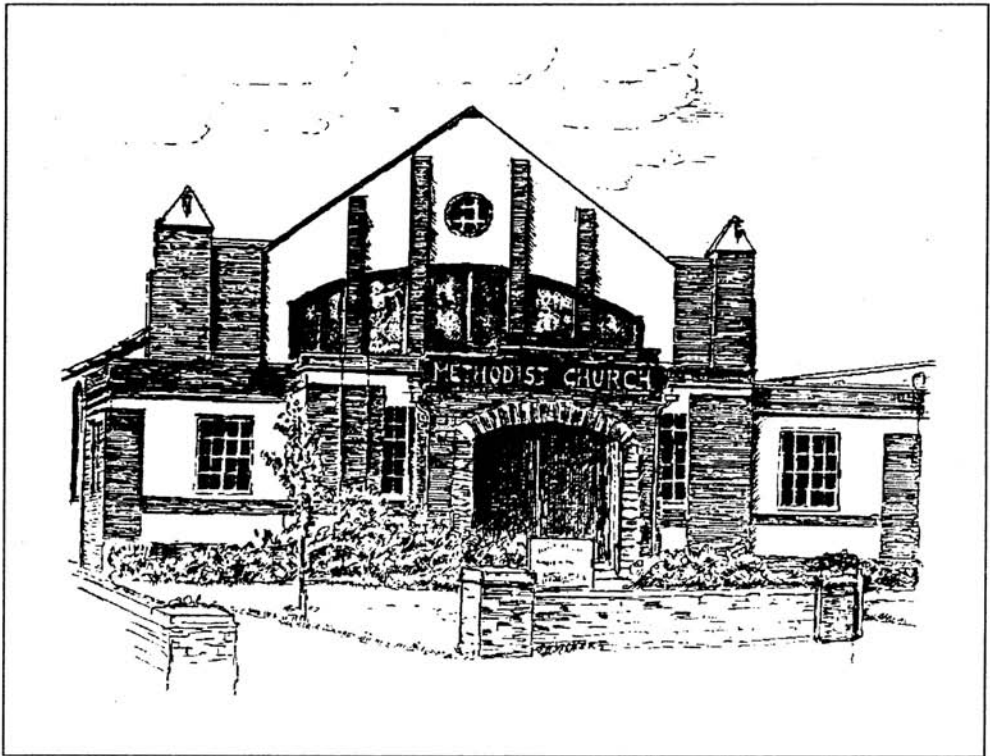


*The History of the Methodist Church  
in the Southend and Leigh Circuit*

# *Hadleigh*

*Chapel Lane, Hadleigh*



One in a Series  
by  
*George Thompson Brake*

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## *Author's Preface*

This account of the history of Hadleigh Methodist Church is one of the first to be published in a series which hopefully will embrace all the churches in the Southend and Leigh circuit. It is a huge undertaking, and I could not have embarked upon it without my past experience of historical research. Nor can it be accomplished without the ready co-operation of a great many people in the various churches.

Most of the records of the circuits which preceded the formation of the Southend and Leigh circuit in 1992, are deposited on loan in the Essex County Records Office at Southend Public Library. These are a valuable resource, and demonstrate the importance attached to our records by the guardians of our history.

Then I am particularly indebted to Jack Dobson who spent some time at the Public Records Office having photo-copied exceedingly interesting items. Leonard Robinson, who has so expertly edited the church magazine, provided me with back issues from which other material has been culled. Michael Tanner's knowledge of Old Leigh and district was very useful. Then I have prompted the memories of Nora Thompson, Ken Ross, Charles and Winnie Dunn, and Hilda Quarterman, all of whom have long and close associations with the church.

It has been a particular privilege to write this story, chiefly because Gwen and I have experienced at a deep level the friendship and love of many of the members. Some were a great strength and comfort to us in our sorrow when our grandson Jonathan died, and to them I dedicate this book. There are bound to have been omissions, but I hope nothing has been left out to rob this story of the facts or events.

George Thompson Brake

Hadleigh 1994.

# *A History of Hadleigh Methodist Church*

Even though the earliest part of the parish church of St. James-the-Less was reckoned to have been built about 1140, archaeological finds indicate that there was probably "an inhabited settlement since prehistoric times"<sup>1</sup>. Thus religious life, as generally understood, was late in establishing a place in the community. The name "Hadleigh" comes from a Saxon name for the village *Haedlege* which meant "a heath clearing". The historical background is well described by Hancock and Harvey in their book, *Hadleigh, An Essex Village*. The church is called St. James-the-Less, who became Bishop of Jerusalem, to distinguish him from St. James the Great who was one of the three principal apostles. The first rector was instituted in 1216 and the full list of 83 rectors is well-preserved. There are no records of dissenting congregations.

## ***Methodists First***

It is surprising to find that the Methodists were the first to be established among the main Non-Conformist bodies. However, before them came the "Peculiar People". This was a sect which grew out of the witness of James Banyard, one time Wesleyan Local Preacher, who after a religious experience in London in 1837, returned to his chapel at Rochford. When he announced he would hold a prayer meeting not initiated or approved by the Wesleyan Society his zeal was not encouraged. He left and began prayer meetings in his own cottage. It was out of these meetings that the "Peculiar People" emerged. There is an extended reference to this in the companion in this series on Rochford. It is mentioned here because from Rochford the movement spread to Daws Heath, but splits occurred in the

membership, and at one time two separate congregations worshipped in two chapels.

