

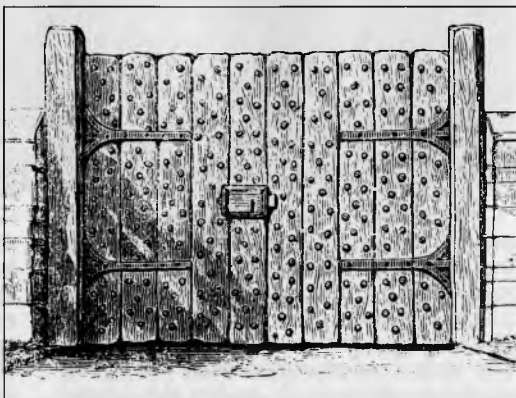
28 he built three gun positions to deter any enemy landing in Dover bay. The westernmost was Archcliffe Fort, which still survives. The Black Battery (sometimes called by other names in old documents) stood near the present site of the landward end of the present Admiralty Pier but is long since gone, and Moats Bulwark, much altered later was built half way up the cliff below the castle and still survives. All were armed with an assortment of guns and an establishment of soldiers.

In 1544 Henry mustered army and the Cinque Port ships at Dover to carry them across to the continent. Little permanent success followed, but Henry's force did capture Boulogne, bringing back to Dover the gates of the town. Henry presented the gates to Sir Thomas Hardres as a trophy of war and Sir Thomas erected them at the gates of his estate at Upper Hardres. In the 19th century, the gates having become rotten, the local blacksmith there bought them and burnt them to salvage the iron hinges and nails. Henry had no special contact with Dover from the end of his Boulogne campaign until he died in 1547.

After the destruction of Dover's religious institutions, which will be dealt with later, there were several problems which were not resolved. One of these was the church of St Mary the Virgin, which was ordered to be closed, but the people of Dover petitioned Henry that they should continue to be allowed to use

it as their parish church. Henry, after discovering that it had no connection with the old monastic foundations, presented it to the people as their parish church.

Since it had no assets of any kind, they ran it, with financial difficulties at times, for more than three hundred years. They voted for, and elected, their own priest for more than three centuries, each aspirant taking services for one Sunday, the people then voting for the priest they preferred. It was a rare right in the Church of England, a right they lost in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the machinations of the priest at that time, the ambitious and devious Canon Puckle.



The Gate of Boulogne, brought back to Dover as a prize of war, and given by Henry to Sir Thomas Mardres who used them, as shown here, as the gates to his estate at Upper Hardres. In the late 18th century they were sold to the local blacksmith, who unfortunately burnt them to extract the usable iron from them.

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## ***Hugh Price Hughes and Methodism in Dover***

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Alan Brooks

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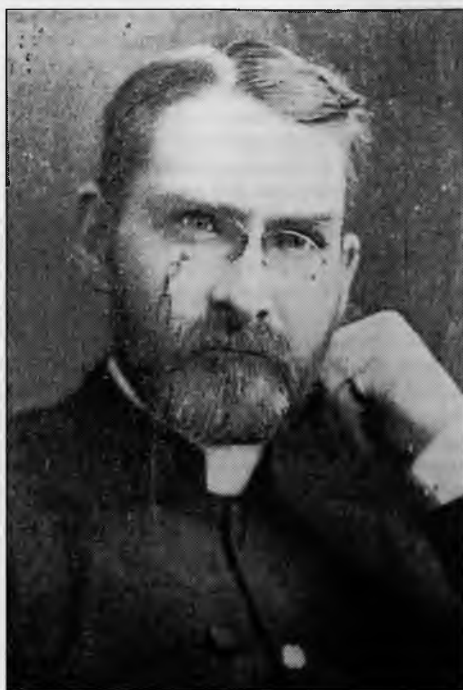
### *Introduction*

The history of Methodism in Dover has been one of steady and faithful ministry, characterised more by honest endeavour than by spectacular tidal flows. In the course of its 250 year history, one of its high points was undoubtedly the three year ministry of the young Hugh Price Hughes between 1869 and 1872, for whom Dover was his first circuit of appointment and which provided the

practical grounding for his meteoric ministry.

Hugh Price Hughes is remembered as one of the towering figures of Victorian Methodism. He revolutionised the perspective of the traditional Methodism of the time. His theology was practical, thoroughly based on observations of society, social issues and political situations that he found firstly in Dover, then in other places. He founded the 'Forward Movement' in Methodism, a new

social gospel where the church would address both the contemporary social as well as spiritual needs of people. He founded and edited the *Methodist Times*, which carried his message, and he founded the West London Mission in 1886 which was its practical expression, pioneering an innovative programme of social work which continued



Hugh Price Hughes

later under Donald (Lord) Soper. Hughes became President of the Methodist Conference in 1898-9, and was President of the Free Church Council before his untimely death in 1902.

