

# Froyle Methodist Church



1862 to 1998



This booklet has been produced for the  
Thanksgiving Service on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May 1998  
to commemorate the end of 136 years of  
worship in Froyle Methodist Church

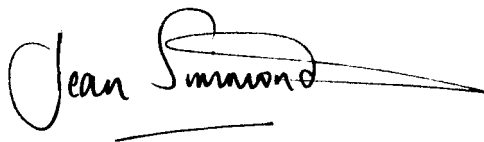
## MINISTERS

1862	William Sanders
1864	William Priest Peck
1867	John Dawson
1869	James Aldis
1872	Samuel Atkinson
1874	James Portrey
1877	Joseph Payne
1880	Thomas Thompson
1883	Alexander Borrowman
1886	Samuel Green
1889	Richard Fletcher
1892	George Reid
1895	James G. Lawrence
1897	George Gibson
1900	Henry Cotton
1903	David Hinchcliffe
1908	W. Sinclair Smith
1911	John Willian Almond
1915	Arthur Eustace Southon, D.Lit.
1919	Ernest S. Welch
1923	Arthur Clay Lywood
1926	Stanley Derham Robinson
1929	William D. Knight
1931	W. Routley Bailey ( <i>died Oct. 1932</i> )
1932	E. Geoffrey Parrinder, M.A., D.D., Ph.D., Hon.D.Lit.
1933	George W. Demaine
1937	Thomas Hooper Johnston
1939	( <i>Dec</i> ) Edgar P. Blamires
1940	Edwin de Ville
1943	Peter A. Kerridge
1944	Frank Woodward Ross
1948	William Albert Parrott
1951	Hillier J. Herivel
1954	T. Hooper Johnston
1958	John J. Mahoney
1961	William D. Robinson, Ph.D.
1967	( <i>April</i> ) Bryan W Imbush
1967	David G. Thorpe
1969	Arthur W. Banks, M.A., B.Sc.
1971	Dennis Bussey
1972	David Porter
1977	Ivan B.U. Wilson, B.A.
1982	Robert C. Schnase
1983	Neil R. Bartlett
1989	Ian D. Bowley
1997	Jean Simmonds

It is with real sadness that we have reached the decision that the small Methodist Chapel here in Froyle must close. The building has come to the end of its life and we know that we should invest our resources in the growing work of our much larger church in the town centre at Alton. However, as is so often the case, there is so much that is good in the midst of the sadness. Let me share with you two particular causes for thanksgiving.

When our chapel was built in 1862 I expect the relationships with the vicar and worshippers at the parish church were non-existent! Sadly, it has taken a long time for different expressions of our faith to accept and appreciate each other. Now we are able to say with sincerity that it is better for a small community like Froyle to have one church, a single focus for the spiritual life of the village. We rejoice in the fact that our small Methodist congregation will be a welcome part of the life of the church with thoughts and experiences to contribute from our tradition.

Secondly, we give thanks that we can look back to so much that has been achieved. There are good memories of times when the Sunday School was large and busy, of times when the church was filled for services and when the support and care that was offered from the chapel to the life of the village were important. There is gratitude to God for people who have shared their gifts, time and faith among us and for the fact that their love and faith contributed much to individual lives. Because of their service the church does not die with the closure of the building. The church is not the building, it is the people, so the work of God will always continue among the people of Froyle. My prayer is that God will richly bless you all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jean Simmonds". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Rev. Jean Simmonds.  
Superintendent Minister,  
Farnham and Alton Methodist Circuit



*Froyle Methodist Church and Chapel Cottages  
at the turn of the century*

For 136 years the Methodist Church in Froyle has been open for worship. On the occasion of its closure we look back on the growth of Methodism in this small Hampshire community.

Methodism had actually come to the village twenty years before the Church was built, during a Primitive Methodist Mission to Alton and district organised by the Micheldever Circuit. For a few months in 1841 there were regular meetings somewhere in Upper Froyle, comprising a Sunday Service at 1.30pm and a Weekday Meeting each Tuesday. Nothing else is known of the work there and the meeting very quickly died out. Very likely they never obtained the regular use of a house for indoor meetings.

