

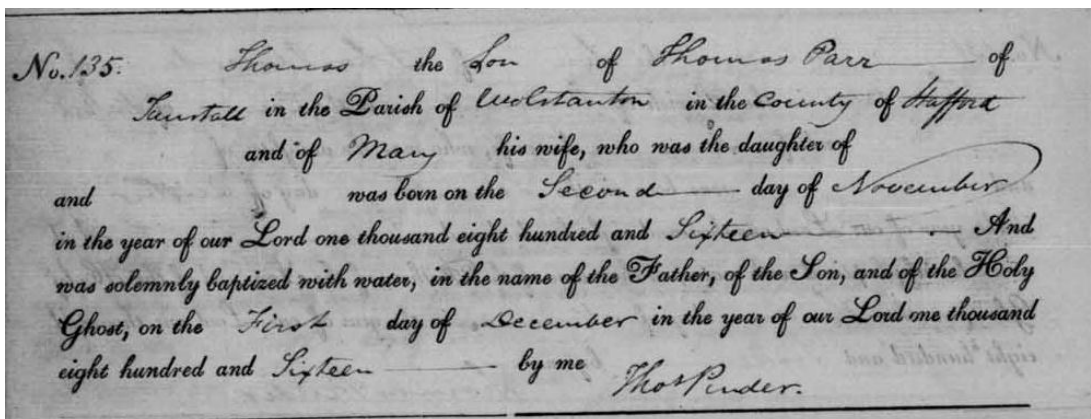
Thomas Parr and Family: From Primitive Methodism to the present



Travelling along the A5 in Staffordshire you'll see signs for Lapley and Wheaton Aston. In the graveyard of Lapley's lovely parish church, All Saints, you'll find this memorial stone.

Thomas Parr was a Primitive Methodist minister. He was born, (I think) on 2nd November 1816 and christened at the Wesleyan chapel at Wolstanton on 1st December. Why am I not sure? Because, all the census returns for him suggest he was born two years later.

Thomas Parr was the son of another Thomas Parr who married Mary Reeves in Wolstanton on 10th June 1810. They had at least four sons and three daughters. Thomas Parr was a "potter" so *his* father, if living around Burslem, would have been a contemporary of Josiah Wedgwood and Josiah Spode, but we have no evidence to date of any connection with either of these people nor of any connection with the Quakers or other Non-Conformist movements until 1810.



Of this elder Thomas Parr's relations, one, probably his brother, founded the "Parr Pottery" around 1825. Based on my research so far, at least two of Thomas' children are of note for the purposes of this history; Thomas Parr Junior, who is buried at Lapley and of whom more later, and the youngest child, Aaron, born in 1826 and baptised at Newchapel, Tunstall. Aaron was the father of a Wesleyan Methodist minister, Smith T Parr and in 1901 we find him in Selby Yorkshire following his calling. Another son, William Henry Parr was also a Methodist minister and we find him in 1881 at Budleigh Salterton in Devon. Aaron and his wife, Betsy, are buried in Tunstall cemetery along with a number of their children.

