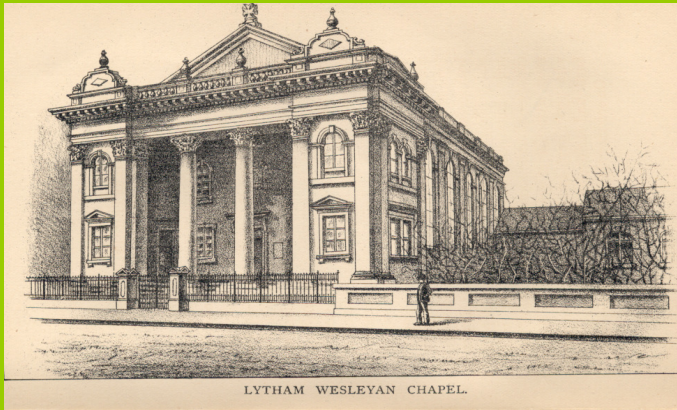
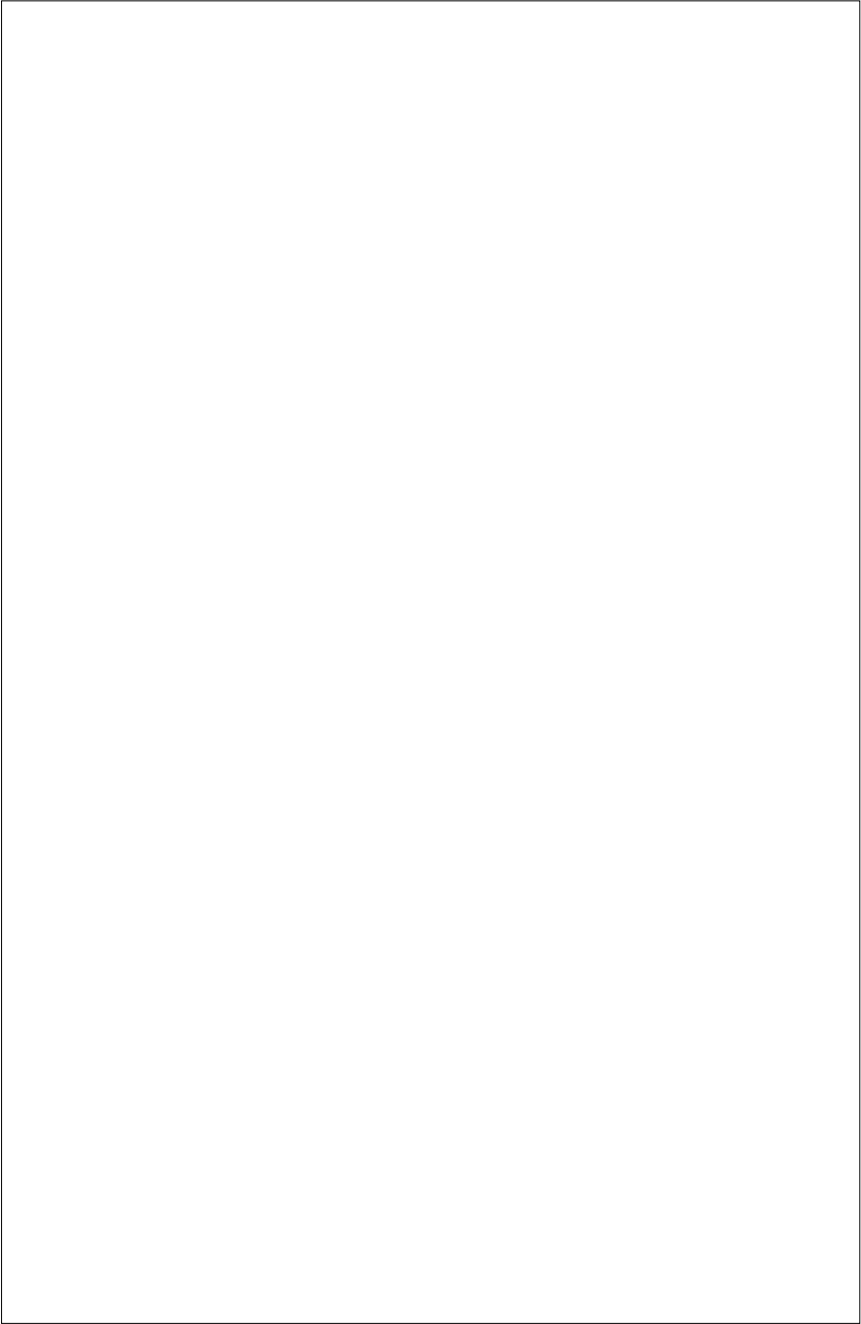


THE
BEGINNING
AND EARLY
DEVELOPMENT OF
LYTHAM
METHODISM



LYTHAM WESLEYAN CHAPEL.

Compiled and written by Rev. Eric W. Dykes
May 2003



Preface.

In this tercentenary year of the celebration of the birth of John Wesley Methodists throughout the world will be celebrating in all kinds of ways. Here at Lytham Methodist Church we are presenting a Flower Festival combined with an exhibition on the Life of John Wesley.

