

**A DEVOUT
AND INDUSTRIOUS
FAMILY**



Peter Hardiment

THE CHEMISTS SHOP
OF JOHN HIGGS AND ROBERT WALKER
c. 1850

cover picture

**The chemists shop of John Higgs and Robert Walker
c. 1850**

CONTENTS

Foreword	2
Family Tree	3
John Higgs	4
Mary Ann Curtis Cullern	12
Robert Walker	18
John Wesley Walker	26
Postscript	32
References	33
Appendix	35

FOREWORD

The pen portraits which follow record something of the life and times of a lady born Mary Cullern and the members of her subsequent family line. Although linked by genealogy Mary's family also shared a strong Christian faith, in their case expressed and sustained through the worship and teaching of Methodism, as well as a call to public service focussed on a chemist's shop at 35 High Street sited symbolically at the centre of Maidenhead on the opposite corner to the old Town Hall.

Much has been written about the history of Methodism in Maidenhead and the part played in the first hundred years or so of that history by Mary Cullern and her family, but very little has been recorded about their active and equally prominent lives in the town, the neighbouring villages and the wider world. This is an attempt to redress that omission.

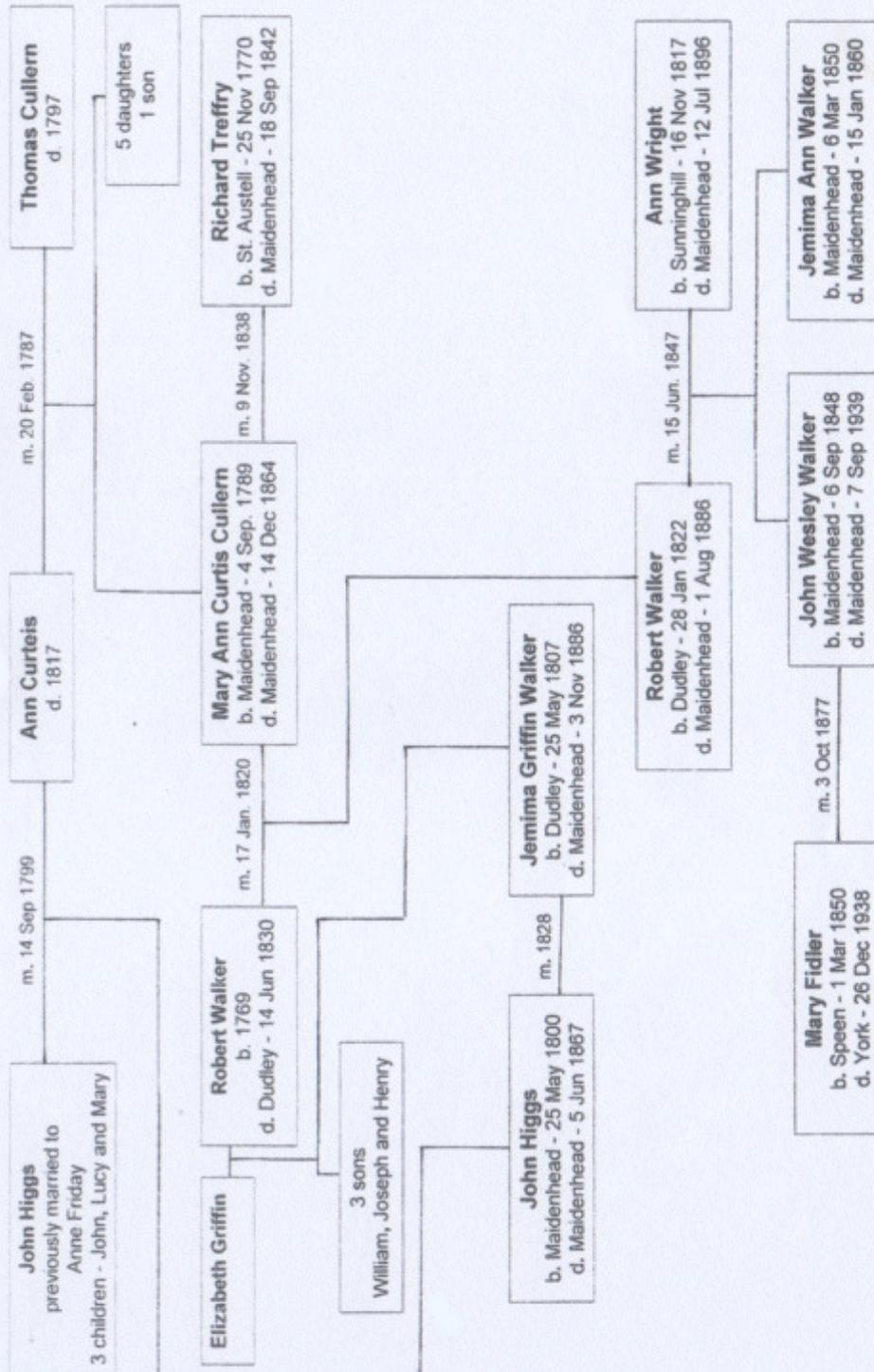
Like all historical research it has involved a certain amount of rummaging through old records, an activity not unlike the art of trying to follow overgrown tracks in a wood. At first there seems to be nothing much to see but when helpful guides point out little signs which lead off in one direction or another all sorts of revelations come to light.

There is much to be found in the Berkshire County archives where the Maidenhead Methodist records and the Maidenhead Borough Council archives are kept, but the staff at the Heritage Centre, Maidenhead library, Wesley's Chapel and the Oxford Brookes College have all been most helpful in looking out relevant records and pointing me in the right direction and I am happy to gratefully acknowledge their help, while the Maidenhead Advertiser and the Probate Registry among other records have each added their silent contributions.

As pen portraits the details which follow are probably not complete, there is always more to find, but in reading them I hope they provide a little relaxation, perhaps even a little inspiration; but a final word about order and priority. The cold logic of dates, hard genealogical facts, and the more graceful traditions of chivalry all indicate that Mary Cullern's story should be told first, but it seemed to me that as one of the linking threads is Methodism and John Higgs had set the Methodist cause in Maidenhead in motion before Mary, twice a widow, came back, first from the Midlands and later from London, to live in the town and make her contribution it would be more logical to begin with John.

Peter Hardiment

Maidenhead
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JOHN HIGGS



John Higgs was born on 25 May 1800 although the earliest surviving formal record of his entry into the world is a single line in the baptismal register for Holy Trinity church at Cookham “*29 June 1800 - John, son of John and Ann Higgs*”. Although the birth was registered in Cookham parish its then boundary with Bray parish to the south ran along the centre of Maidenhead’s High Street and therefore embraced all the houses to the north of it.

For each of John’s parents it was their second marriage, their original partners having died. There are no other baptisms recorded for John and Ann Higgs so John junior seems to have been their only child; but he did inherit one half brother and two half sisters on his father’s side and six half sisters and one half brother from his mother, so he had a large extended family from which, many years later, he was to choose his bride.

A record showing how John’s father earned his living appears in the register of Freemen of the Borough sworn in at St. Mary’s church where “*John Higgs, blacksmith*” is shown as having taken the appropriate oath on 12 June 1789. His name also appears in the Maidenhead section of *The Universal Directory* of 1798 where among the list of town tradesmen is the entry “*John Higgs - smith*”, and old plans of Maidenhead show a smithy which could have been his to the north side of what is now Bridge Road. As a skilled tradesman John senior would have had a steady income, and his son appears to have had a good schooling and to have been a competent pupil.

