

Wesleyan Methodism in 19th and 20th Century Basingstoke: 1870-1939

Introduction

Arguably the most striking feature of Wesleyan Methodism in Basingstoke was its late arrival. It is well documented that John Wesley made a number of visits to the town during the eighteenth century but, using a contemporary expression, he was 'not impressed'.¹ In the circumstances it was unsurprising perhaps that, although the Primitive Methodist cause was established in the early 1840s, it was to be another 30 years or so before the Wesleyans followed suit. The reasons for this are unclear but it may have been a legacy of Wesley's somewhat jaundiced view of the town.

In what follows, attention is given to the beginnings of the cause; superintendent ministers, including building projects; major events in the life of the Church; and church organisations. Throughout, in the absence of surviving church records, a heavy reliance has been placed on newspaper articles. Insofar as there are secondary sources these tend to be in the form of press reports.² One complaint that can be made about some of them is that while they claim to recount the history of Methodism in Basingstoke, it is the Wesleyans who get most of the attention with relatively little being written about the flourishing Primitive Methodist cause.³

Beginnings

There are various accounts of the beginnings of Wesleyan Methodism in Basingstoke although these all come from later sources. For example, at the 1896 anniversary celebrations of the cause Mr Higgs, the Circuit Chapel Secretary, gave what was described as 'an interesting historical account of the rise and progress of Methodism in the Basingstoke circuit.' According to this account:

The beginnings of Methodism in Basingstoke, so far as regards the actual establishment of a circuit, were chiefly due to a farmer who had been turned out of his farm in Lincolnshire solely on account of his Nonconformity, and who took a farm in the neighbourhood of Overton it was to be hoped under a more liberal and less bigoted landlord.⁴

Unfortunately, Higgs did not provide the name of the farmer. However, in a *Souvenir Handbook* published in 1955, to mark the golden jubilee of the new Methodist Church in Church Street, the following account appears:

... eventually a farmer named Mead, who had been evicted from his farm in Bedfordshire because he was a Methodist, came into this neighbourhood and being deeply disturbed at the low ebb of the Methodist Society, enlisted the

¹ See, for example, 'Mr Wesley's Visits to Basingstoke' letter from the Revd Samuel Miles to the editor, *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 1 March 1879.

² See, for example, Arthur Attwood, 'Sacrilege or glory in the Methodist phoenix', *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 December 1978, and 'The struggle for a Methodist 'meeting'', *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 15 December 1978.

³ See Roger Ottewill, 'Primitive Methodism in Basingstoke c.1833-1932/9', <https://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/items/primitive-methodism-basingstoke-c1830-1932/9>

⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 June 1896.

interest of two gentlemen – brothers – Mr. W. Pocock and Mr. T.W. Pocock, living in Staines, who together with Farmer Mead succeeded in purchasing the Granary in Potters Lane, which they converted for use as a Methodist Chapel.⁵

Unfortunately, references to sources are not provided. However, as will be seen, Mead and the Pocock brothers are mentioned in another more detailed account of the early days of Wesleyan Methodism in Basingstoke.

With respect to dates, Wesleyan Methodism put down permanent roots at the beginning of the 1870s. Indeed, Wesleyans saw 1870 as the year in which their cause was founded in Basingstoke, by celebrating their (golden) jubilee in 1920. As Higgs pointed out, a key figure in its establishment and early years was the Revd William P. Ellis who in 1872 was appointed by the Wesleyan Conference as ‘the first home missionary’ in the town, where he laboured until 1876.

Recalling these experiences in 1920:

When he arrived in Basingstoke in 1872, Mr Ellis found that, by tradition, Basingstoke had been a member of the Winchester Methodist Circuit.

He was told that a local preacher had walked from Winchester and back to preach in Basingstoke and had had only one person in the congregation. Years later the preacher referred to the occasion at a public meeting in Basingstoke.

Imagine his surprise when a man stood up and said that he was the person referred to who had heard him preach and said: “I owe my all, under God, to that sermon, as it led to my conversion.”

The Winchester preacher was so impressed that he immediately resolved to keep up the name of Methodism in Basingstoke and hoist its flag by preaching once a year in the Market Place, which he continued to do for many years.⁶

Two other figures who featured in the early years of Methodism were, the previously mentioned, Thomas Mead and James Kingham of Dummer. They found a regular meeting place, by renting the granary in Potters Lane. Until the arrival of Ellis, the Andover circuit supplied the preachers.

In commenting on his appointment Ellis wrote that:

“I was not consulted on whether I would like to go to Basingstoke, I was simply appointed to what was known as the ‘Methodist Wilderness’. I received no communication from any circuit official and, after writing to the chairman of the district, Dr Osborne, was told that if I heard nothing just take a train to the town. Dr Osborne said I was to stay in a hotel over the Saturday night, preach in the open air on Sunday and look for lodgings on the Monday.”

This, however, was not necessary, since:

“Just before I was to leave a letter saying Brother Bridgman would meet me at the station. On arrival I was taken to 3 Sarum Villas, Sarum Hill, where I found every needed comfort. My first congregation comprised two adults, one of whom was smoking a short pipe and three or four children. We met in

⁵ ‘Church Street Methodist Church: Golden Jubilee Souvenir Handbook 1905-1955’, p.6. Hampshire Record Office [HRO] 57M77/NMS10.

⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 15 December 1978.

Potters Lane Room ... In the evening the congregation consisted of about 18 children.”

Notwithstanding these inauspicious beginnings, within a few years Wesleyan Methodism became firmly established in Basingstoke.

In the early days, a particular challenge for Ellis was ‘obtaining a site and building the first chapel.’⁷ According to his account:

“It was a Saturday afternoon and as I turned into Church Street, I noticed several old cottages on the right hand side going from the town. I made enquiries to see if they were for sale and was told that they were with the asking price of £480.

I immediately wrote to the Rev Charles Present, chief of the Home Mission, to Mr Thomas Wilmer Pocock and to Mr William Wilmer Pocock, but before I could get any replies I was told, by the agent, that unless we decided to have the cottages by the end of the month they would no longer be available.

The Home Missionary Society wrote to say they had no money for the purpose, no reply was received from Mr W.W. Pocock and the other Mr Pocock wrote to say he had to go to the Continent for six weeks.

This put me in the dumps and the opportunity to find a site had been lost. The next morning, however, another letter arrived from Mr Thomas Pocock to say that he had been delayed in leaving for the Continent and enclosed was a cheque for £40 as deposit for the site and to say that he would pay the balance when he returned to England.

A Board of Trustees was formed and a fund raising campaign launched (see Figure 1). What the Primitive Methodists felt about Basingstoke being described as a ‘Methodist Wilderness’ is not recorded.

⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 3 April 1920.

“The Methodist Wilderness”

“Basingstoke and villages within two hours walk, contain more than 17,000 people and not one Wesleyan Chapel.

“In the town itself, there are nearly 6,000 but the religious accommodation, of all kinds is only sufficient for about half that number, while in the villages it is even less.

“A Methodist Mission has been established here a little over 18 months and a chapel is indispensable to give permanency and success to our work. A site has been secured at a cost of £400 and active measures are in operation to raise the means for a chapel. Will you favour us with a contribution? If it be only one shilling for this engraving.

Signed, W.P. Ellis, Wesleyan Minister.

Figure 1 *Wording on reverse side of a small fund raising card with an engraving of the proposed design of the new chapel on the front*

Plans were prepared by Mr Wonnacott. However, these were ‘greatly mutilated and cut down’, presumably in the interests of ensuring that the chapel could be afforded. Eventually, the foundation stone, in the form of two memorial stones, was laid on 22 June 1875. As reported at the time:

The site of the new building is in Church-Street, and it will replace three or four old cottages, whose absence is a considerable advantage to the architecture of the town. The ceremony of laying the stones was launched with a hymn, given out by the Pastor of the Church, the Rev E.P. Ellis, after which prayer was offered by the Rev. J. Thomas of Winchester, and then the first stone was laid. At the opposite corner a second stone was laid. A bottle was inserted in each of the stones, containing papers relating specially to the Wesleyan cause in Basingstoke, together with some local and other papers. The new Chapel will accommodate about 320 persons, and will have suitable rooms for Sunday-school classes, &c ... The entire outlay is expected to be about £1300.⁸

The chapel was officially opened on 14 November 1876 (Figure 2).⁹

⁸ *Reading Mercury*, 26 June 1875.

⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 June 1896.

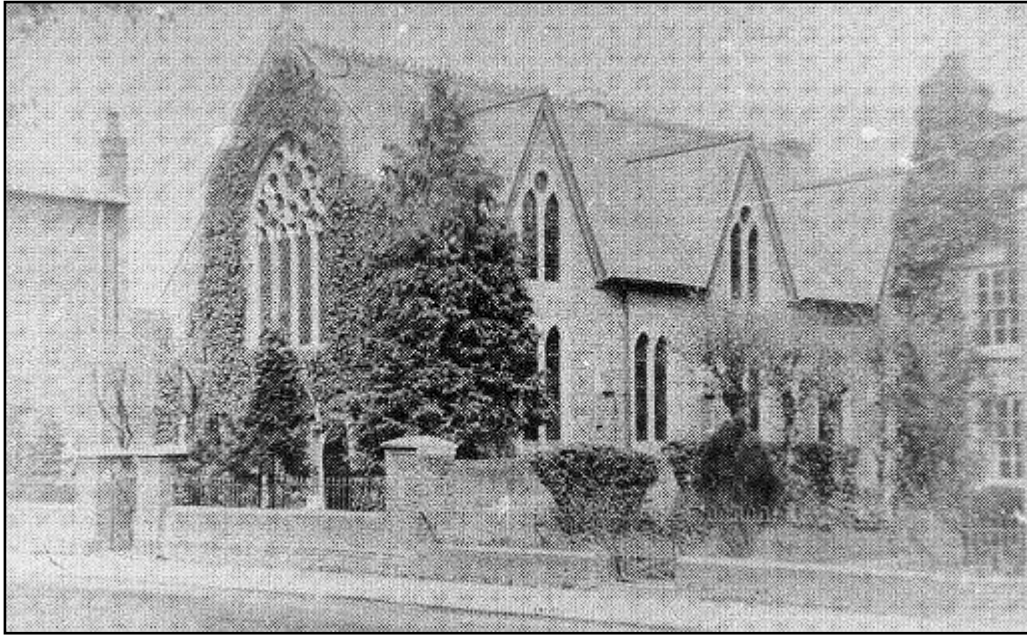


Figure 2 *Original Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Church Street*

Subsequent improvements and changes to the Wesleyans place of worship in Church Street are considered in the next section in the context of the superintendent minister in post at the time.

Subsequent Superintendent Ministers

As explained at a recognition meeting for a later superintendent, the Revd John Oswald, 'Wesleyan ministers could not remain in a circuit more than three years.' This was intended to reflect the itinerant nature of Methodism's view of ministry and was regarded as one of its strengths. In the main, however, it meant that there was a more rapid turnover of Methodist ministers than for those of other Nonconformist denominations in Basingstoke.

