

*‘We Come Unto Our Fathers’  
God;  
Their Rock is Our Salvation.’<sup>1</sup>*

*The Story of the Metropolitan Methodist  
Church, Pietermaritzburg  
(The Chapel Street Society), 1846–1996.*

John Wesley believed that all the world was his parish. The Methodist Church adopted this belief, and early in the nineteenth century founded the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to spread the gospel throughout the rapidly expanding British Empire. In 1816 it sent its first missionary, Revd Barnabas Shaw, to the Cape Colony.

Methodism began in South Africa as a missionary enterprise, to preach salvation to the heathen, but with the arrival of the 1820 Settlers, many of whom were Methodists, a new dimension was added – the pastoral care of the British settlers. These two facets – ‘making disciples of all the nations’ and ‘feeding God’s sheep’ – have continued in partnership, though not always easily, in South African Methodism ever since.

The work spread rapidly throughout the Cape Colony. Revd William Shaw, the great settler missionary of the Eastern Cape, planned his ‘chain of mission stations’ stretching northwards from Grahamstown through the Transkei and Pondoland into Natal and Zululand. The list of stations in the ‘Minutes of Conference’ for 1829 includes ‘Tshaka’s tribe, Port Natal – One to be appointed.’ However, it was not until 1842 that the first Methodist missionary arrived in Natal.

In 1841 Faku, the Pondo chief, appealed to Revd William Shaw for protection against the harassment of his followers by the Dutch settlers. Shaw sent this request to the Governor of the Cape Colony, who sent Captain T.C. Smith and a small force of soldiers to take possession of the British trading settlement of Port Natal. With this force came Revd James Archbell with his wife and family. No sooner had they arrived, than the Boers attacked, seized the settlement and besieged the British troops in their camp, from where Dick King set out on his famous ride to Grahamstown to fetch relief.

Natal was annexed by Britain in 1843. Archbell, who had built a small wattle and daub church and mission house in Durban, began negotiations with the government for a site for a Wesleyan church in Pietermaritzburg, and in June 1845 was granted erf 15, Longmarket Street – the site of the present Metropolitan Methodist Church.

The Methodist Church still owns the whole of this erf, which extends from Longmarket Street to Church Street.

Archbell retired from the active ministry in 1846 and settled in Pietermaritzburg, where he played a prominent role in business, journalism and municipal affairs. As a layman he played a major part in the development of the Wesleyan church in Pietermaritzburg.

### The First Chapel

In 1846, two further missionaries were appointed to serve in Natal – Revd William Jefford Davis at Durban and Revd John Richards at Pietermaritzburg. They arrived in Durban aboard the *Mazepa* on 17 April 1846. Richards travelled to Pietermaritzburg the following week, and immediately asked the Colonial Secretary, Donald Moodie, to arrange permission for him to hold services for the English-speaking inhabitants in the Dutch Reformed Church – the original 'Church of the Vow'. This was granted and the first service was held there on 26 April 1846.

Pietermaritzburg was then a very small town. Though many Voortrekkers had left when Natal was annexed, they still outnumbered the English inhabitants. The membership figures given to the 1848 Methodist District Meeting recorded 13 English members, 3 Coloured members and 15 African members – 31 full members of all races, which was an increase of 16 over the previous year! John Richards' ministry was very much an inter-denominational one. The only English-speaking minister in Pietermaritzburg, he ministered to the needs of all its English inhabitants, and all, from the Lieutenant-Governor downwards, attended his services.

In true Methodist fashion, a Sunday School was immediately started in the 'Mission House', a small building on erf 15, at which, by December 1846, some 60 children, English and Zulu, were attending.

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THE NEW

## WESLEYAN CHAPEL,

PIETERMARITZBURG,

**W**ILL be opened for DIVINE WORSHIP on  
**Sunday, the 31st instant.** The following  
 Ministers are expected to officiate on the occasion :—

*At 11 o'clock, a.m.*

The Rev. W. C. HOLDEN, from D'Urbao.

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*At 3 o'clock, p.m.*

The Rev. L. E. DÖHNE, Minister of the Dutch Reformed  
 Church.

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*At half past 6 o'clock, p.m.*

The Rev. D. LINDLEY, of the American Board of Foreign  
 Missions.

COLLECTIONS will be made at the close of the Services,  
 towards defraying the expenses incurred in the erection of the  
 Building.

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Beginnings of Methodist worship in the colonial capital.

