

## METHODISM IN CARNON DOWNS

This article is taken from a much longer one written by the late Mr T. Trebilcock, which he read at the Centenary celebration of the Chapel in 1925.

"Let us take the year 1824 as our starting point. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism had been dead for 33 years; the Truro Circuit formed a quarter of a century later was then, and had been, part of the Redruth Circuit for 14 years. The Superintendent Minister was the Revd Paul Orchard. The first editor of the West Briton, Mr Edward Budd, was a local Methodist preacher and conducted a service in the open air at Carnon Downs, approximately on the site where the Chapel now stands, the congregation coming from Perranwell, Devoran, Penpol, Feock and Calenick. Mr Edward Olive supported him on this occasion. Mr Budd was chosen as Circuit Steward in 1819.

In 1824, Mr Olive secured a lease from Lord Falmouth of a piece of land for a chapel. Capt. Olive, as he was locally known, was about thirty years old, of medium height and build, a shoemaker with an establishment of journeymen and apprentices. He was also a farmer, rate collector and relieving officer. He resided at Ebenezer, which he had on lease from Lord Falmouth, having built the dwelling house with workshop attached and brought the land into cultivation prior to his marriage with Honor James of St Feock Churchtown.

The piece of land granted for the Chapel was of considerable size; being part of the common it was not as valuable as it is today. Capt. Olive could have had the whole of the land from the Turnpike to Kitty's Lane (Staggy Lane). It was originally intended to use part of the ground as a burial ground, but this project was abandoned in view of the fact that the lease was on three lives. According to the original deed, the lives were those of William Roberts, aged 5 years, the son of William and Juliana Roberts Penrose of Tregie; John aged 6 years, son of John and Jane Dunstan; and Honor James, the daughter of Edward and Honor Olive, aged 6 years, all of Feock parish. This was subject to a yearly rent of 5/-. The names of the Trustees were Edward Olive, John Retallack, William Bassett, William Daniell, Edward George, Stephen Martin, William Scoble, William West, Samuel Gillard, Richard Nicholls and Simon Nicholls.

The Chapel was built by donations, subscriptions and borrowed money. Every subscriber of £1 had a free sitting during the lease subject to the following regulations: Seats to be built by the Trustees but kept in repair by the seat-holder;

that any seat-holder wishing to give up his seat shall first offer it to the Chapel Steward and if he fails to buy it for the Trustees, the holder may sell to anyone else; that no seat-holder may alter his seat by making it longer or higher without the consent of the Trustees; that no seat-holder shall claim a right because he or she has a sitting, to be present at any Society meeting or love feast, or to disturb in any way the peaceable worship of Almighty God. The number who availed themselves of this privilege was 56; the rest of the sittings were let in the manner of the present (1925) day.

The Chapel stood unenclosed on the downs until 1833 when hundreds of loads of stone were drawn and a ring fence built, with entry by a stile on the Bissoe Road, at a cost of £15.1.0. Some time later a portion of the land was granted to Mr Morton, who built the house (Crossways) where Mr Burrell now lives; and Mr Charles Manuell also had a portion and built the premises which Mr J. H. W. Davey now occupies. In 1834 Mr Morton received a grant of another portion of land west of the Chapel; among the conditions were: (a) a 9 ft roadway to be left at the west of the chapel; (b) half the high rent (2/6) to be paid; (c) a stable to be built to the west of the Chapel, 10 ft by 9 ft and 6½ ft high, with a small window with shutter for admitting air. The Trustees contributed £2 towards the cost and it became the property of the Trustees who used it on Sundays to shelter the preacher's horse; it was used by Mr Morton during the week. Another condition was that no public house or kiddleywink should be built on it.

The total cost of building the Chapel was £186.2.0. of which the Trustees themselves collected £81, a further £95 being lent by them.

In 1842 the western end of the Chapel was taken down and the building enlarged to seat 537. Capt. Olive held a service in the open air with the congregation among the building materials.

