

## Methodism and the Methodist Chapel, Coldharbour

Methodism began primarily through the work of John Wesley, an Anglican priest and educator who adopted unconventional practices, such as open-air preaching, to reach the poor and working classes. Following his death, the Methodists became a separate non-conformist church which did not adhere to the rules of the established Church of England and which was a firm advocate of lifelong learning, i.e. education which may begin in an infant school and end in Heaven.

Methodism first came to Milborne Port around 1820. Initially meetings were held in the homes of local people, notably William Pearce, a stonemason, who lived in Sherborne Road near the junction with Gainsborough, and latterly John Roberts, a carpenter, who lived in Newtown. The meetings went from strength to strength and in 1829, two



cottages were purchased from Samuel Fudge in Coldharbour and the Wesleyan Methodists opened their first chapel. In response to events further afield, the Milborne Port Wesleyan Methodists sent anti-slavery petitions to the House of Commons in 1830 as did 'persons residing' in the town.

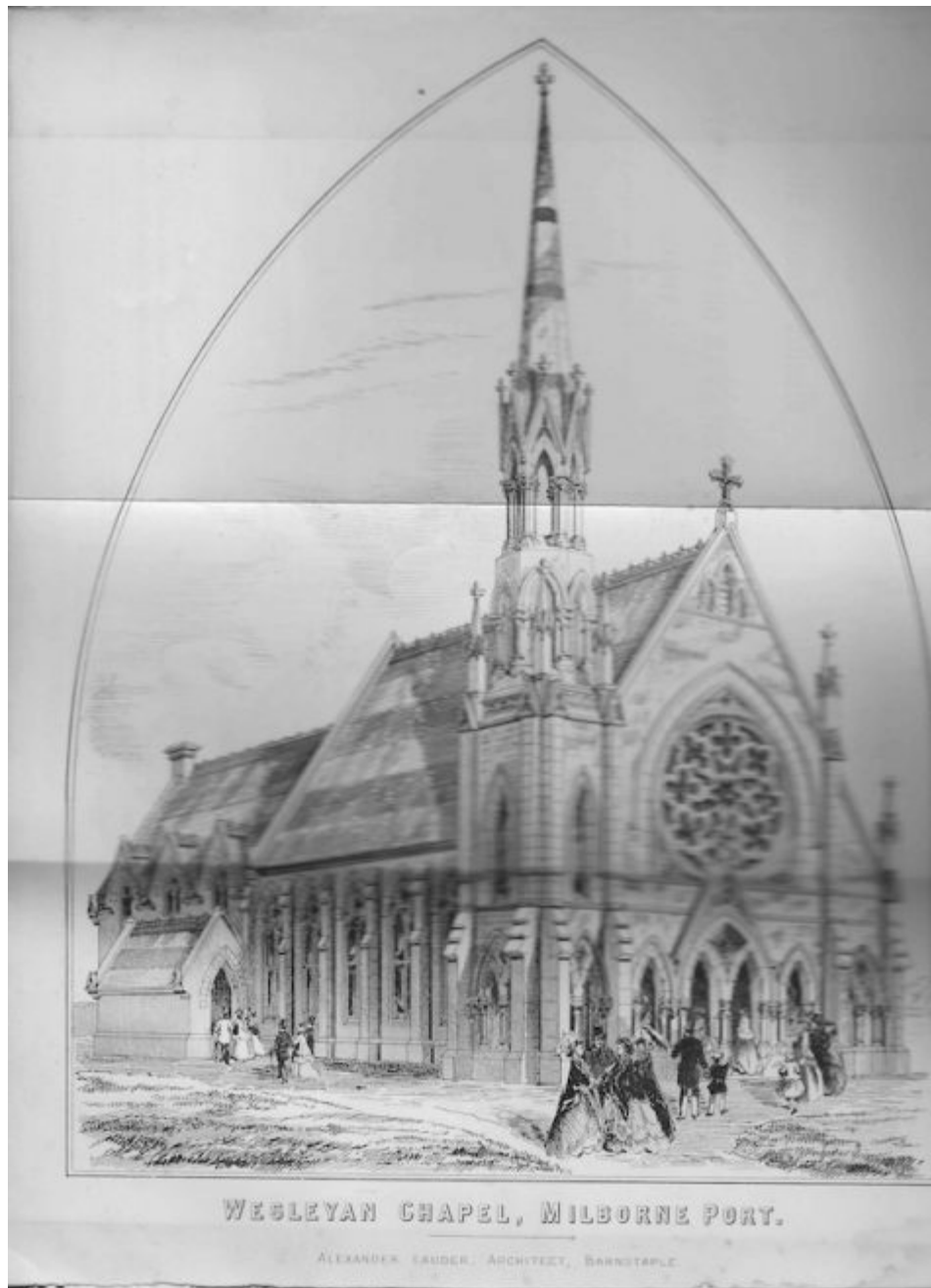
Enlargements to the chapel were undertaken in 1831 to double its size and again in 1860, but it still could not accommodate all the worshippers who had to be rationed to one attendance per Sunday, at either morning or evening services. Additional land was purchased