(An advertisement in *The Natal Witness* of 22 December 1848)

Services were held in Zulu and Dutch (for Dutch-speaking Coloured people), as well as in English. In 1848, Revd Jacob Döhne, minister of the Dutch Reformed congregation, offered to hand over his African congregation to the Methodist Church. Whether or not this actually happened is not recorded in the District Meeting minutes, but by the end of 1848 a small African chapel had been built – the first church building on the site. This was replaced in 1850 by a 'neat, substantial and commodious chapel of stone foundation and burnt brick walls, 60½ by 28½ feet, with forms, communion and belfry'.<sup>2</sup>

Early in 1848 the building of the first English chapel began. The first builder was Mr John Fleming, but after he had laid the foundations and built the walls up to about three feet, he decided to return to Scotland. The chapel was completed by a Mr McCabe, apparently a soldier of the 45th Regiment then stationed in Pietermaritzburg. Thatch for the building, some 6 000 bundles, was cut by the African community living on Revd James Allison's mission station at Indaleni. The new chapel was opened for worship on Sunday, 31 December 1848.

Six trustees were appointed for the chapel – Revd John Richards, chairman and treasurer, Alphonso Torkington Caldecott, who was supervisor of works, Charles Kestell, David Dale Buchanan, editor of the *Natal Witness*, Revd William Clifford Holden, minister in Durban (and Natal's first historian<sup>3</sup>) and Revd James Allison of Indaleni. The chapel was an ecumenical venture. Of the three lay trustees, Caldecott, a candlemaker, hardware merchant, brewer and an important figure in the early life of Pietermaritzburg, was a prominent Wesleyan layman. Charles Kestell was an elder of the Dutch Reformed Church and the father of Revd John Daniel Kestell, the celebrated Dutch Reformed minister after whom the town of Kestell in the Free State was named. David Buchanan and his brother Ebenezer, were Congregationalists and played a major role in establishing the first Congregational Church in Pietermaritzburg in 1850.

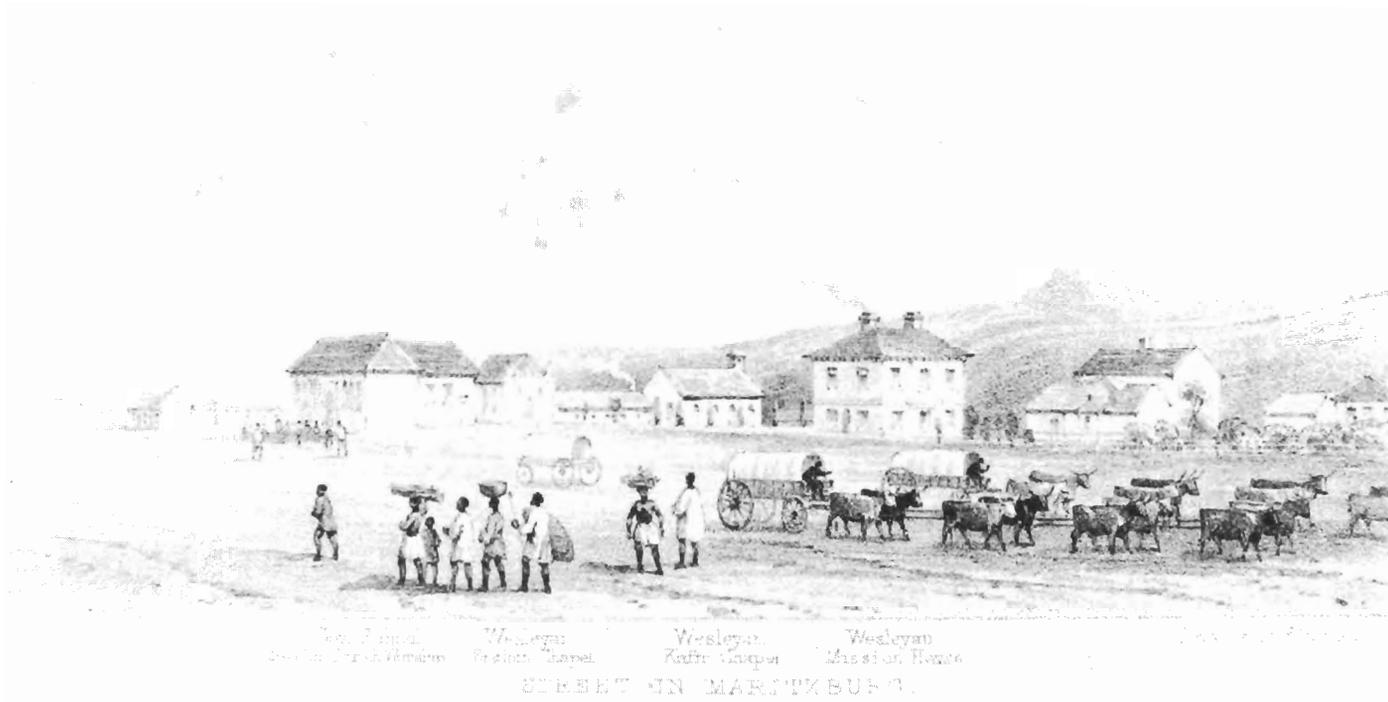
### **The 1850s.**

From 1850 onwards, Pietermaritzburg changed rapidly. The various immigration schemes, notably that of J.C. Byrne, brought several thousand new immigrants to Natal. Many of these were tradesmen – carpenters, builders, masons, shopkeepers – who settled in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, where they could practise their skills. With them came the established English denominations – Congregational, Presbyterian, Anglican and Roman Catholic – which soon began to build their own churches. Many of the new immigrants were Methodists and by 1851 the membership of the Methodist Church in Pietermaritzburg had risen to 122.

