

BASINGSTOKE:
CHURCH STREET METHODIST
CIRCUIT

FROM JOHN WESLEY'S VISITS TILL ITS
FORMATION IN 1872

AND ITS FIRST PURPOSE-BUILT
CHAPEL IN 1875

by

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FOREWORD

Wesleyan Methodism first came to Dummer and Basingstoke in 1738 and 1739 in the person of John Wesley, but faded out a number of times; eventually it came again from Andover, and was established in 1872. The Booklet looks first at the reasons why Wesley and his co-workers largely ignored northern Hampshire. It then looks at the coming of the movement to the area.

The next chapter looks at Wesleyan Methodism after Wesley: its changed character, with information about some of the early Hampshire preachers, and the ‘family history’ of the circuits leading to the formation and spread of the Andover Circuit from 1818, including to villages close to Basingstoke.

It then focuses on the town of Basingstoke, the final (and now successful) attempt from Andover to plant a permanent society, with some of the personalities involved, the acquisition of the first Wesleyan chapel in Potters Lane, and the first purpose-built chapel.

The author’s grandfather and father were local preachers in the Circuit, and he himself began his preaching in the Circuit (in Oakley) in 1965. He holds the degrees of MA from Cambridge University in Modern and Medieval Languages, and M Phil from the University of Chester in early Methodism in northern Hampshire.

CHAPTER 1

THE AGE OF WESLEY: 1738-1791

In the 1740s Methodism spread rapidly in Newcastle and Bristol, and to a lesser extent in London. From the mid 1760s numbers grew nationally almost every year till the 1850s, and Methodism grew at a faster rate than the population till the 1880s. But local strength varied considerably, and showed considerable variation also by occupation.

Dr J H Rigg, in his introduction to Pocock, writes:

Wesley devoted his labour chiefly to districts where the population was numerous... He left unvisited most of the purely agricultural regions of England; the sparse peasant population, bound to their field-work, the torpid tenant farmers, the coarse squires made up a state of society which offered... the fewest opportunities for his work.

Methodism appealed selectively in terms of occupation and social status, attracting more of the craftsmen and industrial workers than less skilled and agricultural labourers. Its greatest strength was in the industrial Midlands and North; purely agricultural areas were seldom much affected, especially in the South (except for Cornwall).

The on-line *Dictionary of British Methodism in Britain and Ireland* says concerning Surrey, Kent, Sussex, Berkshire and Hampshire:

This was an area in which Methodism was, and remained, relatively weak. Predominantly rural, with compact Anglican parishes, it was largely unaffected by the Industrial

Revolution.

John Wesley spent little time here, apart from winter forays into east Kent (e.g. to Canterbury and Dover) and along the Kent-Sussex border (Tunbridge Wells, Rye), where societies had been formed.

Bebbington wrote in *Evangelicalism in modern Britain* (p. 26) that “Growing industrial areas, including the big cities, were deliberately targeted by Wesley and his contemporaries, for there dwelt the most concentrated populations.”

Vickers in the 1989 Wesley Historical Society annual lecture (*Proceedings* 47, p. 90) said that: “As late as 1791... there were still only a handful of Methodist societies scattered throughout Hampshire and Dorset and southern Wiltshire.”

Pocock¹ wrote of Wiltshire, Hampshire and Surrey that “It does not appear that Charles Wesley ever preached within the border of either of these three counties, except at London and Devizes.”

Page 12 below carries a ‘genealogy’ of the early circuits which led eventually to the formation in 1872 of the Basingstoke Circuit. The Wiltshire Circuit was formed from London in 1748, according to Stamp, who adds that it extended from Salisbury to Chichester. The South Wiltshire Circuit was formed in 1768; it was later renamed “Salisbury”. Pocock², without giving further details, refers to a note written by John Wesley in 1782 saying that “the work of God has not prospered in the Salisbury Circuit for several years.” It included all Hampshire. The Portsmouth Circuit was formed towards the end of Wesley's life, in 1790. Vickers tells us³, “There were at this period four preachers stationed in the circuit, and their base was still Salisbury, from which they set out in turn to travel round the

1 page 19

2 page 18

3 p. 112

societies.” Even after Portsmouth became head of the new circuit, it stretched from the Isle of Wight to Newbury and Chichester.

Vickers⁴ records that until 1758 Methodist societies in Hampshire were in the London Circuit, explaining that “The growth of Methodism in this part of England had not been spectacular.”⁵ In 1769 the Salisbury Circuit contained 200 members, about 0.7% of connexional membership. It included all of Hampshire. Portsmouth Circuit was formed in 1790 from Salisbury.

According to *A new History of Methodism* (Vol. I, pp.368-9), at the time of the death of John Wesley in 1791: “The neighbourhoods where Methodism was located were unequally distributed... The societies... were most numerous and powerful in large towns and in the counties where mines, manufactures, and commerce abounded.”

Vickers tells us⁶ that “The seed from which Methodism in virtually the whole of Hampshire and Dorset sprang was planted in Salisbury in the earliest years of the Methodist movement.” He goes on to recount at considerable length the early work in Salisbury, Wilton and Shaftesbury.

Volume 1 of the *History* edited by Davies and Rupp⁷ records that this uneven geographical spread was partly due to the deliberate policy of winning as many souls as possible, as quickly as possible, and it was found that townspeople, as well as being more numerous, were more responsive than rural communities who still lived under the leadership, if not indeed rule, of the manor and the Anglican clergy.

4 p. 67

5 p. 64

6 page 67 (§2.1)

7 page 278

Dummer, Basingstoke and Andover: the period of Wesley's visits

The story of Methodism in northern Hampshire begins in May 1738. On 29th, five days after his evangelical conversion, John Wesley went to Dummer. On the Sunday (4th June), he wrote: "For from the time of my rising till past one in the afternoon, I was praying, reading the Scriptures, singing praise, or calling sinners to repentance."

On the Thursday, Wesley left for Salisbury. The next event was not a visit by John Wesley, but by Charles Kinchin, Rector of Dummer from 1735 to 1742. Baigent and Millard, pages 546-7, relate:

A letter from the Rev T. Warton, Vicar from 1723 to 1745, addressed to the Town Clerk, "Mr. John Russell, Attorney at Law," is still preserved in M.S. It is dated February 13th 1738-9, and ends thus:

"They write from Basingstoke, that on Sunday last the Reverend Mr. Charles Kinchin, M.A., Rector of the Church of Dummer, in the Bishop of Winchester's Diocese, and Fellow of Corpus Christi College, (where his Lordship is a Visitor) held a publick meeting consisting chiefly of Dissenters of both sexes, who were very numerous, at the Crown Inn in that Town, where he prayed much extempore and expounded or preached after the manner of the Methodists, taking a whole chapter for his text; the noted Mr. Whitfield (an itinerant Preacher lately arrived from Georgia) having done the same at the King's Head on the Thursday, and at the Crown on the Friday and Saturday next preceding.