in 1864 and the foundation stone laid on November 16<sup>th</sup> of that year; and the building of a new chapel was completed in 1866<sup>1</sup> with an opening service on 18<sup>th</sup> April. The building was designed by Alexander Lauder of Barnstaple in Devon. In a statement still resonant today it was noted that 'the completion of the works was delayed by the dilatoriness of the

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<sup>1</sup> An article in the Western Gazette of January 26<sup>th</sup> 1866 reports that 'Samuel Fudge of Milborne Port caused damage to an outhouse [William Ford's]. It appeared that the defendant had hauled the stone for the New Wesleyan Chapel and whilst the wagon was passing the plaintiff's outhouse it came into contact with the corner of the building and knocked down a portion of it. The defendant said that he offered to have the damage repaired if the plaintiff would allow him time to do so but the plaintiff was in a great hurry and did the repair himself. He had since had it valued by two builders who said that 1s would cover the damages; this he was willing to pay.'

builder'. The chapel was 116 feet long and its turret reaches the height of 82 feet. The total cost was £2732.12s.6d. Ministers generally stayed in role for about three years and in the period of 1920-1934 they were Montague Foyle, Harold Snowdon, Wilfred Jenkins, Goronwy Davies and Ellan Lowther.



*This picture shows Lauder's original design for the chapel.*

At the opening, a tea was given to over 1,000 people during the afternoon and evening. The chapel was built to accommodate 480 people but alterations reduced the seating capacity to 420. There were large square

curtained pews for the principal families on either side of the pulpit. Older boys were allowed to sit together at the back and it was common for devout men engaged in outdoor occupations to stand all through the often hour long sermon (ensuring no one nodded off).



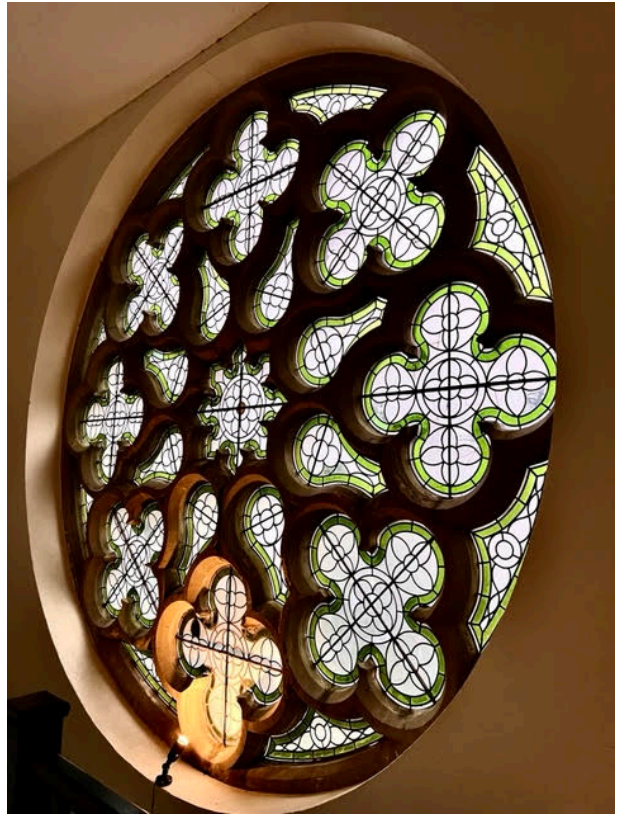
A school room and classrooms were built at the back to accommodate Bible Study Classes, Mothers' Meetings, Youth Club and Sunday School, which made a great contribution to improved literacy, especially among girls; there was also a small room to the south side of the Assembly Room where flowers were prepared for the main chapel. Singing was led by an orchestra; not everyone could read and the hymns were recited through in couplets as the singing proceeded. Chapel and Sunday School anniversaries were opportunities to dress up, have a special meal together and chapel teas were legendary.