John junior’s mother, Ann, died when he was 17 and the first glimpse of him in his teenage years and early twenties comes in John Wesley Walker’s book *Methodism in Maidenhead* where he notes John Higgs’ dissolute youth and quotes from personal papers long since lost. But it would probably be wrong to make too much of this for enterprising young men will always seek an outlet for their energies, perhaps not always wisely; and in both Methodist and other Christian writings it was not uncommon for an early life to be portrayed in varying shades of grey, both to emphasise the change that conversion had wrought and through it to give thanks for God’s saving grace.

But wherever the truth may lie John Higgs’ life was clearly not all play and no work for John Wesley Walker also records that when John left school at 14 he was apprenticed for seven years to a local doctor to learn the skills of a chemist and druggist, with the costs associated with an apprenticeship being another indication that the family finances were sound. During the second half of the 18th century the preparation and dispensing of pills and potions had evolved into a specialist branch of medicine; even so when John began work the life enhancing skills of the chemist still seem to have rested on a combination of ability, homoeopathy and tradition for there were not yet any agreed qualifications or set courses of study, and students were left to learn their skills wherever they could.

John appears to have been a diligent pupil and when he had served his time he worked for two years in London before setting up in business on his own account at the age of 23 by leasing a small shop on the north side of High Street, opposite what is now the entrance to St. Ives Road, and beginning to trade as a chemist. But it would seem that this was an insufficient sole source of income for Pigot’s *Directory of Berkshire* published in 1831 shows John trading as “*chemist, druggist, oil and colourman*”, a colourman being a mixer of paints and dyes. This was an additional skill which many chemists learned as they had ready access to some of the chemicals and compounds which formed the basis of a number of the colours then in use.

At the age of 28, and settled in his shop, John married 21 year old Jemima Walker. Jemima was the youngest child and only daughter of Robert and Elizabeth Walker of Derby Hand, near Dudley; she was also John’s step niece and part of his extended family from his mother’s first marriage. Robert Walker was both a wealthy man and a committed Christian and he had helped the local Methodists to acquire a plot of land and build a small chapel in the village of Derby Hand. Jemima had been drawn to this devout little band and had found spiritual fulfilment in their worship and witness, and she looked to continue her links with Methodism when she moved to

Maidenhead; but the nearest Methodist presence was at Windsor, and it was there, with Jemima's encouragement, that John was challenged to make his own commitment to Christ and subsequently to enrol as a member of the Wesleyan Methodist church. His first Class Ticket dated September 1829 survives and bears the admonitory text "*Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God*" (1).

The year following John and Jemima's marriage proved to be a significant and active one. The account of Mrs. Groom's painful tooth, of John's prompt and effective attention thereto, and of how this led to the first Methodist Service to be held in Maidenhead is recorded in John Wesley Walker's book; and it is clear from both this and the events which followed that once John Higgs committed himself to something he was a difficult man to stop. If John's speed of thought matched his energy in action he would have proved a sore trial to the cautious and complacent.

By the end of the year John and Jemima had drawn together a small band of Methodist worshippers, and the little notebook recording the names of John, Jemima and the other original eight members, with the weekly amounts they contributed to the cause in the closing months of 1829, is deposited with the county archives at Reading. But John now set about both increasing their number and raising the money to build a little chapel; by 1833 he had achieved both objectives and the Methodists had an established base from which to evangelise. It is a measure of John Higgs' growing wealth and commitment that he felt able to give £50 (worth approximately 100 times this sum in current values) towards the building. Well might it have been said of him that he was "*clad with zeal as in a cloak*" (2).

In these more disparate and secular times it is not always easy to understand the passions which such an energetic and new found faith as John's could inspire, but in a town where the population was only numbered in hundreds (3) and gossip ran like quicksilver John's active involvement with the Methodists did not pass without comment; and one consequence was that his father, former associates and others of their friends seem to have seen this as an implied criticism of their looser lifestyles and to have drawn apart. This in turn was reflected in a drop in John's income, and a time of financial cramp which might well have given him cause to reflect on William Cowper's couplet

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform*

But people soon adapt and a knowledgeable, honest and efficient tradesman such as John seems to have been will always draw customers, and although the time of trial was a difficult one it proved to be only a temporary setback.

As John's business recovered and prospered he was able to employ assistants, and here another side of his character became apparent. He expected his employees to be diligent and conscientious in their duties, but he was also unfailingly concerned for their spiritual welfare, constantly encouraging them to read their bibles and to attend worship regularly. For himself he made it a discipline to retire from business in the middle of the day for a time of quiet prayer and reflection, an example which did not go unnoticed.

But John's missionary activity was not confined either to his shop or even to Maidenhead. At some point his attention had been drawn to the lack of a place of worship at Holyport and he led a band of Methodists from Maidenhead who helped him to form a class in the village, an initiative which generated such an enthusiastic response that by 1835 the money had been found to build a little chapel on the edge of the village green (4). The land on which it stood does not seem to have been owned by the Methodists initially for the deed conveying it to them is dated two years later in July 1837, but John Higgs' name is still shown at the head of the list of Trustees.

Cookham too did not escape his attentions. Stephen Darby, in a history of the village published in 1909 records that "*the Wesleyans, about the year 1840, commenced to hold open*

air services at Cookham in which Mr. John Higgs took an active part ” (5) and preaching plans of the time show John regularly leading worship there, both in the open and later in the newly built chapel.

But busy as they were with their commitments to their shop and the church John and Jemima still found time for their family. In 1834 Jemima’s widowed step mother, Mary Walker, had come to live with them in the rooms above the shop, and later, when Mary had remarried, John and Jemima nursed her dying husband before Mary, widowed for a second time, became a welcome and resident member of the household during the autumn of her days.

It was in 1835 that John felt the call to preach and his name first appears on a Plan for that year where he is listed as an Exhorter, the approximate equivalent of the present day Preacher on Note, and he joined the ranks of fully accredited Preachers the next year, only standing down from regular preaching due to ill health as he approached the age of 65. John was an energetic and committed Preacher; a surviving and not untypical Plan for the period November 1841 to March 1842 shows him leading worship, sometimes twice, on 18 out of the 25 available Sundays, and this in a Circuit which stretched as far as Denham, Chertsey and Sunninghill.

As John’s character and qualities became more widely appreciated he was invited to serve on the management committee of the newly formed Maidenhead Gas Company, a position he took up in April 1835 and which he was to occupy until his death, and later in the same year he was elected to the town Council for the first time.

By an Act of 1835 Parliament made Local Authorities more democratically accountable and reformed the way they were to be managed, and John was among the first members elected to the new Council where he took an active part in its discussions; to inaugurate a system where one third of the members retired each year John served for only two years, and when his term expired he did not seek re-election.

This was probably for business reasons for soon after he stood down the growing demand for his services enabled him to exchange the lease of his small shop for that of the larger, more commercially attractive premises on the corner of High Street and Park Street where the HSBC bank now stands; and at the age of 45 he expanded his business interests still further by buying a small firm of printers. The size of his household at this time is shown in the 1841 census where, apart from John, Jemima and the Methodist Minister staying with them, there were three teenage apprentices and two domestic servants.

But John was also active in a wider context during these years. He had become involved in correspondence and discussions with a group of fellow pharmacists, as they were now more generally known, concerned to raise the public perception of the profession by setting minimum and common standards of qualification for its practitioners. This resulted in the formation of the Pharmaceutical Society in 1841 with the archives of the Society showing John as a founder member, and acting for a time as the honorary secretary.

