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THE STORY OF THE

NEWBOLD VERDON METHODIST SOCIETY

1822 TO 1962

WRITTEN BY JH WILKINSON

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A FOREWORD

The history of the Church is always a thrilling story to those who are interested in the things of the kingdom of God. Told by one who shares the vision and the conviction of our fathers in the faith, it can become a challenge to our day. I trust that such will be the result of the publication of this story telling the history of the Newbold Verdon Methodist Church. Written by our Church Treasurer, Mr. Harold Wilkinson, it reveals the struggles and sacrifices of those who have gone before. How proud they would have been to see our present suite of buildings, to have worshipped in our modernised and beautified sanctuary, and to have felt the throb of spiritual life that is moving within the Church of today.

In writing this short history the author has naturally had to look back, but the Church must forever be looking forward. Whilst we thank God for all that is past we trust Him for all that is to come. So inspired by the narrative of former days may we continue the work to which God has called us so that the chapters of our history yet unwritten may tell the same story of devotion, of sacrifice and of Divine blessing.

Gordon W Argyle BD

(Superintendent Minister)

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IN THE BEGINNING

The story of any Methodist Society must needs commence in June 1713, on the 28th day of which month was born one John Wesley, to Samuel and Susanna Wesley in Epworth Rectory. It was due to the courage of a villager that the life of this wonderful man was not cut short at the early age of five and half years, when the rectory was burnt down. Surrounded on his lawn by the personal belongings, and what was salvaged from the fire, the Rev Samuel Wesley felt moved to offer among his parishioners a heartfelt prayer of gratitude to God that all his family was safe and well.

This kind of dedicated life, lived by the parents, exerted a tremendous influence on the lives of the two boys John and Charles, channelling their minds away from thoughts of the material things of this life to a greater depth of realisation of spiritual needs. Through a normal school life for that class of family to the time when he was ordained a deacon in 1725 John was brought to a state of mind where he was constantly seeking for the answers to his spiritual needs. He preached his first sermon at South Leigh in January 1726.

In the meantime his brother Charles was forming the Holy Club at Oxford whose members were soon dubbed 'Methodist' because of their precise and disciplined Christian life. John joined the little group and their activities amongst prisoners and the poor and destitute showed the direction in which their sympathies lay, and to us may be some indication of what lay before them. The restless urging of the Spirit imposed upon John the desire for evangelical work, which resulted in him sailing for Georgia as a missionary in December 1735. Both Charles and John were deeply impressed, on a dangerous voyage, by the courage and devotions of a group of German Moravians.

For three years, missionary work was carried out amongst the Indians, but the important thing about this period was the disturbance caused to John by the very pertinent questions put to him by these Moravian friends. Returning to England early in 1738 he continued discussions, seeking the truth, and the source of so great a faith as he saw among these

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friends of his. "Preach faith till you experience it." he was told again and again; but it was his brother Charles who saw the light first, three days before John was converted on that wonderful Wednesday evening of May 24th 1738, in Aldersgate.

From that day the whole of John's life was spent in preaching the Gospel, up and down this land of ours. In the early days, Methodism was a society within the Church of England, but opposition from Bishops and Clergy and their failure to appreciate the passionate sincerity of the Wesley brothers was causing a rift between the parent church and it's virile offspring. Before long it became necessary for John to perform an act which he had endeavoured all along to avoid, that is to ordain ministers, first for America and then for work at home.

John Wesley preached his last sermon at Leatherhead in February 1791 and died in March of the same year. For the next thirty years came a period of unrest, and some breakaway from the main body of Methodism. Camp meetings had met with singular success in America and some American evangelists became very prominent with this kind of meeting in England. The first was held at Mow Cop in May 1807 and it was through disagreement here that the Primitive Methodist Church came into being. Hugh Bourne was a fervent believer in these meetings and as such was expelled from the main church in 1808 taking with him several stalwarts like himself. They accepted the name of Primitive Methodist in 1812 at the Tunstall Centre, four circuits being quickly formed Nottingham, Tunstall, Hull, and Loughborough. At the time of the death of Bourne in 1852 there were 104,762 members in the Primitive Methodist Church.