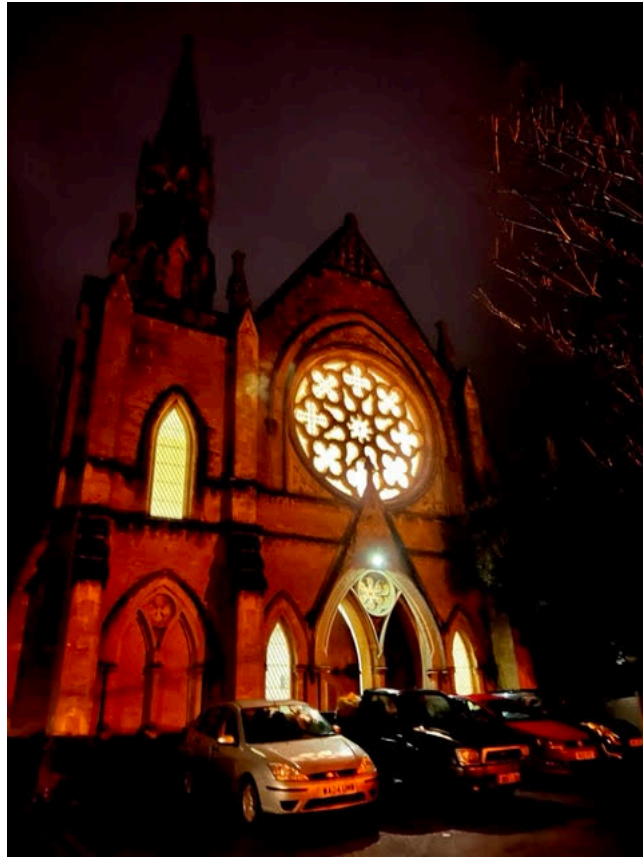


The chapel is large by village standards and has a beautiful rose window at its western façade.



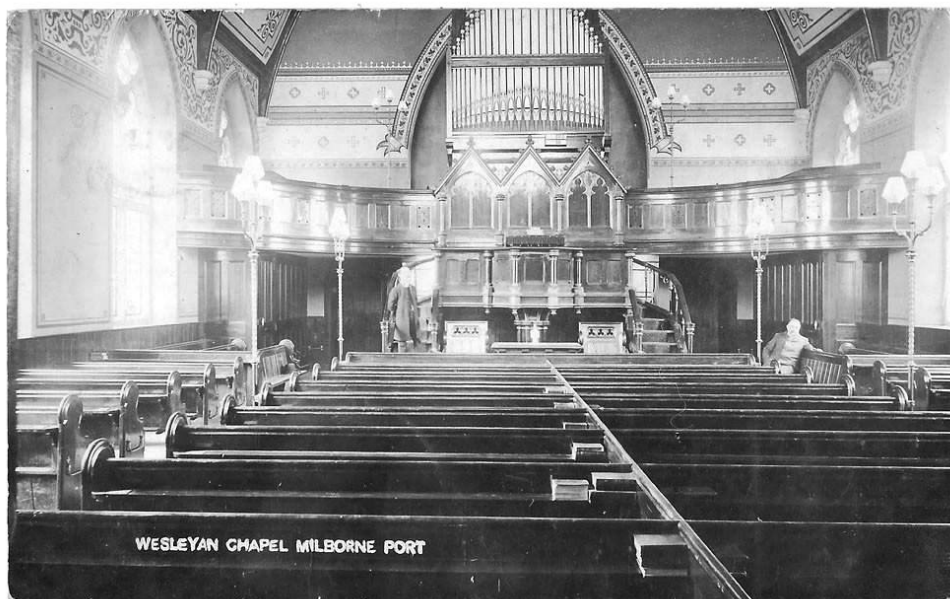
*The photographs below show views of the rose window from the interior and of the double door with the much smaller window above.*

