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THE
STORY
OF

REEPHAM
METHODIST
CHAPEL



1817 - 1992

PROPERTY OF
REEPHAM SOCIETY 26

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by

WESLEY G PIERCY B.A.

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REEPHAM SOCIETY



PREFACE

CHURCH BUILDINGS it seems are usually taken for granted and no thought given to how they came into being. This little book attempts to tell of one particular set of buildings; how it was built and maintained by people of modest means, some of them very poor, entirely by their own efforts. The Church of England had its tithes and endowments, Methodism had to depend on the pennies of its members.

Most of the material in this book derives from documents preserved in the Circuit safe and in the County Record Office, but as many of the early records have been destroyed there are large gaps in the story. These the author has been able partly to fill from verbal accounts handed down from several generations of his family who were connected with the Chapel from its early days. Any mistakes that there may be are his own.

WESLEY G PIERCY

Reepham, December 1991

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE cost of printing this book was defrayed by the generosity of a lady who wishes to remain anonymous.

The proceeds from the sale of this book will go towards the work of the Chapel.

From the Minister 1990 - 1992

THERE is always an ebb and flow in the affairs of men. There is the exuberance and energy of youth, the measured tread of maturity, the wisdom of old age. Sometimes this appears as impatience, lack of drive and rock hard conservatism.

However it is looked at, there is always change. Change is a fact of life. If there is no air in the lungs to enrich the blood as it courses around the body, here feeding, here cleansing, protecting or being itself filtered, then the body is dead.

It is the same with any institution as it is with the body. Methodism was raised according to John Wesley, to cause change, the change from our earthly state to our heavenly one. The history of the chapel and its people at Reepham records such an ebb and flow. At times the Chapel has been packed to the walls and at other times almost at death's door. On two occasions it has been my pleasure to see the 'occasional' side benches being used.

You will read in this work about a small gathering that grows and changes. There are changes in technology, grasping for instance at the miracle of electricity, or the Chapel being the place where a first experience of radio is had. There are changes in trustees, ministers, pastors, committees, all attempting to hold onto the same vision, all attempting to follow in God's footsteps. At the same time that the people are moving forward, there are people who are aware of the past, attempting to hold onto the good things of the past. It is sometimes difficult to see the difference between a crippling load and a staff or light which will help us on our way. A love and care for each other is vital, this itself shows the presence of God in a place.

Much of the above is in this work which records 175 years of this Chapel and its people in Reepham. Give God the glory for his protection and the Chapel's

survival up to this time. Give God the glory for the adventure that is to come. In all things may we be aware of a living God, leading us ever onward, his people who are alive with His Holy Spirit, praising him for and in all that is to come.

I would like to thank Mr Wesley Piercy for bringing together this work so that; "We might look to the rock from which we were hewn". [Isaiah 51 v 1]

D C SHAWCROSS

From the Superintendent Minister of North Walsham and Aylsham Circuit

TO be able to look back on 175 years of faithful Christian witness in the local community is a tremendous achievement. To be able to look forward with confidence and hope is really exciting. This booklet tells the story of what has been done for Christ over many years in Reepham. For it all we give thanks and praise to God.

But dwelling on the past is only good in so far as it enables us to learn lessons for the present and the future; a base established from which to move forward, an understanding of the rich resources and glorious opportunities yet to be experienced.

It is particularly encouraging to note the way in which in the last few years spirits have revived, positive change has taken place and a vision has grown for the future. A vision for Christ's church in Reepham - alive in worship, rich in fellowship, welcoming and outward looking in concern for others and for God's world and with premises attractive and fitted out to "serve the present age our calling to fulfill".

May the Lord bless you in every way out of the riches of His grace in Christ Jesus.

CHRIS SHARP

From the Chairman of the East Anglian District

ONE hundred and seventy-five years ago our parents in the faith built the new church at Reepham in a spirit of optimism and a deep desire to help forward the whole church mission in the neighbourhood. They could not have foreseen all the changes that have followed so rapidly during that fascinating period. English society is less interested in going to church, yet just as needy as ever. Perhaps it is just as attracted by genuine religion as ever.

So we have no need to be depressed about the future. We have to be extremely flexible indeed, and to be obviously Christian in all that we do. But there is an important place for us in God's whole strategy.

The District sends warmest greetings, the prayer that together we shall find that place, and the promise that we are profoundly committed to your support.

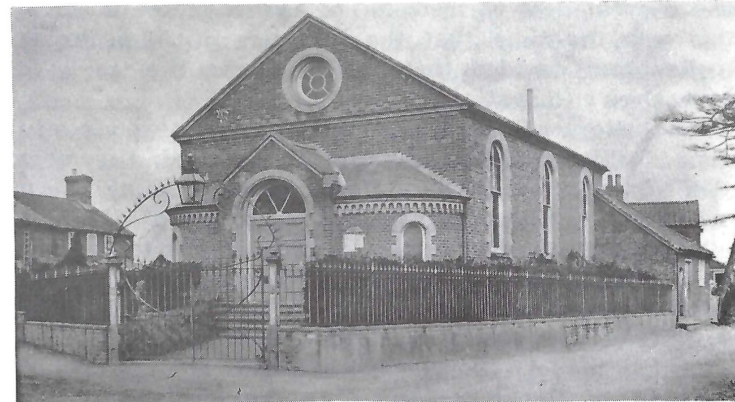
May God bless your work richly during the next 175 years!

RICHARD G JONES
December 1991

REEPHAM METHODIST CHAPEL

I THE CHAPEL

METHODISM came to Reepham at some time in the eighteenth century by means of two preachers from Norwich who attempted to preach in the Market Place but were prevented by a mob of local roughs, who were said to have been instigated by the local clergy. Not deterred by this hostile reception and convinced that they were called to the work, they returned and were welcomed by the ordinary people. Their message appealed to many people in the town and district and in due course a Methodist Society was formed in Reepham. It is not certain when this took place but the first Methodist Society was formed in London in 1739 and in 1751 a man named James Wheatley brought Methodism to Norwich. John Wesley himself visited Norwich for the



The Chapel after 1892 alterations, showing the old schoolroom and cottages demolished in 1904.

first time in 1754. Also, in 1754 the house of Francis Taylor in Hackford (Reepham) was 'set aside for the exercise of religious worship by Protestant Dissenters', who may possibly have been Methodists.