At the "earnest desire" of Charles Kinchin, Wesley returned to Dummer on Saturday 10th March 1739, where on the next morning he preached to "a large and attentive congregation." Kinchin died in January 1742.

On 10th March 1739 visit, Wesley writes, “I was desired to expound in the evening at Basingstoke.” Back in Basingstoke on 29th March 1739, he “in the evening expounded to a small company.” Although he passed through Basingstoke a couple of times in 1747 and 1751, he does not appear to have preached there again till Friday 12th January 1759, when he wrote: “In the afternoon we rode to Basingstoke, where the people put me in mind of the wild beasts of Ephesus. Yet they were unusually attentive in the evening, although many of them could not hear.”

In January 1759 six male “Protestants of the Church of England as by law established” signed a certificate that they had “apoynted the House of John Cowderey situate in Basingstoke for the exercise of the religious worship of Almighty God.” Protestants of the Church of England were not Dissenters: they were Wesleyans.

On Monday 24th September 1759, Wesley recorded: “I preached in the evening at Basingstoke, to a people slow of heart and dull of understanding. Tuesday, 25. I preached in the new house at Whitchurch.”

On Thursday and Friday, 25th-26th October 1759, Wesley wrote:

I determined to try if I could do any good at Andover. The congregation at ten in the morning was small; in the evening their number was increased, and I think some of them went away crying out, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” Fri. 26. I rode to Basingstoke. I was extremely tired when I came in, but much less so after preaching.

On Friday 7th November 1760: “I preached about nine at Andover, to a few dead stones; at one in Whitchurch, and in the evening at Basingstoke.”

John Haime, one of Wesley's preachers, spent a short time in

Andover in the 1760s, and Vickers⁸ writes, “The earliest Methodist certificate for Andover (1761) is ‘for a congregation of Protestant Dissenters to meet for exercise of religion and John Haim Pastor.’” Stamp records that he was stationed in the Wiltshire Circuit in 1767.

The on-line *Dictionary of British Methodism in Britain and Ireland* says concerning Andover:

A house in Back Street was licensed for worship in January 1761 and the certificate named John Haime, who had retired to the town, as ‘pastor’. A chapel was later built in Shepherd’s Spring Lane, replaced in 1824 by a church in Winchester Street (then known as Brick Kiln Street).

On Friday 30th September 1763 Wesley wrote:

I preached about one at Whitchurch, and then rode to Basingstoke. Even here there is at length some prospect of doing good. A large number of people attended, to whom God enabled me to speak strong words; and they seemed to sink into the hearts of the hearers.

Finally, on Friday 23rd October 1766 he preached “at Winchester, Whitchurch and Basingstoke, where many attended at five on Saturday morning.” Vickers⁹ records the registration of a private house in Basingstoke for Wesleyan worship in 1773.

In March 1781 a store-house belonging to Benjamin Loader, situated in Church Street, Basingstoke, was licensed as a place for the exercise of divine worship, the certificate being signed by Jasper Winscom among others. Winscom was a significant Methodist figure.

Three years later, in February 1784, a group of Protestant Dissenters

8 p. 124

9 page 89

and householders of the town of Basingstoke, “finding our present place of Meeting in divers Respects very inconvenient for Public Worship”, certified a building belonging to John Mulford and Benjamin Loader, on the east side of Oat Street, for the public worship of God. (Oat Street is now called Wote Street.)

Wesley appears to have enjoyed a more encouraging response at Whitchurch than at Basingstoke or Andover: “Friday, 12th January, 1759 I went on to Whitchurch, and preached at one to a large and serious congregation.” Further entries in Wesley's Journal follow:

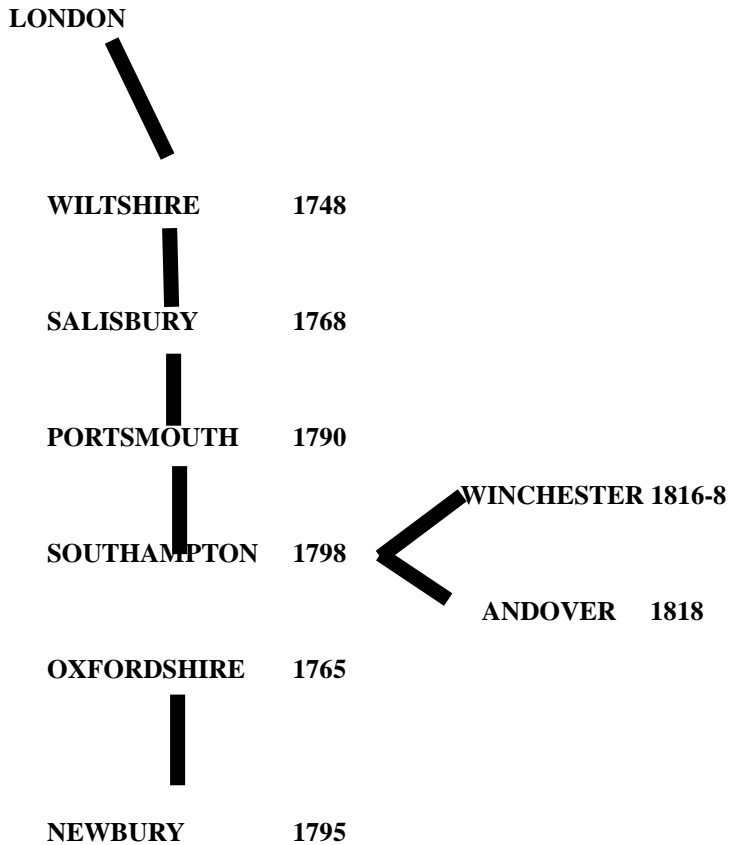
Wednesday, 2nd October 1771. *I preached at Whitchurch.*

Tuesday, 5th October, 1779 *I preached at Whitchurch, where many, even of the rich, attended, and behaved with much seriousness.*

Wednesday, 4th October, 1780 *The preaching-house at Whitchurch, though much enlarged, could not contain the congregation in the evening. Some genteel people were inclined to smile at first; but their mirth was quickly over. The awe of God fell upon the whole congregation, and many “rejoiced unto him with reverence.”*

WESLEYAN TIME-LINE:

formation of the circuits



CHAPTER 2

“THE METHODIST WILDERNESS” 1792-1872

The *Methodist Recorder* of 16th May 1901 (pages 13-5) carries an article on Wesleyan Methodism in Basingstoke entitled *The one-time Methodist Wilderness*:

After Mr Wesley's visits to Basingstoke a few cleaved to Methodism, and we find mention of services held in the home of Mr M Cook... and at another time of services held in a loft behind the Pear Tree. These services were, however, given up, and Methodism died out. Services were recommenced in 1871, and the little society worshipped in a granary to which the only entrance was a ladder.