A major event in the life of the young church was the appointment in 1850 of the Revd Horatio Pearce as minister. He had had a distinguished ministry in the Eastern Cape, and it was his drive, enthusiasm and sheer hard work that really launched Methodism in Pietermaritzburg.

In 1852 the chapel was renovated and a small gallery built, in which was installed the first church organ in Natal. It was built by a local citizen, Mr Steven Watts and, according to the *Natal Independent*, was 'spoken of by unquestionable judges as an instrument of superior order'. It was not a pipe organ. In the same year, a large new double-storeyed Mission House was built on the corner of Chapel and Church Streets to accommodate the minister and provide rooms for the Sunday School and other church meetings.

The work soon began to spread. Helped by a band of enthusiastic local preachers, services and class meetings were held in the surrounding farms and settlements –



*Pietermaritzburg Methodist Church Premises in 1854.* The L-shaped building on the left (cnr Longmarket & Chapel Streets) was the government schoolroom and meeting-place of the first Legislative Council. Anglican services were held there. Next to it in this picture (but actually on the other side of Chapel Street) is the first Wesleyan Chapel. To the right of that (facing on to Church Street) is the Wesleyan African Church, and to the right of that (cnr Chapel & Church Streets) is the double-storied Mission House. The building between the English and African chapels is either a schoolroom or the caretaker's and schoolteacher's cottages.

(Illustration from Bishop J.W. Colenso's *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 1855)

York, Shafton, Umzindusi, Ashley, Lidgetton and The Dargle. With few roads and no bridges, these local preachers faithfully served the rural areas.

### **The Second Chapel**

'In June 1856 a remarkable revival of religion began in Maritzburg, and continued for several months. The Revs H. Pearce and F. Mason were the resident ministers. The revival affected both younger and older people about equally. The work was singularly calm and deep. The more modern plan of an inquiry room had not yet come into use; penitent seekers of salvation knelt at the communion rail, where local preachers, class leaders, and others, gave counsel to the inquirers, and rejoiced over them with great joy. Two young men who then gave themselves fully to the service of God afterwards entered the ministry. One of them, the Rev. J. Jackson, jun., became a most effective preacher in English and Kafir, wrote several books in Zulu, and, after a brief and honourable career, entered into rest. The other, the Rev. William Shaw Davis, became well known as an able Kafir scholar and Missionary Superintendent. In Maritzburg the English membership was doubled'<sup>4</sup>.

The chapel was now too small to cater for the needs of the congregation, so in August 1856 a meeting was called at which it was resolved to build a new church. A committee was formed to launch the scheme and subscription lists were opened – payment being allowed over one, two or three years. The town was canvassed by members of the committee and by October they had secured pledges of £800 and felt that another £200 could be obtained.

The District Meeting was asked to approve the construction of a new church, to allow Mr Pearce to tour the Eastern Cape to raise contributions, and to pay off the debt on the old chapel – some £200. A Building Committee was appointed to plan and supervise the work. Its members were James Archbell, James Smarfit, John Russom, John Wade, William Bennitt, John Symons, Daniel Hull and William Jenkins.

The Committee proposed that the Grecian order of architecture be adopted, with four columns of the Ionic order in front – an unusual step this, as the prevailing fashion in church architecture was then the neo-gothic style. There must have been many who complained that 'it did not look like a church'. The building was to be 45ft wide and 65ft long. James Smarfit was appointed supervisor of works.

The foundation stone was laid by Mrs Pearce in July 1857, but it was nearly two years before the church was opened, and even then it was not complete. Though it was easy enough to get pledges of money, it was much more difficult to get the actual cash. Economic conditions in the 1850s were bad, cash was very scarce and bankruptcies were frequent. Payment for work done on the church was often made partly in cash and partly in bills redeemable in six months or a year's time. Pearce visited the Eastern Cape early in 1858 and raised nearly £650 in contributions towards the building.

An interesting item in the Building Committee's minutes was a proposal that the new chapel be lit by gas. Attached to the minutes is a fascinating advertisement for the 'patent portable gas apparatus' manufactured by William Asbury of Birmingham. 'The material used for making the gas is refuse of the kitchen, such as grease or fat of every description'. Perhaps fortunately, the idea was dropped – it must have been dangerous in inexperienced hands and smelt worse than Lazarus! The Church was lit by chandeliers of candles till about 1896, when electricity was tentatively introduced – power being supplied by the City Council for the Sunday and mid-week evening services.

The new chapel was opened for worship on Friday, 25 March 1859.