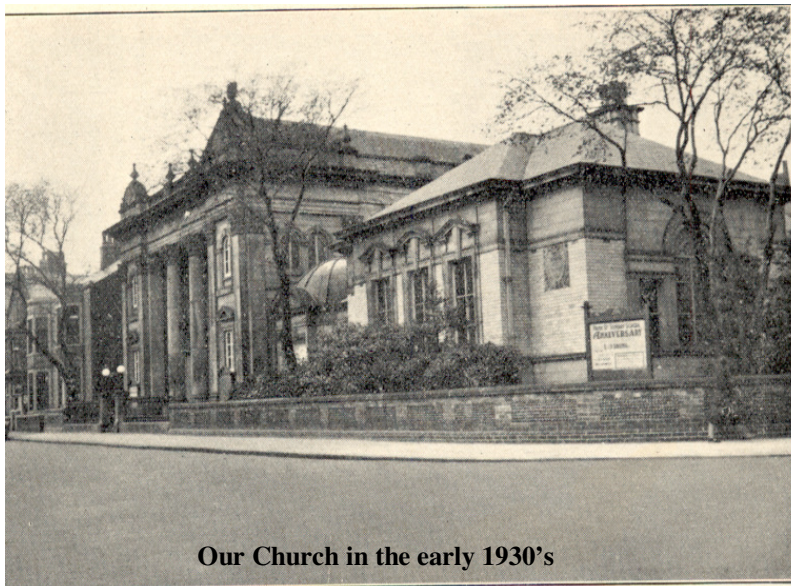
This little booklet is part of the contribution to that celebration. In no way does it attempt to be original. This is not by any means a complete history of Methodism in Lytham. The aim is to offer a simple account of the story of how Methodism started and grew in its early years. Note also, that no attempt is made to write of the development of Methodism in Fairhaven and St. Annes.

From time to time short accounts of our story have been produced and material has been printed in other works. I thought it would be useful to bring some of these together in the hope that it will be helpful to those who cannot gain access to what are often out of print or private publications. The primary sources, minute books etc. have not always been drawn upon, but in spite of that I trust that there has been no repetition of mistakes and misrepresentations that are always a danger when attempting to write a potted history in this way.

At the end I have printed a short bibliography for further reading and reference.

We are happy at Lytham to celebrate this special occasion and we trust that our continued existence as a Methodist Church in these parts is a worthy tribute and thanksgiving for all that we inherited from our father in God John Wesley.

Eric Dykes,
Lytham, May 2003
May 2003



The Church Banner

Introduction and Early Days

This short history of Lytham Methodist Church is written to coincide with the Tercentenary of the birth of John Wesley on June 17th 1703. He was a remarkable cleric who made a tremendous impact upon his own age. There is no intention here to rehearse the story of his fascinating life, this has been done over and over again and modern studies throw fresh light upon the exploits of our Father in God.

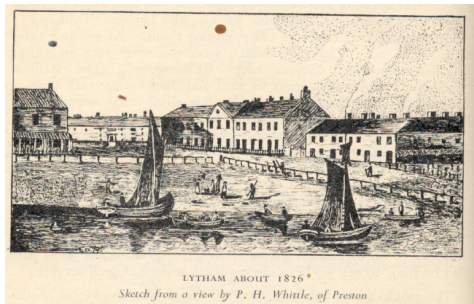
John Wesley was born in the Rectory at Epworth, Lincolnshire to the Rev Samuel and Susanna Wesley and was their second surviving son, his younger brother Charles was the great hymn writer and poet of the Methodist revival. It is important to remember that that this was part of a larger picture of movements for the renewal of the Church going on all over the place. Nevertheless no one was better known in his own day than John Wesley. It is impossible here to even summarise his achievements in our own country and his legacy to world Christendom. There were so many facets to his life and to mention them briefly does him great disservice. I draw your attention to some of them: as a preacher who travelled thousands of miles on horseback and in the chaise, a remarkable organiser of those who responded to his preaching, as a man with a social concern, as a clergyman devoted to his beloved Church of England, nevertheless exercising the Catholic Spirit in all his relationships, as a person of deep and



varied spirituality, as writer of more than 500 titles, as a disciplined Christian who kept a diary account of every hour of his life from his teen-age days and recorded in his famous Journal the major events of the long years he lived and travelled, as one persecuted and mocked for his enthusiasm but above all as one whose chief delight was to spread 'scriptural Christianity' throughout the land.... and much, much more. When he died in 1791 Methodism had spread throughout our country and far beyond, especially in the Americas. Our story in Lytham is part of that on-going story.

Methodism comes to Lytham. It is easy to understand why Wesley in spite of his extensive peripatetic ministry never came to Lytham. In the long period of his life this part of The Fylde was a remote rural area dominated by the Roman Catholic Cliftons who were efficient and kindly landowners. Wesley visited Preston, he had a dear and sympathetic friend in the incumbent of Chipping parish Church, the Rev John Milner, who defended him against the mob. He stayed at Brock House, near Garstang but never ventured further west than what is now the A6.

It becomes increasingly difficult to imagine what Lytham was like 250 years ago. Our thriving, busy and well-populated community bears little resemblance to the Lytham of those days. At the end of the 18th Century



Reproduced from 'Lytham' by Ed. Ashton

Lytham was beginning to develop, shops were opened in one street and private houses were being built to add to the fishermen's cottages. The population in 1801 was 920. In the next twenty years it rose to 1292. By 1830 Lytham township had a population almost

double that of Blackpool. In 1861, well after the Methodists had established their first chapel, there were 3194 inhabitants.

Captain Latham's History of Lytham published in 1799 tells how "Bathers of the working classes literally came in shoals during the spring tides from some of the populous districts of the country, when males and females were seen lining a considerable extent of the shore in promiscuous groups and not embarrassing themselves about appearances." It cost 3/6d per DIEM to stay at the Ship Inn !!

In 1822 a correspondent to the "Babbler" writes that "during the last four years new cottages and elegant villas had considerably increased, and that the houses on the beach formed a '*continued line of genteel erections*'. At the old market place a star and cross were surrounded by 'fish stones' evidence of the main occupation of the few locals.

