

JOHN SLEEP HICKS

John Sleep Hicks was born in Linkinhorne in South East Cornwall in 1853 the son of William Hicks a Boot, Shoe and Harness maker. John followed his father into the business.

In 1877, while on business in Glastonbury, he was asked to take on work as a Lay Agent in the Wesleyan circuit and a year later he was sent directly into the Wesleyan ministry with very little formal training.

He served first in the Berkhamstead and Hemel Hempstead circuit prior to coming to Maidenhead in August 1878:-

REMOVAL OF THE REV J.S.HICKS

“The Rev J S Hicks, who has been the resident Wesleyan minister at Hemel Hempstead during the past three years, and who is now about to enter upon a new sphere of labour in the Maidenhead and Windsor circuit, preached his farewell sermons in the Queen Street Chapel on Sunday last to large congregations.

In the evening the chapel was quite filled. The text selected was Acts chapter 27 verse 23 – “Whose I am and whom I serve”. Deducing two principal lessons from the text – that Christians are the property of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that there is a service to be rendered to Him – Mr Hicks enlarged upon these truths with great force and earnestness in manner. At the close of the sermon he referred to his connection with the circuit and his approaching removal. He observed that three years ago he came among them as a perfect stranger, but now he was known by every one present. There were some who had attended nearly every one of his services there during his residence, and others who who attended the services at other places of worship in the town. He enquired what they were the better for them. The time had apparently gone so rapidly that he could scarcely imagine that he was three years older than when he came there. It was the best course to be diligently employed in the Master’s service; and he could sincerely say that he had devoted his time and energies to the work of preaching the gospel, and, whether they knew it or not, he had had but few idle moments during the last three years. But he could not help feeling that he would like to begin his work there again; he would try to do better, and now ask God’s forgiveness for all his failings and shortcomings. There were some present who had accepted Christ, and some who had not. He, however, must testify that in nearly every all the sergices Christ was the main theme of the preaching; and if ever any people had been exhorted and earnestly entreated, they had. He should not forget them; he could not, for that was his first Conference appointment, and it would ever be prominent before him, perhaps the most prominent. In conclusion he asked them only for one thing, and that was to serve Christ.

It should be stated that Mr Hicks has in a special manner not only won the affections of the people whom he has served in his capacity as a Wesleyan minister, but he is also held in high esteem by others outside the denomination to which he belongs, and will leave Hemel Hempstead with the good wishes of the inhabitants generally.

On Tuesday last he was presented with a purse containing £16 12s contributed by his friends in the St Albans circuit as a practical expression of their feelings towards him.”

Shortly after coming to Maidenhead he returned to Hemel Hempstead to marry Rosina Gazely Colley .

After leaving Maidenhead John and Rosina were to have one daughter, Lilian Beatrice

John's subsequent appointments covered Portsmouth, Dalton (Lancs), Clacton on Sea, Ilfracombe, Torquay, Plymouth, Woking, Redruth and Surbiton.

One of the earliest newspaper records of John's opinions, given at a public meeting to discuss the "Csar's Rescript" (qv), foresees (almost) the birth of the United Nations (!)

"The Rev J.S. Hicks said he believed the time was coming when we should apply the same laws to nations as to individuals, and we had no patience with what would not apply equally to both. (Hear Hear). Men's quarrels came to court and why should not those of nations, before they fought? The ball had been set rolling, and would not stop until the principle of loving one's neighbour as one's self was applied by the nations. The time was coming when the religion of Christ would have so purified our politics that the earth would become the City of God (loud applause). He believed that these great principles of right were leavening the world, and the whole matter strongly appealed to the brotherhood of men (Hear Hear)"

Throughout his ministry John was consistent in his support for total abstinence:

Temperance Sunday Ilfracombe November 1899

"On Sunday evening last the Rev J.S. Hicks preached at the Wesleyan Church a powerful sermon on the question of intemperance. The text was from Amos vi. 6 " They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph" and after describing the circumstances of the prophet's words, the preacher said that this unconcern was one of the saddest features of the age in the presence of the enormous appalling evils brought by the liquor traffic. The outlay on drink was increasing, and yet so little seemed to be done to make effective headway against it. The sermon concluded with earnest appeal for Christian men and women to take their stand against the drink and its evils."

