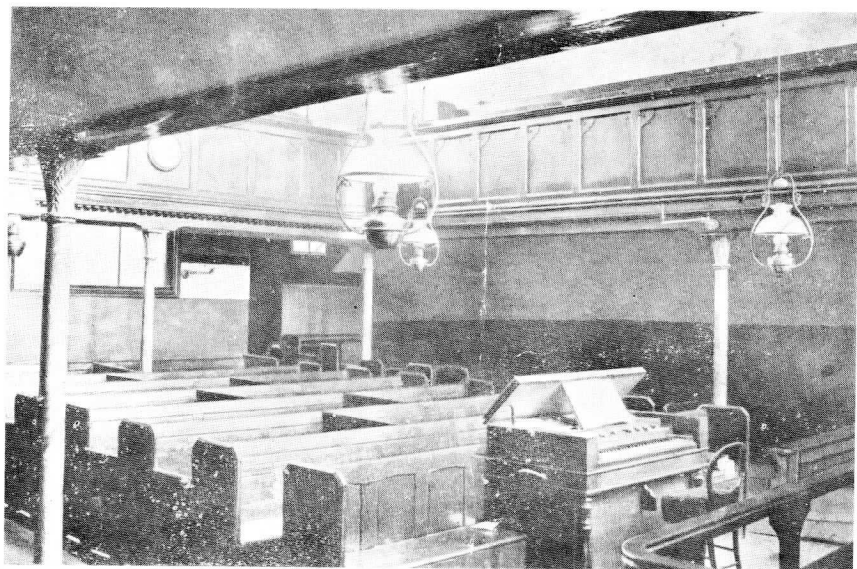


**Waterloo Street Methodist Church
Thornley**

1838 — 1948

SOUVENIR
of
CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS
during
November, 1948

Price — — One Shilling and Sixpence



INTERIOR OF CHAPEL ABOUT 1905.

PREFACE.

I have been asked by the Trustees to draw up a history of our Church since its beginnings in 1838. I duly appreciate the honour and realise what a privilege is mine.

Unfortunately I can, by no means, call it a history; but would rather it be regarded as just a few observations I have been able to gather, from the matter at my disposal. Records are few and there are large gaps in time and many of my observations may be subjected to criticism and correction; but I have done my best and have enjoyed delving into the story of this church.

I am very thankful for the ready and willing help I have had from so many, who do not wish their names to be mentioned, and I sincerely thank Mr. Rushford, the Editor of the Durham County Chronicle, for his ready and gracious assistance.

HARRY E. COX

October, 1948.

Up to recent years there has always been a close relationship between the Church and the colliery, while it must have been uncomfortable and perhaps distressing at times, many of the colliery viewers and officials have been closely connected with Waterloo Street Church.

In the year 1837, the year Queen Victoria came to the throne, Thornley was being pegged out as a building site for houses, cottages, and shops.

The early members had a mighty faith and belief in what they preached—so they reached out for a building site which was already staked, and which cost them £19. Evidently they set about building and erecting a chapel before the actual deeds were completed.

It is recorded that the women as well as the men carried the stones from the quarry to the site. They took time by the forelock as the urgency of the situation demanded a mighty adventure of faith and trust in the ultimate success of their work.

The following is an extract from the deeds of that time showing that the Wesleyan Society purchased one of the sites pegged out.

This indenture made on the 26th day of May in the year of our Lord 1840 between Henry John Spearman of Newton Hall and James Raine of Thornley, grocer, Thomas Athey of the same place, engineman, Thomas Richardson, of the same place, blacksmith, Robert Curry of the same place, mason, George Dent, of the same place, pitman, Richard Greenwell of the same place, joiner, John Hunter of Haswell, Colliery Viewer, George Southern, Haswell, grocer, Henry Fenwick of the City of Durham grocer, James Chambers, of the same city, shoemaker, Moses Thompson of the same city, mason and John Chambers of the same city, woolcomber.

All that piece or parcel of ground, as was lately staked out situate and lying and being on the west side of a certain street called Princes Street (now Waterloo St.) in the said town of New Thornley, in the parish of Kelloe, abutting on the tenements of George Liddell, on the north side thereof, measuring from N to S thirty five feet and from E to W forty two feet, and all those, the meeting house, erections and buildings now thereon and built.

It is very interesting to note how prominent are the tradesmen and artisans. We must remember that very few people were able to read and write. In fact one of the men who signed the indenture signed by making a cross which was witnessed as his signature.