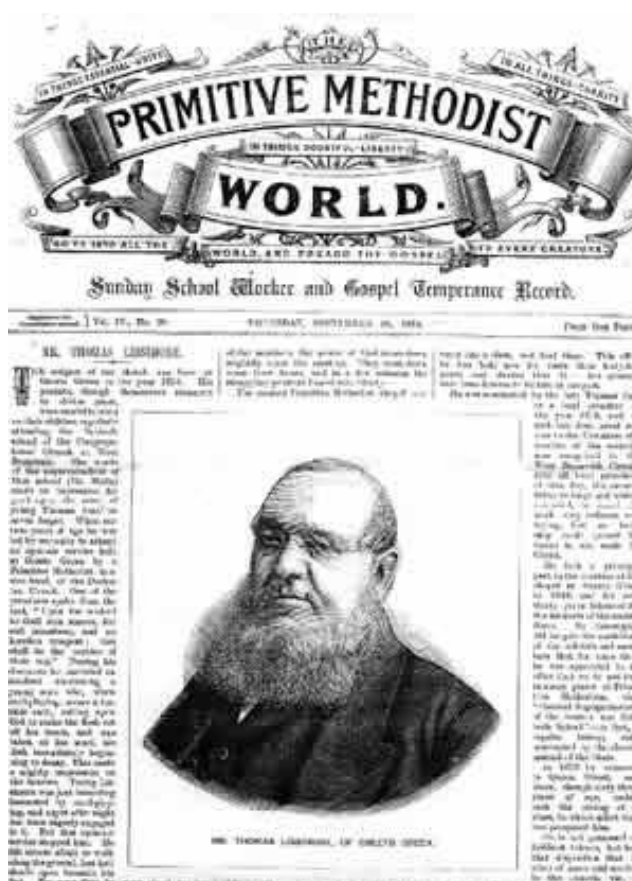
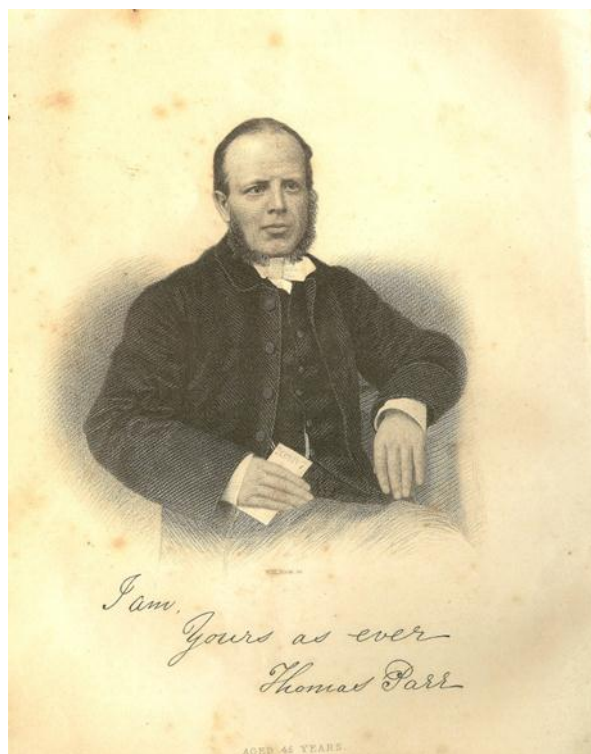
And so to Thomas Parr Junior, my great-great grandfather. According to the picture he is 44 years old. He died in 1866, so just four (or six years) after the picture was made. He was married twice; to Mary Turner in Newtown, Powys around 1842. Their daughter, Mary Ann, (a family name I think) was born on 3rd September 1844 in Newtown. By then Mary Turner was probably dead and Thomas was minister at Wrockwardinewood, near present day Telford.

In 1846 on 16th January at Lapley parish church, Thomas married Matilda Bayley (note the spelling).

We'll review their children and descendants all the way to my own father, Arnold Parr, in a little while.

But the first reference I have found to Thomas Parr comes from a copy of a newspaper, The Black Country Bugle, of fairly recent publication, though I have no date for it. The headline "Illuminated Tribute to a Greets Green Methodist" refers to the life of Thomas Lissimore of Greets Green born in 1816 and goes on... *"When sixteen years of age he was led by curiosity to attend an open-air service held at Greets Green by a Primitive Methodist mission band, of the Darlaston Circuit. One of the preachers spoke from the text, "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup". It continues... "He was nominated by the late Thomas Parr as a local preacher in the year 1838,"*

Indeed according to the listing of Primitive Methodist Ministers, though not an entirely accurate source¹, Thomas Parr was fulfilling his first ministry at Darlaston in 1838. It was the start of eighteen different locations over a twenty seven year ministry. From the birthdates and birthplaces of the children; of the single daughter Agnes, a most caring daughter from the evidence we have, and the four sons (the only survivors of Matilda's twelve pregnancies) we can chart the ministry of Thomas Parr and from the census returns the loneliness of a Primitive Methodist minister's wife whose husband oftentimes must be elsewhere and whose death rendered her a widow at the age of 44.