Whether or not the Reepham Methodist Society met in the house of Francis Taylor they undoubtedly met somewhere. As a Methodist Society was divided into Classes they probably met in the house of their Class Leader; as the Wesleyan Catechism says 'they meet together in small companies for fellowship and mutual edification'. A class Leader had to collect one penny per week from those of his Class who were able to pay and to enquire into their Christian conduct. Any member whose conduct was not of the required standard could be expelled from the Society. There were several Classes in a Society and the Leader's Meeting was the governing body of the Society. All the Societies together formed what was known as the Connexion.

In 1816 George III was on the throne and hopelessly insane; his son, the future George IV was the Prince Regent. After the Napoleonic wars which had ended with the battle of Waterloo in the previous year, there was a great deal of distress and unrest in the country. This was the time that the followers of John Wesley in Reepham decided that the time was ripe to build themselves a Chapel or Meeting House.

The history of the Chapel begins with a young man named William Bircham, a tailor of Hackford, a member of the Society. On the 21st March 1816, William Bircham and his 'trustee' George Wymer, an attorney of Reepham purchased the land on which the Chapel was to be built from John Dennis, a farmer of Reepham and Samuel Sewell, a carpenter of Hackford. The piece of land is described as being 'bounded to the North by land belonging to John Dennis and by roads from Kerdiston and Sall to Hackford Market to the East, South and West'. Part of the land was freehold and part was copyhold of the Manor of Kerdeston-Reiffham. The copyhold

portion had been awarded to Samuel Sewell in 1805 by the Commissioners for the Act for the Enclosure of the Commons of Hackford and Whitwell. It appears that Sewell had previously agreed to sell his piece to Dennis but the sale had never been completed. George Wymer, as well as being William Bircham's solicitor, was a Steward of the Manor Courts. The price paid by William Bircham was £20 0s. 0d. of 'lawful English money', £12 0s. 0d. for the freehold and £8 0s. 0d. for the copyhold. The 'custom of the Manor' also required him to pay five shillings to Samuel Sewell.

Money had already been collected and donated toward the building of a Chapel and a further amount was borrowed. A Chapel was erected on the site by the end of the year, at a cost of £700 according to a later document. It was built of locally made bricks and tiles; it measured thirty-eight feet by twenty-five feet with sixteen inch thick walls, sixteen feet eight inches in height, and had a hipped roof. It had a gallery on three sides and had seating for three hundred and fifty people on narrow seats with almost straight backs, no thought of comfort in those days. It also had what is described as a 'boxed up' pulpit. There is no known picture of the Chapel in its original state but the writer has been told that the entrance was on what is now called Station Road and that the seating faced west but there is no documentary evidence of this. There were probably two rows of small rectangular windows on the Station Road side as can be seen in other Chapels of the same period which have not had the alterations that Reepham has had. We do not know how the Chapel was heated, if at all, and the only lighting was by candles. It is odd that people now flock to candle light carol services when there is better light available, the old timers would think we are crazy. In the early days there was no organ to accompany the hymns. After a hymn had been announced someone would have to start it. There is a story that a man called John Frankland (there have

been several of that name connected with the Chapel over the years) who, when starting a hymn would always start the tune 'Old Hundredth'; whether it fitted the words or not. Because of this he was always known as 'Old Hundred' Frankland.

There was a schoolroom where the vestry and organ chamber are now, joined to the Chapel but on a lower level, with steps up from it into the Chapel. Whether this was built at the same time as the Chapel or later is not known; however, the Returns to the Select Committee on the Education of the Poor for Hackford Parish states that, 'The Dissenters have a Sunday School containing thirty boys and twenty-nine girls'. As we know of no other Nonconformists in Reepham at this time, it may be assumed that this was the Methodist school. This, together with schools belonging to the parish churches, was the only education available to the poor in Reepham at this time. As well as religious instruction children were taught to read in these schools.

On 3rd February 1817 the 'piece or parcel of land with a chapel or meeting house erected thereon, known as Reepham Chapel' was leased for twelve months at a rent of one peppercorn, 'if legally demanded', by William Bircham and George Wymer to the following people:

William Dewing of Cawston, pumpmaker
Martin Dewing of Cawston, pumpmaker
John Pye of Cawston, farmer
John West of Whitwell, farmer
John Harrison of Weston, thatcher
John Sayers of Witchingham, miller
Richard Sadler of North Walsham, druggist
David Ducker of North Walsham, tailor
John Chapman of Haverland, carpenter

The reason for this lease is not clear because by another document, dated 4th February 1817 William Bircham released to these Trustees 'a piece or parcel of land with a chapel erected thereon called Reepham Chapel

... for the use of preachers who are or may be members of the Methodist Conference, and for the Services of the People called Methodists of the late Reverend John Wesley's Connexion', which was paid for by 'monies raised by collections and by voluntary subscription and donations and partly by money borrowed by the Trustees'. The document goes on to say that the Chapel is for 'preaching and expounding God's Holy Word and the performance of all other acts of Public Worship therein'. The Trustees were required to ensure that no other doctrines than those contained in John Wesley's Notes on the New Testament, or the first four published volumes of his Sermons were preached and that nothing indecent or immoral was preached. A trust fund was to be set up for repaying the mortgage and keeping the building in repair, the income for this purpose to come from seat rents. All this was in accordance with the Model Deed for Methodist Chapels as laid down by the first Methodist Conference in 1784.

It may seem that a Chapel with seating for three hundred and fifty was rather large for a place the size of Reepham with a total population of less than two thousand in the four parishes. We do not know how many members and adherents there were in those days



The Chapel after 1904

but there were probably a large number from the surrounding villages, this being one of the first Methodist Chapels in this part of Norfolk. As nearby villages got their own Chapels the Reepham Society must have declined.

