

**Primitive Methodism
At
Haslingden**

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An Interesting Record
(by The Rev. S.L. George)

The following historical sketch of the growth of Primitive Methodism in Haslingden, from the pen of the pastor, the Rev. S. Lawrence George, will be read with greater interest in view of the grand "bazaar" which is to be opened on Wednesday next, with the object of extinguishing the debt of one thousand guineas.

The historical record is culled from the bazaar handbook, and will be found well worthy of perusal.

The Primitive Methodist Church was the outcome of an earnest evangelism, which broke out among the working men of the Potteries of North Staffs, in the opening years of the nineteenth century. The leaders of the movement, especially Hugh Bourne and W. Clowes were men of simple faith and apostolic zeal, in whose lives a beautiful piety furnished the motive power for deeds of high endeavour in Christian service.

Their one aim was the conversion of the rough and godless masses around them. They held no official position in the Methodist Church of which they were members, but did a great deal of "unauthorised" mission work. When the reports of the American camp meetings appeared in the Methodist magazines. Bourne thought he saw in them the means of reaching and rousing the people, and proceeded to arrange for a camp meeting on Mow Cop. this was held on May 31st 1807, and the results were so satisfactory that it was decided to hold others. But the Conference of 1807 did not view them with favour, and declared them "to be highly improper in England, and disclaim all connection with them."

The embargo thus laid upon this work detached many of Bourne's coadjutors from his side. But the doggedness of spirit which was one of his chief characteristics he persisted in the work, which he fully believed was of God. The defiance of Conference could have but one result, and on June 27th, 1808. Bourne was "put out" of Society. He accepted the decision quietly and regretfully, but went on with the work. Its success was his justification. Gradually his old associates re-joined him. Chief among these was William Clowes, who from October 1808, was his constant comrade in evangelistic labours.

Clowes was a leader of two classes in the "Old Body," and in November 1809, notwithstanding his co-operation with Bourne in camp meetings, was made a local preacher, but eight months later he shared the fate of Bourne, and was expelled. This only bound the men in stronger union, and they continued their work, bent only on saving men, and never dreaming of adding another to the churches of the country.

They followed implicitly the leadings of Providence. Being compelled to provide for the care of their numerous converts, they gathered them into "Classes" for religious fellowship, and found exercise for their faith and gifts in numerous cottage prayer-meeting and camp meeting services.

The persons thus gathered had no connection with any existing church and acknowledged allegiance to no spiritual authority save that of Bourne and Clowes and their co-workers.

These "Classes" formed the nucleus of our denomination. By 1812 about 200 persons were thus associated, being chiefly known as Camp Meeting Methodists, though they had not chosen any designation for themselves. In that year a "general meeting" was held, at which the name "Primitive Methodist" was adopted, and arrangements made for the systematic extension of the work. The Church thus organised was not a "disruption" or a "split" from any other church. The great majority of them had never had the slightest connection with any church at all, and the men at the head of the new movement, who had at one time been members of the mother church of Methodism, had been separated from there for several years.

Fairly launched upon its independent mission, the work extended rapidly in all directions. Very early Lancashire, with its growing towns, was visited by some of the most fervent and successful of the early preachers. Before the first quarter of the century closed, Primitive Methodist Societies were established and circuits formed at Manchester, Bolton, Preston, Oldham, Blackburn, and other centres of the county.

It is probable that Haslingden was "missioned" from Blackburn some time between 1821 and 1820. The first authentic record of the Haslingden Society is in 1824. It was then part of the Blackburn Circuit, which was formed that year, with the eccentric "George Herod" as superintendent. Haslingden was second on the plan and only slightly inferior to Blackburn in importance. Blackburn is reported to have had 67 members and to have contributed £4-12s, to the Circuit Fund, the figures for Haslingden being 60 members and £4-6s-3d contributions. In June 1829 the membership was 75, and in the next year the following interesting entry appears in the Circuit account book: Quarterly Meeting held at Haslingden June 21st 1830: Income: Blackburn, £4-16s-6½d: Haslingden, £5-15s-3d: Duncan Square, £1-3s-8½d: Accrington, 9s-10½d, total £12-5s-4½d. Outgo: Preachers salary £9-2s: house rent £1-12s-6d: taxes 4s-6d: T.P.'s- child, 13s: expenses of delegate to district meeting, 7s: quarter day refreshments 2s-4½d: last quarter's deficiency 4s: total £12-5s-4½d.

This record has a quaint interest, as showing the state of things as they existed seventy years ago. Truly it was a day of small things.

Hitherto, the Haslingden Primitive Methodist had held their services and taught their Sunday school in what had been a stable and hayloft in Burgess-Nook, which occupied a site now filled by the Bank. But the growth of the cause led the officials to take steps for building a chapel on land in Deardengate. This erection was finished in 1831, at a cost (probably) of about £300. Their debt when finished was about £200. A few years later they took off the roof, raised the walls and put in a gallery, and built the cottage at the back for the preachers residence. The outlay for this was £363.

