

## THIS IS OUR STORY

Halliwell has many quaint and lovely buildings, but it is doubtful if any could hold such a large place in the hearts and minds of so many as the little Methodist Church in Harvey Street.

The older portion of the premises has been in constant use for Methodist services from 1876 until this day. That alone is something worthy of celebration but added to this is the fact that, for some 30 years before, the Wesleyan Methodists made their home here. In fact they had been using the premises since 1844. In 1868, in a little cottage in Stewart Street, the Wesleyan leaders met to plan the building of their new and commodious Chapel at the corner of Halliwell Road and Stewart Street. When the Chapel was finished they vacated the Harvey Street Church but we will come back to their story later on.

In 1876, the Primitive Methodists took over and reopened the Church for worship and so we celebrate 100 years of unbroken worship at Harvey Street.

The opening was on July 9th 1876 and the preacher was Rev. Robert Jones, Circuit Minister, and the "Leading Singer" was Mr. John Withnell. A few weeks later a Sunday School was started under the leadership of Mr. Henry Turner. From then the work grew and prospered. Though the site was not conveyed to the Primitive Methodists by the Wesleyans until September 19th 1889 there is no doubt that they had the use of the premises, perhaps paying a rental. Perhaps they were saving up for the purchase price, or perhaps having bought the premises earlier, they then were able to acquire the freehold as well. They must have owned something because they formed a board of Trustees as early as June 5th 1876.

They purchased a harmonium, appointed a chapel keeper and paid him £5 a year. They spent over £150 on two new vestries, two pews and a porch. The good fellowship of the Wesleyan Society was shown in that they put on a concert in aid of the Primitive Methodists Bazaar. Union was still half a century away but the seeds were already there. The first five representatives from Harvey Street to the Circuit Meeting were Henry Turner, Elizabeth Goode, Alice Danby, Cornelius Parkinson and Samuel Thornley. How proud they must have been when they took their places at the Quarterly Meeting on September 9th 1876. Thus we were off the ground.

Through the next 80 years Harvey Street lived an independent life, though of course it was deeply involved in the life of the Circuit, and, as from 1932, in the newly-united Methodist Church to which it was glad to belong. Through the years since then, the Bolton Circuits have seen many rearrangements, closures and openings and long and trying discussions on re-alignments. We are now one of 25 churches forming the Bolton Circuit and enjoying a proud place in all Circuit activities and in sharing the ministry of nine Ministers and 59 Lay Preachers. We have 152 members.

During this period the Minute Books are missing for many years and so we have to rely for the most part on the memory of older members. Although the records are scanty, there is much evidence of a lively society.

It is said that Methodism was born in song and this tradition has been amply carried on at Harvey Street. There has always been a strong choir which in former days gave many Services of Song and Cantatas, besides a Male Voice Choir which numbered 40. This singing was also a feature on New Year's Eve, when, after the Watchnight Service, there was a great crowd gathered on the front of the church, some even coming from the local "pub"<sup>1</sup>, to herald the New Year with song.

The Cricket team also had its heyday, as well as the Tennis Club.

Maypole Dancers are also remembered giving demonstrations on the cricket field which was on land behind Bennetts Lane. Field Days were also a great event and the Minutes record that on at least one occasion it was resolved to give one bun and to order "12 quarts of milk, 18 Ibs. of sugar, 6 Ibs. of coffee, 1 Ib. of Chicory and 2 Ibs. of sweets." The admission - up to 12 years old - was Two Pence. The Sunday School Minutes also record that in 1921 "we accept the offer of a speaker to conduct an Afternoon Service in connection with the campaign now being organized against Bad and Indecent Language" and in the same year "that prizes be earned, not only for regular attendance but that we emphasize the 'good conduct condition'<sup>1</sup> and all teachers are authorised to cancel any marks gained by a scholar if the said scholar has been guilty of 'unruly behaviour'."

In 1926 special Jubilee Services were held in September and October. At that time there were 136 members, 35 teachers and 475

scholars. Also during this period the Band of Hope and Christian Endeavour made their contributions to the spiritual life of the church although counter attractions were having their effect as witness this minute in 1924 - 'The Band of Hope reporting no meetings held of late attribute the fact to the counter attraction of the Cotton Street Open Market. The Town Council have decided to close this in the near future and immediately they do so, the meetings will resume.'

So life went on at Harvey Street with its varied activities and witness.

Now we come to 1954 when the Halliwell Road Church had to close. So let us pause for a short time and see what had been going on lower down the road.