At this point it seems appropriate to give some account of the people who were responsible for the Chapel who are known to us, starting with William Bircham. He was a tailor with a shop in the Market Place which is now the Post Office. His grandson still had the shop in the early years of the present century. William is buried in the Nonconformist section of Hackford cemetery under an imposing monument with this inscription: *'Here rest the mortal remains of WILLIAM BIRCHAM who died August 14th 1868, aged 76 years. Impressed with the values of Christian Truth and Personal Piety he early became associated with the Methodist Society. Constrained by the Love of Christ to aid in making known the Gospel of Salvation he laboured for many years as a zealous Local Preacher to the Common People, and greatly influenced by a desire to promote the Happiness and Independence of the Working Classes of this County he was the chief means of establishing The Reepham Provident Society, the members of which erected this monument to his memory.'*

Another member of whom we have some knowledge is Thomas Staples, a druggist, whose shop and house was in Norwich Road, now called Victoria House. Mary Staples, his wife, is buried in the Chapel, her memorial tablet is over the back of the pulpit. Their daughter Hannah married Thomas Bircham, son of William. Thomas and Hannah lived in Norwich Road, where Hannah carried on her father's business while Thomas carried on the tailoring business in the Market Place as a lock up shop. The property adjacent to the druggist's shop is still known as Bircham's Yard.

Before Hackford cemetery was opened in 1854 many Methodists were buried in the graveyard attached to

the Chapel. This was because the Anglian clergy would not allow Nonconformist Ministers to officiate in churchyards until 1880, when Gladstone's Burial Act made it possible. Even then the author of Armstrong's Norfolk Diary called it an 'impertinence' that Nonconformist Ministers should expect to conduct services in a churchyard. The earliest recorded burial in the Chapel graveyard was of Ann Patfield who died in 1819 aged 19. She was probably the daughter of a blacksmith who is recorded as living in Back Street. Among others were Mary and Thomas Peck, died 1836 and 1840 respectively, he may have been a schoolmaster; Thomas and Margaret Scurill, they had a bakery in Back Street, (readers of 'Diary of a Country Parson' will remember the good Parson having dealings with a baker of that name, the father of his servant, Briton); John Frankland, a brazier of Hackford; Ann, daughter of James Pumfrey, farmer of Kerdiston and Bethia his wife and Seymour Jewell, a veterinary surgeon, who lived near the Market Place. Most of the Methodists who have died since 1854 are buried on a part of Hackford Cemetery reserved for Nonconformists.

For those unfamiliar with the peculiarities of Reepham with Kerdiston, Hackford and Whitwell, which together make up the Market Town of Reepham a few words of explanation may be helpful. (Old Reephamites may skip the next few lines). Reepham Market Place is in Hackford Parish, St Mary's is the parish church of Reepham and Kerdiston, St Michael's is the parish church of Whitwell and the ruined All Saints was the parish church of Hackford. In the past Hackford and Whitwell were sometimes referred to as Reepham St Michael and Reepham All Saints respectively. Reepham Chapel is in Hackford parish. May be this will make things clearer or maybe not!

In 1830 the Reverend Robert Key introduced Primitive Methodism to Reepham. As his Wesleyan predecessors had done he attempted to preach in the Market Place

but was prevented by a mob. A full account of this episode can be found in Cyril Jolly's 'History of the East Dereham Methodist Circuit'. Key converted a man named Robert Wilkin of Whitwell Street who became a Local Preacher and helped to form a Primitive Methodist Society. Preaching places were established at Whitwell Street, Reepham Moor, Whitwell Beck and Booton, presumably in the open air. By 1847 they were able to build a wooden chapel in Dereham Road, rebuilt later in brick and tile. At about the same time as the Primitives were building their chapel another group, the Free Methodists, who later became the United Methodists, took over the former Baptist Chapel in Fisher's Alley which has since been demolished. The Wesleyans may have lost some members to these new Societies.

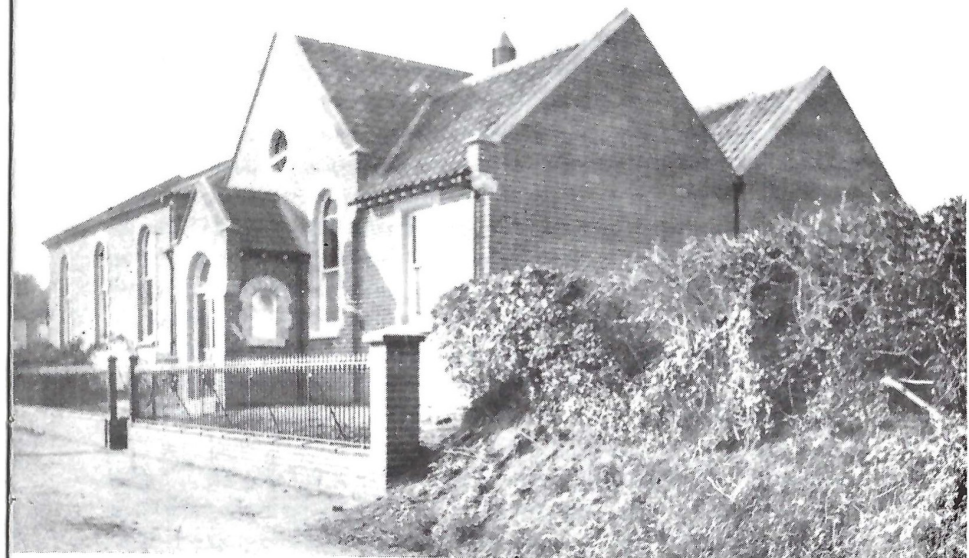
In 1839 the Wesleyan Society commemorated the centenary of the founding of the first Methodist Society by purchasing a silver Communion Service, consisting of a flagon or ewer, a salver and two cups or chalices. There were also two silver candelsticks. The flagon bears this inscription: *'This service was brought by the Society and Congregation of Wesleyans in Reepham, Norfolk, as a Memorial to the Centenary of Methodism'*. Although Queen Victoria was on the throne in 1839 the Service is a good example of Regency silver. Sadly, for safety reasons it has to be locked away where no one can see it. A clock, which also commemorated the Methodist Centenary, was stolen when the Chapel was broken into some years ago.