At this peak period of his life John’s days were long and active. He rose early to read his bible, to pray and to breakfast before opening the shop. The morning would be spent in ordering replacement stock, preparing potions, serving customers, organising the delivery of pills and medicines and supervising his apprentices before the shop closed for an hour for lunch and John retired for his own lunch and his time of prayer. The afternoons were a repeat of the mornings, but when the shop finally closed John’s day was not over for his evenings were devoted to church work, a meeting with his Class, attendance at a church meeting, a time of preparation for a service at one of the Circuit churches, some sick visiting or the writing of letters before a time of prayer to close the day and to bed.

Jemima’s support in all this is rarely mentioned, but in her quiet way she took her full part in the running of the shop, the supervision and care of the assistants, the activities of the Sunday

School, the leadership of her Class and the entertainment of the visiting Preachers who came from near and far to lead worship at the little chapel. She began an autograph book, now in the county archives, in which visitors were invited to write a few words, and it is a measure of John and Jemima's growing influence in the wider world of Methodism that among its many entries it contains the signatures of three past Presidents of the Wesleyan Conference, and two who in after years were to be elected to that office.

By the time he reached his mid 40s John had become a prominent and respected member of the town community, and at the age of 44 the high regard in which he was now held led to him being nominated again for election to the town Council; and in November 1844 he was duly elected and immediately chosen by his fellow Councillors to serve for a year in the office of Mayor.

It proved to be a taxing year and here another side to John's character showed itself as he was drawn to the fringes of national politics by a Government announcement that it proposed to increase the grant paid to the Roman Catholic seminary at Maynooth in Ireland, then still considered to be a part of the United Kingdom. From Elizabethan times Irishmen wishing to train for the Catholic priesthood had traditionally enrolled at seminaries in France but following the French Revolution the British Government, fearing that newly qualified priests would bring unsettling revolutionary ideas with them when they returned home, established the Maynooth seminary in 1798 and instituted an annual grant of £9,000 towards its costs.

This had never been increased and in 1845, at a time of great hardship in Ireland, and as a conciliatory measure, the Government proposed to increase the grant to £26,000. This brought out much of the latent centuries old English prejudice against Catholicism and generated a national backlash against the increase. Feeling in the town ran sufficiently high for the Council to call a special meeting to discuss the matter and John, in his capacity as Mayor, subsequently signed a formal petition from the Council to Parliament asking that the proposal be dropped.

John must have shown the petition to Jemima for she engaged someone to inscribe a copy of it into her autograph book in a neat copperplate hand, a copy which John signed with a flourish and to which he attached, probably illegally, the Council's official seal. John also wrote to the Rev. Jabez Bunting, the Secretary and a former President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, and Jemima kept Jabez Bunting's cordial reply, sending his regards to Jemima and expressing the hope that John would be part of a delegation to an anti-Maynooth protest meeting to be held in London later in the week.

But all this indignation gained nothing for the Government was not to be moved and Maynooth had its grant.

John's leadership of the Council was much respected, and his wise advice and active involvement led to him being elected Mayor again in 1845. One example of the impression he made on people relates to his wish that Sunday worship might be encouraged by the town shops ceasing to open on that day; to this end he wrote a personal letter to each of the relevant tradesman asking that they might reflect on the position and respect his wish that such trading should cease. His request was universally granted but John took great pleasure from one reply, " *Yes, I will shut up* " replied one tradesman, " *If the Mayor had sent me orders to close I would not have done it; but tell Mr. Higgs I shall not refuse to comply with his kind request.* " (6)

In recording their sadness at John's death many years later the Circuit Quarterly Meeting recorded that he had " *a disposition eminently amiable (which) revealed itself in a deportment always Christian, forbearing and conciliatory.* " (7), and this would also seem to have been how his fellow townsmen regarded him.

In twice accepting the mayoralty John became the first in a long list of members of the Bridge Street, and later the High Street, churches who have served the town in that honourable office.

Having served his three year term as a Councillor John did not seek re-election in 1847 but the high regard in which he was now held led a year later to his election by the Council members to the post of Alderman, to his subsequent appointment as a magistrate, and to his acceptance of invitations to serve as a Trustee for various local charities; all positions in which his wise counsel was much valued and respected.

There exists a studio portrait of John Higgs, seemingly taken when he was in his 50s. It shows him to have been a sturdy, clean shaven man apparently smaller than average in stature; he is shown gazing thoughtfully into the distance and is wearing a finely tailored frock coat with a top hat held in his left hand, both implying a man of some importance and financial substance, while his sharp eyes and firm mouth indicate a person of perception and resolution.

These characteristics are reflected in John's signature, inscribed many times in the Council Minutes Book, where the bold, sprawling words *John Higgs - Mayor* with their emphatic underlining indicate a self confident, energetic man impatient with delay and anxious to move on. While these qualities undoubtedly brought John wealth and public prestige he was also unsparing in using them that others might know and share "*the love of Christ which passes knowledge*". (8)

In his early 50s John formally retired from business. His general health was beginning to deteriorate and Jemima had developed respiratory problems which were later diagnosed as tuberculosis, so they moved from the cramped corner shop which had been their home for 20 years to a then relatively new semi-detached house at 3 Castle Hill Terrace; this had a large garden and views over what was then open country to front and back, and the fresher air suited them both.

But as John passed his 60th year he grew increasingly frail and his poor health left him weak and in much pain. But his mind remained alert and his interest in the spiritual welfare of others continued undimmed. "*At his table the case of the poor was constantly considered. Young converts were inquired after; plans to promote their welfare and usefulness were discussed; and negligent professors of religion were remembered*". (9)

John died quietly 10 days after his 67th birthday on 5 June 1867. Six days later the Mayor and fellow Councillors met the coffin as it was borne into the High Street church for John's funeral service, and a large, silent crowd watched afterwards as his body was laid to rest in the family vault.

The subsequent meetings of the various church and Circuit committees recorded their sadness at their loss, their appreciation of John's pioneering work in establishing Methodism in the town and surrounding areas, and of his generosity and diligent activity in support of the cause in the years which followed; and the Quarterly Meeting directed that a valedictory service should be preached in his memory at each of the nine Churches in the Circuit.

Jemima lived on for a further 20 years. For a while she continued with her Sunday School teaching and in meetings with her Class; and although she had not lived in the Midlands for many years she had kept in touch with her family and friends there and two years after John's death she was invited back to lay a foundation stone for a new Wesleyan Chapel at Dixons Green, near Dudley.

But with the passage of time Jemima's breathing grew steadily worse and she became an invalid who rarely left the house. Much of her time was spent resting but she retained her interest in the affairs of the church and responded generously when funds were needed for the various alterations and improvements, or when individual need was brought to her notice. But her enfeebled lungs finally failed her and she died at the age of 79 on 3 November 1886. Jemima's wish was for a simple funeral, and although there was a respectful congregation for her funeral

service this was conducted in a low key before she was laid to rest beside John in the family vault where they both now lie at peace.

Those who lead the way in any new enterprise, and who are widely respected in their time, can often slip into the cold pages of history with their names in after years largely forgotten. Unless it be the Methodist presence represented by High Street church the town has no memorial to John or Jemima, and at Jemima's death the church's only visible reminders of them were two foundation stones laid many years before and built into the walls of the then school room and Wesley Hall (10).