In 1869 the new church had been erected and the leaders were intent on building a strong society there. They succeeded. By 1880 no less than 100 families were attached to the church and in regular attendance. In those days, as you may recall, families were by no means small. The site had been acquired in 1862 and many notable Methodists pledged regular subscriptions towards the Building Fund. The treasurer's collecting book is in our exhibition.

By 1871 the new chapel was registered for the solemnization of Marriages and all was set for nearly a century of service. Following the chapel, School premises were built behind and provided a much needed Day School for the crowds of children living around. Until the turn of the century "School Pence" were paid by the scholars for their education. Extensions to the school had to be made in the 1890's and these were doubtless the "palmy days" of Halliwell Wesleyanism. Over a thousand scholars would join the processions and special pews were put in the gallery for children attending church. Pew rents were not only normal practice in those days, but were necessary if a family wanted to be sure of sitting together in church. Alas, by the turn of the century, church attendance was beginning to decline, but the leaders never flagged in their efforts to maintain the witness. The Minutes show that there were conversations on 'non-attendance at church<sup>1</sup>, 'special services', 'tract distribution', 'open-air services', 'formation of a Mission Band for visitation and cottage services'.

So the years passed, Ministers came and went. Amongst the young, Cubs, Scouts, Guides, Camp Fire Girls and Busy Bees flourished under able leadership. Other week-night activities included the Wesley Guild, both Junior and Senior Sections, and the teachers

preparation classes.

The inroads of falling membership, falling income, decay in the premises, and savage losses following two World Wars made their impact. The Annual Three-day Bazaar, held at the New Year, was a great time for getting together and meeting old friends. One recalls the colourful scene with the many stalls filled with a vast array of goods, many of them handmade by the ladies during the year, the evening concerts, the wonderful luncheon and teas, the disappearance of the men on New Year's Day afternoon (where to? - why, Burnden Park, of course). But the Bazaar was becoming merely a means to an end. Throughout the year they were 'in the red' and the Bazaar had to be held to rectify this and with the decline in membership this became almost impossible. So in 1954 it was decided reluctantly to close. Many of the members joined Harvey Street and so the erstwhile 'Wesleyans' came back to where they had started.

During this time the witness was being maintained in the Brownlow Fold area. There were apparently two Methodist Churches, one the Methodist New Connexion Church whose Baptismal Registers are in our exhibition, and the other the Raphael Street Mission, mothered by the Leaders of Halliwell Road. The last entry in the M.N.C. Register is in 1907, when the Methodist New Connexion united with the United Methodist Free Churches and others to form the United Methodist Church. It could well have ceased to operate in Brownlow Fold.

The Raphael Street work grew in response to the Sunday School which some Methodist folk were running in a house in Raphael Street in 1884. It was so successful that the middle wall was removed and adults met downstairs whilst children met upstairs. By 1895, Raphael Street friends had decided to build a church. Subscriptions from members of the Park Street Circuit were gathered in. From the Minutes we see that 'Mr. Spring and Mr. Roocroft be asked to wait upon the Halliwell Road people with a view to getting subscriptions.'

Having raised £436 they spent the lot in paying for their Mission Hall. It was opened on August 31st 1895 and the Rev. Dr. Moulton preached on that occasion. Tea followed at SIXPENCE per person!

By 1903 such was the overwhelming success, a wooden hut had to be built in the yard to house the Men's class. This became known as the 'Tent'. The Mission Hall was extended in 1915 to accommodate the crowds of children. (Even though the Great War was at its worst,

they did not neglect the Lord's work). In 1921 it was decided to purchase an organ for the sum of £290 and this was dedicated in 1923 to the memory of those young men of Raphael Street who lost their lives in the Great War.

From then on let extracts from the Minutes speak for themselves :-

'The question of Methodist Union was considered but no resolution passed'

'That we have Sacramental Services more often' A poor Plan! The Secretary to write to the Super'

'Super has promised a little relief from Mr..... who has been coming quarterly and a little more of the more acceptable preachers!'

'Poor congregations because we have for some time been without choir. Suggested a Choir Supper to discuss the matter!' (The supper was held on Tuesday evening and on Thursday evening Choir Rehearsals re-started). 'Permission for electric light to be installed (1930)'

The Minute Book records tremendous activity amongst the Youth in the forties, Football, Rounders, Table Tennis (producing one international player), drama, Swimming and many other adventurous efforts to interest young people and harness their enthusiasm except that they insisted that "all meetings on school premises closed at 10 p.m." From this Church and School at least one Methodist Minister and several lay preachers had emerged and thousands of people in that area had been spiritually blessed.

However in 1957 it was sadly decided that the Church should be closed and that members should go to Harvey Street.

So the three strands of Methodism in Halliwell springing from a common source became united in their birthplace.

