elizabeth Boone, John Shaw, John Cort, George Maine, Mary Smithson, Joseph Pendell, Ann Forbes and John Spencer were the Class leaders who moved into the new chapel. Pendell made a scanty living selling herbs. He was accustomed 'to take off his velvet skull-cap and exhibit the bumps on his head which he said were got by having brick bats and other missiles thrown at him for listening to Wesley preach at five in the morning.'

When the Gold Street Chapel was opened the membership stood at 200. In eight years it had grown to 353. A good idea of the standing of Methodism in the town at that time is obtained from the Poll Book of 1820. Some fifty of the burgesses taking part in the General Election, of that year were members of that Society.

The General Election of 1830 caused the superintendent to note in the Circuit Register "I fear that owing to the late Election, which has been carried on with great animosity, there will be found a decrease in several of the town classes."

But the work continued to progress, and in November 1839 a Chapel of ease to the mother church was opened in Todd's Lane, later known as Grafton Street.

GEORGE LAWTON.

(To be continued)

NOTES AND QUERIES

855. JOHN BACON—THE FIRST METHODIST R.A. It seems strange that the same issue of the *W.H.S. Proceedings* which contained a query about John Bacon, R.A., (xxv: 64), should also contain a reference to him in an article about his friend John Russell, R.A., who painted his portrait. Like Russell, Bacon was a Methodist of the Calvinistic school, attending Whitefield's Tabernacle. He was more than four years Russell's senior, having been born in Southwark on November 24, 1740, into the family of a clothworker. As an apprentice in a pottery works, he showed great initiative, and gained a prize from the Society of Arts. Soon he was winning distinctions wholesale, and was one of the first students enrolled at the Royal Academy on its opening in 1768. He also received from its First President, Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first gold medal for sculpture awarded by the Academy, Russell being awarded a silver medal for drawing a few days later. Bacon was also ahead of Russell in becoming an Associate of the Royal Academy, receiving that honour in 1770, whilst Russell became an A.R.A. in 1772. The *Dictionary of National Biography* gives no details of his becoming one of the forty Academicians, but Sir Walter R. M. Lamb, K.C.V.O., the present Secretary of the Royal Academy, informs me that their records show him to have been elected R.A. in 1778. He was thus ten years ahead of Russell in gaining that distinction, so that the better-known portrait-painter loses his title of "first Methodist R.A."

Bacon's work was characterised by simplicity and good taste, and he had neither the desire nor, according to some, the ability to venture far into the realms of imagination or antiquity. Whilst examples of his work are to be seen in many important buildings, they can best be studied in those two great repositories of the sculptor's art, St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, where are also to be seen monuments by his son John, who carried on the business after his father's death. Outstanding in St. Paul's are his memorials of Dr. Samuel Johnson and John Howard the philanthropist, whilst in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey are his works commemorating Thomas Gray and William Mason. Most striking of all in the Abbey is his huge £6000 monument, 33 feet high, to William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, for which he served not only as sculptor but author, composing the inscription. This fact led George III to warn him—"Now, Bacon, mind you do not turn author; stick to your chisel." He did not altogether follow the king's advice, however, but continued to write many epitaphs, both in prose and verse, as well as occasional religious essays, and

PROCEEDINGS

articles on painting and sculpture, including those in Rees' and Chambers' encyclopaedias. Bacon was a very prosperous man, and on his death in 1799—before he reached the age of fifty—he was able to leave £60,000 to be shared between his five children. There seems little doubt that he was also a genuine Methodist by conviction, with a fine Christian character, as is maintained by his biographer, the well-known Evangelical, the Rev. Richard Cecil, author of the life of John Newton. He was buried in Whitefield's Tabernacle, his self-composed epitaph being—

“What I was as an artist seemed of some importance while I lived; but what I really was as a believer in Jesus Christ is the only thing of importance to me now,”

Rev. Frank Baker, B.A., B.D.

856. WESLEY'S FIRST SERMON. The *Methodist Recorder* published in December a picture of an old barn at the Grange Farm, South Harrow, with the heading “Wesley preached his first sermon here.” The *Standard Journal* records Wesley's own statement that his first sermon was preached at South Leigh, near Witney, and the *Methodist Recorder* in its Winter number for 1904 published a fully illustrated and documented account of the occasion. There seems no reason whatever to doubt the claim of South Leigh, though the *Evening News*, referring to the barn, said in October 1945. “Local people will tell you with pride that John Wesley preached his first sermon within its oak-timbered walls and beneath its 60 feet high tiled roof”.