After the closure of the mission a Travelling Preacher was stationed at Holybourne and no doubt also sought to spread the gospel to the adjoining villages. It seems he must have had some response, certainly at Lower Froyle, for in 1846 it was decided to move the struggling Holybourne meeting to Froyle. There they met at the house of George and Harriet Reed. This was one of the dwellings into which the old workhouse had been divided. The building still survives - almost opposite the village hall. There were then twelve members of the Society, including a number who came from Holybourne. They also had the benefit of a resident Minister, or Travelling Preacher, as they were then called. This was John Wright, and he must be the only Methodist Minister ever to have been stationed at Froyle.

However, the remoteness of the village from the centre of the circuit, Micheldever, created difficulties. The Travelling Preacher was moved to Basing, the numbers dwindled, and it seems in about 1849 the congregation changed their allegiance and joined the Bible Christian branch of the Methodist Church. George Reed, who had been a Local Preacher under the former body, continued to be recognised as such after the transfer, and his house was registered for worship. But the change did not have the desired effect and after a few years the Society became extinct, probably because of the existence of a more flourishing Bible Christian Society at East Green, Bentley, and the building of a chapel there in 1854.

And so along came the Wesleyan Methodists to build on the missionary work of the Primitives and Bible Christians. At the March, 1860, Local Preachers' Meeting of the Guildford Circuit - Alton became a separate circuit later in the same year - it was decided that Froyle should come on the plan. Where exactly they met is not known - perhaps it was again the old workhouse. In 1861 there were Sunday Services at 10.30am and 6pm, with the Lord's Supper once a quarter, and also a Wednesday Evening meeting twice a month.

Things moved quickly. In that same year a site was purchased from William Messenger and a start made on erecting the present Chapel. The Trustees appointed at that time were John Benjafield (*farmer*), Albert Hiscock (*farmer*), John Chubb (*blacksmith*), John Goddard (*shepherd*) and Uriah Benjafield (*believed to be a wheelwright from Holybourne*) and six from other churches in the circuit. William Hall, a shoemaker from Upper Froyle, was one of the witnesses of the conveyance. The Chapel was built of stone with brick quoins at a cost of £260 and a date, 1861, can be seen crudely inscribed on a stone in the north west wall of the building. It was officially opened in 1862 and had, until now, the honour of being the oldest Methodist Chapel still in use for worship in this area.

Little is known of the next thirty years but among the couples whose children were baptised at the chapel were:- John & Eliza Benjafield, Emanuel & Caroline Trim, George & Jane Shute, David & Harriet Bowman, Charles & Jemima North, George & Jane Mills, Caleb & Eliza North, Charles & Jane Covey, James & Susan Cole, George & Mary Stimson, and George & Rosa Cox.

In those early years the Chapel Anniversary was always held on Easter Monday. The report of the occasion of 1892 is typical. The Alton Mission Brass Band was there and two van loads of visitors came from Alton. Tea was served, followed by a meeting. The following year there was also an Open Air Service before the evening service.

By 1890 the name of 'Hockley' was prominent in church affairs. Charles Hockley (right) used to belong to Bentley Parish Church. As a boy he had the job of filling the oil lamps there, for which he got twopence a week. It is said that with his first sixpence he bought himself a bible. Certainly he became a shining light for Christ. At Froyle he served in every possible way - Poor Steward, Chapel Steward, Society Steward, Sunday School Superintendent, Class Leader, Trustee and Local Preacher. There are records of him speaking at Chapel Anniversaries as early as 1892.



In 1903 the Society Stewards were Charles Hockley and his father in law, Edward Hall. Mr. Hall, who had succeeded to his father's shoemaker's business in Upper Froyle, had been a leader at Froyle for many years prior to that date. Hockley's brother, James, was also a regular preacher. A memorial to the brothers is in the form of the Church's unusual font which

bears the words 'Presented to Froyle Chapel, July, 1929, in loving memory of Charles and James Hockley who served so faithfully in the Methodist School and Circuit for over 50 years.'

The earliest membership figures are for 1900 with 15 in September and 17 in December. From then until 1905 the numbers fluctuated between 13 and 17. A decline then set in with a minimum of 7 being reached two years later. Subsequently a recovery took place and, from 1910 onwards, the membership was always in double figures.