Temperance and Home Mission services Barnstaple Wesley November 1900

"Temperance and Home Mission Services were held at Barnstaple Wesleyan Chapel on Sunday and Monday. On Sunday the Rev J.S. Hicks of Ilfracombe was the preacher and in the morning he delivered a powerful sermon on "Love", the evening discourse being based on the text from the book of Isaiah "take up the stumbling block from among the people". Mr Hicks dealt with the great evil of intemperance, and made an earnest appeal to non-abstainers to sign the pledge."

On Monday evening The Rev J.S. Hicks thought it was gratifying that the pulse of our Christian life never beat more quickly nor the aim of Christian enterprise more clearly and definitely set before them than at present. Mr Hicks gave a most interesting account of the establishment of a Soldiers Home at Portsmouth at which was chaplain and instrumental for raising £1,300 for its erection. His address was enjoyable and he produced a subscription sheet which had been sent to the soldiers in the second Soudan campaign for contributions to the Soldiers Home. They recognised the good of the establishment and over £7 was sent home from those actually under fire. The sheet had been in many other battles as well as the Soudan and he prized it highly. - Mr Hicks had to leave in order to catch the last train, and a successful meeting terminated with the singing of the Doxology.

Annual Temperance meeting Exeter Synod May 1901

"The Rev J S Hicks of Ilfracombe remarked that it was particularly the sphere of the church to save the young. If we looked at the question from an educational point of view what was the nature of the education of a public-house?. What kind of conversation was carried on?. It was maudling, idiotic and often obscene. The public-house was the manufactory of criminals and paupers. As an Army Chaplain at Portsmouth he had painful experiences of the demoralising powers of drink".

John was consistently interested in promoting Christian social responsibility

Bible Christian United Tea Meeting Ilfracombe 6 february 1899

“The Rev J.S. Hicks said it was most important to take a cheerful view of life if they would be successful. They must be prayerful and practical, and as jealously guard the reputation of the brotherhood of Christians as if it were their own. All petty jealousies must be banished, and a spirit of generosity take possession of them. None must think that the work of God could be sustained and developed unless hands and hearts kept pace together.”

Annual New Year United Tea Party at the Bible Christian Church Ilfracombe January 1900

“The Rev J.S. Hicks in a forcible speech said that the members of the various branches of the church did not attend the week night services as well as they might, and the work of the church was left to a few. It would be a great blessing if the business men and women of the town could be convinced that the business of Christ’s Kingdom was of the first importance. Christians should take a practical interest in Municipal matters, while the duties of the Christian Church should have the pre-eminence. Other things should come into the life but these greater things by all means. Faithfulness should be shown in all things and they would find strength in quiet waiting upon God”

United Tea Meeting at the Congregational Church Ilfracombe January 1901

“The Rev J.S. Hicks said he was sure that the duty most pressing in the New Century was to do more than they had yet done. The greatest need of humanity was a closer fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. The past 25 years had shown them a craze for money, and the past 18 months a craze for War, which he prayed might speedily be brought to an end. They wanted to be enthusiastic in spreading the gospel, which alone could supply the need of men. The coming mission in the town could only be successful so far as each Christian subordinated himself to the thought of ‘Ilfracombe for Christ’

In August 1916 the following paragraph appeared in the Evening News:

“The Chaplain to a Canadian Division in training in England the Rev J.S.Hicks, formerly Wesleyan minister at Surbiton, recently thanked the Commanding Officer for providing him with such an efficient and attentive orderly. ‘So glad you are pleased’ replied the Colonel. ‘Before the war your orderly was the Mayor of Toronto’

His obituary in the 1937 Methodist Conference Minutes states:

“As a pastor he exercised a gracious ministry in the homes of his people, and his preaching, expository and fervently evangelical, was of a high order. He was diligent in his work in the Sunday school, for he loved young folk, and was repaid with their confidence and affection. He brought to the service of his Lord a richly stored mind and a heart charged with love for his fellows. There was about him a courtesy and quiet dignity that won for him the regard, not only of his own people, but also of these outside the Church who were privileged to know him”

Retiring from active work in 1915, John lived in Bournemouth until the death of his wife in 1931 when he moved to Surbiton where he died on 20 March 1937 on the eve of his eighty-fourth birthday