I have not discovered any original reference of the time to services held in a loft behind the Pear Tree, a public house which was demolished in the 1960s. The article, which seems to identify Methodism only with Wesleyan Methodism, mentions (without dates) work in Upton Grey, North Warnborough, and Greywell, and the inclusion of the area in the Surrey and North Hampshire Mission in September 1900.

Harrison¹⁰ writes in his section entitled “Vigour of nineteenth-century Methodism”:

Until the birth of the Oxford Movement [in the 1830s] it represented the heart of English religious life... and their

¹⁰ pp. 54-5

influence was most powerful where the changes in the national life were most rapid. In some of the agricultural districts this counted for little, but in the new industrial districts of the Midlands and the North, the Methodist chapels were rapidly springing up.

Changed Character of Wesleyan Methodism

It is recorded¹¹ by Harrison that the Conference of 1820 set out their ideal of a preacher's life and work. "It is interesting to see that the ideal is rather that of a pastor of the flock of Christ than that of a wandering evangelist," he writes.

There were in fact at least two strands within Methodism at this time, the "high", with emphasis on the Connexion, ministerial authority and sacraments; and the "low", with authority residing locally, and emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and thus lay involvement.

Vickers tells us¹² that, by the time the Primitive Methodist movement reached northern Hampshire, open-air preaching had been "almost entirely abandoned by Wesleyan itinerants, who had largely become the pastors of established congregations."

Some Andover Circuit Local Preachers' meetings minutes have survived, beginning in 1846. It is interesting that by then, if not earlier, the Wesleyans were experiencing the a problem which occurred frequently also among the Primitive Methodists: preachers not turning up for their preaching engagements, as evidenced in these minutes for December 1846, September 1847, March 1848, September 1848 and December 1852:

¹¹ p. 64

¹² p. 249

That Bro Brock be admonished for the neglect of several important appointments.

Bro Broad has neglected his appointments. It is agreed that a Note be written to him expressive of the disapprobation of the Meeting.

Bro Allen of Collingbourne neglected his appointment at Thruxton. It is agreed that a similar note be sent to him.

Bro Wright has neglected his appointments three Sabbaths successively, and as a plea for this neglect a grievance existing betwixt himself and Mr. Dance. Bro Wright having admitted that he used highly improper language in the Public Market at Andover to Mr Dance it is agreed that he be suspended until the case is investigated. In this resolution he fully consented. [He was present at the meeting. His resignation was tendered and accepted at the December meeting.]

Bro Broad has neglected some of his appointments, it is agreed that a letter be sent to him expressive of the regret of the meeting.

Bro Whitehead neglected an appointment.

The brethren whom will not engage to attend to their appointments to be removed from the Plan.

Jabez Bunting

It is impossible to come to understand Wesleyan Methodism in this period with out taking Jabez Bunting into account. Hempton writes: “fearful of popular radicalism and unrestrained revivalism, Bunting placed his faith in sound management and connectional discipline”

(p. 205). Here is Hylson-Smith¹³:

1833 dawned for the Wesleyan Methodists with one man pre-eminent and exercising a rule which was to last to the middle of the century. Jabez Bunting was unquestionably the most prominent and authoritative Methodist since John Wesley. He drew his strength from his administrative ability... By his control over major committees he could determine Conference decisions. The Conference was the only venue for constitutional opposition to him, and he so dominated it that there was no threat to his iron grip. And the Conference itself was thoroughly authoritarian, with only a minute twenty-seven out of the 1,216 speaking at its annual meeting in 1844...

Bunting had such an exalted view of the ministry that he demanded for the Conference an authority which was not dissimilar to that of papal sovereignty... Such a view... tended in some situations, and overall as a policy and strategy, to set ministers not only over the laity but in opposition to them, especially if an individual or corporate, local, district or national lay opinion arose which was counter to the ministerial line. There was no room for any manoeuvre in Bunting's theology of ministry.

Such centralisation was in marked contrast to the more flexible liberty allowed in the Primitive Methodist circuits.

During the period when the first circuit came to be based in Andover, in 1818, Wesleyan membership nationwide¹⁴ grew in every year except the following, with the losses shown:

13 pages 118-9

14 drawn from Currie, Gilbert & Horsley, page 40

1820	-2.39%
1835	-0.33%
1837	-0.15%
1842	-0.63%
1847	-0.61%
1848	-0.15%
1851	-15.65%
1852	-6.93%

The year 1851 saw statistical impact caused by the great schism within Wesleyan Methodism. The schism was set in motion by dissatisfaction in the denomination on the concentration of power in the hands of the ministers and the controlling power of Jabez Bunting and his system. Over 100,000 members were lost, some of the seceders joining other Methodist bodies, whilst some left Methodism altogether.

Hampshire Preachers

A brief look at the lives of some of the early preachers in northern Hampshire will reveal something of their faith and its inner character. It was the faith and experience they strove to pass on to those to whom they ministered.

The Wesleyan Magazine of 1849 (page 982) carries a memoir of Thomas Simmonite, who was stationed in the Southampton Circuit in 1799. Born at Greasbrough in 1766, he was brought, under Wesleyan ministry, “to seek and find redemption in the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of his sins.” He became a class leader and local preacher, but in time “believed God had called him to a more extensive sphere of labour. Mr Wesley, observing his sincere piety, and growth in grace and in useful knowledge, appointed him to the Methodist ministry in 1789... He was frequently made an instrument of extensive revivals and had the happiness of witnessing the conversion of many souls.” He died in 1848, aged 82.

In 1800 Thomas Kelk was sent to the Southampton Circuit. Born in or about 1768, he was converted in early life and began to preach at the age of 15. When aged 19, he filled a vacancy in a Circuit, and in 1788 was sent officially to Norwich. "His sermons were delivered with great seriousness and fervour" (Minutes of Conference, 1837, pages 144-5). He died in 1836, aged 68.

John Knowles was another minister in the Southampton Circuit, sent there in 1801. Born in Pateley Bridge in 1779, he was converted whilst still young, and became a minister at the age of 23. "He was accustomed to set forth prominently, and with power, the doctrine of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ" (Wesleyan Magazine, 1853, page 867).