James Smarfit seems to have been the leading light in the building of the new chapel. He and Henry Chatterton, a relation of his, came to Natal on the *Haidee* in 1850. They moved to Pietermaritzburg in 1852 and established a brick and tile works north of the town, where Chatterton Road now runs. The bricks and tiles for the chapel came from this yard. Smarfit was supervisor of works, responsible for getting the building up, and treasurer for a time while Revd Horatio Pearce was away in the Eastern Cape. A popular local preacher, he was asked to canvass the rural areas for subscriptions. He also had a good knowledge of music. He was asked to consult with Mr Steven Watts about a new organ for the chapel, and later lent his own harmonium for the opening services. After his death in 1860 his widow gave the harmonium to the church.

Henry Chatterton was a long-serving member of the church. John Russom was a member of the town council and mayor for a short time. He was involved in many organisations in Pietermaritzburg, and was church secretary. John Wade was a schoolteacher who ran a school for older boys on the Chapel Street premises with some success until ill health forced him to give it up.

In 1863 a gallery made by Thomas Palframan was installed. It was made of yellow-wood, with red deal panels in front and was supported in front by iron pillars. In 1866 the beautiful wooden ceiling was installed, made by Joseph Nicolson, a prominent and long-serving member of the church, who, with his brother William, ran a carpentry business in Theatre Lane, where Scotts Theatre was later built. The chapel was increased by half its length in 1878 largely to accommodate the increasing number of soldiers from Fort Napier who attended services, and a pipe organ was installed. Of this, a 'Peripatetic Worshipper' wrote in the *Natal Witness* of 5 October 1881 'The feature that strikes the eye on entering, and one that dominates all others, is the garish organ, decked out in light blue and gold – a real unmistakable "kist o' whistles", which might have come straight from some chapel of rank Popery, so out of keeping does it seem with the staid surroundings'.

### **Growth of Methodism in Pietermaritzburg**

By 1880 the number of Methodists in Pietermaritzburg had risen substantially, and a campaign was launched to build a new church at the east, or lower, end of town. People living down there must have found the long trek up to Chapel Street extremely trying, especially in the heat and wet of summer. Of public transport there was none, except for rickshas, and parking a horse and cart must have been far worse than parking a car. A site was therefore bought on the corner of Church and Boshoff Streets, and the Boshoff Street Wesleyan Methodist Church opened in 1882. A third Methodist church was built in Victoria Road in 1897 and a fourth at Prestbury in 1904.

A significant event in the life of South African Methodism was the formation in 1883 of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa, with its own Conference and President – Revd John Walton. Prior to 1883 Methodist activities in South Africa had been controlled by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in London. Missionaries were appointed and sent out to South Africa by the Society, and remained responsible to it. The Society also provided much of the finance needed, particularly for missionary work and for opening up new areas. From 1883 on, the Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa was responsible for its own affairs and had to fulfil its task from its own resources. The newly formed Transvaal and Swaziland district was excluded, remaining under the control of the Missionary Society until 1931 when the three Methodist bodies in South Africa – the Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa, the Transvaal and Swaziland District of the

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**NEW WESLEYAN CHAPEL,**  
PIETERMARITZBURG.

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**T**HE Opening Services in connection with the  
above will be (D. V.) as follows, viz.:—

**On Friday Morning, the 25th March,**

A SERMON WILL BE PREACHED BY

**THE REV. G. BLENCOWE, OF DURBAN,**

*To commence at Eleven o'Clock.*

In the Afternoon, a TEA MEETING will be held  
in the INFANT SCHOOL ROOM, at half-past Five  
o'Clock; afterwards, there will be a PUBLIC  
MEETING, at which suitable addresses will be  
delivered by several Ministers, and other Gentle-  
men. LL. E. MESHAM, Esq., R.M., is expected to  
preside.

*Tickets to the Tea, 1s. 6d. each.*

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**On SUNDAY, 27th MARCH,**

TWO SERMONS will be Preached, that in the  
Morning, at Eleven o'Clock,

BY THE REV. H. PEARSE,

And in the Evening, at half-past Six o'Clock, by

**THE REV. G. BLENCOWE.**

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**On SUNDAY, the 3rd APRIL,**

**THE REV. W. CAMPBELL**

Will Preach in the Morning, at 11 o'clock, and the

**REV. F. MASON**

In the Evening, at half-past Six o'Clock.

**Collections on behalf of the Building Fund  
will be made after each service.**

By order of the Committee,

**J. Russom,**

Secretary.

Wesleyan Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Primitive Methodist Missions in South Africa – united to form the Methodist Church of South Africa.

### **Some nineteenth century ministers who served the Chapel Street Society**

Revd Horatio Pearce served the Pietermaritzburg Wesleyan Chapel as minister, and Natal as Chairman of the District and General Superintendent from 1850 to 1861. It was he, along with Revd Calvert Spensley in Durban, who really got Methodism going in Natal and established it as a force in the Colony. He played a prominent role in the life of Pietermaritzburg. He was a founder member of the Natal Society, serving for a number of years on its Council, and ministered to the English and Zulu Methodists in Pietermaritzburg and the rapidly expanding surrounding areas, as well as to the Methodist soldiers of the British garrison at Fort Napier. His wife played a major role in starting the first infants' school in Pietermaritzburg.