What excitement there must have been and what a thrill, when as a result of their personal labours the opening ceremony was performed. The building may not have been very pretentious and would not boast any real architectural beauty but it was theirs. I have searched (by kind permission of Mr. Rushford) the files of the Durham County Chronicle and the County Advertiser for year 1838, and while there are many references to the celebrations and feasting in commemoration of Queen Victoria's coronation, no reference is made in the local gossip columns of the opening of the Chapel. I should imagine the members would not worry too much, neither would they be concerned about being closed in on the north and south, the house of God was theirs, and for their children. They were in a solid position to make their witness known and to mould and influence the village life of their day.

Very little information is available as to how they progressed and what took place in the meeting house or of the men and women connected with it up to 1865. I would like to draw your attention to the extracts from a letter which will be found at the end of the book.

We know that Thornley played a great part in the formation of the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Association and we feel sure that men connected with our Church would play their part too. Later on when the Durham Miners' Association came into being the Methodists of Thornley played their part in the great movement.

In 1844 occurred the so called strike and Thornley men suffered very severe hardships many of them being evicted from their homes onto the street and members of our Church were among the sufferers.

One thing we do know that Thornley Wesleyan Church was accepted into the Durham Circuit. What it must have meant, we today cannot visualise. Fancy belonging to a Circuit that included places like Durham, Chester-le-Street, West Rainton, Framwellgate Moor, Brandon, Brancepeth, Wingate, Shotton Colliery, Lumley and the villages in between and the only way of getting there was by walking. There were three "travelling preachers," two in Durham and one at Chester-le-Street.

I have seen a plan of the Durham Circuit (4 months) dated 1853-4 and the services at Thornley began at 2 p.m. and 5-30 p.m. and while on this plan, there were no local preachers at Thornley, there were several names from Haswell including Peter McKenzie. Every preacher was expected to keep his own appointments and from all accounts these appointments were honoured. Quarterly meetings were usually held at one o'clock and stewards were to have their monies in by 12 o'clock and the local preacher's meeting was at 10 a.m. Much was made of the Love Feast, Watch-night services and fast days.

The officers and leaders in those days must have had to shoulder much responsibility regarding worship and devotional exercises. The visits of the "travelling preachers" were few and far between.

When we try to picture the stirring times and the industrial development through which they passed, and how they were determined to overcome all difficulties, and place their Church in the forefront of the life of the community we begin to realise what a tradition and heritage has been handed down to successive generations. There is no doubt that an impact would be made upon them even though they would seem remote, by national standards. One tries to think of the trying years of the "hungry forties" when the price of a loaf of bread would make a serious inroad into wages. The upheavals caused by the "Unions" where a man had to face continued persecution and unemployment if he openly declared his convictions. I have already referred to the terrible strike of 1844 when many Thornley men were sent to prison and scores were evicted from their homes. I wonder if any of the six men taken by Mr. Roberts to London in order to secure the release of the miners, were Methodists. The whole business must have been very distressing to men and women worshipping in our Church. One is tempted to digress, and bring in matters more fitted for some other place—but there is no doubt that members of our Church were among the sufferers. They realised the Christian obligation of social righteousness and justice which was the outcome of a faith believing in the regeneration and emancipation of men through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. So they faced trial, difficulty and tribulation for their faith. I think we sometimes forget that all the heroes of faith are not found in the letter to the Hebrews.

In 1865 a new episode in the life of our Church was born. Evidently, the premises which had served so well for nearly thirty years, were growing inadequate for the needs of worship and fellow-

ship and the chapel was rebuilt and considerably enlarged and took the form, in main outline, as it is today. The enlargement could only go one way, i.e., upwards, as the old building was hemmed in on both sides by houses, and the present gallery is the result. The former members must not have seen the possibilities of expansion to any great extent. This "hemming in" was always a bugbear right up to 1910. The new Chapel was built to seat 500 people and according to an old schedule each person was allowed eighteen inches of seating space. I wonder how they managed with crinolines and bustles with this so called calculation !

Again I failed to find any reference to the opening ceremony in the papers of the day. Thornley was evidently a self contained community with very little connection with the outside world. There was a little sidelight of the activity of the Church in the Durham County Chronicle dated April 21st, 1865 :

" Mr. Michael Catron, who has removed to Willington, was presented with several volumes of books, as a token of the esteem in which he was held by the members of the Wesleyan Society at Thornley. The presentation was made by John Smith, of Ludworth, who described Mr. Catron as " Father Catron, who was class teacher and Sunday School Superintendent for 20 years."