This early picture was confirmed by the researches of Ed. Ashton who published his History of Lytham in 1946. He writes:

"In the closing years of the 18th century, many Lancashire people had taken to visiting the seaside for a holiday, and especially for the purpose of sea bathing. Lytham then had a charm of its own; it was almost untouched by civilisation, the beach was natural, and the sands clean and golden. The inland was thickly and beautifully wooded, some of the trees, as they are today, being magnificent. It was out of the way as it had always been, quiet and difficult to get to. Nevertheless the visitors came on horse- back, or by cart, and on foot, and a demand was developed, by those bent on a few days' change, for accommodation. The few inhabitants who were well enough situated to provide this, made easy money, and the hotel business was born"

As more and more visitors came so there were those who wished to live in what was then becoming a fashionable place. In the early years of the 1800's Lytham grew from a small fishing village into a small but thriving township. The many coaches bringing visitors became an almost daily spectacle for the locals. In Mr. Ashton's book he quotes from the "Port News", how in 1820 there were no cov-

ered vehicles owned in Lytham, and on wet Sundays the two bathing machines were used to convey ladies to St. Cuthbert's Churchand later in 1827 among the things much needed in Lytham were ..."bath carriages to convey folks to Church in wet weather."

Anglicanism and Nonconformity The mention of St. Cuthbert's helps us to remember that the Christian Church had been well established in this small community for many years. In the early part of the 12th century the ancient settlement of 'Lidun' (meaning an estuary) was in the possession of Count Roger of Poitou, a royal courtier, and he bestowed it upon the Benedictine Monastery of Durham for the foundation of a priory "as a pure and perpetual offering to God" and "to the honour of Saint Mary and Saint Cuthbert". As is well known there are remains, at Lytham Hall, of the priory that was established here by Durham with two monks, pages and a manager. The manor eventually came into the

hands of the Cliftons, a staunch Roman Catholic family.



Saint Cuthberts, Lytham, Lancashire

Amongst the small fisherman's cottages, many perhaps built of mud and thatch the Church and Lytham Hall would stand out.

The first St. Cuthbert's Church was erected probably before 1200. It was so named because of a long tradition that Lytham was thought to be one of the many 'resting places' as the monks carried the body of the saint from place to place on its way to a final burial place.. There may have been a replacement in the reign of Henry VIII and that building was demolished and the third church built in 1770 and in turn that was replaced in 1834. The Parish of St. John was created in the late 1840's to accommodate the increasing population of the town. So by the time the early Meth-

odists explored the possibility of forming a Society here, the Church of England was well established.

The Roman Catholic community worshipped for many years in the Chapel of Lytham Hall and then St. Peter's was built in 1839 and the Presbytery established beside the Church in 1850. Like the rest of the Fylde the Roman Catholic Church was strong and influential. Even the Church of England required the sanction of the Roman Catholic squire to establish new buildings.

A few years after Methodism had taken root the Congregationalists showed interest in building a chapel. Money was set aside by the Preston District for the evangelisation of Lytham, but there was not much encouragement until a Congregational Chapel was built in 1862 on land leased by Mr. Clifton, but it was not until 1868 that they had their first Minister and Pastorate. So all this shows the strength of 'religious' activity, but not without difficulty, in the period 1840 to 1870. Into that situation we must now record how Methodism came into this growing community.

John Wesley in Lancashire and the Early Methodists in Lytham

John Wesley made his last visit to Preston in 1790. However previous to that it had been outside the major influence of the Methodists. It is well claimed that the first person in Preston to become a Methodist was Martha Thompson (1731-1820). In 1750 she had made the treacherous journey to London to become a domestic servant. She came under the spell of John Wesley's preaching at Moorfields and found new life in Christ. Her constant singing of Isaac Watts' words 'And will this sovereign King of Glory condescend?' caused her master and doctors to believe that she was suffering from religious mania. She was committed to Bedlam where she wrote to John Wesley. He sent doctors to investigate; she was discharged and cared for at The Foundery, Wesley's headquarters in London. Later she accompanied him on his journey

north and was instrumental in forming the first class meeting in Preston about 1759.

The early Methodists in Preston were under the care of the Colne Circuit and it was not until 1787 that the Back Lane Chapel was built. On the occasion of Wesley's visit in 1790, Moses Holden, born in Bolton but now resident in Preston, was amongst the large company gathered to hear the aged Evangelist. He was a well-known astronomer but more so he became a true preacher of the Gospel. He fell in with another young man in the Preston Society, Roger Crane, and along with Michael Emmett a converted inn-keeper, and William Bramwell a native of Elswick, they became known as the Apostles of Fylde Methodism. *(Their story is told in a fine book with the title "The Apostles of Fylde Methodism" by John Taylor pub. in 1885 and long out of print. The book also has a lengthy chapter on Dorothy Hincksman.)*

Moses Holden, described as a man of short stature and broad-set physique, of strong, dominating character, is the key to the founding of Methodism in Lytham. He was encouraged by the Superintendent of the Preston Circuit, The Rev. Thomas Jackson, to use his exceptional gifts in the evangelisation of the Fylde. In 1811 he set off from Preston went to Poulton, where a small Society of 10 members had been established and during the next six months in turn visited Pilling, Preesall, Rawcliffe, Thornton, St. Michael's, Marton, Lytham, Freckleton and Kirkham.

At Lytham he was delighted to know that a small group of people had been meeting in the home of a fisherman James Mercer in his Bath Street low thatched fisherman's cottage. Moses Holden kept a careful diary and it is best to relate those early days from what he recorded.

"When I got to Lytham, I found a house licensed for preaching. I understood a Mr. Lyon had got it licensed, and

preached in it a long time before, but it had been given up. However I opened it again, and had good congregations, but a deal of persecution. The clergyman of the parish came to the house and kicked up a great stir, demanding the license. They showed it to him, but he puffed at it, and talked of stopping the services. Mercer's daughter told him he could not stop them, for the license would stand good for that house as long as there was one stone upon another. Then he went to Squire Clifton and asked him to put a stop to this Methodism, and get Holden sent out of Lytham. But Mr. Clifton said '*I shall do no such thing. Let them alone or I may put Holden into your place.*' He troubled us no more after that."