By 1858 John Chapman was the only survivor of the original Trust. He was now an old man, living in Norwich and was no longer willing to serve. On 23rd May that year the property was transferred to a new Trust comprised of the following persons:

Robert Frankland, ironmonger
Thomas Frankland, malster

John Rix, gardener
Robert Rix, gardener
Robert Barber, grocer, all of Reepham
John Neech, miller
Richard Frankland, tinman
Horatio Ransome, tailor, all of Aylsham.

This Trust lasted until 1891, by which time its numbers had been reduced to four, all of whom wished to resign. The Circuit applied to the Wesleyan Chapel Committee in Manchester for permission to appoint a new Trust, but were told that as the property was not held under the Wesleyan Chapel Model Deed of 1832 it was necessary under the Charitable Trust Acts to either appoint new Trustees by deed or to apply to the Charity Commissioners for an appointment and request them to establish a scheme of the trust of the Chapel Model Deed. This was done and the Chapel became a Charitable



The new building of 1904

Trust from 1st March 1892, subject to the conditions set out in the Chapel Model Deed, with the following Trustees:

Benjamin Wyand, farmer of Witchingham
Thomas Fox, baker
John Frankland, ironmonger both of Hackford
Charles Frankland, tailor
William Gillingwater, farmer
James Piercy, labourer
Thomas Piercy, ironmonger's assistant
all of Reepham
William Arthur Bush, farmer of Whitwell
Richard and Alfred Pumfrey, farmers
both of Bawdeswell
Stephen Westney Faircloth, miller
Christmas Willie Austin, carpenter and wheelwright
both of Aylsham.

Meanwhile in 1889 it was decided that the Chapel was badly in need of repair and renovation and a committee was set up to raise funds for this purpose and to decide what improvements were needed. It was decided that Mr Ormiston, a baker, be appointed chairman; Mr Fox, another baker, secretary and as treasurer, Mr E Gibbs, ironmonger. Fund raising was started by holding a tea-meeting on 15th May 1889. Tickets were priced at sixpence for adults and fourpence for Sunday School children. The proceeds amounted to £5 16s. 2½d. In October books were issued to committee members in which to enter contributions they collected.

On 14th January 1890 a lecture by Reverend Miller raised £1 5s. 6d. and on 22nd May another tea-meeting raised £7 8s. 2d; and so the business of fund raising went on.

In 1891 application was made to the Wesleyan Chapel Committee in Manchester for permission to make certain alterations to the Chapel. The application stated that there were twenty-four members in the Society, the

average congregation numbered fifty, twenty sittings were let, the Chapel could seat three hundred and fifty, there was no outstanding debt and the Society was duly secured to the Connexion. The proposed alterations as set out on the application form were to improve the front of the Chapel, remove the 'unsightly' gallery, reseat the Chapel and replace the old 'boxed up' pulpit with a new rostrum. The following remarks were added by the Minister - "The Chapel is a century behind the times and is in very urgent need of complete renovation. The marvel is that the people continue to go to such a structure in its present deplorable condition".

On Whit Tuesday afternoon 1891 a sermon by the Reverend Gould of Norwich raised £1 12s. 0d. and on that evening a public meeting with several speakers raised £2 4s. 2½d. At this meeting papers were passed round among the audience on which they were expected to write promises of contributions towards the cost of the renovations. One friend promised a heifer and calf, valued at £13 10s. 0d., another friend promised a porker and another a year's eggs from his or her hens. The total amount of the promises received that night were about eighty pounds.

On 5th June 1891 the Committee asked Mr A F Scott, a Norwich architect, to prepare plans and specifications for the proposed alterations and on 25th June these were received, considered and accepted. A number of builders were invited to submit tenders, the lowest of which, submitted by F Howard of Reepham, was accepted. Howard's tender was for £191 10s. 0d. and he signed an agreement to finish the job by 31st October 1891 and was paid £30 on account.

The Trustees decided that the Chapel should have better lighting and paraffin lamps were purchased from Mr E Gibbs. The Trustees also decided to purchase matting for the Chapel and rostrum.

It is not recorded if Mr Howard completed his contract on time. Not till 13th November 1893 was his account



Circuit Quarterly Meeting about 1910



Probably a Sunday School treat about 1912. In the centre Mr B E Wyand, Mr T Piercy, Mr W A Pask and Mr H Leonard. Among the young people in the front row are Elsie Piercy (Mrs Kiddell) and Marjorie Gibbs.

finally settled. However, the Chapel was officially re-opened on Thursday, 25th February 1893, with a sermon by the Reverend Gould, supported by other speakers, followed by the usual tea, which on this special occasion cost ninepence. A newspaper report of the proceedings states that the total cost of the renovations were £250, of which £150 had already been raised.

With the gallery gone and the new pews fitted the building would now seat about two hundred. The pews filled almost all the available space with seats along the side walls which could be let down when extra width was required in the aisles. The harmonium was installed in a space between the two front pews, to be replaced later by an American organ. The Communion Table stood in front of the rostrum, two chairs to match the rostrum were purchased later and stood beside the table. There was no Communion Rail, the Sacrament was received seated.

The outside appearance of the Chapel was greatly changed. A porch was added at the south end and a gable erected above it, replacing the hipped roof at that end. The north end is still hipped, giving the building a lopsided look. A Regency style building had been given a Victorian appearance.

The next improvement to be considered was the erection of a fence and gates; Mr S P Eglington offered to supply and erect iron capping, palisading and gates at five shillings on cost. This generous offer was accepted by the Trustees. The next requirement was efficient heating for the premises and the Trustees decided to enquire of Messrs Reeve and Sons of Norwich regarding the installation of hot water heating; this however seems to have been deferred till later.

