MIDDLETON ON THE WOLDS HISTORY GROUP

"This village is one of the most irreligious on the Wolds....."
Rev Woodcock

METHODISM IN MIDDLETON

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BACKGROUND

In 1660, with the monarchy restored after the years of Civil War and Cromwellian rule, religious tension eased. In the century which followed, the established Church of England assumed the dominant position in the religious life of the country and influenced by the new age of reason and the growing desire to avoid the bitter doctrinal struggles of the past settled into a period of complacency. Consequently the spiritual side of life suffered as the Clergy adopted at times a worldly approach to the problems of existence.

The more lowly members of society were particularly affected by the consequent neglect of their interests. It was against this background that John and Charles Wesley started their "methodical pursuit of biblical holiness". They themselves worked within the established Church and were to remain in it. The word "Methodist", which had been a term of derision, became the name of a separate body in 1784 and because this body addressed the needs of ordinary people it is credited by historians with helping to keep revolution at bay and giving lay people organisational skills at a time when general education was very patchy.

John Wesley visited the East Riding twenty times between the years 1752 and 1791 and this probably helped to spread Methodism throughout an area which had not in the past been favourably disposed to other forms of dissent in religious observance.

In Middleton Christopher Spencer Brearey, the Rector at the time of Archbishop Drummond's visitation in 1764, reported in smug fashion that there were 36 families in the parish "in which thank God there is not a dissenter" and "There is not any licensed or other meeting house in my Parish".

At the time of the famous and unique religious census carried out on 30th March 1851 the total attendance at services in the village that day for the Methodists was 189 and for the Church of England 125.

WESLEYAN CHAPELS

The first Wesleyan Chapel was erected in Chapel Lane in 1809 and closed in 1902. It was bought by Mr A Dooks in 1904 for £55 and subsequently used as a house. (An earlier tender had alarmed the trustees who thought that the would be purchaser intended to use it as a "dancing room"). At the time of the 1851 Religious Census Samuel Dooks was the steward.

The present chapel in Front Street was opened with a silver key on 31 October 1902 by Mrs Elsworth wife of the Rev. J Elsworth the secretary of the Hull District. Mr

Luke White MP for Buckrose Division rushed from the House of Commons at midnight to be present. He spoke of the Education Bill then being considered and the problems of religious instruction in schools. He looked forward to the time when a secular system of instruction was provided and when Parliament would say "We will have an efficient system of education that will enable a child to rise from the elementary class to the University". The Rev S Chadwick then held the audience spellbound while he discoursed on the Methodist Church's place in history.

The Driffield Times described the building as being in the Renaissance style. The design was by Gelder and Kitchen of Hull and Mr G T Eastwood of Middleton was the main contractor his tender being £615 5s 6d. The site on Garth Hill was given by Lord Londesbrough and among the subscriptions received was one of £10 from Colonel Brooksbank.

MIDDLETON WOLD CHAPEL

There was a chapel at Wold Cottages on the Market Weighton Road dating from 1847. This was formerly a barn which was given by Mr Hornby and converted into a chapel and rebuilt in 1902. At the time of the Religious Worship Census in 1851 John Hornby was the Chapel Steward and William Hornby was presented with a bible and hymn book on the occasion of his marriage in 1890. A letter of thanks was sent to Mrs Hornby on her departure in 1906 for hospitality given to preachers for many years.

The late Harry Richmond spent his boyhood at the Cottages. Harry's grandmother, Ruth Richmond who died in 1935, was the widow of Joseph Richmond who was employed as a shepherd for many years on wolds farms, acted as caretaker of the chapel she loved and was highly valued by the many preachers who visited it. During the Second World War it was well attended on occasions. The Driffield Times reported on one such in September 1943 of a good congregation at 6 pm. The service was conducted by Mr W H Blakeston of Driffield and the organist was Miss Syred of Middleton.

The property was subsequently converted into a private dwelling by Alec Bryans in the 1980s.

The Rev H Woodcock in his book "Piety among the Peasantry", published in 1889, being sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds states:

"Middleton is eight and a half miles from Driffield. For ages it has been the Wolds rendezvous for tramps, pedlars, cheap jacks, beggars and all kinds of waifs and strays of society – a fact which has not been without its influence on some of its inhabitants. Our early success was great. Long had the caverns of hell resounded over this demoralized village, but sixty years ago devils trembled as the guilty found pardon, the enslaved freed and the burdened rest".

He continues "For many years our preaching place was a stable-like structure past a wheelwright's shop up an uninviting back yard . . . . ."

"This village is one of the most irreligious on the Wolds. The people prize religion very highly as a mere ferry boat to convey them across the last river when every other mode of conveyance fails. They attend God's house but sit stolid and indifferent

under the most faithful sermons. One party has tried curates, sisters of mercy, cricket clubs and amateur theatre but these did not mend matters. Prodigious efforts have been put forth and much money spent in seeking to save the people, but with scant success so far as actual conversions go".

In 1881 two evangelists visited the village and received much cooperation from the Rector, Mr Blanchard, who felt that they might reach those in the community who had resisted his own best efforts. His curate was much less helpful however and being a man who walked about the village "as though he were peer and pope combined" considered the established church as the only true church and exhibited a lofty attitude towards dissenters. The Rector subsequently dismissed the curate.

PRIMITIVE METHODISM (broke from Wesleyans in 1812)

CHAPELS

The first chapel was situated in Front Street and dated from 1821. The 1851 Religious Census return was signed by Rev James Phillips of Westgate, Driffield. It closed in 1864 and was subsequently demolished. The other, situated in Station Road, was built in 1864-65 at a cost of £454 to a design by H Fippard, Architect of York. It was sold in 1937 and converted into two dwellings as the merger of different Methodist groups in 1932 rendered it redundant. (The sale was on condition that the proceeds were applied towards the cost of alteration to the ex Wesleyan Chapel and the balance appropriated to other trusts in the Circuit for decorations and repairs.)

In 1913 a visiting reporter of a local newspaper writing under the name "Paul Pry" stated that "the services at this chapel are badly attended indeed. The Sunday School which used to operate but for lack of scholars has been allowed to die out".

In his article he also states "the rising generations would be better employed in perpetuating and maintaining the various chapels bequeathed them by their fathers than in participating in this insane rush after pleasure and amusement which is lowering the tone of the national life, killing ambition, thrift and self advancement and is altogether retrograde in character".

While discussing Methodism reference should be made to William Petch (1826-1919), who although born in Goodmanham, lived in Middleton from 1852. At the time of the 1881 census he resided in Front Street and was described as a master joiner employing two men and a boy. He designed the Primitive Methodist Chapels in Little Driffield, Lockington, Lund, Watton, Beswick and Sledmere. In addition he was Chapel Steward and local preacher.

Later he became a member of the first Parish Council and was described in "Piety among the Peasantry":-

"Mr William Petch, who as a builder and architect has done much to improve our Wolds chapels is a man of good abilities and sterling character ..... even, steady, consistent, thorough and who has represented the circuit at district meetings and conference, has been our leading official here (Middleton) for many years. He and his wife entertain one of the preachers and for years their daughter played the harmonium at the chapel."

Over the years the Anglican and Methodist communities have co-existed in the village. The Rev E W Winter, Rector of Middleton 1957 – 1962 cooperated in services with the Methodists and in 1965 the Parish magazine reported the first united discussion group at St Andrews Cottage by arrangement with Dr & Mrs P Clements.