¹ The Primitive Methodist Ministers listing, page 158, shows incorrect information for James Tolefree Parr. His father was not Theo Parr and nor was he born at Kirkby-in-Ashfield. The year of Thomas Parr's birth is probably incorrect also. Some of the references to the Primitive Methodist Magazine issues are possibly incorrect and I think are incomplete.

Two of the sons, Theophilus, born at Bishop's Castle, Powys in 1849 and James Tolefree, born at Oswestry, Shropshire in 1855 became prominent Primitive Methodist ministers. Theophilus' ministry carried him afar in England but further still to Africa, Australia and New Zealand. His story is worth relating at a later time. But more so that of James T Parr who in 1917 was President of the Conference making his address during a Zeppelin raid. It's tempting to say more. But this narrative deals only with the immediate line of descent from Thomas Parr Senior to more or less the present day, emphasising the legacy of Primitive Methodism.

Two other sons, Thomas Philip and Frederick Bayley were Primitive Methodist preachers. My great-grandfather, Frederick Bayley, we'll come to later. But first, more of their mother.

Matilda Bayley came from a Wheaton Aston family of farmers, farm-workers, tradesmen and avowed Non-Conformists. It may be that Tolefree was Matilda's mother's maiden name. But certainly there was a notable preacher in the district in the early 1800's who carried the surname Tolefree and that in what was then a rough and tumble part of Staffordshire. A chapel, Zion Chapel, was built. It dates from 1815. But Non-Conformist activities go back to 1745. The Primitive Methodist Chapel was built much later. It has been converted to a house nowadays, though maybe that was its original purpose.

Close by is Providence Cottage. It was built some years before 1900 by Matilda's father. Matilda moved there with her daughter, Agnes Emma (a name we'll come across again in connection with the Parr family) probably on the marriage of Agnes to Abraham Weate, a local farmer from a local family. Emma was born at Bloxwich in 1859 or 1860 and died at Wheaton Aston in 1943. Her mother died in 1902, see the memorial stone.

We now come to my great-grandfather Frederick Bayley Parr. He was born near Ludlow in 1854 and died in Bacup, Lancashire in November 1900. We have pictures of Thomas Parr and all his sons and their families except Frederick. Frederick became a preacher in Bacup in 1889 having moved there from Failsworth near Manchester and prior to that Salford and Birkenhead. He was a stonemason by trade, though often not in employment. It's likely he was preaching before 1889 and possibly as early as 1881. I expect it was in his blood.

In Birkenhead, where he was living with his mother at the time of his father's death in 1866 (his father died whilst at Penkridge), he met and married Emma Roberts and they were married at Bolton Parish Church in 1872. At the time a new parish church was being built and it is unclear; firstly why they were married in Bolton at all since Emma's family were from North Wales and Cheshire and secondly which church in Bolton. It is possible Frederick was working on the new church at the time of his marriage. It seems the new one was not fully complete until after 1872, perhaps marriage in the old church would have some resonance.

Frederick and Emma had three children; James Frederick was born in 1876 and his sister, Agnes Emma, in 1877, both in Birkenhead. Arthur was born in Salford in 1879. The family moved to Bacup, Lancashire around 1885. The family was active within the local Primitive Methodist community and attended North Street Chapel. The photo is from the Bacup Times website <http://www.bacuptimes.co.uk/churches.htm> with thanks to Wendy Lord.



A significant feature of the lives of later members of the Parr family is Beulah United Methodist Church, at the junction of New Line and Rochdale Road, Britannia, Bacup. But we have records of Frederick baptising local children at the chapel. Therefore it's certain that the Parr family were involved at

BAPTISMS solemnized in the Free Methodist Chapel <i>Beulah Britannia</i>						
in the County of <i>Lancaster</i> in the year 18						
When Baptized.	Child's Name: Son or Daughter.	Parents' Name.		Abode.	Date of Child's Birth.	The Minister by whom the Baptism was solemnized.
		Christian.	Surname.			
1896 <i>Dec 27</i>	<i>Sammy</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Tanner</i>	<i>582 Rochdale Rd</i>	<i>30th Nov</i>	<i>Fred R B Parr</i>
No. 25.	<i>Laughter</i>	<i>Beulah</i>	—	<i>Beulah</i>		