Alexander Weir was stationed in the Southampton circuit in 1816. Born in Cork in 1783, he joined a Wesleyan society in Aberdeen in 1800, and became a class leader two years later, and a minister in 1804. He married Mary Shaw of Newbury.

In the Andover Circuit was William Griffith. He was born in 1777, converted in about 1800, and went as a Wesleyan missionary to Gibraltar 1808-11, before returning to England and in time to north Hampshire.

Hugh Carter was born in June 1784 near Mold in Flintshire. He was converted through Wesleyan preachers, and became a local preacher in 1802. In 1805 he was appointed as a Welsh-medium minister, but later transferred to the English sector of the denomination. It was his custom to set apart one day a week "for abstinence, humiliation and prayer" as well as to pray alone both before and after preaching, "thus seeking for the dew of heavenly grace to rest upon the word preached"¹⁵ He endured severe family bereavements.

In the Newbury Circuit was James Lawton, stationed there in 1795.

¹⁵ Wesleyan Magazine 1856 p. 841

He was, like Thomas Simmonite, a minister of John Wesley's own choice and appointment. Born in or about 1759, he was converted through Methodist preachers and class meetings, and began to preach two or more years later, making a beginning on an occasion when the preacher failed to arrive. "From that time I preached almost every evening in one place or another," he wrote (Wesleyan Magazine 1799, pages 417-423). After 18 months as a local preacher, he "was called by Mr. Wesley to labour in the itinerancy" (Wesleyan Magazine 1841, p. 414). He died aged 82 in 1841.

The Circuits after Wesley's Death

Newbury

Newbury Circuit was formed, from the Oxfordshire Circuit, in 1795. It was predominantly rural, and included societies in Hampshire.

The Surrey-Hampshire boundary region

A certain James Horne¹⁶, born in Salisbury in 1798, joined the Wesleyans in 1819, and moved to Flexford, between Guildford and Farnham. He began to preach in 1825, whilst working as a farm labourer and village schoolmaster. He is briefly mentioned here because of the small circuit which was built up around him and which included Bramley, near Basingstoke.

Portsmouth

In 1793¹⁷ the Portsmouth Circuit still listed only Whitchurch in the

¹⁶ Pocock pages 38ff

¹⁷ Stamp

area of this study, with seven other places including Winchester and the Isle of Wight. The circuit had 500 members. By 1794 it had grown to 550 members. Stamp adds a note that Hurstbourne Priors (“Downhurstbourne”) and Whitchurch formed a united society.

The year 1795 saw some expansion in the area, though a decrease in members to 500. Hurstbourne Priors and Whitchurch are separate societies, “Laverstock” and Baughurst have been added. Laverstoke should not, on account of the variant spelling of its name, be confused with Laverstock, near Salisbury. Myles (1813)¹⁸ notes that the Wesleyans had a chapel in Baughurst in 1795. The two chapels, Whitchurch and Baughurst, were the only ones in the region of this study, among 1255 chapels in England. In 1796 Whitchurch is as earlier the only place in the area listed in the circuit’s financial returns.

Southampton Circuit, 1798

The Southampton Circuit was formed in 1798 from Portsmouth with 180 members and two preachers. Vickers gives a list of preaching places in the 1825 Southampton Circuit. By then, none was in the area of this study, but it is worth noting (in view of the immeasurable significance of the village later in this history) that Micheldever had a Wesleyan society from 1820. In 1825 it was holding Sunday services at 10.30 and 6.00.

Andover Circuit

Andover

Andover needs to claim our attention, as the base from which the

¹⁸ page 431

later Basingstoke Wesleyan society was planted. Archives held at the County Record Office in Winchester include Minute books from 1868, schedule books from 1846, and account books from 1845. These give considerable information concerning the inner life of the Circuit, but will not be studied in detail here, as our focus is on Basingstoke. But first we shall look at the Circuit a little earlier than those books.

In May 1808, “Protestant Dissenters called Methodists” appointed the dwelling house and premises of Thomas Hendy in Kingshead Street, Andover, as a place “for the exercise of the worship of Almighty God.”

The Salisbury District contained the Winchester Circuit 1816-8, with two preachers, one of whom was required to live in Andover in 1817. Andover became the head of a new circuit in 1818 with one minister and 190 members. Deveson writes¹⁹:

...the Southampton Circuit became too large and reorganisation was necessary. From 1816 to 1818 there was a short-lived circuit based on Winchester, and Andover and Whitchurch were part of this, with a minister resident in Andover. But in 1818 Winchester returned to the Southampton Circuit, and Andover became the centre for its own circuit.

Initial Andover Circuit records show a membership of 42. The first minister stationed there was William Griffith. Two years later came Alexander Weir, who had been stationed in the Southampton Circuit in 1816. In 1823 Hugh Carter came. Andover chapel was built in 1824 and opened on Sunday 5th December, in Brick Kiln Lane, later renamed Winchester Street.

Andover acquired a second minister in 1825, despite having the

¹⁹ p. 14

smallest membership of any circuit in the area. It now had 17 preaching places, of which nine were served only by local preachers. The Wesleyan Magazine of 1825 (page 51) included in its report on the opening of the chapel that “an increased disposition to hear the truth, has for some time been manifest in the country parts of the Andover Circuit.”

Daniel Osborne²⁰ was appointed to the Circuit in 1829. Born at St Just in 1785 “he was early in life convinced of sin, and led to cast his soul upon the Atonement. Having obtained mercy, he felt it his duty to devote himself to the work of the ministry, to which he was set apart in 1815. He possessed a vigorous understanding, which under the influence of the Holy Spirit, rendered his ministry impressive and successful... Towards the close of his life, his sufferings were intense; but he manifested the greatest patience. There were times when he was powerfully assailed by the great adversary; but his faith triumphed in the Atonement.” He died in 1853.

Osborne had John T. Barr, M. A., as colleague in the ministry. He²¹ was born in Liverpool in 1802. “On Easter Sunday, 1817, under a powerful discourse, he was deeply awakened. He then sought with earnestness, and soon obtained, the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins. After a few years he became a zealous and successful Local Preacher and Class-Leader; and in 1826 entered on the work of the ministry, in which he thenceforth laboured faithfully and successfully nearly thirty-three years. His preaching was evangelical, experimental, and practical.”

However, from the mid-1830s “the work in Andover went into a decline that lasted until ... 1906” (Kilby). Paintin²² records a period of decline setting in in the early 1830s, such that in 1836

20 Wesleyan Magazine 1853, p.866

21 Wesleyan Magazine 1859, p. 839

22 page 8

membership sank to 15, and “Wesleyan Methodism in Andover almost foundered at times in the next sixty years.” Paintin suggests four factors which might have contributed to this decline:

- Andover, with fewer than 5000 inhabitants, was served by several Dissenting congregations
- Financial resources were reduced by the chapel debt, which was not paid off for some 60 years
- The leadership was unequal to the tasks which the situation demanded
- The Primitive Methodists arrived at about the time the decline began.