With the passage of time this was thought to be insufficient and to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the first Methodist service a memorial tablet bearing the names of John and Jemima was fixed to the wall alongside the then central pulpit. It was thought fitting for it to include both their names for although it was John who had taken the lead in introducing Methodism to Maidenhead it was Jemima, inspired by the example of the devout and enthusiastic Methodists of Derby Hand, who had prompted his initial visit to Windsor and who had encouraged and supported him thereafter.

In 1920 a memorial plaque to the members of the congregation who had died during the first world war was put in place on the east wall of the church, and to balance this the memorial to John and Jemima was moved to the west wall in 1929 as part of the church centenary celebrations. At the same time it was given increased prominence by the addition of an elaborate plaster frame, and some 80 years later it continues to remind the historians, the curious and the thankful of John and Jemima's unique place in the story of Maidenhead Methodism.

**MARY ANN
CURTIS TREFFRY**

In February 1787 Thomas Cullern, a coach harness maker, married Ann Curteis at St. Michael's church at Bray, and Mary Ann Curtis Cullern (1), born on 4 September 1789, was the second of their seven children, with her baptism three weeks later noted in the register of Holy Trinity church at Cookham. Thomas Cullern was a freeman of the Borough, a prominent and respected member of the Maidenhead community and a member of the Town Council from which he was elected to the office of Mayor in 1793; but in April 1797, a month after the birth of his youngest child, Thomas died and was buried at Bray. After two years as a single parent his widow Ann is shown in the Cookham records as marrying John Higgs senior in September 1799.

Although Mary was only seven when her father died, and the Diocesan archives contain no record of a will, it seems that Thomas left his family well provided for. So despite her loss, and the general uncertainty of the times, with England at war with Napoleonic France, Mary seems to have had a comfortable upbringing with a conventional private education; and as a young lady growing up she enjoyed the pleasures of the age available to those who could afford them – dancing, dressing fashionably, reading novels, and playing whist. But woven into her character were threads of earnestness and reflection which led her to see these things as shallow and ephemeral luxuries, and from her earliest years she began to seek a deeper and more satisfying way of life.

The conventional public piety of the age encouraged Mary to seek spiritual relief for her restlessness. As a teenager Mary read her Bible and regularly attended worship in the Anglican church, but as she later wrote “ *I had no Christian friend to guide me . . . and I frequently walked before the late Mrs. Poulton in the hope of attracting her notice and getting a word from her* ” (2). Mrs. Poulton was a devout and prominent member of the group of “ Dissenting Protestants ” who worshipped in the Congregational, now the United Reformed, church in what is now West Street, a church with an active and thriving membership under the energetic leadership of the Rev. John Cooke, but Mary's efforts to attract Mrs. Poulton's attention were unsuccessful and she added, “ *I grew discouraged and hardened my heart to sin and folly.*”

Ignoring the penalty of procrastination Mary resolved to defer further efforts to find spiritual release until she was 20, but this age came and went and with it a further postponement of any decision about finding a purpose in life until she should be married. These may seem the purposeless inconsistencies of an immature young lady but they need to be set against the spiritual mood of the times.

John Wesley had died only two years after Mary was born and by the early years of the 19th century the influence of his life and teaching had taken firm root and was growing increasingly widespread. By his vigorous interpretation of the Christian scriptures and his untiring and inspiring preaching John Wesley had set in train a debate which challenged the traditional, and by then complacent, English view of how men and women should accept their position in society, and had offered a new vision of how they should respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and live out their lives.

These were ideas that Mary did not feel able to ignore. John Wesley had urged his followers to worship as Anglicans, which Mary did, but set against Wesley's vibrant Christianity the ordered formality of Anglican worship and the measured cadences of the Anglican Prayer Book did not resonate with Mary's restless spirit, rather it was the outspoken professions of faith and the enterprising energy of Dissenters such as Mrs. Poulton which drew her into their company.

By the time Mary reached the age of 20, with her father dead and her mother married again, she should, by the conventions of the time, have been seeking a suitable marriage. Whether her inner restlessness was reflected in her outer manner and deterred prospective suitors may never be known but it was to be a further ten years before Mary, at the then advanced age of 30, was eventually married in January 1820 at Holy Trinity church in Cookham to Robert Walker, a widower aged 50 from Derby Hand near Dudley who already had three sons and a daughter from his previous marriage.

Robert was a wealthy man, the lessee of a coal mine and the proprietor of a prosperous nail making business, and with Mary's marriage came a move to Withypool House, a large property set in extensive grounds in Derby Hand and, with her earlier resolution not forgotten, a renewal of her spiritual search.

Robert Walker was also a devout man who, in the custom of the day, led regular family prayers and worshipped each Sunday in the Anglican church two miles away in Dudley; Mary shared in the family prayers and in the Anglican worship although she found no fulfilment there. There was no place of worship in Derby Hand although for some years a small band of Wesleyan Methodists in the village had met regularly together in a house fellowship to share in worship, bible study and prayer.

To encourage Christianity in the village and to overcome the need for himself, his family and the poor people of the area to walk two miles to and from church each Sunday Robert Walker proposed to the Anglican authorities the building of a new church on a plot of land he was willing to give. The powers that be agreed that there was a need for a new Anglican church in the area but not at Derby Hand, so in 1821, a year after his marriage to Mary, Robert offered his plot, and the money he had raised to pay for the building, to the Methodists who gladly accepted both.

Mary continued to worship in the Anglican church at Dudley but when it was completed she and her step daughter Jemima also began to worship in the new Wesleyan Methodist chapel. Both found themselves challenged by what they heard and experienced. Mary wrote that she found Methodist preaching and conversation "*a sharp two edged sword*" adding, after listening to one especially fiery Preacher, "*I don't like to hear him, he is so earnest*" (2), but she was gradually drawn into the Methodist fellowship and at the age of 37 was enrolled into their little band "*On Trial*", a period of probation before she became a full member of the Wesleyan Methodist church two years later in 1829.

Although she had married John Higgs in 1828 and moved to Maidenhead Jemima Walker, Mary's step daughter, had made a similar spiritual journey and she, like her husband, received her first Class ticket from the Wesleyan Methodist Society at Windsor in September 1829. Mary and Jemima corresponded regularly, and although their letters have been lost they would have rejoiced together in the peace that passes all understanding and would have encouraged each other as they committed themselves to declaring "*the praises of Him who had brought (them) out of darkness into His marvellous light*". (3)

With her commitment to Methodism Mary's restless spirit had at last found its release and she threw herself enthusiastically into the worship life, spiritual study and community outreach of Methodism, and when in after years a local branch of the Dorcas Society (4) was set up to provide clothing for those in need Mary quickly added membership of this little band to her many other commitments.

But she suffered a sharp setback in June 1830 when her husband died leaving Mary at the age of 40 to bring up their only son, then aged eight, alone. In his will Robert listed Mary at the head of his bequests ordering that £1,000, a considerable sum for the time, be invested in her name with the interest payable to her for as long as she lived; and although the income was modest it enabled Mary thereafter to have a degree of financial independence. Robert's trust in Mary was also shown by other provisions for her income and welfare, enabling her to continue to live comfortably in the house they had shared together. Mary mourned her loss, accepted her new responsibilities and, in due time, resumed her worship life, her missionary work and her benevolent activities among the local community.