Beulah in Frederick B's time. This was before the amalgamation with the Bible Christians and New Connexion Methodists in 1907. Note the heading on the certificate. For details of Beulah, see <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/LAN/Bacup/Beulah.shtml>

By 1901 with his father now dead, James Frederick Parr became a Primitive Methodist minister. The 1901 census shows him to be lodging at 84 Baptist Row, Bedale, North Yorkshire. Within a few years he left for Canada and the next and final news we have of him (to date) is from my Uncle Arthur's 1946 diary giving his address as 120 Garfield Street, Winnipeg. My uncle used to speak of an "Uncle Jim". But my Father, never! After 1901 we find nothing more of Emma Parr, nee Roberts. She is not buried with her husband. The grave holds four people; Frederick B, his daughter Agnes Emma O'Hara, Arthur Parr and his wife, Hannah Sarah Chestney. All Primitive Methodists during much of their lives.

The discovery of this grave in Bacup cemetery tells much of the 20th century years of the Parr family. Not long before my Father died in 1981 he told me of a family grave. But I did not discover it until it was too late. In any case neither I, nor anyone else in my family knew who Frederick B Parr was. "He's not one of us," his grandson Arthur said, although the grave held his own father who had died whilst he was in India in 1944. But it held too, his aunt who died in 1935 and his mother who died in 1937. Both my Father and his brother said that their mother died young, or when they were young. I never understood which and neither was strictly true. How sad, so many deaths in that family, at least twenty and maybe thirty aunts, uncles and cousins through the years of the 1920s and 30s, including, of course, James Tolefree and Theophilus Parr, that even their own mother became another unreal statistic. But so it was in Rossendale at that time for the Parr and Chestney families....and many others too.



Agnes Emma Parr married Thomas O'Hara in 1905. His family was Roman Catholic Irish, from County Mayo. They came to the Rossendale around 1860. There were no Catholic churches so the children went to the local United Methodist chapel and there Thomas O'Hara met and married Agnes. He died, I don't know when and she died later, childless.

The other two people in that grave are Arthur Parr (Arthur Parr Senior for the purposes of this narrative) and Hannah Sarah Parr, nee Chestney. She was from Norfolk of farming stock, poor labourers. Immigrants; they were part of Joseph Arch's plan, he was by then an MP, to rehabilitate the farmworkers of England and restore their pride and improve their wages by immigration. Many went further afield – to Canada mostly. But there was a significant community in Bacup, many were Primitive Methodists.

Hannah was the youngest of a family of nine children, though one died aged about three. The Chestney family needs a full and separate account. For the time being I'll restrict myself to Hannah Sarah and her brother Matthew Robert, born in 1869 and died in 1922. The family had moved from the vicinity of Wells-next-the-Sea

in north Norfolk around 1882 to Bacup. There were jobs for all the family there, though one brother returned to Norfolk for several years and two others turned back to agriculture in Lancashire though not for long. Matthew became, at least for a while, an insurance agent and I possess the ferrule from a walking stick inscribed by work colleagues for his wedding on 22nd December 1909 to his second wife, the first one dying around 1901 and their daughter when she was twenty one in 1921. He became, though I don't as yet know when, a Non-Conformist preacher. His name appears in the Beulah baptism records on at least two occasions.

It's likely that the Chestney family were Primitive Methodists when in Norfolk. They were all baptised at the same Anglican church, Warham All Saints, a village not far from Wells, though they moved around the local villages a lot. From about 1850 onwards many Primitive Methodist chapels were built in north Norfolk and

there are still Chestney family connections with at least one of them at Hindringham.



Hindringham Primitive Methodist Chapel: There I met a man who told me of the Chestney family and some of their background in Norfolk

We now come to Hannah Sarah and her husband Arthur Parr Senior. They are my paternal grandparents.