Early in the nineteenth century a great wave of religious fervour swept down through Loughborough to adjoining villages. Camp meetings were held in Woodhouse, Wigston and Hinckley, with such rapturous enthusiasm that participants were nicknamed the 'Ranters'. Growth was extremely rapid and a chapel was opened in George Street, Leicester in 1819. Three years later, 1822, there were 37 societies in the Loughborough Circuit including Bagworth, Barlestone, Hinckley, Enderby and Newbold Verdon.

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LOCAL STIRRINGS

With the help of enthusiasts in Barlestone and Bagworth a blacksmith's shop and some ground in the centre of Newbold Verdon were bought in the name of Primitive Methodist by seven trustees at a cost of £95.0s.0d. £90.0s.0d of this sum was lent by a Mrs. Sarah Allsopp and at that time Earl Shilton was the head church of 16 societies with 264 members. Eight of these members belonged to Newbold Verdon. This took place in March 1845.

Early as this was in the Primitive Methodist movement, Barlestone had already built a chapel in 1833 with 20 members, at a cost of £185.0s.0d borrowing £150.00 to do it. It seems that a Church was erected at Newbold Verdon in 1850 when a Samuel Gee was president and Benjamin Blackburn was Circuit secretary. It is interesting to note that the total circuit income was £21.18s.2d., Newbold Verdon's portion being 5s.10d. Salary of the president was £12.0s.0d. per quarter. The year 1853 saw the birth of the Hinckley Circuit with 16 societies having a total of 419 members. There must have been considerable enthusiasm in this then small village of about 750 inhabitants, for there is a membership of 22 recorded.

It is only when one attempts to piece together a connected story of the growth of a Church, that one realises the scarcity of reliable information and the reluctance of our forbears to maintain adequate records. It is about this period, however, that tremendous movement becomes apparent, and we are indebted to the diary of one Thomas Hargrave, (not a Methodist, by the way) for some very intimate details. Spiritual progress created dissatisfaction with the existing Church premises and the measure of the faith of the trustees is shown in their resolve to rebuild quickly a Church with a gallery capable of holding a congregation of 190. This included 30 rented pews, bringing in a total revenue of £2.7s.6d. a year.

The fact that there was still a debt of £21.0s.0d. on the old premises and that there was a

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need to borrow a further £50.0s.0d., a colossal sum in those days of low agricultural wages, did not deter, and one can only stand amazed at the faith expressed in building a Church capable of holding one quarter of the total population of the village.

On September 6 1859 such demolition as was necessary commenced and continued until September 15 when rebuilding started. On Monday 10 October, the front of the gallery was erected. The following Monday iron support pillars were put in. Men were working all night, even until past midnight on Saturday 22, the Chapel being opened for its first Service on Sunday 23 October 1859. Much work still remained to be done, for we have mention of the need for interior fixings and the putting up of lamps, by a Mr. Dingley, one of the fervent trustees. A thanksgiving tea and meeting, in all probability a Love Feast, was held on Monday 31 October 1859.

The then local life was not without some colour, for there is mention of Sergeant Coulton preaching early the next year on Regimentals and June 18 must have achieved some prominence as Waterloo Day, for the same preacher embellished the pulpit in his bright red parade uniform for a special Service in commemoration, in that year 1860.

And so to normal routine returns our little society, a Church value £300.0s.0d with a debt of £260.0s.0d., but with also 500 yards of spare ground, an average congregation of 90, a Sunday School of 8 teachers and 56 scholars, where only 7 churches of the 19 in the Circuit had any school at all, and a great and faithful benefactor in Mrs. Sarah Allsopp who seems to have been very much their financial safeguard.