We may smile a little to-day at these figures, but they were no light undertaking then for people who were richer in faith than finance.

We gladly record the names of the first trustees. They were Peter Warburton; John Rawstron; Richard Ashworth; James Ashworth; David Maden; Thomas Emmet; Thomas Lonsdale; Christopher Hall; book-keeper (i.e. secretary), and Thomas Wade; (treasurer). May their memories long be cherished.

In the new chapel, preacher-services were held three times every Sabbath; at 10-30, 2-30, and 5-o'clock. Sunday school opened at 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. They were "full-timers" in those days.

The period from 1860 to 1870 was a time of stress for the church, which was greatly weakened by a lamentable decision which took place in 1862. But those who remained by the old cause faced the difficulties of the alteration bravely. Surely, if slowly as a church regained its old position, and by 1870 the membership had risen to its former number of 100 members. At this point it remained practically stationary for 20 years, sometimes rising a few above the century, and sometimes falling below it.

But then came the birth of greater purposes which were when efforts were made to clear off the old debt, that for many years had remained unaltered at £230. The work was nearly accomplished during the superintendency of Rev. W. Goodman, and was due to a very hearty co-operation of the Church and Sunday school, £210 was paid off and only a nominal debt of £20 left, and this remained until the scheme for the new church and school in Grane-road was floated.

The new enterprise was surely a great and risky undertaking for a church of 100 members, not one of whom could boast of wealth. Some people, prominent ministers of the district among them, called it "a mad scheme," and prophecies of disaster were freely uttered. But the church went forward with the heart and hope, being led on by their minister, the Rev. E. Newsombe, who toiled indefatigable for the new building. So intense was his application that for four years he was stationed in Haslingden he never allowed himself a holiday, and right thoroughly did he earn by unceasing toil the esteem of his church.

Strong as were the faith, the energy, and the patience of the church they were often sorely tried. The land, which had cost £546, was found to be so treacherous a nature that it seemed to be almost impossible to secure a firm foundation.

When building operations commenced, the difficulties were revealed. What was built in the day sank from sight during the night. Many loads of stone and many tons of concrete were buried before a solid base could be obtained. But this at last was done, and the superstructure slowly reared upon it.

The difficulties, however, may be judged by the fact that the building took two years to erect. In the meantime the finance became a source of anxiety. Expenses mounted up and funds sank low. The exchequer was empty, but demands still came and the trustees had writs served upon them. The prospect of imprisonment was before them, but, fortunately, they were spared that unpleasant experience.

The building was finished at last, and opened on January 5th, 1880, by Dr Jenkinson, the Wesleyan President. The opening services were continued for a month, the preachers being the Revs. William Rowe, H. Stowell Brown, J. Macpherson, William Antliffe, D.D; and S. Antliffe, D.D.

It had involved an outlay of £5,600, but cost of land and legal expenses raised the total expenditure to £6,200. Even this amount would have been larger but for the work done gratis in preparing the foundations, etc; by the members and elder scholars in the evening hours after their ordinary day labours were ended. But the huge debt of £4,000 remained and again the prophets of ill foretold disaster for a church thus burdened. These gloomy forebodings were, however, falsified by the energy and self sacrifice of the Church and Sunday school. During the year 1882, Rev. T.H. Hunt being minister, the debt was reduced by £500, and steadily year by year since then liabilities have been lessened until the year 1900 when it stood at 1,000 guineas.

The efforts of the trustees to pay off the debt did not deter them from making such improvements as were deemed necessary from time to time. In the past twenty years, £1,800 have been spent on organ, heating apparatus, re-lighting, beautifying, and keeping the property in good repair. When to these items the outlay for interest and working expenses, £3,500 is added, it will be seen that a very large amount has been raised within a comparatively short time.

The faith and courage of the old trustees were great, but we think they were surpassed in these qualities by their successors in the latter and greater work, and think their names should ever be treasured in the Grane-road Church. They were: James Cronkshaw, Edmund J Lord, Thomas Hoyle, (spinner), Thomas Hoyle, (overlooker), Joseph Taylor, John Warburton, Richard Warburton, James Birtwistle, John Cronkshaw, and Henry Barlow. Some of this little band have "fallen asleep," having served their generation according to the will of God. For those who remain we wish long life and joy in the Master's service and congratulate them upon the consummation of a work so dear to their hearts, namely the extinction of the debt.

The labours of the ministers who have had charge of the Grane-road Church are so recent and well known that details need not be given here. Suffice it to say that the ministers and members congregation and Sunday school, have toiled in unity of purpose and persistency of effort to pay off the debt, and in so doing have displayed a self-sacrifice rarely equalled in the annals of a church, where with frugal means and but limited powers great things have been accomplished.

Although the Rev. S.L. George does not mention it was under his ministry in the year 1901 that the last debt was paid off and the Chapel and school was at last free from debt, without receiving a penny from any Connexional fund.

The Chapel organ cost £700; towards which Mr Andrew Carnegie donated £300.