

Extract from the “History of the Dales Congregational Churches” by Thomas Whitehead: Feather Bros, Keighley, 1930.

*Darkling our great forefathers went
The first steps of the way;
'Twas but the dawning, yet to grow
Into the perfect day.
And grow it shall; our glorious Sun
More fervid rays afford;
The Lord has yet more light and truth
To break forth from His word*

GRASSINGTON (population 988), in Upper Wharfedale, may be approached by rail from Skipton to Threshfield (1.5 miles distant). A good motor bus service runs from Skipton to Grassington. It is picturesquely situated on the hillside overlooking the Wharfe. The old Roman roads, the barrows, flint arrow heads, and the like, indicate great antiquity. The moors beyond were formerly rich in lead ore which was worked for many generations, when the miners lived in Grassington. Some years ago the mines were abandoned, and the population was depleted, and it is only within recent years, since it has become a residential area that its prosperity has returned. Oil lamps have long been superseded by electric light.

It is described as the largest town in Wharfedale north of Addingham, but until the beginning of the 19th century it could boast of no place of worship, the nearest being the Parish Church at Linton, built in 1180. Apart from Quaker meeting-houses, the nearest Nonconformist Chapel was at Winterburn, which was erected in 1704. It is said that friends from Grassington occasionally attended Winterburn Chapel in the latter half of the 18th, and the beginning of the 19th centuries, and that lay-helpers from the Church there, and from the Congregational Chapel at Skipton, frequently held services in cottages, both at Linton and Grassington. Services, too, are recorded as being held on the banks of the Warp (Wharfe). Winterburn is 6 miles from Grassington, a good Sabbath day's journey.



MAIN STREET, GRASSINGTON. (Vickery, Kyrle & Co., London)

NEW CHAPEL, 1811.

The awakening came to Grassington with the great Revival. John Wesley, in his diary, says that he preached at Grassington on May 29th, 1782. The Wesleyan Chapel was the first to be built. The religious quickening in the village enthused the Independents so much, that they applied to the Idle Academy for help, when students preached every alternate Lords Day. "The cottages soon became too small for the congregation. A subscription list for a new Chapel had such a hearty reception, that the projected building was commenced; and the enthusiasm in its erection, by voluntary labour and otherwise, speedily completed it. It was opened on Christmas Day, 1811. The opening and dedication services were conducted by the Revs. E. Parsons and Farmer, of Leeds, and William Vint, of Idle. Unfortunately, in spite of much gratuitous labour and many generous gifts, a heavy debt of £250 remained on the undertaking, which was not liquidated for over 50 years. This proved a constant drag on the wheels of progress.

THE FIRST PASTOR.

The Rev. John Calvert, a student at the Idle Academy, accepted the call to the pastorate in 1812; he was ordained on April 22nd, 1813, the Revs.: E. Parsons and William Vint taking part in the ordination service.

The first duty of the young pastor was the formation of a Church, the drawing up of the customary Covenant, and determining who should sign it.

The first names on the list of Church members were those of Robert Somerville and William Simpson, and their wives; other names followed, which are still familiar and honoured in Grassington: Wilson, Lee, Pattinson, Verity, Summergill, and Harker. William Simpson was elected Deacon.

THE COVENANT.

The custom in those days, on the formation of a Church, was for the intending members to stand in a circle, hand clasping hand, whilst in the presence of witnesses from other Churches, they solemnly pledged themselves the Covenant, which they afterwards signed.

The following is a copy of the Covenant signed at Grassington:-

"We, who were by nature sinners ready to perish, having by the good Spirit and abundant grace of God been led to see our dreadful state by nature, as fallen in Adam and far from God; and having, we trust, tasted of the, Grace of God in converting, promised, and communicated Mercy; we do sincerely, unfeignedly and without reserve, desire to give up ourselves to the Lord, and to each other; to walk together in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord, blameless; to watch over one another in love; to exhort with diligence; rebuke with meekness and without partiality; and to pray for and seek the edification of each other in all things pertaining to Life and Godliness.

We profess ourselves to be of that persuasion which is generally called Calvinistic, though we call no man Lord or Master in what we profess, but receive the whole Word of God, as the rule of our faith, and the test of our experience. The Assembly's Catechism comes the nearest to our sentiments of any published opinions, as having a tendency to humble the sinner, exalt the Saviour, and promote holiness in heart and life.

