

## **Guide to the Methodist Church in Lakenheath**

### **A Brief History of Methodism**

Methodism has its roots in eighteenth century Anglicanism. Its founder was a Church of England minister, John Wesley (1703 – 1791), who sought to challenge the religious assumptions of the day. During a period of time in Oxford, he and others met regularly for Bible study and prayer, to receive communion and do acts of charity. They became known as ‘The Holy Club’ or ‘Methodists’ because of the methodical way in which they carried out their Christian faith. John Wesley later used the term Methodist himself to mean the methodical pursuit of biblical holiness.

In 1738 John Wesley had a profound spiritual experience. “I felt,” he wrote, “my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins.”. The experience transformed Wesley, and inspired him to become one of the greatest preachers of all time.

In Bristol 1739 he began preaching to crowds of working class men and women in the outdoors. This ‘field preaching’ became a key feature of the Revival, when thousands came to hear Wesley preach up and down the country. He formed local societies of those converted and encouraged them to meet in smaller groups on a weekly basis. He insisted, though, that they attend their local parish church as well as the Methodist meetings. Every year, by horse or carriage, Wesley travelled the country visiting the societies and preaching.

Preaching radical ideas took great courage in those days. Wesley and his followers were denounced in print and from pulpits, his meetings were disrupted and he was even physically attacked and threatened with death.

John Wesley always declared that his movement should remain within the Anglican Church but the Church of England was keen to distance itself from him and his followers. He declared “I live and die a member of the Church of England.”. However, in 1784 he set up a structure, The Yearly Conference of the People called Methodists, to ensure the continuation of the Methodist movement after his death. In the end, the strength and impact of Methodism made a separate Methodist Church inevitable. In 1795, four year after Wesley’s death, Methodist in Britain became legally able to conduct marriages and perform the sacraments.

The new church wasn’t without its internal schisms. In 1808 the Methodist lay preacher, Hugh Bourne, was expelled from the movement. He and his 200 followers became known as Primitive Methodists. They differed from Wesleyan Methodists in several regards, including the encouragement of women evangelists. Both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist communities grew rapidly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was from among the Primitives that many Trade Union leaders emerged towards the end of the century.

Another major Methodist branch was the United Methodist Church, which itself was formed from earlier mergers of smaller Methodist groupings. It joined with the Primitive Methodists and Wesleyan Methodists in 1932 to form the present Methodist Church in Britain.

In 2003, the Methodist Church celebrated the tercentennial of the birth of John Wesley.

Acknowledgements:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/methodist\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/methodist_1.shtml)

## **The Methodist Church in Lakenheath**

### **Visits of John Wesley**

Methodism in Lakenheath can trace its roots back to November 1757!

During that month, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was travelling from Bedford, through Newmarket and on to Norwich. It seems that this journey to Norwich necessitated a stop – perhaps for the night – in Thetford.

While in Thetford he was asked by Mr Andrew Rolph to preach at Lakenheath. Wesley records this visit in his journal as follows:

“Nov. 24<sup>th</sup> 1757: “A man had spoken to me last week, as I was going through Thetford, and desired me to preach at Lakenheath, near Mildenhall in Suffolk; I now propose so to do, and rode thither from Thetford. One Mr Evans had lately built a large and convenient meeting house there, at his own expense. It was more than filled at six o’clock, many standing at the door, At five in the morning (as uncommon a thing as this was in those parts) the house was nearly filled again with earnest, loving simple people. Several of them came into Mr. E’s house afterward, stood awhile, and then burst into tears. I promised to call on them again and left them much comforted!”

Wesley must have had a soft spot in his heart for the people of Lakenheath for it is recorded in his Journal that he paid thirteen more visits at various interval, the last being on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1773.

It was during his sixth visit, on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1761 that he apparently called the people together and formed them into a Society.

However, when Wesley paid his last visit on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 1773 he records that he:

“found the Society at Lakenheath was entirely vanished away. I joined them together once more, and they promised to keep together. If they do, I shall endeavour to see them again; if not, I have better work.”.

### **People and buildings**

Wesley did not return to Lakenheath – probably due to increasing age – but from brief records found in Colchester we discover that Lakenheath was part of the large Colchester Circuit in the late 1700s and early 1800s. These records show that in the year 1789 Lakenheath had eleven members, and in 1790 the number had increased to fourteen. Among the recorded names is that of Andrew Rolph, who was undoubtedly the man that had first approached Wesley with the invitation to preach at Lakenheath.

Not much more can be said of the early Society, apart from one other brief record which states that Mrs Ann Marshall who died in Lakenheath on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1826 had for forty years been a member there and during that time entertained the preachers.

So much for the people, now to the buildings. The reaching house that Wesley visited was built, it is believed, during late 1755 and early 1756 and was certified as a “Preaching House” by Samuel Churchman, of Bury St Edmunds, on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1757. This building was situated in Anchor Lane, and was the first Methodist preaching house in Suffolk. Until it was demolished a few years back, it was the last Chapel standing in Suffolk in which Wesley had preached. It seems that this building was not adequate for the number of worshippers, for in 1835 the present Methodist Church was built.