Although the parish church of St. James-the-Less has been the chief feature of village life since the 12th century, it was a very different kind of religious expression that made the biggest impact on Hadleigh. This was the Salvation Army, which in 1891 acquired by various stages 1,236 acres of land, including the castle, but in 1948 the ruins were handed over to the Ministry of Works. The purpose of the Salvation Army in acquiring so much land was to set up a "Home Farm" Colony to recover and reinstate in society young men who had "lost their way". The first 30 arrived in May 1891 and in six months the number had risen to 210. The development of this Colony is one of the major stories of achievement in the history of the Salvation Army. In the early years of the 20th century the population of the Colony numbered 500, including Salvation Army officers and members of the colony. And so the social impact on Hadleigh was very considerable. In 1891 the population of the village was 525; ten years later it had risen to over 1,300 people. The story of this work is well told by Hancock and Harvey and so there is no need to recount it here. A separate Corps was formed in Hadleigh village and a Temple was built in the High Street and opened in January 1939. The Salvation Army has retained a high profile in Hadleigh ever since. Some of its regular meetings, especially for senior citizens, attract members of other Christian congregations. Its band and songsters are in demand not only in the South East but beyond.

The Independent Free Church tradition is represented by two congregations in Hadleigh, the United

<sup>1</sup>. *Hadleigh, An Essex Village* - M. Hancock and S. Harvey, Philmore and Co., Chichester 1986 p1.

Reformed Church (formerly Congregational) and the Baptist Church. Congregationalism became established in Hadleigh in 1903 when a small hall was built near the corner of Rectory Road and Church Road. The first services were held on 23rd January 1904 and later that year a larger hall was erected. One notable record is that the present organist, Mrs. Irene Potter, became the organist in the 1940s and at the time of writing this book is still holding the position. She is the daughter of Mr. P. Witty who became Choirmaster in 1908. In 1972, in common with the majority of Congregational churches, Hadleigh entered the newly created United Reformed Church, which was a union of Congregational churches with the Presbyterian Church of England. In 1923 Baptists began meeting in the home of a member of West Leigh Baptist church, Mrs. W. Dann of St. Mark's Road. When a church was opened at Falbro Crescent on Good Friday 1926, it was part of a programme of extension initiated by Pastor White of West Leigh. The first minister was the Rev. Arnold Yates, who in 1929 had a joint pastorate with South Benfleet. Although not of the historic Free Church tradition, an Elim Pentecostal chapel opened in Oak Road in 1923. This congregation, too, had begun in a house. It has maintained a witness ever since, but generally has not been able to sustain a full time pastor. For the sake of completeness it should be mentioned that with the growth of population in the 1930s, the need for another Anglican Church became imperative. Although midway between the borders of Hadleigh and Leigh, the Church of St. Barnabas was built at the corner of Woodfield Road and Church Road to serve the increasingly populated area. It was opened and dedicated on 12th September 1961. The most recent addition to the Church life of Hadleigh was the opening of

the Roman Catholic Church of St. Thomas More in the High Street in 1982.

Initially ecumenical relations in Hadleigh were tentative. There was a reluctance to form what might be called "a full blown" Council of Churches. Instead, a Hadleigh Committee of Churches was set up. Various attempts over the years have been made to ensure that it was an effective instrument of ecumenical fellowship and action. There have been well supported ecumenical occasions, notably a Good Friday procession of witness, occasional house groups and more recently a Bible Event. Much has depended on the lead given by the ministers of the respective churches. What many hoped would be a step towards evident co-operation was the signing of a covenant during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 1994 by representatives of all the churches.

### *The Early Scene*

To set the religious life in Hadleigh in context we draw upon the comprehensive *The History of The Rochford Hundred*<sup>2</sup>, by Philip Benton. In the period with which we are concerned, Benton records that in 1835 the population of Hadleigh was 365; and by 1851 when there were one hundred houses it was 451. The place is not mentioned in the Domesday Book and was probably regarded as incorporated with Rayleigh. Its chief historical characteristic is the castle, which was built by Hubert de Burgh, who in 1231 had a licence from Henry III to build it. The castle was variously assigned during the period 1299 to 1443, but these details are not important for our present study. Of some interest to Methodists is Benton's reference to James Murrell, who lived in Hadleigh and was known as the cunning man. A shoemaker by trade, he augmented his income by

<sup>2</sup>. *The History of The Rochford Hundred* - Philip Benton, A. Harrington (1888).

fortune-telling and the casting of spells. He died in 1860 and so Benton himself was a contemporary. His description of Murrell's activities is one of the most colourful in his entire *The History of the Rochford Hundred*. He emerges as a kind of witch-doctor, consulted by people over a considerable area. One person asked him what religious persuasion he should adopt, and was recommended to join the Methodists, as that persuasion was more likely to obtain health for his soul, which course he immediately adopted.<sup>3</sup>

### *Early Records*

As in other instances, it was the Leigh circuit which took the initiative in providing a chapel at Hadleigh. It was at the Quarterly Meeting on the 8th January 1863 that it was "considered desirable that a new chapel should be erected at Hadleigh". It was decided to apply to Messrs Wells and Perry for a piece of ground. At the March meeting it was reported that Messrs Wells and Perry were in the process of making an application to the Lord of the Manor, "who is supposed to be the Duke of Manchester". In October there appeared to be need for a new initiative, because the minister and Mr. Henry Cater were appointed to make inquiries concerning a piece of ground for a new chapel. Two years later on the 28th March 1865 it was reported that a piece of freehold land had been purchased.

