

King Street Methodist Chapel
Haslingden

One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary

1798 — 1948

King Street Methodist Church

One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary

SATURDAY, JANUARY 22nd, 1949.

4-0 p.m. RECEPTION

Host and Hostess :
Rev. and Mrs. J. GASKELL

4-30 p.m. RE-UNION TEA

Greetings from Former Ministers

6-30 p.m. ANNIVERSARY MEETING

Chairman : H. EASTWOOD, Esq.
Speaker : Rev. J. T. WILKINSON,
M.A., B.A., B.D.
(Hartley-Victoria College)
Subject : "Time and Tide—and God."

SUNDAY, JANUARY 23rd, 1949.

10-30 a.m. Rev. J. T. WILKINSON, M.A., B.A., B.D.

2-15 p.m. Rev. H. W. STEPHENSON (Minister of King Street, 1914)

6-0 p.m. Rev. J. T. WILKINSON, M.A., B.A., B.D.

King Street Methodist Church, Haslingden. 1798-1948

In order fully to understand the effect of the introduction of Methodism into Rossendale it is necessary to have some knowledge of the social and religious state of the district two hundred years ago. Dr. Whittaker says of our ancestors at that time: "Their manners and morals were probably more degraded than in any other part of the island." Bull-baiting, dog-fighting and cock-fighting were the Sunday amusements of those days. John Wesley records in his "Journal" (May 7th, 1747): "We left the mountains and came down to the fruitful valley of Rossendale. Here I preached to a large congregation of wild men; but it pleased God to hold them in chains, so that even when I had done, none of them offered any rudeness, but all went quietly away." In the following year, in August, our founder, again in Rossendale, writes of "meeting a mob savage as wild beasts, who, undeterred by the authorities, proceeded to every extremity of persecution short of murder."

Such were the people to whom William Darney, a Scotch preacher, in the year 1744 offered the Methodist

way of life at Heap Barn, on the wild moor one and a half miles from Bacup on the Todmorden road. He was assisted in his work by Paul Greenwood and the Rev. William Grimshaw, the Vicar of Haworth, near Keighley.

These men, with their first convert, John Maden, were the means of establishing the Methodist doctrine in our district, and their names deserve to be remembered with pride. They were subjected to all manner of persecution, but persevered in their work in face of great odds, and, in the end, succeeded in founding little pockets of adherents—classes in farmhouses and cottages throughout the valley of Rossendale.

The first documentary proof of Methodism in Haslingden is contained in the following entry in the registers of the Parish Church: "December 1st, 1751. Baptised—John, the son of John Taylor, of Hollingate. A Methodist." Although it is clear that Methodism had obtained a footing in the town prior to 1750, no Methodist Society is known to have existed before 1775.

Small groups of converts met at various places, notably Pitt Heads, Flaxmoss (Gregory Fold), and Sykeside. In 1775 Mr. Ralph Rishton induced one of John Wesley's travelling preachers, probably one of the two ministers of the Keighley Circuit, to preach at the Pitt Heads meeting-place, and the result was the formation of a Society there. Mr. John Stott, in his "Notices of Methodism in Haslingden, 1898," states: "This cottage (at Pitt Heads) was still standing till 1896, when it was pulled down for street improvements." And so, in 1775, was Methodism first established on an official basis in the town.

In 1786 the first Methodist Church in Haslingden was erected on the site now occupied by the Grammar School in Bury Road. It was built by Mr. John Holden, of Coldwells, himself not a Methodist at the time, at a cost of £800, and let to the Methodists with the cottage adjoining at a rent of £23 per annum, "the owner discharging all rates except the Highway Rate." Two rooms in the cottage were reserved for the use of the travelling preacher on his rounds. The travelling preacher took six weeks to complete his round of the Colne Circuit, covering on horseback over 130 miles and preaching 61 sermons. The pulpit of the preaching-place, known locally as Holden's Chapel, was entered from the cottage through a doorway in the wall. There was

no access to it from the floor of the Chapel. In this respect the Chapel followed closely the plan adopted at the New Room, Bristol, and the arrangement was the customary one in chapels built at the period. It serves to remind us of the dangers of the preaching of "Dissent" in the early days.

Unfortunately, Mr. John Holden, who had become a Methodist in 1791, died three years later. His brother, Robert, contested his Will, in which the testator had made it clear that it was his intention that the Methodist Society should continue on the same terms as during his lifetime. The Will was declared void, and the Methodists were ejected from their first premises in 1796. So ended in sorrow the first venture.