By 1895 the Chapel was free of debt and a further application was made to Manchester for permission to 'make the premises secure and provide for efficient warming'. (one wonders what sort of heating there had been, if any). The proposed improvements included

a new boundary wall, with iron capping, palisading and gates, installation of a hot water heating system and certain alterations to the schoolroom. These improvements were not completed till 1904 as will be shown later. A separate application to Manchester was made at the same time for permission to install an organ. The organ, which had been purchased for £60 with money raised separately, involved no expense to the Trust. It came from St Nicholas' parish church, Great Yarmouth, where it had been in a side chapel. Mr George Fisher, whose grocery and drapery shop in the Market Place is now known as The Chimes, and who was organist and choirmaster at the Chapel went to Yarmouth to dismantle the organ, which is said to have been transported to Reepham on a farm wagon belonging to Mr Benjamin Wyand of Mill Farm, Great Witchingham, who was a Trustee and a leading member of the Society. Mr Fisher re-assembled the organ in the body of the Chapel; the organ chamber had not then been built. The American organ was relegated to the schoolroom.

The above mentioned improvements were carried out except it seems the hot water heating system; this could not have been done until the new school room was built later. The Trustees decided that Mr Fisher and the two Chapel Stewards, Thomas Piercy and Dawson Pegg should manage the organ. Chapel Stewards had the job of looking after the property, including stoking the boiler, attending to the lamps, trimming hedges, cutting the grass in the graveyard, collecting seat rents, overseeing the cleaning and generally acting as unpaid caretakers.

In 1899 the rails beside the steps up to the front door were erected at the expense of Mrs Leeds, who also presented a Bible for the pulpit.

It may be recalled that the piece of land bought by William Bircham was partly freehold and partly copyhold; the Chapel was built on the freehold part, the copyhold

was retained by Mr Bircham, who had some cottages built on it. These cottages were made over to his son Thomas who died in 1900. They then became the property of Thomas' son Herbert. In 1902 Mr B Wyand informed the Trustees that he had bought this property from Herbert Bircham for £220 and he offered it to the Trustees for the same price which the Trustees accepted. As the property was still copyhold it was decided to enfranchise it, that is to say free it from the Manorial dues. To do so meant paying the Lord of the Manor, Major Timothy White of Salle Park, the sum of £75. To pay for the cottages and the enfranchisement the Trustees needed to borrow £300 and an advertisement was placed in the Methodist Times asking for someone to lend that amount. A reply was received from a Mrs Davies in Torquay, who was willing to lend that sum at 3½% interest.

The acquisition of this property meant that there was now room to expand and it was now decided to build a new schoolroom, organ chamber and vestry. It was also decided to build a stable and gighouse for the benefit of those people who came to Chapel with horses and carts. A stoke hole for the heating system was made under the vestry. These proposals involved the demolition of two of the cottages.

In May 1904 the building committee received plans and specifications for the new buildings from Mr Scott the architect. An advertisement inviting tenders was placed in the Eastern Daily Press; the job to be completed by 10th September 1904. A tender of £351 from John Gaze of Carlton Colville was accepted; Messrs B Wyand and E Gibbs being authorised to sign the contract.

There are no more details available regarding these buildings; the entries in the minute book end with the signing of the contract. We know that the job was done, most of it is there to be seen. We know that the Sunday School children helped to collect money to pay for it, including the writer's mother, who was rewarded with

a purse for her efforts; no doubt others were also. We may assume that there was a grand opening, accompanied by the customary tea, but I can find no record of this.

With the new building completed the organ was moved into its new chamber and the space it had occupied was used by the choir. The Sunday School had a fine new building with its main hall and two separate class rooms with partitions that could be opened to make one large hall. There were shutters which opened into the school from the organ chamber which could be opened at any time when, as occasionally happened, there was an overflow from the Chapel into the school room, enabling the people there to hear and take part in the proceedings in the Chapel. The horses, no doubt, appreciated being in a nice warm stable rather than waiting outside in all sorts of weather. The gighouse was also useful for storing the trestle tables used for tea-meetings and the boards and trestles that made the platform in the Chapel for the Sunday School Anniversary. With its fine premises Reepham was the envy of other chapels in the Circuit.

The Trust was again renewed in 1901, a number of members had died and had to be replaced. This Trust lasted till 1923, when among the new appointments were the first lady Trustees, Mrs Blanche Eglington and Mrs Elsie Kiddell, both of them following their fathers and grandfathers as Trustees, Herbert Stratton, one of the 1901 Trust is listed as a continuing Trustee but 'cannot be found'. The Trust was not renewed again till 1943, when former Primitive and United Methodists were added, long after the Methodist Union.

In 1930 the electricity mains reached Reepham from Norwich. One of the last duties of Mr T Piercy as Chapel Steward was to arrange the installation of electricity in the Chapel. Sadly he died before it could be switched on. In the same year the present writer was appointed organ blower and was paid sixpence per week by the organist, Mr E Gibbs junior.

The Act of Union of 1932 united the three main Methodist Connexions which then became the Methodist Church of Great Britain. This was welcomed by the leaders of the three Societies in Reepham, who lost no time in combining the three congregations at the Station Road Chapel. In 1933 a meeting of the three Methodist Societies in Reepham was held under the chairmanship of the Reverend E Marshall, Superintendent Wesleyan Minister, to elect officers for the amalgamated Society. The following people were elected:

Society Stewards (one from each Society)

J W Frankland, S C Barrett, W Chipperfield

Poor Stewards

Mrs E Kiddell, Miss M Giles, Mr P Morris

Representatives to Leader's Meeting

G F Faircloth, S Hunt, J W Andrews

Secretary

E Siggins

Treasurer

J W Frankland

It was decided that the Wesleyan practice of morning and evening services should be continued; the others had been used to afternoon and evening services. Of course this arrangement did not suit everyone, especially those who had stock to feed on Sunday mornings. Some people thought that the whole process of amalgamation had been done too quickly, people were attached to their own little Chapel and did not feel at home in what some called the 'snob's chapel'. However, most of them eventually settled in quite happily. Arrangements were made to sell the other chapels with the intention of using the proceeds to pay for repairs to Station Road. The Dereham Road (Primitive) Chapel was bought by Mr E Gibbs, who let it to the Reepham Volunteer Fire Brigade. The fire engine was kept there for many years,

even after it was taken over by the County. The 'Chapel in the Alley' became George Bunn's carpenter's shop before becoming the Good Companion's Club. It has now been demolished and two houses stand on the site. It was intended at this time to form a new Trust to include members from all three Societies but owing to pressure of work on the Methodist Chapel Committee it was delayed until 1943.

