

**“This Temple
of His Grace”**

**A Survey of
Wesleyan Methodism in Wherwell**

COLLATED BY REV. B. R. K. PAINTIN

Price One Shilling

*W. H. Bowley
Wherwell*

*The Compiler gratefully acknowledges
his debt to
Mr. T. W. Spratt
Mr. and Mrs. Mitchener
Mr. H. Willshire
whose memories and co-operation have
made this record possible*

THIS TEMPLE OF HIS GRACE is an unpretentious red brick Methodist Chapel of the plainest building in one of England's loveliest villages. Strangers would call it "A Village Bethel," and so it is. This little sanctuary has been "the house of God, the gate of heaven," to many a lonely, sin-stormed soul.

It stands by the old road from Andover to Winchester. About four miles from Andover the road turns sharply down a steep hillside to the Valley of the Test into the ancient village called by its own people "Horrell," but by the uninitiated, Wherwell. The name is said to be derived from a celebrated well situated near the weir, a short distance above Dublin Farm.

The secluded beauty of the place attracted the attention of Churchmen of the ninth century. About the reign of King Eadgar a nunnery was built on or near the site where The Priory now stands. Tradition reports that Eadgar's widowed Queen Elfrida founded it as a penance for the murder of her stepson, King Eadward the Martyr. There is little doubt that the tragic Queen spent her last years there.

The Methodist revival of religion reached Wherwell about 1816. Certificates for worship were obtained by William Griffith, Superintendent Minister of the Winchester Wesleyan Circuit. "I, William Griffith, of High Street, Winchester, do hereby certify that a certain messuage or tenement now in the occupation of John Dugey, Carpenter, situate in the parish of Wherwell, County of Hants and Diocese of Winchester, is intended to be used forthwith as a place of religious worship by an assembly or congregation of Protestants. Witness my hand this sixteenth day of November, 1816." The second certificate concerns a cottage in the occupation of Elizabeth Inglefield, widow, and is dated seventh day of December, 1816.

These cottages were probably situated in The Chalk-pit at Greenwich. The old chapel that formerly stood there consisted of two cottages, of which the lower rooms were made into one, with part of the upper floor removed and part left in position to provide a gallery. So the homes of John Dugey and Elizabeth Inglefield became the first Wesleyan Methodist Chapel at Wherwell.

In 1818 the Andover Circuit was formed from the North-Western section of the Winchester Circuit. It consisted of thirteen societies with a total membership of 204. Wherwell was among them with thirteen members. The earliest class roll preserved is for July, 1820. The members were James Dear (Leader), Lucy Alexander, Fanny Neville, Eliz. Inglefield, Mary Blake, Sarah Baker, William Alexander, John Baker, Chas. Inglefield. In that year they gave collections—To Kingswood School 6/6, to the Chapel Committee 3/6, Overseas Mission 4/-, to the Circuit Fund 6/5½.

Two years passed by, and in 1822 the name of Jas. Tovey was recorded among the members; Sarah Tovey in 1825 and Richard Mitchener in 1828. These names were destined to count for much in future years. The young society did not at first prosper. Through the twenty-seven years between 1816 and 1843 the average membership was ten. Their names in 1841 were :

Jas. Tovey	Chas. Batt
Geo. Alexander	Arthur Anthony
Josh. Poore	and two others

But spring-time, though long delayed, came at last. The membership roll for 1844 increased suddenly to twenty. They were :

	Jas. Tovey, Senior Leader	
John Baker	John Mitchener	Sarah Baker
William Spratt	Geo. Alexander	Geo. Stanmore
Ann Alexander	Jas. Tovey, Junr.	Chas. Batt
Robert Smith	Fanny Batt	Reuben Hawkins
Charlotte Robinson	William Baker	Lucy Lush
John Hoare	Rebecca Monk	Geo. Monk
Henry Mitchener		

Next year membership leaped forward again to thirty. For the next eighty years Wherwell was to be one of the most vital societies in the Andover Circuit. At this point we could wish for some record of the causes of the revival. It may have been due to an ingathering of the younger men and women of the village by a faithful Circuit Minister; it may have been influenced by the apostolic labours of Thomas Russell, the

inspired Primitive Methodist preacher, whose ministry quickened the spiritual life of the villages of the Hurstbourne Valley at that period ; it was surely the joyful harvest of thirty years' faithful witness and perseverance in prayer. James Tovey in after days used to speak of the crowded class meetings which met in his house. As numbers increased, the class moved to a larger room near the White Lion Inn. The meetings were often disturbed by the boys of the village, yet such was the spiritual power of the class that some of those who came to mock remained to pray ; some of those who made sport of the service became stalwart Methodists.

