

The History of Halstead Methodist Church



New Street, Halstead, Essex CO9 1DB

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Part of the Chelmsford Methodist Circuit

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The **Methodist** Church 

Last year, 2024, we celebrated our church's 150th anniversary. But do we know the full history of Methodism in Halstead? By examining our church archives, I can provide a brief history of our 150 years here.

There is no record of John Wesley visiting Halstead but it is possible that he at least passed through the town on his many journeys through East Anglia as there are references in his Journal of having made at least five visits to Braintree.

John Wesley (1703-1791) , the founder of Methodism, preached in Braintree, though he primarily resided and was buried in London. He is best known for his missionary work and preaching throughout the country. He travelled extensively throughout England and beyond, preaching and spreading his message.

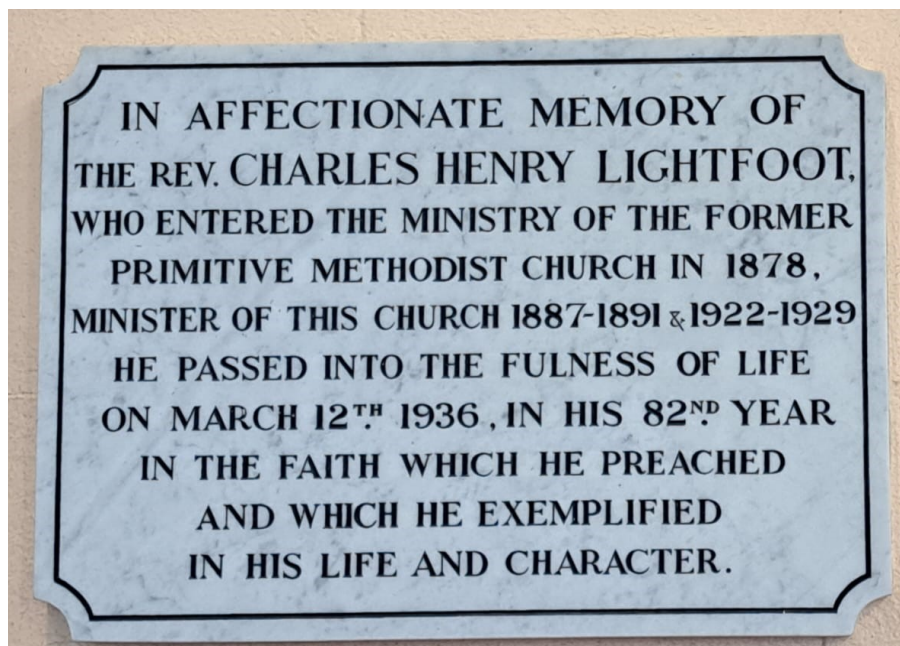


The Schedules of the Colchester Circuit for the year 1837 show that at that time in Halstead there was a Society of nineteen members under the pastoral care of a Brother Sherring. On the 6th January 1842 an application for a licence to worship was made by the Wesleyan Minister at Colchester and a licence was issued on the 12th January. This related to services being held in a part of a house in Hedingham Lane. Of this, the Superintendent of the Colchester Circuit reported that they had a poor but sincere little society in that place. However, premises had been bought for a chapel but they had not yet taken possession of the land and matters regarding this were in hand. The membership at that time in 1845 was twenty-three but by the mid-summer of that year, it had reduced to only three with no cause for this sudden collapse being recorded!

Primitive Methodism

In 1859 visits were made by members of the Chelmsford Mission of the Primitive Methodist Church but it was not possible to provide a preacher and in 1861 Halstead was transferred to the Maldon Mission Circuit where services were held in a hired room. In 1863 meetings were transferred to a barn rented for the purpose and registered as a place of worship on the 21.12.1863 by Joseph Sheale, the Methodist Minister at Braintree. The barn became known as The Preaching House, Trinity Road, Halstead.

The society became a part of the Braintree and Halstead Mission Circuit in December 1866 and on the 21.05.1871 the trustees of the present church paid £91.5.0d to purchase a piece of ground at the rear of a dwelling belonging to a **Thomas Bell in New Street, and the chapel was built there in 1874 by Alfred Brown of Braintree.**



An erection stone was set into the front wall inscribed "**PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHURCH 1874**" and in later years the word Primitive was filled in with cement. However, on close examination this word is still distinguishable.

There is no official record of the date of the opening but this probably took place on the 2nd April 1875 according to the certificate of worship. The total cost of the Chapel, including the site was £674.5.5d. It was necessary to obtain a loan in order to complete payment, the debt not being paid until 1906 and a novel way of raising money was the sale of "Trays of Teas"

The certificate of solemnization of marriage is dated 07.08.1899 and the Methodist Model Deed was adopted on 21.03.1951.

From Circuit to Circuit.

In its early days the Methodist Society at Halstead was shifted from one Circuit to another. It belonged to the Braintree and Great Bardfield Mission Circuit until 18th June 1878 when the circuit was divided and the Society became part of the Halstead & Sudbury (Suffolk) Mission Circuit. Then in 1920 the Braintree, Bardfield & Halstead Mission Circuit was formed into a “branch” section of the Chelmsford Primitive Methodist Circuit. A complete amalgamation with the Chelmsford Primitive Methodist Circuit took place in 1926.

Although the Methodist Church Union Act of 1929 brought together the Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist Churches in 1932, local union did not take effect until the 1st September 1937. Halstead then became a society in the Chelmsford Methodist Circuit of the London North-East District.



A Choir was formed at the Church in 1911 which was continued until at least 1930. Originally the singing was accompanied by a harmonium – of which the church owned three, in various states of musical viability!