It is doubtful that Paintin’s comment on the leadership applied to all the circuit and society leaders, for the decline occurred despite the coming of Thomas Hayes in 1834 and Peter Parsons in 1835. Hayes²³ was converted in 1804 at about the age of 18, “shortly after this he began to call sinners to repentance” and was admitted to the Wesleyan ministry in 1811. Parsons was born in Salisbury in 1810²⁴ and converted at the age of 15. “His ministry was more than ordinarily owned of God in winning souls. He always insisted on the fundamental truths of repentance, faith in Christ and regenerating grace, and was never more happy than when earnestly pointing souls, weary of sin, to the Lamb of God. He was permitted to rejoice in many revivals of religion in the Circuits in which his ministry was exercised, and the Lord gave him much fruit of his preaching.”

Andover itself trailed behind the Whitchurch society, with adult congregations of 40 afternoon and evening on Census Sunday in 1851, compared with 110 and 150 reported at Whitchurch. The actual memberships moved (somewhat erratically) as follows:

23 Conference Minutes 1848, pp. 7-8

24 Minutes 1888 page 26

	1819	1822	1829	1834	1836
ANDOVER	42	18	28	21	15
WHITCHURCH	36	32	66	58	100
	1840	1841	1846	1851	
ANDOVER	29	21	14	20	
WHITCHURCH	121	118	78	82	

This stream of Wesleyan Methodism later flowed into Basingstoke, as we shall see. No other Arminian Methodist denominations became established in the area except the Primitive Methodists from 1830, and it would not appear that the great schism that affected membership so dramatically nationwide from 1851 had much if any effect in these two towns. The membership figures are drawn from the denominational archives at the Hampshire Record Office. The trend lines on the graphs on the next two pages show a gradual average increase over the period, with membership in both towns increasing in 1851 when nationally it decreased by -15.65%.

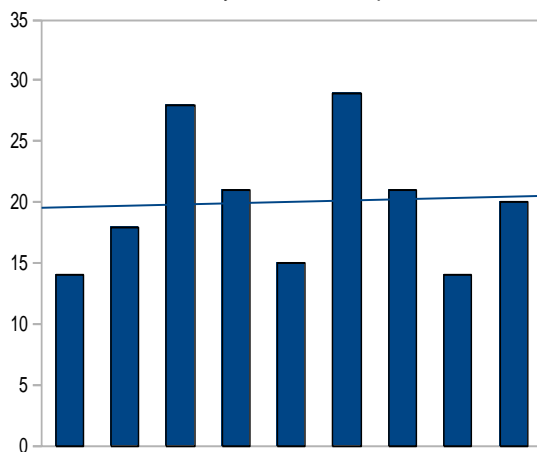
Deveson reached the same conclusion from her research regarding Whitchurch. She wrote by email on 30.1.13:

Whitchurch is the only place which I have examined in real detail, and I didn't find any effect here... There were certainly no breakaway groups locally... I get the feeling that our part of Hampshire was (and is) so parochial, that wider movements within the Methodist church had very little local impact.

Both societies show erratic increases and falls in membership, and this research has not discovered a pattern or an indication of the causes.

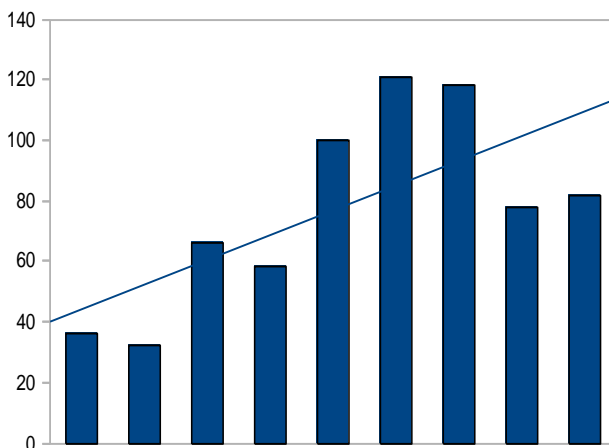
1819	14
1822	18
1829	28
1834	21
1836	15
1840	29
1841	21
1846	14
1851	20

Andover Wesleyan Membership 1819-1851



1819	36
1822	32
1829	66
1834	58
1836	100
1840	121
1841	118
1846	78
1851	82

Whitchurch Wesleyan Membership 1819-1851



Whitchurch

Much of the story concerning the Wesleyans of Whitchurch may be gleaned from Deveson pp 8-15 and need not be repeated in full here.

Jason Withers, a prosperous shopkeeper and flour dealer, was a local preacher, class leader and on occasions circuit steward. His second wife Elizabeth also became a class leader until her death in 1829. Jason died in 1847 and left behind a reputation as “modest and unassuming, in spirit humble and devout, in general conduct upright, zealous and consistent.” The Local Preachers' meeting minuted “their high estimation of the character, private and public, of their deceased Brother.” The Census tells us that the morning congregation was 110, plus 58 Sunday school scholars, evening 150 and 30.

Dummer

According to Paintin (page 8), in 1827 Wesleyan minister John Overton of Andover left a note for his successor to the effect that “a society may be formed immediately” at Dummer. In June 1828, the same John Overton signed the certificate registering “a Tenement or Dwelling house situate in Dummer now in the occupation of Joseph Wooldridge, labourer” for use “forthwith as a place of religious worship by an Assembly or Congregation of Protestants.” Yet the 1851 Census does not record a Wesleyan meeting in the village.

Sherfield on Loddon

About four miles from Basingstoke is the village of Sherfield on Loddon. Here, in February 1798, the dwelling house of Daniel David was licensed for religious worship, the certificate being signed among others by Sam Toomer and William Taphouse. Samuel Toomer signed elsewhere also for Wesleyan certification, and William Taphouse was a Wesleyan before his transference to the Primitive Methodists in the 1830s.

Sherborne St John

Sherborne St John lies two miles north of Basingstoke. The house of Samuel Loader was registered for religious worship in July 1807; the certificate was signed, among others, by Sam Toomer, showing once more that these were Wesleyans.

Monk Sherborne

About 1½ miles further on is Monk Sherborne. Here the house of

James Gosling was licensed, the certificate bearing the signatures four signatures, including Joseph Jefferson and Sam Toomer, who both signed also at Sherborne St John.