For three years he had the help of Revd Frederick Mason as assistant minister, but for most of his ministry, he was on his own. In 1861, worn out by his labours, his health broke down and he was given permission to return to England. A friend, William Hartley, offered to drive him and his family to Durban, and they left on 31 January 1862. At Halfway House, going down a hill, the horses bolted and the vehicle overturned. Pearce was so badly injured that he died a fortnight later – a sad end to a great ministry.

Revd George Blencowe succeeded Pearce in 1862 and served in Pietermaritzburg till 1866, when he went to Ladysmith, where he founded a very successful work among the English and Zulu people there. Filled with missionary zeal, he made several long treks to the Orange Free State and Transvaal, and his letters to the Missionary Society on these trips make fascinating reading. In 1872 he led a Methodist mission to the Transvaal, establishing himself at Potchefstroom. Here, however, he failed. A man of strong views, he expressed himself forcefully, but with little tact. He soon had a major row with his congregation, as well as with the Transvaal government, which did not appreciate his outspoken criticism, and he had to leave.

Revd Frederick Mason served three terms at Chapel Street – from 1856 to 1859 as assistant to Pearce and from 1867 to 1870 and 1877 to 1880 as minister in charge. He achieved considerable stature as a minister in the life of the Colony as well as in the Church. His experience in missionary work had given him a deep knowledge of and sympathy for the Zulu people, and he was frequently consulted by the colonial government on 'Native affairs'. He was elected President of the South African Methodist Conference in 1886 – the third holder of this office.

Perhaps the most outstanding character to minister at Chapel Street was Revd James Cameron. He had begun his ministry in the 1830s under Barnabas and William Shaw, the founding fathers of South African Methodism. He was appointed Chairman of the Natal District in 1864 and served at Durban till 1871 when he moved to Pietermaritzburg, where he remained till his death in 1875.

Cameron was one of the great preachers and theologians of his day in South Africa. Frederick Mason wrote of him:

'He was a marvellous sermonizer, and kept on making new discourses at an age when many, perhaps most, preachers are content to rely on the productions of earlier years. He often prepared with great care; but there were occasions, not infrequent, when he would preach from a text which suddenly occurred to his mind, sometimes in the pulpit itself; yet none of his hearers could suspect that what they heard had not been fully thought out beforehand. His wide reading, knowledge of scripture, and strong grasp of mind rendered him indeed

always prepared; and the sudden inspirations which at times came upon him resulted in some of his happiest efforts.'<sup>5</sup>

He was probably not a 'popular' preacher – in his journal for 1875 is a note 'Preached for 50 minutes – too long for modern congregations'. He could not have been an easy minister to live with. He had a strong strain of Scottish puritanism in his makeup, and little tolerance for wordly vanity and frivolous amusements. He did not approve of dancing and made his views known in no uncertain manner to one mother whose daughter had attended a ball at Government House. He 'smote with a claymore whatsoever and whomsoever he believed to be wrong' and did not let the disapproval of his parishioners deter him.

'Several who were present in the morning did not come again in the evening – offended, I suppose, at my explicitness on the occasion. It may be that I announce the truth too harshly, though my aim is not to offend but to induce my hearers to give themselves to God. But people will do wrong, and when they are told of it, they are offended. Must the truth be softened down to meet the taste of such persons? No. They must hear the plain truth, whether they are pleased or displeased.'<sup>6</sup>

Cameron was not a great administrator, and Natal was not an easy district to administer. His tendency to 'smite with a claymore' did not endear him to his senior colleagues, who were every bit as strong-minded as he was, and disputes were frequent. One District Meeting was described by some of the younger ministers as the most unpleasant they had ever attended. After a ministry of 40 years, unbroken by any visit to England, Cameron died, still on 'active service' on 12 December 1875.

Revd Samuel Evans Rowe had the longest term of office at Chapel Street – thirteen years from 1880 to 1893. He was sent to Natal by the Missionary Society to serve as Chairman of the District because of his profound knowledge of Methodist laws and discipline and his considerable gifts as an administrator, both of which were urgently needed in Natal at the time. He was elected President of Conference for 1890/91. His sister, Annie Evans Rowe came to Pietermaritzburg in 1885 as head of the Girls' Collegiate School and later, in 1899, founded Uplands High School for Girls at Blackridge. His eldest daughter, Agnes, was co-founder, with Elizabeth Allan, of Merchiston Preparatory School.

### Organists

The first Chapel organist was Mrs Helena Chivers, a music teacher, who also held enjoyable evening parties for the young people of the church. She was succeeded by Fanny Chatterton, daughter of Henry Chatterton, the choirmaster. She later married Joseph Nicolson. According to legend, Chatterton was a quick-tempered man and in 1864, taking offence at something, he forbade his daughter to play at the next Sunday services. Some young men in the choir heard of this and asked Charles Varley, then aged 19, to play. He played so well that he was promptly installed as organist, a post he held for some 30 years.