In 1934 it was decided that Pastor Meese should be Class Leader while he was in Reepham and that his successor should be the same. Class meetings were to be held on Tuesday nights with Pastor Meese as Leader.

In 1935 a re-opening of the organ was held with Mr Phillips of Cromer in the chair. A silver tree was unloaded



Dereham Road, Reepham, the former Primitive Methodist Chapel on the right of the picture.

by Mrs Phillips. Also in 1935, on a proposal by Pastor J Walton, it was decided to hold prayer meetings at the close of evening service; the organist to play a voluntary to allow those who wished to leave to do so. A tea or coffee supper, in aid of the Circuit Fund, was held on Easter Tuesday. Still in 1935 Miss M Gibbs was appointed Foreign Missions Secretary. With the money received from the sale of the chapels, Mr W Dewing was asked to prepare specifications for repairs to the Chapel. Repairs were carried out by Messrs Hubbard of Lenwade with Mr Dewing overseeing the work. At the re-opening on 14th November 1937, the Chairman of the District, the Reverend Roberts, was the preacher at the afternoon service, which was followed by a tea, with an evening service addressed by the Reverend Roberts and Mr Maurice Sutton.

In 1935 the new Methodist hymn book was adopted; fifty copies were purchased for the use of visitors.

In 1936 Mrs Guyton was asked to visit former members of the congregation to welcome them back into the church; with what result is not recorded. It was decided to hold weeknight services each week. Also in 1936 the Reepham Methodist Girl Guide Troop was formed with Mrs D Gaskin as leader. A Scout Troop with Pastor O'Connor as leader was started about the same time.

In 1937 the Trustees enquired into the cost of converting the ighouse and stable for use as a Scout Room. Apparently the cost was too high and the Scouts continued to use the schoolroom. The paraffin lamps, which the Trustees had been unable to sell in 1930 were put into Ireland's annual Michaelmas sale. They had not become collectors items as they are now and made very little, just a few shillings.

In 1939 the organ needed tuning; Mr E Gibbs junior offered to obtain the money to pay for the same.

In the wartime conditions of 1940 it was not considered possible to hold the usual harvest sale, when the produce given for the Harvest Festival was auctioned in the

schoolroom. Instead an envelope appeal was made to replace the lost income, and a jumble sale was also held. Money was needed to repair the boiler and chimney.

In 1939 the Methodist Hall was discussed and it was decided that there was no real need of the Hall and that it could be disposed of. We have had no occasion to mention the Hall till now so a short account seems to be called for. In 1916 a Band of Hope was formed at the United Methodist Chapel under the inspiration of Mr J P Walker, a temperance enthusiast. Membership rapidly grew from the original thirty-nine until the Chapel premises were too small for all its activities. In 1921 Mr Jesse Bircham, grandson of William Bircham, bought a building on Mousehold Heath which he brought to Reepham and erected on a site at Sun Barn Yard which he had bought from H E Hawes for £70. It was to be used jointly, for the work of the Band of Hope and the United Methodist Church.

In its heyday the Band of Hope had several hundred members and was thought to be one of the biggest organisations of its kind in the country. Among its many activities it ran a football team, string orchestra, male voice choir and a well known brass band. The hall was sold to the Band and was then called the Band Hall. The band became Reepham Town Band and was quite famous. The Band has now become Matthews Norfolk Brass and has little connection with Reepham. The site of the hall is now occupied by Colin Prince's builders premises.

After that digression we now return to the Chapel. In 1939 a letter was sent to a number of members who had not attended for a long time. Subsequently a number of names were removed from the roll. In the same year Mr S Hunt offered to provide a notice board for the front of the Chapel. This offer was gratefully accepted by the Trustees.

In 1944 Mr W Dewing was asked by the Trustees to report on the state of the cottages. He duly reported

that they were in a poor state and he strongly advised that they should be demolished and that a house for the Minister be built on the site. The Trustees however decided to sell the cottages but to retain part of the garden and the right to draw water from the well. The proceeds were to go towards the cost of building or purchasing a new manse. The Minister at this time was living in a rented house in Cawston Road. The cottages were sold to Mr Walter Reeder in 1946 for £130 which was invested with Brighton Corporation. The cottages were demolished some years ago.

In 1944 sidesmen were requested to wait for each other and to deposit the offertory bags at the same time. The preacher would then offer a dedicatory prayer. Previously the bags had simply been laid on the table. In 1948 the Reverend Blainey intimated that he would like to receive the offertory from the stewards and offer a prayer as is still done today.

At the end of the war in 1945 the blackout paint which had been on the windows was removed free of charge by Mr S A Hardiment.

In 1950 the Reverend B Wood asked the Trustees for permission to use the schoolroom for a youth fellowship which he proposed to start. Permission was granted and the youth fellowship ran successfully for some years. The Reverend Wood also started the practice of taking a collection for the poor fund at the close of the Sacrament.

On 24th March 1946 a memorial tablet to Frank Brooks Walker, a member of the Society, who was killed in action was unveiled at a special service.

In 1952 a weekly fellowship for Bible study was started. The envelope system was started in 1955. On New Year's Eve 1955, a concert was held in the Chapel followed by a Watchnight Service. In 1956 repairs were needed to the Chapel and school: the Reverend Bryant suggested that an appeal be made to members, friends and former Sunday School scholars. This was done and a sufficient

sum was raised. Also in 1956 a new curtain for the organ was given by Miss M Gibbs.