The sixties of the 19th century, however, do not seem to have been at all kind, and serious trade depression affected this area. It became necessary to turn again to Mrs. Allsopp for a further loan of £50.0s.0d. to carry on. A Mr. John Hill was the Society Steward at this time until at least 1870, under the Rev Paul Dakin.

During the year 1874 came upon this society such burdens of anxiety as would make our hearts quell today. We can have no real financial deadlock today, for the Methodist

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Church as a whole accepts financial responsibility, but not so then. They must carry their own burden and so when creditors died leaving the need to raise at once £130.0s.0d., one can only imagine their dire distress. This is reflected in the frantic negotiations in many places, until at last they are relieved by a loan from Mrs. Clay of Hinckley.

Coupled with this was a serious drop in membership down to 4 or 5, nor did this improve much until 1894 and even then only to 11 and to 23 in 1897. Trustees were down to two, Mr. Joseph Hund and Mr. George Dingley. In 1888 permission was sought and obtained to sell the blacksmith's Shop and garden to two brother blacksmiths, Herbert and William Wardle.

What a gesture of faith it was then, when in 1889 two farmers, one carpenter and four miners joined and strengthened the trust, respectively; Jos Hill (Bagworth), John Hill, Jos Cuthbert (Barlestone) and Jos Faux, George Statham, Will Belcher and Fred Argyle of Newbold.

THE PRESENT CHURCH

The date on the front of the Chapel now in use is 1894, and this is the occasion when the premises were completely rebuilt at a cost of £599.4s.9d. The last remaining debt of £40.0s.0d. had been repaid in 1891, probably made possible by the sale of the cottage and shop adjoining. It only needs a cursory examination of the present Church to realise its merit in every way. To a keen observer, it is a matter of wonder that such a building could be erected in so short a time after such a depression. Gone is the box-like structure of many Methodist buildings, and in place is a fine architectural show piece, elegant windows and wonderfully proportioned. Solid pews, with a floor slightly raised at the back and a dignified entrance. One can imagine with what pride those eleven members and seven Sunday School teachers entered their Church for the original opening. Some hard work had gone into this project, for over £139 had been raised that year of opening which, added to sums already in hand left £290 to be borrowed.

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Confidence in freedom from unforeseen misfortunes beyond present day standards is shown by the fact that although valued at £600, insurance cover, at first, was limited to £100. But prudence prevailed in 1896, when it was increased to £500. Rented pews had gone and here began a slow but continual progress to better things.

We have news here of people known to many of us in 1962, Mr George Statham, Society Steward, very probably 1886-1935; Mr John Simons and Mr W Statham, prominent in the Sunday School. Work in the Band of Hope and Christian Endeavour progressed and at the turn of the century the Primitive Methodist Society of Newbold Verdon must have had an important influence on village life. We are told of the enthusiasts walking along the main street singing their marching song "Lion of Judah" and leading into the Chapel for their Sunday evening worship. Gaining strength, the sum of £175 was used to buy back the cottage and shop in 1903 and with the arrival of another Methodist family in 1905, Mr and Mrs J T Wilkinson, the prayers of Mr George Statham, to use his own words, were answered. At this time Mr George Brown was Sunday School secretary, with two ladies, Miss Lois Smith and Miss A Arnold doing the same work for the Christian Endeavour. Some ladies have memories of being escorted to the Christian Endeavour meetings, before street lighting was common, by Mrs George Statham carrying an old storm lantern.

Faith was being rewarded, for in 1905 we read of there being 27 members, 70 Sunday School scholars with 9 teachers. Here too, some further development took place, for Chapel Aid made a loan of £110, which brought the total debt to £245 again. Repayment was very slow, sometimes only £5 in a year and it was not until March 1931 that complete repayment was made. Towards the end, some felt the burden lying rather heavily, and their misgivings perhaps had repercussions on the future financial policy.