Ellis was succeeded by the Revd Samuel Miles (1876-79). At the recognition meeting for a later superintendent in 1897 the Circuit Steward, John Bird, mentioned that under Miles's 'faithful labours the little cause became well rooted.'¹⁰ While, at the time of his death in 1914, the *Hants and Berks Gazette*, quoting *The Methodist Recorder* referred to Miles as "this minister of marked ability, this brother and friend of kindly spirit and genial presence". The obituary went on to suggest that this description would 'be endorsed by those yet among us who had the privilege of Mr Miles's pastorate'.¹¹

Miles was followed by the Revd Alfred Cooke (1879-81). Just prior to leaving Basingstoke, Cooke preached two sermons on 'behalf of the trust fund of the Basingstoke Chapel'. On the Tuesday evening following a tea there was public meeting attended by the Congregational minister and his two Primitive Methodist colleagues, who 'gave addresses suitable to the occasion'. Later the Sunday School Superintendent presented Cooke with 'a handsomely bound album containing the photographs of the teachers and officers of the school.' Cooke responded 'with a

¹⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 1 September 1897.

¹¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 25 April 1914.

speech of warm-hearted affection, thanking those who had made the gift most sincerely for such an estimable token of their regard, remarking that they could not have found anything which would have been more dearly prized by him.' As the Chairman, John Bird, pointed out the occasion was not only one at which they were saying farewell to their superintendent but it was also intended to raise funds for the 'trust in connection with drainage and other expenses.' The total sum raised was £17 which was deemed to be 'highly satisfactory, and, beyond all expectation'.¹² Cooke died in 1890 aged just 41. His official obituary makes reference to his unspecified 'gifts, graces and fruits ... [being] such as Methodism most approves ... [and] great wisdom, zeal and usefulness characterized his Circuit work.'¹³

The next superintendent was the Revd George Brett (1881-84). In 1883, however, it was reported that the 'Rev. J.G. Graves, district missionary ... [had been] in charge of the circuit since the regretted illness of the pastor of the church Rev. G.J. Brett.'¹⁴ The extent to which ill health adversely affected Brett's ministry while he was in Basingstoke is not known.

Brett's successor was the Revd J. Robinson Cleminson (1884-87). As recorded, at the time of his arrival:

... Cleminson, lately in charge of the Wesleyan Methodist cause in the Petersfield circuit, entered upon his new appointment in Basingstoke last week, and preached for the first time in the chapel on Sunday, when the annual harvest thanksgiving services were held. The rostrum and communion table were prettily decorated with flowers, corn and fruit. There were large congregations at both services.¹⁵

In reviewing the history of the chapel at the previous mentioned anniversary in 1896, Cleminson was described as 'a prince of builders add[ing] no less than £2224 to the value of the trust properties by the erection of galleries in the Basingstoke chapel, the building of a Sunday School and classrooms, and the erection of the chapel at Greywell.'¹⁶

Chronologically the building of the classrooms, at a cost of approximately £390 came before the erection of the galleries, with the foundation stone being laid in June 1885.¹⁷ As explained at the time:

The site of the schools is situated at the rear of the Chapel, and when finished will prove of inestimable value. For some time past the present accommodation has been totally inadequate to the requirements, hence the necessity for making provision for the increasing number of children who attend.

¹² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 2 September 1881.

¹³ <https://archive.org/stream/minutesseveralc05churgoog#page/n48/mode/2up/search/cooke> [accessed 12 February 2109].

¹⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 20 October 1883.

¹⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 September 1884.

¹⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 June 1896. The estimated value of Trust property at the time of Miles' departure was £1,200 by 1896 the value had increased to £5,500.

¹⁷ As explained, 'although the tender of Mr Tarrant (at £389 6s 7d) was slightly in excess of the lowest, yet in consideration of his being an old member of the congregation, and thoroughly in sympathy with Methodist work the building committee, had unanimously resolved to accept his tender.' *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 June 1885. The architect was Mr Maurice H. Pocock of London, *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 June 1885.

In keeping with common practice a bottle containing several documents was lodged in a specially prepared cavity under the first stone. These were:

... a copy of the *Methodist Recorder*, *Christian Journal*, *Hants and Berks Gazette*, several coins of the realm, programme of the stone-laying service, and a document from which we draw the following particulars, viz.: The school is erected in the year 1885, by the people called Methodists for the use of the Society founded by the Rev John Wesley M.A., in the year 1739. It is built for the purpose of providing scriptural and religious education for the young, and for the accommodation of the congregation worshipping in the adjoining sanctuary. The number of scholars in the school, which hitherto has been held in the chapel, is 130.

The names of the teachers and officers of the school and of the School Building Committee were also provided. It is noteworthy that at the evening meeting clergy from the other Free Churches in the town and the Salvation Army were also present.¹⁸

The enlargement of the chapel took place in the following year. A report of the its re-opening in January 1887, indicates the reasons for the work:

The increase in accommodation was felt by the trustees to be necessary from the fact that all the available sittings had been let, even to an encroachment on the rights of the poor, provision for whom in the shape of free sittings had become very limited ... numerous applications for sittings had been made by persons desirous of regularly worshiping with the congregation; and these applications for want of room could not be met.

It was also explained that if necessary 'beauty, and conformity to architectural fitness' had to be 'sacrificed ... to utility, to the needs of the Church, and the requirements of the future.' In the event, however, thanks to the skill of the architect, Mr T. Wonnacott of Farnham, who had designed the original chapel, as mentioned previously, the additional galleries had improved the look of the interior of the building. Indeed, the chapel now looked 'very compact, comfortable and neat.'¹⁹

There are relatively few traces of the ministry of Revd John Stevenson, who served as superintendent from 1887 to 1890. One of the gifts he received at his departure was a 'silver-mounted Malacca walking stick suitably inscribed' from the Wesleyan Chapel Choir.²⁰ His retirement from active ministry in 1903, after 43 years service, received a mention in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*.²¹

Between 1890 and 1893, the superintendent minister was the Revd Samuel Oliver, who moved to Basingstoke from Bloxwich near Walsall.²² It would seem from a report that appeared at the time of his arrival that Oliver had a varied denominational background to say the least, and he gave a 'rather funny account of it the other night':

¹⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 June 1885.

¹⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 29 January 1887.

²⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 August 1890.

²¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 May 1903. At the time he was serving 'in the Stonehouse and Easington circuit.'

²² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 1 February 1890.

He ... [was] the son of a Congregational minister. After finishing his term at school he went into business, and for some considerable time attended the services of the Congregational Church. His first visit to a Methodist chapel did not favourably impress him. The singing was vile, and being a man of tender sensibilities in that respect, he felt he could not worship where the singing was not good. After a while he went to London to live and struck out friendship with the Baptists. Afterwards he attached himself to a Presbyterian church, where the singing of a well trained choir rejoiced his soul exceedingly. After a while he moved to Brighton and there attended the ministry of the Congregationalists, which in course of time gave place to that of the Roman Catholics, whose services he attended regularly and religiously for some six months. Indeed he went so far as to practice the swinging of the censer, and the good priest looked forward to him becoming a successful acolyte. But it was in connection with the Church of England that the turning point in his religious career took place. Then he had thought he had lived a wandering life for long enough, and that he must settle down somewhere. So he took to his books and read the history of the various denominations – not so much as to their doctrines, in regard to which he thought there were no essential differences, but as to their church polity and government. The conclusion he arrived at was that the Church of the Wesleyan Methodists was the most perfect organisation and the most effective system on the face of the earth for the promotion of Christianity ... He considers it an advantage to that Church and its ministers that it has a definite creedal basis, and that that basis is not a shifting one.

It was also pointed out that ‘comparatively speaking’ he was ‘a young man’ he was also teetotaler and had ‘said his farewell to the weed’. Reference was made to his Irish origins and related sense of humour and evangelistic zeal, of which there were high expectations.²³ In a report of a choir gathering in 1893, the phrase ‘usual sprightly manner’ was used to characterise his approach to conducting the proceedings.²⁴

At Oliver’s farewell gathering fulsome tributes were paid to the qualities he had displayed during his time in Basingstoke:

All agreed that the anticipation that Mr Oliver’s ministry would be one of active and fruitful evangelistic work had certainly been realised. His winning manners and courteous gentlemanly demeanour have made him easily accessible even to the humblest member of his flock. His constant cheerfulness and manly vigour have made him a welcome companion whether in the home or upon a journey; while his quick sympathies for all who fall and suffer, his earnest faithful preaching of the Gospel, his consistent witness of the Truth before men, his whole-hearted consecration of his gifts and talents to his sacred mission and, above all, his possession of “an even, strong desire, a calmly-fervent zeal” for the salvation of souls have had a manifestly quickening influence upon the spiritual activities of the church. The young men especially have had much to be thankful for from Mr Oliver whose

²³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 September 1890.

²⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 March 1893.

contact with them at all times has had a wholesome and stimulating effect upon their religious experience.

Praise indeed and notwithstanding the tendency to eulogise on these occasions there is little doubt that Oliver's departure was keenly felt both by his Church and Nonconformity more widely within the town. That said, he was 'staunch believer in the existing polity of Methodism and its organisation.'²⁵

Oliver was followed by the Revd Herbert H. Adams (1893-96). He, in a similar manner to some of his predecessors, 'had a lovable nature and was kindly and gracious in all things.' Thus, not surprisingly, 'he was beloved by all who knew him.'²⁶ Shortly after his arrival a pen portrait of him was published in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*:

His looks give him credit for less years than he has actually spent on this planet. He is thirty-four, is of medium stature, has deep-set eyes, a light moustache and an abundance of wavy brown hair.

With respect to his style of preaching:

... [it is] quiet and deliberate, now and then relieved by a rousing utterance during which the expression becomes more animated and the dark face is suffused with a tinge of colour. His gestures are free and natural but not demonstrative. He does not stomp from one side of the rostrum to the other but changes his position almost imperceptibly. The matter of his sermons on Sunday was very listenable, and had evidently been thoughtfully and diligently prepared. Yet the delivery was for the most part independent of notes. The language was well chosen and there were no vain repetitions. The points of his discourses were distinctly stated, and the anecdotes and quotations, with which he illustrated, emphasised and supported his words were for the most part fresh and culled from a wide field of literary knowledge.²⁷

Clearly, Adams had made a favourable impression and it would seem that his ministry in Basingstoke was a very profitable one.

As mentioned, at the 1896 anniversary celebrations every superintendent 'had been blessed with varied gifts, and it could be said of each of Mr Adams' predecessors that he had left the circuit better than he had found it, and this would also be the case when they shook hands and said "Farewell" to their present minister.'²⁸ This was confirmed at the time of Adam's departure in August of that year for the Penzance Circuit with reference to him 'having done much useful work in the Basingstoke Circuit.'²⁹ As a token of their appreciation the members of the Young Men's Bible Class presented him with 'a handsome travelling clock.' In accepting the gift, Adams commented that 'his associations with the young men of his congregation

²⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 2 September 1893.

²⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 17 June 1932.

²⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 9 September 1893.

²⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 June 1896.

²⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 August 1896. Notably he oversaw 'the erection of a new chapel at North Warnborough and the establishment of a preaching station at Upon Grey.'

... [represented] one of the brightest spots of a happy ministry.’³⁰ It is also worthy of note that the contribution of Mrs Adams, specifically with respect to the establishment of a local branch of the British Women’s Temperance Association, was duly acknowledged. She had been one of the chief promoters of its starting [in February 1895] and ... rendered ... very valuable assistance as its secretary, and been very warm hearted and enthusiastic in the progress ... made.’ A presentation of a bag and umbrella was duly made as ‘a souvenir from her friends in Basingstoke.’³¹

The next superintendent was the Revd John Oswald (1896-7), who came to Basingstoke from Retford, and commenced his ministry by conducting the Harvest Festival services in September 1896. At his recognition service, Oswald spoke of his priorities, the first of which was to preach the Word. Something of his forthrightness was evident in what he had to say:

In these days there were many different ideas to this, and he might not preach their conception of the Word; his preaching might interfere with some of their prejudices. He was not here to preach what would please people or tickle their ears, or to preach in such a way as to get popularity, but he was here to preach the Gospel. His knowledge would be imperfect, but he would preach the Word as God led him to understand it. He hoped it would not hurt them, but there were some he hoped it would hurt.

He went on to speak of his approach to pastoral ministry and to home visits and also stressed the importance of prayer.³² Oswald’s time as superintendent, however, was to be a very short one since he was plagued by ill-health and died unexpectedly at the early age of 43 in the following year. During his illness the Revd E.J. Iles provided cover for him. Oswald’s death was ‘deeply felt’ with a memorial service, which ‘a large congregation attended, being held in May 1897. The preacher, the Revd H. J. Loxley of Aldershot was an old colleague of the deceased. Speaking of Oswald’s contribution to the Retford circuit reference was made to his ‘genial presence’ as a pastor; his sermons which ‘were full of life and vigour’; and the ‘helpfulness’ of his discourses. Clearly, if he had lived, he would have made a valuable contribution to the Basingstoke circuit.’³³

Oswald’s successor the Revd William Thackray served for two years (1897-99). At his recognition meeting, having indicated that ‘he wished to be a friend to his people as well as their preacher’, he went on to highlight his priorities. These were the Sunday school, cottage prayer meetings, temperance work and encouraging church members to remain loyal to their denomination when they got married and buried their dead ‘instead of going to a clergyman of the Church of England.’ He was not one to mince his words and expressed his belief ‘in putting the truth as plainly and as simply as possible, in hitting straight and making people wince under it.’³⁴ There is no record of a leaving event for Thackray so it is not clear what kind of impression he left.

The Revd Joseph Caley, who took over in 1899, appears to have been, perhaps, a more emollient character. Indeed he stayed for four years rather than the usual three. On being welcomed, he ‘had no sooner begun his homely talk, rich with

³⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 15 August 1896.

³¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 1 August 1896.

³² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 September 1896.

³³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 22 May 1897.

³⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 September 1897.

reminiscences of a long experience of the Methodist ministry, than he seemed to lose his aspect of new superintendent in the closer relationship of an old and confidential friend.' He was also much affected by 'the kind words of a brother minister of the town.'³⁵ In speaking of his personal experiences as a Methodist he spoke warmly of the class-meeting which had 'been a source of untold spiritual blessing up to the present hour.'³⁶ During the time Caley spent in Basingstoke the administrative arrangements were altered with a number of circuits being combined in 1900 to form the Surrey and North Hants Wesleyan Mission.³⁷

Caley's ministry appears to have been something of a family affair. In reporting on his departure, reference was made to not only Joseph who was given a fountain pen 'as a mark of affection and esteem by his class', but also his wife who was presented with an 'easy chair' by members of the Ladies' Sewing Meeting and the Misses Caley, whose services would be greatly missed by the Wesley Guild 'especially in connection with their musical entertainments.' From Basingstoke, the Caley family moved to Henley on Thames, where Joseph was to 'perform the less arduous duties of a supernumerary minister in the Reading Church.'³⁸

The new superintendent, the Revd Harold Chapman (1903-08) had the privilege of being in post when the old chapel was dismantled and removed to Cliddesden and replaced with a new larger place of worship, which was opened in 1905. Chapman came to Basingstoke from Manchester and was described as 'a cultured and devoted minister.' His introductory sermon on the Sunday morning following his arrival was based on words from St Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth and included references to the need for 'all true evangelism ... [to] begin in compassion'; the fact that 'a true pastor is a rod as well as a staff and seeks not so much to please men as to improve them'; and to the claim that 'they, as Methodists, had been in danger of exalting the instrument of faith to the detriment of the power of grace.' At the Monday evening welcome meeting, he ended his remarks with the rallying cry that: 'If they only shared their work, he had no fear for the future of Methodism in Basingstoke, and, by the blessing of God, they were going to have great and glorious times by an outpouring of the Spirit and by a willingness to work under their one Master, Jesus Christ.'³⁹ Chapman was to remain for 5 years, a relatively long period, as minister 'in charge of the Basingstoke section of the Surrey and North Hants Wesleyan Mission.'⁴⁰

Undoubtedly the most significant event during his time as superintendent was the replacement of the chapel in Church Street with a far more impressive building. Some idea of its imposing character can be gained from the following contemporary account of the new building:

The new Church erected on the site of the old one in Church-street ... is double the size of that which it has replaced. The new buildings ... have been designed by Messrs Gordon and Gunton ... and are so arranged as to give seating accommodation for nearly 700 persons.

³⁵ This was the Revd Eustace Long of Immanuel Church, who was acting as spokesman of Basingstoke's Nonconformist ministers.

³⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 9 September 1899.

³⁷ This consisted of four sections: Basingstoke, Guildford, Alton and Petersfield.

³⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 22 August 1903.

³⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 September 1903.

⁴⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 26 December 1908.

The internal dimensions of the building on the ground floor are 62ft 6in by 50 ft. The galleries do not go the whole length of the two sides of the building, but terminate at the second bay from the chancel wall, and are rounded off in such a way as to allow an uninterrupted view of the rostrum from every seat in the galleries. The internal work is carried out entirely in Oregon and selected pitch pine. The roof is of the hammer-beam open timbered description and gives a very lofty and well proportioned effect. An organ chamber is constructed at the back of the rostrum, and accommodation for the choir is provided by radiating seats on the ground floor on either side of the rostrum.

The entrances, which are mosaically paved, are large and ample, with two wide staircases leading to the gallery and a long uninterrupted narthex some eight feet wide. The windows are glazed with leaded lights. The heating apparatus has been carried out by Messrs. Jones and Sons of London, on the low pressure hot water system. The Church is well lighted artificially, there being four large pendants on either side each fitted with four-light incandescent burners with white Paris globes, and single burner brackets on the walls, and a large storm-proof lamp in the vestibule.

Externally the buildings are faced on the front and two flank returns with spilt flints and stone dressings; the sides and ends are carried out in Faversham stock brickwork with stone dressings. The design adopted by the architects is English Perpendicular Gothic, infused with that modern feeling which is perhaps one of the most pleasing features in the recent revival of Gothic architecture (see Figure 3).

The description ends with a reference to the builder, Mr John Harris of Basingstoke and the comment that the Church formed ‘one of the most striking architectural features of the town.’⁴¹



Figure 3 *The New Wesleyan Methodist Church in Church Street*

⁴¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 March 1905.

In a similar manner to most Methodists, Chapman was a committed supporter of the cause of temperance, for which he composed hymns and wrote poems. Thus, it is unsurprising that in July 1908 he and his wife placed the manse lawn at the disposal of the British Women's Temperance Association. Rain, however, meant that most of the proceedings took place in the Wesleyan Hall when, amongst other things, Chapman's "Campaign Hymns" were sung and his 'new poem "The Song of the Beer" was read.' In view of his impending departure, 'special mention was made ... of the great service ... [he] had done for the temperance cause by voice and pen'.⁴²

Chapman's lengthy ministry in one location, for a Methodist, was indicative of the high regard in which he was held. There was considerable evidence of this in the tributes paid to him and his wife at the time of their departure. The Superintendent of the Mission, the Revd W.R. Sellars referred to Chapman:

... as being appreciated from one end of the Mission to the other. Where he had gone he had carried with him brightness and had won the esteem and love of the people. He had made them merry when they were melancholy, and they were fearfully sorry that he was going. They all knew his ability in the pulpit and in every branch of work that he cared to take up; but they thought of him most of all as a friend. He had been in many of their homes, and in times of sickness he had never neglected them.

The chairman, Mr A. Millard, 'with his characteristic suavity' added that the size of the audience:

... spoke well for the affectionate, endearing friendship which had bound minister and people so closely together during the last five years. He had much pleasure on behalf of the Church in tendering to Mr. Chapman their sincere and cordial thanks for his loyal devotion to the cause of God and of Methodism in this Mission. They remembered how Mr Chapman had distinguished himself in the raising of funds for the new Church of which they were so proud (see Figure 4); and they remembered how, during the epidemic of 1905, rising early and late in taking rest, he bravely did his utmost to comfort the sick and the dying both in the hospital and in the homes of the sufferers (applause). Mr Chapman's sermons had been characterised by brightness, independence of thought and literary grace. They had been singularly practical and edifying, and there were many in this room who thanked God that Mr Chapman ever came to Basingstoke. A true man, loving in disposition and modest almost to a fault, Mr Chapman was greatly beloved by those among whom he had laboured here. He had had to serve many tables, and he had served them well and with great ability.

Praise indeed and in the circumstances it is unsurprising that Chapman was presented with 'a gold watch as a small token of the affection and esteem in which he was held by those who were proud of being associated with him.' The contribution of Mrs Chapman was recognised in the gift of a 'dress basket.'

⁴² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 July 1908.



Figure 4 *Opening of New Methodist Church in Church Street*

A later speaker, the Junior Steward, Mr Ellingham, ‘alluded to Mr Chapman’s work as a Poor Law Guardian and as Secretary of the Free Church Council, and eulogised his tact, talent and sagacity which had characterised ... [his] ministry.’ Other speakers mentioned that ‘he had broken the record with regard to his length of ministry’; his rule being one of ‘peace’; his ‘usefulness as a handy man’; and ‘his cheery ministry in the time of sickness’.

For his part, Chapman’s ‘heart was full of gratitude’ and ‘the only virtue he claimed as a minister: he could really enter into the sorrows and joys, into the social as well as the spiritual life of the people.’ He claimed that the one gift God had given him which ‘he prized very much [was] the gift of ready sympathy.’ He went on to say that:

Without any sort of affectation ... he felt himself at home with the people among whom he lived and worked. Such genial sunshine had been round about him in Basingstoke that his time here had been a time of true mental and spiritual development.