Mary joined with other members in the leadership of classes for those who wished to meet for prayer and bible study and mutual support, and her outgoing personality, her faith and her

energetic concern for others evoked such a warm response in the community that the growing congregations in the little chapel soon made it necessary to add a gallery to accommodate them.

Although now lost in the conurbation of Netherton Derby Hand was then an independent and predominantly coal mining and nail making community, employments which were both dangerous and poorly paid, so Mary found ample scope for her charitable work through the provision of clothes, food, and compassionate support for those in need. When cholera struck the village in 1831, and again in 1832, and brought its normal activities to a halt Mary was one of a number of ladies who, at some risk to themselves, went from house to house nursing the sick, praying with the dying and comforting the bereaved. When it was all over those she had helped made a collection among themselves and presented her with a silver cream jug as a token of their gratitude; it was something she was always to treasure.

Two years later a colliery explosion killed several men of the village and injured others, and Mary's practical response was not only to offer consolation and comfort but also to collect a significant sum which she distributed as gifts to the families worst affected.

After 14 years Mary seemed settled at Derby Hand but the quiet undercurrents of family life were drawing her back to Maidenhead. After her marriage to Robert Walker Mary and her step-daughter Jemima had grown very close, but in 1828 Jemima had married and moved to Maidenhead; and in 1832 Mary's son Robert had also moved to Maidenhead, both to complete his formal education and to then go on and learn the skills of a pharmacist. Although Mary corresponded regularly with both Jemima and Robert she greatly missed them both.

By 1834 Robert Walker's children by his first marriage had married and moved away, the large echoing house she had shared with her husband and the children now had few attractions, and her other ties to Derby Hand although close were not binding; so in June of that year, at the age of 44 and amid many emotional expressions of farewell, Mary moved back to Maidenhead to a room above the High Street chemist's shop. As she recorded it, "*On Friday morning I left Derby Hand favoured with the prayers of the poor and came to reside in Maidenhead with my three dearest ties on earth.*"

As John and Jemima Higgs were prominent members of both the town and the Methodist congregation which met in the little chapel in Bridge Street it did not take Mary long to become involved in the life of the chapel, the town and the wider community. Two months after her move to Maidenhead she began a class of scriptural education for girls, in June of 1835 she became a teacher in the Sunday School, in August of the same year she began a scriptural class for boys, and in June 1836 she helped to form a group committed to distributing Tracts, or Christian essays, around the town.

Mary also began to teach in the Sunday School at the Holyport Methodist chapel, walking there and back each week with a snack lunch for refreshment, and making additional use of her time there by distributing Tracts and visiting the sick and those in need in the village.

But in 1837 the peace of Maidenhead and the surrounding area began to be disturbed by a marching army of itinerant workers who arrived as part of the workforce engaged in the building of the Great Western Railway and the construction of Brunel's unique bridge designed to carry it over the river. The arrival of these men, tough, poorly educated, many of them Irish and Catholic, together with the women and girls who travelled with them, was a profound culture shock, and many townspeople recoiled. But Mary, buttressed by her experiences among the rough, hard working miners and nail makers of Derby Hand, went confidently and cheerfully among them to talk of spiritual things and the merits of thrift and sobriety, as well as to encourage them to worship in the town churches. Her gentle manner, her quiet words and the clear conviction of her beliefs quickly disarmed the belligerent, persuaded the doubtful and shamed the scoffers.

For Mary there were four general groups of people. There were those who had no time for Christianity and shared Karl Marx's view of it as "*the opium of the people*"; to these Mary was a constant and unwearied opponent, countering their ribaldry and arguments with quotations from scripture and examples from experience. Then there were those who were poorly educated and knew little or nothing of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; to these Mary was a patient teacher spending many hours helping them to read the scriptures and understand their meaning. For those who knew more but could not or would not make a decision to live their lives for Christ Mary was a restless conscience, constantly reminding them of the shortness of life, the finality of death and the reality of eternity. But with those who thought and believed as she did Mary rejoiced, and with them constantly prayed that others might be added to their number.

This all made for an active life and it was because she seemed so settled that it came as a great surprise to her many friends when Mary at the age of 49 announced that she was to marry for a second time. Her new husband was to be the Rev. Richard Treffry, an eminent and respected Wesleyan Methodist minister and a past President of the Wesleyan Conference. Richard was then 67 and the Principal of the Wesleyan Theological Institution at Hoxton, and after their marriage in November 1838 Mary moved to London.

Although Maidenhead was growing in size there was nowhere in England to equal London, and Hoxton, bordering the East End, was not the most salubrious area in which to sample it at close quarters for the first time. But Mary's strong sociable character, founded on faith, moulded by prayer and buttressed by experience, enabled her to quickly make her mark among the students, the staff and the wider community. As the wife of the Principal Mary also became the semi official matron to the students and effective supervisor to the domestic staff, roles in which she found ample scope for her natural concern for those around her.

Mary's time at Hoxton was to be barely two years but her relationships with both students and staff grew sufficiently close in that time for many of them to keep in touch in after years when both she and they had moved on. Outside the Institution Mary continued with her visiting and Tract distribution and was thereby enabled to extend her missionary work into the local community.

But in 1840 Richard, now aged 70, was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and in 1841 increasing pain and poor health forced his retirement; so Mary made her fourth and last move when she and Richard moved back to Maidenhead. In the cramped accommodation above their corner shop John and Jemima Higgs converted the room formerly occupied by Mary into a sickroom for Richard, but there was not enough room to accommodate Mary as well so she took rented rooms in North Street.

In September 1842, after a painful and protracted illness, Richard died and his body was taken to London to be buried in the "Preachers' Grave" in the forecourt of Wesley's Chapel; and Mary at the age of 52, was again a widow. Her unceasing attendance on her dying husband had exhausted her physically and emotionally, but Jemima insisted that Mary move into the now vacant sick room while she gently and patiently nursed her back to health.

Although not a wealthy man Richard Treffry had no surviving family by his first marriage and in his will he was able to make Mary a modest but generous monetary bequest as well as other gifts which, with the inheritance she had received from her first husband, gave her financial independence during her final years.

Mary's time in London had not been long enough to lose touch with her many friends in Maidenhead and once her health had recovered she was quickly back into her routine of worship, prayer, Sunday School teaching and pastoral visiting both in Maidenhead and the villages of Holyport and Cookham.

But in the quiet moments of her busy life Mary had always been a conscientious writer of letters, and as she aged and became less mobile letter writing became another way by which

she could show her practical and spiritual concern for the world around her and those she addressed. One example gives a flavour of her style. Along with her good wishes and prayerful support in a letter to a young lady member of her extended family about to start at a new school she wrote, “ *I hope you are resolved to have a good education, so as to creditably fill the station in which God has placed you. Education is very useful as the handmaid of piety. The balloon, the diving bell, the electric telegraph are useful results of education, but there is a higher wisdom which I hope you will never neglect. Let this truth be fixed in your mind.*”

While such a close and compassionate interest in the affairs of others annoyed some there were many who appreciated Mary’s concern. Jemima, putting into words the thoughts of many, acknowledged “ *No matter how trivial the circumstances that caused us pleasure or pain, it struck a responsive chord in the deep sympathies of her kind and genial disposition. Never a thought entered my mind that she would not feel really interested in all that concerned me*”, and what applied to Mary’s family applied in equal measure to her circle of friends and acquaintances.