There will be many with recollections of a Bible Class in the first decade of the 20th Century, under the leadership of Mr. W Farmer, and later Messrs S Bridgett and J Banton. On into the early war years, this class was the foundation of virile spiritual

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worship, and it would be failing in historical record if such names as Mr. G Foreman, Mr. H Kind, Mr. G Frearson, Mr. J T Wilkinson and Mr. C S Barsby were not included among the pioneers of this movement. Development later on included concert parties for charities and the annual Whit Monday Outings, which gave members unusual opportunities of enlarged horizons.

Mr. C S Barsby and Mr. J T Wilkinson under the superintendent, Mr. George Statham, were prominent workers in the Sunday School and Church, for the first thirty or forty years of the 20th century. It was due to their efforts that several young people came under the influence of the Church and have now become mature workers and important office holders in more than one society of the Albert Road Circuit. The very fine notice boards on the front of the Church were erected by his family as a token to the memory of Mr. Barsby and there is a foundation stone on the side of the schoolroom performing the same purpose for Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson.

Thoughts were still in progress, however, and in March 1920 under the Rev T Holmes, this little Primitive Methodist Church became No 22018 on the register of "Places of Worship for the Solemnisation of Marriages." It was not, however, until 1 November 1924, a day of blustering wind and sleet that this Church was filled to capacity to see the wedding of Miss Margaret Eleanor Kind to Mr. John Harold Wilkinson, an active sailor, fresh home from a long spell overseas. The occasion was marked by the presentation to bride and bridegroom of a beautiful Bible and Hymnbook.

The whole country had been shaken by the 1914 - 1918 War, but no sooner was this ended than the Leaders and Trustees of the Newbold Verdon Society were on the move again. Early 1919, it was felt desirable to improve the accommodation for a rapidly growing choir, by erecting a raised platform. Two years later £65. 10s. 0d. was paid to Peggs of Earl Shilton for a complete interior renovation

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Music had been provided for many years by a reed organ, but in 1926 a small, but quite efficient, pipe organ became available from friends at Ratby. Under the persuasive influence of Mr. Richards this opportunity was seized upon and at a cost of £50.00 a new era of music opened. For some years employment was thus provided for a suitable boy as an organ blower, remunerated by a few shillings annually. The choir continued to grow under the leader ship of Mr. J T Wilkinson with organist Mrs. S Bridgett and Miss Brown, so the raised platform was continued right across the Chapel from side to side.

The musical side of the Church, including all arrangements for Sunday School Anniversaries had been continued to be in the hands of these two for some years and it was not until the 1930s that any problem arose, when the health of Mr. J T Wilkinson compelled him to hand over the position of choirmaster to his eldest son, Mr. J H Wilkinson. Successive organists in Mr. P Kind and Mr. C Barsby carried on the work but it was not until 1945 when Mrs. W Frearson, a very versatile performer, took over, that a really stable position was reached and has continued as a team to the present time.

Electricity came to the village and the petrol vapour lamps, with their incessant hissing noise, albeit an improvement on their paraffin predecessors, were replaced by electric light. An interesting anecdote here. Mr. W Puffer, a Hinckley local preacher of some renown, while taking a service at Newbold Verdon found the hissing noise a nuisance. Turning to Mr. George Statham, he inquired if the noise might not be stopped. 'Alas,' replied Mr. Statham in his characteristic way, 'if you are prepared to carry on in the dark'.

In most Church Societies there is to be found a ladies meeting of some kind. About this time, under the leadership of Mrs. C Barsby, a sewing class was formed with the intention of providing the ladies with an opportunity to meet in fellowship and at the same time to do some useful work for friends. The meeting gradually developed to a regular fortnightly feature, Ministers and laywomen giving addresses, and under the subsequent presidencies of Mrs. Rose Statham and Mrs. Nina Smith, became a most valuable branch of the society, under the name of Ladies Guild.