Varley played an important role in the life of Methodism in Pietermaritzburg. According to Whiteside:

'Towards the end of 1881, Mr C.J. (*sic*) Varley, of Maritzburg, invited a few friends to meet at his new house for religious conversation and prayer. Portions of Finney's work on "Revivals" were read, suggestions were made, and the rest of the time was spent in earnest prayer. Ten or twelve persons usually attended, but gradually the feeling deepened, and extended to the Friday evening prayer meeting, one of the oldest Methodist institutions in Maritzburg. Soon the

schoolroom was filled, and at one of the meetings the first conversion took place.<sup>7</sup>

The revival lasted for several months and affected not only Pietermaritzburg, but spread into the country districts as well. 'Local preachers rode out ten or fifteen miles when the day's work was done, praying as they went, held meetings, often long ones, then rode back singing joyfully, and were found next morning at their usual posts of business'.<sup>8</sup>

Varley was also one of a group of laymen who began conducting open air services in the Indian part of the town. From this grew the Indian Methodist Church, first at Thomas Street, later at Mountain Rise.

Since the Second World War, the organists have been David Cockburn, whose son Christopher is organist at Grahamstown Cathedral, Eitel Maasch and the present organist, Miss Val Bindon.

### **The Metropolitan Buildings Trust**

An event of ultimately major importance to the Church and to Methodism in Pietermaritzburg was the formation in 1902 of the Metropolitan Buildings Trust.

In 1898 the Chapel Trust Committee decided to lease the part of the property on which the Mission House stood for commercial development. The lease was taken up in 1901 by Mr E.W. Ireland. However, in January 1902 he offered to cancel the lease and to hand back the property to the Trust Committee for it to undertake a comprehensive building scheme itself, provided the profits were used for church and school buildings. The offer was accepted, a loan raised and the Metropolitan



*The Methodist Chapel in the 1880s.* This building 'in the Grecian order of architecture', was opened in 1859. It stands on the corner of Chapel and Longmarket Streets.

Buildings, comprising three shops (the 'McNamee's building') were built. The profits, after the interest and sinking fund on the loan had been met, were to be used for three purposes :

1) To erect a new church, to be known as the Metropolitan Wesleyan Methodist Church, the existing church to become a large hall.

2) To extend the Sunday School Hall (the old Chapel) by the addition of extra classrooms, and to build a recreational hall.

3) To assist Methodist educational work in Natal by providing high-class connexional schools for boys and girls.

Unfortunately, it was a very long time before the Metropolitan Buildings became a paying proposition. The uncertainty of the years leading up to Union, the post-war depressions of the 1920s and 1930s and the Second World War, led to a period of stagnation in Pietermaritzburg. Rents for the property had to be kept as low as possible simply in order to keep tenants in it. The recreation hall and the Sunday School extensions were completed in 1902, but little more could be done. However, from 1902, the church became known as the Metropolitan Methodist Church.

A new organ, built by William Hill and Son of England, was installed in 1901. This fine instrument, recently fully restored, is one of the best church organs in Pietermaritzburg.

It was not until the boom times of the 1960s and 1970s when Pietermaritzburg began to grow rapidly, that new leases at much higher rentals could be negotiated. Since then, the Metropolitan Buildings Trust has flourished, and the income has been of great benefit to the Methodist churches and schools in Pietermaritzburg.

## **The 20th Century**

The building of the Metropolitan Hall in 1902 was the last major development that took place on the property during the first half of the 20th century. With the coming of Union in 1910, Pietermaritzburg lost its status as colonial capital, and gradually declined in importance. The two world wars and prolonged depressions meant that money was scarce and there was little scope for development.

The church's income derived mainly from the weekly collections, and this was paid to the circuit for circuit expenses, including the salaries of ministers. For purely local activities, the church had to depend on special fund-raising activities, such as jumble sales, beetle drives, tickety evenings and so on. The system of 'pew rents' seems to have been discarded after the First World War. By the 1950s the financial problem had become acute. Repairs and additional accommodation for the Sunday School and youth activities were urgently needed. In 1957, therefore, the first 'planned giving' campaign was launched under the guidance of the Wells Organisation – a specialist church fund-raising organisation. It was an outstanding success. Almost every member of the church was visited, 680 people attended the two 'loyalty dinners' held at the City Hall, and over £27 300 was pledged over a period of three years. The church treasurers at last had a good idea of what the income would be, and could plan accordingly.

One feature of the planned giving scheme was a pledge given that this would be the only fund-raising method used. There would be no more special appeals or other fund-raising drives. While this was a great relief to church members, it did have a negative effect in that the community spirit engendered among members by these special activities was gradually lost, which became a problem for a church like Metro which draws its members from a widely scattered area.