In 1963 the Trustees decided to investigate the possibility of heating the Chapel by electricity. An estimate of £125 for ten heaters for the Chapel was obtained from Messrs F Randell and Sons and was accepted. A further estimate of £17 14s. 6d. for heaters for the vestry and schoolroom from Messrs Stoner of Aylsham was also accepted. The money invested with Brighton Corporation was withdrawn, presumably to pay for the heating. The electric heating was a great improvement on the old hot water system which involved someone lighting the boiler on the Saturday evening, banking the fire late at night and rising at the crack of dawn on Sunday to stoke it up. Now a flick of a switch is all that is needed.

There is no record of any celebration of the Chapel centenary in 1917. In the middle of a terrible war it would have been inappropriate. However, in 1967 there were celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary, commencing with a Wesley Day Rally on Wednesday 24th May when Mr Cyril Jolly of Gressenhall spoke on 'The Coming of Methodism to Norfolk'. On Saturday 27th May the anniversary meeting was addressed by the Reverend Bertram Wood, a former Minister, supported by the Circuit Ministers. This was followed by an anniversary supper. On the Sunday the Reverend Wood preached at both morning and evening services with solos by Mrs Wood.

In 1970 a meeting, was held in the Chapel in conjunction with the Church of England, to discuss church membership at which it was decided to visit people in their homes. It was subsequently reported that although people welcomed the visits they did not wish to become involved. Also in 1970 the Trustees allowed a playgroup for children aged three to five years to use the schoolroom. The Playgroup was to pay a share of the heating bill. The Playgroup was also asked to contribute £5 every six

months to the Trust Fund. A formal agreement has since been made between the Chapel and the Playgroup.

The name of Herbert Stratton who could not be found in 1923 was removed from the list of Trustees in 1972.

In 1973 Mr S A Hardiment reported to the Trustees that the splines of the main Chapel roof were in a bad state and that one of the windows needed repair. Mr A Howard started the fund there and then with a donation of £10. A letter written by the Reverend Thornton Smith was circulated to friends asking for donations. The possibility of converting the stable and ighouse to lock up garages was considered but judged impractical. Mr C Durrant was to be allowed to keep his car in the ighouse.

During the 1970s several of the old faithful members passed away with no one to replace them. Membership and congregations dropped to an all time low. The Chapel was without a resident Pastor till Mr Dennis Fox was appointed in 1986. Since then the congregations have increased but credit is due to the faithful few who kept it going till others came along to help. Otherwise the Chapel could have gone the same way as so many other country chapels in recent years.

During Mr Fox's Pastorate the ighouse, stable and graveyard were sold as a building site and the proceeds used for necessary repairs and improvements to the premises. It is somewhat ironic that the scanty remains of those old Methodists that were removed from the graveyard, were not re-buried in the unconsecrated part of the cemetery reserved for Nonconformists, with their fellow Methodists, but in the main part of the cemetery.

And so in 1992 we celebrate the 175th Anniversary of Reepham Chapel. The building has seen many changes in its long history the most recent being to the schoolroom, where one of the class rooms has been converted into a kitchen and the other into a store room and ladies toilet, hiding the initials on the walls

of those who contributed to the building of the school. In the Chapel almost half the pews have been removed, the old Communion Table has been replaced, the two matching chairs have gone and there is now a Communion Rail. There is no longer a choir and the chairs on which they sat have been sold. The premises are no longer vested in a local Trust but in a central body with local 'managing trustees'. The Leader's Meeting is no longer the governing body, there is now something called a Church Council. These are just a few of the changes which have taken place. However, despite all the changes things are essentially the same as they have always been. God's Holy Word is still preached and expounded as it was in William Bircham's day; John Wesley's doctrines are still followed; Charles Wesley's hymns are still sung and will continue to be. Membership has increased after a period of decline and the buildings are in good repair and free of debt. The People called Methodists in Reepham can face the future with confidence.

We end this account with a quotation from the programme of the 150th Anniversary in 1967:

' . . . The building has stood through a period of many rapid and far reaching changes in this country. There is no doubt that we live in a different age from our forefathers who built the church.

'And yet we are one with them in the conviction that the Christian Faith and Practice is the best foundation for life in any age.

'We give thanks to God for the work and witness of the People called Methodists in Reepham and for all whose labour of love is responsible for the fine set of premises we have today . . . '.

These words are just as relevant today.

REEPHAM METHODIST CHAPEL

II THE PEOPLE

THE first part of this story has been mainly about the building. This part tells of some of the activities that have taken place in it. We start with the Harvest Thanksgiving or Harvest Festival as it is now more often called. As might be expected in an area where almost everybody was either directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for their living it was one of the high spots of the Chapel year. Without disrespect to those who decorate the Chapel today, the Chapel used to be decorated to an extent that is impossible now. With combine harvesters there are now no sheaves of corn available as there used to be and there are now no farmers in the congregation. Everybody gave the best of the produce of their gardens, even some who seldom attended Chapel at other times. There would be enormous quantities of fruit and vegetables, blackberries from the hedges and grapes from a hothouse, cabbages and carrots, always an enormous pumpkin, loaves shaped like a sheaf from the local bakers and masses of flowers. A board hung above the pulpit with the figures of the year in ears of wheat on a background of moss with a border also made of ears of wheat. There were no professional flower arrangers but the result was beautiful.

The chapel was always packed for both Sunday Services and a weeknight one as well. At the end of the weeknight service all the produce was taken into the schoolroom and sold by auction. At the time of the writer's recollection, Mr S P Eglinton always acted as auctioneer. This was always an enjoyable occasion, a good source

of income and brought in people who did not often attend a place of worship, which is surely desirable.

