

GLIMPSES INTO OUR PAST by Michael Green

2. THE WESLEYAN METHODIST HISTORIC ROLL

The 1898 Conference of the Wesleyan Methodists agreed to establish a scheme to collect a million guineas from a million adherents to celebrate entry into the twentieth century. The Fund so created became known as the Twentieth Century or Million Guinea Fund. The money was to be spent as follows:

- £300,000 towards the purchase of sites and the building of Wesleyan Methodist Chapels, Sunday Schools, Mission Halls and Soldiers' and Sailors' Homes.
- £200,000 for educational work in educational institutions associated with the Wesleyan Methodist Church and for furthering the mental improvement and training of local preachers.
- £100,000 for Foreign Missions.
- £100,000 for Home Missions including Temperance.
- £250,000 for the purchase of a suitable site in London and for building a monumental Connexional Building on it.
- £50,000 for developing the work of the Children's Home to save all children of Methodist and Nonconformist parentage from Workhouse Schools and also provide for orphan children of Methodist Soldiers and Sailors.

It was agreed that a Historic Roll be opened on 1st January 1899 and closed on 1st January, 1901 when a list of donors in every Chapel or Circuit would be read out at services held that day. The Roll would include members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, teachers, scholars in Sunday and Day Schools, communicants, seat holders, adherents and friends of Wesleyan Methodism both at home and abroad.

Registers were sent to all Wesleyan Circuits for Circuit use, along with sheets for local Chapels, Sunday Schools, Class Meetings and family use. Collection books for weekly and monthly contributions and boxes for the use of families were also sent out. To qualify for a place on the Historic Roll, a donor must have given a guinea (£1.05) or more either on behalf of himself or another, in memoriam or in the judgement of the Circuit Committee could not reasonably be expected to give a guinea after making efforts to do so. Amounts given were not recorded.

Adult donors who had contributed a guinea or more received a signed certificate. Sunday School scholars were encouraged to save up their farthings and halfpennies and donate a shilling (5p) to receive a John Wesley medallion

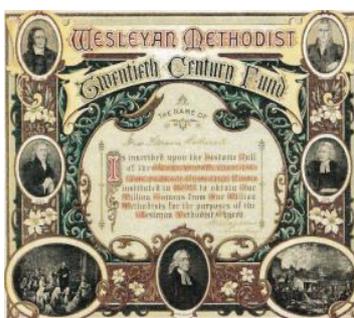
As the target had not been reached by 1st January 1901 the period was extended and the Fund finally closed on 30th June 1904 standing at over £1,075,725. In 1908 it was agreed to bind the 17,000 pages showing the names of the 1,025,000 donors and in excess of 6900 Chapels. A special bookcase was commissioned and placed in Westminster Central Hall, which had been paid for from the Fund, following its opening in 1912. The 50 leather bound volumes of the Historic Roll remain there today.

In 2002 the Historic Roll was copied onto fiche but has not as yet been digitised. It is slowly appearing on the My Wesleyan Methodist Ancestors website at <http://www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk/index.aspx> but the former Ashby and Castle Donington Wesleyan Circuits have yet to appear. It has been possible, however, to create digital images from the fiches and the pages are available for Castle Donington, Melbourne. Wilson, Ingleby, Sutton Bonnington, Aston on Trent, New Sawley, Long Whatton, Disworth, Weston on Trent, Shardlow, Kegworth, Bilton, Ratcliffe, Ashby, Swannington, Griffydam, Breedon, Tonge, Ogasthorpe, Hugglescote, Whitwick, Ibstock, Heather, Thringstone, Measham, Oakthorpe, Moira, Ravenstone, Worthington, Appleby, Normanton, Packington, and Coalville.

The Historic Roll provides a unique window enabling us to see the people and families associated with a particular Chapel at that time and if any readers are interested in looking then a copy of the page can be obtained free of charge from the writer by emailing him at michael@theoldbell.co.uk



Historic Roll



Certificate



Medallion

Below is a copy of the Griffydam page of the Wesleyan Historic Roll. There are only a few names on the page but three of them are worth noting: Herbert Rowell; John Johnson, father of teacher Miss Florence Johnson; and Walter Davies who were all pillars of the chapel.