However, he went on to qualify these very uplifting comments with an acknowledgment that:

His success had not been what he had hoped. He felt very much indeed that he failed to achieve what he had set out to do; but what success had been accomplished had come about through their kindly co-operation and sympathetic support in what he had attempted to do.⁴³

Notwithstanding this qualification regarding his achievements, Chapman was undoubtedly going to be, in contemporary language, ‘a hard act to follow.’⁴⁴

⁴³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 August 1908.

⁴⁴ When Chapman returned a year later to speak at the Sunday school anniversary services and meeting he was accorded ‘a very hearty welcome.’ Reference was also made to the fact that ‘by his theological and general scholarship, his catholicity of spirit, and especially by his frank and natural demeanour towards everybody he won the respect and enduring affection of all who came in contact with him.’ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 19 June 1909.

This was acknowledged by his successor, the Revd W. Arthur Chettle (1908-11). At his recognition meeting, he made reference to his predecessor and the challenges he faced as the new minister:

... he wanted to read a telegram which came into his hands a few minutes before the meeting began, addressed from Stoke-on-Trent "Success to the meeting. Goodwill to all. Chapman." (applause). He was glad that Mr Chapman had not forgotten them, and he was sure they had not forgotten him. That was one of the difficulties of every new minister – that while conscious that he had the loyalty, the support and the affection of those amongst whom he worked, he was conscious that he had to fill the shoes of one who had done excellent work in their midst. He was hopeful, but he was not forgetting that he had to carry on the traditions which had been so excellently maintained by his friend Mr. Chapman.⁴⁵

In the event, however, according to an obituary in *The Methodist Times*, Chettle was remembered as "one who brought to the service of his Church the full measure of his great gifts and the earnest devotion of his untiring service."⁴⁶ It would seem that, as his predecessor had predicted, if the Wesleyan Methodists of Basingstoke 'extended the same kindness and sympathy to his successor, Mr Chettle would be a fortunate man.'⁴⁷

Between 1911 and 1912 the Revd Edwin Woodward served as superintendent. There are very few traces of his time in Basingstoke. It is known that he served as President of the Wesley Guild and 'called upon the representatives of kindred societies to make their responses' at the Guild's festival in February 1912;⁴⁸ and was present at the Church's anniversary during the following year.⁴⁹ However, there is no mention of him in a report of the Sunday school anniversary held in June.⁵⁰ He presumably left during the summer as was the custom to be succeeded by the Revd Walter Barnes, who commenced his ministry on 1st September 1912.

As was by now the longstanding custom, he was welcomed by ministers and representatives of the principal Free Churches in the town. At the meeting for this purpose, the Revd William Thomson from Immanuel Church observed that on the basis of five year's experience: 'nowhere would he find nicer people to get on with in Christian service than he would find at Basingstoke.' In his contribution, Barnes expressed the view that 'the churches were often in danger of minimising their own influence and of magnifying the influence of the world.' They needed 'courage and concentration, a brave heart and a cool head.'⁵¹

Coinciding with Barnes' arrival was the establishment of 'the work at Kempshott Village', to which he made a significant contribution (Figure 5. See also Appendix C).⁵²

⁴⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 September 1908.

⁴⁶ As quoted in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 March 1931.

⁴⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 August 1908.

⁴⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 10 February 1912.

⁴⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 9 March 1912.

⁵⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 20 June 1912.

⁵¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 October 1912. Barnes came to Basingstoke from Kensington 'where his work had been largely among men'.

⁵² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 7 August 1915.



Figure 5 *The Wesleyan Church at Kempshott*

Somewhat ironically, in view of what was to happen less than two years later, at the evening harvest service of 1912 Barnes preached eloquently and in a striking manner for the realisation of the prophecy: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up arms against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”⁵³ Following the outbreak of the First World War, however, Barnes along with Mr and Mrs Floyd, played an important part in the founding and running of the Soldiers Home.⁵⁴

In August 1913 the Revd Roland F. Priestley from Accrington was appointed by the Methodist Conference ‘as a junior minister’ to assist Barnes.⁵⁵ At an event pervaded ‘by a spirit of cheery optimism’, Priestley was formally welcomed with Barnes speaking ‘enthusiastically of the splendid traditions of Methodism throughout the world, and especially of the Basingstoke Church’. In a similar vein, Priestley expressed the ‘hope that by pulling together they would be able to achieve much good.’⁵⁶

Barnes moved from Basingstoke to Exeter in 1915. His ministry had been ‘greatly appreciated’ especially for the ‘strong leadership’ he had provided and ‘by the way [that] the difficulties ... [the church had faced] had been tackled and largely solved.’ Specific reference was made to what had been done, as mentioned above, with respect to ‘the comfort and inspiration of the soldiers while they were in Basingstoke.’ Mrs Barnes was also commended for ‘her services at the organ’ which had been ‘incalculable’. While ‘the successful way the ladies of the Sewing Meeting carried through the [1914] bazaar was in no small degree due to her courage, tact and enthusiasm.’ Barnes and his wife were presented with ‘a valuable coffee service as a token of goodwill.’⁵⁷

Barnes’ successor, the Revd Finlay Mackenzie (1915-19) moved from Melksham to Basingstoke and at a meeting held to welcome him promised that ‘he would do his utmost ... to extend the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.’⁵⁸ During his ministry in 1917, ‘the Basingstoke Wesleyan Circuit ... [was] reconstituted by resolution of the Wesleyan Conference’ with the Surrey and North Hants Mission

⁵³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 October 1912.

⁵⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 7 August 1915.

⁵⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 16 August 1913.

⁵⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 September 1913.

⁵⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 7 August 1915.

⁵⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 September 1915.

‘being dissolved and the various sections reverting to separate circuits.’ During the 17 years of the Mission’s existence there had been a 100 per cent increase in membership and a number of new churches had been erected including the one in Basingstoke. It was hoped that ‘the reversion to circuit life, which had become desirable owing to changing conditions, the record would continue to be one of prosperity and advancement.’⁵⁹

At the conclusion of his ministry in the town Mackenzie was presented with a cheque for 30 guineas. In making the presentation, the senior circuit steward, Mr G.H. Webber, referred to ‘the progress that had been made financially and spiritually during Mr Mackenzie’s ministry’. From Basingstoke, Mackenzie moved in 1919 to Glastonbury where he took charge of the Mid-Somerset Mission.⁶⁰

Mackenzie’s replacement, the Revd Thomas Caddy (1919-22) came to Basingstoke from Plymouth. At a social gathering held in September 1919 to welcome him formally, he expressed the belief that:

... the present was the most crucial period that Christians had had to face since the first century. Much was being said about the reconstruction of our social order, but he thought that efforts in this direction would never bring about the results we desired unless actuated by the spiritual force which Christianity alone could command.⁶¹

After making clear that he was ‘no bigot’, he nonetheless ‘believed that Methodism at her best had a distinct and definite contribution to make to our common religious life and thought and experience.’⁶² At its heart were the principles of ‘fellowship, co-operation and equality.’ As was usual on these occasions he stressed the importance of minister and people working together in harmony. At the conclusion of his ministry, Caddy was praised for ‘the unsparing way in which he ... [had] given himself to his work.’⁶³

Prior to coming to Basingstoke, the next superintendent, the Revd Thomas Biltcliffe (1922-24) had served in Porthcawl.⁶⁴ As a guest speaker at Bridgend Wesleyan Church Anniversary celebrations in 1916, he was described as an ‘eloquent preacher’. Taking as his text “For they kindled a fire” from Acts Ch 28 v2, he was reported as speaking with ‘apostolic fire.’⁶⁵ When he arrived in the town in September 1922, his initial sermons ‘gave evidence of deep thought and originality and spiritual power.’⁶⁶ In early 1924, it was reported that Biltcliffe was seriously ill as a result of ‘the bursting of a gastric ulcer.’⁶⁷ Consequently, it was necessary to appoint an acting superintendent minister. This was the Revd Harry J. Basham of Richmond

⁵⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 22 September 1917. Comments made by the Revd F.L. Wisemen, representing the Home Mission Committee, at the first quarterly meeting of the reconstituted Basingstoke circuit.

⁶⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 9 August 1919.

⁶¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 September 1919.

⁶² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 September 1919.

⁶³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 2 September 1922.

⁶⁴ Information from Ancestry indicates that Biltcliffe was born on 26 Sept 1872 in Batley. He married Florence Jessop in 1894 and they had two children Florence and ... At the time of the 1911 census the family was living in Melton Mowbray. He died in 1937 aged 68. His death was registered in Flintshire.

⁶⁵ *Glamorgan Gazette*, 17 November 1916.

⁶⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 9 September 1922.

⁶⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 January 1924

College, who had only recently been ordained.⁶⁸ However, he proved to be a sound choice and at the time of his departure in August 1924 he was praised for ‘the excellent work’ he had done. He was presented with ‘a book (suitably inscribed), together with a wallet containing £12 10s in Treasury notes.’ In returning thanks Basham ‘spoke of the kindness with which he had been received everywhere in the Circuit, and ... he hoped in the course of his new duties as a military chaplain to visit Bramley, and probably Basingstoke, and so renew his many friendships.’⁶⁹

A week later the Revd A. Percy Parkinson (1924-27) took up the post of superintendent minister, the first time in his varied clerical career that he had performed the role. Among his previous postings was one in Southampton where he successfully transformed ‘an old “down town” church ... into a flourishing Central Mission.’ On his move to Basingstoke it was mentioned that ‘his tall well built frame ... [would] be missed at Walthamstow [his previous posting], where he ... [had] been a fine example of muscular Christianity and a practical demonstration that a manly man ... [could] don clerical garb.’ He was an ‘enthusiastic footballer’ and a keen all round sportsman.⁷⁰ The next change of minister occurred in the summer of 1927, when Parkinson moved to Chester-le-Street in County Durham. Prior to his departure Parkinson was presented with ‘a wallet containing £17 in Treasury notes as a small token of appreciation and esteem from the town and village churches in the circuit.’⁷¹

Parkinson was replaced by the Revd James Ash Parsons (1927-30) of the Leysian Mission in City Road London (see Figure 6).⁷²



Figure 6 *The Revd J. Ash Parsons*

Parsons had entered the ministry in 1891 and by the time he arrived in Basingstoke he had a considerable and varied experience of ministry. In addition, he had lost two of his three sons in the First World War, one of whom had won the VC. At Basingstoke he had a lay assistant, Stanley Belcher, who had worked with him at the Leysian mission. During his final year in Basingstoke, Parsons’ ministry was ‘interrupted by a long and painful illness, followed by a serious operation, from which he made a wonderful recovery.’ The President of the Wesleyan Conference appointed the Revd

⁶⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 16 February 1924.