The earliest of the preserved records of Methodism in Hadleigh is a Trustees' minute book which begins with a record of a special meeting held on 25th February 1901 for the purpose of renewing the Trust. The minutes of this meeting are prefaced by two dates of considerable significance -

Constituted	29th July 1865
Renewed	25th February 1901

This was by no means the beginning of Methodism in Hadleigh. The generally accepted tradition is that in 1860 Methodists met in a house in the Old High Street. However, there is evidence that Methodism was well-established much earlier. In 1748 there were nine Methodist Divisions one of which covered London and the Home Counties. By 1765 Colchester figures in oversight and in 1808 a Mission to Essex was initiated from there. We know, too, from Certificates of Public worship issued to private houses in Southchurch in 1840, and the following two or more years, that the Wesleyan Methodist minister at Chelmsford had oversight of the area. Plans of the Maldon circuit show that as early as 1849 Hadleigh appeared on the plan for preaching appointments; as did Leigh, Rochford and Rayleigh. By 1854 a Leigh Circuit had been formed consisting of Leigh, Rochford, Benfleet and Hadleigh; and a plan exists for this circuit for August to October 1869. Since the first Chapel to be built in Hadleigh was in 1865, where did the Methodists meet from 1849 until then?

### *First Chapel*

It was in this chapel in Chapel Lane, which is still standing but used for other purposes, that the Methodists worshipped until 1929 when the present Church was opened, literally a stone's throw from the original one. In the years following the first World War, Hadleigh, like some other villages in the Rochford Hundred, began to take on the character of a small town. The leaders of the local Methodist community realised their church had to respond to the challenge and opportunity. Indeed it was during the War itself, on 28th January 1916, that the Trustees took an important step towards the building of a new Church. The circuit stewards promised to look into the matter of acquiring a suitable site. Meanwhile there were other issues to

<sup>3</sup>. *Op cit* - vol.1. p254

consider. In 1919 the secretary was instructed to write to the Gas Company with a view to lighting the Chapel with gas: surely a sign of progress! By 1923 the issue of Methodist Union was beginning to engage the mind of the Church. At a meeting of the Trustees on 3rd January 1923 the Superintendent Minister, the Rev. Richard Kennedy, reported to a meeting consisting of himself, the secretary, the treasurer and one Trustee, that the Conference had directed that the matter of Methodist Union should be raised. The voting was one against and one neutral. At a subsequent meeting on 27th January 1925 the attendance was similar. It was not surprising therefore that the Superintendent was asked to arrange for the renewal of the Trust. This was accomplished in 1927 when a new Trust of fifteen members was set up for a piece of land, purchased from the Salvation Army intended for a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Chapel Lane, Hadleigh, in the Leigh-on-Sea Circuit.

### *A New Church*

The first steps towards the building of a new church were taken at a Trustees' Meeting held at Leigh Wesley Church on 28th March 1929. The Rev. J. H. Maddock explained that until the point of "debt allowed" by the Connexional Chapel Committee was reached, the Circuit Church Building and Extension Fund Committee would finance the scheme during that period. The meeting approved the purchase of an additional piece of land from Mrs. Marks at the corner of Chapel Lane and London Road to secure access at the side of the proposed church. A discussion took place about various offers that had been made to prepare the plans and specifications of the new building. It was decided to accept the recommendation of Mr. Albert Stibbards that the offer of Mr. Jennings to prepare the plans for a sum not

exceeding £10 be accepted, together with Mr. Stibbards' offer to prepare the specifications free of charge.

The Trustees considered that the new church should seat not less than 300 people, that there should be a larger and smaller hall with moveable partition, and with vestry and other accommodation, all on the ground floor. The approximate cost was estimated at £3,500. On 18th April 1929 Mr. Jennings presented plans and after discussion he was asked to submit further plans giving better school accommodation. At a meeting on 2nd May 1929 revised plans were approved and a list of contractors drawn up to invite tenders. These were considered at a meeting on 27th May 1929 and that from Messrs. S. F. Johnson and Son for £3,300 was accepted. The offer of Mr A. Stibbards to provide twelve stones for the stonelaying ceremony was gratefully received. The proposed date for the opening of the church was 11th December 1929. When the Trustees met on 7th June 1929 they were told that the Connexional Chapel Committee were satisfied with the plans and gave permission for the work to proceed. The date of the opening was brought forward to 4th December when the Rev. F. L. Wiseman would preach the dedicatory sermon. The foundation stone laid by Mr. C. J. Williamson in the old Chapel on 14th April 1865 would be brought to be placed in the new chapel.

The *Southend Standard* of 27th June 1929 carried a full report of the stonelaying ceremony. Although it was an occasion of great celebration for the Methodists, it was also an ecumenical occasion. Regrettably the rector of the parish was suffering from lumbago, but he sent greetings. The other churches were all represented. At the Opening it was announced that this was the fourth Wesleyan Church in the Leigh circuit to be opened recently. Two doors were

opened, one at the side by Miss Nancy Cotgrove and the front door by Mrs. Leonard Ramus. The visiting preacher, as arranged, was the Rev. F. L. Wiseman. With the opening of the new chapel the old one was sold for £250 to the Acme Photo Company, of which Mr. James Attwood, a member of the church was proprietor.

### *Progressive work*

Even with the limited facilities at the old Chapel there was evidence of progressive work being done. In the Southend and Leigh Circuit magazine, news items from Hadleigh gave the impression of a lively fellowship. In an issue in 1908 it was reported that the New Year saw the institution of the Wesley Guild. "Steady work continues to be done", it was reported, "and we look for better times". "Good news comes from Hadleigh", was the report later in the year; "congregations are growing". The Young People's Society was a remarkable success. "Instead of some six or so attending the weeknight service, the attendance at the Young People's Society has sprung to thirty, and meetings have been bright and attractive". In an issue in 1910 it was reported that Sunday services, especially in the evening, were well attended, "extra chairs often have to be provided". In May 1910 a group appointed by the circuit to visit every church to discuss assessments came to Hadleigh. This was reported by the Hadleigh correspondent in the circuit magazine - "The visitors had been prepared not to expect much from this little cause. As soon as the meeting opened it was felt that we were in for a good time, and the beautiful spirit that prevailed the place had its effect upon both speakers and audience. The chairman asked for £15, the amount the Committee thought enough for Hadleigh to raise, seeing they had no debt and nothing to gain - But the meeting took this

matter in their own hands and made a firm offer of £24.10s.10d. with more to follow. Oh, that all might catch the fire that animated this little company".