Permission for the building to be erected was received from Liverpool Conference in June 1835. The cost of the building, measuring 38 feet by 27 feet, was £120.

The membership at the time numbered 14 with an average of 80 “listeners” (now known as ‘Adherents’). The annual cost of lighting and cleaning was estimated at twenty shillings and other incidental expenses probably twenty shillings. There was no gallery in the original building. The Church was enlarged about 1911 and the schoolroom added in 1913. The cost of the erection of the schoolroom was £100.

In 1985, to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the present Church the premises were enlarged by the addition of an extra meeting room (The “Evans Room”) together with many other improvements to the kitchen etc., together with the addition of a Minister’s vestry.

Acknowledgement:

Mr. Ron Brooks who wrote the original history.

### Things to see in the Church building:

On entering the left side of the church, from the porch, there are some items on the wall above the first and second pews.

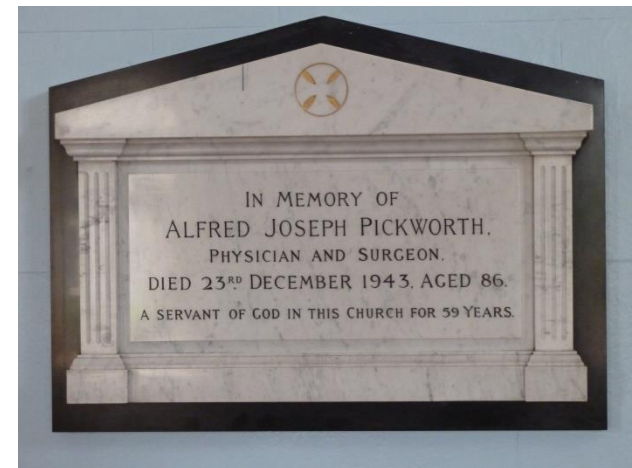
On the back wall, above the first pew, are a painting (by Ron Brooks) of this Church and below it is a photograph of the Old Methodist Preaching House in Anchor Lane (albeit in a poor state of repair and some while after it ceased to be used as a Preaching House).

The small Terracotta name plate (on the side wall) was taken from the Old Methodist Preaching House, Anchor lane (Licensed 1757) having been preserved by Fred J.S. Drew in 1938.



Further along and between two rows of pews (on the floor) is a blue square (two foot square). This is the site of the old boiler.

On the right wall of the church is a plaque in memory of Alfred Joseph Pickworth.



Also, behind the communion rail is a table on which there is a plaque that reads:

“This table, chair and font were placed in this church by the Trustees in memory of Dr & Mrs A J Pickworth May 15<sup>th</sup> 1949.”



In the Evans Room, is a cross with a small engraved plate below it which reads:



Pulpit  
Communion Rail



“This cross was removed from Eriswell Methodist Church after the closing service held on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1981 and is placed here in the Evan Room to honour the life and witness of our Methodist people in that village.”

## Banners

### The double sided Harvest and Sunday School Banner



Away back in the 1930's, Mr Val Gathercole (a younger brother of Mr. Z. Gathercole) was a sufferer of tuberculosis (TB) of the spine. Medical knowledge for TB in those days was not as advanced as it is today, so Val had to lay on his back in a hut in the garden, in order to get as much fresh air as possible.

It was while he was in that condition that he had the desire to spend the long hours in making a banner for the Church and Sunday School that he loved. So began this great labour of love.

With the help of Mrs Serjeant, some blue material was hemmed and prepared for Val to begin. His brother, Clem, outlined the large circles for him on each side of the banner which was made up in two squares, measuring 6 feet by 6 feet. One side was to be for Sunday School

Anniversaries and the reverse side to be used at Harvest Thanksgiving services.

Without very little more help – apart from Mrs. Rhoda Rolph stitching on the fringe and tape loops for hanging purposes – Val began to embroider the design for each side that God had laid on his heart. He used to pin out a small section of the material on an old picture frame and do a little at a time. Almost all the embroidery id done in chain stitch and it is worked in Clarke's stranded embroidery silk. In those days a skein of silk cost 'tuppence' (old money) but a local store that sold haberdashery used to let Val have it at cost price – 'threeha'pence'. Ron Brooks, who used to work in that shop, thought that there was somewhere in the region of 936 skeins of silk used in the banner.

As already said, the banner has two side. The centrepiece of the Sunday School side is a picture of Christ blessing the children; the Harvest Thanksgiving side is a picture of Christ our Help in Ages Past, Our Hope for Years to Come.

It is not known which picture of Christ it was, but for one of them Val was inspired at four o'clock one morning to pin a square of the banner to the picture frame and embroider the face of Christ, so dedicated was he to his work.

The banner was dedicated during the Harvest Thanksgiving of 1940 by the Rev. E.H. Livesley – the Superintendent Minister of the Circuit. Val was brought to the Church in a spinal carriage to see his banner dedicated; he dies the following February at the age of 28 years.

What an achievement!!!! And what a treasure for our Church!!!!

He being dead still speaketh.