Records show that the petition for the registration of his meeting house described it as a "House situate in the south side of Lytham and in the possession of Mr. James Mercer, Fisherman's Row" The petitioners were James Mercer, John Marcer, William Edmondson, Thomas Marcer, Thomas Gaulter and James Lyons. James Lyons who had persuaded James Mercer to open his cottage for meetings was a preacher in the Blackburn Circuit. The Circuit accounts for 1793 show that the small Lytham Society made a contribution but this also includes a contribution from the Hoole Methodists and the total involved was on 5/s/6d! Norman Cunliffe gives more details in his "Beckoning of the West"

The rise of early Methodism contains many stories of small groups of people meeting in homes, sometimes just within a family. John Maden, a stone-mason from Rossendale, when times were hard eked out a living by clock-mending. He was able to take on a small farm called Top-o th'-Bank nr. Stacksteads. His house became 'the centre of Methodist operations in the valley'. He carved a pulpit in the biggest room, and there the little congregation gathered regularly to worship God.

In spite of the enthusiasm of the Mercer's, Moses Holden found that " he could not prevail upon the people of Lytham to join the Society. They received me kindly and heard me gladly, but that was

all" It was obvious that it required a great deal of courage to stand against the prejudice of the local Christian leader. We to-day owe much to the devotion, passion and fervent belief of James Mercer. It is good that we have a personal tribute to him in the Memoirs of Thomas Crouch Hincksman, who was eventually to be so instrumental in the firm establishment of Methodism in the town and the building of its Chapels.

In 1885, the then Wesleyan Minister in Lytham, Rev. William Kirkham, published a book "*A Memoir of Thomas Crouch Hincksman*". This was based on the diaries and journals that Mr. Hincksman had kept, beside letters etc. preserved by the family. It also used "*A History of Lytham Methodism*" written by Mr. Hincksman. In this is included these words about James Mercer followed by a detailed account of how things developed in those early years. Since the work has long been out of print, the present author thought it would be interesting to have the record as contained in Mr. Taylor's book.

"James Mercer, was of the same occupation as St. Peter, a fisherman. Though poor, he was evidently a man of fervent piety, an earnest and constant reader of the Scriptures, and, considering his position in life, a man of more than ordinary intelligence. By the kindness of his great grandchildren, some of whom still worship with the Wesleyans (this was written in 1875 and presented to a Society tea-meeting in the present Church), the writer has become possessed of a small publication, entitled, *The Fisherman's Hymns*, consisting of a collection of sacred songs, twenty-four in number, on Gospel themes, and written by this very James Mercer. Two or three sentences from the 'Address to the Reader' prefixed to these hymns may be cited: "The hardships and difficulties which I have experienced in a low occupation and laborious life for the support of my family, called me to the frequent reading of the Holy Scriptures; from this fountain of true comfort under every calamity, my scanty meals and hard lodgings became as delicious feasts and bed of down. The following verses were composed in

my younger years when under frequent bodily infirmities, to strengthen my hope and raise my aspirations after that blessed state, where the persevering Christian and patient sufferer will be rewarded."

"The Unlearned Author", as he styles himself, further states that the publication of the hymns was owing to his repeating a number of verses from memory on one occasion in a company of friends, who expressed a desire to see them in print, and offered to defray the cost of passing them through the press.

Mercer was originally a member of the Church of England; but when later on in life he became a Methodist, the Gospel rhymes which had often doubtless been the solace of his spirit when plying his lonely task on the sea, were--- according to family tradition -- sometimes sung at the religious gatherings in the fisherman's cottage. The subjoined hymn, if not remarkable as poetry, may be taken as a fair specimen of the evangelical character of these compositions:

For Saving Grace

'Do Thou, O Lord, in me perfect,
The work Thou hast begun,
And let Thy saving grace be shewn,
And merits of Thy Son.

Disperse, O Lord, this misty cloud,
Which hinders me of sight;
And let me feel Thy saving grace,
Thou blessed God of might.

To Thee alone I make my moan,
Involved in deep distress;
Thou art the only help I have,
I ever will confess.

My God, if Thou becloud Thy face,
 Darkness besets me round,
 But by one gracious smile, I soon
 In light Divine abound.

Let me with Thomas still cry out,
 My Lord and God most just;
 For in Thee and Thy bleeding wounds,
 O Lord, is all my trust.'

There are echoes here of early Wesleyan emphases and the images and phrases quite biblical. The whole impression that Mr Hincksman gives of James Mercer is that of a devout and fervent believer who wished to share his undoubted faith with his fellow townsmen.

The First Methodist Society and Chapel in Lytham

This memoir also links the name of William Wignall of Freckleton with the Mercers. Old Mrs Mercer was his father's aunt and as a young boy he recalls going with his father to the Mercer's and distinctly recalls hearing his father pray with great fervency that The Lord ' would send the Gospel into Lytham'. This recollection was sometime after Moses Holden's visit and seems to prove that at that time there were no regular preaching services in Lytham. Methodism struggled to take root in spite of occasional visits by preachers from Preston. Sometimes services were held on the beach and some contend on the meadow where our Church at Park Street now stands, also at one time in a painter's shop. On the whole those who attended were poor and the local prejudices hindered any progress. It was the involvement of Thomas Crouch Hincksman that finally brought about a major development. We depend on his own account in the book mentioned above, generally speaking it is more informative than the minutes of those early days.

The connection with Preston Methodism continued intermittently over a period of years. The growing popularity of Lytham as a place of retreat and relaxation brought a local preacher from Manchester making frequent visits with his family to the coast. He became convinced that Methodism ought to have an established base in 'this agreeable watering-place.' Mr. Hincksman's account continues:

"Under that impression, he (i.e. The Manchester local preacher) represented the case to the Preston Circuit, accompanied with the promise of a subscription of £100, if a chapel were built, and the assurance that he would see it out of debt, through his influence with numerous friends in Manchester and elsewhere. Another person residing in Lytham urgently pressed the erection of a chapel, himself engaging to collect £30 or £40."

