

John Wesley And Dover Methodists

by Derek Leach,

*based upon an article written some
years ago by Graham Tutfull*

This year Methodists have been celebrating the birth of John Wesley 300 years ago. It was on 24 May 1738 that John, already ordained in the Anglican Church, attended a meeting in Aldersgate Street, London and felt his heart strangely warmed. 'I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.' Shunned by the established church for his views, John took to preaching in the open air and made the world his parish.

He first came to Dover in 1756 and established the first society here. 'I preached at noon at Dover to a very serious, but small, congregation. We afterwards walked to the Castle on the top of a mountain' he wrote in his journal. He came again in 1759, preaching in the recently finished 'new room'. In the following year his brother Charles preached in Biggin Street and John made another visit commenting, 'Who would have expected to find here some of the best singers in England!' He came again in 1764 and 1765 when he rebuked members of his society who were still busy as smugglers! Until then the society had been meeting in a cooperage in Queen Street, but then started meeting in Limekiln Street where two homes had been knocked into one. Visiting again in 1767 and 1768 he wrote, 'Many were obliged to go away after the house was filled.' In 1770 he climbed Shakespeare Cliff 'with some difficulty'.



There were more visits between 1771 and 1788. On his visit in 1789 (at the age of 86) he recorded, 'The new house, large as it is, was far too small, so that many could not get in'. This referred to new premises in Elizabeth Square in the Pier District. Throughout his life Wesley resisted calls to set up a separate Methodist Church and expected his followers to attend services at their parish church. Methodist meetings were held at different times to avoid clashes, but, following his death in 1791, his followers established the Methodist Church. Locally, a preaching place was established at Buckland in 1806 and in 1810 a Wesleyan Chapel was built at London Road (now Cairns the chemist). In 1823 St John's Chapel was built in Middle Row in the Pier District by a splinter group. The Elizabeth Square chapel proved to be too small and in 1834 a new chapel was built

in Snargate Street next to the Grand Shaft staircase entrance. Another large chapel was built on the terrace in London Road. It provided the first day school in Buckland. The imposing building is still there, but no longer a church and is now called the King's Hall. In 1850, Striker Finnis, the builder of Tower Hamlets, gave the Wesleyans a site for a chapel, which closed

tive Methodists - because they felt that the original spirit of Methodism was being lost by the Wesleyans. It was not until 1932 that they were all reunited into the Methodist Church we know today.

The Primitive Methodists did not appear in Dover until 1848. They established small preaching places. One was in Round Tower Lane in the Pier District and another was



River Methodist Church

for worship on 31 August 2003. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Wesleyans needed a church in the town centre and built Wesley Hall in the Folkestone Road in 1910. It was destroyed during the First World War but was rebuilt and damaged again during the Second World War. It closed in the 1981 and is now the Menzies Hall, part of Dover College.

Within 30 years of Wesley's death many of his followers had formed separate Methodist Churches - the Methodist New Connexion, the Bible Christians and the Primi-

in a cowshed loft at Brook Street. There was a chapel in Strond Lane in the Pier District by 1858. Yet another chapel was built in Peter Street in 1860 and this was followed by another in Round Tower Street in 1874, which had to make way for the railway in 1879. Compensation money enabled Belgrave Road chapel to be built in 1882. Yet another Primitive chapel was built, the Maxton Tabernacle. Since the Second World War, the Snargate Street, Belgrave Road and Maxton chapels have closed.

The London Road church was built by the 'Prims' in 1901 to replace the Peter Street building. On 31 August 2003, London Road Methodist Church ceased to exist as such, but began a new life as the home of 'The Beacon Church' uniting the members of London Road, Tower Hamlets and the United Reformed Church in a new venture. River Methodist Church is still with us. Apparently a visiting Methodist preacher spoke to a small crowd outside Tritton's bakery in Common Lane in 1834 and when the River Workhouse closed in 1836, Wesleyans moved into the vacant building (now River House in Valley Road) until they were expelled in 1842. We know that a visiting preacher held services in a cottage next to the Royal Oak in 1871. Serv-

ices were held subsequently in two rooms in a cottage behind the Royal Oak. The chapel in Common Lane (now the church hall) was built on land donated by Mr Churchward of Kearsney Abbey and was opened in 1876 at a cost of £162 plus £80 for the adjoining cottage. The adjoining Lewisham Road site was acquired in 1935 for a new church, but the war intervened. The new church finally opened in 1956 and was soon followed by new school rooms for the expanding Sunday School. River Methodists and Anglican friends at St Peter's in River enjoy a very good relationship and intend to put it on a more formal footing. Nationally, the Anglican and Methodist Churches are renewing their efforts to unite. I think Wesley would approve.

Dover and the 18th century Sea Wolves

by Ivan Green

In the 18th century Dover was the premier port for cross channel ships, and the centre of much coastal seaborne traffic, principally the distribution of goods from the Western ports of France, Spain and the Western Mediterranean. These miscellaneous goods were imported by increasingly prosperous Dover merchants and stored in bulk in the warehouses beside the harbour. There were two shipyards, a small one dealing mostly with running repairs, and the manufacture of ropes and rigging, and a large one producing sea-going ships, especially the famous Dover fast and nimble sloops.

Besides legitimate enterprises there were

others of questionable legality. One of these yards was the home base of local privateers which preyed on French and Spanish ships in the Channel. Of these, one was owned and operated by a Dover mayor, John Bazely. A privateer was distinguished from a pirate by operating under Letters of Marque, issued by the sovereign, but this was only recognised in England. To other nations such a ship was only classed as, and dealt with, as a pirate. Others, often called 'Sea Wolves' were just pirates, preying principally in the Atlantic and off the shores of central and south America, much as Drake and Frobisher had done a couple of centuries earlier. These, for obvious reasons