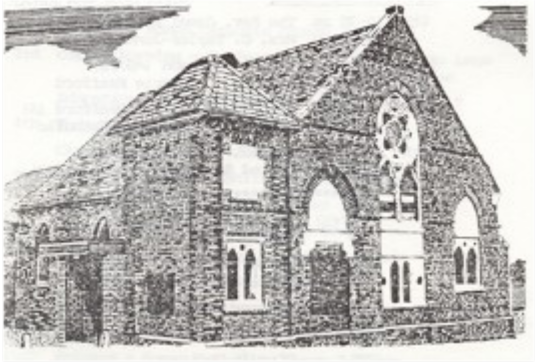
# A Brief History of Methodism in Prestwood

## 1863 - 2013

**By John F. Deakin**



# Acknowledgments

"Looking Back; Moving Forward" is the theme for the many events planned to mark the 150th anniversary of Prestwood Methodist Church in April 2013.

A great debt is owed both to those who were inspired to purchase the land and build our Church (or chapel, as it was then, and for many years thereafter, called) in 1863 and to those dedicated souls who over the following 150 years have maintained a Methodist presence in our village.

I thought that it would be appropriate to write a short history of our church and, with the aid of church records, newsletters and magazines together with the personal reminiscences of present and past members, this is what I have attempted to achieve. Other valuable resources have been '250 Years of Chiltern Methodism' by Barry P. Sutcliffe and David C. Church, published in 1988 and Mr Desmond J. Keen's 'Prestwood Historical Guide' by The Prestwood Society. I have spoken to Mr Church and Mr Keen and they have been most helpful. Mr Keen has also kindly allowed the reproduction of the map delineating the Ecclesiastical Parish of Prestwood as it was in 1850. I am indebted to Mr Mike Dewey of the High Wycombe Library who most readily allowed the reproduction of some old photographs which are in that library's possession.

I am also grateful to Mr Christopher Hartley, the current Senior Steward of our church, and Mr Bill Stephens who each read this booklet in draft form and to my wife Margaret for producing the booklet.

I am, however, responsible for any errors or inaccuracies that remain in the text.

John Deakin
Prestwood
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# A BRIEF HISTORY OF METHODISM IN PRESTWOOD

Although the Preface to the 1933 edition of the Methodist Hymn Book clearly states that 'Methodism was born in song' it would appear that in Prestwood - a village in Buckinghamshire - Methodism was nurtured in a pub - but of that, more later.

## Prestwood, the village - The Early Years

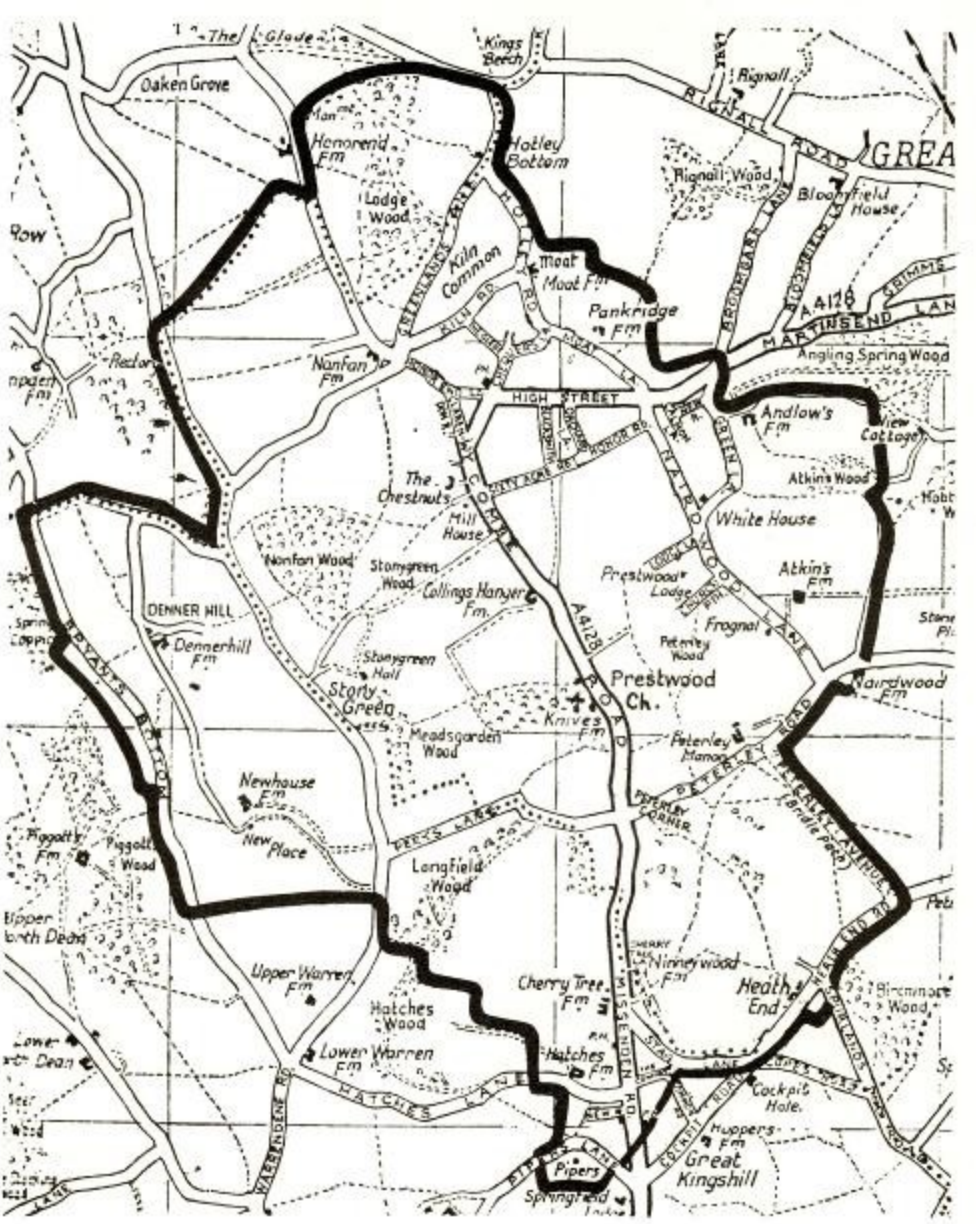
Arguably, Prestwood did not exist as a separate entity until the mid 19th Century, when, following the building of Holy Trinity Church in 1849, the ecclesiastical parish of 'Prestwood' was created. The name itself though has a longer history. Purportedly Anglo Saxon in origin as 'Priest-Wood', it was written as 'Prestwude' in a 12th Century Missenden Abbey land charter. In an early edition of the local Ordnance Survey map however the name had become 'Priestwood' (a form of spelling which, not surprisingly, was much favoured by the clergy of the ecclesiastical parish) but eventually the now familiar form 'Prestwood' was adopted.

Prestwood's small Victorian population of about 800 people lived in an area of some 2,100 acres. Most residents were dependent, directly or indirectly, on the land for their livelihoods although cottage industries such as lacemaking existed, with brick manufacture and gravel extraction continuing until the late 19th Century. Since Prestwood and neighbouring Great Missenden lay on the stage-coach route between London and Birmingham, many rest-inns or public houses existed in the vicinity. Prestwood itself had several, including the 'Travellers Rest', which, as will be seen, played an important role in early Prestwood Methodism.