An amusing paragraph directly under the above, shows other activities at work in the village. A Thornley man, named Lax, won £5 and became the local champion, because he shot ten sparrows in less time than his opponent. Fancy being champion Sparrow Shooter.

The rebuilding of the Church demanded the formation of a new trust as many of the originals had died, others grown old, and the whereabouts of some was not known.

There was again the close connection with tradesmen and colliery officials as at first, perhaps for the same reason.

The new trust brings before us many names and personalities which are remembered even today by some of the oldest of our members and makes us feel as though we do belong to the tradition. The retiring trustees were paid five shillings each by the new trustees. It seems as though the idea was there of new trustees buying the property of the old trustees. Of course this must have been a mere nominal transaction, but the receipts are there.

The new trust formed in 1868 was composed of John Elliott, draper, Michael Cook, grocer, John Fell Smith, miner, Wm. Ralph Golightly of Cassop, grocer, Robert Embleton, Trimdon Grange, grocer, William Tulip of Trimdon Grange, grocer, John Coward of Durham, stationer, Wm. Ford, Upper Wimpole St., Cavendish Square, London, Thomas Gullick, 24 Pall Mall, London, George Walton, Weardale Villa, The Downs, Clapham, London, John Patton, the Elder of Westoe, John Patton, the younger, Pembury Rd., Lower Clapham, London. The Church still formed part of the Durham Circuit. There is really no information of activities of the Society for the next four or five years; but one can well imagine the joy and sense of freedom that would pervade the fellowship during 1872 when the "hateful bindings," became a thing of the past, and when the 1870 Education Act was being put into operation which led to the erection of the day schools in 1876.

In 1873, a new era in the affairs of the Church was begun. At the Newcastle Conference of 1873, it was decided to carve out two additional Circuits out of the Durham Circuit, viz., Chester-le-Street and Thornley. The Rev. W. E. Gardener was to take charge of Thornley under the direction of the Chairman of the District. Thornley was to be regarded as a Home Missionary Station until 1875, at which time was to be built and furnished. The total number of members in the eleven places in June, 1873, was estimated at 314 with an income of £164. Thus our Church was to be the centre of what was to be a great adventure of faith, and leader in administrative matters.

The new Circuit was composed of Thornley, Haswell, Wingate, Trimdon Grange, Trimdon Colliery, New Kelloe, Quarrington Hill, Shotton Colliery, Wheatley Hill, Cassop Colliery and Fishburn. I think only three of these had Chapels of their own, the rest met in houses or buildings, put at their disposal, by the colliery companies.

Fortunately a copy of the first plan has been preserved.

The following is an extract taken from some notes made by Rev. W. E. Gardiner :—

1873. "Mrs. Gardiner and infant remained in Durham five days as there was no accommodation or lodgings to be had. Then my boxes, etc., are to be deposited in the Colliery office

at Wheatley Hill until other arrangements can be made. Mrs. Matthew, of Cassop Colliery, kindly consented to entertain us for six or seven weeks. We were then the guests of R. Cooper, Esq., of Thornley, for about ten days. After that we removed to Cooper's Terrace, our new extemporised home. **Then** I got my books from Wheatley Hill."

1875. "Removed to Wesley Villa, which was only partially completed, workmen in and out for months. Not papered whilst we remained until August 1876."

At the December Quarterly Meeting of 1873 Thornley had 48 members under the leadership of John Fell Smith, John Elliott, Robert Youll and Thomas Walker. Much importance was evidently given to members "on trial" and catechumans.

Another blow fell on the Church in May 1874 :—

"All the collieries in County Durham were on strike the first two weeks of May. The Thornley and Wheatley Hill Collieries remained out for weeks. Many families in the village were again evicted from their homes and compelled to seek shelter just where they could. This made our work exceedingly painful and largely nugatory."

In 1874 Thornley was recognised as a circuit with a married minister, and in addition takes a young man "with the pledge."

It seems as though Thornley Church was destined to face severe handicaps and trials. On Saturday night about 9-15 p.m. May 8th, 1875, a very disastrous and destructive fire burst out at Thornley Colliery, destroying the engines, engine-houses, etc. The estimated damage was £30,000.

Mr. Gardiner makes this note :—

The pit will not be restored for full working under six months at least. This will cast a gloom over Thornley Society and prevent the prosecution of cherished purposes for the present.

It was not until the 9th of September or seventeen weeks after the great fire, that one part of the pit at Thornley resumed work. Not $\frac{1}{3}$ of the men are yet employed and there is no prospect of the residue being "taken on" until early spring of 1876. The unsettled state is very trying."