The announcement during this period that a choir had been formed under the leadership of Mr. Charles Potter marked the beginning of a notable feature of the Church's life. It became customary for the choir to render oratorios and to share in circuit choir events. This aspect developed more prominently when the new church was built and the pipe organ was installed. A contribution from the Rev. G. Birstall about the worship at Hadleigh while the congregation still met in the old chapel sums up the liveliness of the church's life. He said that when he had come to take charge of the church seven months earlier, he could easily count the congregation and now as he looked at a full church he asked, "Where have all the people come from?" He also loved to hear his sermons punctuated with "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord". He was sure the Women's Own had had much to do with it. Women had been converted and had brought their husbands too.

### *Signs of Life*

Did these signs of life survive the transition to the new church when it was opened in 1929? The answer seemed to be less categorical than would have been wished, but there was no real despondency. In 1926 Hadleigh had been one of the churches to form the Leigh-on-Sea circuit. In the new circuit's magazine for June 1936 it was reported that "Congregations both morning and evening had improved". Young people were attending the morning service and "the increased attendance of young men at the Sunday afternoon study circle is encouraging". There was also reference to "our excellent choir". This was due in no small measure to the leadership of Mr. Jack Barber the choirmaster. Earlier

in his life he had been a Salvationist, which may partly account for his enthusiasm for singing. He was also the captain of the Boys' Brigade. In the 1930s the choir at Hadleigh numbered 30 to 40 members and regularly sang oratorios at Easter, Harvest and Christmas. On two occasions it won awards at the Leigh Music Festival. The original organist was Ted Cox, who also demonstrated his prowess on the church tennis courts at Benfleet Road. He was briefly followed by Keith Cullup, then Mrs. Penny. The most recent organist was Ciceley Goodwin who had two spells before retiring in 1993. Mr. Barber died somewhat prematurely in his early sixties. He was succeeded by Gerald Porter, whose conducting at choir practices was so exuberant that he sometimes stripped off his vest. Nevertheless, there was a note of caution.

"But we mourn that so many people continue in their indifference to the claims of Divine Worship", commented the magazine contributor, "and therefore we appeal to all interested in the work of the kingdom to attend the services regularly, to use every effort to persuade their neighbours to join us in worship and above all to pray for the people of the church and for a revival of true religion." When the Annual Society meeting was held in April 1937 the Rev. Walter Charlesworth read the membership roll and reported that during the year there had been one death, five removals and eleven new members received, making a total of 77. The figures for the following year were encouraging, as ten new members had been received and the total was 82 on the roll. The concern of the church for evangelism was shown when Mr. Tom Thompson of Redcar, Yorkshire, was invited to conduct a twelve-days mission in the Spring of 1938. He was announced as a preaching, singing and

musical evangelist. He had been to Hadleigh before but on this occasion he brought his daughter with him to sing. Each night the congregations grew and a number responded to an appeal to follow Christ. Besides visiting the Sunday School and other church organisations, he met people in the streets and invited them to the meetings. On the Sunday following the mission thirteen young men and women were received into the membership of the church of whom Ken Ross and Charles Dunn were two and are still members today.

### *Search for a site*

It was a sign of the times that when the church began to think seriously about an extension to the premises, there was also a plea for a car park. Mr. Horace Ling, the Trustees' Meeting secretary, told a meeting on 4th October 1944 that they should take the long view. Land should first be secured for future development. At this meeting drawings were shown by Mr. Lukin of how an extension could be added to the existing schoolroom. Mr. Ling proposed that before further consideration was given to a particular scheme, the Salvation Army, the owners of the property at the side of the church should be approached with a view to the purchase of a portion of land. This was agreed. At a meeting on 8th February 1946 further reference was made to this matter. A letter from the Salvation Army was read, offering a piece of land adjoining the church for the sum of £500. The Superintendent Minister, the Rev. Greville P. Lewis, said he thought the Chapel Committee would be very reluctant to approve this expenditure unless a very necessitous and urgent case could be presented. It was agreed to take measurements and ascertain how a car park and tennis court could be provided. Discussions took place from time to time

and then at a meeting on 6th February 1948 it was reported that a letter had been received from the Salvation Army stating that in view of the uncertainty of the future development of land at Hadleigh, it was not thought wise at present to dispose of it. The Trustees decided to ask the Salvation Army to keep the matter open. However, on 23rd April 1948 it was reported that owing to the Essex County Council's proposal for a new road, the Salvation Army declined to negotiate the sale or rental of the land. A small map of the proposed road was affixed to the Trustees' minute book. It shows how the road would have bisected Chapel Lane and crossed diagonally the Recreation Ground opposite the Chapel, to join the A13 to the east of Victoria House Corner. In view of this possible development the hesitancy of the Salvation Army to dispose of a piece of land in that area was understandable. A letter from the Ministry of Town and Country Planning dated 13th July 1949 formally informed the Trustees that the land being sought was subject to Section 85 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. This could have restricted the ease with which the land might otherwise have been obtained. The plan to build the road was clearly abandoned, because houses have since been built in Chapel Lane and Florence Gardens in the path of the proposed road.