At one time there was a Band of Hope attached to the Chapel, (a temperance organisation). When this started is not known but the membership card of Mary Besford Timbers in the writer's possession (his grandmother), is dated 1880. There were both adult and junior members who met fortnightly for lectures, concerts, social evenings and so on, paying one penny per fortnight. The Band of Hope finished in 1910 and was replaced in 1911 by the Wesley Guild with Pastor E Brown as president. The activities of the Guild were similar to those of the Band of Hope but with less emphasis on temperance. The writer's name appears on the list of junior members in 1925 so we now come to personal reminiscences. Members paid twopence per week. A typical programme went something like this; opening hymn, prayer, hymn, scripture reading, solo, chairman's address, hymn, address by visiting



The Chapel decorated for Harvest Festival

speaker, collection, vote of thanks, hymn and benediction. At other times there were debates, lantern lectures and social evenings. One memorable occasion was a 'wireless concert'. On 4th November 1924 the then Pastor, Mr W Smith, who made wireless sets as a hobby, rigged up an aerial on the roof and a specially made set in the schoolroom for the performance. This was in the very early days of broadcasting and many people had never heard the wireless so it attracted a large audience who listened to an hour or two of BBC programmes. In 1926 a fund for the purpose of purchasing a piano was started by the Guild and in 1927 a piano was purchased from W Howlett and Son of Norwich for £33. It is still giving good service. On 23rd May 1928 a sub-sectional rally of the Wesley Guild was held in Reepham under the auspices of the Norwich Sectional Council. Proceedings opened with a sermon by the Reverend G Allen, after which two hundred people were given tea, in two sittings, in the schoolroom. This was followed by a Council meeting at six o'clock and at seven thirty a 'Grand Rally' was held in the Town Hall, addressed by the Reverend Allen and others with solos by Miss Marjorie Gibbs of Reepham and Mr D Herring of Yarmouth, (he must have been a Yarmouth bloater!). Mr Kerridge of Yarmouth was in the chair. Thirteen branches answered the roll call, plus Reepham Primitive Methodist Christian Endeavour. On 15th August 1929, a party of twenty-eight adults and two juniors from the Wesley Guild took a half day trip on the Norfolk Broads. It is interesting to look at the cost; rail fare - Reepham to Wroxham, £1 15s. 3d.; hire of launch £4 10s. 0d.; tea £1 3s. 0d., total cost £7 10s. 3d.! Declining attendance caused the Guild to close in 1930.

REEPHAM METHODIST CHAPEL

III THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

THE old schoolroom and what is known of the beginning of the Sunday Schoolroom have already been told. The first teacher whose name is known to us is Miss Matilda Timbers, (the writer's Great Great Aunt), born in 1842 who was a Sunday School Teacher in the 1860s. Coming forward to the 1890s, the superintendent was Mr John Frankland, whose family was connected with the Chapel and Sunday School from the beginning. Mr Benjamin Wyand was also connected with the Sunday School; photographs of both these gentlemen hung in the schoolroom for many years but have now disappeared. A Roll of Honour bearing the names of former scholars who died in the Great War 1914-1918 has also gone. Thomas Piercy succeeded John Frankland as Superintendent. In the writer's possession is a gold watch-chain presented to Mr Piercy on his retirement; it is inscribed 'T P Reepham Wesleyan Sunday School, 1895 - 1928'. His successor was Mr George Alcock, father of the Reverend Bert Alcock.

When the present writer was a scholar there were about thirty names on the register, not all of them with Methodist parents. Even people who never attended a place of worship themselves thought it necessary that their children should attend Sunday School. There were no less than seven Sunday Schools in Reepham at that time. Apart from the Superintendent the chief teachers were Mrs S P Eglington and Mrs E R Kiddell. Mrs Eglington taught the little ones, Mrs Kiddell the older girls and Mr Piercy the older boys. There was a short Sunday School session at ten o'clock, taken by



*United Methodist Sunday School 1917
Among those pictured are
Mr and Mrs C H Guyton, Mr and Mrs J P Waller and Mr S Barrett*

Mr Piercy alone, before morning service, but the main session was at two thirty. The School was opened by the superintendent with a hymn and a prayer, Mrs Kiddell marked the register, another hymn and then the School split into classes, big boys and girls going into the two class rooms, the rest staying in the big room. After the lessons all returned for another hymn and the benediction.

The great occasion of the year was the Sunday School Anniversary, dreaded by some, including the present writer. Standing in front of a large congregation was quite an ordeal, everyone had to 'say a piece', the implied threat being, 'no recitation - no treat', thus ensuring that there were no slackers. A platform was erected in the front of the Chapel and on this sat all the Sunday School and the augmented choir. The Chapel was always packed on these occasions, sometimes with an overflow into the school room. It took place on the afternoon and evening of the first Sunday in July. The evening service was usually a Service of Song when we youngsters did not have to do much, our contribution was mainly in the afternoon.

During the summer there was the Sunday School Outing. This was usually to Cromer or Sheringham, where the local Wesleyan schoolroom could sometimes be borrowed to have the tea which had been taken with us. On one memorable occasion the outing was to Mundesley and could have ended in tragedy. A boy named Gordon Long fell into a stream which runs down the beach to the sea and formed a kind of whirlpool. Fortunately, a man on the cliff top saw him and dashed down to the beach in time to pull him out, with nothing worse than a wetting. He was taken to an hotel to dry off and I believe Mrs Eglington bought him some new clothes.

There was also the winter treat which took place in the schoolroom soon after Christmas, commencing with tea. After tea the tables were cleared away and traditional games were played such as 'Here we come

gathering nuts in May', and 'One poor widow was left alone', most of them involving kissing. Parents and friends came along after tea to see the fun. Prize books for attendance were sometimes distributed at the treat if they were ready in time. Everybody got one, those with the best attendance got the best books.

In 1933 a meeting of representatives of the three Methodist Sunday Schools was held under the chairmanship of Pastor T Morgan, to elect officers for the amalgamated school. Mr J W Frankland was appointed Superintendent, with Miss M Giles and Mr S Hunt as sub-superintendents. The combined school opened on 9th April 1933 and the first Anniversary was held on the first Sunday in July 1934. In 1936 the afternoon Anniversary Service was held in the Methodist Hall. In the same year Mr J Frankland resigned as Superintendent, and his place was taken by Miss M Giles; Mrs E Kiddell became secretary-treasurer. Mrs Kiddell became Superintendent in 1940. By 1960 numbers had become so small that the afternoon Anniversary Service was omitted. Shortly after this the Sunday School closed down. A Sunday School has recently been started in conjunction with the Morning Service. Numbers are small but likely to increase.