For many years there was a strong Sunday School. In 1910, for example, there were 32 scholars and 4 teachers. They met both morning and afternoon. Certainly at a later date, and probably at this time also, the 3pm appointment shown on the plan was the Sunday School. Then the normal practice was that a preacher would be appointed to take the afternoon Sunday School and then, after staying for tea, the evening service at 6pm. This most probably accounts for the rather incongruous entry in the Minute Book of 1938 - "The secretary was instructed to write and thank Miss Hall and Miss Mills, the organists, and also to express their thanks to them for entertaining the preachers on Sundays!"



These two ladies, pictured above, Miss Emily Mills and Miss Louise Hall, who was Edward Hall's grand-daughter, were two stalwarts of the Church. As well as being organists for over 30 years, they were joint Sunday School Superintendents for many years. At one time there were said to have been as many as eighty belonging to the Sunday School. They also took over as Society Stewards after the death of Charles Hockley in about 1929 and continued as such until 1971.

Others who should be mentioned include Miss Mills' brother, Charles, who from 1937 until 1958, when he had to retire owing to ill health, was both Treasurer and Secretary to the Trustees of the Church, and Walter and Mavis Start, who took up the two offices on Mr. Mills' retirement and have continued serving Froyle Methodist Church to this day.

The years 1952 and 1953 were particularly significant for the Froyle Church. For some years the lack of any accommodation other than the church had



been strongly felt. In 1952 this difficulty was overcome by the erection of a wooden hut next to the church on a site which had once been part of Charles Hockley's garden. No doubt he would have been pleased to see it so used. The hut has an interesting story. After the sale of Union Road Primitive Methodist Chapel in Farnham in 1936 a site was bought in an area in which it was expected the town would develop with the intention of ultimately erecting a church there. In the meantime a tennis court and pavilion - the hut - were put on the site. However, the development at Farnham did not take place and so the site was sold in 1952 and the hut sold to the Froyle church for £100. As well as serving as a pavilion, it had also been used for a time at Farnham for other meetings.



*"Charlie" Mills opens the new schoolroom on November 26<sup>th</sup> 1952*

Following the erection of the Schoolroom it was immediately decided to renovate the church and so on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1953 a completely renovated church was reopened by Mrs. Thomas. According to the newspaper report it had formerly been a drab building, dark and uninviting with a bare wooden floor and only hard benches for the congregation. Externally the chapel had been changed little, apart from the roughcast applied to the front and south east walls and the removal of the porch. The roughcast covered up an engraved stone high up on the front of the building. There were formerly two flights of steps from the road - one to each side of the porch. The

presence of the porch had made it very difficult to manoeuvre coffins into the church for funerals and so such services had often been held at the house of the deceased.



*A Harvest Festival in the 1920s - note the benches for the choir*

Internally the changes were greater. Previously there had been a centre aisle, no fixed screen inside the door, three or four fixed pews at the back, and forms in front which were moved for the Sunday School. There were also choir pews at either side of the pulpit - there was a flourishing choir in Froyle for many years, at least up until about 1960. There was a solid fuel stove to provide the heating and the building was open to the rafters. The pulpit had two fine oil lamps with spherical glass shades on the wall behind it. The changes involved new strip lighting, rubberised floor, new pulpit, chairs of light unstained wood, and the erection of a ceiling.

Membership reached a peak of 23 in 1958, but then a gradual decline set in; 19 in 1961, 11 in 1971 and 11 again in 1981. The numbers had not increased even though members of Crondall Methodist Church had joined Froyle in 1979, following the closure of their own church. Perhaps the writing was already on the wall for Froyle's building. The Church was rewired in 1990 and in 1991 work was carried out on the roof, the entrance and the schoolroom. Further roof repairs were carried out in 1995, but with falling numbers - only 8 by now - and mounting costs, it was obvious that the Church could not be kept open. The Minutes of a meeting of the Church Council held on Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1997, tell the sad story - "The Quinquennial Report had been received from the surveyor & the cost of repairs prohibitive & beyond the financial means of the Church. After

discussion it was unanimously agreed that the Church be closed... All the members expressed a wish that the Church should close with a Thanksgiving Service in the Spring.”

The numbers that will be attending that service are a testament to Froyle Methodist Church’s important place in the community.

*Taken from notes by David Woodcock M.A. with additional material from Froyle Methodist Church Council Minute Books and the Froyle Archive.*





*Methodist Sunday School group in 1954*



*Bright Hour outing in June 1955*



*Sunday School Nativity in 1965*



*Celebrating Harvest Festival in 1997*

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