Newbury Circuit

Kingsclere and Wolverton Common

Wesleyans began worshipping in Kingsclere in a private house in 1797, according to introductory notes compiled by the Berkshire County Record Office. This was in fact the dwelling house of Richard Dyer in Swan Street, as the certificate shows us. There was still a meeting in 1810, according to *Doing the Duty of the Parish* (see Mark Smith in the Bibliography)..

A chapel was built some time in the period 1807 to 1812. At that period²⁵ Kingsclere had a population of about 1500. On census Sunday 1851 the chapel attracted 130 in the afternoon, plus 30 to the Sunday school; 176 in the evening.

A house belonging to Mary Tibble, on Wolverton Common in the parish of Kingsclere, was licensed for religious worship by William Edwards, Wesleyan minister in Winchester, in June 1828.

Baughurst

The 1851 religious census informs us that the Wesleyans in Baughurst had been using since 1795 premises joined on to a house but used exclusively for worship.

²⁵ *Doing the Duty of the Parish*

In 1810²⁶ Baughurst had a population of about 400. In 1824 there were regular Wesleyan services there at 10.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m.. A footnote in the Plan states that they were held in a “rented preaching-place or dwelling-house.”²⁷

The 1851 census adds that they drew 35 people in the morning, 29 in the afternoon, and 12 in the evening. The chapel steward was James Stacey, who resided in Baughurst.

By November 1854 the Newbury Wesleyan Plan included the following places:

Kingsclere	Sunday 10.30 and 6.00 pm; Tuesday 6.30
Baughurst	Sunday 10.30 and 2.00 pm
Ashfordhill	Sunday 10.30 and 2.00 pm
Facombe	Sunday 2.30; Friday 6.30
East Woodhay	Sunday 5.30; Friday 6.30

And by the time of the Wesleyan Atlas (1871) only East Woodhay, Baughurst and Kingsclere remained.

²⁶ *Doing the Duty of the Parish*

²⁷ *Baughurst Methodist Church 1872-1972*

CHAPTER 3

BASINGSTOKE TILL 1875

According to Paintin (page 7) writing about the 1820s: “Andover at this period was a centre of evangelistic enterprise. Societies were formed at ... Longparish ... and as far north as Basingstoke.” Basingstoke appears in the Andover Circuit in October 1825, but disappears again in October 1827.

The brief, anonymous *History of the Church and of the Methodist Society in Basingstoke from 1739* says on page 6 concerning John Wesley's final visit on 30th October 1763: “it does not seem there was much immediate advance. There is however a record that a group of people met for years in a loft behind the Pear Tree Inn, where until about 1860 relics of the old Methodist meeting still existed.” John Vickers also mentions this location for Wesleyan meeting in his 1986 doctoral thesis: “A society which, following Wesley's visits to Basingstoke, met in a loft behind the Pear Tree Inn died out.” Neither the *History* nor Vickers offers any contemporary documentation to verify this, and the report is possibly erroneous. We shall return to this problem later.

The Wesleyan Magazine of 1872 (pages 955-6) carries a report from the Rev. G. E.Startup. Writing of the 19th century, he says: “So far as I can learn, it is more than half a century since Methodism was first introduced into Basingstoke. There are persons still living who remember some of those earnest pioneers who introduced it.”

This implies that any society raised in the age of Wesley died out before the 1820s, and a new start (Startup's “first introduced”) was made, perhaps in about 1820. The report continues: “The names of

Gibbs, Tovey, Withers, and Moses Cook are still green, and are remembered with pleasing interest.”

Gibbs is presumably the Stephen Gibbs whom Paintin lists as one of the members at Whitchurch in 1820.

There was a minister called Ebenezer Tovey, stationed in the Andover Circuit rather later (1843-5), whose father had been employed by John Wesley as a master at the Kingswood school. The 1851 Census has a James Tovey, boot- and shoe-maker, signing the return for the Wesleyans of Wherwell, in the Andover Circuit. Paintin, in a history of the Wesleyan society at Wherwell called *This Temple of His Grace*, reports that James Tovey and his family were evicted from their home in about 1846 because of their Wesleyan membership. His son, also called James Tovey, became a leader of the Society, class leader, and local preacher.

There was a Jason Withers, of Whitchurch²⁸, a local preacher in the Andover Circuit, who died in 1847 aged 74: he was also a class leader for many years, and is given by Paintin as a leader in the society at Whitchurch in 1820.

This gives pointers to the identity of these men. Startup's report continues: “For some time the meetings were held in the house of the last-mentioned person [Moses Cook].”

The 1841 Census locates Moses Cook, aged in his mid-50s, resident in Winchester Street, Basingstoke. He was a baker. Sadly there is no schedule for him and his family in the 1851 decennial Census, but the national register of births, marriages and deaths informs us that Moses Cook of Basingstoke (there is but one such person) died in the first quarter of 1857.

Startup continues:

²⁸ Wesleyan Magazine 1838, pp. 218-9

After a while a more public place was engaged for our work; but from this time the cause began to decline, owing to the difficulty of supplying the pulpit regularly. The assembled congregation would frequently be without a preacher, and then - as a not unnatural result - the preachers would sometimes go, and find almost no congregation.

On one occasion, a good brother preached, it is said, to two persons. His labour, however, was not in vain; for, as he learnt years afterwards, one of the two persons was led by that sermon to seek the Lord. The cause soon died out, and for forty or fifty years Basingstoke remained without Wesleyan services.

This would mean the new start was brief, and would place *the cause soon died out* in about 1830 at the latest. This in turn would fit in with the *Methodist Recorder* of 24th March 1904 which states: “Basingstoke was Methodistically the child of Andover. Two or three starts were made, it appears, but finally the “New Mission at Basingstoke” was firmly established.”

The 1851 Census records no Wesleyan meeting in Basingstoke. The Andover Circuit schedule book records no members in Basingstoke in 1859 or 1860, and in 1865 the Andover Circuit local preachers recorded in their minutes that “Attempt has been made to enter Basingstoke but without success.”

The “new mission” began in the early 1870s. Pocock²⁹ relates that a Mr Mead from Bedfordshire took a farm near to Basingstoke, but found no Methodism. According to the *History of the Church and of the Methodist Society in Basingstoke from 1769* - the Golden Jubilee Souvenir handbook published in 1955 - he had been evicted from a farm in Bedfordshire because of his Methodism. Together with a

29 pp. 75-6

man from Guildford and one or two others in Basingstoke itself, he made a persevering search for premises, but could fix only on an ill-lit granary to which access was by a ladder which obstructed the pathway and had therefore to be drawn up after the congregation had assembled inside. This first Wesleyan chapel was thus an old granary in Potters Lane, rented, and opened, according to an old picture of it, in 1870, which accords with G. E. Startup's "about 18 months ago" published in May 1872.