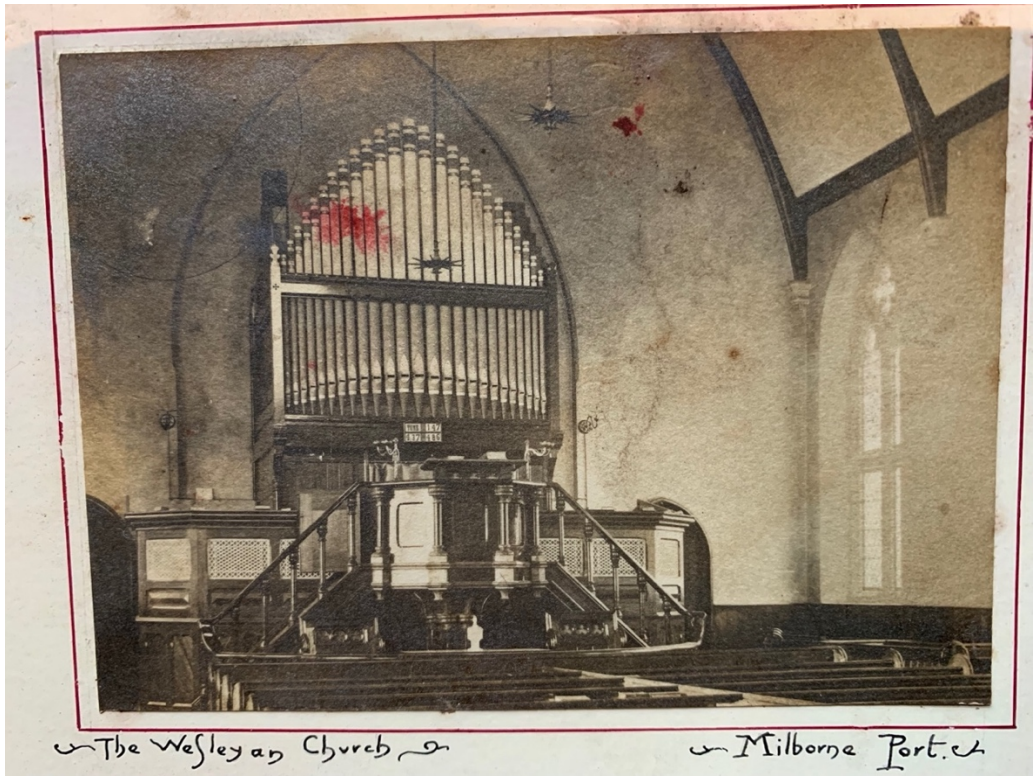




An adjoining manse followed in 1871 together with an iron fence in front of the chapel and in 1877 an organ was purchased, which you can see in the

three photographs below. Following a long and steady decline in attendance, the chapel was closed in 1988 and converted to flats and named after its original architect.





The Wesleyan Church

Milborne Port.

1905 interior.







*The modern extension used as the Assembly Room. The Boys' Brigade met here, and the Sunday School took place here.*





*The Manse*

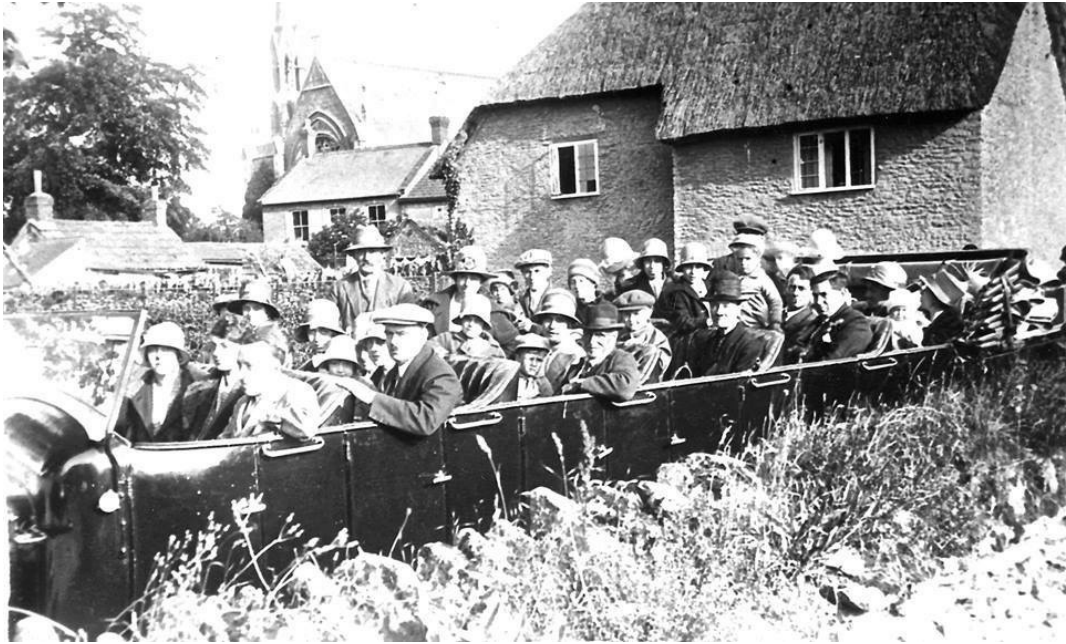






General Booth's Motor Campaign, Milborne Port, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1906 – Booth was 77 years old at the time. The photo above, showing the Address of Welcome by the Chairman of the Parish Council, Hugh Neville, was taken at the corner of South Street and High Street, with a view of the east end of the Town Hall to the left; the window of the shop behind Booth has since been blocked up and it is no longer a shop. The photo below was taken probably minutes just before or afterwards from the other side of the street, so shows the building on the corner of High Street and North Street; the doorway has since been blocked up. Perhaps Hugh Neville was the rather distinguished looking gentleman with white hair and a beard whose face can be seen just to the right of Booth's chest.





