

A DOCUMENT WRITTEN BY JOSHUA C. PARKER, OF BLAKENEY, IN 1912, THE CENTENARY YEAR OF THE METHODIST CHAPEL, AND COPIED VERBATIM.

When Methodism was first introduced into Blakeney, services used to be held in various cottages, but chiefly in the house of Mrs. Thomas Bond. During that time an independent gentleman by the name of Blyford became converted under the influence of one of its members who visited him during an illness, and also became a member. He, in connection with the Society held a Sunday School during the summer months in the summer house of his garden. After a time the membership grew and the congregation became so large that it was thought advisable to build the present Chapel, which was in 1812. The site was procured being part of the garden belonging to the cottages now standing in front. The necessary funds were subscribed mostly by the members of the Society, each lending whatever they could afford, taking the interest until the principal could be paid. The blessing of God attended its efforts and it continued to prosper. In 1816, a sad loss was sustained by the Society by the drowning of some of its members in the Cley channel. They were returning from one of the revival services which were being held at Cley. It was a dark night, the 17th of February. At that time, the people had to cross in a boat, the tide was in, the keel of the boat caught in a rope that was fastened to another, turned over and precipitated the company of 10 persons into the water, five of them were drowned. A memorial service was held annually in commemoration of the event, called the Watch Night service and continued until about 1867 or 8. One of the drowned was a young man named Thomas Whisker, the member under whose influence Mr. Blyford. was converted. He held him in such high esteem and was so grieved by the event that he made the request that when he died he should be buried at the young man's feet. Anyone going to the churchyard will notice it by the tombstones, also the event of the accident is recorded as well.

Revival services were held here from time to time, and many added to the flock. One was the wife of the Minister under whom the late Rev. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was converted. She was a native of Blakeney, and attended this chapel, and was converted during one of these meetings. Again after a long time the congregation became so large that it became an absolute necessity to enlarge the chapel. This was in 1846. It was decided to raise the roof to its present height, as the building was only half as high as it is now, with a plain mean looking pulpit, of which traces are still to be seen on the north wall, and square family pews, some sitting face, some sideways and perhaps some sitting back to the preacher, the entrance door being in the middle of the west wall. The lighting at night was by means of cotton candles put in tall iron candlesticks, some with hooks attached to hang the snuffers on. When a hymn was about to be sung it was generally forestalled by cries from various parts of the building, "Snuff the candle, Brother (or Sister,)" who was sitting nearest. Often it was snuffed out, then, "Give us a light, Brother so and so." Some who were not adept in the art of snuffing candles would sometimes

Rev. J. C. Parker  
1912  
Blakeney  
Society

knock the candle over and woe betide the ladies' dresses if any were sitting near.

When the chapel was altered and raised, (the north side wall when being raised, had to be entirely built from the inside as the owner and occupier of the garden adjoining would not suffer anyone or anything to come on his boundary, vowing vengeance against anyone that did,) the tiles were taken off and the present wood frame, which is the original one, was lifted to its position and shored up with props. It being considered rather a delicate affair, fear took hold of some, lest a strong wind should spring; up and blow the whole over. Some of the members met together and. prayed that the Lord would not send any wind until the roof was lodged in its proper place. In answer to those prayers scarcely a breath of wind came the whole time, and they were glad. At that time a gallery was put in, fixed on the south wall. The new pews were made smaller with nice little doors, very straight backs and rather narrow seats, but made to hold comfortably three persons, and all let very well until a later period when the ladies' fashions altered a bit and the notable crinolines were much worn. They got so big that it became almost impossible for three ladies to sit in one pew. The chapel had to suffer for that fashion because after that the people vowed that the pews were only large enough to sit two, and would not hire them if they could not have them on these conditions. Afterwards it was only on special occasions that three would cram into a seat. One rather amusing incident happened one Sunday during that time. A rather fastidious spinster was leaving after the service, and in coming out of the pew her crinoline became entangled in the hinge of the pew door. She got stuck fast and had to remain so until some kind friend went to her aid and liberated her. There being two side aisles of two feet wide, it was generally known when a lady went in and out of the chapel by her crinoline scraping against the sides. Also a familiar sound at one time was to hear the ladies come in with their Sunday going clogs on clickiping on the brick floor.

After the chapel had been altered, the old iron candle sticks were replaced with fine brass ones and lit up with composite candles, which were a great improvement, no snuffers being required.

Things continued to prosper until the great eruption of 1849, which played havoc in this chapel as well as many others. During the strife friends parted, causing much sorrow. One member who had lent money on the chapel and. was so exasperated at the affair, said to another, I will suffer my flesh to be taken off my bones before I will lose my money." The other remarked, "God can take your money without taking your flesh." Sad to relate, that many years after, the same member said, to the other member's widow, "Ah, I would not do what God wanted me to, now He will take all from me." He did lose it all and died in the Union.