In his extensive writings on Methodism, the Rev. John Munsey Turner, draws attention to the impact upon the nation of wealthy businessmen who were also devoted Christians. "Wesley may have feared for industrialists' souls, but the businessmen who more than 'stood on their own feet, cannot be ignored. Historians are now becoming more perceptive about their contribution to British life. Men like Jesse Boot (1850-1931), Thomas R. Ferens (1847-1930), The Mackintoshes of Halifax (Quality Street indeed), Sir William Hartley (1845-1922), 'the jam maker', Joseph Rank (1854-1943), make a saga of their own. Their concern for Methodist building, and concern for secular and religious education and human need, is part of a Methodist culture, even if rather different from Wesley's pre-capitalist economic ethics" [Quote from "John Wesley by. John M Turner, pub. Epworth 2002] . Indeed we might add the names of Hincksman and Hollas to such an illustrious list !!

Encouraged by these offers the Preston Circuit applied for a piece of land and such was granted by Mr. Clifton, though a severe letter of objection was received by the incumbent at St. Cuthbert's. We have a facsimile of this letter in the church safe. The chapel was to cost £600 (those were the days!!) and the site chosen was that of James Mercer's cottage in Bath Street. But there was a setback, the Circuit having decided on the project were dismayed when the Manchester friend became insolvent and they received



Thomas and Dorothy Hincksman

nothing from him nor any of his friends. Even the local person only succeeded in raising a few pounds and then disappeared. Mr. Hincksman had been appointed as secretary of the committee to make arrangements for the building of the chapel. Other members of the committee were J. Furness, George Penny, William Smith, R Lowe, J. Archer, J. Penny, and J. Parkinson. After the set-back they launched an appeal so that the project could go forward. Mr. Smith begged over £60 and by the 5th March 1846, £200 had been raised. There is little doubt that Thomas C Hincksman was amongst the donors.

He became the first Chapel steward as the foundation stone was laid in Bath Street, the exact date is unknown. The building was completed the following year and opened by the then Chairman of the Liverpool District, Rev. Dr. Robert Newton in the spring of 1847. The Chapel seated 200, and it was agreed that pew lettings should be offered for 1s. /6d. per sitting per quarter. Incidentally pew lettings were a feature of the early chapels. The author has seen many 'pew-letting plans' and he recalls in his own chapel in Yorkshire some pews being allocated with the word "Free" on them!. The introduction of the envelope scheme was meant to eliminate the system of pew rents.

By this time the debt was reduced to £200. Even so there was a lament from Mr. Hincksman, of the fact that even by this time there was no established Society, neither a local leader nor member, a building with none to care for it. Preachers came from Preston and were discouraged by the small congregations. But the first sign of development came when Dr. Newton suggested that a retired Minister might be encouraged to have oversight of the chapel. The Rev Charles Naylor was appointed in such a capacity. His health was not good but he managed to form a small Class and, as mentioned, there was no local leader and one travelled from Preston. Sometimes when there was no preacher available a sermon had to be read from the pews to the small numbers that gathered.

Norman Cunliffe's researches showed that in June 1847 a Class Book recorded "five members and no payments went to the Preston Circuit". Mr. Taylor had to retire again as his health deteriorated.

In the early autumn of 1847, seven members were recorded, amongst them Mrs Hincksman. She had moved to Lytham

earlier in the year because of her failing health, at that time Mr. Hincksman became the Class Leader. This was a turning point for he was the main inspiration as the Society began to grow, congregations increased as new people taking up residence in Lytham began to attend the services. When he decided to remove from Preston to Lytham he was obviously the leader and 'manager' of the whole Society. Preachers were entertained in his home, when a preacher could not be appointed he it was who read the sermon from the pew. By 1849 the trustees resolved to build a schoolroom and T. C. Hincksman gave a guarantee that the entire cost £65- £75 should be defrayed by the following year. A prominent Preston Methodist, Mr. William Smith, who had taken a lively interest in the progress



The first Wesleyan Chapel in Bath Street



of the work at Lytham described T.C. Hincksman as 'the king'. It is little wonder that in the local community the Bath Street Wesleyan Chapel became known as 'Hincksman's Chapel' as the Heritage Plaque on the building, now a solicitor's office, shows.

The Education of Children and a Sunday School

caused controversy The membership of the Society was slow to grow. In June 1848 there were 14 members, in June 1850 18 members and later on that year a second class was formed. But in the meantime prior to the building of the schoolroom, another incident revealed the hostility that Mr. Hincksman, and the few loyal Methodists, had to face. A room had been hired on Sunday afternoons for the purposes of a Sunday school in what was known as 'Crookall's Room' (a building that became the engine room of the baths). Almost as soon as the Sunday school began to function an objection was raised and Mr. Fair, the agent for the squire, ordered the suspension of all teaching. In Mr. Hincksman's memoir there is a full account of the letter he sent in response to this ruling and the reply from the agent's son. It is rather lengthy to print in full and Norman Cunliffe, in the article mentioned above, relates the correspondence fully.

The gist of the incident appears to be that the objection to the Sunday school was on the grounds that it would take children away from the Church school, and that Mr. Crookall, owner of the room, and a Mr Butcher, a late schoolmaster of the Church School, were involved in the Wesleyan school. Mr Hincksman indicated that some 20 children attended and were taught by him and a 'few plain persons... in manner conceived to be inoffensive'. The two people mentioned had not been involved. His letter continued "Permit me to enquire whether, under these circumstances, you think Mr. Clifton will consider it his duty to interfere, and if so, I shall feel particularly obliged by your informing me in what way a little good may be done amongst the poor children without giving offence in

quarters where I should be unwilling to render myself, as a resident in Lytham, an object of dislike, or to bring upon others the just disapprobation of their superiors. May I ask the favour of your communicating with Mr. Clifton on the subject, and giving such information as you think necessary....."