In 1960 it was decided to purchase a pipe organ that had become available from Adams, a local firm of brewers. The organ had been used in a private chapel in the grounds adjoining the brewery and was purchased for £100 with a further £350 spent on its removal and renovation which included the fitting of an electric blower.

A dedication took place on the 27th October 1961 when a recital was given by Mr. Hedley Norfolk, then organist and choir master of the Braintree Methodist Church. David and Nancy Shearmur organised efforts to raise the £450 total cost and one notable event was a pancake race through the Causeway followed by a sale in Courtauld's factory schoolroom.

A Jubilee of the church was celebrated during 1925 and commemorated by the installation of underfloor gas radiators. Electric lighting was installed in 1927 and in 1960 overhead electric heaters were fitted instead of the coke stove which had replaced the gas radiators. Around this time the Ladies Sewing Meeting raised funds for the purchase of a piano.

Improvements to the Schoolroom and also the re-design of the interior of the Church was undertaken 1962-63 including an ambitious building of a kitchen and cloakroom at a cost of £1,300. The wooden floor of the church was completely renewed in order to eliminate dry rot and woodworm and the coping stones on the front gable end of the church had to be removed.

The timbered schoolroom floor was in such a bad condition that it had to be replaced by a solid concrete floor. The concrete was delivered ready mixed and conveyed in wheelbarrows through the Church!

When the work was finished, none of the keys to the building could be found; last seen on the back of the schoolroom door; it could only be assumed they had fallen off and were now buried in inches of concrete never to be seen again!

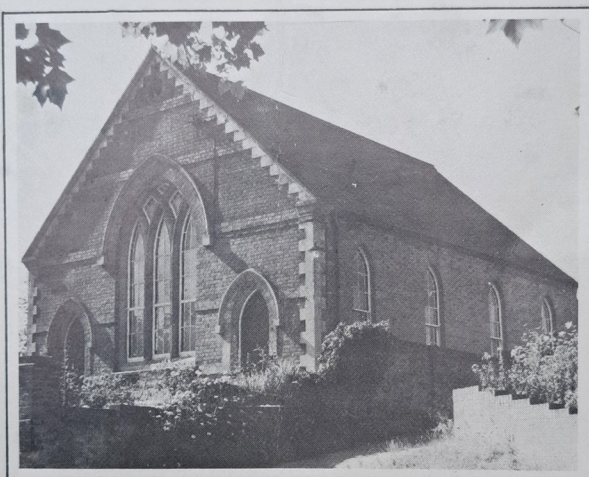
The Church was originally approached by a rather steep and narrow flight of steps which caused difficulties, particularly for bridal couples. It was

decided to replace these steps when a wedding was imminent and the time was unfortunately underestimated.

Three days before the wedding the Church could only be approached by climbing over a heap of earth! Several members, including the bride's father, worked frantically to help bring some order out of chaos, and in the end the work was completed just in time to avoid the wedding party uniquely dressed in top hats and gum boots!

Then the church floor was replaced and a hedgehog was found in a deep sleep under the joists. It was placed in a cardboard box in the shed, where it slept for a further three months. It is not sure whose sermon induced this long sleep!

**THE METHODIST CHURCH
NEW STREET
HALSTEAD**

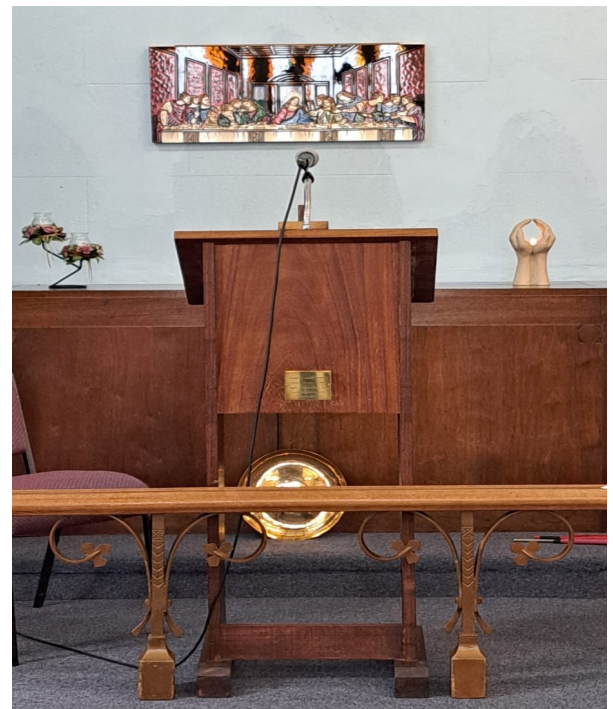


**THE CENTENARY
Of the Present Church Building
2nd APRIL 1975**

Reflections of a local preacher at the time

It was all of 45 years since, as a young and very inexperienced local preacher, Wilfred J. Marshall came to Halstead to take an appointment. The impression he received then, and which continued over the years, was that although it was a relatively small society, it was a very friendly church. The Revd. Charles Lightfoot was still a retired Minister at that time and being a lovable, saintly man whose presence was always an inspiration to any preacher, his wise counsel helped to make a lasting impression.

Times were difficult during the 1939-45 war but worship was maintained by a loyal band who kept things going. It was felt that Halstead at that time was a "Do-it-yourself" kind of church and no one has ever calculated the man-hours spent in decorating, renovating, repairing and cleaning the premises. It must be considerable and is a tribute to the friendly co-operation of the members themselves.



To the present members of our little Church, “thank you” for what you have given by way of friendship to all who step over your threshold and God’s blessings on you all for your help and concerns to ensure a future in this holy place. It is all still on-going and we cannot stress too strongly the need to work together to ensure the longevity of our building and the continuation of our worship in this wonderful building.

2025 Church Stewards

Rev. Sue King, Helen Catley (Senior)

Heather Williams and Kathy Butler.