⁶⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 16 August 1924.

⁷⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 August 1924 and 17 September 1924.

⁷¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 15 August 1927.

⁷² Parsons had two periods at the Mission which was situated in one of the most deprived parts of London. During his first spell with the Mission at the beginning of the 20th century, membership increased from 300 to 1,700 and ‘a magnificent building in City Road involving a capital expenditure of £130,000 was erected.’

R.J. Day to act for Parsons during his illness, which he did 'with great faithfulness and loyalty.'⁷³ At a meeting following Parson's final evening service, fulsome tributes were paid to him by other Nonconformist ministers. The Congregational minister, the Revd Howard Stanley, referred to his friendship with Parsons and in 'glowing terms to the way in which ... [he] had tried to touch the life of the town.' While the Revd Ezra Ramm, the Primitive Methodist minister 'also spoke of the friendship and esteem which he felt for Mr Parsons and paid eloquent testimony to the efforts made to foster the spirit of union between the Methodist Churches [in Basingstoke] in preparation for the consummation of Methodist Union.' Parsons was presented with 'a wallet containing Treasury notes' as a token of the Church's and circuit's 'esteem and gratitude'. From Basingstoke, Parsons moved to 'semi-retirement in Lynton.' The Revd Day was also thanked and presented with a wallet containing Treasury notes. He 'had been appointed to the ministerial staff of the Tooting Mission.'⁷⁴

The first choice of successor to Parsons, the Revd H.S. Seekings, was unable to take up the post since 'his health ... [had] given way.'⁷⁵ In his place the Revd W. Benjamin Charles (1931-32), from the Paisley Road, Glasgow, circuit was appointed. At a meeting to welcome him, Mr G.A. Lelliott, one of the circuit stewards, pointed out that:

There was now no debt on any of the churches in ... [the] circuit ... and Mr Charles' work would therefore be unhampered by financial troubles. They had a good band of young preachers as well as those of older experience, and they looked forward together to happy fellowship in the work of the church.

In his comments, Charles mentioned the 'friendly feelings' of those he had already met and that although 'he might not be able to fill every niche and corner that had been filled so well by Mr Ash Parsons ... he might be able to fill some niche or corner that Mr Parsons was not able to fill.'⁷⁶ With 32 years of experience behind him Charles might have been expected to remain in Basingstoke for the usual three years. However, this was not to be and he moved on a year later.

There is no report of a farewell gathering for Charles. It is simply recorded that he 'concluded his ministry ... last Sunday when he preached at the morning and evening services, and administered the sacrament of the Lord's Supper at the close of each service.'⁷⁷ At the same time, Stanley Belcher who had served the Basingstoke Circuit as Assistant Minister for five years moved on. At his last circuit rally 'he thanked all who had helped him during the ... [time] he had been amongst them, and urged all to remember the acts of loving kindness they received as they journeyed through life, and there were many.'⁷⁸

The Revd Theophilus Tilke (1932-36) moved to Basingstoke from Hereford. He was welcomed along with Mr Seager as Lay Pastor and Tilke's assistant. During the course of his remarks, Tilke expressed the view that 'he felt convinced that they had come amongst kindly people.' He went on to highlight amongst other things, 'the congenial atmosphere'; 'the heartiness of the singing, which was good as the singing he had been hearing in Wales in the past few weeks, and that was saying something';

⁷³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 September 1931.

⁷⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 September 1931.

⁷⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 31 July 1931.

⁷⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 September 1931.

⁷⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 August 1932. Charles moved from Basingstoke to Bacup in Lancashire.

⁷⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 August 1932.

the fact that ‘in everything that pertained to the cause of Christ and the work of the Christian Church, he earnestly desire to help his ministerial brethren as much as he could’; the importance of work among young people, in which ‘he would take an interest in everything that appealed to them ... not only with regard to their religious and intellectual life but with regard to their recreation and social activities’; and the need to combat ‘sin and injustice and wrong of every kind, whether in the Church or social life ... [and thereby] bring about the Kingdom of God in their midst.’⁷⁹

The most important event while Tilke was superintendent and which occurred just after he arrived in Basingstoke was the celebration of the Methodist Union, combining the Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist Churches. At what was described as a ‘great public meeting’ held on Monday 3 October at Church Street, in his address Tilke likened the proceedings to a ‘wedding reception’ He went on to comment that:

... they had entered into this union with one great object of being more capable for service for the Kingdom of God. We have been united as the friends of all and the enemies of none except those who want to do evil, and we desire to cooperate with all who are trying to bring in the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ ... He was still under the spell of that great Uniting Conference at the Albert Hall ... The most thrilling moment was when ... the President asked all three conferences to vote on the resolution and 1,600 representatives stood up and every one raised their hand in favour ... By coming together ... we are not simply adding the primitives and United Methodists to the Wesleyans. We are making a new Church and are going to produce a new power. There will be many who regret the breaking away from the old ties but God has called us to a new home and given us new responsibilities.⁸⁰

Tilke remained in Basingstoke for four years and as far as the press was concerned his time as superintendent ended in a relatively ‘low key’ manner. It was simply reported that he ‘brought his ministry here to an end on Sunday evening, and on Sunday next will commence his ministry in Swindon.’⁸¹ Surprisingly, there was no mention of any farewell gathering or presentation. Whether there was a unreported gathering or one was simply not held is unknown.

Tilke was succeeded by the Revd Walter Weddell (1936-44), who came to Basingstoke from Castle Donington, in Leicestershire. At the meeting to welcome him in September 1936, the chairman commented that ‘after spending many years in the North, ... [Weddell] had come South and they hoped he would find southerners no less appreciative of his services than northerners’. For his part, Weddell, made ‘no promises except that he would do the best he possibly could and try to live up to the standard that was set before him when he entered the ministry.’⁸² Aspects of his character which were highlighted in his official obituary were:

His kindness, sympathy, cheerfulness and manliness, together with his gift of humour, [which] made him a very welcome visitor in the homes of our people, who remember him with affection and gratitude.

⁷⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 9 September 1932.

⁸⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 7 October 1932.

⁸¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 4 September 1932.

⁸² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 September 1936.

... [his] gift of ready speech, and [his] preaching [which] was a joy to him throughout his life.⁸³

Weddell was in post when the Second World War broke out and this explains the exceptional length of the time he served as superintendent.

Between 1870 and 1939 no fewer than 24 ministers superintended the Basingstoke circuit (Wesleyan until 1932). A full listing and further details of their arrival and departure dates can be found in Appendix 1.

Regular and special events in the life of the church

For committed Wesleyans the regular Sunday services were the highlight of their week. With hearty singing and stirring sermons, services were not only spiritually uplifting but also contrasted markedly with the more mundane aspects of life and many would have attended both in the morning and evening at 11.00 and 6.30 respectively. Because Church-street was the principal church in the Basingstoke circuit, the preacher would frequently be the Superintendent minister. On other occasions lay preachers would occupy the pulpit. Some of these were leading figures in the community. During 1893, for example, two of the lay preachers were John Bird, proprietor of the *Hants and Berks Gazette*, and the previously mentioned William Higgs, a member of the Basingstoke School Board from 1894 to 1903. The survey of churchgoing in 1882 recorded 136 worshippers at the morning service and 121 at the evening,⁸⁴ with the equivalent figures for 1903 being 151 in the morning and 163 in the evening.⁸⁵

Regular services were interspersed with those for special purposes, such as the major Christian festivals including Harvest. In addition, on New Year's Eve there was a Watchnight service and from time to time evangelistic services targeted at particular groups in the community, such as young people and the 'unchurched.'

A key feature of services, as well as church life more generally, was music and congregational hymn singing in particular. As it was put in an advertisement from 1930, 'Hymns you know, tunes you can sing.'⁸⁶ In these circumstances, members of the choir and the organist had a key role in leading the singing thereby making a memorable and stirring contribution to services. Indeed, in 1921 the choir was described as 'a body singers that ... [had] justly earned a great reputation for their finished performances of church music.' The report went on to offer further praise:

The choir distinguished themselves highly, singing with plenty of verve and breadth. A pleasing feature of these services is the manner in which the performers always preserve the reverence and dignity which is suitable to any House of God.⁸⁷

⁸³ https://www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk/content/people-2/wesleyan_methodist_ministers/obituaries_of_wesleyan_ministers/surname_w/weddell_walter_sydney_1881_-_1951 [accessed 1 April 2019]

⁸⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 18 February 1882.

⁸⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 21 March 1903.

⁸⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 October 1930.

⁸⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 19 March 1921.

The centrality of music is highlighted in the Golden Jubilee Souvenir Handbook, to which reference has previously been made, with there being a section devoted to the musical history of Church Street Methodist Church. This recounts that an organ was placed in the original chapel in 1879 and ‘in 1889 a special effort was made to purchase a new Organ, which was installed in 1890 at a cost of £160.’ This account also gives details of the organists, the organ installed in the new Church and still in use at the time of the jubilee and works which the choir performed, such as Handel’s “Messiah” and Haydn’s “Creation”.⁸⁸ Also of importance were the services of song which were held at intervals. While during the inter-War years monthly musical services were seen as a way of attracting those who did not worship at Church Street on a regular basis. Further examples include an annual choir festival which celebrated its fifth anniversary in 1913 and sixth anniversary in 1914;⁸⁹ a concert held in aid of Sunday school funds in 1920;⁹⁰ and a programme of music on a Sunday evening given by the Thorneycroft Military Band in 1925.⁹¹

In keeping with the traditions of Nonconformity, the Wesleyans were also assiduous in celebrating, on an annual basis, the anniversary of their cause. Initially observed in November and subsequently May and then from 1905 onwards usually during the spring. The standard format was to hold special services on anniversary Sunday, followed by a weekday meeting. The earliest anniversary for which there is a newspaper report is that of 1879:

The anniversary sermons in connection with the Wesleyan chapel were preached on Sunday last by the Rev F Cunningham of Cobham. The services were well attended. On the following day a public tea took place in the schoolroom, of which a goodly number partook. A public meeting was afterwards held in the chapel. Mr A Wallis occupied the chair, and stirring addresses were given by the Revs A. Cooke [Wesleyan minister]; H. Barron [Congregational minister]; W.H. Hines [Countess of Huntingdon minister]; and F. Cunningham. The anniversary was a most successful one, and the proceeds considerably in excess of those that preceded it.⁹²

The presence of a visiting preacher, as well participation by ministers from other Nonconformist churches in the town, were important features of the celebrations. Likewise, the event was often used for fund raising purposes.

Further examples are provided below for a selection of years to illustrate both the continuity of format and the nature of the occasion. Thus, in 1895:

WESLEYAN CHAPEL ANNIVERSARY. – On Sunday last anniversary services were held at the Wesleyan Methodist Church, when sermons were preached by Sergt-Maj Moss of the Army Service Corps, Aldershot, to large congregations. Sergt-Maj Moss is a credit to the British Army and his discourses were attentively listened to, and evidently appreciated. On Thursday evening a lecture was delivered by the Rev. H.H. Adams [the Wesleyan minister] entitled “A hundred and fifty years ago.” The lecturer graphically described

⁸⁸ ‘Church Street Methodist Church: Golden Jubilee Souvenir Handbook 1905-1955’, p.14-5. HRO 57M77/NMS10.