The reply came that the representation that Mr Thomas Butcher was employed to teach at the Wesleyan Sunday-school has been proved to be incorrect. The hope was expressed that persons making such representations should confine themselves to the facts. Apologies were expressed and having seen the reply it was hoped that Mr. Crookall would not prevent children being assembled in his room, 'whose instruction you have so laudably undertaken.' So the Sunday school continued until their own building was opened.

Thomas Crouch and Dorothy Hincksman The story of Mrs Dorothy Hincksman has been well rehearsed. She was born into an Anglican family (Hobson) at Cobridge, Staffs in 1802. She found comfort and help amongst Methodists when her mother died, though her father objected strongly, and it resulted in Dorothy leaving home. Later they were reconciled. She married a young missionary, Thomas Jones (c.1802 -26) and in 1825 they arrived in Antigua, where she established a school. In February 1826, returning with her husband from a District Meeting on St. Kitts, she was the sole survivor of five missionaries and their families when the mail boat sank in a storm. Returning to England after she convalesced she married Thomas Crouch Hincksman in 1832. The moving story of her son returning, many years later, relates how in Antigua he found the dress that she had worn at the time of her escape. It had been lovingly cared for by the local people. He brought it back to Lytham, and it was cut up in pieces to make missionary collecting bags for the Sunday-school children. This was a tradition carried on until quite recently, though of course the bags had been replaced many times.

The devoted couple continued to be the inspiration of the growth of the Methodist Society. They overcame disappointment that not more responded to the Gospel, nevertheless the work developed. Personal sorrow came to them. In 1852 their youngest daughter died at the age of sixteen. Four years later in 1856, their youngest son died suddenly at the age of twenty-two. Added to this was Dorothy's fight against years of ill-health, the result of the ordeal she went through as a young missionary years ago. She died in 1859. Writing later, T. C. Hincksman expressed his feelings "The loss of two greatly-loved children in the bloom of youth, and of their most excellent mother, were sore trials of my faith; but help was given in the day of trouble, and I have felt quite satisfied that my Father does all things well, and that I shall understand it better by and by!".

The New Wesley Chapel in Park Street Signs that the Society at Bath Street had emerged from its faltering beginnings came in 1867, when it was suggested by a Mr. Eden that a much larger chapel was needed, not to mention, possibly, the felt need to move to a more fashionable and popular area. Colonel Clifton agreed to a site in Park Street and the foundation stone of the present building was laid on the 12th September 1867. The building was to have all the features of the neo classical

The Watering Places Fund

In response to the growing popularity of annual holidays among middle-class Victorian families, the Wesleyan Conference of 1862 accepted an offer from the Rev. W. Morley Punshon to raise £10,000 towards the building or improvement of chapels in seaside and inland resorts. Mr. Punshon raised the money by a round of preaching and lecturing tours. The target was reached by 1867. Lytham Wesleyan Chapel was one that benefited by grants from this fund.

style. Its impressive external columns, the fine proportions of the interior with a dome and chancel area, had seating for 360 people and a further 200 in the gallery. A schoolroom was attached and this was later extended. A local paper described it as being in the

Italian style, with Corinthian columns and a Longridge stone-faced front measuring 64' x 46', and 30' high. The architect was T. Bird and Sons of Manchester. It was opened on Wednesday September 23rd, 1868, by the Rev. John Bedford.

The final cost was £4100. The prominent benefactors were Mr. Hincksman along with Mr. James Eden of Fairlawn, Lytham, described as 'wealthy and a churchman', he was befriended when ill and was moved by the preaching of the Rev. Samuel Broadbent. Also Mr. Thomas Threlfall, brother of the 'Martyr Missionary' William Threlfall, who came from Hollowforth Hall, Woodplumpton and others were liberal in their support. About the same time a Manse was purchased at No. 24 East Beach and the said gentlemen again contributing handsomely to the cost.

Some two years before the opening of the new Chapel Lytham moved from the Preston Circuit into the Blackpool Circuit. In 1869 the Circuit was able to report that the chapel, school and manse



The Church as it was after enlargement in 1901

were free from debt. Still under the careful eye of the ageing Mr. Hincksman and devoted ministers, the work flourished. In the next decade the schoolroom was extended, an organ installed and in 1883 it was resolved that Lytham become a separate Circuit. In the meantime the Drive Church had been built and the new Circuit comprised of the two stations and one minister. At that time the membership was 114 at Lytham and 28 at St. Annes and there was a small Society meeting in Warton of 5 members. It is interesting to reflect that such a fine edifice as Lytham Wesley Chapel (as the stone over the entrance names it) seating more than 550 people could be sustained and thrive with only 114 members.

The invaluable devotion of T. C. Hincksman in those early years has never been forgotten. His son Major W. H. Hincksman, who eventually resided at Starr Hills, carried on with the same diligence, especially as Sunday School Superintendent. He was the grandfather of Dr. Dorothy Hincksman Farrar of Halifax, who at one time was Vice-President of the Wesley Deaconess Order and in 1952 became the second woman to be elected Vice-President of the Methodist Conference. The memorial plaque in the Church and the memorial windows "The Four Apostles" are evidence of the affection and gratitude with which the members, contemporary and later, held the Hincksman family. Mr. Hincksman died in 1883 and was buried in a family vault beside his wife in the Necropolis at Liverpool. A week after his death the Rev. Charles Garrett, who had known him for many years, preached a funeral Sermon at Wesley Chapel, Lytham to a crowded congregation. A work wonderfully accomplished here in Lytham and also in Preston, but that is another story.