## Methodism in the Chilterns

John Wesley, an Anglican priest since 1725, had a life changing religious experience at a meeting in Aldersgate Street, London on the evening of the 24th May 1738, an experience which many have likened to St Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. In his diary for that day Wesley wrote "*I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that He had taken*

*away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death".* From that time on, John Wesley began a life of travel, often preaching in the open air as increasingly he was denied access to the pulpits and buildings of the established Church. Although he never intended to create




*The Ecclesiastical Parish of Prestwood in 1850*

a separate Church, increasing opposition and indeed some disagreements between Wesley and his immediate band of preachers and followers led first to a 'Deed of Declaration' in 1784, which set up a governing body of 100 Ministers, and then later to a 'Plan of Pacification' in 1795 - four years after Wesley's death. It was probably from about this time that the term 'Wesleyan Methodism' came into popular use for those who had become known as the 'People called Methodists'.

Although Wesley continued to live in London, he regarded 'the world as his parish' and his travelling (estimated at some 5,000 miles a year - an extraordinary feat considering the state of the roads and the fact that he travelled either by horseback or chaise) often took him westwards and High Wycombe, also sometimes referred to as Chepping Wycombe, became a very important place in his journeying. Between 1739 and 1789 his diary records some 50 preaching visits to High Wycombe. Although there is no record of his ever passing through Prestwood, his journal does record visits to Chesham. Hannah Ball, a resident of High Wycombe, became one of Wesley's most trusted lay workers and devoted correspondents. In 1769 she started a Sunday School for ostler children working in local coaching inns. Wesley's last visit to High Wycombe was at the age of 86, little more than a year before he died in 1791.

One further piece of Methodist history needs to be noted before this little treatise turns specifically to the history of Methodism in Prestwood.

Although the Wesleyan Methodist Church effectively dated from the last years of the 18th Century, it was not long before some of its members felt that the new Church lacked to some extent the fervour of those who had actually travelled with Wesley. In particular they favoured open-air revival meetings, which the Wesleyan Conference had expressly forbidden. A split became inevitable following the expulsion of the two main proponents, Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, from the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Primitive Methodist Church was formed on the 13th of February 1812 as 'The Society of the Primitive Methodists'.

From 1746 Methodism linked churches into 'Circuits' of which initially there were only 7 across the whole country. At that time High Wycombe churches were included in the Oxford Circuit, but in 1815 they were moved into the newly created High Wycombe Circuit. Although the new circuit

remained part of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, rifts within the Wesleyan Church continued and this was reflected in High Wycombe with the formation in 1836 of a Primitive Methodist Circuit and in 1849 by a Free Methodist Circuit. In 1932 the Deed of Union brought the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists together again, and it was this Union which triggered the birth, in 1933, of the Methodist Hymn Book to which reference was made earlier.

## Early Methodism in Prestwood

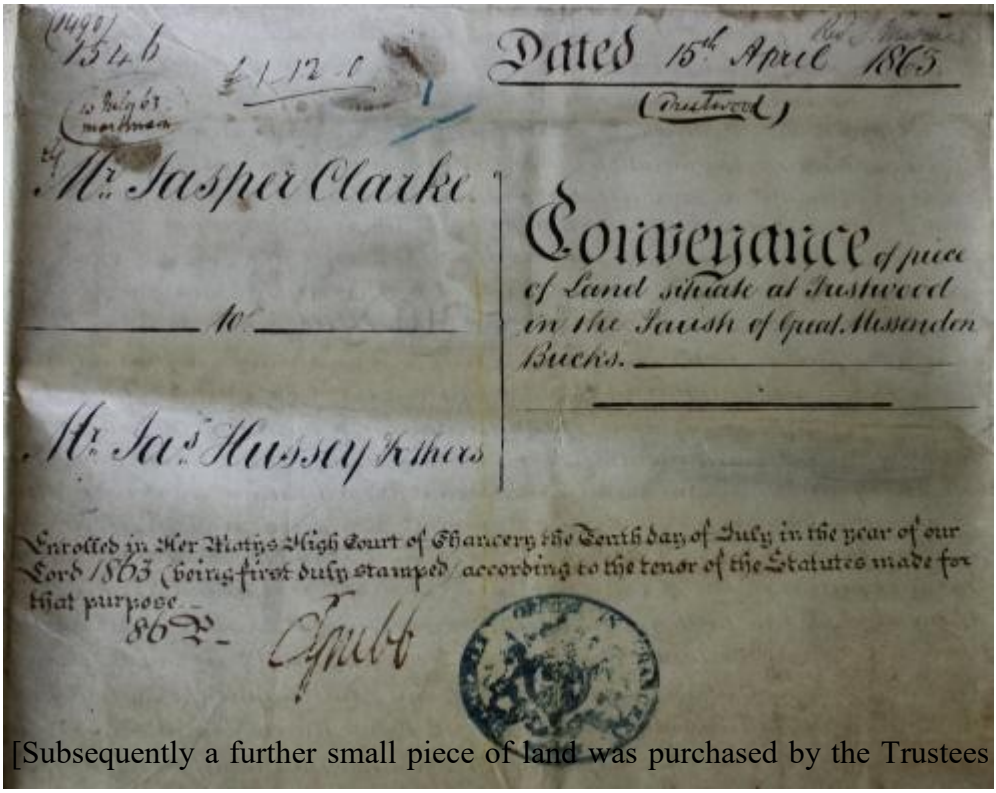
With High Wycombe as the Methodist hub for the locality, Methodism spread throughout the local villages during the first part of the 19th Century. However as already noted, High Wycombe Methodism comprised Wesleyan, Primitive and Free Methodists. Lee Common, Naphill and Cryers Hill opened Primitive Methodist Chapels in 1839, 1851 and 1852 respectively. Winchmore Hill had two Methodist Chapels, a Primitive Chapel opened in 1860 and a Wesleyan Chapel dating from 1861. Both chapels continued until the 1932 Union. Penn established a Wesleyan Chapel in 1808 which became a Free Methodist Chapel in 1850.

Tradition has it that there were Methodists in Prestwood from 1861, meeting firstly in one another's homes and then in the skittle alley of the Travellers Rest public house in the High Street. It was the Wesleyans who brought their influence to bear in Prestwood and when a formal chapel was established, it was as a Wesleyan Chapel in the High Wycombe Wesleyan Circuit.

By 1863 Methodism in Prestwood had grown to such an extent that it was felt necessary to provide a permanent place of worship. Thus it was that under a Conveyance dated the 15th April 1863, Mr Jasper Clarke - a schoolmaster then living in Homerton, Middlesex, but previously from Bledlow - sold a plot of land, '*..containing by estimation eight perches (be the same more or less) and measuring in front adjoining the High Road there leading to Great Missenden forty feet or is thereabouts and in depth fifty five feet and five inches or thereabouts…'* to a Mr James Hussey and twelve others (together acting as Trustees of the Wesleyan Chapel and School) for Twelve Pounds, so that a chapel could be built.

*Prestwood High Street early 20th Century.*
*The Travellers Rest is on the right*

The thirteen Trustees, who bought the land on behalf of Methodism (Appendix 1), comprised seven chair makers or chair turners, a blacksmith, a builder, a draper, a farmer, a grocer and a polish maker. We will probably never know how the Trustees raised the Twelve Pounds to purchase the land (about £550 in today's money). Perhaps it was those early Methodists meeting in the public house who between them funded the site for their new chapel. Interestingly also is that of the thirteen, nine had addresses in Chepping (or High) Wycombe and seven of the nine were Preachers in the High Wycombe Wesleyan Circuit.