The question of providing a car park came up again in 1952, when concern was expressed about the hazard of parking outside the Church. A further approach was made to the Salvation Army and a month later it was reported that the Governor of the Salvation Army Colony had said the request would receive his sympathetic consideration. In December 1952 the trustees learned that despite correspondence with the Salvation Army authorities there had been no progress. Five

years later, on 22nd May 1957, the secretary reported on the prolonged negotiations with the Property Department of the Salvation Army, and that an ultimatum had been received from Colonel L. E. Russell and Mr. Pittam of Kemsley Limited, the Salvation Army surveyors, saying that if the Church was not prepared to pay the price demanded, the whole site would be put up for auction in June, and the Church would have to negotiate with the purchasers. After further discussion the Trustees decided to purchase a triangular piece of land having a frontage of 100ft to Chapel Lane. It was agreed to pay 10% deposit forthwith and proceed with the purchase of the land for £500. It was not until 20th September 1958 that the trustees were informed that the Salvation Army had consented to the sale.

### *A new Trust*

A new Trust was formed on 30th January 1959 and at a meeting on 12th May 1959 the Superintendent Minister, the Rev. Tom Sutcliffe reminded the new Trustees of their privileges and responsibilities. He said the former Trustees had purchased the land and that it was the privilege of the new ones to further the plans which had been prepared for the building of the new Youth Hall. The estimated cost was £6,000 to £7,000, and grants for half the amount would be forthcoming if the Church did its part. In September 1959 the minister, the Rev. Harry Allen, told the Trustees that plans for the new hall had been approved by the Chapel Committee, but that work could not commence until the sum of £2,000 had been raised by the local church and the amount of the Grants been agreed. On 6th December 1960 it was reported that the sum of £5,000 was now available, made up of £2,000 from the Rank Trust, £1,000 from the London Mission and Chapel Committee and £2,000 raised by the Church. The crucial decision to implement the scheme

was taken on 21st April 1961. The original estimate of the architect, Mr. Kenneth Cheeseman, had been £9,200, but this had been revised to £7,000 or £7,300. The Trustees accepted the revised estimate and instructed Messrs. Wiggins, the contractors, to proceed as soon as possible. For the stone-laying ceremony in September 1961 Mr. A. Stibbards had donated twenty stones. The new Youth Hall was opened on 10th March 1962.

## *Perennials*

There were a number of issues which could be described as "perennials" in the sense that they never seemed to go away permanently. One of the most persistent and important was the organ. There had been problems in the old chapel and the original instrument in the new chapel was not satisfactory. The problem seemed to have been solved in 1949 when the Rev. Richard Boggis told the Hadleigh Trustees that the Highlands Church had declined the opportunity to purchase an organ from Newton Methodist Church in Manchester. Before refusing the opportunity, he wondered whether it would be a suitable organ for Hadleigh. The specifications were 18 to 19 stops, hand-blown, pipes 14' and 6' high, space required 10' by 10', 60 years old and in good playing condition. It was being offered for £60. The opinion of an expert was given to the trustees - "From the specification, the materials alone are worth the money. The offer is in the nature of a gift." It was estimated that the cost of dismantling and re-erecting would not exceed £100. It was decided unanimously to purchase the organ. The eventual cost, including a blower, was £140. The old pipe organ was offered to the Benfleet Church for £20.

After some years the organ showed signs of needing major repair, especially the pedal-board. At a Trustees' meeting on 28th

October 1960, the issue had to be faced whether to spend money on the organ or sell it and purchase an electronic instrument. The opinion which prevailed was not to sell it, or repair it, but to have it virtually rebuilt. Mr. Gordon Crawford and Mr. Edward Crawford offered an interest-free loan of £500 for a period of two years to assist with the cost. In May the following year it was decided to accept the quotation from Messrs. Noterman, which included the provision of a detached console. To assist the financing of the project Mr. W. R. R. Bridge announced his intention of paying for the cost of the console. Mr. Bridge could be described genuinely as a "tower of strength" in the Church. He lived at Cross Farm, where one of his employees was "Charlie" Dunn whose memory still provides anecdotes about "the old days". Mr. Bridge also founded the Leigh Building Supply Company, which meant that the maintenance of the property was welcomed by him and generously provided. Ken Ross and others remember his lorries being loaded with children and young people for outings to Maldon and elsewhere. He was a keen bowler and with the Rev. Harry Allen, one time minister of Highlands and Hadleigh, won the Southend Open Pairs Tournament. There were other promised gifts, so that a decision was taken to instruct Messrs. Noterman to proceed with the work immediately, on the understanding that it would commence in January 1964 and be completed by the Easter. By July 1966 the Trustees were losing patience with Noterman; the organ had not been completed in a satisfactory manner. When it had been completed the Trustees were far from satisfied with the on-going maintenance, and in 1973 the contract was taken from Noterman and put in the hands of Messrs. Martin Cross.

Of less significance in some ways were frequent discussions about notice boards,

**allocation** of keys, behaviour of children in respect of property, changes in caretaking, inadequate heating, trouble with flat roofs and security of the premises especially after the theft of the safe from the vestry in 1975. The anxiety about car parking was relieved when a church car park was provided. With the coming into force of the Methodist Church Act 1976 the function of local Trustees ceased. In future Church Councils took over the responsibilities hitherto exercised by the Leaders' Meetings and the Trustees' Meetings.

### *The real work of the Church*

Since until that date the Trustees and Leaders had quite separate functions, to complete an account of the life of the Church it is necessary to research the minutes of the Leaders' meetings over the same period. Fortunately the Leaders' Meeting minutes have been preserved from 1912, only eleven years later than those of the Trustees. It is from these minutes that we can trace the development of what is sometimes called "the real work of the Church". At one of the first meetings recorded, that is for 27th January 1914, the Rev. J. S. Hollingworth introduced the subject of an eight days' mission and it was agreed that this should take place from 15th to 22nd February. Arrangements were made concerning speakers and advertising. Clearly there was a concern for the church to be seen as taking the Gospel to the people, for on 13th May 1914 the Leaders unanimously agreed that a request be made to the Circuit for one or two camp meetings to be held during the summer, and that the Rev. J. S. Hollingworth and the secretary arrange one for Sunday 7th June or other convenient date. With young people in mind a Leaders' Meeting in September 1914 decided to call the congregation together the following week to discuss a proposal for creating a Young People's Society. A reminder that the church

was being affected by the first world war was the decision to prepare a "Roll of Honour" of those who had "joined the colours". The Leaders' Meeting suggested this should be unveiled on 25th September 1917.