They were married in 1907. Hannah probably attended North Street chapel. But it is likely, considering her brother Matthew's involvement that the Parr and Chestney families were known to one another much earlier. My grandparents had two children; Arthur born in 1912 and my Father, Arnold, born in 1915, though unlike his brother not in Bacup but in Staleybridge, Cheshire. An explanation is still sought. They both attended Beulah United Methodist chapel and it is certain that their mother taught in the Sunday School. I know barely anything about my grandparents' relationship with one another or with their children. My grandfather was a "carter" according to later documents. But in the 1901 census he gives his occupation as "Lurryman". The term is important and may shed some light on his personality and his beliefs. I surmise he was stern and distant from his sons, perhaps dogmatic by nature. "Lurryman" is an old term for someone who works on "lurries" (lorries). It's significant in this case because on Saturday 8th December 1900 (so only a couple of weeks after the death of Frederick Bayley Parr, his father) the 3rd Annual Meeting of the Carter's and Lurrymen's Union met in Bacup. The General Secretary was John Parr who's address in the 1907 18th Annual Report is given as Bolton, Lancashire. It is doubtful if he is a relative. But there are several family connections with Bolton. By 1907 the Union was known as The Amalgamated Carters' Lurrymen & Motor Men's Union. It was an early forerunner of the Transport & General Workers Union.

Arthur Parr's involvement in the Union cannot be proven at this stage. But the circumstantial evidence suggests more research would be worthwhile since the links between Primitive Methodism and the trade unions were so strong. What is not clear is how strong were Arthur's attachments to the chapel. But the family ties were certainly life-long. My Father hardly ever drank alcohol. Occasionally he would have a light ale and on one memorable Christmas a year before he died in 1981 I recorded him singing a carol I've not found elsewhere ("Sweet Bethlehem star, sweet Bethlehem star. Up above nations sweet Bethlehem star"). Just that once he succumbed to whisky, jokingly I think, blaming his sons-in-law.

After his wife died in 1937, and maybe before then, I believe Arthur Parr Senior suffered ill health, though I have no details just a photo taken in a sanatorium or hospital of some sort. However, he was well for his elder son's wedding in July 1941 and in 1942 re-married, though I know of no chapel connection at present.

I was born in 1946, in Bolton, the hometown and birthplace of my Mother, Doris May (nee Taylor) shortly after my Father's discharge from the army. I knew nothing of the history related here until after my Father died and I spent more time with his brother, Arthur. What I learnt was confusing but after his death in 1997 I found amongst his possessions some of his diaries from 1941 through till the 1960s. Some had much detail, such as in 1942 he was asked by his RAF padre if he was a Methodist minister (No he was not). Was it indicative of his upbringing and bearing? Arthur, too was mostly teetotal, though less so after his wife died in 1988. She was from a strongly Methodist background, her father was a coal-miner in the Rossendale. She never let her nine year old nephew eat sweets on a Sunday! I also have all her account books covering the period from marriage until her death. More research needed there also! They lived for many years on the Isle of Man and Arthur became an expert on Celtic churches. I lodged his Celtic church archive with the museum in Douglas.

Not long before my Mother died in 1992 she described for me her family background but claimed to know nothing of my Father's. I started researching this history but the real surprises came for me when the internet ancestor websites started up. What had been confusion I started to clarify.

I could relate my days at North Road Methodist Church, Longsight, Manchester in the 1950s and early 60s and

North Road Wesleyan Methodist Church Now Northmoor Road: In the 1950s only the original brick church and porch were there surrounded by trees where the railings stand. See <http://manchesterhistory.net/LONGSIGHT/CHURCH/northmoor.html>



later to Radcliffe Wesleyan Methodist Church, Radcliffe, Lancashire where I was, for a short time until my family moved house (again), a Sunday School teacher. I'd been baptised at the age of 14 and confirmed into the Church of England. But my sisters were baptised as babies into the Church of England and my brother as a baby at North Road Methodist.

In 2001 I moved to my present home at Bronington, near Whitchurch, Shropshire². As I learnt more of my family I was astonished at the number of Primitive Methodist chapels surrounding us. Many have connections with my great-great grandfather, tenuous to be sure. But there remains that tombstone at Lapley.

Ian M Parr 5th June 2012

² An early source of information: PRIMITIVE METHODISM IN SHROPSHIRE. 1820-1900
Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Leicester by Delia Garratt
Centre for English Local History University of Leicester
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