

Excerpts from the Trustees Minute Book of the Methodist Free Church St Bees – a potted history

The beginnings...

“The propriety of erecting a Methodist Free Church at St Bees in the Whitehaven Circuit having been stated in the quarterly circuit meeting held March 27th 1865 in Whitehaven, it was also stated that a piece of land had been purchased by Mr Ireland, part of which was offered as a free gift for a building site included in a subscription of £50 which was unanimously approved of and accepted.”

12 April

Committee started to meet in Bigrigg.

15 June

After a setback through a sickness and a fire, plans for a chapel and schoolroom were approved.

5 July

Subcommittee meeting in Whitehaven amended the plans and instructed the architect Mr John Smith of Bank End to proceed forthwith.

13 July

Amended plans to add stoves in schoolroom and chapel.

27 July

Tenders accepted from John Brockbank of St Bees for masonry at a cost of £167 6s, Isaac Jenkinson of Egremont joinery £97, Isaac Lewthwaite of Egremont plastering £67, Robert Edgar St Bees painting £6 10s, William Strathern of Whitehaven plumbing £13 10s totalling £351 11s.

8 August

Agreed to lay foundation stone at 2.30 on 21 August by Thomas Hudson of Whitehaven followed by public tea at 4.00 and public meeting at 6.00.

“The foundation stone of the Methodist Free Church, St Bees was laid by Mr Thomas Hudson of Whitehaven in the presence of a very large and respectable congregation of people. 21 railway

1865

carriages from Whitehaven arrived, containing about 800 persons who being joined by friends from St Bees and from Egremont, Bigrigg, Cleator etc formed a very large concourse of people who at once proceeded to the site of the proposed chapel, the Whitehaven [Catherine Street] Sunday school children, walking in order, and depositing as they passed, each a brick in the form of $\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 into a crown decorated with flowers and evergreens, and held by a lady who had been a teacher in Catherine Street Sunday school before these children were born, the children being conducted by their teachers to a field kindly granted by Mr John Carter, St Bees for the occasion. A very large number of the company congregated to witness or join in the ceremony of laying the stone.

“The Rev Mr Dawson commenced with giving out a hymn, which being sung he read the 84th Psalm, and engaged in prayer, and after singing another hymn called upon Mr W Ireland to address the meeting. Another hymn being sung, Mr Hudson laid the stone with due solemnity in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost and very feelingly addressed the audience on the importance of the work in which they were that day engaged, after which Mr Gordon addressed the meeting. Another hymn being sung, the large company separated after the benediction, leaving some handsome additional subscriptions in the crown which amounted to £8 19s. A very generous feeling prevailed during the ceremony.

“A public tea was held in the field when about 300 persons sat down, exclusive of Catherine Sunday school and teachers after which a public meeting was held...”

United Methodist Free Churches Magazine:

“The necessity of a suitable place of Divine worship, in this small, but noted, Cumberland watering-place, has long been felt. Hitherto none have had any existence except the parish church; the small congregation of Free Methodists there had been ejected from, and deprived of their preaching room; and all dissent has been most zealously denounced. Through lapse of time, however, an opportunity having occurred, the foundation stone of our new chapel was laid. Between eight and nine hundred people, including scholars were conveyed by cheap trip from Whitehaven, which, with the addition of friends from nearly every part of the Circuit,

1865

made above one thousand. Mr. Thomas Hudson (Wesleyan), according to arrangement, proceeded to lay the stone, in a cavity under which were deposited the Connexional Regulations, local papers, and coins of the realm. A brief address followed on religious liberty, etc. In answer to special prayer, fine weather was granted and the proceedings were a great success realising £25. The new Chapel will have a school-room underneath, it will accommodate two hundred people and cost £400.”

2 November

The Secretary reported that a serious accident had befallen the chapel at St Bees. A gale from the north west on 25 October having blown down a large portion of the west end gable wall and damage amounting to between £30 and £40 was probably incurred. Whereupon it was resolved that an extra effort be made to aid the various contractors to bear the loss.

(£13 5s was collected at the meeting. The contractors were subsequently paid around a third of their loss on 17 May 1866.)

1866

25 January

That the Secretary be authorised to get the conveyance deed executed as speedily as possible and that Mr John Thompson, solicitor, Egremont, be employed to draw it in accordance with the Connexional model deed.

Trustees were nominated:

John Falkner, gentleman, Whitehaven – went to America
1867

Thomas Jackson, surgeon, Whitehaven – gone to America

John Potts, draper, Whitehaven – died 1893 at Drigg

William Hird, insurance agent, Whitehaven – moved to
Yorkshire 1869

William Herd, tailor, St Bees – died 1890 at Egremont

Joseph Swinburn, surveyor, St Bees – died 1875

William Ireland, chemist and druggist, Egremont – died 1901

Edward Jackson Ireland, chemist and druggist, Egremont

Clement Mossop, grocer, Egremont – died 1884

James Kitchin, mining agent, Cleator – died 1892

Thomas McLaughlin, miner, Bigrigg – died 1898

James Higgins, miner, Bigrigg – died from a pit accident
1891

8 February

Conveyance signed by trustees.