The War over, an Annual Society Meeting followed by a Leaders' Meeting was held on 23rd January 1919. The minister at that time who presided was the Rev. C. J. Wright. With members returning home, he suggested that a Society Class should be recommenced and he nominated Mr. Porter as leader, who agreed to act as deputy until Mr. Chislett returned to take up office. It was agreed to hold the Class every alternate Wednesday in conjunction with the fortnightly Church service. An approach was to be made to Leigh for co-operation with Sunday services and the Sunday School, and to join with Hadleigh friends in a social gathering. It appears from the Minute Book that no further Annual Society Meeting was held until 6th January 1926 and this was followed by a Leaders' Meeting. The Rev. J. H. Maddock read the membership roll consisting of twenty five members, also several names of people who had come into membership recently, including three who were added during the meeting. Miss Stibbards, whose name appears constantly in the minutes of both the Trustees' and Leaders' Meetings, gave what was described as a very encouraging report about the Sunday School. There were reports also about the Junior Guild and Women's Own. Mr. Maddock said that the Hadleigh part of the circuit was doing splendidly and the spiritual tone was encouraging. In the minutes of a Leaders' Meeting on 17th November 1926 there was this cryptic minute - "The meeting requested that the Rev. Folley (the local minister) ask Rev. Maddock to send "strong men" to Hadleigh for Sunday evening services".

## *Membership and growth*

At the Annual Society Meeting in 1927 the Rev. J. H. Maddock read the membership roll and reported an increase of fourteen members compared with the previous year. "The meeting throughout was full of inspiration and the general feeling, that through the year 1927 God will lead us on to higher and fuller service", concluded the Minutes. An interesting feature of a Leaders' Meeting on 19th December 1929 was a decision to unite with the Baptist Church for Christmas morning service and to invite members of the Baptist and Congregational churches to join in the Watchnight Service. The optimistic note struck at the Annual Society Meeting in 1927 was not misplaced it seems. At a Leaders' Meeting on 20th January 1931 a Band of Hope was formed and consent given for the formation of Boys and Girls Brigades; there had also been increases in Sunday School attendance, especially in the morning and two Junior classes had been formed. Later a Life Boys Company was formed. The Brigades were active until the second World War, which with the blackout made evening activities difficult, and which created a vacuum of leadership. After the War Scouts and Guides were adopted and have remained in place ever since. The Leaders' Meeting on 28th July 1932 gave the superintendent, the Rev. J. H. Maddock, the opportunity to speak about the Uniting Conference and the need for increased zeal. He mentioned especially the Circuit Week of Prayer arranged for the beginning of the first Connexional year of the United Church. In July 1934 it was agreed to purchase copies of the new hymnbook. It was estimated that 100 copies at 2s. 6d. and 50 copies at 1s. 0d. would be needed for Congregational use, 13 at 7s. 6d. and 15 at 6s. 0d. for Choir use. Members would be asked to donate copies.

Evidence that the Church was anxious to get its priorities right was the prominence given in a Leaders' Meeting on 26th September 1936 to the recently adopted statement on "Corporate Prayer" by the Conference. A copy of the statement was attached to the minutes. At the meeting this was read by the Rev. W. Charlesworth. After discussion of the statement, it was decided to hold a prayer meeting at 6 p.m. every Sunday in the young men's room at the front of the Church, "and should this room prove to be too small, the lower end of the schoolroom". Mr. Hughes agreed to prepare a Plan showing names of all members who wished to lead the meeting. It is perhaps too much to infer that the increase in membership during the six-year ministry to date of Mr. Charlesworth was a direct result of the call to prayer. Nevertheless, at the Annual Society meeting on 9th February 1938 it was reported that there were 82 members on the roll and 41 names had been added during Mr. Charlesworth's ministry.

## *Weeding Out*

Seventeen years later the question of membership came up at a Leaders' Meeting on 27th September 1955. The then minister, the Rev. Garfield Wade said he had carried out a quick survey and it was decided to call a meeting of the class leaders "with a view to weeding out the membership, bearing in mind a rather large influx of new members which of course would have a direct bearing on the assessment". This prompts the comment that all the time everything changes but remains the same! It is interesting to compare the minutes of the meeting on 27th September with those of a meeting on 14th December of the same year. These recorded - "The Rev. Wade reported that after a comprehensive survey of our membership roll, which showed one or two 'ceased to meet', and having received several transfers from other circuits etc. we

now have returned a total of 112 adults and 4 juniors." From the minutes of the Annual Society Meeting in 1956 there was evidence of buoyancy in the life of the Church. The minister, Garfield Wade, told of "the wonderful spirit of fellowship and unity" in the Fellowship meeting. "Quality and attendance had improved and were a source of real strength". Mr. James Attwood was thanked for his leadership.

A similar sentiment was expressed when Mr. Ken Ross gave a Stewards' report. He spoke of the importance of the Envelope scheme of regular giving which had helped to increase collections to £9 per week. Speaking about the Church membership Mr. Wade said there were 112 full members and four juniors, with six new members to be added in the next quarter. There was in his opinion "No dead wood".

### *Trends identified*

Surveying the life of the Church from the standpoint of the Leaders' Meetings various trends can be identified, but the pattern does not materially change. If church membership is taken as a kind of barometer, then the rise and fall remains within a small band. Once the membership had risen above one hundred after the inevitable decline during the years of the second World War, it remained at that level, never rising much above 130 and never declining below 110.