In 1901 the church was enlarged, the apse and choir being added. The

Wesleyan Methodism and Education

In the last quarter of the 18th C. Wesleyan Methodism was very active in providing denominational education for children. This is a long story, but useful to mention in this context that there were more Methodist Day School in Lancashire than in any other part of the country. A few still survive.

opening in June of that year was performed by Alderman E. R. Lightwood. He and his brother, James Thomas (sons of a Wesleyan Minister) , had established a boarding school at Pembroke College, Lytham. James T. Lightwood, for a number of years the organist at The Drive Methodist Church was an expert on hymnody and wrote extensively on the subject, he became the first Editor of the Connexional Magazine, The Choir. He was also well known in cycling circles. He was a member of the Cyclists Touring Club (CTC) being the Chief Consul for Lancashire and a member of the National Council. Both brothers were very active in the community beyond their professional lives. James claimed to have broken a record by cycling 20,000 miles without an accident and rode 14,000 miles on his cycle to attend Church services.

There is little written evidence that a Wesleyan Day School was established at the Church, but it does seem possible in the late 1800's or early 1900's. An un-identified record shows that there was a William Croft, who possibly was a teacher at the Wesleyan School. A few years ago four ink-well stands, complete with heavy glass ink wells, with dried ink deposits in them and as used in older schools, were found in the church cellar. Also there is extant a printed booklet "Catalogue of Books.... In the Park Street Wesleyan SUNDAY SCHOOL LIBRARY" It lists in alphabetical order more than 650 books. The library was open on Sunday Afternoons from 2 pm to 3.15 pm and it contained a list of rules. Quite an enterprise in encouraging reading amongst the young folk at the church. This is all part of the continuing tradition, established by John Wesley, that by spirit, enterprise and organisation, had become a reading, studying denomination. (An article in the Winter 2011 Bulletin of the Lancashire Wesley Historical Society includes an article by John Booth throwing further light on the Wesleyan Day School)

Lytham Methodism featured in a full-page spread, with pictures, in the Methodist Recorder, October 5th 1905. The comment was

made that it was admittedly one of the finest buildings of its kind in Methodism. This was confirmed many years later when the Museum of Methodism was opened at Wesley's Chapel, London. Interior and exterior photographs of Lytham Chapel were chosen for display showing the development of Methodist buildings.

Further development and into the 20th Century

As mission inspired the beginnings of Methodism in Lytham this was not forgotten as Church life settled down in the new Church. As mentioned earlier there was a small Society at Warton. This had been established in 1884 when the Circuit Meeting approved the lease of a room at Warton at a rental of £8 per annum. The Society did not survive very long and never had more than ten members.

In 1888 a Mission Room was opened in the east end of the town in Victoria Street and eventually the Mission Church in Albert Street was opened in 1907. This was often under the care of a Deaconess and the Church served that area of the town with care and love. There are still members of the present Church who were associated with Albert Street. It was closed in the 1970's and new housing was built on the site.

In 1898 a new Manse was purchased in Seafield Road and this served well until a house nearer the Church was bought in 1922, at 7 Upper Westby Street. The present Manse at The Serpentine was acquired in 1958.

The Chancel of the Church was enlarged in 1900 and the aforementioned memorial windows were added. Soon followed the extending of the School Hall and in 1911 the courtyard between the church and the school was enclosed, creating supplementary classrooms. This became the Primary Department and was made possible by the generosity of Mrs. T. G. Batho. For many years they were known as the Batho Rooms.

Earlier potted histories comment that the wisdom of the decision to enlarge the church in 1900 became increasingly evident. Though the membership never reached the three hundred mark, the presence of boys from Pembroke College and other boarding schools swelled the numbers. It was well known that the Musgrave family were always accompanied by their eleven children. The Chancel had not enough room for the choristers in attendance.

This prompts a mention of the introduction of "The Fylde Chant Book" in 1900. It was prepared for use in the Circuit but had its origin, I believe, at Lytham. Instrumental in its production was James T. Lightwood, (together with E. Garlick and Harry Cooper) who as we have already noted, was an expert on Church music and hymnody. It contained Chants and hymns not in the Wesleyan Hymn Book. It became well known and was used and subsequently adopted in Bolton, Rotherham, Manchester and other places.

For many years the Church membership remained stable without any rapid growth. There were plenty of activities; a Wesley Guild at one time had a most ambitious programme. The Sunday school flourished and all the usual enterprises for overseas mission, the National Children's Home etc. were well supported and sustained by devoted people. There is little doubt that the Methodist people made a distinctive contribution to the local community and the imposing Church structure in an important thoroughfare was in itself a witness to the Gospel. There is no attempt here to go into details of people and events in that long period between the wars and in the post- Second World War period. The First World War affected the Church, like many others it suffered greatly from people becoming disillusioned about religion.

The Jubilee of the Church had seen a great response to the appeal to cover essential repairs to the Church to 'strengthen the building for its sacred uses for a further term'. During the Second

World War, an American Air Force base was established at Warton, and the G.I.'s poured into Lytham for off duty relaxation. The schoolroom was opened to serve this purpose. Ladies of the Church and other helpers staffed it, and it soon became a popular rendezvous for airmen of several nationalities. Many friendships were made and the marriage registers show records of G.I.'s marrying local girls. The beautiful stained glass windows, memorial gifts over a number of years, were of concern, but they escaped any damage in spite of bombs in the locality. There is little detail about the donators of the Stained Glass windows. They are of a high quality and deserve more detailed attention than has been given to them as far as the artists and benefactors are concerned. The modern window by Brian Clarke, who is now a renowned Stained Glass window artist, always prompts comment. This is but one subject of many that is raised when an attempt is made to record the history of a Church like ours.

Mr Joseph Hollas
d. 1967



The rebuilding of the organ became necessary in 1952 when the condition of the soundboards and action had so deteriorated that complete renewal had to be effected. It had been hand-blown in its early days, the organ blower receiving the handsome annual sum of 30/-s, but about the time of the Jubilee it was converted to mechanical blowing. The fan was operated by an ingenious water motor. The Water Board levied a special rate because the device consumed so much water. Hence it was supplanted by an electric blower.