No picture of Mary Treffry survives but those who knew her in the evening of her life describe a lady small in stature but large of heart, with a ready and gentle smile which seemed to those on whom it shined an outward sign of an inward warmth and peace. When John Higgs retired Mary went to live with him and Jemima in their new home on Castle Hill, and she became a familiar figure walking to and from the town dressed in the dark clothes of the widow common at the time, and wearing, rain or shine, one of the black straw bonnets then in fashion.

Although the passing years began to limit Mary’s physical activities they made no impression on her piety or the ardour with which she challenged those around her to attend to the Christian life. She worshipped regularly, was diligent in prayer, taught enthusiastically in the Sunday School, shared tea and prayers at home with old and young, and was always ready to give a compassionate hearing to those who wanted to share their troubles or concerns.

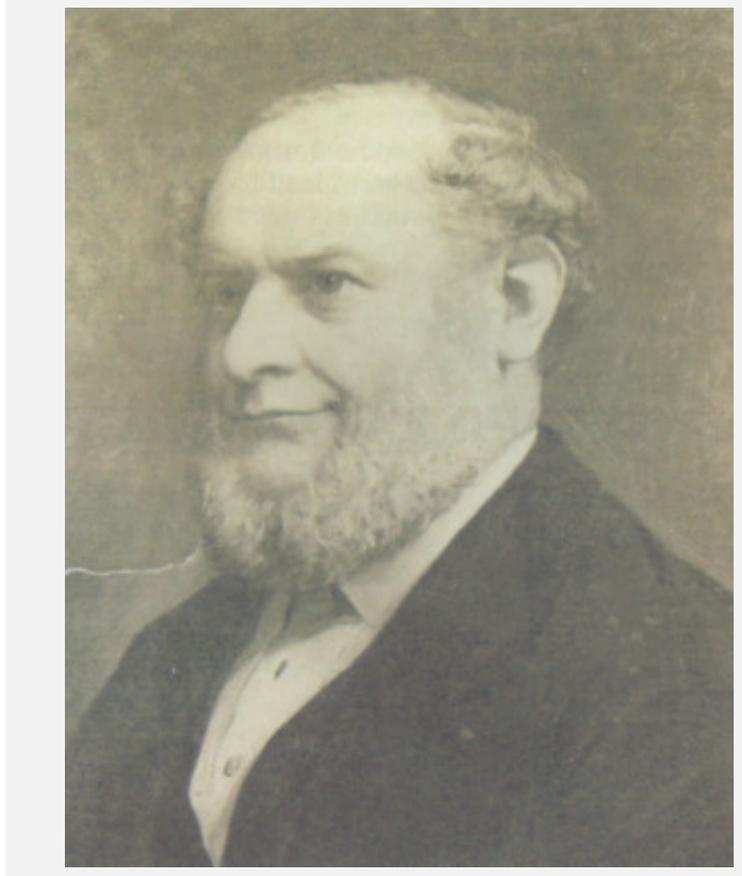
But in 1864, as Mary approached her 75th birthday, her strength began to fail and she was obliged to give up her Sunday School teaching and much of her visiting. In October of that year she returned from worship one Sunday evening feeling exhausted, and although she was subsequently forced to spend much time in bed she continued to keep in touch with her family and friends through her letters, letters recording her faith and her prayers for the well being of those she addressed, as well as her calm acknowledgement that her earthly end was near.

At the age of 75 Mary Treffry finally crossed her personal Jordan on 12 December with her death certificate quaintly ascribing her passing to “ *natural decay*”. Four days later, amid many expressions of sadness at the loss of her presence and rejoicing that she was now beyond suffering and pain, the coffin containing her mortal remains became the second to be laid to rest in the family vault beneath High Street church.

In the age in which Mary lived it was generally considered that a lady’s natural gifts and graces were best expressed through the roles of wife and mother, the “ *angel in the house* ” of Victorian popular sentiment, but for those ladies for whom this was insufficient the church and charitable activities within the community were considered to offer suitable additional outlets for their abilities and energy; and it can be argued that Mary’s varied and active experiences both in the church and outside it represented a perfect example of such a life.

But with this Mary would probably have been content for she was a people person and her skills were social skills. In words from the scriptures she would have known so well hers was a life of “ *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance* ” (4), and at her death her memorial would have been best seen among the people with whom she had shared her life - her family, her friends, and those she sought to bring to Christ. They were the ones who mourned her, they would be the ones who would best remember her, and they would be the ones who would now have to labour in her place.

ROBERT WALKER



If John Higgs is remembered as the man who laid the foundations of Wesleyan Methodism in Maidenhead and the neighbouring villages then Robert Walker must be acknowledged as the man who built on them, and led their congregations through the middle years of the 19th century. Robert also drew inspiration from John Higgs' example of public service and followed him in playing his own part in the life and governance of the town.

Robert, the only child of Robert and Mary Ann Walker, was born at Derby Hand, near Dudley in the West Midlands, on 28 January 1822 and was baptised at St. Thomas' church in Dudley on 27 March; he was born into an extended but closely linked family for through the second marriage of his grandmother he was indirectly related to John Higgs and through the first marriage of his father to Jemima, John's wife.

Robert junior's father was a wealthy man but he died when Robert was only 8 and he was then left in the care of his devout and loving mother. Although both his parents had wanted their son to have a good education they seem to have had a poor opinion of the schools in and around Dudley for Robert junior led an academically nomadic existence during his early years at Derby Hand, attending 11 schools before he reached the age of 10. However at that age his mother, encouraged no doubt by her step daughter, sent Robert to Maidenhead to be educated at one of the local schools; and from there, at the age of 11, he went on to a boarding school on the outskirts of Bath where he studied for three years in congenial surroundings under challenging tutors and was able to develop his innate potential. As well as his academic studies Robert also learned to play the piano and sing, and music was to play a large part in his adult life.

At the age of 14 Robert moved back from Bath to Maidenhead to become an apprentice and assistant to John Higgs. He quickly proved himself an able and reliable worker, and under John's tutelage he studied the disciplines of the pharmacist and learned the routines of the shop. He was also introduced to the worship and witness of the Bridge Street chapel where, at the age of 15, he was recruited as a teacher in the Sunday School. His involvement with the school was briefly interrupted when he moved to the West Country to further his business experience, but was renewed when he returned and for the rest of his life the Christian education of young people remained something close to his heart, and to which he devoted a great deal of his time. Robert became the Superintendent of the school at the age of 23, a post he retained until he died, and he subsequently spent many hours in planning and leading Sunday School activities, not only in Maidenhead but also in the schools at Holyport and Cookham for which he took the additional responsibility.

In his early twenties Robert was taken into partnership by John Higgs and at the age of 25 he married Ann Wright, a young lady from Sunninghill, a marriage subsequently blessed with a son, John Wesley, born in 1848, and a daughter, Jemima Ann, born two years later (1). With his partnership and his marriage the course of Robert's life was set.

As he moved through his 20s Robert's became an increasingly influential voice in the counsels of the Bridge Street chapel, but the 1840s in England were difficult years. In the nation at large the Anti Corn Law League was agitating for the repeal of the Corn Laws and the Chartists were agitating for Parliamentary reform, with their respective speakers drawing large crowds which sometimes disintegrated into public brawls when they were confronted by opponents or the forces of law and order. In Methodism too in the 1840s there was a bitter running war of words for and against the increasing authority assumed by Conference and its Secretary Jabez Bunting; and a series of poor harvests during these years brought hardship and destitution to many.