Again let the extracts from the Minute Books tell their own story.

1955 'Could the Choir sing an Introit to assist in creating an atmosphere of worship'

1956 'Moved that a Building Fund be started'

1957 'Recommended the following areas for visitation - The Ring Road to Wolfenden Street and from Halliwell Road to Arnold Street'.

A year's Planned Services, with all departments taking responsibility,

are written in detail in the Minute Book in the Exhibition. Headed "What the Church stands for" they were full of interest to all age groups.

1957 'Resolved that a Camp Meeting be held on Sunday, June 23rd, at Tennis Street, the Salvation Army assisting.'

1958 'Details of the sod-cutting ceremony on the new Church site were discussed'.

The New Church was opened on Saturday March 14th 1959 by Mr. William Gregson. The Chairman of the District, Rev. W. Walker Lee, conducted the Service and the Rev. Wilfrid Hough preached. The crowded congregation was an even mixture of Harvey Street, Raphael Street and Halliwell Road friends. A New Chapter in our story was about to begin.

In 1960 came the campaign conducted by students from Handsworth College and in the discussion which took place on the Campaign Sequel, a Youth Programme, Sunday School Teachers' conference and new Youth Club activities were all in prospect. Following the departure of Rev. Wilfrid Hough we had several Ministers for short periods due to various reasons until 1964 when Rev. John H. Randell became our Minister, to be followed by Rev. G. Alan Stanton, Rev. Keith Sanders and so to our present Minister, Rev. George Artingstall. During this time the Men's Fellowship had a brief life, the Wesley Guild having served us well was discontinued and a Church Bookstall was started. The New Room behind the stage was built and decorated and opened in 1972, and more recently the Kitchen has been modernised.

## BUT LIFE MUST GO ON ...

On orders from the Conference, Re-structuring was carried out completely, changing the patterns of our Church life beyond recognition when compared to those of 1876. Many think the new ways are not as good as the old, but we shall try them, well. We have a detailed Church Directory, indicating our present membership to be 152 with 51 Community Roll, a total of 203.

The little stone houses of Halliwell, and our old School Building have all been sand-blasted and are delightfully clean-looking, in a Bolton from which Victorian smoke has been banished. We seem "all set" for another century. Would to God the moral smoke had also gone for good.

During the past two years the Youth Club has been revived. It is a thriving concern and one day will provide rich harvests of young members of the Church. The Minister met a very thoughtful Class Meeting during last winter and what it lacked in numbers it certainly gained in concentrated thought. We have received several new members each year and are very encouraged by the enthusiasm we find in all our new members for all that is best in Methodism.

We are always on the alert for new ways of witnessing, as were our fathers before us. This summer we again appeared in Moss Bank Park, though as an event of the Methodist Conference Week. Nevertheless, we were all there and so were two hundred others! On our home ground, we have the Toddlers Club for mothers and children of the locality, the Creche on Sunday mornings and the Sunday School, although in common with all Sunday Schools passing through difficult times, has a great staff of teachers, with two having completed their training and another in training. Brownies, Youth Club, Drama Group, Rounders Team, Tennis Club and Women's Fellowship, not to forget the Ladies' Choir and Church Choir make up the present-day programme at Harvey Street. Frankly I do not think our founders would feel ashamed of us. Rather the contrary. Congregations are generally good, though we are restless to make them better. Our average collection is now about £38 per week.

Also during these latter two years much thought has been given to the terms of the new Methodist Church Bill particularly as it affects Doctrinal Integrity and the Trustees. If the Bill becomes law, our next local history book will have some big changes to report. Currently we are at the request of Conference examining ten propositions respecting Church Unity upon which we shall be passing judgement in the coming Connexional Year. Truly these are dynamic days and one can only guess at the outcome of it all.

Meanwhile at Harvey Street, Life must go on. As ecumenically-minded as ever, we initiated a revival of joint Communion Services with our local Parish Church, St. Paul's, with notable success.

It is said that when the ladies' sewing team were trying to arrange the stars on the Communion Table Screen, they had great difficulty in placing them, so after prayer, they threw them in the air over the stretched-out cloth, and resolved to sew them where they

fell. This they did, and we have a perfect circle round the Cross. Now, whether this is a bit of Harvey Street folk-lore or whether it is a fact, it is certainly true that the circle round the Cross represents this holy fellowship. Joined heart-to-heart by God, and truly one in Him, even though our ways to Harvey Street have been so varied, even though we represent differing traditions, we can truly say, in the Centenary Year, WE ARE ONE IN HIM.

"He bids us build each other up  
And gathered into one To our high calling's  
glorious hope We hand in hand go on."