Spot checks on the number of Sunday school scholars indicates greater fluctuation than in Church membership, but there are no clear reasons for it. In 1960 the Annual Society Meeting learned that the Primary was "flourishing", the Seniors were "doing well" but in the Junior School there were only 20 scholars. Five years later the overall figure given was 107 with an average attendance of 80; but more teachers were needed.

### *Encouraging Youth Work*

In this same period there was one encouraging feature in the Youth Work and this was the Youth Club, led at one time by Victor Clough, Douglas Howard and Horace Ling. In 1960 the leader was Bernard Wallace, who told the Annual Society Meeting that it was desirable to limit the membership to the manageable figure of 50. He was succeeded by Jack Phillippo, who reported that there was a membership of 60 to 70 with an average attendance of 50. It was a difficult area in which to work and he called for the support of the Church. Laurie Buck became assistant Youth Club leader and eventually succeeded Jack Phillippo. In November 1967 the Club was closed so that it could be restarted in January and "recognised as a direct responsibility of the Church Youth Council". It was re-opened but with a restricted membership. A year later at a Leaders' Meeting in September 1968, Laurie Buck said that it had not worked with a restricted membership as it had been planned. However, he was willing to try again.

What did succeed was the Men's Forum which had over 200 members. Of course most of the members were retired. In fact, it was remarked that the Men's Forums at Highlands, Hadleigh and other churches in the area were the ultimate goal of retirement to which men aspired. There was a strong Sisterhood too at Hadleigh which brought women into association with the Church who might not have been but for that contact. A growing feature of the 1950s and 1960s were Young Wives' clubs. Every Church had one! There was one at Hadleigh, but it was called Chapel Lane Young Wives' Club, presumably to ensure it was not too closely associated with the Church. This was borne out by a reference in the Leaders' Meeting minutes for 7th March 1958. "Considerable discussion took

place over the unhappy situation of the Young Wives' Club. Their officers not all being church members caused their organisation to be divorced from the Church. Mr. Allen (the minister) would like an infiltration of our own young women into the club to draw the club closer". He said they were ready to help with the bazaar or anniversary, but when invited to have a Young Wives' Sunday, their President was "not having any". In 1962 there was another reference which seemed to indicate that a closer relationship had been achieved.

### *Priorities for growth*

What is plain from the minutes of the Leaders' Meeting is that the vital matter of Church membership was given priority, both in preparing people for it and exercising pastoral care. There were indications in the 1960s that the Classes met and there were discussions at Leaders' Meetings about the content of these meetings. There seemed to be a similar awareness of such priorities in other Churches in the circuit. Hadleigh, in common with churches in similar situations, had shown signs of growth. There were calls for increasing the circuit staff to ensure that the growth was consolidated. In 1962 there were five ministers. At that time Highlands and Hadleigh were linked under one minister. By 1967 the staff had increased to six and Hadleigh and Thundersley were linked under the pastoral care of a minister living at Vicarage Hill, Thundersley. It was not an appropriate location for either Church. In 1970 it was decided that a more appropriate place for the minister to live would be Hadleigh. And so, in 1971 a property at 61, Westwood Gardens, Hadleigh was purchased with the intention of enlarging it. At that time also, Canvey Island, instead of Thundersley was linked with Hadleigh for pastoral oversight. This

appointment was filled initially for two brief periods by probationers. Thundersley was transferred to the care of the minister at Benfleet. The new arrangement worked well. With the Benfleet manse being located quite near to the Thundersley Church the relationship was close and helpful. It worked well for Hadleigh and Canvey Island between which road communication was direct.

The ministry of the Rev. Ian Field was particularly fruitful. Hadleigh grew under his leadership and pastoral care, especially among the young couples of his own age, though the older members loved him too! When in 1979 he was succeeded by Robin Mann, Canvey Island became another Church under the care of the Benfleet minister, and Belfairs was linked with Hadleigh. Robin Mann's ministry introduced a dimension of spiritual depth, which was a valuable development of the ministry of his predecessor. This arrangement continued until 1986, when circuit rearrangement led to the appointment of an active supernumary to Hadleigh, which was filled by the author of this series. Belfairs was linked with Leigh Wesley. In 1993 with the appointment of the Rev. Cynthia Hardiman, Rochford was linked with Hadleigh in another slight circuit rearrangement. It was during the Superintendency of the Rev. Malcolm Clark in the 1980s that the circuit adopted the concept of trying to secure a pastoral focus in every church. This led to the appointment of some lay pastoral assistants. These were paid appointments at Belfairs, Hockley and Canvey Island. At Hadleigh, Dr. Peter Hawker, a G.P. and well-equipped for pastoral work, joined in a partnership ministry. This was an honorary appointment. To ensure there were defined boundaries of work, he became responsible for following up marriages and baptisms

and giving counselling and advice to people with special needs.

### *No dramatic change*

It is probably true to make the judgement that certainly for the period beginning with the purchase of the manse in Hadleigh, the nature of the life and work of this church has not seen dramatic change. What changes there have been related to some of the auxiliary activities. For instance the Men's Forum ceased and the Young Wives Club became the Wives Club. The Classes continue to meet. The Guild remains as strong numerically and in programme content as ever. The uniformed organisations, especially the Guides and Brownies, are thriving; and although not strictly a church based organisation the St. John Cadet group ranks perhaps higher than any other in Essex. The secret has been in the leadership, especially of Joy Hardwick, who has credited her husband Bill with the kind of support without which her own work would have been impossible. The Cubs have been a lively group and the Scouts have fluctuated but survived.