The minister's house, Wesley Villa, was completed and furnished in 1876 at a total ascertained cost of £1350. It is interesting to note, that many of the older inhabitants of Thornley, still call it the Preacher's House.

Our Church was first licensed for the Solemnization of Marriages on December 9th, 1874. This in its day was a very vital matter for the Methodists of Thornley.

A period of steady progress began in about 1879 under the leadership of class leaders R. Clark, J. Hills, J. Fell Smith, R. Youll, I. Youll, J. Clark and Sister Clark. It seems as though outside influences were no longer interfering with the steady building up of the Church. In June, 1880, the number of members was 48. In 1881 the number was 105 and remained steady until June of 1884 when membership was still 105 after removals and newcomers had been reckoned. The peak number was 117 members.

Another blow fell on the village and consequently on the Church. In April, 1884, occurred the "Putt Pay" which created great alarm and disturbance in the village, and while its influence on our Church was not immediately felt, there was a rapid drop in membership, which continued so that in 1889 there were only 25 members under the leadership of Mr. and Mrs. Clark. This was the lowest ebb in all the long history of the Church, and one can well imagine the feelings of the faithful remnant, as they faced the future with such a building and cause in their hands. All honour to those faithful few who by the grace of God, and the assurance of His Presence, refused to be daunted and give in.

Once again work began to revive, so that in December, 1891, the membership return showed 74 members under the leadership of Mrs. Robinson, Mrs. Sharp, Mr. Michael Cook and Miss Robinson.

Up to now little or no reference has been made of the work in connection with the Sunday School. There had always been a Sunday School, and in the early days, a day school was held in the chapel.

In 1871 or 1872, two cottages below the chapel were bought for £325, and a deposit of £25 was paid. Once again before actual expansion much money had to be spent before any actual alterations could take place. No more money for the two houses was paid except the deposit and one cottage was converted into a Sunday School with an upper room. Probably many members of today can remember this, as I am given to understand that this remained practically unchanged for very many years.

In 1876 enquiries were being made as to the legal position. Two men had previously deposited the £25 and started alterations, but eventually the trust accepted the responsibility representing £470. The Chapel Committee officially sanctioned the "Enlargement" after it had been in operation for at least 4 years. So began the first separate school.

Unfortunately there are no records available regarding further development of our Church or of any happenings of note until 1905.

Their feeling then was, that the old premises should be sold. In fact a solicitor was authorised to put up the whole of the premises for auction—and a new church erected further up the village, on what appeared to be green fields. Negotiations were put in hand for a site on which "The Gables" now stands. Evidently, some with wider vision, saw the folly of being compelled to spend money in buying cottages before any enlargement could be done, and also saw the trend of the growth of the village westwards.

Evidently matters did not pan out as was expected and the members had to concentrate again on the old premises.

There was an urgent need for catering for the young people and for extending and modernising the Sunday School. Again the trustees had to buy a further cottage for £300 before any expansion could take place.

In 1910 the Sunday School and Institute were opened. Events proved that the Institute met a very great need of young people, for recreation and culture. I still hear people call rooms—billiard room—reading room, which functioned until the Welfare Hall was built.

According to minutes this new departure in Church affairs caused much heartburning in some, and rules and regulations seem very strict to our present day ideas. In 1912 quite a flutter was caused by the request to be permitted to hold a billiard handicap and smoking was severely frowned upon—defaulters having to appear before the trustees.

On October 1st, 1920 it was moved by R. Henderson and seconded by R. Willey that a scheme for the purchase of a new pipe organ be initiated. This was unanimously agreed to and R. Nicholson was appointed Secretary and R. Willey as treasurer to the fund.

Many of you will remember the intense activity in the Church during the next three years. Cake and apron sales—sewing meetings—Old people's concerts—young people's efforts—married folk having a concert—single folk doing something. I have heard wonderful stories of a mighty co-operation in order to have the organ dedicated and free of debt. The cost was £650 for the organ and a very pleasing feature is the tablet placed on the front to the memory of members and associates who fell in the Great War of 1914-1918.

The erecting of the organ necessitated quite a lot of alterations to the lay out of the Church. The organ chamber had to be constructed, and the front of the chapel changed. The rostrum which had served its purpose since 1865 was cut to the size of a pulpit, and the choir grouped around the pulpit in the centre of the chapel as it is today.

The organ was dedicated to the Glory of God on August 29th, 1923, free of debt.

The history of the Church from that time is well known to you all.