Mr. Sydney Walton, one of our members who lives at Harrow, says that the barn is situated in Roxeth, which he thinks to be more ancient than Harrow. He kindly secured the opinion of a local historian who says he does not think that the “first sermon” story can be substantiated, but is confident that Wesley did preach in the barn, and would welcome any documentary evidence on the point. I cannot furnish him with such, and although one hesitates to be dogmatic, I should be greatly supplied if any came to light.

It has been pointed out that Dr. Adam Clarke lived for a period at Eastcote, near Roxeth, but as he did not acquire his property there till 1824 the fact seems to have no bearing on the point at issue.

F.F.B.

857. WATERFORD AND THOMAS WILLIAMS: In a recent number of the *Proceedings* (XXV. 56ff.) we printed a copy of a letter written by Thomas Prosser, of Cardiff, from a place called “Watterford”. The Rev. R. Lee Cole, M.A., B.D., wrote to us suggesting that we should explain that Prosser wrote his letter from Waterford, in Glamorganshire, and not from the place of the same name in Ireland. For further particulars concerning the Welsh Waterford, also known as Watford, see Wesley's *Journal*, ii. 342n., 506n.

Mr. Cole's letter, however has raised another point that demands some clarification. Crookshank (*History of Methodism in Ireland*, i. 14-16) gives the following account of Thomas Williams, the first Methodist preacher to preach in Ireland: “He was a member of a respectable Welsh family, and having received a liberal education, graduated at one of the Universities . . . Having entered the Itinerancy in 1741, at the close of the following

WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

year he was at work with Mr. Wesley in Newcastle. But early in 1743 he was appointed by Mr. Whitefield superintendent of his societies "in the Vale of Glamorgan and in part of Monmouthshire," and also was present at the Conference of Calvinistic Methodists, held three months later at Waterford, in Wales. In the following year, however, he was at work again in connexion with the Wesleys . . . In the summer of 1747 Williams crossed the Channel to labour in the city of Dublin . . ." Crookshank appears to have confused two men who bore the same name. There was a Thomas Williams who was appointed superintendent of the Calvinistic Methodist Societies in parts of Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire, and who was present at their Association in April, 1743. In recent numbers of the *Journal of the Calvinistic Methodist Historical Society* (xxix. 23ff., 66ff., 129ff., xxx. 27ff.,) the Editor has published a number of his letters to Howell Harris, from August 1747 to April 1749, which proves conclusively that he was itinerating with the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists during the whole of that period. During the month of August, 1747, he was preaching in Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire on Sundays and helping to harvest the crops on weekdays, whilst the other Thomas Williams was presumably already preaching in Dublin. The former was appointed a Calvinistic Methodist exhorter early in 1743 and continued to exhort amongst them until the beginning of 1752 at least, and he must not be confused with the pioneer of Irish Wesleyan Methodism. There is no evidence that the latter was ever a Calvinistic Methodist exhorter in South Wales or that he attended their April Association in 1743. But was he, (as Crookshank says), "a member of a respectable Welsh family"? And if so, where did his family reside?

Rev. Griffith T. Roberts, M.A., B.D.

858. SUSANNA WESLEY'S BIRTHPLACE. Her father, Dr. Annesley, was one of the clergy who suffered expulsion in 1662. On losing his position as Vicar of St. Giles, Cripplegate, he moved to Spital Yard, off Bishopsgate, and there, Susanna his youngest daughter was born, January 20th, 1669.

In the summer of 1933 the Lord Mayor of London unveiled a memorial plaque, placed on the house by the Corporation of the City of London. A scheme to purchase this house for Methodist purposes, initiated by Mrs. W. Harrison, Dr. W. E. Sangster, Mr. J. C. Gibbs and Mr. Frank Medicott, M.P., has recently been carried out. The building will be available for the use of the Women's Fellowship. *F.F.B.*

The ANNUAL LECTURE under the auspices of the W.H.S. will be delivered at Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London, on Friday, July 19th, at 7 p.m. by the Rev. John Henry Martin. The chair will be taken by Mr. R. H. Griffith. The subject will be "Wesley's London Chapels."

The ANNUAL MEETING will be held on the same premises at 6 p.m.