

WESLEYAN METHODIST HISTORIC ROLL – VOLUME 10 - OXFORD DISTRICT

Some notes by Richard Ratcliffe

The Wesleyan Methodist Historic Roll is a unique set of 50 leather bound volumes which is located at Westminster Methodist Central Hall in London. The volumes contain the names of over one million people who donated a guinea [£1 1s 0d - or £1.05] to the Wesleyan Methodist Million Guinea Fund or Twentieth Century Fund between January 1st, 1899 and June 30th, 1904.

WHY DID THE WESLEYANS SEEK TO COLLECT ONE MILLION GUINEAS?

Simply put, the Wesleyan Methodists wanted to celebrate the Centenary of the death of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement in a spectacular way.

John Wesley [1703-1791] was a Church of England priest who with several others founded the Methodist Movement at Oxford in 1729 as an evangelical movement within the Church of England. Most of his ministry was spent travelling the length and breadth of the British Isles preaching in the open air to working class people mainly in the Industrial Centres of the Midlands, Yorkshire, North East England, Bristol and the South West and in London.

After his death in March 1791, his followers broke away from the Church of England and formed the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Disagreements among the Wesleyans led to the formation of the Methodist New Connexion in 1797, the Primitive Methodist Church in 1807, the Bible Christians in 1815, the Wesleyan Protestant Methodist Church in 1827, the Wesleyan Methodist Association in 1834 and the Wesleyan Reformers in 1847. The last three groups amalgamated in 1857 to form the United Methodist Free Church. In 1907 the Methodist New Connexion, the Bible Christians and the United Methodist Free Church came together to form the United Methodist Church. Eventually the Wesleyans, the Primitive Methodists and the United Methodists came together in 1932 to form "The Methodist Church."

The Wesleyan Church was by far the largest of all the Methodist groups and at the Annual Conference in 1898, Mr Robert William Perks, Liberal M.P for Louth in Lincolnshire, a leading Wesleyan layman, proposed the setting up of a One Million Guinea Fund from One Million Wesleyans to build more Wesleyan Churches, Sunday Schools and Day Schools, expand the work of the Home and Overseas Missionary Departments and the Children's Home [later known as The National Children's Homes or NCH] and to purchase a site in Central London on which would be built a Central London Wesleyan Church, Conference Centre and Administrative Centre. Mr Perks, later Sir Robert Perks, has Oxfordshire connections- his wife was Edith Mewburn, daughter of William Mewburn of Wykham Park, Banbury.

The Fund was officially launched on January 1st 1899. Initially no one was allowed to donate more than One Guinea [£1.05] but donors could make additional donations "In Memoriam" for loved ones who had died or moved away from home. Later, larger donations were permitted but the amounts given are not recorded – only the total amount collected by each Circuit is recorded in the Treasurers' Accounts.

The Fund Raising Committee decided to ask all donors to write their names and addresses on special pages which were distributed to all Wesleyan Churches and Circuits in England, Wales, Scotland and Overseas. When the pages were returned, they were bound into 50 volumes which were called "The Historic Roll." The volumes were arranged in District order, then by Circuit and then by Church/Chapel within each District. Altogether the 50 volumes comprise over 17,000 pages and contain the names of more than 1,025,000 donors.

When the One Million Guinea Fund closed in 1904 £1,073,682 had been donated.

Each adult donor was given a rather splendid commemorative certificate [approximately A3 in size] which is now a collector's item. Children were encouraged to participate and to collect one shilling. Each child achieving that target was allowed to sign the Historic Roll and received a John Wesley commemorative medallion. 90,000 medallions were struck according to the Treasurers' Accounts and the Children's Fund raised £4,162 0s 1d.

Anticipating a good response to the appeal, Mr Perks was authorised to negotiate the purchase of a suitable Central London site. The Royal Aquarium, opposite Westminster Abbey, was purchased for £340,982 but part of the site was sold off as surplus to requirements. A competition to design a building appropriate for a World Centre for Wesleyan Methodism attracted 132 entries. Entry Number 27 submitted by the architects Lanchester and Rickards was adjudged the winner by Sir Aston Webb, President of the Royal Institute of British Architects and construction of the Westminster Wesleyan Central Hall began in 1909. The contract price for the building was £155,170 including the architects' fees. The grand opening took place on October 2nd 1912. Shortly afterwards the Historic Roll was placed in a specially made bookcase in the Central Hall and the 50 volumes were made available for inspection by visitors.