Dated 15th April 1863
(Prestwood)
Conveyance of piece of Land situate at Prestwood in the Parish of Great Missenden Bucks.
Enrolled in Her Majtys High Court of Chancery the Tenth day of July in the year of our Lord 1863 (being first duly stamped) according to the tenor of the Statutes made for that purpose

[Subsequently a further small piece of land was purchased by the Trustees

*Extract from the 1863 Land Conveyance*

from Jasper Clarke on the 31st October 1872 for Eight Pounds and a much larger piece from a Mr Amos Mason on the 3rd December 1907 for Fifty Pounds. The 1907 Conveyance shows that Amos Mason - a chair turner from Prestwood who had moved to Butlers Cross - was unable to sign his

name and had to make his mark. A significant part of the land bought in 1907 for Fifty Pounds was sold to a development company in 1968 for Four Thousand pounds to allow for the extension of Peters Close and the building of houses at the back of what is now the church car park. And then, in 1974, Buckinghamshire County Council compulsorily acquired 5 square yards of land at the front of the church to facilitate a road improvement scheme and the Church received One Hundred and Forty Pounds in compensation.]

In the absence of any substantive local planning regulations the chapel was built very quickly by a local builder, Mr T. Wheeler, for £130. An early member, and a Church Trustee for more than 60 years from 1897, Mr William Peedle wrote:

'*Much ready voluntary service went into the building. No proper foundation was laid. The shell was made of bricks and stones, many of these latter being gathered from the local fields.'*

In 1863 the Foundation Stone was laid by Mr Glenister, and can be seen in what is now the vestibule. The chapel was completed and a Certificate was granted on the 8th September 1863 for its use as a place of public worship by *'a Congregation or Assembly of persons calling themselves Wesleyan Methodists.'*

*Foundation Stone 1863*

For many years church anniversaries took place in the autumn to celebrate this event rather than in April - the month of the 1863 land acquisition.

As can be seen from the photograph, the main entrance was initially on the High Street itself - not until 1977, and then primarily because of safety reasons, was that entrance blocked up and moved to the left side.

In the quarterly Wesleyan Methodist Preachers' Plan for the High Wycombe Circuit for the 3 months to October 1863 a 'Special Collection for Prestwood New Chapel' was scheduled for at least one date in that quarter for all but one of the fourteen chapels in the Circuit. 'Preachers', those 'On Trial' and 'Exhorters' had numbers against their names and the detailed quarterly plan shows a number, rather than a name, for each preaching appointment. Exhorters were a category of lay worker (unfamiliar since the mid 20th Century in UK Methodism) who had originally been recognized by Wesley, apparently reluctantly, to encompass those who were called to 'exhort' a congregation by offering testimony or encouragement but who did not feel a call to preach. Sunday Services at Prestwood were at 2.30 and 6pm with another at 7pm each Wednesday.

:

In describing the new chapel Mr Peedle noted that until 1865 it lacked proper flooring, pews and pulpit - straw was spread on the earth and the congregation sat on forms. These welcome additions in 1865 cost a further £65. The pulpit, which was enlarged in 1872, was placed centrally - perhaps recognizing the importance of preaching in the regular acts of worship - but during the building renovations of 1977, it was thought more appropriate for it to be moved to its present side position and reduced in size.

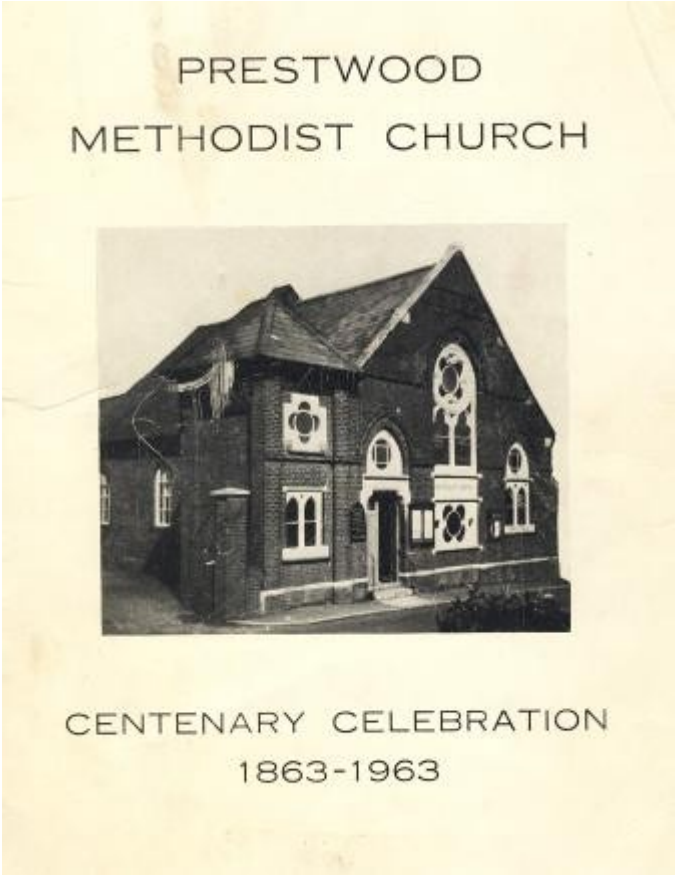
To accommodate the growing membership, a gallery was built by Mr George Parsons in 1869 - the ironwork at the front being made and given by Mr Benjamin Hildreth, the village blacksmith and one of the original 13 Trustees. A schoolroom was also added in 1872, the opening of which was recorded as follows in the Bucks Free Press:

*On Wednesday last the foundation stone of the Wesleyan new Sunday Schoolroom was laid by D. Glenister Esq. Memorial stones were also laid by W. Ward Esq., Aylesbury, T. Wheeler Esq., Wycombe and Mrs T. Twitchell, Willington, near Bedford. Memorial bricks were laid by several friends; afterwards a public tea was provided to which a large number sat down. In the evening a public meeting was held in the chapel, which was well filled. The chair was taken by J.B. Twitchell Esq., Peterley Farm. Collections amounted to £42. Methodism began here 11 years ago, when services were held in a skittle alley; since then a nice chapel has been built, upon which there remains a debt of only about £30, and many have been made 'New creatures in Christ Jesus' and some have gone to join the Church Triumphant. In the new schoolroom we trust many a child will find "the pearl of great price.*

Methodism is renowned for music - particularly as expressed in the singing of hymns and indeed, Charles Wesley, the younger brother of John, wrote several thousand hymns, many of which are still sung regularly - and not just by Methodists. Early Methodists, even if they could have afforded one, generally regarded an organ as 'a sign of popery' and, until the purchase of a harmonium for £5 in 1892, the chapel relied upon several members with their violins sitting on a stand at the back of the chapel to provide the accompaniment for singing. It is recorded that Messrs Frederick Freeman and Tom Gomm (viol and clarinet respectively) assisted on special

occasions such as Sunday School Anniversaries. Once the gallery was installed that was where the musicians, teachers and Sunday School members sat.

In the Centenary Anniversary brochure, the Revd Robert Flenley records how during a particularly severe winter, a Mr Church (possibly the Mr G. Church who was pastor from about 1896) of Chesham was planned to take a Sunday service at Prestwood. This dedicated gentleman walked through deep snow from Chesham, determined to fulfil the appointment, and after the service walked back to Chesham (a round trip of some 15 miles) - not arriving until daylight the following day.