The Chapel was lighted with candles (tallow dips). The late Mr Theo Hawkins in his reminiscences says that when he visited the place as a lad he counted eighty candles (West Briton, April 3rd 1913). It was the custom, during the singing of a hymn, for one or more people to go round with snuffers. In those days there was a pulpit; Sammy Michell was the last to preach from it. The Leaders' seat was across the centre, immediately in front of the pulpit; it was occupied by Capt. Olive, William Bassett, Capt. Jewell (retired mine captain), Harry Michell (Calenick), Edward Tregaskis (Mid-Devoran Farm), whose brother, Thomas Tregaskis, founded Hick's Mill Chapel, Nicholas Dunstan (Carnon Hill) and Walter Hearle (Killiganon Farm). Joanna Ede also sat there.

Having a good voice, she pitched the tunes as there were no instruments or choir at that time. She had a drunken husband and worked at dressmaking, going out sewing for sixpence a day.

William Dunstan joined this society in 1837 at a revival meeting. He was born at Penelewey Farm, but the family moved to Chyreen where he married Nancy the third daughter of Edward Olive. He became a local preacher and continued until he was over eighty. I well remember his tall, straight, wiry figure, clear bright eye and fine happy face and his thin white hair and snowy beard.

Among the loyal supporters of the Chapel were the Simmons family of Killiganoon; the Squire paid a visit every day to Capt. Olive at Ebenezer, where, if the Captain was absent, he was sure to find his Lieutenant, William Bassett, who also acted as the Society's Whip. On the day of the week-night service he called on all those holding office to remind them of the service and on other members as well.

Mr Walter Hearle had lent money to the Chapel, but, having taken a larger farm at Constantine, he called in his money. Squire Simmons advanced it, charging more than the bank rate of interest. Shortly after, Andrew Paul, a very quaint preacher was appointed to preach at the Chapel and taking as his text the words "Will a man rob God" (Mal. ch. 2, v. 8) went on to speak of robbery in its worst form, the taking of more usury from God than from his fellow men. The interest on the loan was promptly reduced to the bank rate.

Among the Leaders at this time were Charles Lobb, Fanny Manuell, Henry Manuell, Stephen Teague, Joseph Locke, my father William Trebilcock and Joe Witta who was a local preacher and strong temperance advocate. By this time there was a choir and the singing was led by wind instruments. Phil Sampson told me the following story when he was well over eighty:

"The choir that my boy Jack belongs to down there 'edn a bad lot but nothin' like th'ould choir my brother Sammy and I used to sing in; Uncle Ebb could make that bassoon of his almost speak. We used to get invited round to different Chapels once a year to sing our anthems on a Sunday afternoon. We once went to Kea Church and, occupying the gallery at the back, sang to a crowded congregation. I well remember an invitation we had from St Erme. The Sunday came and we met as arranged except for two brothers; they were taking important important solo parts and we could'n very well go without 'em, so two of our party went in search and found 'em in bed, fast asleep. They had been working on night core, but they roused up, dressed, came down and had a dish of tay and

a morsel for a stay-stomach and was on the road in a jiffy with a corner of pasty in their pockets to ait on the way in case they felt leary. That made us late and we drove fast; we were riding in farm carts. The horses galloped through Truro and a pretty bad shaking we got over they granite cobbles from Lemon Bridge right on through Boscawen Street, but we managed to arrive at St Erme only a quarter of an hour late."

Capt. B. Donald was a retired sea captain who came to reside at Higher Clydia. Arrangements were being made for a bazaar and Capt. Donald was appointed Treasurer. After a successful effort the Committee and workers met in the old vestry - an old room over the present boiler and coke house - which had a ramp with hand rail leading up to it. The meeting was rather stormy as the Captain presented his statement in nautical terms which appeared to be unintelligible to the audience. Some village lads were on the ramp listening, among them John Nettle, known as Pickles. During one or two lulls Capt. Donald was heard saying, "I wish I could see my way out!" Pickles had a brainwave. He went to Mrs Locke's to borrow a lantern on the pretext that he had dropped something and could not find it as it was a dark winter night. On his return to the Vestry the storm was still raging and at the next lull came Capt. Donald's voice still more impassioned: "Oh I wish I could see my way out!" Pickles promptly knocked loudly, the noise inside suddenly abated, the door opened, and a voice demanded what he wanted. "I'm come to show Captain the way out," he said. Captain Donald heard this welcome sound and, rising from his seat leaving the financial statement and cash on the table, followed Pickles down the ramp and along the main road as far as Trethewey where he stopped and said, "I'll not trouble you to go any further lad." He then took sixpence from his pocket and gave it to Pickles, saying, "I shall not forget your kindness in showing me the way out."