The OXFORD DISTRICT – includes Circuits in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

Oxford Circuit

Oxford Wesley donors include many university students stating either their college address or their home address. It is interesting to note that there were more donors in Bladon than in Woodstock.

High Wycombe Circuit

Page 68 – Hannah Ball – Founder of Wesley Sunday School – In Memoriam

Charles Abbott – Many years Superintendent of Wesley Sunday School

Witney Circuit

Page 100 – 21 members of the Tarrant family shown as donors plus Margaret Langdon, Camelford, Cornwall.

Page 109 – Catherine Fenemore, plus Richard, Betsey [In Memoriam], Ellen **Jessett**, Gertrude Sarah and Henry Richard.

Page 121 – In Memoriam – Mary Hankins, grandmother of Miss E Hankins and converted under John Wesley's preaching in Witney.

Burford – Page 129 – Robert Dannatt Foster – Local preacher for over 50 years, plus 26 members of the Matthews family of Burford including William Lee Matthews, NSW, Australia and Mary Matthews, Cape of Good Hope, South Africa.

Page 130 – Thomas Buswell – founder of Methodism in Burford.

Banbury Circuit

Marlborough Road – Page 145 - the first names are those of the Mewburn family of Wykham Park, Banbury.

Lower Boddington – Page 185 – 21 members of the Cherry family.

Kineton Circuit

Kineton – Page 195 – 5 members of the **Jessett** family of Kineton, Warwickshire.

Newbury Circuit

Newbury – Page 218 – Henry Burgess of East Fields, Newbury –X – his mark.

Page 222 – Edwin Middleton Weaver and family all of Wesley Mission House, Batticoola, Ceylon.

Reading Circuit

Reading Oxford Road – Page 255 – **William James Hannam** of Overdale, Western Elms Avenue, Reading, and Handsworth College, Birmingham.

Who's Who in Methodism [1933] shows that he was born in Lewes, SSX in 1867, educated at Queen's College, Taunton and trained at Handsworth College before entering the Wesleyan Ministry in 1903. he married Edith Elizabeth Oldham of Eccles and served in Llanelly, Wakefield, Hebden Bridge, Ramsey IOM, Yeovil, Castletown, Maryport, Retford and Newton Abbot where he was living in 1933.

Wokingham – Page 261 – Isaiah Gadd of St Mary's, Wokingham, James and Anna Maria Gadd [my dear parents], Father Lunn [my first Class Leader], Old Father Cheeseman [a fellow member], old Maister and old Mistress Collier [two old members].

Page 262 – Archibald Moorcock of Broad Street, Wokingham – for some years a Preachers' Home.

Watlington Circuit

Page 327 – Many donations given In Memoriam giving dates of death, e.g. Mary Ann Spyer died 23 Jan 1893, donated by William Godfrey Leaver Spyer.

Britwell – Page 329 – 28 members of the family of Samuel Hutton of Britwell Salome including 6 members living in Stoke Newington, London and 3 in Durban, South Africa. There are In memoriam donations for Samuel Hutton [his father died 14 July 1876], Ann [his mother died 28 Dec 1890], E Jemima Russell [his aunt died 21 Mar 1890], Thos Wilkinson [father of Samuel's wife Harriette W Hutton died 24 Dec 1865], Ann Thornton [his wife died 6 Jan 1830], Mary Ann Dunham [daughter died 8 Sep 1885], and Henry Wilkinson [son who died 21 Dec 1889].

Chipping Norton Circuit

Chipping Norton - Page 393 – Joseph Wincott gave donations In Memoriam for Thos Strong died 23 Jun 1894, Mary Catherine Wincott died 19 Jul 1895, Minnie Wincott died 29 Mar 1889 and Mary Wincott, Senr, died 31 May 1857.

Page 397 – Page 397 Frederick and Clara Allen of Over Norton gave a donation In Memoriam for **Mary Gascoigne** died Oct 1893. Mary was my great, great Grandmother!

Wantage Circuit

Childrey - Page 501 – Joshua and Jane Burson of Childrey gave donations for Rev Henry Burson, Street Lane, near Derby, Mrs S H Burson of Street Lane, Mr Josiah Burson of Childrey, Mrs Elisa Burson of Childrey, Rev George Burson of St Catherine's Canada, Mrs G Wilks [nee Elizabeth Burson] of Stanford in the Vale and Mrs W Flux [nee Pauline Burson] of Wroxall IOW.