Their trouble served only to put them on their mettle. Immediately they purchased a plot of ground on which to build a meeting-place from which nobody could eject them. The present Chapel was opened for public worship in 1798, and externally it appears to-day substantially as it was originally built. Small additions have been made at the rear, and, instead of the two original entrances at the front, there is now only one, but otherwise there is no change. An old sketch of the building now hanging in the Minister's Vestry proves this to be the case. The interior, however, was

completely remodelled in 1888 at a cost of £1,500. Since that time only minor structural alteration has been made. Although the exterior is somewhat bleak and forbidding, arrangement of the seating and the siting of the rostrum make the old Chapel a delightful place in which to worship.

King Street Chapel remained the only Methodist place of worship in the town itself until 1857, when the Manchester Road premises were built. This was made necessary by the development of the Methodist movement and by migration of the inhabitants to new building areas as the town increased in population. From 1814 up to 1857 our King Street Chapel was the Circuit Chapel. In preparation for this the Trustees had, in 1810, bought a site adjoining their Chapel on which to build a house for their first Superintendent Minister, with whom the second minister, always a bachelor, resided. This house is shown in the sketch of the Chapel already referred to. The Circuit, of which King Street was the head, comprised Haslingden, Accrington, Hippings, Grane, Edenfield, Ramsbottom, and Oakenshaw. The first Quarterly Meeting was held at Haslingden on October 4th, 1814. The ministers at that time were the Rev. Joshua Farnside and the Rev. Daniel Jackson, Junr. The number of members in the newly-formed Circuit

was 384, and the Circuit income at its first Quarterly Meeting was made up as follows:—

	£ s. d.
Haslingden	14 0 0
Accrington	6 10 0
Hippings	5 10 0
Grane	5 0 0
Edenfield	1 10 0
Ramsbottom	0 11 6
Oakenshaw	0 10 0
Dinner Collection	1 18 0
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	£35 9 6

The expenditure for the Quarter was £28 16s. 6d. The first Circuit Steward entered upon his stewardship with a credit balance of £6 13s. 0d.

This arrangement, with King Street as head of the Circuit, persisted until the erection of the Manchester Road premises in 1857. It was intended that the new

building should supersede the King Street Chapel, and accordingly the latter was closed in that year. The whole congregation removed to Manchester Road to the new Church. Before very long it became evident that the accommodation was quite insufficient, and in 1868 the old premises were re-opened. The Sunday School continued to meet in the body of the King Street Chapel until the new Sunday School at Manchester Road was ready in 1863. The scholars walked in procession from School at King Street to Divine Service at Manchester Road. As lately as ten years ago there were several people in the town, Mr. J. H. Trickett and Mr. J. H. Anderton, for instance, who well remembered these processions of their childhood. As a result of these developments Manchester Road Church became the head of the Haslingden Circuit in 1857, a position still retained.

The story of the Sunday School movement in Haslingden is a fascinating one. The ideas of Robert Raikes took shape in 1781, and John Wesley's followers at once seized the opportunity afforded and organised their Sunday School work. It is not certain that our founder's visit to Haslingden in 1788 had for its purpose the foundation of a Methodist Sunday School, but we do know that the first of our own town Sunday Schools met in Holden's Chapel in that year. Two years later

a code of seventeen Articles was drawn up, and a copy of these is still preserved. The master was paid a small salary and was responsible to the Trustees for the instruction and discipline of the School. Fines of 6d. were inflicted on teachers and "overlookers" for absence or lack of punctuality. The School met at 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. Some of these regulations are exceedingly quaint. For example:—

10. Every master and assistant are to make use of every opportunity of procuring scholars and begging books.
13. The doorkeeper is to see that the children come clean or send them back.
14. No scholar to be admitted into the School to write only—but read.
15. No woman but what is admitted by the Committee to be teachers in the School.

Other days, other ways. From 1788 to 1823 the Sunday School was conducted in the body of the Chapel, first in Holden's Chapel, and from 1798 at King Street. The numbers attending this School are astounding. In 1824, according to the "County Directory" of the period, there were 700 scholars. It must be remembered that large numbers attended from Rawtenstall, Crawshawbooth, Edenfield, and Baxenden, as well as the children

of the town. The accommodation was strictly limited, and the Trustees, one is sure, must have had recourse to some form of shift arrangement.

In 1822 a public appeal for funds was made—public because the School doors were wide open to children of all denominations. Need not creed! A new School was built in Chapel Street, and this served until the building of other Sunday Schools relieved the position. The Chapel Street premises remained as a Day and Evening School until the Manchester Road School was opened in 1863. When it is remembered that Michael Davitt, the Irish patriot, was a pupil at this School, its value to the community will be readily admitted. Men like John Holden, a teacher and Superintendent of the Sunday Schools at Bury Road and Chapel Street from 1788 almost to his death in 1848, did a great pioneer work in education. Mr. Holden is buried in the Chapel graveyard near to the grave of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Gregory and Mr. and Mrs. George Ashworth. Our Methodist forefathers certainly did a fine work with their Sunday School project, and their success must rank high among the records for the whole country. We should always remember that the great majority of our people relied entirely for their instruction on the voluntary efforts of Sunday School workers.