*The front cover of the Centenary Anniversary Cover.*

# Prestwood Methodism in the 20th Century

The harmonium was replaced by an organ immediately after the First World War as a memorial to the 35 men of Prestwood who died in that war including at least three who were members, or related to members, of the chapel. A special afternoon service was held at which the organ was dedicated and this was followed by an organ recital by Mr Perry of Little Kimble and a Public Tea. After that a further service was held with addresses from the Minister and the Baptist Minister from Great Missenden. The late Mrs Annie Gibbs has noted that the cost of this new organ was £150, and by the end of that day, all but £8 had been raised. The current electronic organ was installed in 1984 at a cost of £1,900 - replacing one which had only been purchased in 1978 and which had proved unsatisfactory.

The chapel (or church) was not however Licensed for Marriages until March 1922 - with the first marriage recorded being that of Miss F. Wright to a Mr Bird on the 26th December 1922.

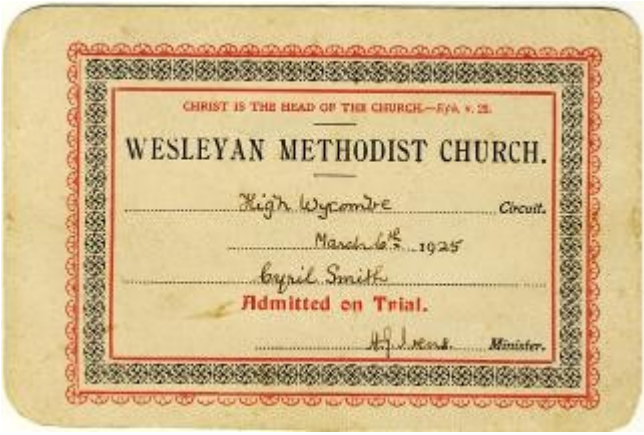
Following the 1923 anniversary celebrations a local Newspaper wrote under the heading Prestwood Wesleyan Church:

*Successful anniversary services have been held in the above church, when the Revd H.J. Ivens (who received a hearty greeting on his first visit to Prestwood) preached afternoon and evening on the Sunday, to excellent congregations, his sermons proving most helpful and inspiring. At the evening service the Choir rendered the anthem "The radiant morn has passed away".*

The celebrations continued on the Monday with afternoon and evening meetings - with a good Methodist Tea between. It is also pleasing to note that the Treasurer was able to report that 'the collections, which were for Trust Funds, proved most satisfactory'.

A new schoolroom, now known as the 'Old Hall', was opened on the 12th October 1926, celebrated by a service at which the preacher was the Chairman of the Oxford District, the Revd Ernest D. Green. After the service 180 people sat down to a Public Tea and this in turn was

followed by another service. It was reported that of the £600 needed to fund the building of the schoolroom, £185 had been raised.



CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH—EPH. v. 23.

WESLEYAN METHODIST CHURCH.

High Wycombe Circuit.

March 6th 1925

Cyril Smith

Admitted on Trial.

H.J. Dennis Minister.

*Cyril Smith remained a member at Prestwood until his death in 1998.*

FRIDAY, MAY 15, 1936.

Clergy and ministers of High Wycombe were among the large company which welcomed the President of the Methodist Conference, the Rev. W. C. Jackson, of Manchester, when he visited the borough last week to take part in a rally at Priory Road Methodist Church. In the photograph are (right to left) the Mayor and Mayoress of High Wycombe (Councillor and Mrs. J. K. Taylor), the Rev. W. L. P. Float (vicar of High Wycombe), the Rev. W. C. Jackson (President), the Rev. F. Dennis (superintendent, High Wycombe Methodist Circuit), the Revs. J. H. Cartwright (Stokenchurch), W. H. F. Bleby, R. O. Stobbs (High Wycombe), E. W. Eavis (Chesham), N. Renshaw (Marlow) and F. C. Searle (High Wycombe).—Photo, Roberts.

*In 1936 Revd G.W. Eavis was Minister at Prestwood . Here he is (pictured 3rd from the left) at a gathering in High Wycombe Circuit to greet the President of the Methodist Conference, Revd W.C. Jackson.*

Even by the 1930s the High Wycombe Wesleyan Circuit represented a very rural community. It comprised 19 churches stretching from Marlow to Amersham. A 1932 Circuit Plan and Directory lists 4 Ministers, 43 Local Preachers, 4 On Trial and 5 Exhorters but only 11 of these 55 gentlemen (there were no ladies) had telephones, so communication must have been difficult, even though amongst the list of treasurers and Secretaries is Mr E. Weller - the 'Treasurer of Horse Hire'. By April 1942, almost 10 years after the Deed of Union, the number of churches in the High Wycombe Circuit had increased to 40, with 12 Ministers, 1 Deaconess, 83 Local Preachers (including 7 ladies), 6 On Trial, 1 Exhorter and 14 Helpers. The Circuit membership was 1,813 and the quarterly bill for Ministerial stipends and allowances totalled £416.80.

Extracts from an early account book, bought in 1932 for 1/6d (7p post decimalization) and still being used in 1996, to record the costs of maintaining the church fabric, formed the basis for the following article which was published in a Church Newsletter of the 1990's.

*A regular monthly expenditure in 1932 was for firewood (4p) and coal and coke for about £1.10. Clearly the old stove needed to be cleaned and black lead was purchased for 2p. When the chimney needed to be cleaned the sweep charged 12p. Repairs (unspecified) to the stove cost 25p and were carried out by Mr Hildreth. The quarterly electricity charge - quaintly described as "Electric Light A/C approximated to £1 in the winter and 50p in the summer.*

*The Church had a caretaker who was paid £2 per quarter. In October 1934 he/she was paid a further 10p for 'extra work'.*

*Annual Fire Insurance was £1.24 in 1932 and remained unchanged until 1944 when it increased to £1.66 - although in 1941 £4.50 had to be found for War Damage Insurance.*

*By 1933 the Church also had to pay 38p a quarter for an 'organ blower'.*

*Obviously there was bad weather in March 1934 as 25p had to be laid out for 'Repairs to Roof'. In fact that quarter must have been a nightmare for the treasurer, since a further 15p was required to repair the stove (in 1937*

*one stove had to be replaced entirely at a cost of £3.50 including fitting), 5p for 'Repairs to Coal Box' and the piano had to be both tuned and repaired at a cost of 88p. The piano continued to cause problems and in March 1935 it required a 'New Back Lining' - another 8p.*

*By 1935 it must have been decided to supply toilet paper since 10p was spent on 'Toilet Paper (Lavatory) & Fittings'. In 1936 2 dozen tea plates cost 22p, chairs had to be repaired for 8p and the caretaker needed a new broom for 4p. Electric light bulbs were comparatively expensive - 8p was paid for a single 60 watt light bulb on 18th February 1939.*

On the 11th June 1936, after further renovations to the buildings, an evening Thanksgiving Celebration with musical items from members of the Chesham Methodist Church was held. This was attended by the Mayor and Mayoress of High Wycombe and was preceded, in true Methodist tradition, by 'Tea on the lawn at 5pm'. On this occasion it would appear from the records that the tea was provided free, but just a year or so later when a Public Tea was held as part of 'Prestwood's official welcome to its new Superintendent', a charge of 8 old pence was made.

The Great Missenden Primitive Methodist Church, which had opened in 1866, closed in the 1930's and a few members of that church transferred their membership to Prestwood. Mrs Annie Gibbs recorded that she had sometimes preferred to take her small son to the Methodist church in Great Missenden rather than to her own church in Prestwood as "*they didn't mind small children running round during the service".*

## World War II

The first mention of the war in the church records relates to the need on the 9th October 1939 to spend £2.08 on providing blackout material. But in fact even a detailed perusal of church records elicits almost no information as to how Methodist church life in Prestwood was affected by the war. Neither the Pulpit Notices for the 3rd September 1939, nor those of the following Sunday make any reference to the commencement of hostilities. The war was not allowed to get in the way of the 'annual voluntary cleaning of this place of worship' for which the Notices on the 24th September 1939 urged members to 'come and do your bit'.