The majority of the people took the Reform side of the question, therefore they were expelled from the Society, the Wesleyan body claiming the chapel as their own private property independent of all money that various members and friends had lent and expended on the place. Although some rebelled, they found it to

be only too true and had to submit. A Mr. Waddy, one of the Wesleyan officials, tauntingly told the people at one of the meetings that were being held at the time in some town, "The chapels are ours but the debts are yours. For that remark he was styled "Flippant Waddy." The people were not to be daunted by the way things were going. They banded, together and hired the Club Room at the Ship Inn to hold their services, and these continued for three years. Only about six persons attended the chapel during the time. About the end of that time, Captain Smither, a former member who had removed to London and associated himself with the Wesleyans there, went to the headquarters and asked them to sell the chapel to the Reformers as it had really become no use to them. They gave way and it was bought again. As none of the former Trustees were eligible to buy it, it was bought in the name of Mr. (James) Parker who held it as private property until the new commission was established, "The United Methodist Free Church," Then it was entered on the reference deed of that commission, and it stands so today. Some time previous to the 1849 split, the Sunday School was started again by a Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Smither, as it had been discontinued for a time. A good school was raised and continued to flourish. Some few years after, Mrs. Smither removed with her husband to London. When the Reformers got back into the chapel, Mrs. Parker took up the work again and continued it until 1879, having to relinquish her work on account of Mr. Parker's illness and death. No one at that time seemed willing to take the responsibility of carrying it on. During that time great difficulty was experienced in suitable and new hymns and tunes for the Sunday School Anniversary. Young people used to be sought after, who had been away from home, or a stranger who had come into the village, to know whether they knew a hymn or tune, as it had been a general thing to have some of the same hymns over and over again.

As the times moved on and advancement was being made in that direction, Mrs. Parker felt it necessary and was prompted to have her two boys taught music so that the difficulty might be got over. Accordingly they were taught and in 1869, when the older was thought proficient enough, he at the age of 11, conducted the Anniversary using the small harmonium that they were taught upon. The title of it was, "Oh Touch Those Chords Again." He played it with fear and trembling, vowing in his heart that when he was a man he would never touch those chords again. About 1871, it was thought desirable to introduce the Instrumental Music for a continuance, so a Mrs. Nichols, the grandmother of the two boys, bought a harmonium specially for the purpose, and her two grandsons, Henry Parker and William Nichols, were the two first players, each taking every alternate hymn. Previous to that the singing had been led for many tears by Brother Harmer, who seemed, a bit put out by the order of things thus changed. As he did not care to be wholly set on one side, he said to Mrs. Nichols, "I suppose I shall not be wanted now." She replied, "Oh yes, Brother Harmer, we shall - there may be a tune they cannot play."

Some of the older portion of the congregation thought it a wonderful thing that a whole verse should be given out and sung through. Many at that day could not read and could not remember all the words, and

thought that they would not be able to take any part in the singing. Before that, no more than two lines were given out, they were sung, the next two lines were given out and they were sung, so finishing the hymn and tune up. A hymn of six verses with six or eight lines in a verse was scarcely ever got through. Brother Harmer's vocal powers were very strong and rather harsh, but of good pitch, so that once started one could easily sing to it. His attitude when singing was rather remarkable. He would stand fairly straight up. He was rather tall in stature, with his head a little on one side. His hymn book was generally held with both hands fixed in front of him, but it did not matter how high or low the hymn went, Brother Harmer scarcely ever moved his position without it was that his eye caught some urchin who was just having a lark, then his hymnbook would come sweeping down on the delinquent's head, with the exclamation, "You boys!" oft times nearly upsetting the hymn altogether, the congregation striving to keep serious and continue their devotions.

Things kept moving on. In 1872, Henry Parker left home, his brother (the present organist) had then to take his place, continuing with his cousin, Willie Nichols, to play the tunes alternately, hating Sundays more than any day of the week. One Sunday he was grumbling to his mother because they never sung any new tunes, always the old ones which seemed threadbare. She said, "How should we, you never play any." He made up his mind that he would, play two that Sunday. His first tune that afternoon happened to be C.M. meter. Now is my chance, thought he. Accordingly he started, but nobody sang. After the verse the Preacher said, "Come friends, you don't sing." Brother Harmer seemed on the alert that day and called, out, "We don't know the tune," possibly thinking he had scored a point, then ...

THE ABOVE was written in longhand with many corrections and additions on eight sheets of foolscap. Unfortunately the ninth and subsequent sheets are missing, so we shall never know if Brother Harmer scored his point, or possibly read of the addition of the Sunday School Room in 1903, or of the acquisition of a pipe organ, second hand from a Cambridge college. The organ is now a rare model.

AND SO the boy who vowed he would never touch those chords again, and hated. Sunday more than any day of the week, grew up to be organist and the mainstay of the chapel for more than half a century. Thank you, Joshua Parker.