The Wherwell services were made attractive by the efficient choir conducted by James Tovey, the younger. His was a magnetic personality, richly endowed with spiritual and musical gifts. He was a beautiful singer, an able conductor, and a most acceptable local preacher, a great gift of God to the society and the circuit. Mr. William Tovey was the leading instrumentalist, and played a clarionet. Mr. R. Smith played the violoncello and other village musicians completed the orchestra. The harmonium of later days usually justifies its presence, but it does not take the place of a company of musicians like those of Wherwell.

These were days not only of good music, but of long sermons, and the patience of even these earnest souls was sometimes overtaxed. One Tuesday evening the preacher from Whitchurch discoursed for an hour and a half, and then said he was sorry not to finish his subject that evening, but when next he came he would continue. "What do you think I thought," said George Tovey to his neighbour. "I thought to myself, I shan't be there." Sometimes the preacher met with trouble on his way to Wherwell. One Tuesday evening the Rev. John Dowty came to the service in a mud-stained and disreputable condition. His horse had stumbled and thrown him into some mud. As was often the custom, Mr. Dowty found his text and sermon in the inspiration of the moment, discoursed upon his journey from Whitchurch, choosing his text from St. Luke 9, v. 42, "And as he was yet a-coming the devil threw him down." The preacher was apt to apply the text to the occasion. "Well, if the devil should throw you down, what must you do? Why, get up again as quickly as you can, as I did this evening."

This society influenced the entire neighbourhood. People both young and old came from Chilbolton, Newton Stacey, Barton Stacey and other places more distant. Eternity alone will reveal how many souls were brought to Christ in that lowly temple of the living God.

OPPOSITION

The labours of these enthusiasts were not to continue without opposition. The Priory was especially displeased. Some of the servants attended the services and decided for Christ. Their employers were angry and called upon them to choose one of two things, either to cease going to the chapel or to leave their service. To their lasting honour some of them chose the latter, although it was a great sacrifice. **They did not suffer in vain.**

AND ADVENTURE

By the year 1846 the revived society resolved to build a chapel. The way was not easy, as the local land owners were not likely to provide a site. These earnest Methodists gave themselves to prayer that if God willed He would open a way, and He did. The Priory did not own quite all the land. Presently James Tovey and Charles Batt heard that some cottages in The Court, owned by a lady at Basingstoke, were for sale. Without mentioning their purpose, they went to Basingstoke and took enough money to pay the deposit on their purchase. Their errand was successful; Mr. Batt bought the cottages at some personal inconvenience for the Wherwell Wesleyans. That evening they and a few others met to give thanks to God. "It is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes" records one of those present. In the meantime steps had to be taken to circumvent the expected opposition. They pulled down the old Chalkpit Chapel and allowed the village to believe that a new chapel would be built on its site. The old building being removed, they dug trenches as for the foundation of another and so the play continued until the Conveyance was completed and the new site made secure. When it became known that the Wesleyan Methodists had obtained a new site for the chapel, and in the centre of the village, there was a great stir among the people, and the opposing powers explored every possible means to wrest possession from Mr. Batt. He was offered double the price, and when bribery failed the opposition resorted to threats, but in vain. Mr. Tovey and his friends paid Mr. Batt £100 for the two cottages near the street, the others he sold in order to repay a mortgage he had taken up.

The foundation stones of the new chapel were laid in the Spring of 1846, the Chairman of the District conducting the Service of Dedication. Their first hymn was aptly chosen; it was:—

"Except the Lord conduct the plan
The best concerted schemes are vain
And never can succeed."