In July 1941, however, the Superintendent Minister, the Revd Arthur Walters, wrote this to all members of the High Wycombe Circuit:

*My dear Friends,*

*The War drags on, someone said to me the other day, rather wearily. But this scarcely describes the situation - it hastens on, ever widening, with a rapidity and intensity we feel difficult to realise. Not a few have reached a stage when they feel any sort of calculation is beyond them. With each day's news, as one writes, the situation becomes more and more puzzling. One thing alone stands out clearly, and that is the scope of the Nazi aims, and their determination to stake their all on realizing them. What we must do is to hold on to our faith - Faith in God, in our cause and in ourselves.*

*"Fraud and wrong shall have an ending. Truth, immortal truth, shall reign."*

*The days are critical. We deceive ourselves if we do not realise this and prepare ourselves for all that may be ahead. All is not well, but all* ***will*** *be well.*

Prestwood continued to hold its annual church anniversary services. In 1941 the service was, naturally, accompanied by a Public Tea 'which has kindly been promised by members of the Women's Meeting and friends. So you can be assured of a good Tea.' It is perhaps reassuring to note that the cost of the Tea had been maintained at the 1937 level – 8 old pence.

In July 1942 the Sunday School arranged an outing to London Zoo for its scholars and all other friends. The adult cost, inclusive of fares, entrance and tea was 7 shillings.

By January 1943 the Superintendent was able to say:

*By the time the Plan is in circulation the fourth War Christmas will have passed. We can, I think, face the New Year with hope and to use the Prime Minister's words "sober confidence".*

And just 3 months later the Superintendent obviously felt able to omit any reference to the war and, instead, report on something which is always

close to the Methodist heart:

*We had a full Agenda for our Quarterly Meeting, so full that we were late even for tea.*

It is interesting to note that the cessation of hostilities was anticipated by a Pulpit Notice of the 25th February 1945:

*At the close of The European War a Special Service is being arranged to take place in this Church, Further Particulars in due course.*

And indeed such a service was held on the 8th May.

## Post War Years

In the early 1950s Prestwood was moved out of the High Wycombe Circuit into the newly formed Chesham & Chalfonts Circuit - now the Amersham Circuit.

The Revd Dave Tomlin, who with his wife the Revd Alison Tomlin (President of the Methodist Conference in 2010/11) will be guests at the church's 150th anniversary celebration weekend in April 2013, moved to Prestwood at the age of 5 in 1948. His father, Maurice Eric Tomlin, was appointed a Church Trustee on the 5th May 1952 and Treasurer on the 10th of February 1955 and his mother often spoke at the Women's Meetings.

In an article published in the summer 2009 edition of the Church Magazine, the Revd Dave Tomlin recounted some of his boyhood memories.

*'Chapel was a focus for life in those days. The Sunday School was renowned for its ability to decimate the population one Saturday in the year by taking anything up to 7, yes 7, coaches filled with members and friends to the sea-side.'*

Clearly this future Methodist minister enjoyed life in the Sunday School, especially since one of the teachers allowed him the use of his black

powder muzzle loading gun. But he also recalls with affection Mr William Peedle who was his Sunday School teacher and:

*'one of the devoted souls who revealed the love of God to me in a down to earth manner that has remained with me for the rest of my life.'*

Prestwood had long been famed for its cherry orchards - sadly no longer in evidence - and on the 24th July 1953, to support church funds, the church held an open air Cherry Pie Supper with side shows, a gymnastics display and a film show illustrating past Sunday School outings.

Wartime food rationing measures continued after the war and were not finally abolished until May 1954. Eggs were in short supply and at the Easter Day services in April 1954 eggs were collected for donation to local hospitals. Unfortunately there is no record of how many eggs were given but a letter of thanks was received from Amersham Hospital and displayed in the church.

Church members continued to clean the premises on a voluntary basis but grass cutting merited a special 'grass cutting picnic'. One was held in July 1957 - refreshments were provided (free) but volunteers were asked to bring their own tools.

The Sunday School Minutes show that Mr Peedle retired as superintendent in 1961 'after 83 years connection with the school'. By 1964 only 2 coaches were needed for the annual outing (even though total Junior Church membership was recorded as over 70 in the July 1967 Church Newsletter). The 1973 outing was reported as follows in the Newsletter for September.

*On a fine Saturday morning on 14th July about 70 children from the Sunday School and Inters Club set off in 2 coaches for Bekonscot. Everyone seemed to find the model village interesting, especially the trains. About 11.30am, the coaches took them to Burnham Beeches where the children ate a picnic lunch. They were then organized into playing games nearby. Later, half the group went swimming and the younger ones visited a small fun-fair. The afternoon had by then turned cloudy but was still warm enough to enjoy further play before an open-air tea. Choruses were sung on the way home and a very tired party of children arrived back at the Village Hall just after 6pm but all agreed they had had a lovely time*.

Although scholar numbers were starting to decline by the late 1980s, the decline was arrested and numbers stabilized for a time at between 30 and 40. Indeed a Youth Club was formed, led by Mrs Daykin, with its first meeting on the 6th March 1968. However it would appear that this Club did not survive because in 1972 the Church Council Minutes record that Mr Raymond Bickerton had offered to 'help form a Youth Club'. This Club was successful and provided social activities with a Christian witness to the young people of Prestwood for many years. The Church Newsletter for June 1992 reported that Junior Church numbers were still high, that the attendance each week was good and, more importantly, the children 'seem to enjoy coming'. Unfortunately though, the decline in numbers returned - even more dramatically as the new century dawned - and sadly the church's 150th anniversary will be celebrated without the existence of either a Junior Church or a church Youth Club.

Reading the Minutes of church meetings spanning more than half a century, albeit laborious, can often unearth surprising and curious facts. Although the distinction no longer exists, for most of our church's history the Leaders Meeting looked after its spiritual needs whilst the Trustees were the legal custodians of the church buildings and were required to maintain them and decide how and by whom they should be used. For example the Trustees Meeting of the 11th July 1952 resolved 'that the proceeds of the sale of silver go towards payment for roof repairs'. There is no further clue as to what that silver was, where it came from or to whom it was sold although amongst the church records is an insurance policy issued specifically in 1936 to cover 1 cup, 1 plate and 1 jug (silver) for £22.50 and 1 stand and 32 small cups (glass) for £3.50. It was a requirement of the policy that each night this property had 'to be removed to the private residence of a Churchwarden'. A few years later, in 1957, it was recorded that 'two silver cups from the disbanded Wesley Guild Tennis Club were before the meeting for disposal and it was agreed that the Revd Poole should endeavour to obtain a fair price for them'. They were subsequently sold for £4.50. In 1964 the Minutes show that the church had been advised by the County Civil Defence authorities that the premises had been listed for use 'in case of national emergency'. It would be interesting to learn if they continue to be so listed. And then on the 19th July 1965, the Trustees voted by 8 votes to 7 to allow smoking in the schoolroom 'when used for social purposes'.

Collection Journals can also make interesting reading. During the 1950s and 1960s when Sunday services were held in the morning and the evening, the collection during the evening service was often greater than that of the morning. Weekly collections in 1957 ranged from about £3 to £11 - with £15 for the Sunday school anniversary (but there were 3 services that day). These amounts do not seem large but one must bear in mind that, for the same year, the church's annual donation to the Local Preachers Fund was just 5 shillings (i.e. 25p).