5 April

Agreed that the schoolroom be opened on 15 April and that
Sunday evening services continue there until the chapel is opened.

19 April

The schoolroom was opened for public worship on 15 April by the
circuit minister Mr Dawson. The attendance was satisfactory and
encouraging. Sunday evening services were to continue there until
the chapel was opened.

3 May

Trust deed received and chapel insured for £200.

17 May

Agreed to enquire whether a railway train could be procured on 18
or 25 June or 2 July in order to arrange for the opening services of

1866

the chapel and a cheap trip from Whitehaven to St Bees on the following Monday.

31 May

As a train could not be got until 16 July agreed that the train be engaged for Monday 16 July and that the chapel be opened for public worship on 15 July.

The opening services of the chapel took place on July 15. The Rev W Dawson preached in the morning to a small congregation, W Ireland in the afternoon, congregation good and Mr Dawson in the evening, chapel quite full. Collections £5 0s 0½d.

On Monday afternoon, July 16th (the weather continuing delightfully fine) the cheap train arrived as arranged, bringing about 600 persons, between 3 and 400 of whom took tea in Mr Carter's field (permission kindly granted) including others from Egremont, Bigrigg, Cleator etc. after which a public meeting was held in the open air. A good and successful piece of business!

Mr Ireland, secretary to the building fund gave the report of receipts and expenditure showing a deficiency of £97 14s 5d and stating that if the day's proceedings realised the additional sum of £17 4s 5d he would be happy to be one of four to make up the remaining sum whatever it might be.

£30 was pledged that day together with a collection of £2 4s 7d.

The train left for Whitehaven at 8pm. It cost £8 5s, printing costs were 18s and ticket sales £10 19s 6d making a profit of £1 16s 6d.

6 September

Chapel keeper appointed.

Hire charges of 5s for one night and 2s 6d for subsequent nights.

20 September 1866

Pew rents proposed.

1866

To the friends worshipping at St Bees

Dear Friends

Your chapel being now neatly finished and in working order, some expenses will naturally be incurred in lighting, cleaning, repairing etc. And in order to keep the same comfortable and adapted to the worship of Almighty God, some little income will therefore be required. It is proposed that in order to maintain the same that sittings be let at 8d per quarter each as in other places. Persons desirous of taking sittings will please to apply to Messrs Herd and Swinburn and with them to choose their places.

Egremont September 21 66

W Ireland, Steward

1867 onwards

Building fund accounts:

Cost £438 4s 1d including masonry £167 6s, joinery £97 5s and the ground £34.

Income includes public subscriptions £171 7s 7½d Mr Ireland and family £60 Mr Falkner and family £60 Mr Jackson and family £30 Connexional Sunday school grant £25.

Trustee meetings continued to be held at Bigrigg until 1879 and from 1880 in St Bees.

1901

16 January 1901

The Secretary [still W Ireland] reported that the old trust had become defunct, all the former members of the said trust having been disqualified by death or removal, he himself being sole survivor and moved that the following seven brethren be nominated as new trustees subject to their consent being obtained W Ireland, H Telford, T C Hall, J B Kitchin, R Lambe, J Bell, J Sherwen.

1901

William Ireland Snr died in 1901 and new trustees were appointed:

Edward Jackson Ireland (continuing)

William Ireland, farmer

Henry Telford, butcher

Thomas C Hall, retired lifeguardsman

James B Kitchin, mine manager

John Bell, miner

Robert Lambe, quarryman

John Sherwen, insurance agent

Myles Richardson, mine manager all of St Bees

Isaac Mossop Fisher, incorporated accountant, Egremont

Henry Edward Trend, blacksmith, Egremont

Daniel Satterthwaite, timekeeper, Egremont.

And so the work of the church continued throughout the 20th century.

Congregations were generally fairly small.

1867 onwards

The minutes record nothing of the world wars except that the trustees did not meet from 1916 to 1920 when the secretary's actions were confirmed. During the second world war there was an early inquorate meeting to alter times of services.

By 1956 the trustees had agreed to provide a toilet and kitchen.

Extensive alterations in 2000 included replacing pews with chairs and new furniture, new kitchen, an accessible toilet, chairlifts, induction loop and sound system at a cost of £36,500 or over 80 times the original cost of the building. The aim was to make the building a resource for the whole community. It is normally open every day as a quiet place for residents and visitors.