This year has seen the publication of an excellent and well researched biography of Hughes by an American, Christopher Oldstone-Moore (1) which covers his Dover ministry in some detail. The following account is inspired by this book.

#### *Methodism In Dover*

John Wesley first preached in Dover in January 1756, 'to a very serious but small congregation' as he records in his Journal. He

continues 'We afterwards walked up to the castle, on the top of a mountain. It is an amazingly fine situation...'. Methodists first met in rooms, but as they grew in strength they built a chapel in Elizabeth Square in 1790, which Wesley visited at the grand age of 87 (3). This was sold in 1834 and replaced by a new chapel in Snargate St adjacent to the Grand Shaft which opened in that same year. This was one of the two chapels that Hughes preached in: a commemorative pamphlet from there from 1934 described Hughes as the 'second Wesley', such was the depth of feeling for him. The other chapel in which he served was the 1839 Wesleyan Chapel in Buckland, on the west side of London Rd (in Buckland Terrace) and which happily remains today, still with its splendid galleried interior, though not now in Methodist use. This building superseded another which dated from 1810 and which was opposite on the east side of London Rd.

Hughes was said to have revived a flagging congregation. Although true, he was helped by the general religious revival of the 40 year period up to the First World War during which time both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist congregations grew. The *Dover News* reported the Primitives at a low ebb even in 1872, but under Rev Thomas Russell they turned the corner and added to their Peter St chapel by building a new one in Round Tower St in 1874, succeeded by Belgrave Rd in 1882. The culmination of their prosperity saw the impressive London Road premises opened at the end of 1901, replacing Peter St. It was here that Wesleyan and Primitive congregations united in 1938, and this is the sole remaining Methodist church in the town today. For the Wesleyans, their growth had seen the opening in 1910 of Wesley Hall nearer the centre of town, again a building that still remains (though not the original).

#### *Hughes' Ministry in Dover*

Hugh Price Hughes was stationed in Dover in 1869 as assistant minister and lived at 1 Buckland Terrace next to Buckland Chapel in a house that is no longer there. This, in the words of his daughter (2), was 'in the centre of the poor quarter of the town'. From his study window 'the dwellings of the working classes formed.... a vista to the eye'.

Hughes, aged 22, pale and bespectacled

30 and just out of college, made his mark in his first service. He audaciously declared that his main purpose was to convert the whole town, no less. In the prayer meeting after his sermon, 18 people came forward to dedicate themselves to Christ. My copy of his daughter's biography belonged to W.D Atkins, later a church stalwart, and he writes in the margin 'I was present- I can well remember it!'. This in a town where another remarked 'I had been dissatisfied for many years at the lack of manifestation of Divine power in our services'.

The local YMCA provided an unexpected vehicle for Hughes to promote his views on social as well as religious issues. Founded in 1856, the Dover branch was flourishing by the 1870s. The Bible Class on Sunday afternoons was led by the Mayor no less, Edward Knocker. In fact Hughes, who became one of the vice presidents, was keen to expand the educational functions of the organisation and move the emphasis away from prayer meetings, and he complained that local town councillors did not attend as they did in Leeds (*Dover News* 4.3.71).

Through their mid-week meetings, the YMCA provided a regular platform for lively public debates on important issues. Hughes used these as a medium for delivering addresses and taking part in debates, and his abilities combined with the fact that both major local newspapers, the *Dover Express* and the *Dover News*, were liberal journals which both reported the debates fully and generally concurred with his views, meant that his influence spread well beyond his local congregations.

At a YMCA debate in January 1870, Hughes delivered a lecture in the Union Hall on 'Total Abstinence and its Social, Medical and Religious Aspects', which the *Express* described as 'a masterly exposition'. He had become a total abstainer in Dover when he witnessed the disastrous effect of excessive drink on local communities (there were at the time around 220 pubs in Dover) and he developed and projected the practical case for temperance. The Temperance Movement was in its infancy in Dover: Hughes propelled it forward by several addresses from the public platform (even returning to Dover in 1873 to repeat it) and by helping (with W.D Atkins) to

found the local Band of Hope which instructed children in temperance, but also provided other educational and recreational opportunities. Atkins says that at the YMCA meetings in the Wellington Hall the local publicans would occupy the front rows of chairs with their solicitor, Mr Mowll. This was at the time that the 'Permissive Bill' was being re-introduced to Parliament, which would give Boroughs and parishes the right to prohibit the retail trade of alcohol within their areas. Hughes thrived on the controversy and earned a reputation by sharp debate and witty retorts at hecklers. In the Wellington Hall in February 1872 (*Dover News* 16.2.72) Hughes complained at how much money was being spent on drink, and that everyone knew that the public house bill must be paid, whether the butcher and baker were paid or not; an indignant voice at the back cried 'No, no!'. Hughes said he much regretted it and hoped the gentleman's customers would pay forthwith.