The question Hadleigh and almost every other church in the circuit and beyond has no answer to is - what has happened to the Sunday School? The question has to be posed in relation to churches of all denominations. The meaningless remark in response to concern is - "The children are the church of tomorrow". In fact, they are the Church of today. This author is entitled to comment that a child's relationship with the Church begins at Baptism. It has to be accepted that many parents will not understand all that the sacrament implies, but the more serious question is - does the church? It is a long process between baptism and confirmation. Hadleigh has been particularly fortunate in its Baptismal Roll secretaries, certainly in recent years. Flossie Sutton visited the parents and so

does Mavis Malin. One important adjunct to the pastoral care of families with children who have been baptised is the Mums and Toddlers Club. This was set up in 1975 by Pat Mullender and Margaret Saunders, to provide mothers and their little children with an opportunity to meet and give space for youngsters to "let themselves go". When Margaret Saunders moved away, Carol Wallace took her place and then acted as leader for some fifteen years until 1993. She handed over to Mavis Malin, who had been assisting and had the advantage of being Baptismal Roll secretary. Baptism is the theological and pastoral point at which the renewal of the Church might begin, not only at Hadleigh but everywhere else.

One of the least publicised, and therefore one of the least known projects largely initiated by members of Hadleigh Methodist Church, was the local expression of the Guideposts Trust. Indeed, the real initiative was taken by Jack Phillippo who since he came down from the north about thirty years ago, has been making an important contribution not only to the local church in which he served as Youth Club leader and steward, but in the circuit as a Local Preacher and as a Circuit Steward. With the encouragement of the minister, the Rev. Robin Mann, he set up a local volunteer group to work towards providing a house for people seeking rehabilitation after a period in a psychiatric hospital. The organisation, which is now nationwide, became a registered charity in 1972. Eventually in 1983 a property was acquired at Beech Road, Hadleigh to accommodate four or five residents. Their support came from the DSS, but they retained their independence by paying their rent. This required someone of great sensitivity to be the treasurer. In Cyril Cruess, Hadleigh Methodist Church supplied such a man. It was disappointing that after the

organisation became registered as a Housing Association, an element of bureaucracy made it difficult for Jack Phillippo to exercise the kind of pastoral role which induced the sort of care that was an expression of his Christian experience. He was marginalised, as were others who worked with him, and he left saddened to break his ties with a work which almost certainly would not have begun without him.

### *The Church of today*

The Church of today, which has the call to "exercise the whole ministry of Christ where it is" as Standing Order 600 affirms, is also part of the history of Methodism in Hadleigh. As various sources about the past have had to be researched for this book, so in years to come the church of today will be studied in the context of history. What kind of church is it that will form part of that history? In membership terms, there are 130, gathered into eight Classes, all of which meet, some on a more regular basis than others. These are seen as an important element in the Church's life, engendering closer fellowship than is possible at Sunday worship. However, the introduction of tea or coffee after the monthly morning parade service has introduced people, who might otherwise have remained on the fringe, to personal contact with Church members. This has added a dimension to a Church life that has always been characterised by friendship. No doubt the regular visitation not only by the minister and the class leaders, but by couples who have a natural gift for this ministry has been vastly important. Few Methodists coming into the area to live, settle in any other church and they quickly feel part of its life. The Wesley Guild provides for them a valuable fellowship and its strength encourages them to believe that the Church is alive. Throughout the Church, with its various

component organisations, there is a sense of cohesion and unity.

### *Who are these people?*

Who are these people who form the Methodist Church in Hadleigh? Certainly the character has changed since the days when Methodists worshipped in the old chapel down the lane. And indeed from the early days of the new Church. Among the 130 members there are retired accountants and bank managers, active and retired school teachers, retired managers or proprietors in retail trade, a retired engineer, a retired company director of a brickworks, a master bricklayer, a retired cowman, a retired area manager of a major dairy, a police officer, nurses, a retired florist, a finance consultant, a retired music teacher, a lecturer in further education, a secretary in the City, a welfare officer in local government, a retired company director of a saw doctor firm, several housewives with employment behind them, a Post master, a nurse in care of the elderly, proprietors of a rest home for the elderly, a retired higher grade station master, a VAT executive, a retired water works employee, a sixth form college tutor, a teacher at a Women's high security prison, a manager in aircraft component manufacture, and a retired bank messenger. Amongst these are people with special talents, such as music, both playing and singing, acting, painting, needlework, gardening, floral art, cooking, woodwork, metal work, poetry, and authorship. There are four fully accredited Local Preachers, and others who have gifts of communicating the faith in other ways. Here then is a Church reflecting in its membership the infinite variety of human life and experience. Real people, one might say.

Real people are not perfect, though it might so far seem to be implied in these pages. In any community, especially where

personal relationships become close, there are bound to be misunderstandings. Hopefully they can not only be restrained, but can lead to deeper mutual trust. A few people, though not with long associations with the Church at Hadleigh, have felt compelled to leave and find fellowship elsewhere. What does emerge is a sense of continuity. Over the years there have been changes of procedure and emphasis, but the basic tradition has remained intact. If we are humble enough to accept the fact that we are trustees of an inheritance, it will save us from the arrogance that initiates change without reference to history. One of the objects of this exercise in plotting our past is to ensure that we do not stray too far from our foundations.

Before his death in 1994, Laurie Gage, a Local Preacher and much more, in the Southend and Leigh Circuit, discussed with the Rev. George Thompson Brake the importance of producing a history of Methodism in the Southend and Leigh area. Laurie Gage was a second-hand religious book-seller, with a business that extended worldwide. His knowledge of Methodism was phenomenal. He had a close relationship with George Thompson Brake, who, for his major historical works, including *Policy and Politics in British Methodism 1932 to 1982*, was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. In planning this history it was decided to produce it in a series, which at this point in time, 1994, is an on-going exercise.