Encouraged by the success of the campaign, plans were made to build new classrooms and even a new church. However, in 1958 it was discovered that the

church had been seriously affected by white ants and death-watch beetles. Several pews were badly damaged, the floor joists had been eaten away – in places the floor was held together only by the pews – and the beautiful wooden panelling in the choir stalls had been damaged. Even the ceiling was threatened.

In 1959 therefore, a major restoration was undertaken. The old wooden gallery was replaced by a concrete balcony, a concrete floor with wooden parquet blocks was laid in the church and adjoining hall, new pews were installed – families were encouraged to 'buy a pew' for £50 each in memory of someone – and the 'preaching end' of the church was completely re-designed. The pulpit was moved from its former (and traditionally Methodist) place in the centre of the church, to one side, leaving the altar as the focal point of worship – perhaps a growing awareness in Methodism of the importance of the sacraments in worship.

During the alterations the church had to be closed, and for four months services were held in the King's Theatre in the old YMCA building at the corner of Longmarket and Buchanan Streets. This caused considerable misgivings at first, but the 'exile' seems to have been a singularly happy one. A strong spirit of fellowship and worship was maintained, and Metro lost nothing by it. The church was re-opened for worship on 28 November 1959.

The minister during this time was Revd Arnold Walker, a man of outstanding ability as pastor and leader, whose ministry made a profound impression on Pietermaritzburg. Arnold Walker started Metro's first newspaper, the *Metropolitan Times*, which ran from 1957 to 1960, when it became the more widely published and very popular *Faith for Daily Living*.

The last building at Metro was the Trinity Hall, erected in 1974 to serve as a large hall for meetings and youth activities, as well as to provide accommodation for the Sunday School.

### **African work**

The African church, built in 1850 and later enlarged and extended, served the Zulu community in Pietermaritzburg till about 1970, when a new church was built in Imbali. The old church was demolished and a commercial building erected. Zulu services are still held at Metro every Sunday afternoon for Africans living in town, and the local *Manyano* branch meets every Thursday. These are lively and well-attended services, but unfortunately are not part of Metro, being run by the minister from the Imbali circuit.

The first minister to be appointed to African work in Pietermaritzburg was Revd Charles Roberts in 1862. He later became a distinguished Zulu scholar. From about 1872 English and African work in Natal was divided as far as possible into separate circuits. The African church in Pietermaritzburg was made into a separate circuit with its own minister. Though this was no doubt practical at the time, and made the entry of Africans into the Methodist ministry more acceptable, it had unfortunate consequences in the long run – the rigid separation of Methodism into English and African churches, each with very different traditions of worship and administration.

The first African minister in Pietermaritzburg was Revd Damon Hlongwana, who was appointed in 1877. He was succeeded by Revd Job Bunga (1878–1882) and Revd Luke Msimang (1883–1886), who was the son of Revd Daniel Msimang, one of the pioneers of Methodism in Swaziland. Msimang is a name still greatly honoured in Pietermaritzburg Methodism.

## Education

Education has always been a prominent feature of Methodist missionary work, and the Chapel Street Society played an important role in the education of early Pietermaritzburg. In 1852 Mrs Pearce and a committee of ladies started an infants' day school. The first teacher was Mrs Mary Boast, the young widow of Henry Boast, who had organised the passage to Natal of the *Haidee* immigrants, but died a month before the ship sailed. The scheme had run into considerable difficulties and Mary was left with the unenviable task of getting the whole party to Natal and settled on their lands. The consequences of this plagued her for the rest of her life. She later married John Moreland, Byrne's agent in Natal.

The school was a great success. Under Miss S.A. Howitt (1864–1870) it became the best school of its kind in the Colony.

'The Wesleyan Infant School in Pietermaritzburg continues to be the best infant school in the colony receiving Government aid. Miss Howitt, with no other assistance but that of an elder girl (there are none, however, of 12 years in the school) put in charge of a class from time to time, continues to instruct and keep in perfect order a school which has an average of 64 scholars'<sup>9</sup>.

The passing of the 1870 Education Act in England, however, caused great difficulties for schools in the colonies.

'In past years the teachers were procured at home, having received the special training essential to success in these schools. Of late, however, the great demand for these teachers at home has rendered it difficult to secure their services out here; and in Pietermaritzburg, as in Durban, the teachers have had to acquire knowledge of the system on the spot'<sup>10</sup>.

In spite of these problems, and, later, a fairly frequent change of teachers, the school gave good service till 1886, when it closed.

A school for African children was started in 1856 under Mary Rock, which continued until 1886 when it, too, closed down. Records of this school are sketchy, though it seems that in later years, its pupils were mainly Coloured children. An illuminating comment in the Natal Native Education Department report for 1885 reads:

'No Zulu is taught, owing to an objection raised by the parents, who are not Zulus, to the use of that language . . . The teacher (Mrs Mendenhall), explained that the great obstacle which stood in the way of advancement in the School lay in the fact of the parents taking the children away for long periods at a time.'