⁸⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 December 1913 and 19 December 1914.

⁹⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 14 February 1920.

⁹¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 April 1925.

⁹² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 1 November 1879.

the wretched state our country was in a hundred and fifty years ago, and also spoke as to the influence of the lives of the Wesleys and Whitfield.⁹³

The reference to the Wesleys and Whitfield was, of course, a reminder to those attending on the Thursday evening of the rich ecclesiastical heritage of the Methodists.

In 1914, just prior to the outbreak of the First World War:

Anniversary services were held at the Wesleyan Church on Sunday last. It had been arranged that the services should be conducted by the Rev. C.A. Skinner, B.A., of Richmond College, but he was unable to come due to sudden and serious illness. The morning service was taken by Mr W.J. Floyd and the evening service by Rev Walter W. Barnes [the Wesleyan minister]. On Thursday afternoon the Rev. Dr. Haigh, ex-President of the Wesleyan Conference, preached in the church and, following a well attended tea in the Schoolroom, there was a good gathering for the evening meeting, which was presided over by Mr A. Batley of Chandlersford (formerly of Basingstoke). The chairman gave a rigorous and inspiring address, and Dr Haigh delivered a lecture "China as I have just seen it." Dr Haigh's address, which was listened to with the closest attention and frequently applauded, was of the most interesting and informing character. His impressions of China, the conditions and life of the people, and the immense multitudes in that great country with the enormous changes which the next few years must bring, so graphically set forth, produced a great impression upon his hearers. Dr Haigh believes in the serious possibility of the Yellow peril and holds strongly that the only way of averting what he described as a world Armageddon is the Christianising of the great Chinese Empire. A hearty vote of thanks to him and also to the Chairman was unanimously awarded on the proposition of the Rev. Walter W. Barnes.⁹⁴

The somewhat apocalyptic tone of Dr Haigh's address, although based on his experiences of China, was perhaps prophetic given the catastrophe of the impending World War.

Anniversaries continued to be celebrated during the inter-War years. The report of the 1921 anniversary was particularly positive in its tone:

WESLEYAN CHURCH. – Very successful anniversary services were held on Sunday, the 13th inst., and Thursday, the 17th inst. On Sunday the preacher, morning and evening was the Rev F. Luke Wiseman, an ex-President of the Wesleyan Conference, there being excellent congregations. On Thursday a service was conducted by the Rev. Dinsdale T. Young, of the Westminster Central Hall, who preached a most eloquent sermon from the words "Of His Fulness have we all received and grace for grace". Tea was afterwards provided in the Schoolroom, a large company sitting down at the well spread tables. At the meeting in the evening Mr H.W. Cater, circuit steward, presided in the unavoidable absence of Sir Henry Holloway. The financial statement for the past year was given by Mr G.H. Webber, who also referred to the grand

⁹³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 4 May 1895.

⁹⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 23 May 1914.

achievement of clearing off the capital debt which had just been accomplished. The Rev. Dinsdale T. Young then delivered a lecture having for its title "Vanity Fair" based upon Bunyan's famous allegory in "The Pilgrim's Progress". Mr Young's deliverance was listened to with the keenest attention and the greatest appreciation by a large congregation. At the close a hearty vote of thanks to all who had helped to make the anniversary a success was unanimously accorded on the proposition of Mr G.E. Whiteman, seconded by the Rev. T.H. Caddy [the Wesleyan minister].⁹⁵

Clearly such events were well patronised and it was undoubtedly gratifying that, notwithstanding the heavy outlay on the new Church of 20 years earlier, the capital debt had been eliminated.

Five years later, in 1926:

The anniversary of the Wesleyan Methodist Church was celebrated on Sunday and Monday, when the church was honoured with a visit from one of the distinguished leaders of the Connexion, the Rev J. Alfred Sharp D.D., an ex-President of the Conference, Chairman of the First London District and a Book Steward ... on Monday night he gave an extremely interesting account of his visit to British possessions in the Southern Hemisphere [entitled "on top and down under"]. At the close of the evening service on Sunday the choir and a string band ... rendered a [musical] programme ... The performance was very creditable. Following a service on Monday afternoon, at which Dr Sharp was the preacher a public tea was held, and at 7 o'clock Mr. W.J. Bird, one of the Circuit stewards, presided at the annual meeting, at which the financial statement relating to the church property was presented by Mr Norman Endacott, the trustees' treasurer. The income for the year was £261, and the expenditure £249. The balance due to the Treasurer had been reduced from £58 15s 6d to £46 17s 11d ... the capital debt had been extinguished and the property was in a reasonable state of repair, but there were certain improvements, particularly the making good of the paths around the church, which the trustees would like to be in a position to carry out if the necessary funds were provided ...⁹⁶

As this and other reports indicate, the financial position of the church was very much to the fore on these occasions.

As a final example, in 1937:

The Church Street Methodists held their anniversary yesterday week, when they again had the pleasure of welcoming their former superintendent, the Rev J. Ash Parsons, now a supernumerary minister at Lynton. Mr Parsons preached at the afternoon service which was followed by a public tea in the schoolroom. In the evening a meeting was held in the Church at which the present Superintendent, Rev. W.S. Weddell was chairman. In the absence of the Treasurer (Mr. N. Endacott) the annual financial statement regarding the trust fund was presented by the Chairman. The balance due to the Treasurer at the beginning of the year was £27 0s 10d., and at the end of the year this deficit

⁹⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 26 February 1921.

⁹⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 March 1926.

had increased to £87 18s. This was accounted for by a falling off in contributions through the envelope scheme, and an increased expenditure on repairs. Mr Weddell went on to say that they were delighted to have Mr. Ash Parsons with them again. His ministry here was one of the great memories of this Church. Mr Ash Parsons gave an address, for which the Chairman thanked him on account of its high spiritual tone. The anniversary was further celebrated on Sunday, when the special preacher was the Rev. E.R. Squire of London, the national secretary of the Christian Endeavour movement in Methodism.⁹⁷

Not surprisingly, as these examples illustrate, anniversaries served as occasions for welcoming distinguished figures within Methodism to Basingstoke. Visits were also made at other times, such as that of the Revd Scott Lidgett in 1913. He was ‘a former President of the Wesleyan Conference, a prominent theologian, author of some important treatises and of the apologetic work “The Christian Religion: Its Meaning and Proof,” ... [and] also widely known as one of the founders of the Bermondsey Settlement, as well as for his work on the London County Council and on the National Free Church Council, of which he was President in 1906/7.’⁹⁸

Also of note was the return of past superintendent ministers for special events. Thus, in 1920 celebrations to mark the jubilee of Wesleyanism in Basingstoke were attended by a number of previous ministers, including the very first the Revd William P. Ellis, then ‘in his 78th year ... living at Grove, near Wantage ... [and] remarkably vigorous and active for his years.’ Others included the Revd Finlay Mackenzie, then of Glastonbury; the Revd Walter Barnes then of Exeter; the Revd Harold Chapman then of Hull; and the Revd Samuel Oliver, then of Walsall (see Figure 7).⁹⁹ The publicity attached to such events helped to keep the Church in the public eye and could be seen as a form of outreach.

⁹⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 23 April 1937.

⁹⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 3 May 1913.

⁹⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 3 April 1920.



Figure 7 *Past Ministers and Circuit Officers attending the 1920 Jubilee Celebrations*

Left to Right: Standing – Mr Pattenden, Mr Whiteman, Mr Hale, Revd Barnes, Mr Millard, Mr Webber, Mr W. Bird and Mr H Cater
Sitting- Revd Caddy, Revd Chapman, Revd Ellis, Revd Sellers, Revd Oliver, Mr Kynaston and Revd Mackenzie

Source: HRO 57M77/58/7

Evangelism was also to the fore in the missions that were held from time to time. An early example was a Revival Mission held in February 1886 and conducted by Captain W.W. Dennis, D.L., J.P., which produced a ‘decided and beneficial impression on the town.’

On Sunday night a crowded congregation listened with profound attention to his manly and effective utterances, and during the week, considering the foul weather and counter attractions, good congregations have gathered. The service on Thursday night for men only was a decided success. We have heard many “missioners” but rarely one that so approved himself and his methods to our judgment as Captain Dennis. He is utterly unconventional. He is fresh and forcible, original and pungent in style, and speaks with the ease and naturalness of an accomplished speaker. He addresses himself not to the fears and feelings, but the common-sense of his audience. He is free from cant, rant and unhealthy excitement. He is a fine sample of masculine Christianity, and his work cannot fail to achieve much good.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 20 February 1886.

To what extent the mission boosted regular congregations is not recorded, but it would seem that the “missioner” commended himself to both the press and his audiences.

In 1904 a ten day mission was held at the Corn Exchange. It was conducted by the Rev D.H. Moore who had ‘had a romantic career as a sailor, a member of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, city missionary, and finally pastor.’ There were special meetings for men and children and it concluded with ‘a cinematograph lecture ... by Mr J.A. Groom of the Flower Girls’ Mission.’¹⁰¹

A final example was a mission held in April 1913, when the “missioner” was Mr Arthur Richards, who had originally trained as a solicitor, and whose ‘outspoken, earnest and original addresses made a great impression on his congregations.’ Indeed, during the week, each night there had been ‘a gratifying increase in attendance’.¹⁰²

The Church was also very supportive of missionary activity at home and overseas. Indeed, as pointed out at the annual meeting in aid of the Wesleyan Home Missionary Fund in 1915:

But for the Home Missionary Society there would have been no Wesleyan Methodist Church in Basingstoke, and without the help of that Society they could not have a minister in Basingstoke at all. For a number of years they had been receiving £82 a year towards the support of the minister, and for the last two years they had received an extra grant of £50 towards the stipend of the lay agent.¹⁰³

Similar meetings were also held in aid of the Wesleyan Foreign Missionary Society. The chief speaker at the meeting in 1917 was the Revd A.H. Bestall of Woking who used the example of the Wesleyan Mission at Mandalay ‘and particularly of the work of mercy amongst the lepers, for whom Buddhism did nothing.’ He argued that:

If there is no other reason for supporting foreign missions, believe me, it is worth your while, if not as Christians, then as humanitarians, to spread the gospel which is the only thing that really helps and heals and purifies, the only vital philanthropy for the world today.¹⁰⁴

Raising funds for foreign missions and taking an interest in their work were seen by many Wesleyans, as well as members of other denominations, as a Gospel imperative.¹⁰⁵

The foregoing references to finance highlight an ongoing preoccupation of the Wesleyans and indeed members of other denominations. Consequently, events and initiatives designed specifically to raise money were a constant feature of church life throughout the period under review. In the early days of the cause the emphasis was on sacrificial giving by church members and securing donations from well-wishers for the Wesleyan Thanksgiving Fund in 1879;¹⁰⁶ and the Twentieth Century Fund in 1902.¹⁰⁷ However, arising in part from the financial commitments associated with the

¹⁰¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 29 October 1904.