You will have noticed that not a great deal has been said about the devotional activities of the church life. Unfortunately there is neither a Society or Leaders' Minute Book available so I cannot give you any idea of the great spiritual movements and of great preachers that have ministered from time to time.

We remembered with gratitude the services of the Rev. F. H. Benson who for nearly 40 consecutive years conducted the Chapel Anniversary Services, and Mr. J. M. Lawson of Birtley who for 20 years conducted the Harvest Festival Services.

I do say this from what I have gleaned, that the Church, through the long years of her life, has always had a band of devoted and faithful men and women, who with their families, some to the third and fourth generation, have worshipped and served their God with great thankfulness of heart.

In the early days, the Howorth's family, whose mother helped to carry the stones for the first building, the Catrons—the Elliotts—John Hills—Michael Cook and his wife—Rd. Youll, Isaac Youll, George Peel and a host of stalwart men and women.

In later times Robert Hedley and his wife—Tom Hedley and his wife and family—the third generation is still actively engaged—James Tait Scott and his wife and family—a son J. H. C. Scott is still with us and has been Trust Treasurer for many years. Mr. Simon Henderson and family, Richard Willey who served his church so faithfully—the Jordisons—Mr. W. Potts and his wife and family—Mr. Potts senior is still choir master after many years' service. Then there are those faithful folk, who have never sought, or been in the limelight, but who throughout have been the very backbone of the society and by their loyalty and devotion have kept the work of God alive. All honour to them all.

I cannot resist just giving a few words to our young men and women. Ours is a glorious heritage and I have tried to show how it has come to us. It has been handed down by men and women whose hearts were warmed by the love which our Saviour shed abroad in their hearts—men and women of a living faith—resolute in prayer and a mighty trust in God. Our Church has weathered many storms, suffered severe set-backs, endured much tribulation before she came into the peaceful waters of our day. Sooner perhaps than you are aware, you will be called to assume the responsibilities which were first shouldered in 1838, and you in your turn will hand over to new generations. You have entered into a rich heritage and tradition—pass it on richer and finer than it was when it became yours.

What will happen before the bi-centenary—who knows? Already plans are being formulated for the building of a new church to meet the growing needs of our village. Perhaps in this a new sphere of activity may unfold itself.

I am concluding with extracts from a letter written by Rev. Wm. Sidebotham of Bay City, Michigan, U.S.A., a minister for over 53½ years, who lived in Thornley during 1852-1860. I am indebted to Mr. A. Young of Easington, whose wife was a Howorth, for this privilege.

“ I attended the week-day school in the chapel—the boys sat on the side nearest the railway and the girls nearest to Rd. Greenwell's shop.

My parents were Primitives, but they took me one Sunday to hear a Wesleyan local preacher, Peter McKenzie.

In 1858-1859-1860 I recited at the S.S. Anniversary, parts of the Catechism with cross examination. When I get to heaven, I will thank Michael Catron, Michael Watson, John

Elliott and John Hills for the recitations selected for me. They have done me good ever since and helped me to be a better preacher than I otherwise would have been.

I still remember some of the S.S. songs I learned in Thornley Wesleyan School. Some of them I have not heard for 50 years.

Paraffin Oil first came to Thornley in the winter of 1859-60. About a year before this our chapel had its walls white-washed and its pews painted. At that time Rd. Greenwell, who lived next door, had a small gasometer erected behind his house, for his home and shop and the chapel. There were no shades on the gas lights—but when the chapel was re-opened without the old candlesticks, I thought heaven could not be a finer place than our chapel was.

In my time there were no local preachers in Thornley Wesleyan Chapel. I remember Newrick Featonby of Shotton, an old man then and a popular preacher. I can still remember — Thompson of Haswell, and then there was — Brass of Wingate. Another was — Golightly of Cassop and there was Mr. Parkinson of Sherburn.

When we got the gas lights in Church another innovation occurred. Till then we had five or six fiddles in the choir, one was a big bass fiddle. The fiddlers with their fiddles were dismissed and a harmonium was bought. The first harmoniumist was Wm. Walker, the policeman's son.

We then knew that we were superior to the Primitives (shades of the past) who had no instrument but fiddles and I believe one clarionet, even though they had three local preachers.

July 29th, 1860 was my last Sunday in Thornley. We had a preacher from another Circuit. Some called him Praying Johnny. We had a long prayer meeting in the evening. The servant girl at the Dun Cow Inn was at the penitent form and could not get liberty.

WM. SIDEBOTHAM.

1925.