With respect to our Church government, we call ourselves Independents or Congregationalists, readily receiving the advice of any other similar Society if we see that we need the same, but not to be under the jurisdiction of any other person or society whatever."

CONSECRATION OF BURIAL GROUND.

The first burial in the new graveyard was that of a baby girl, three months old - Mary Simpson - on January 31st 1814. She had been baptised on October 20th, 1813. This was followed on July 8th of the same year by the interment of a baby boy, 6 months old - Richard Mycock. Thus, was the ground consecrated for ever.

The first baptisms were Isabella Holmes, November 24th, 1811; Betty Ellerton, August 23rd, 1812; James Wilson, May 14th, 1813.

Mr Calvert accepted a call to Colne, and in 1818 he left Grassington, taking with him a Grassington lady as his wife. "His labours were extensively blessed and the cause of the Redeemer prospered." He died at Morley, in 1847, aged 59 years.

Robert Aspinall, another student from the Idle Academy, succeeded Mr. Calvert. The Revs. William Vint, of Idle; Walter Scott, of Bradford; and T. Sharp, of Skipton; took part in the ordination service, on October 6th, 1822. "His ministry was attended by a large share of the Divine Blessing." He removed to Bury, in 1825, and died at Colne, 1856, aged 55 years. A mural tablet erected to his memory at Colne, contains the following appreciation:-

"As a testimony of his Christian excellence, the diligence, ability and faithfulness with which he discharged his ministerial duties, this tablet has been erected by his friends and the people who were committed to his charge. 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.' "

The Rev. Richard Harper followed Mr. Aspinall in 1825. He, unlike the previous ministers, was mature in years and thought, having been previously the pastor of the Heywood Chapel, Northowram, for 17 years, and had the honour of forming the first Sunday School there: he was also at George Street, Leeds, from 1818-1845. His preaching was distinguished for the variety in the choice of subjects, and great power in the treatment of them.

The attention of the people was arrested, and much good was the result. He was a portly little man; and it is said that he was accustomed to mount a chair when speaking at Cottage meetings. One Sunday after evening service, he had a seizure, and quietly passed into rest. He was buried in the Chapel.

The tablet on the wall reads thus:- "In Memory of the Rev. Richard Harper, late of Grassington, Minister of this place, who departed this life March 5th, 1829, aged 60 years, and in the fortieth year of his ministry."

THE BASS SINGER.

John Broughton, a Scotsman by birth, a stone-mason by trade, and a schoolmaster by profession, was bass singer at the Congregational Chapel for many years. It is said that his eccentricities caused much amusement to the younger members of the choir. When he lost his word, he substituted, aloud, such monosyllables as, "Wo wo lol lol," etc., in which he could see no impropriety. His grave is said to be in front of the far door of the chapel, but the burial register contains no date, only the name; no headstone marks his resting-place.

John wrote poems as one of his accomplishments. These were published in 1828. The following lines are from his pen: -

FAREWELL TO MY LYRE.

One single effort, Lyre, then all is o'er,
And thou and I will calmly sink to rest;
Our loss no tuneful bard will e'er deplore,
Still that shall never rankle in my breast.
What though no minstrel by the muses blest,
Should o'er my grave in silent sorrow mourn,
My soul shall aye possess that cheering zest,
That I shall once again from dust return,
And shall eternally with noblest praises turn.

Had John anticipated the neglect of posterity regarding his grave, he might have adapted, conveniently, the latter part of the lines, to that contingency.

ANXIOUS TIMES.

The Rev. Lewis Gaunt, M.A., in his Grassington Centenary Pamphlet, says: "For the first 20 years of its existence, the Church at Grassington enjoyed outward prosperity and inward peace. It had been blessed with the services of three Godly and able ministers, whose preaching had attracted hearers, not only from the village itself, but also from the neighbourhood for miles round; after Mr. Harper's death, things did not go so well."

The Rev. John Williams succeeded Mr. Harper in 1830. He is said to have been a powerful preacher, but to have left a not altogether happy memory. He left in 1833, and for seven years after that date, the pulpit was supplied by students and laymen. During Mr. Williams' ministry, in 1832, William Wright and George Lee were appointed deacons, so that, with William Simpson, who had been a deacon from the beginning, the Church had now three deacons.