The Sunday School was started by Capt. Olive in his workshop, two years before the Chapel was built. When it was transferred to the Chapel the numbers soon reached 200. There were approximately 150 when I first attended and when I became the secretary just over fifty years ago, the numbers of pupils and teachers kept steadily around 125 for several years. The Anniversary was always kept on Whit Sunday and the Tea-treat on Whit Monday. In the early days this was held at Tregy, but after the death of Juliana Penrose, the treat was held at Killiganoon during the lifetime of Squire Simmons and continued under the new owner, John Messer Bennetts, for sixty-five years altogether. When transport difficulties became a problem, together with other considerations, it was decided to hold it in a field near the Chapel; this has continued for a little over thirty-five years.

In 1885 the Chapel lease expired with the death of Honor James Dunstan, having run for sixty years at a rental of £1 per annum. There had been an insurance on the lease, but prior to its expiration the insurance company became bankrupt and paid 1/- in the pound.

Under the successive stewardships of John Teague, Ned Davey, Tom Pollard, T. J. Trebilcock, J. H. Williams and John Tippett, the debt begun in 1825 was reduced and finally paid off in 1916. In 1923 a new heating apparatus by Holden Bros. of Sheffield was installed at a cost of £160. Money was raised by subscription and concerts, etc. for a new pipe organ. The Trustees having dwindled to two members, a new Trust was formed and held its first meeting on March 20th, 1928. On the 4th June of the same year, the Organ and Renovation Secretary, Mr J. Tallack, presented the specification of a pipe organ from Messrs Hele of Plymouth, as recommended by Dr Dunstan, together with details of structural alterations necessary for its installation, plus details of renovations and lighting schemes. On August 10th, Messrs Burton and Dunstan's tender of £184.19.0 for structural alterations was accepted. The new organ cost £300. A petrol gas lighting plant replaced the oil lamps. The organ was delivered seven weeks later and opened by Dr Dunstan on December 4th, with Sir Tudor Walters as principal speaker.

During October 1935, electric lighting was installed at a cost of £52. All the expenditure has been met and the premises are free from debt. Mr and Mrs John Tallack gave an electric blower for the organ as a memorial to their son Basil who was killed in Holland in 1944".

Further information from members of the Chapel:

Mr T. Trebilcock based his address on research done by Mr Theodore Hawken of Truro to which he added his personal reminiscences.

In the late 19th century the vestry was used as a Dame School by Mary Michell and Emily Gay. Later, a day and evening school was kept there by Mr Pond. It also housed the Cow Club and the Men's Institute. From 1895 it served as the Polling Station.

In 1894 the size of the Chapel was reduced to provide room for a Sunday School room with a gallery above flanked by two small lobbies; in one of these there was a chest, known as Noah's Ark, where the music was kept. The reduced space offered difficulties for the orchestra which was soon disbanded.

In 1896, a Christophe Harmonium was purchased and housed in the Choir Stalls with a passage behind it. At that

time lighting was by oil lamps in chandeliers hanging from the ceiling and lamps in decorated brackets along the gallery.

In 1928, central heating was installed, with pipes behind the organ to help in its maintenance, by the engineers working on Devoran church.

The new schoolroom, built in 1955, cost £3853 and was the only large hall here until the Village Hall was built in the 1960s. It became the centre for all village activities, but was subject to the rules of the Methodist Church. It now houses a Nursery School and is still available when the Village Hall is fully booked.

Cannon Downs owes the beginnings of its now flourishing social activities to the Chapel and its Sunday School rooms.

WESLEYAN CHAPEL IN 1977