A trust was formed to hold the property for the purposes of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion. The trustees were :

James Dance, of Longparish, Miller
John Withers, of Longparish, Yeoman
George Alexander, of Wherwell, Market Gardener
Henry Mitchener, of Wherwell, Labourer
George Monk, of Wherwell, Labourer
William Spreadbury, of Longparish, Miller
William Hillier, of Andover, Hairdresser
George Whitcher, of Broughton, Grocer
James Tovey, of Wherwell, Cordwainer
Robert Smith, of Wherwell, Waterman
James Tovey the younger, of Wherwell,
Cordwainer
Thomas Neil, of Wallop, Baker
John Hawkins, of Houghton, Grinder

On the 31st day of October, 1846, the chapel was licensed for worship, and the Rev. John Rattenbury conducted the opening service. The congregation sang Isaac Watts' call to worship—

“ Lord of the worlds above
How pleasant and how fair
The dwellings of Thy love
Thine earthly temples are.
To Thine abode
My heart aspires
With warm desires
To meet my God.”

It was an inspired choice, for no words more fittingly described their gratitude and aspiration. Mr. Rattenbury preached from Psalm 84, verse 7, “ They go from strength to strength. Everyone of them appeareth before God in Zion.” It was a memorable service, the experience of divine power was felt by all. These joyful Methodists cherished the memories of it, and passed on the story of that happy day to their children. But their joy was soon overclouded, for the opposition, although frustrated, remained powerful. They could not prevent the Methodists from building a house of worship, but they could

make life difficult for the builders, and this they proceeded to do. Mr. Tovey and his family received notice to leave their house, and as none other could be obtained in the village, Mr. Tovey found a new home at Longparish. Later on he moved to Charlton, where after a few more years he finished his very useful life here and passed on to higher service to meet his Lord.

Charles Batt was the Priory blacksmith. He was dismissed, and as he could not find home or employment in the village he emigrated to Canada. His removal seemed likely to inflict an irreparable loss upon the society, for he was a man of spiritual power. Few men exceeded his knowledge of the Word of God, and he possessed profound insight into its message and power in preaching it. After many years abroad Charles returned to Wherwell. Soon afterwards he visited his old friend, James Tovey, at Salisbury, and recalled their earlier days together. "Do'st mind when thee preached thee trial sermon, Jimmy?" On that Sunday Charles Batt was the morning preacher and James Tovey was planned to preach his trial sermon in the evening. That morning Charlie reached chapel a few minutes after James. "Marnin', Jimmy," he said. "'Ow dost feel about tonight? What's thee text goin' to be. "Oh, so and so." "I suppose it will be firstly, secondly and thirdly," said Charles, "They'll be the heads." and Jimmy agreed. "Well, I suppose we had better start," and the preacher entered the pulpit. When he came to the sermon he announced Mr. Tovey's text, the heads were those already chosen for his trial sermon. The preacher developed the subject on the lines already prepared by the young man, and when he finished he turned to him and said, "'Ow about that, Jimmy, what be'st going to do tonight?" Jimmy was not dismayed. "Same sermon," he answered, "but a different man."

When these two pillars of the society quitted the village their enemies prophesied that local Methodism would die. They were mistaken, the great Head of the Church overruled persecution for the advancement of His work. He caused the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He restrained.

James Tovey, the younger, remained and became the Leader of the bereaved society. Until this time Mr. Tovey was distinguished for his beautiful singing and his able leadership of the choir and orchestra. As class leader, local preacher and society steward he became their spiritual leader. Prayer meetings and class meetings were well attended and a work of revival continued for several years. In course of time the opposition of earlier days was removed. A family of devout Christians lived at the Priory, and took a generous and tolerant interest in the village life. Mr. Tovey and his fellow Methodists held prayer meetings in the Priory drawing-room. The Vicar of this period valued and respected their Christlike sincerity; he was known to say to people who were "under conviction": "I advise you to go to the Methodist Class Meetings." One of the stories James told against himself has been preserved by Mr. Fred Mitchener:—"one Saturday while I walked near the village I saw some of my boys bird-nesting, and I made up my mind to give them a talk about it at class on Sunday. The boys paid so much attention that I was rather surprised, especially when a nephew of mine asked me if I would answer some questions. Of course I agreed, feeling rather pleased. 'Do you mind telling us what you had for breakfast this morning, Uncle?' I said, 'I had a rasher of bacon and an egg.' My nephew at once asked, 'And where did you get the egg? Bird-nesting?'"