The 1870 chapel in Potters Lane
(Hampshire Record Office: Basingstoke Methodist Circuit Archive:
57M77/NMS178)

The Andover local preachers' meeting agreed in December 1870 that Basingstoke's week-night meeting should be held once a month at 7:30. In December 1870 Basingstoke had five members; six by March 1871. But they fluctuated: five in June 1871 with five on

trial; six members in September, four in December; in March 1872 nine in society including two on trial. In April 1872 the local preachers moved Basingstoke's Sunday service from 10:30 a.m. to 11 o'clock. In June there were ten members, and Basingstoke then vanishes from the Andover Circuit and was itself made into the head of a new circuit.

Basingstoke library holds a brief document published in 1965 which confirms this. It is entitled *Church Street Methodist Church, Basingstoke*, and tells us that "the Wesleyan society met in a room over an old granary in Potters Lane entered by ladder."

By then, Basingstoke as a town was rapidly increasing in importance. The Wesleyan church was made head of a circuit in 1872, and Conference sent a home missionary. The Rev. G. E. Startup's 1872 report, which was quoted earlier, continues:

the congregations were good, and the people appeared to receive the Word with gladness. A Society was formed, and the infant cause appeared to be prosperous and promising, when suddenly death removed the one man on whose activity and influence it seemed mainly to depend... a great and serious loss.

A period of slow decline unhappily now set in. Some who joined the Society at the first began to neglect our services; and after six months of earnest toil and anxious watching, the home missionary felt it to be his duty to leave the apparently unproductive field for one that seemed more promising. When his successor commenced his labours, the aspect of affairs was very discouraging. His first sermon was preached to five adults and as many children. It was announced that the class would meet at the close of the service, but only one person remained; and it was not until a month had elapsed that a Class-meeting could be held at all.

From that time, however the work has been steadily growing. Our congregations have gradually increased. Last Sabbath there were about forty at each service.

Arthur Attwood (1916-2002) was born and grew up in Basingstoke. He became a journalist for the local paper, and was known as a local amateur historian. He wrote books on local history including *An illustrated history of Basingstoke*, plus numerous historical articles for the local paper, and was made a Freeman of the Borough. In the *Gazette*, 15th December, 1978, in an article entitled *The struggle for a Methodist 'meeting'*, he supplies a few additional details to this story:

The information is taken from notes left by the first minister, the Rev W. P. Ellis, who was appointed in 1872.

Mr Ellis wrote his reminiscences in 1920, when living in retirement at Wantage and sent them to his old friend, Mr. W. J. Bird, son of Mr. John Bird, founder and first editor of the Basingstoke Gazette...

Mr. Thomas Mead linked up with a Mr James Kingham of Dummer to rent a granary at Potters Lane, which served as a meeting place, with the Andover circuit supplying the preachers.

Who met near the Pear Tree Inn?

The brief, anonymous *History of the Church and of the Methodist Society in Basingstoke from 1739* says on page 6: “There is however a record that a group of people met for years in a loft behind the Pear Tree Inn, where until about 1860 relics of the old Methodist meeting still existed.”

John Vickers also mentions this location for Wesleyan meeting in his 1986 doctoral thesis: “A society which, following Wesley's visits to Basingstoke, met in a loft behind the Pear Tree Inn died out.” Neither the *History* nor Vickers offers any contemporary documentation to verify this, and I suspect the report is erroneous.

Arthur Attwood wrote in about 1980 an undated Gazette publication entitled *Look in the Past*, in which he says:

Before the Primitive Methodists had their own chapel, they worshipped in a barn on the opposite side of the road. This was near where the Pear Tree Inn was built just over a hundred years ago... on the site of a house where a brewer by the name of Hinde lived. Behind the house was one of Basingstoke's small breweries belonging to Messrs Barrett and Hinde.

Sadly, like the anonymous *History* and Vickers, Mr Attwood supplied no contemporary evidence for this location for the Primitive Methodists, though as a long-term amateur local historian, born in the town in 1916, he doubtless had access to local knowledge and tradition which have not survived to the present day.

In time the Primitives purchased a site on the south side of Flaxfield Road, the very road the Pear Tree stood in, and a house and chapel, opened in 1847, were built.

The suspicion arises that the reports of Wesleyans meeting in a loft behind the Pear Tree Inn, and of Primitives meeting in a barn behind the same site, plus the location of the first Primitive chapel in the same road, represent muddled pieces of folk memory, helped by the fact that the Wesleyans really needed to enter the “room over an old granary” which was their first chapel by means of a ladder (giving rise to the idea of a loft).

It may of course be that the Wesleyans' “more public place”

mentioned by Startup was in reality a loft close to, or behind, the Pear Tree Inn, which would mean that the Wesleyan and Primitive meetings, though perhaps distant in time, were nonetheless close in location. But in that case, why did relics of the Wesleyan meetings remain there from when they faded out in about 1830 at the latest till the 1860s?

It is not impossible, but it does strain credibility. As matters stand, we have undocumented reports of Methodists meeting behind and later in a chapel in the same road as the Pear Tree Inn. Perhaps we shall ever know for sure who met near the Pear Tree Inn, nor when.

Wesleyan Conference Minutes from 1873 (page 128) record that the sixteen members who made up the Basingstoke Society were transferred from the Andover Circuit to the Home Mission department of the Second London District. A plan of Wesleyan weekly open-air services from July to October 1873 “in connection with the Wesleyan Chapel, Basingstoke” has survived. It shows meetings in Totterdown, Gas House Lane, New Town, Chapel Street, Sherborne and “Thursday” (perhaps outside the chapel itself?), which are mounted by small specified groups of six to eight people. There is also a note announcing that services are held in the chapel every Sunday at 11 and 6 o’clock, and at 8 p.m. on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays, with Sunday School at 9:30 and 2 o’clock.

Eventually a site for a chapel was acquired, and a purpose-built chapel opened in November 1875. The photograph shows it after it had been taken down and re-erected in Cliddesden. By 1878 the Wesleyan Basingstoke circuit included only Basingstoke, Sherborne, Newfound and Cliddesden.

CHAPTER 4

WAS IT REALLY A METHODIST WILDERNESS?

We saw in Chapter 2 that *The Methodist Recorder* of 16th May 1901 (pages 13-5) carried an article on Wesleyan Methodism in Basingstoke entitled *The one-time Methodist Wilderness*, and that by 1878 the Wesleyan Basingstoke circuit included only Basingstoke, Sherborne, Newfound and Cliddesden, but it is necessary to ask whether the region truly was a desert as far as Methodist presence or distribution were concerned. When I was growing up in the area, friends and I used to go on long bike rides in the surrounding country, up to some fifty miles in length, and one feature of the villages which was noticeable is that they were dotted with Methodist chapels. Hardly the sign of a wilderness!