The chapel celebrated its Centenary as a licensed place of worship in 1963 with several days of celebration starting on Saturday the 19th October with a concert by The Chalkburn Singers. Sunday services - morning and evening of course - with the Revd A. Kingsley Turner (Chairman of the London North-West District and former Circuit Superintendent) preaching in the evening. Perhaps the highlight of the anniversary occurred the following Wednesday when the Revd Dr Maldwyn Edwards (Former President of the Methodist Conference) was the guest preacher in the afternoon and speaker at the Centenary Meeting which was held in the evening after Tea. The printed programme refers to the Tea as being a time when 'friends from other Churches will bring greetings and share in Tea Table Conversations'.

On the 19th July 1964 5 new members were welcomed into the fellowship of the Church, including Nigel Phillips who still faithfully greets people with hymn books and bibles each Sunday morning. In June 1966 a Men's Group was organised, although after an initial period of success its meetings lapsed but were then re-instated briefly in the 1980s. In 1969 a Young Marrieds Group (which became Meeting Point) was formed which met monthly for discussion and social events, including visits to the Amersham swimming pool, although this group apparently closed in 1976.

Shortly after the Centenary it was felt that, recognizing the increasing population of Prestwood, a new hall should be built at the rear of the church. A building fund was established and the work was completed in 1973 at a cost of £18,500 and opened on the 9th June. Commenting in the Church Newsletter of August 1973 the Revd Tony Bullock wrote:

*My first words this month are THANK YOU, spoken as loud as I can, as long as I can, and written in the largest letters.*
h

*The way people pulled together to get our New Premises ready whether in painting or cleaning, or furniture moving, was excellent. The ladies as usual, tackled the mammoth task of providing for and feeding nearly 200 folk with an energy, and enthusiasm which was magnificent. The flower arrangements for the day were delightful and everything went off so well. I don't know how you all managed it, but I am deeply grateful for every individual effort made by all the friends at Prestwood, to make the day such a resounding success.*

Thought was then given to the possibility of replacing the church itself, since the building was over 100 years old. However the potential cost of such a major project could not be justified and instead, significant alterations, in part already referred to, were carried out and the re-modelled church was opened again on the 16th July 1977. The main door was relocated; a new staircase installed in the newly created vestibule and the pulpit was re-built and moved to its current position by Mr Raymond Bickerton. To create increased seating in the body of the chapel, a small chancel area was added by carving out part of the Old Hall. At the same time the old pews which had been installed in 1865 were replaced with chairs. A Church Meeting Minute of the 15th June 1977 proposed 'that the best of the old pews could be used in the gallery and the rest advertised as garden seats or sold as planks.' This whole project cost £23,000 and then, in 1980, a gated car park was added at the rear of the church which cost a further £2,200. Although grants had been obtained and churches in the Circuit had generously contributed to the Development Fund (for at least 2 years Amersham St John's donated half the proceeds of their annual Garden Party), most of the monies required had been raised by church members. The Revd Tony Bullock decided to embark on a sponsored 'slim' and by shedding 28 pounds of himself raised over £350 for the Development Fund. The Minutes were however meticulous in recording donations from all sources, even the smallest amounts were noted, such as the proceeds (£10.66) from Little Chalfont's coffee morning received on the 11th February 1977. At the same Meeting authority was given to sell 'an old unwanted piano stool for £3'.

About this time a wooden cross was installed above the Communion Table. It now hangs on an outside wall providing external visible evidence to the village that the building in its midst is a church. The provenance of

*The Church after the 1977 alterations*

this cross is unclear although Mrs Marilyn Jukes believes that old timbers were found beneath the church floor at the time of a floor restoration and that these were used to make the cross.

*The present siting of the cross*

Prior to the extensive alterations of 1977 it is clear from Property Committee Minutes of the 16th January 1976 that, notwithstanding the installation of an oil fired heating system in 1963 at a cost of £325, heating for parts of the premises was somewhat primitive. Mr Tony Jukes (who is still very active in the church as a steward) offered to 'organize a rota for lighting the fires each weekend as Mrs Gibbs had not been well' and the decision was taken to buy a Calor Gas Stove immediately (for £53) 'because the weather was so cold'.

The Trustees did not always make the right decisions. For example, in May 1979, after gas had replaced oil, it was noted that there was no contract of maintenance for the boiler and it was 'considered that little advantage could be gained from such a contract'. But less than a year later the Minutes record that 'owing to the sudden fault in the gas boiler and consequent failure of the central heating the question of regular boiler maintenance was brought up again and Mr Bonnett was to receive quotations...'. By June 1980 arrangements for boiler maintenance had been implemented!

Almost from the beginnings of Methodism in Prestwood the Peedle family played a vital role in the life of the church. As noted earlier, the Revd Dave Tomlin owed much to William Peedle who was his teacher in the Sunday School. Winifred Peedle served faithfully for very many years as the church organist. She and her sister – Annie Gibbs – were also Church Trustees. Their aunt Miss Alice Peedle, who died on the 6th March 1981, bequeathed her bungalow in Clare Road to the church. In her Will Miss Peedle wrote:

*"I give my freehold property at 11 Clare Road, Prestwood aforesaid to Prestwood Methodist Church upon trust for such charitable object or objects or for such charitable purpose or purposes as the Property Stewards of the said church may in their absolute discretion select…"*

Following much discussion by the Church Council the property was sold by the church for some £39,000 in 1983 and the funds invested as 'The Peedle Bequest'. Since that time the Bequest has been invaluable in that it has enabled the church to meet the sometimes substantial and often unexpected costs associated with the maintenance of old buildings and to defray the cost of a new kitchen in 1994. The fact that expenditure can be unexpected was demonstrated very clearly when, after a Sunday evening service in 1982,