¹⁰² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 April 1913.

¹⁰³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 February 1915.

¹⁰⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 December 1917.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, report of meeting held in 1925, *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 21 November 1925.

¹⁰⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 April 1879.

¹⁰⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 4 January 1902.

new church building, by the first decade of the 20th century bazaars were being organised to raise funds from the general public. One of the earliest of these was the Empire Bazaar of 1903, with the following announcement appearing in the 13th June edition of the *Hants and Berks Gazette*:

BRITISH EMPIRE BAZAAR. – In aid of the new Wesleyan Methodist Church a grand two-days' bazaar will be held in Drill Hall Basingstoke on Wednesday and Thursday next. On the first day the opening ceremony will be performed at 2.0 by His Worship the Mayor (Alderman W. Wadmore), and on the second day at 2.30 by Mrs Hedges, of Ealing. The stalls will represent England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Canada. Amongst other attractions, in addition to the usual side-shows, there will be selections of popular music by a full orchestra of 24 performers, under the direction of Mr A.A. Aylward. There will also be half-hour concerts, for which excellent programmes have been arranged. The price of admission each day is 1s; after 6 o'clock, 6d. Season tickets, 1s 6d.



Figure 8 *Interior of the Drill Hall*

There was clearly an attempt to emulate the “Reformation Times” bazaar held by the Congregationalists a few months earlier. Every effort was made to create a very favourable impression and as the following comments indicate the organisers succeeded in doing so:

The sentiments of patriotism and of pride in the vastness of the British Empire ... found expression in a very appropriate scheme of decoration, elegant and charming in its general effect ... Attractive scenes typical of the Colonies and the British Isles were placed above the various stalls. The best view of the Hall could be obtained from the platform and from this standpoint the Hall was a scene of gay magnificence. The coloured streamers and Chinese lanterns decorating the tie-rods of the roof; the attractively dressed stalls on either hand, and behind the band stand in the middle of the floor the brilliant flower stall with its bank of dark foliage and clusters of bloom surrounding a

representation of an Indian pagoda – all combined to produce a charmingly light and graceful result; and when the hall became crowded the kaleidoscopic effect of the moving figures and bright dresses completed a brilliant and exceedingly interesting ensemble.¹⁰⁸

Each of the stalls was representative of a particular part of the UK or British Empire. While, ‘at the back of the stage was a grand representation of Windsor Castle, with the River Thames in the foreground ... [standing] for a suggestion of England, the mother-land.’ Again there was a full programme of music and entertainments. A particular attraction on the first day was a ‘nail driving competition for ladies which attracted considerable amusement.’¹⁰⁹ On the second there was ‘a hat trimming contest for gentleman.’¹¹⁰

While on the Friday evening, ‘notwithstanding the continuous downpour of rain a large number of visitors repaired to the Drill Hall to listen to Mr. Aylward’s band, to enjoy the half hour concerts, to admire the gay scene, and to help realise the laudable intention of the promoters.’ Two further half hour concerts were held in the Masonic Hall. All of this activity help to boost the takings with just under £222 being raised, slightly less than the “Reformation Times” bazaar, but still a very large sum.¹¹¹

Three years later in 1906, a “Fairy Glen Bazaar” was held in the Schoolroom. As it was put in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*:

The large financial responsibilities devolving upon the Wesleyan Methodists of Basingstoke in consequence of the erection of their new church, and its adjuncts, have imposed upon them the necessity of living the strenuous life ... [That said], the bazaar was carried out by the workers in a spirit of cordial and harmonious co-operation, and, besides providing a means of amusement for a large number of people, proved financially successful, the expectations of its most sanguine promoters being quite realised ... [with] the total receipts amount[ing] to £103 8s 3d.¹¹²

Thus, apart from the main objective of raising funds, bazaars were seen as a means of fostering fellowship with an opening ceremony incorporating a hymn and a prayer to signify the underlying religious purpose of the event.

During the inter-War years, concerts as well as bazaars were organised to raise funds. For example, in February 1920 a concert was held in aid of the Sunday school, with the schoolroom being ‘crowded with a most appreciative audience, who greatly enjoyed the excellent programme provided.’¹¹³ Examples of bazaars include one entitled “Ye Olde English Fayre” held in 1931 and opened by Lady Cynthia Colville, Lady in Waiting to the Queen;¹¹⁴ and a “Spring Tyde Fair” in 1938.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 20 June 1903.

¹⁰⁹ The first prize was won by Mrs Davis.

¹¹⁰ Prizes were awarded to Mr E, Marshall, Mr W, Champion and Mr Burt.

¹¹¹ The exact amount was £221 19s 10d. Later, when the accounts had been finalised, it was reported that the ‘total receipts ... [were] £235 17s 10d (including amount taken at stalls £193 10s 10d and cash for admission £23 10s). The expenditure (including £35 for scenery contract) amounted to £63 6s 4d leaving a net profit of £172 11s 6d, which will be devoted to the new church building fund.’ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 15 August 1903.

¹¹² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 December 1906.

¹¹³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 14 February 1920.

¹¹⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 19 June 1931.

¹¹⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 1 April 1938. The total receipts were £205 2s 10d.

Church Organisations

In a similar manner to other churches in Basingstoke, Wesleyans gave pride of place to organisations associated with their ministry amongst children and young people. The Sunday school, bible classes and, from the 1890s, Wesley Guild were all prioritised and church members who devoted their time and skills to them were well respected.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the Sunday school was established right at the start of the cause, in November 1870, 'with a register of twelve scholars'. Ten years later there were 87, but there had been a considerable turnover due to removals from the town.¹¹⁶ Each year the work of the Sunday school was recognised at anniversary celebrations usually held in late spring. These were recognised as 'a notable event in the Church Calendar'.¹¹⁷ Special Sunday services often with a visiting preacher were followed by a weekday meeting at which the secretary and superintendent would give details of the 'health' of the school and an address would be delivered to encourage those present. From the late 1880s, these were often reported in considerable detail in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*. Some information from this source has been collated in Appendix 2. It provides details of the size of the school, which had grown to over 200 scholars by the 1890s and by implication the logistical challenges faced by the superintendent and teachers. Although the number of scholars fell during the years leading up to the First World War and throughout the inter-War years numbers were somewhat less than those recorded during the late Victorian era and early years of the 20th century, the school still had a considerable reach, with well over 100 scholars. Alongside the regular Sunday classes, there were annual summer treats. Some idea of their format and character can be gauged from the report of that of 1891.

SUNDAY SCHOOL TREAT. The annual festival of the Wesleyan Sunday School was held (by kind permission of the Rev. S.J.G. Fraser and Mr J. Medwin) at Brambllys on Tuesday. At two o'clock the children formed in procession at the schools in Church-street, and marched to the meadow, where, under the direction of their teachers, they indulged in various innocent games, as well as competitive sports for prizes, in which the tiniest little mites of humanity were not forgotten. The free tea to the children was the chief item in the programme and was successfully disposed of. The adult friends and visitors were entertained afterwards at a moderate charge. Afterwards the sports and games were resumed, and were continued until dark, when the band of the Railway Temperance Society, under Mr Duke (which had enlivened the proceedings by their music), played the National Anthem, and the assembly, which had during the evening swelled to considerable numbers, dispersed, congratulating themselves that the weather, though lacking sunshine, had not interfered with their enjoyment. Thanks are due to many kind friends who sent toys and sweets for distribution among the little ones.¹¹⁸

Closely linked to the Sunday school, there was, for many years, a branch of the Band of Hope which promoted the cause of temperance amongst the young.

¹¹⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 17 July 1880.

¹¹⁷ 'Church Street Methodist Church: Golden Jubilee Souvenir Handbook 1905-1955', p.15. HRO 57M77/NMS10.

¹¹⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 15 August 1891.

The Wesley Guild was modelled on the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavour and was designed to promote the cause of Christian discipleship amongst those who were too old for the Sunday School. Because of its importance, it is the subject of a separate paper in which its history from its foundation in 1897 to 1939 is traced. The Guild can be said to have facilitated the move from Sunday school to adult church membership and to have played an important part in encouraging young people to engage in 'good works'.

For adults, and in keeping with a practice adopted by other Nonconformist churches, during the late 1870s and early 1880s the Wesleyans sponsored a Mutual Improvement Association.¹¹⁹ Its importance was symbolised by the fact that the minister, at the time the Revd Samuel Miles, served as President and participated in the meetings. The Association was designed to foster debate and discussion amongst members; develop their public speaking skills or what was billed for one meeting as "elocutionary practice"; and contribute to what today would be called their 'lifelong learning'. Subjects discussed were a mix of both the religious and secular. Examples from the 1878/9 session include capital punishment;¹²⁰ 'total abstinence *versus* moderate drinking';¹²¹ poetry and music;¹²² and Sunday school work.¹²³ Although the Association only met with mixed success,¹²⁴ the ongoing commitment of the Church to "adult education" can be seen in its sponsorship of *ad hoc* talks and lectures. To give a flavour of these, some examples are provided in Table 1. As might be expected, many of the topics were religious in character and many of the speakers were ministers.

¹¹⁹ At that time, both London Street Congregational Church and the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion Church sponsored similar societies.

¹²⁰ This was entitled "Life for Life". *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 November 1878.

¹²¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 1 February 1879.

¹²² '... two excellent essays were read; one by Mr R.H. Jarvis on "Poetry"; and the other by the Rev. S. Miles, on "Music" ... a lively discussion followed in which several members took part.' *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 February 1879

¹²³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 March 1879.

¹²⁴ In December 1890 it was reported that the Association had 'lain dormant for ... three to four years' and that the then minister, the Revd Samuel Oliver wished to revive it. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 December 1890. However, this initiative only appears to have met with short term success.

Table 1: Some Examples of Talks and Lectures Organised by the Wesleyan Church

Date	Speaker	Topic
April 1896	Revd J. Dodsworth	“Manliness”
Nov 1913	Revd W.H. Lax	“A Parson’s Wanderings in Europe”
Mar 1921	Revd H. Arthur Meek	“Sunshine and Shadow in Deptford”
Mar 1922	Revd Thomas Caddy	“With notebook and camera in Central America”
Feb 1924	Revd H.J. Basham	“Palestine as I saw it”
Aug 1930	Revd Samuel Oliver	“How a Minister became a Timber Merchant”
July 1933	Dr Dinsdale Young	“Peter Mackenzie” ¹
April 1936	Dr Dinsdale Young	“The Good Samaritan”
June 1936	Revd Henry Hogarth	“Religion and Health”
June 1939	Rev Prof E.S. Waterhouse	“The Psychology of Laughter, Wit and Humour”

Note

1. Peter Mackenzie was one of the foremost preachers of the 19th century, ‘an undoubted genius of the pulpit; a little eccentric perhaps, but essentially lovable and warm-hearted, possessing great histrionic gifts and a large fund of humour, yet ever an evangelist and winner of souls.’ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 June 1933.