Music making in Methodism was also a point of controversy with many churches disbanding the *ad hoc* groups of musicians who had previously led in worship and installing organs in their place. In 1849 Robert, a competent musician, aligned himself with the progressive party by buying a small organ for the chapel, and his influence was demonstrated when he persuaded the

congregation to put aside their other wider concerns and focus on extending and improving the building to make space for it.

Five years later Robert was again active in raising money and enthusiasm for the building of a new school room for the rising number of children and young people who met on the premises.

In 1855 another of Robert's initiatives was to arrange for the preparation and printing of a children's hymn book for use in the Sunday School. A surviving copy shows one fifth of the hymns to be valued old favourites which still find a place in *Hymns and Psalms*, while those which have fallen into disuse range from the stark

*There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.*

to the sentimental

*There is sin in the camp, there is treason today !
Is it in me ? Is it in me ?
There is cause in our ranks for defeat and delay,
Is it, O Lord, in me ?*

But the hymns the children were encouraged to sing give a unique insight into both how the teachers expressed their own faith and how they sought to pass this on to the young people in their care; Robert Walker is believed to have written some hymns for the book but as no index of authors is given his contribution cannot be identified. However the book proved very popular, ran through seven editions and was later adopted for use in the day school before the Methodist authorities produced a school hymn book for general use in 1882.

As if all this was not enough it was during the early 1850s that Robert heard the call to preach; the relevant records have not survived but he is recorded as a fully accredited Local Preacher on a Plan of May to July 1855, and he remained an active Preacher until age and illness forced his retirement.

Contemporary reports often refer to Robert Walker's able and inspiring preaching, and one sermon of his has survived to witness to his qualities. It is the one he delivered at High Street at a memorial service for John Higgs in June 1867 and is reproduced in the appendix. It is a remarkable testimony to Robert Walker's talent; the original is written out in full and it seems as if the words had arrived fully formed in his mind and had flowed through his pen and on to the paper with only the most minor of corrections. The sermon begins with a remembrance of John Higgs' earthly life, moves on to give thanks for a triumphant soul now at rest and ends with the anticipation of a blissful reunion in the world to come, with every part illustrated with appropriate scriptural and other quotations. Depending on his speed of speech Robert's sermon would have taken between 30 and 40 minutes to deliver, and it could not have failed to make a deep impression on the minds of his listeners.

At the age of 30 Robert became the sole proprietor of the chemists shop when John Higgs retired, and this qualified him for registration as a full member of the Pharmaceutical Society. But busy as he was with his young family, church affairs and public engagements these did not affect his business activities where, in true entrepreneurial style, he drew his income from many sources, for his entry in *Billings Directory & Gazetteer* of 1854 reads " *Walker, Robert - chemist, druggist, Postmaster, agent to the Star and Manchester Fire and Life Offices, general printing office* ". With so much happening the shop must have been both commercially successful and a great place to catch up with the local gossip !

In his poem “ *If* ” Rudyard Kipling commends those who can fill each unforgiving minute with 60 seconds worth of distance run, but there are some who seem able to do better than that and Robert appears to have been one of them.

But in 1860 all this activity would have been put in perspective when Robert and Ann had to endure a parent’s worst nightmare when their daughter Jemima, then only nine years old, fell ill with typhoid fever; she lingered on in febrile pain for several weeks before she died, and only parents who have had a similar experience can begin to understand the anguish and grief suffered by Robert and Ann. The Methodist congregation had moved from Bridge Street to High Street two years before, into a larger building with its own burial ground, and Robert paid for the construction of a vault by the east wall with Jemima becoming the first member of the family to be laid to rest there.

There was considerable public sympathy for the family for Robert had become a well known figure in the town and where his skill and hard work had earned him a significant sum which he now began to invest in property. A Conveyance of 1863 held at the Heritage Centre records him investing jointly with John Higgs in houses and land at Chertsey Road, Addlestone, and 12 years later another shows him making a similar investment in his own name at Gloucester Place in Windsor.

Robert’s growing stature during the 1860s was recognised in November 1868 when, at the age of 46, he was elected to serve as a Councillor. Two years later was chosen to be Mayor, being re-elected to that office again the following year; and a reading of the Council Minutes for these years shows him to have been diligent, efficient and effective in the performance of his mayoral duties.

Robert was instinctively aware of the publicity value of the mayoralty and in February 1871 he invited the local paper to send a reporter to a *soiree* for Sunday School teachers which he hosted in the Town Hall. Teachers from the Congregational, Primitive Methodist and Wesleyan churches responded to Roberts invitation, and after sharing in food and fellowship heard him speak of the importance he attached to the Christian education of young people and his hope that such a gathering might become a regular event (2).

One of Robert’s more formal responsibilities later in the year was to lay a memorial stone as a lintel above the entrance to the railway station, but he added his personal stamp to the proceedings by presenting a Bible to each of the 120 or so workmen, reminding them that “ *The Bible is the charter of old England. God gave it to be the rule of life.* ” (3)

Each year when a new Mayor was elected it was the custom for the Council to record a formal vote of thanks to the outgoing Mayor, but when Robert retired from his second year of office in November 1872 the dry language of the Minute Book conveys a tribute which is both fulsome and generous. “ *The thanks of the Corporation were presented to Robert Walker, Mayor of this Borough for the past two years, for the most able and efficient manner in which he has filled the office of Mayor and conducted the business of the Borough during his mayoralty, and also for his exertions in obtaining substantial and lasting benefits to the Borough.* ”

There exists a picture of Robert, reportedly taken during his time as Mayor and when he was therefore in his late 40s or early 50s. It shows him to have had a full, strongly featured and confident face with receding curly hair above and a goatee beard below. The lack of the moustache which often accompanied such a beard seems to indicate a man who was conscious of his appearance, but it also serves to reveal the suggestion of a smile playing round the edges of his mouth and hints at the suspicion that here was a man who laughed readily and was a good companion. Robert’s son John colours in the outline with his description of his father as a man of “ *Good health, good brains, good looks, musical ability, a splendid voice, and a pleasing manner* ” (4)

But for all the respect in which he was held in 1874 Robert was caught up in a local *cause celebre* which, by his choice, ended his service on the Council although not in the wider public life of the town. In the Council elections of that year Robert, having come to the end of his allotted three year term as a Councillor, chose to stand for re-election; and for this purpose he and two other candidates, William Poulton and William Dawson, issued a joint declaration of their aims. When the votes were counted they showed Robert and William Dawson to have the highest number of votes and they were declared elected, but this was subsequently contested by William Nicholson, the proprietor of the brewery, who claimed that the election was flawed because, in the catch all legal wording of the Corrupt Practices Act, there had been “ *bribery, treating, corrupt practices and undue influence* ” during the vote.

The unruly conduct of elections had been mocked by Charles Dickens nearly 50 years before in his description of the election at Eatonswill, and an understandable assumption might be made that on polling day in Maidenhead in 1874 there had been similar riotous behaviour, with voters being plied with alcohol and led staggering to the Town Hall to cast their vote. But the reality seems to have been less dramatic, and to have revolved around the provision of free beer and sandwiches for those in the know at some of the town public houses. This seems to have been a long standing Maidenhead custom at election times but in this case William Nicholson thought that it had all been taken a step too far.

That there had been some nods and winks, and the provision of free refreshments, on election day was beyond doubt but the subsequent trial completely exonerated Robert and William Poulton from any knowledge of or involvement in it. However the judge found that William Dawson had broken the electoral law, and he ruled that because all three had stood for election under a common manifesto the law must consider them to have acted jointly in all their actions in connection with the election, and therefore Robert and William Poulton were also legally guilty. Although the judge commented that Robert could leave the court without a stain on his character the verdict was a crushing blow to a man who had always sought to act honestly and openly in all that he did.