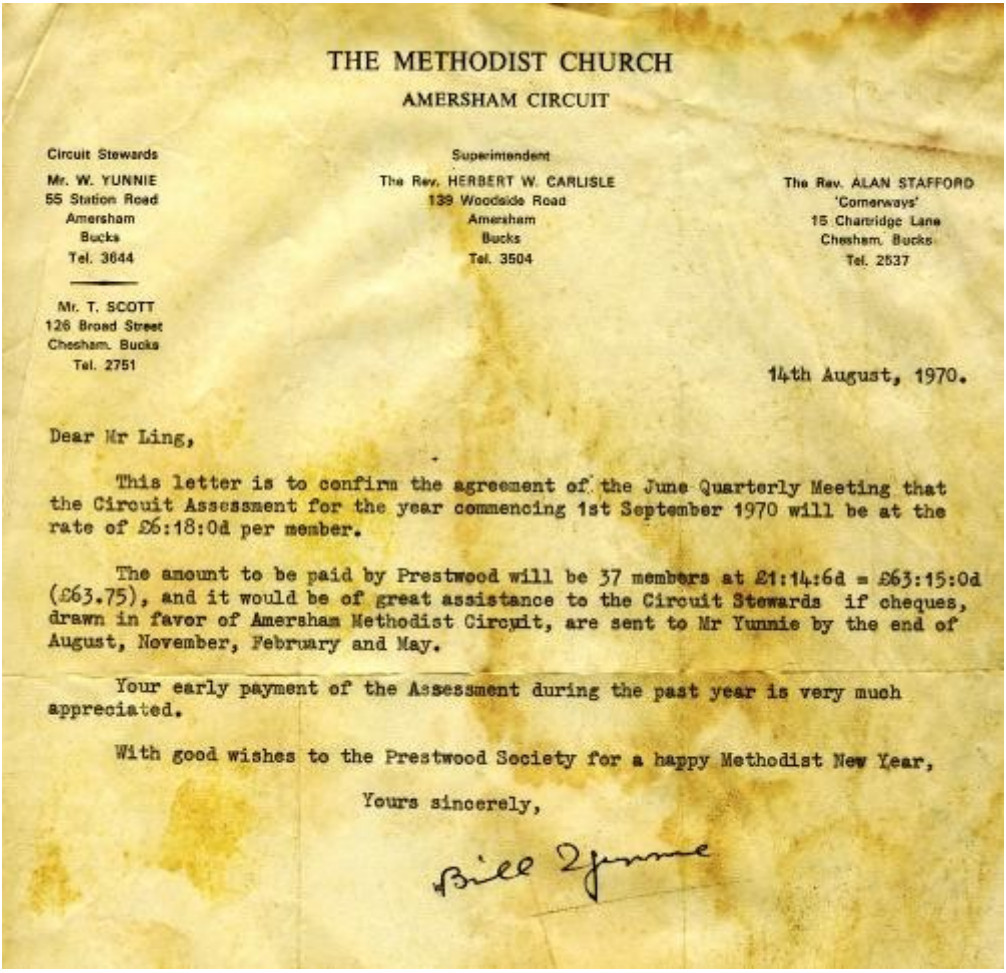
part of the wooden church floor collapsed into an empty space, exposing the earth of 1863 below. A replacement concrete floor with appropriate carpet tiling, at an overall cost of some £6,000, had to be laid as a matter of urgency before the church could safely be used again. Church members and friends were invited to buy a carpet tile and this novel idea of financing raised over £1,000. Unfortunately this was not the end of essential, but expensive, repair work. Following the 1990 Quinquennial Property Inspection, required by Methodist regulations, the church was faced with further renovation and repair bills of almost £20,000. Once again church members were generous and showed initiative in fund raising - but The Peedle Bequest provided a very welcome contribution to the overall cost.

Miss Peedle was not the first person to give property to the church. In 1961, Mrs Elsie Harding, a church Trustee from 1952, had bequeathed 'Maple Cottage' in the High Street, together with her harmonium. Until 1967 the property was rented to a retired minister, the Revd Robert Flenley, who provided ministerial support to the church for many years. When Mr and Mrs Flenley took up residence in a Methodist Homes for the Aged home in September 1967 (sadly Mr Flenley died just 8 weeks later), it was decided to sell Maple Cottage for £4,600.

In the 1970s and 1980s members of the church helped in establishing Summer Holiday Clubs for youngsters in the area. Over the years this concept grew and soon developed into Lighthouse - the annual club organised in Great Missenden by Churches Together for children in the first week of their summer holiday.

The Church Council noted at its meeting in early 1982 that church membership numbered 62, Junior Church numbers were increasing and the Youth Club had over 80 members. That year the annual Circuit Assessment (the church's contribution to Circuit Expenditure) was £917.

[A letter dated 14th August 1970 from Mr Bill Yunnie, the Circuit Treasurer indicates that the Circuit Assessment had only been £63.75 each quarter i.e. £255 for the full year. And it is also interesting to note that by 2012/2013 the annual assessment had increased to £17,400 although church membership had fallen to 22.]



THE METHODIST CHURCH

AMERSHAM CIRCUIT

Circuit Stewards

Mr. W. YUNNIE
55 Station Road
Amersham
Bucks
Tel. 3644

Mr. T. SCOTT
126 Broad Street
Chesham. Bucks
Tel. 2751

Superintendent

The Rev. HERBERT W. CARLISLE
139 Woodside Road
Amersham
Bucks
Tel. 3504

The Rev. ALAN STAFFORD
'Cornerways'
15 Chantridge Lane
Chesham. Bucks
Tel. 2537

14th August, 1970.

Dear Mr Ling,

This letter is to confirm the agreement of the June Quarterly Meeting that the Circuit Assessment for the year commencing 1st September 1970 will be at the rate of £6:18:0d per member.

The amount to be paid by Prestwood will be 37 members at £1:14:6d = £63:15:0d (£63.75), and it would be of great assistance to the Circuit Stewards if cheques, drawn in favor of Amersham Methodist Circuit, are sent to Mr Yunnie by the end of August, November, February and May.

Your early payment of the Assessment during the past year is very much appreciated.

With good wishes to the Prestwood Society for a happy Methodist New Year,

Yours sincerely,

Bill Yunnie

*Letter from Mr Bill Yunnie regarding the Circuit Assessment in 1970*

For many years Sunday services were held in the morning for both adults and the Junior Church and in the evening, with an additional Sunday School for primary children in the afternoon, although during the war the evening service was replaced by one in the afternoon, presumably because of the blackout restrictions then in force. At the annual Sunday School anniversaries prizes were awarded to those who had recorded 25 attendances in the calendar year. But in the mid 1980s the decision was taken to have just one Sunday service - in the morning.

## Prestwood Methodism in the 21st Century

To celebrate the Millennium, the church held a very successful weekend Flower Festival in March 2000, with local churches and organisations each taking responsibility for a floral arrangement.

*Preparations for the Millennium Flower Festival*

As the church moved into the 21st Century the Senior Steward at the time, Mrs Pam Sitford, wrote a few paragraphs for the brochure which was given to all those attending. Her comments still remain relevant 12 years later:

*....today the congregations are smaller and made up of largely ageing members. So many of the young families who moved in during the 1970's have now moved on and we struggle to attract the younger generation against the ever advancing attractions of the secular world. The cost of keeping the 'old' fabric of our premises in good repair is ever increasing.... but this weekend is about what Prestwood Methodist Church/Chapel has always stood for – 'friendship and fellowship' and the joy of working together as a team and caring for our village, having an ever 'open door' to welcome the stranger as a friend. We hope you will feel welcome and that you will want to come back again.*

These sentiments should guide us as we move through the second decade of this century. Church membership has not increased but the premises are increasingly being used both for sacred and secular activities.

In 2005, to meet legal obligations, extensive work costing over £19,000 was undertaken to improve access for the disabled to all parts of the premises and to install specially designed toilet facilities.

Sunday services are held each week at 10.30 and worship is led either by a minister, local preacher or occasionally members of the church. Full use is made of the church's computer and projection equipment, including a Powerpoint Presentation preceding the service based on either a biblical text or verses of a hymn. Ministers now often prefer to preach from the beautifully carved reading desk whilst the Bible is read from the lectern presented in memory of Mrs Mary Buckle.

In 2009, a weekly 'Thought for Thursday' service was started, with communion being celebrated once a month. This is now preceded by a 20 minute prayer meeting.

A Women's Fellowship began at the church in 1939 and has thrived for many years. The 40th anniversary in 1979 was celebrated over 2 days. On the Wednesday, over tea, one of the original members outlined its history and on the following Sunday there were special services with musical items from members and from Group Captain Mike Thom. Although age has since taken its toll and members can no longer meet at the church, meetings of the Fellowship are still held fortnightly in a member's house.

The Monday Group (known as the Young Wives Group until 1971) provides a monthly evening fellowship for women of all ages, church and non-church members, from the village. On open evenings (at least 4 occasions each year) members and regular visitors are encouraged to bring their menfolk and other visitors. Each year a charity is chosen and over £14,000 has been raised for such charities in recent years.

In January 2010 the church started a fortnightly Friendship Club to provide a special hour where local people of different denominations or no church background can enjoy various activities, talks on a variety of subjects (well

*Friendship Club Outing to Windsor in 2011*

known local personalities have been amongst the speakers) and outings. Each meeting includes a short act of worship and refreshments.