Closer inspection however would have revealed that they had been Primitive Methodist, not Wesleyan, and Joseph Ritson, Primitive Methodist historian writing around the time of that Connexion's centenary, stated on page 127 that "Some of the most astonishing triumphs were won by the pioneers among the agricultural labourers in the south of England." By 1870 the Primitive Methodist Basingstoke Circuit included thirty-eight venues for Sunday preaching, and the Plan announced camp meetings, revival meetings, chapel anniversaries, Sunday School anniversaries and tea meetings: again, hardly a Methodist wilderness.

Kitching³⁰ states that "the early Primitives in Hampshire were either farm workers or in the towns more poorly paid industrial workers." Vickers (1987:245) writing about central southern England says:

30 letter, 5.4.2007

“The first Primitive Methodists were drawn from the working classes, ... In the rural societies, where its main strength lay, the agricultural labourers as well as artisans provided much of the leadership. ... The trusts of some of the smaller Primitive Methodist chapels were composed entirely of labourers, some of whom could not even sign their names.” A comment from Thompson (1939:70) should nonetheless serve as a caution: “Some who could write their own name quite well would make a cross as signature to a document out of nervousness or modesty.”

This constituency is confirmed by studies of Hampshire baptismal registers:

- Vickers (1987:421): “the baptismal register for the Mitcheldever Circuit shows a preponderance of labourers (including woodmen) and artisans (in the proportion of three to one), reflecting the humble social background of rural Primitive Methodism.”
- Borrett (2008) analysed the Andover Primitive Methodist circuit baptismal registers in detail for 1834-9, showing a two-thirds majority of fathers entered as ‘labourer’, adding “Most parents’ signatures are signed by Minister or X. Few are signed properly.” Other professions include shoemaker, miller, carpenter, drillman, toll-gate keeper, shepherd.
- Kitching (page 5): “Certainly Methodism in the Meon Valley was a poor people’s religion.” His study of the baptismal registers for the latter years of the 19th century show mostly farm labourers, carters, and an occasional blacksmith or shepherd.

Disregarding the main towns, a number of ideas emerge from a study of the two connexions. First, although Wesleyan Methodism had mounted meetings in other villages, it was established only in and near the Bourne Valley and in the part of Hampshire served by

the Newbury Circuit. Secondly, the 1851 religious census lists strong Primitive Methodist services in Sherfield and Sherborne St John where Wesleyan worship had earlier been registered. The Wesleyans also registered places for worship, but faded out, in Burghclere (1794) and Dummer (1828), which had Primitive Methodist chapels functioning well into living memory. This points to a possibility that the ground was prepared for Methodism in some places by earlier Wesleyans, making them receptive to Primitive Methodism after the Wesleyans had begun to undergo the early nineteenth century changes noted above. Vickers comments³¹:

Wesleyan preachers had withdrawn from many of the village causes and were concentrating on the town chapels, so that the Prims had a ready-made opportunity which they seized upon.

This was certainly true in rural parts of the south which I covered in my thesis.

In considering the question why the Primitive Methodists established themselves more widely than the Wesleyans, it is important to remember that Wesleyans had pursued a policy of targeting denser, urban populations, whereas the Primitive Methodists focused on rural communities; this also meant that the Wesleyans attracted a higher proportion of artisan, middle-class adherents than the Primitive Methodists, in a time when northern Hampshire was largely rural with poor agricultural labourers.

Excluding Basingstoke, Andover, Whitchurch, Overton and Kingsclere as likely to provide sufficient population for several non-Anglican denominations, the research for this booklet discovered Wesleyan meetings at various times from 1738 in the villages in the left-hand column of the columns on page 40, but in the 1851

31 email, 22.5.2013

religious census surviving only in the ones in the left middle column; Primitive Methodist meetings are listed in 1851 in the right middle column. In the years 1863-1871 Primitive Methodist chapels were built in the villages listed in the right-hand column. The columns show:

- In 11 villages, the Wesleyans and Primitives both had meetings.
- The Primitive Methodists had meetings in 15 additional villages.
- There were 5 villages with Wesleyan but no Primitive meetings.

This was no “Methodist wilderness”! *The Methodist Recorder* is using the word Methodist to refer only to Wesleyans. There was a rich and vibrant Methodist presence in northern Hampshire, from the Silchester area across to the Bourne Valley, from the Berkshire boundary down to Micheldever and beyond. This booklet is about the much less numerous Wesleyans, but the thrilling story of the Primitive Methodist expansion into the area is told at length in my 233-page book *The great River: Primitive Methodism till 1868 illustrated mainly from northern Hampshire* (Stoke-on-Trent, 2016) and need not be entered into here.

<u>Wesleyan 1738ff</u>	<u>Wesleyan 1851</u>	<u>PM 1851</u>	<u>PM chapels '63-71</u>
Ashfordhill	Ashfordhill	Ashfordhill	
Ashmansworth			
Baughurst	Baughurst	Baughurst	
Burghclere			Burghclere
Combe			
Dummer			Dummer
East Woodhay		East Woodhay ³²	
Facombe	Facombe		
Hurstbourne Priors		Hurstbourne Priors	
Hurstbourne Tarrant			Hurstbourne
Tarrant ³³			
Laverstoke			
Longparish	Longparish		Longparish ³⁴
Monk Sherborne			
Saint Mary Bourne	St Mary Bourne	St Mary Bourne	
Sherborne St John		Sherborne	
Sherfield on Loddon		Sherfield	
Sydmonton			
		Charter Alley	
		Newnham	
		North Waltham	
		Silchester	
		Tadley	
		<i>Facombe</i> ³⁵	
			Hannington 1871 ³⁶
			Little London 1868
			Oakley 1866
			Wootton St L. 1870
			Plastow Grn 1866
			Wolverton Cn '64
			Basing 1867
			Stoke 1864 ³⁷

32 Gore End, in East Woodhay parish

33 Ibthorpe, in Hurstbourne Tarrant parish

34 in the area called Forton

35 Facombe is included, although there is no Primitive Methodist census return. The Primitives had an 1847 chapel there, plus members listed in 1850 and 1852

36 dates in this block are from *The Methodist Church Statistical Returns* 1970

37 Hants CRO 36M94/9

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Some Wesleyan north Hampshire Chapels

**Longparish, Bramley,
Newfound, North Warnborough, Wherwell,
George Street (Basingstoke)**







**The 1875 Basingstoke Wesleyan chapel after its
demolition and removal to Cliddesden**