Rarely was the Church full to capacity, except for special occasions. When serious structural deterioration was recognised in



The Church showing the gutted interior in 1962

1962 the decision, to proceed with a major renovation enabled the seating to be reduced. The walls and roof structures suffered drastically from dry rot. The whole of the interior was completely gutted as surviving photographs show. Only when thousands of pounds had been spent in removing the defective masonry etc. was the full extent of the deterioration appreciated. The architect suggested a complete demolition and the reconstruction of an entirely new church as the most prudent course for the trustees. The trustees were faced with a major crisis and apparently it was only by slender margin of one vote that they decided to proceed with renovation rather than demolition. The major force behind the plan to renovate was one of the members, Mr. Joseph Hollas, a great benefactor of North Lancashire Methodism, who lived at Seafield House. He was later to leave Seafield House to the Auxiliary Fund of the Methodist Church to be used to house retired Methodist Ministers.

Mr. Hollas with determination effort and generosity, as was the mark of all his work for the Church, offered to contribute almost unlimited finance to support the project. The cost was more than £25, 000, no mean sum in those days. He had already paid for the modernisation and redecoration of the Church hall at a cost of more than £10,000. This included the provision of the best stage equipment one could wish for. He promoted the use of films in the proclamation of the Gospel and drama he felt would be a fine medium of evangelism. The Hall was used whilst the Church was under re-construction and it was out of use for more than a year. When the major renewals were effected the pews were reduced in numbers and made more comfortable, hence the lovely and roomy accommodation that we have today. There are very few churches that have heating under each pew! A new ceiling concealed one of the domes above the transept of the Church. A new floor was laid after the ceiling had been completed. The importance and value of a larger welcoming foyer was recognised and it was doubled in size by bringing forward the screen to a position level with the gallery. A central aisle was created and richly carpeted in blue. Externally the gateposts were removed and the forecourt was opened up and accessibility was enhanced.

Soon after the reopening a minister, the Rev. John Watson, attending a District Synod at the Church was moved to write of his experience. It was printed in 'Mosaic' a review of worship and the arts.

"In 1964 I had an experience which for me at any rate clinched all arguments about the value of church furnishings. I went to the District Synod on a dull, rather cold spring day but found in Park Street Chapel, Lytham (a century-old building recently restored and redecorated) an atmosphere of supreme felicity. There was a sense of space and freedom. And of such warmth and light that it seemed to be full of gentle sunshine. There seemed to be a complete harmony in every part of the Chapel, the old blending with the new. When I returned home my wife asked how things had

gone and I replied, "It was like being in heaven itself". Which, as every Methodist minister will know, is a very unusual comment on a May Synod".

Well, the story of a Church, of course is far more than the story of its building. People matter. The Church is the assembled people of God charged with power in worship to enable them to fulfil the calling to evangelism and the spread of the Gospel. The main purpose of this booklet is to draw attention to how Methodism began here in Lytham and a briefer study of its subsequent development. If concentration has been on buildings, it must not in any way detract from the fine, wonderful and dedicated service of many people throughout the years. To mention names involved in more recent history is an unwise thing for it is so easy to miss people out. In every aspect of the life of the Church, its ministers, stewards, officers in every part of the organisation of the Church's life, in maintaining the property, in the training and caring for the young, in pastoral oversight, in music and whatever, you name it, Wesley Chapel, Park Street, Lytham has been wonderfully served. The lovely Banner showing the Church has been used over the years in the Annual Club Day Procession. This has always been an exciting time for the children and Sunday School workers. Over the years we have provided the Rose Queen and in this special year it is our turn again.

In recent years the attempt to make the premises more accommodating to contemporary needs has been highly successful. The extension of the communion area provides excellent facilities for more people to gather round the Communion Table and also lends the building to a more varied use. Residents and visitors are always pleasantly surprised the first time they come into the church. This is one of the most attractive Methodist Churches in the country. The Flower Festival to mark the Tercentenary of John Wesley's birth is a fitting opportunity to see our Church in its full beauty, but even more important it challenges us to the task of

spreading the Gospel in these parts and beyond. If we ask what is the legacy of John Wesley, may our Church (named Wesley Chapel) be a pointer to the answer?. The people called Methodists who faithfully gather week by week are a small but important part of that inheritance.

"Lord my time is in Thy hand, My soul to Thee convert;
 Thou canst make me understand, Though I am slow of heart;
 Thine in whom I live and move, Thine is the work, the praise is Thine;
 Thou art wisdom, power and love, And all Thou art is mine"
Charles Wesley

Works consulted and short Bibliography **for further Reading and Reference**

"Lytham" by Ed. Ashton 1946. Mather Bros. Printers Preston

"Preston Methodists: 200 Fascinating Years" by W.F. Richardson, Preston 1975.

"The Beckoning of the West" by Norman Cunliffe. Published in co-operation with the WHS North Lancashire Branch 1992.

"The Apostles of Fylde Methodism" by John Taylor, London 1885

"Memoir of Thomas Crouch Hincksman" by W. Kirkman, London 1885

The Bulletins of the WHS North Lancashire Branch 1985 to date (this is now known as the Lancashire Wesley Historical Society.

There are several histories of the Fylde and Lytham St. Annes. These give background information on the early days in Lytham.

There is an excellent series on "Exploring Methodism" published by the Epworth Press. The works of John Munsey Turner, Henry Rack and the Eight Volumes of John Wesley's Journals and Letters are invaluable. There is an ever increasing number of works on all aspects of the life of the Wesleys and the rise and development of Methodism in all its Branches. Membership of The Wesley Historical Society is open to all.



Wesley Chapel Lytham
 seen in all its 'classical splendour'
 Post cards of circa 1904-1910