The Linton Mills, in which many of the congregation were employed, closed down in the "forties," and soon, only a handful of middle-aged and elderly folk remained to carry on the work. Under such depressing circumstances the Rev. Mr. Dalton, 1842-1844, and the Rev. Mr. Tyson, 1845-1847, had only short pastorates. The Rev. James Morish, a missionary in Bradford, came in 1848, and was ordained the following year, when the officiating ministers were Principal Walter Scott, and the Revs. J. A. Savage, of Wilsden; J. Tattersfield, of Keighley; and R. Gibbs, of Skipton. Mr. Morish appears to have been over-anxious to get rid of the material difficulties, and, in consequence, to have neglected the spiritual welfare of his flock. He suddenly departed for Australia in 1852.

"The Church was left in pitiable condition, with a debt of £250 and a sadly depleted membership."

A PASTORLESS PERIOD.

For the next 35 years, the pulpit was supplied by students from the college. Friendly ministers, such as, the Rev R. Gibbs, from Skipton, who rendered special help; John Aston, of Eccleshill; and William Kingsland, from College Chapel, Bradford; and among the Laymen, whose names were long remembered with gratitude, were John Harrison, Samuel Farey, Anthony Richardson, and John Calvert, all of whom were deacons at the Skipton Congregational Church; and Elizabeth Craven, from Keighley, who was often designated, "The Bishop of Grassington." The workers in the Church were most loyal; prominent among them, apart from the deacons, whose task was no enviable one, were William Rogers, Abraham Varley, Thomas Whitaker, and James Cuthbert.

In 1854, William Simpson died at the advanced age of 76. He had been deacon for 42 years. The deacons, then, were William Varley, William Wright, and George Lee. The Superintendents of the School were William Wright and R. Lee. The lay preacher and delegate to the Union was William Varley. Five years later, in 1859, William Wright died, after being deacon 27 years.

JUBILEE AND REMOVAL OF DEBT.

The Jubilee of the Church was celebrated in 1861. In honour of the event, it was decided to re-roof the Chapel, which was long overdue. Much voluntary labour enabled the work to be completed, at a cost of £100, all of which was raised without any addition to the debt. The original debt of £250 still remained. Alderman James Law took a great interest in Grassington at that time, and he, and Benjamin Harrison, promised £100 if the remainder could be raised locally. With such an incentive, success followed the appeal. It was after this, in 1869, that the Rev. Bailey J. Harker, in his "Rambles in Upper Wharfedale," was able to write : "In connection with the Chapel is a burial ground, several cottages, a large garden and a parsonage; it is the only Chapel in the town which is clear of debt." Later, Alderman Law offered to pay one-third of the cost of an adjoining cottage and its conversion into a schoolroom. Similar help in 1876, led to the re-seating of the body of the Chapel; the old calf-stalls, as Mr. Law called them, being replaced by the comfortable pews of today. The gallery was not touched and there the "calf stalls" still remain.

A new list of trustees, in 1879, included James Law, Thomas Rawson Hill, John Hill and Elias Thomas, all of Bradford, and honoured names in Grassington Congregationalism.

The Rev. J. M. Calvert, son of the first minister, whose mother was a Grassington lady, removed to Grassington from Gargrave in 1880, where he had been rendering very effective help at Winterburn during his retirement. Here he gave similar assistance, until he again in removed in 1885. Perhaps the arrival and fortunate assistance of Mr. Calvert, in 1880, saved the Church from disaster at that time, for the gradual closing down of the mines so reduced the population, that to continue the Church scarcely seemed worth while.

In 1887 through the County Executive, the Rev. J. B. Robertson became pastor. Previously he had been Secretary of the Union. The following year he resigned, but, continuing to reside in the district, he took a practical oversight of the Church until 1892.

In 1907, the Rev. John Bailey Harker, after being in the Congregational ministry from 1867 to 1907, a period of forty years, retired to Grassington. His services were frequently requisitioned, until his death at Moorside on October 5th, 1916, at the age of 73. He was born at Garr's Hill, Grassington, on July 16th, 1843. Mr. Harker was a well-known antiquarian, Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society, and the founder of the Wharfedale Antiquarian Exploration Society. He was also an author of no mean repute. His "Rambles in Upper Wharfedale" has been extensively read. The railway, from Skipton to Threshfield, opened July, 1902, was largely due to his prolonged advocacy.