As the years passed by Mr. Tovey was led to move to Salisbury. In the Church Street Circuit he continued to exercise his gifts as local preacher and class leader with great acceptance; but he retained his interest in his native place, and often returned there. In association with the Rev. Thomas Smith he preached the fortieth anniversary sermon. Two years later, in 1888, after three days' illness, he passed peacefully away.

James A. Tovey, his nephew, son of William Tovey, took his place. For many years he filled with distinction the offices of Choir Master, Organist, and Sunday School Superintendent. It is not too much to say that he spent the whole of his life in consecrated and devoted service to the work of his Master in that little church. When he was quite young his friends recognised his outstanding ability and devotion, and presented him with Dean Farrar's "Lives of Christ and St. Paul" in two

beautifully bound volumes. They were inscribed:—"Presented to James A. Tovey by the Wherwell Wesleyan friends and others as a token of esteem and regard for his zeal and ability as Choir Leader and for years of faithful service at the Wherwell Wesleyan Sunday School. 23rd April, 1886."

There was now a fine team of men and women to maintain the Methodist witness. Some of their names are preserved in the second memoranda of Trustees appointed in March, 1887 :

Thomas Hobbs (the elder), Hurstbourne Priors, Clerk of Works
William Thos. Hobbs (the younger), Hurstbourne Priors,
Carpenter

Josiah Broundon, Andover, Builder

Wm. Arthur Gillingham, Andover, Grocer's Assistant

Arthur Lambourne, Andover, Clerk

Charles Frank Jones, Whitchurch, Jeweller

John Thos. Rodaway, Wherwell, Relieving Officer

Fredk. William Turley, Wherwell, Gardener

Jas. Arthur Tovey, Wherwell, Cordwainer

Jas. Reynolds, Longparish, Gardener

William Tovey, Longparish, Cordwainer

One of the first acts of the new Trustees was to renovate the chapel. The cost seemed likely to be considerable, and subscriptions were invited. One subscriber was invited to help. "Yes," he said, "I will. I will give you ten shillings to pull down the gallery." It was pulled down, but chiefly because he shared the opinion of others.

John T. Rodaway was another outstanding personality. He became Sunday School Superintendent in 1889 and gave it 25 years service. At that time the scholars numbered between fifty and sixty. The teachers were :

First Class Boys, Mr. J. Rodaway ; First Class Girls, Mr. Jas. Tovey ; Second Class Boys, Mr. C. J. Tibble ; Second Class Girls, Mrs. Batt.

Miss Fanny Rodaway and Miss Mabel Spratt (now Mrs. Mitchener) looked after the smaller children. Mrs. Batt's memory is held in affectionate remembrance because of her great kindness and her pleasant face. John Rodaway was also a

most faithful local preacher. Not even the worst weather kept him from his appointments. Often in the winter he walked eight miles to Wallop over the Downs in driving rain or snow. He was Society Steward, too, and some of the happiest Quarterly Meetings were held at Wherwell, where he and Mrs. Rodaway dispensed hospitality in their home. At the June Meeting it was their pleasure to regale their guests with strawberries from the garden. Mr. Rodaway's influence over the lads in his school class was unique; lad after lad followed his example and became worthy and devoted local preachers. He resigned from the Sunday School in February, 1904. Mr. J. A. Tovey and Mr. H. Young were appointed Joint Superintendents in his place, and continued in office until their last years. They were followed by others, including Mr. A. G. Prangley.

The Sunday School Anniversary was the great occasion of the year for the children. Every boy had a new suit and every girl wore a new frock for the occasion. Those village fathers and mothers must sometimes have provided the new clothes at considerable self-sacrifice. Perhaps without the stimulus of the festival they might not have made the effort, but they would be rewarded by the better appearance and greater comfort of their children. There was usually a special preacher for the day. Both teachers and scholars took a particular interest in the collection for on the amount given depended the summer treat. If the funds permitted the school went to Bournemouth, Portsmouth and Boscombe. In 1904 it was decided to join Longparish School and go to Drayton or Forton Downs.