One other development in connection with the Sunday School cannot be omitted. Following the re-opening of King Street Chapel in 1868 it soon became necessary to consider the question of new premises for the Sunday School. There was no longer any need for the old Manse in King Street alongside the Chapel. The Superintendent now lived in the Manchester Road Manse, and Eastville was built in 1871 by private subscription at a cost of £1,350. The old King Street Manse therefore gave way to a new Sunday School. Formal sanction to its erection was given at the March Quarterly Meeting, 1872, and the foundation stones were laid in August of that year. The School was opened on Good Friday, April 7th, 1874, the Rev. Luke H. Wiseman being the preacher for the occasion.

One might go on at great length quoting quaint and interesting minutes from Trustees' and Society Minute Books, or genealogical tables could be built up from the records contained in the two baptismal registers, which give particulars of every baptism from the erection of the first Holden's Chapel in 1786 to the present day. Lack of space forbids this. A record of all the Circuit Ministers resident in the town since the Haslingden Circuit was formed in 1814 appears in another section of this brochure, but this is only one side of a story of great endeavour. The names of prominent lay people

have been preserved in the Church records, and it must be remembered that many hundreds of good men and women, whose names never appeared in records as having taken office, have laboured here to the glory of God during the past century and a half in their several ways.

In the very early days of our local Methodism we read of the work and sacrifices of men and women like Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Gregory, Mr. and Mrs. George Ashworth, and Mr. John Rishton, who was the leader of the Class at Gregory Fold. Mr. Gregory was a farmer whose home, Fold House, Gregory Fold, was the meeting place of Mr. Rishton's Class during the stirring times of the later half the 18th Century. He lived to see King Street Chapel built, and was the second to be buried in the graveyard in 1798. The first interment was that of Alice Dewhurst, "mantuamaker." Mr. George Ashworth was the first Steward of the Haslingden Circuit, commencing his duties in 1814 and being continuously in office until his death in 1836, while Mrs. Ashworth was the saintly daughter of the Mr. and Mrs. Gregory mentioned above.

Mr. John Stott, in his "Notices of Methodism in Haslingden," gives an interesting account of his being taken by his father to visit this dignified Christian lady

at her home when he was quite a small boy. Mr. Thomas Kay, who became Mr. Ashworth's colleague in the Stewardship, was the father of Mrs. James Stott (the mother of Mr. John Stott), Mrs. Thomas Smith, and Mrs. Peter Whitehead, Rawtenstall. Here we have the Methodist springs of the families of Stott and Smith, and of the Whitehead family of Rawtenstall.

Mr. William Robinson was Class Leader and Society Steward for over twenty years, and served also as Circuit Steward. He was killed in tragic circumstances in 1841 as the result of a coach accident. His eldest daughter married the Rev. Samuel Merrill, who was second Circuit Minister, 1832-34, and whose portrait now hangs in the Minister's Vestry. The second daughter became the wife of the Rev. William Sugden, and the third married the Rev. William J. Skidmore, who was third Minister, 1841-43. It may be remarked here that from 1836 the Haslingden Circuit had three ministers. Other names prominent about a century ago were those of Messrs. Thomas Falshaw, James Greenwood, James Cronkshaw, William Dean, and John E. Lightfoot.

To come down to living memory, many of us remember Mr. J. Theodore Donaldson, who took a prominent part in the Centenary celebrations of the Church. Contemporary with Mr. Donaldson was Mr. John Chew,

whose care of the fabric of the Church was a consuming passion. And finally, a perusal of the names of the worthy people who have loved the place and its work will show that in the last fifty years the cause of Christ has had at King Street no lack of distinguished and fearless champions. Among those who held office during this period were Messrs. James Lonsdale, Abraham Ashworth, Matthew Ainsworth, James McEwan, John O. Swire, James Ormerod, John H. Trickett, John Moss, William Ormerod, Jonathan Birtwistle, Thomas Haworth, G. Ernest Newbold, John W. Hargreaves, and Miss Florence E. Holmes.

We should not forget those who laboured to make the musical part of the services attractive. Mr. Alfred

Smethurst was organist for a considerable period, in addition to holding many offices in Church and School. Mr. Francis E. Whiteley was organist and a generous benefactor for well over forty years. Mr. J. S. Titherington was choirmaster for a long period, and his interest in the work is shown by the transcriptions of music which are still used by the organist and choir. To these and many others, of whom there is no space to write, the present generation owes a deep debt of gratitude, and their work and the sacrifices they made to do it should be a great incentive to us to see that they have left the Cause in good hands. This Cause is the greatest of all causes. The Society, of which we are members, has a great tradition. We must not fail in our duty to it or to the Christ we proclaim.