SKIPTON OVERSIGHT.

A great quickening, spiritually and financially, was produced, when the Church at Skipton volunteered pastoral oversight, in 1908. Mr. Gaunt, its pastor, promised to preach once a Quarter, and to visit as much as possible. It was in 1909, that the Grassington Church was able to dispense with the grant-in-aid, which had been received by the Church for over three-quarters of a century.

CENTENARY.

The great "happening" of 1911 was the Centenary Celebration on September 16th and 17th, by a tea and re-union. The Rev. Dr. Adeney was the preacher on the Sunday. To mark the event, the Rev. Lewis H. Gaunt, prepared a Centenary History. This appeared in pamphlet form, and was reproduced in the Union Year Book for 1912.

Mrs. Fryer, a daughter of William Wright, who was deacon in 1832, passed into rest on December 13th, 1918, at the age of 88 years. Her attachment to the Church was so marked, that, when increasing weakness prevented walking, she was wheeled from Threshfield to service, every Sunday, for over two years. The bath chair was placed near the stove, and there she worshipped.

LEST WE FORGET.

The supreme sacrifice, 1914-18.

Hubert Wood. Charley Wood.

PROSPERITY: BENJAMIN ALBERT MILLARD.

Since the end of the Great War, Grassington and Threshfield have become more and more a residential area, and the new attachments have been a great encouragement to the Church. After thirty-three years without a pastor the Church gave a call to the Rev. B. A. Millard, of Milton, Huddersfield. The Induction Service was held on Thursday, October 26th, 1922, when Mr. Millard was welcomed by the Revs. E. Johnson Saxton (Moderator); James Leighton (Rector of Linton); S. Waterhouse; D. C. Tincker; F. L. Kennings; and R. J. W. Hill; also Messrs. E. Woodhead, from Huddersfield; and A. Gunnell, from Skipton.

A quickened interest has produced great changes. The "envelope-offertory-system" was adopted in 1922; and a sale of work was held the same year to raise funds for the improvements' in the Church and Manse. The sale realised £378 1s. 0d.

In 1923, electric light was installed.

Hospitality was provided for the delegates of the Dales' Conference the same year.

The greatest change effected, perhaps, has been the installation of a new two-manual and pedal organ by Messrs. Thomas E. Hughes, of Bradford, at a cost of £553 10s. 0d. This was opened on Saturday, September 10th, 1927, with an organ recital by Mr. H. H. Mort, Mus.D., F.R.C.O., of Manchester; and again on Sunday, when Mr. Millard was the preacher. Master George Woodward was the soloist.

During the pastorate of Mr. Millard, over £1,000 has been raised for special objects by this little Church.

Since the above was compiled, Mr. Millard has concluded a seven years' ministry at Grassington, and has accepted a call to the Bude Congregational Church, Cornwall.

A large and representative gathering of members and friends was held in the Church on July 25th, 1929, to bid farewell to Mr. Millard. Mr. Tate presided, and was supported by the Rev. F. Mosby (Rector), Mr. Theo. Taylor, the Revs. J. Leighton (former Rector), T. Oliphant, F. Tattersall, and J. Lefevre. Mr. Oliphant offered prayer. Glowing tributes to the good work Mr. Millard had done in Upper Wharfedale were paid by all the speakers. During the evening Mr. Theo. Taylor presented to Mr. Millard, on behalf of the congregation and friends, a cheque for £140 7s. and a picture of the "Ghaistrills," painted by Mr. J. S. Atherton, the well known Grassington artist. Mr. Taylor voiced the good wishes of all present for the future happiness and well being of Mr. and Mrs. Millard in their new home. He also said: "In Mr. Millard's pulpit ministrations we have had the advantage of hearing a thorough student, a cultured Christian, and a fearless expounder of his views of God's message to men." In referring to Mrs. Millard, Mr. Taylor said she had been the true helpmate of her husband - his greatest help and his greatest stay. In his, (Mr. Taylor's) opinion, that was the highest service a congregation has any right to expect from a minister's wife. Unless and until a minister's wife is paid a separate salary, no congregation has a right to expect more. Mr. Taylor concluded by saying: "May God bless and keep you and give you much happiness and great success in your new sphere of work; that is the hope and wish of every one of us."