Attempts were made to provide schooling for older boys and adult evening classes, but with limited success.

## Metro and the Community

Metro has had a special relationship with a variety of groups in Pietermaritzburg. From 1845 to 1914, a garrison of British troops was stationed at Fort Napier, and played a major role in the social, cultural and economic life of Pietermaritzburg. Methodist soldiers regularly attended the chapel and contributed greatly to the services. How welcome they were socially among the ordinary church members is not so clear. Officers, of course, would always be welcome – especially as prospective husbands – but they would be mostly Anglican. The majority of the soldiers who attended Metro would be NCOs and other ranks, who in those days were not highly regarded in peace time:

*For its Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' 'Chuck him out, the brute!'  
But its 'Saviour of his country' when the guns begin to shoot. (Kipling)*

The Chapel Trust minutes of November 1898 recorded that 'Mr Chalker stated that he suffered much, especially from ladies, as pew warden, and many reflections were passed upon his character because he showed soldiers into certain pews'. It is also recorded that soldiers objected to being confined to the gallery and certain pews in front.

Girls from the Epworth Girls' High School regularly attended morning services, and by the 1960s filled nearly three-quarters of one side of the church. Their special music services at Christmas and Easter were great treats for the congregation. Methodists from other schools also regularly attended morning services.

Nurses from Grey's Hospital and student teachers from the Natal Training College found a home at Metro and contributed greatly to its life, especially in the youth guilds and Sunday School. Metro was for many years the 'University Church' for both students and staff. Many distinguished men and women played a major role in the church and the lives of Methodist students – Professor Hamish and Mrs Effie Scott, Dr Herbert Shaw, Professor C.W. Abbott, Bruce and Jutta Faulds and many others. As a student at the university during the 1960s, the author became very aware of the warm and friendly relationship between Metro and the University.

### **The Present**

From the 1960s Pietermaritzburg began to change rapidly. The population grew and large new suburbs sprang up – Hayfields, Bisley Valley, Pelham, the Grange and Westgate. Many families moved out of town into new houses in the suburbs. The pattern of family life changed, too. Children on leaving school went to university or on national service, and often found jobs elsewhere. Many emigrated. The closely-knit family life and relationships of old Pietermaritzburg, where one half of the town seemed to be related to the other half, diminished. Metro began to feel the effects of all this.

New suburban churches were founded – Wesley in Hayfields, the Scottsville Society at St Alphege's Anglican Church and the All Saints' Ecumenical Church in Athlone. Many of Metro's most prominent families joined these churches, either as founder members, or later because their children wanted to attend a church where they could more easily meet their friends.

The Scottsville Society became home to the university students, which meant that the university element was lost to Metro. The closure of the old Grey's Hospital and the Natal Training College meant a further loss of young people. Increasing transport costs, followed by the collapse of the city bus service meant that schools could no longer bus their boarders to the city centre churches. Many schools built their own chapels and expected the clergy to go there. The loss of the Epworth girls was a serious blow. The rapid rise of the pentecostal and charismatic movements during the sixties and seventies also drew several members away. Gradually, the congregation began to age and dwindle, especially in the evenings, with people becoming increasingly reluctant to go out at night. Fortunately, Metro has escaped the disaster which overtook the city centre churches in the big cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, which became virtually deserted. It still has a congregation and during the last few years there have been encouraging signs of renewal, especially in the increasing numbers of young people who are not merely attending, but playing a lively and vigorous part in the Sunday evening services and the youth guilds. More and more African people are attending the services and the Sunday School.

The 150th anniversary of Metro is not so much a milestone in its history as the end of an era. Till now, Metro has been a white pastoral church. This role is now over, and the Church will have to find a new role in the new South Africa, as a multi-racial, or even mainly African church, serving not primarily the needs of its parishioners, but of the city centre as a whole, caring for the homeless, the poor and the unemployed, serving as a cultural and educational centre, and ensuring that its extensive premises are fully used throughout the week and not just on Sundays. It is a role which will have to be undertaken in co-operation with, and not in opposition to, the other city centre churches.

#### NOTES

1. *Methodist Hymn Book*, 1933 ed., Hymn 71, Thomas Hornblower Gill.
2. Natal Archives. A 534: District Meeting minutes 1850.
3. Holden, William C. *History of the Colony of Natal*. (London, 1855) (See also Notes and Queries in this issue).
4. Whiteside, J. *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa*. (London, 1906). p. 363 (Hereafter referred to as 'Whiteside'.)
5. *The South African Methodist*, 20 November 1891.
6. Journal of Revd James Cameron for 1875. Cory Library, Rhodes University. Methodist Archives.
7. Whiteside. p.390. Varley's initials are incorrectly given as C.J. They were in fact C.T.
8. Whiteside. p.391.
9. *Natal Education Department Report*, 1869.
10. *Natal Education Department Report*, 1873.

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