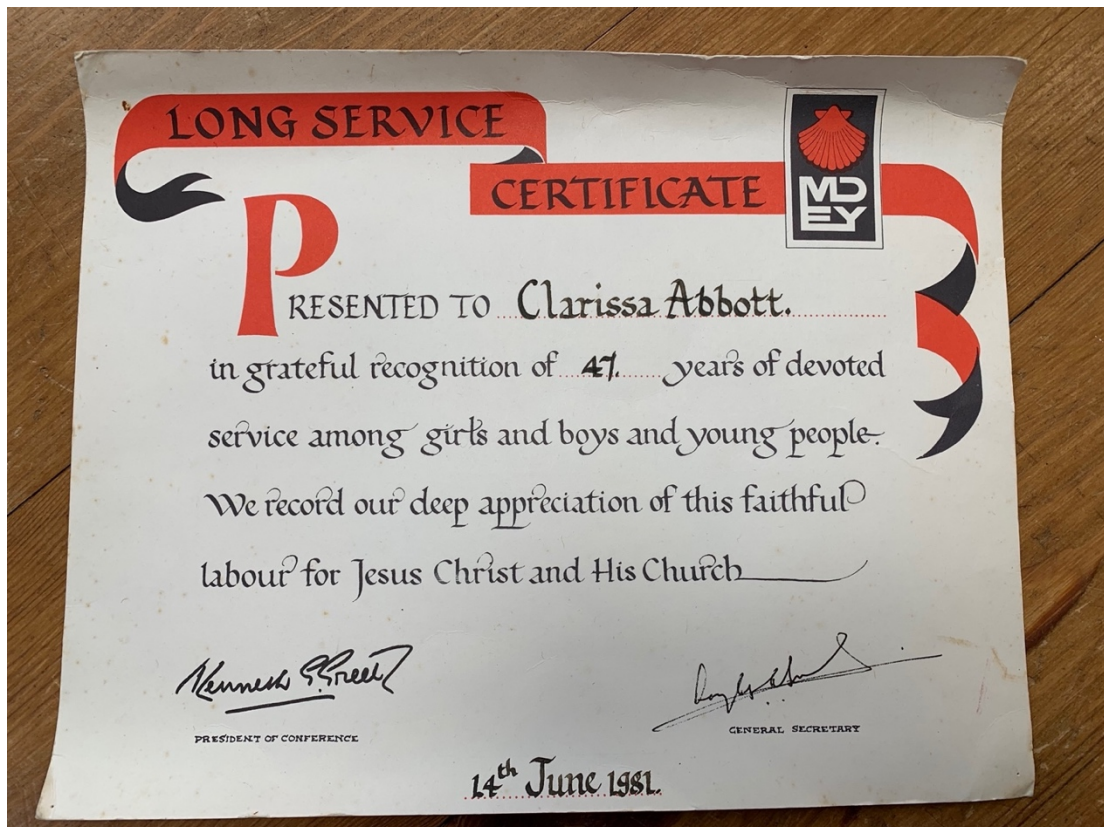
*Methodist Chapel Charabanc ('sharra-bang')<sup>2</sup> Outing 1920s*



*Wesleyan Sunday School c1910*

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<sup>2</sup>derives from the French 'char-à-bancs' – carriage with wooden benches



Clarissa (Bunty) Abbott was a Chapel stalwart and ran the Sunday school with Mrs Coney and Jan Newman. Sunday school activities included Bible reading, colouring, crafts, festivals and singing. The children would regularly join the main Chapel service after their own activities; there were also garden parties at the Manse.







Further information, why not listen to the oral history of Chris Topp? He was very much a part of the Methodist community in the 1950s.

<http://milborneporthistory.org.uk/milborne-port-oral-history-project/>

In 1960, Reverend Frank Chamberlain published 'a short survey' which he entitled 'A Chronological History – with Anecdotes of Milborne Port Methodist Church' which offers a fascinating account of the development of what was clearly a tight-knit community of chapel-goers. The links to all of the pages of the booklet are accessible [here](#). Harry W Brown also writes about the chapel in his 1941 'Gi'e 's a 'dip'; click [here](#) to see his observations.

Also, for a video clip of an outing in the 1950s, follow this link:

<http://milborneporthistory.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Methodist-Chapel-outing-early-1950s.mp4>

*Nathalie Hetherington  
November 2022*