THE BRENNAND FAMILY.

Mention should be made of the Brennand family, which came to Grassington in 1893, since when the members of it have served the Congregational Church in most of its offices. When living at T'osside, Mr. Brennand was actively associated with the cause there. He was delegate to the Union

in 1881 and 1882. He became deacon at Grassington; and was again delegate to the Union from 1894 until his death in 1907. He was also Superintendent of the School. His daughter, Miss Brennand (now Mrs. Raper) was Supply Secretary from 1899 to 1908. Her sister, Miss I Brennand, held the same office from that date to 1929. Mr. Robert Brennand was harmoniumist from 1899, and succeeded his father as Superintendent of the School, in 1907 which office he occupied until 1929. He was also a deacon of the Church. Mr. Henry Brennand became Church Secretary on the resignation of Mr. Verity in 1899, and held the position until 1929. He was deacon and Church secretary for 30 years. Mr. Raper succeeded his brother-in-law, Mr. Brennand, as harmoniumist in the Chapel in 1921, and when the new organ was installed, in September, 1927, he became organist and choirmaster. He resigned in May, 1929.

Mr. G. H. Leeson, of Bradford, accepted a call to the Church in October, 1929. His induction meeting was held on November 18th.

Mr. Leeson is a stalwart in Congregationalism and Mrs. Leeson is a daughter of the Manse. Before coming to Bradford, Mr. Leeson had been Chairman of the Surrey Congregational Union, and afterwards, its Secretary for four years. Since his arrival in Yorkshire, he has held most of the offices open to laymen - Chairman of the Bradford Congregational Association and its Secretary for several years, Chairman of the Bradford District of the Yorkshire Congregational Union and its representative on the Executive of the Union. In the latter capacity, the Union recognised his merits by appointing him Chairman of the Executive for 1928 to 1929. For four years he has been one of the Yorkshire representatives on the Council of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. As a lay-preacher he has been in constant request by our Churches, large and small, and gladly welcomed wherever he has gone. For many years he has been a Governor of the United College.

*And the work that we have builded
Oft with bleeding hands and tears,
Oft in error, oft in anguish,
Will not perish with our years.
It will last, and shine transfigured
In the final reign of right;
It will pass into the splendours
Of the City of the Light.*

MINISTERS.

1812-1818	John Calvert.	1822-1825	Robert Aspinall.
1825-1829	Richard Harper.	1830-1833	John Williams.
1842-1844	Mr. Dalton.	1845-1847	Mr. Tyson.
1848-1852	James Morish.	1887-1888	James Bishop Robertson.
1922-1929	B. A. Millard.	1929-	G. H. Leeson.

PRESENT TRUSTEES.

John Darwin, Farmer, Grassington.	Richard Hawley, Grassington (deceased)
Robert Chapman, 'Bus Proprietor.	William Padgett, Bradford (deceased)
George Pattinson, Farmer.	J. W. Elsworth, Saltaire (deceased)
John Howarth, Scarr Cottage.	John T. Dawson, Skipton (deceased)
Robert Brennand, Linton.	James Dodgson, Skipton (deceased)
Henry Brennand, Hebden Road.	
Percy Grimshaw, Bridge End.	
Sidney Gunnell, Liverpool.	
Charles Wade, Bradford.	
Rev. L. H. Gaunt, Wilmslow, Cheshire.	
James Moorhouse, Skipton.	
Percy Clark, Bradford	

THE CHURCH AND ITS OFFICERS, 1929.

Accommodation, 300.
Scholars, 48.

Church Members, 39.
Teachers, 8.

Times of Service: 10-30 a.m. and 6-30 p.m.
School: 10-00 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Minister - Rev. G. H. Leeson.
Deacons - W. Tate, M. Greenwood, Dr Cummin,
Mrs T. C. Taylor, Mrs J. R. Chapman.
Treasurer - W. Tate.
Secretary - M. Greenwood.
Organist and Choirmaster - W. Dickinson



GRASSINGTON CHAPEL.



GRASSINGTON CHAPEL INTERIOR.