Reading the local newspapers of the time, one cannot help but be struck by the inordinate amount of space devoted to another controversial and more lurid issue that Hughes threw himself into, namely the debate about the Contagious Diseases Act (CDA). As a garrison town containing several thousand troops, Dover was especially affected. The first of the CD Acts was passed in 1866, the second in 1869. These established mandatory medical examination of prostitutes in places like Dover to prevent the spread of venereal disease among the troops.

The first problem was that the Acts had been passed in an air of secrecy. This issue was raised by Alderman Rees in January 1870 who complained that the Town Council had never been consulted. The cause was taken up by both liberal newspapers who exposed serious problems in the execution of the Acts. An examination of a woman at a house in Seven Star Street caused the gathering of 500 people in the street. The wider issue was that, as an editorial in the *News* explained (29.1.70), in towns like Dover the Acts placed all women under police surveillance: the onus was on the woman to prove she wasn't of the 'prostitute class'. It was this victimisation of women that caused Florence Nightingale to lead national protests, and for Josephine

Butler to come to Dover to speak at the Union Hall in March 1870. Debate raged between those defending the rights of women and those who thought the Acts prevented the spread of disease. This included the Mayor who was of the opinion that 'with the exception of Manchester, Dover was the foulest town of any from which statistics had been obtained' (*Express*, 28.1.70).

The liberal clergy arraigned themselves on public platforms with others, and a strong local movement grew in favour of the repeal of the Acts. Among them were Hughes' Superintendent, Dr Knowles, Rev Dobson, and Hugh Price Hughes. Hughes spoke at a public meeting at the Wellington Hall in May 1870 and 'addressed the meeting in a racy, forcible and highly talented speech' (*Express*, 28.5.70). Hughes analysed the defects of the Acts in detail. He went so far as to describe the Acts as unconstitutional, setting the military over civil power: and said that those engaged in enforcing them were nothing short of Government 'spies'. Morally, they were defective in giving official recognition to prostitution, and they penalised 'the betrayed' (women) while allowing the betrayer (men) to escape. Prostitutes, he insisted, weren't 'sewers to be treated' but were equally children of the Father just as well as anyone else. Hughes' eloquence crystallised moral outrage against the Acts and made the local anti-CDA movement a force to be reckoned with.

One reason for Hughes' success was the support he received from his Superintendent, the Rev Dr John Knowles, an able and experienced minister in his final stationing before retirement, and a prominent and very active local Alderman, Rowland Rees JP, a surveyor by profession and also a staunch Methodist who later became Mayor in 1883. Other allies on the public platform included Rev S. Dobson of the Zion Congregationalist Chapel, Queen St, who exhibited a similar sharpness of wit to Hughes.

The final and most extraordinary series of events to refer to were ones which put Dover, and Hughes, on to the pages of the national press.

The YMCA had a reading room stocked with edifying and educational material. Its contents were under the scrutiny of the

Management Committee, who on 6th March 1871 voted to ban *Punch* from its shelves. The motion was led by the Mayor, who believed *Punch* 'to be a publication contemptuous of religious influences, if not absolutely hostile to them' (*Express*, 10.3.71). Hughes spoke against, and later made an impressive case explaining the use of God's gifts of humour and satire. Almost overnight the issue hit the streets of the nation. *Punch* of course reported the vote, but so did *The Daily News*, *Echo*, *Daily Telegraph*, even *Figaro*. The *Telegraph* applauded Hughes as 'true to the good old cause of common sense'. *Punch* ridiculed the decision and suggested that Dover 'must be a place of Dolts' and that special efforts should be made in the journal to explain its contents in simple language to educate the Dover Dolt. The YMCA Committee was taken aback by their sudden elevation to fame, and the unfortunate Mayor 'did not care for the abuse which had been heaped upon him throughout England'. Another meeting was soon held and the vote reversed.

Hughes moved from Dover to his next Circuit in August 1872 a much loved and respected Minister. Dover had taught him a lot. He hadn't converted the town- 100 extra members added to the Circuit roll was the figure quoted at his packed farewell service- but he had set an inspiring example of evangelical fervour and moral leadership. New practical ventures had been started: the Wesleyan Band of Hope and the Dover Working Men's Coffee and Recreation Rooms, set up in 1872, a precursor of similar projects later established for the West London Mission.

When Hughes died prematurely at the age of 55 thirty years later in 1902, memorial services were held at Buckland and Snargate St and were both packed with those who recognised his greatness and the fact that Dover had been his testing-ground.

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The Life of Hugh Price Hughes : Dorothea Price Hughes : Hodder & Stoughton, 1904.

There is an account of Methodism in Dover in a series of articles in the *Dover Express* in May 1885.