There were also two organisations specifically for women. One was the Ladies’ Sewing Party/Meeting which, as its name suggests, focussed on producing items that could be sold to raise funds for either particular projects, such as the new organ, or the general running costs of the Church. The other was the Women’s Bright Hour, which provided ‘an opportunity for worship and spiritual fellowship.’ It is not known when this started but it was still thriving in 1955.¹²⁵

Finally, the Methodist Church was keen to embrace developments in society more generally. For example, in January 1939 Basingstoke was visited by one of its open-air cinema vans. Two films, ‘produced by Pinewood studios’ were shown. One ‘called “Barabbas,” pictur[ed] the trial and death of Jesus Christ; [and] the other called “Faith Triumphant”, ... scenes ... [from] the arrest of St Paul.’ The screenings attracted ‘large crowds’ especially one at the bottom of Wote Street on Saturday night. However, ‘inclement weather’ restricted the number of screenings. In charge of the van was Stanley Belcher who had been lay pastor at Church Street during the late 1920s and early 1930s.¹²⁶

Conclusion

Following the Methodist Reunion in 1932, both Church Street and the former Primitive Methodist Church on Sarum Hill, although united denominationally, retained their distinctive identities. Thus, Basingstoke had two town centre Methodist Churches both of which had sizeable congregations and Sunday schools and were the lead churches of separate circuits. That said, while there may have been an element of competition, Church Street as it had traditionally done, remained on good terms with Sarum Hill and indeed the wider Nonconformist community within the town.

¹²⁵ ‘Church Street Methodist Church: Golden Jubilee Souvenir Handbook 1905-1955’, p.16. HRO 57M77/NMS10.

¹²⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 January 1939.

Appendix A: Superintendent Ministers Dates of Arrival and Departure

No	Name	Arrival	Departure
1	William P. Ellis	1872	1876
2	Samuel Miles	1876	1879
3	Alfred Cooke	1879	28/08/1881
4	George J. Brett	1881	1884
5	J. Robinson Cleminson	18/09/1884	20/08/1887
6	John Stevenson	1887	30/08/1890
7	Samuel Oliver	13/09/1890	02/09/1893
8	Herbert H. Adams	09/09/1893	1896
9	John Oswald	12/09/1896	22/05/1897 ^d
10	William W. Thackray	11/09/1897	1899
11	Joseph Caley	09/09/1899	22/08/1903
12	Harold J. Chapman	12/09/1903	08/08/1908
13	W. Arthur Chettle	12/09/1908	1911
14	Edwin Woodward	1911	1912
15	Walter W. Barnes	05/10/1912	07/08/1915
16	Finlay Mackenzie	04/09/1915	09/08/1919
17	Thomas Henry Caddy	13/09/1919	02/09/1922
18	Thomas Biltcliffe	09/09/1922	12/01/1924
19	Harry J. Basham	16/02/1924	16/08/1924
20	A. Percy Parkinson	13/09/1924	15/08/1927
21	James Ash Parsons	10/09/1927	30/08/1931
22	W. Benjamin Charles	11/09/1931	12/08/1932
23	Theophilus Tilke	09/09/1932	1936
24	Walter Weddell	04/09/1936	1944

Note

d = died in post

Appendix B: Sunday School Anniversaries and Statistics

Key:

HBG = Issue of the *Hants and Berks Gazette* in which report of Sunday school anniversary appeared.

AA = average attendance. M = morning. A = afternoon

OT = officers and teachers

Year	HBG	Roll	AA	OT	Superintendent	Quote
1887	16/07	---	---	---	Mr Kynaston	The Secretary's report 'showed the school to be in a most healthy and flourishing state.'

1888	16/06	169	---	15	Mr Kynaston	'A cricket club had ... recently been started for the benefit of the elder scholars.'
1889	06/07	187	---	14	Mr Kynaston	Mr K 'urged upon parents of scholars the duty of co-operating with Sunday School workers in promoting the moral and spiritual interests of their children.'
1890	14/06	180	---	17	Mr Kynaston	The school 'was making sure and steady headway'
1891	20/06	230	---	18	Mr Kynaston	'... the Rev A. Capes Tarbolton preached excellent and appropriate sermons morning and evening and addressed the scholars in the afternoon.'
1892	18/06	230	---	18	Mr Kynaston	'the school continues to prosper'
1893	03/06	237	100M 160A	19	Mr Kynaston	'most successful ever held' SS choir formed
1894	02/06	200+ ¹	---		Mr Kynaston	'the musical contributions were a pleasing feature'
1895	01/06	184	97M 135A	23	Mr Kynaston	'though scarcely reaching the high water mark of last year, [the anniversary] gave much encouragement to all concerned'
1896	06/06	n.k.	---	n.k		'the report ... showed an increase in numbers attending the school'
1897	05/06	200	---	23	Mr Kynaston	'although there had been no great increase, yet the work done had been of a very solid and enduring character'
1898	14/05	230 ²	85M 150A	24	Mr Kynaston	'flourishing and well-managed'
1899	13/05	190	80M 140A	24	Mr Kynaston	'the best financial result which has yet been attained by the school on any similar occasion'
1900	02/06	210	---	24	Mr Kynaston	'Never in the history of the school has there been such a healthy and cheerful outlook'
1901	22/06	---	---	---	Mr Kynaston	'A flower service was held in the afternoon'

1902	10/05	210	88M 176A	25	Mr Kynaston	'The report given by the secretary of the school was of a very satisfactory character'
1903	23/05	217 ³	71M 142A	27	Mr Kynaston	'the largest anniversary result [collections] ever realised in the history of the school'
1904	21/05	227	75M 152A	27	Mr Kynaston	the superintendent 'had served the school with ... conspicuous fidelity and devotion'
1905	---	---	---	---	---	---
1906	23/06	200	132A	27	Mr Kynaston	'new premises'
1907	22/06	160	---	22	Mr Webber	The Chairman 'was struck by the amount the school had raised for foreign missions ...'
1908	06/06	---	---	---	Mr Webber	'usual Monday meeting not held'
1909	19/06	177	---	27	Mr Webber	'special hymns used at the anniversary were exceptionally pleasing'
1910	11/06	195 ⁴	---	---	Mr Webber	'The meeting on Monday ... advertised as "a great public rally" was better attended than such meetings usually are'
1911	13/05	118 ⁵	---	24	Mr Webber	'The need for Sunday school work was as urgent as it had ever been'
1912	22/06	136 ⁶	---	21	Mr Webber	the mayor, 'as an old Sunday School teacher and lover of children, gave a sympathetic and encouraging address'
1913	05/07	---	---	---	Mr Webber	'The singing of the special hymns at the services by the children was very pleasing ...'
1914	13/06	---	---	---	Mr Webber	'not sufficient attention given to the teaching of Christian ethics based on the life of Christ'
1915	25/06	---	---	---	---	'Owing to exceptional circumstances the public meeting usually held on the Monday was dispensed with'

1916	24/06	---	---	---	Mr Whiteman Mr Davis	'the day school would look after the head; let the Sunday school attend to the heart ... [and be] a great recruiting agency for the Kingdom of Christ'
1917	---	---	---	---	---	---
1918	15/06	117	---	---	Mr Whiteman	'The Mayor said he was glad to know that in spite of the difficulties of the time this school was still going ahead'
1919	05/07	---	---	---	Mr Hughes	'A gratifying feature was the record amount (£38) the scholars ... had raised during the past year for foreign missions'
1920	---	---	---	---	---	---
1921	02/07	---	---	---	Mr Hughes	'A large number of book prizes, awarded according to a system of marking were presented ...'
1922	24/06	---	---	---	Mr Hughes	'A large number of book prizes had been awarded for regular attendance, punctuality, good conduct and Scripture knowledge'
1923	07/07	--- ⁷			Mr Hughes	'... the School was in a flourishing condition'
1924	05/07	---	---	---	---	'increases both in the number of scholars and in average attendance ... reported'
1925	20/06	166 ⁸	105M 130A	---	Mr Hughes	The results of the Scripture examinations were 'a splendid testimony to the good work done in the School.'
1926	03/07	164	---	23	Mr Hughes	'singing of special hymns by scholars and teachers'
1927	16/07	---	---	---	Mr Hughes	'During the meeting members of the congregation were allowed to make requests for hymns which had especially appealed to them during the services of the previous day'
1928	30/06	---	---	---	Mr Hughes	The Church was 'decorated for the occasions with flowers and foliage'

1929	13/07	---	---	---	---	'Mr Kynaston still on active service as a School visitor was received with acclamation'
1930	---	---	---	---	---	---
1931	03/07	150	66M 104A	22	Mr Hughes	'the children were trained to give [to good causes]'
1932	01/07	---	---	---	Mr Hughes	'Scripture recitals were given in the morning' and evening services
1933	07/07	---	---	---	Mr Hughes	'The church was decorated and special hymns were sung at all the services ...'
1934	29/06	140	---	20	Mr Hughes	'the children were thoroughly trained by their superintendent'
1935	05/07	134	---	20	Mr Hughes	'the excellent singing of the special hymns was worthy of the highest praise'
1936	03/07	138 ⁹	48M 78A	17	Mr Hughes	'The services were well attended, especially in the evening.'
1937	02/07	126	---	17	Mr Hughes	'A large choir of pupils and teachers occupied the choir stalls, and their singing was delightful'
1938	01/07	107	---	16	Mr Hughes	'A good proportion of eligible scholars entered for the Connexional Scripture Examination'
1939	30/06	140	---	---	Mr Hughes*	'the proceedings passed off very happily and successfully'

Notes

1. (1894) 'about 70 are either fully recognised members of the church or members of junior classes'.
2. (1898) 40 under 7, 100 over 15.
3. (1903) Senior Bible classes: Girls and young men 30.
4. (1910) 'including 38 in the senior classes'
5. (1911) 35 in senior classes, 50 are juniors and 33 infants, plus 9 on 'recently instituted' cradle roll.
6. (1912) 17 on the 'cradle roll'
7. (1923) 'increase of 38 in number of scholars but decline in number of teachers.'
8. (1925) 50 in Primary Dept and 116 Main School. Decrease of 10 on previous year.
9. (1936) 36 in Primary Dept, compared with 30 in previous year.

For certain years the membership of the Band of Hope was also recorded: during 1897 there was an increase of 20 members; in 1903, 1906 and 1907, 80 members were recorded and in 1912, 50.

Some of the reports also included references to examinations and prize winners.

* Mr Hughes was still in post in 1955.

Appendix C: OS Map Showing location of the Wesleyan Methodist Church at Kempshott