Twice a month a coffee morning is held in aid of 'Send a Cow'. Over £1,200 has been raised.

Close relations have been forged with other local churches through Churches Together and many representatives thereof regularly attend the annual Covenant service at the church.

Men have not been ignored, and although few in number, try to meet monthly at local hostelries for pub lunches.

Church premises are used by a variety of organisations - the largest being a local Dance Academy which has met in the church halls for over 30 years and with whom the church has an excellent relationship. Other regular activities at the Church Halls currently include toddler groups, Weight Watchers, keep fit and Zumba classes, and the Churches Together Choir.

In Summer 2012 a special Queen's Diamond Jubilee edition of the Church Magazine was produced and a copy was sent to Her Majesty. The letter from Buckingham Palace acknowledging its receipt and sending the Queen's best wishes is produced overleaf.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

21st May, 2012.

Dear Mr. Hartley,

The Queen has asked me to thank you and the Members of Prestwood Methodist Church for your kind letter containing a message of loyal greetings to Her Majesty, sent on the occasion of the Sixtieth Anniversary of The Queen's Accession to the Throne.

Her Majesty was interested to receive your Diamond Jubilee Edition of the Prestwood Methodist Church Magazine including personal memories of the Queen from her sixty year reign. Her Majesty sends her best wishes to all concerned for a most memorable and enjoyable Diamond Jubilee year.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Sandamas
The Chief Clerk to The Queen

Christopher Hartley, Esq.

The church celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2013 and a special weekend of celebration has been planned for the 13th/14th April with the theme "Looking Back; Moving Forward". The guest preachers will be the Revds Alison and Dave Tomlin. The weekend will include a Flower Festival and an Exhibition of photographs and memorabilia of Old Prestwood and particularly of the church. Trusting that God still has a role for Prestwood Methodist Church, the church decided to 'move forward' by creating something tangible for the anniversary and therefore the current external entrance to the church will be re-aligned and the existing solid, rather forbidding wooden doors will be replaced by glass doors. This will provide a welcoming and uninterrupted view from the street into the vestibule and will greatly improve wheelchair access. The new entrance will be dedicated during the weekend by the Revd. Nigel Coke-Woods, the Minister from 2008 until 2012.

So, we look to the future. After the Battle of El Alamein in 1942 Winston Churchill said in a speech in the City of London:

*This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.*

For 150 years people in Prestwood have, through their faith and belief that Methodism has something of real value to offer in bringing people to a knowledge of God, nurtured and maintained the Methodist presence in our village. We pray that if it is the will of God to continue that presence, our church will be strengthened and shown the way forward.

The final words though must be reserved for the Revd David Owens, Minister at Prestwood between 1959 and 1965 who, writing in the church's Newsletter for July 1963, said:

*If there are any who read this who haven't been to Church for a long time, why not try and start again, or if you don't feel ready to do that yet, then get down your Bible from the shelf and read again the story of Jesus in the Gospels (St Mark is the easiest), and then ask yourself whether there isn't something here that you are missing out on. If you read it prayerfully and carefully there is no saying where it may lead you.*

# Appendix 1

**The Thirteen "Trustees of the Wesleyan Chapel and School" who purchased land for Twelve Pounds from Mr Jasper Clarke on the 15th April 1863.**

| Name | Profession | Address |
|---|---|---|
| James Hussey | Chair Manufacturer | Chepping Wycombe |
| Stephen Weller | Polish Maker | Chepping Wycombe |
| Benjamin Howland | Chairmaker | Chepping Wycombe |
| Peter Crusoe Male | Chairmaker | Chepping Wycombe |
| Joseph Pointing | Chairmaker | Chepping Wycombe |
| John Hussey | Chairmaker | Chepping Wycombe |
| Robert White | Chairmaker | Chepping Wycombe |
| Joseph Child | Draper | Chepping Wycombe |
| Edmund Pierce | Builder | Chepping Wycombe |
| Henry Collins | Chairmaker | West Wycombe |
| William Ware | Farmer | Holmer Green |
| Benjamin Hildreth | Blacksmith | Prestwood |
| Benjamin Carter | Chair Turner | Prestwood |

## Appendix 2

### Pastors and Ministers of Prestwood from 1863 to 2013

| | |
|---|---|
| 1863 – 1896 | Unknown |
| 1896 – ? | Pastor G. Church |
| ? | Pastor Thomson |
| ? | Pastor Goodrich |
| ? – 1916 | Pastor G. Bullock |
| 1916 – 1918 | Pastor J.H Binns |
| 1918 - 1920 | Revd. Philip Callier |
| 1920 – 1924 | Revd. Henry J. Atkinson |
| 1924 – 1927 | Revd. Henry Scanes |
| 1927 – 1929 | Revd. Dr. Kenneth H. Crosby |
| 1929 – 1932 | Revd. W. Cyril Cardy |
| 1932 – 1939 | Revd. E. W. Eavis |
| 1939 – 1941 | Revd. Frederick Pilkington |
| 1941 – 1946 | Revd. F. Bertram Clogg |
| 1946 – 1950 | Revd. Eric G. Chapman |

## Appendix 2 (cont)

| | |
|---|---|
| 1950 – 1955 | Revd. Thomas J. Welch |
| 1955 – 1959 | Revd. Gordon W. Poole |
| 1959 – 1965 | Revd. David Owens |
| 1965 – 1971 | Revd. Alan Stafford |
| 1971 – 1978 | Revd. Tony Bullock |
| 1978 – 1984 | Revd. Marjorie Hopp |
| 1984 – 1986 | Revd. Dr. Michael Sheard |
| 1986 – 1996 | Revd. James Cooper |
| 1996 – 1997 | Revd. Christopher Humble |
| 1997 – 1998 | Revd. Brian Whitlock |
| 1998 – 2003 | Revd. John Glover |
| 2003 – 2004 | Revd. Vaughan Tong |
| 2004 – 2005 | Revd. John Amankwatia |
| 2006 – 2008 | Revd. John Lambert |
| 2008 – 2012 | Revd. Nigel Coke-Woods |
| 2012 – | Revd. David Jebb |

# WHO'S WHO at PRESTWOOD METHODIST CHURCH 2013

| | |
|---|---|
| **Superintendent Minister:** | Revd David Jebb |
| **Lay Worker:** | Mr Afsar Ahmed |
| **Senior Steward:** | Mr Chris Hartley |
| **Stewards:** | Mrs Margaret Deakin |
| | Mrs Diane Emsley |
| | Mrs Mary Spooner |
| | Mrs Sandie Wheatley |
| | Mr Tony Jukes |
| **Church Council Secretary:** | Mrs Tina Hillas |
| **Communion Stewards:** | Mrs Diane Emsley |
| | Mrs Cynthia Hartley |
| **Treasurer:** | Mr John Deakin |
| **Property Steward / Bookings Secretary:** | Mr Malcolm Appleby |
| **Gift Aid Secretary:** | Mrs Diane Emsley |
| **Pastoral Secretary/Flowers:** | Mrs Tina Hillas |
| **Friendship Club:** | Mrs Mary Spooner |
| **Monday Group:** | Mrs Margaret Deakin |
| **Women's Fellowship:** | Mrs Eveline Aloof |
| **Safeguarding:** | Mrs Sandie Wheatley |
| **Weekly Notices & Magazine** | Mrs Margaret Deakin |
| **Organists:** | Mrs Tina Hillas<br>Mr George Orme |