In the year 1896 or '97 the Anniversary suffered the rare misfortune of a wet Sunday. The preacher from Tytherley did not come. He set out from home to cycle, but, becoming drenched by the heavy rain, returned home. The teachers managed the Morning Service, and in the afternoon Mr. Harry Willshire borrowed Mr. Spratt's cycle, rode into Andover, and prevailed on Alderman W. C. McLoughlin to take the evening service. He preached from the words "I beg your pardon, I am very sorry." The Alderman contrasted the politeness we show to friends with the flippancy that mars our relations with our Lord Jesus Christ. For the cyclist that sermon proved to be arresting and beyond his power to forget.

George Lawrence was another man of grace and power. He was received as a preacher on trial at Overton, September 29, 1873. An unusual condition was attached to his acceptance. The question was asked "Is any to come on trial?" to which the answer was given, "Brother Lawrence, of Wherwell, with the understanding that he wears spectacles." Though totally blind, Brother Lawrence tramped the Circuit unaided. He was always well prepared, and if the preacher failed could take the service without notice. One bitterly cold morning the preacher did not arrive. Mr. Lawrence sat in front and waited until five minutes past eleven, and then said "Well, friends, the preacher hasn't come. I suppose we had better make a start, but would someone kindly close the door, for there is six foot of warmth going out and six foot of cold coming in." He had never seen the door, but he knew its height. His knowledge of the Scriptures and of the Methodist Hymn-book was wide and accurate. He rarely made a mistake with number or verse. One thoughtless preacher said he was going to read the 154th Psalm for the lesson. "Oh, no, you won't," whispered George. Rarely did he use in public the Braille Bible which he studied at home. A friend gave him a clock, which he carried in his pocket and read the time on its face with his fingers. A prayer meeting was usually held after the evening service. When the preacher finished and the congregation was likely to leave, George was apt to stand up and say "There is no need to go yet, friends, the time is yet young, it is only ten minutes past seven." The uninitiated wondered how the blind man knew the time so well.

The Chapel Anniversary was a very popular festival. The public meeting in the week was always well supported, and a Coffee Supper followed. At these celebrations Mr. Albert Spratt was always a generous and willing helper. On one occasion as he sat with his family beneath the gallery he announced that he would gladly pay for a Coffee Supper for everyone upstairs. When counted they numbered 47, but Mr. Spratt merely remarked "Really, well I should not have sat so comfortably here if I had known the weight above me."

Successful Jubilee Services were held in 1896. Mr. T. W. Spratt, then a local preacher of four years' standing, was one of the speakers. He is the son of Mr. Albert Spratt, and Mrs. Spratt is the daughter of Mr. Alfred Tovey. Since then Mr.

Spratt has served the Circuit and his Church in almost every office, and his name now is first on the Plan. We trust he will enjoy the rare distinction of speaking at the Centenary Services as well as the Jubilee. In this case he will follow his great-uncle, the Rev. Thomas Smith, who assisted at the Opening Services one hundred years ago. His sister, Mrs. Mitchener, serves the Society as Steward, and her husband, Mr. F. Mitchener, bears one of the honoured names which appeared on the roll in 1828. Mrs. Gertrude Trodd maintains the great Tovey tradition at the organ, and Mr. A. G. Prangle is the Chapel Steward. Mr. C. J. Tibble and Mr. H. Willshire formerly of Wherwell, continue to serve the Circuit Plan, and the memory of this village society is treasured lovingly in distant places.

This Temple of His Grace stands today where the fathers built it in the main street of this lovely village. Once again it calls for the loving generosity and devotion of its children. The roof should be renewed, the structure needs an overhaul and renovation. To this end we ask our friends to give £1 for every year of its history. Our members are few, not more than there were in 1816, but we are not discouraged. What prophetic eye perceived in 1816 or 1846 the grand harvest of the hundred years so gloriously mixed with devotion, persecution and success. We dare believe that what God has done once He can do again if we are faithful. In His name we go forward into the future, believing that the best is yet to be.

THE CENTENARY will be celebrated on Wednesday, April 30. At 3.30 p.m., Divine Service of Thanksgiving and Dedication, Preacher, the Rev. Iwonwy Morgan, M.A., of Poplar. Public Tea at 5 p.m. in the Village Hall. Re-union Rally at 6.30. Chairman, Mr. T. W. Spratt. Lecture by Dr. I. Morgan, M.A. "What's the Use?"

Greetings from Members and Friends. A Centenarial Collection for the Renovation Fund

HOLMES & SONS.
PRINTERS AND OVER.