The election was declared void and Robert chose not to stand when it was re-run; he never served on the Council again. Instead he found outlets for his energy as a Magistrate, member of the Board of Guardians and Trustee of many local charities as well as his work with the church.

Like his mentor John Higgs, Robert Walker was also imbued with the missionary spirit and was John's able lieutenant and successor in supporting the congregations, and particularly the Sunday Schools, at Holyport and Cookham, but where John Higgs had found an outlet for his pioneering evangelism in these communities Robert was to find his at Cookham Rise.

In 1854 the Wycombe Railway Company began to run their trains to and from Maidenhead, and their station at Cookham prompted the development of the area now known as Cookham Rise. By the beginning of the 1880s this growing community had come to the attention of the High Street church and Robert led a small mission band which held regular open air services there during the summer months of 1884. Although by this time Robert's health was beginning to deteriorate his energetic leadership soon inspired the formation of a regular group of worshippers and the subsequent building of a little corrugated iron chapel, with Robert's name listed among those of the first Trustees.

This was to be Robert's last major enterprise for, after a long and painful illness, he died at the relatively young age of 64 on 1 August 1886 his last recorded words being a line from the chorus of one of his favourite hymns, “ *I love Jesus, Hallelujah* ”.

Victorian funerals in Maidenhead, especially for well known public figures, were dignified and impressive affairs, and Robert Walker's was one such. (5) On the Thursday afternoon of the funeral the flag above the Town Hall was flown at half mast, many of the town shops closed as a mark of respect, and the police worked hard to keep a path open for the procession of some 300

people who followed the coffin as it was carried from Robert's house on the north side of Kidwells Park to the High Street church where it was met by the Mayor and senior Councillors. The congregation included members of the Anglican, Congregational, Baptist and Primitive Methodist churches and High Street was filled to capacity for the funeral service with many mourners having to stand, while many more gathered silently outside to witness the coffin being laid to rest in the family vault alongside those of Robert's mother, daughter and mentor and friend John Higgs.

On the following Sunday evening a two hour memorial service in the church saw a reported 800 people (6) squeeze together to hear an hour long sermon and give thanks for a long, devout and influential life.

In comparison with Robert's energetic and influential personality his wife Ann appears as a shadowy figure who avoided the limelight and was content with her relative anonymity, but this would be to underrate her. Ann became a Class leader, a teacher in the Sunday School and a member of the Tract Society soon after her marriage, activities which she continued until age and infirmity limited her mobility, and such records as survive show her to have been a trusted confidante, a quiet diplomat, a reliable friend, and a reassuring presence. But the emotional scar of her daughter Jemima's death was something that she always carried with her; her son recorded that "*never wearing her heart on her sleeve she was yet capable of deep emotion (and) the loss of her little girl was a blow from which she never wholly recovered.*" (7)

As she aged Ann began to suffer from what was then described as dropsy, the painful swellings arising from the accumulation of water in the soft tissues, but as she became more housebound and could no longer attend Services Ann "*would on Sunday evenings take the Circuit Plan, go over all the appointments and make each one a subject for prayer*" (8); her suffering and pain finally ended at the age of 78 on 12 July 1896.

The report of Ann's funeral occupied a whole column in the *Maidenhead Advertiser* (9) and the esteem in which she was held can be gauged from the report that the mourners included members of the town Council as well as members of the Anglican, Congregational and Primitive Methodist congregations; when the service was over her body became the sixth, and last, to be laid to rest in the family vault.

Unlike some other communities Maidenhead has rarely commissioned plaques or public memorials to commemorate its prominent citizens. Although Isaac Watts was making a point about the never failing presence of God when he wrote,

*Time, like an ever rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.*

nevertheless it is the case that for all Robert Walker's contemporary reputation he is now barely remembered in the town, only Walker Road carries his name. The memorial stone at the railway station may still be in place although it is not now visible, but the porch at the rear of the High Street church has built into it a foundation stone originally laid by him in 1855 and Ann has a brick with her name in the wall nearby (10), while the faces of both Robert and Ann gaze benevolently down from their portraits on a wall of the Minister's vestry, their work long done but their legacy ongoing.

**JOHN WESLEY
WALKER**



John Wesley Walker, son of Robert and Ann, was born on 6 September 1848 in a room above the corner chemists shop which had become the focal point for so much Methodist prayer, planning and pastoral care, and while it could be said of him that he was born with Methodism in his blood it is also true that John inherited a family tradition of public service; and in parallel with, and deriving from, each of them a lifelong appreciation of history.

In 1848 Robert Walker was 26 and rapidly making a name for himself both in the town and in the wider world of Methodism, and John's formative years were inevitably spent in the shadow of Robert's energetic and influential presence. Some young men coming to maturity in such circumstances would have asserted their independence by striking out in a different and contrary direction, but John not only inherited many of Robert's gifts but was also to follow him in putting them at the service of the town and the Methodist Church, both of which were to mean so much to him.

John's earliest schooling would have begun at home and been continued at a local primary school and the Methodist Sunday School, but at the age of 11 he was enrolled at the *Classical and Commercial Academy* run by a Mr. Shaw and set in grounds on the outskirts of Bath where his father had been a pupil some 20 years before (1). The school closed during the latter years of the 19th century, and any records it may have left seem to have been lost, but it is reasonable to assume that it was run on Christian principles and was, by Methodist judgement, theologically sound. In his mature years, apart from his other qualities, John Walker impressed his contemporaries with his financial acumen, his ease with words and his elegant calligraphy, and if these were fruits of the seeds sown by Mr. Shaw he must have been as inspiring a teacher as John was a receptive pupil.

After leaving school John returned to Maidenhead and at the age of 16 began his lifelong service to Methodism when he was admitted as a teacher in the Sunday School, while in the world of business he followed in his father's professional footsteps as he studied to become a pharmacist. Pharmacy had moved on from the *ad hoc* training undertaken by John Higgs and Robert Walker and had become a regulated profession with strict national standards, but at the age of 22, after gaining experience in Bristol and Liverpool and passing the appropriate examinations, John was entered on the rolls of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society as a Pharmaceutical Chemist (2) and joined his father in the management of the small but thriving High Street shop. John quickly demonstrated his competence and Robert soon began to leave him with more and more responsibility, until eventually taking him into partnership.

As a fit and active young man John became a founder member of the town football team, a volunteer member of the town Fire Brigade, and an enthusiastic and wide ranging cyclist. Settled back into the life and routines of church and business life John was accepted as a Local Preacher on trial at the age of 22, becoming fully accredited two years later, and beginning a career as a regular and highly regarded leader of worship in Methodist churches both in Maidenhead and in the wider Connexion.

In 1877 at the age of 29 John seemed settled in life when he married 27 year old Mary Fidler, the daughter of a long standing friend of his father; and Robert took this opportunity to formally retire and leave John to become the senior partner in the business.

By his diligence and enterprise Robert Walker had built the chemist's shop into a prosperous concern, a prosperity which John had maintained and helped to grow, but in 1887, a year after Robert died, John sold his share in the business to Arthur Upson, a Methodist colleague and by then a fellow partner, and retired. Through the death of Jemima Higgs in the autumn of the previous year John had inherited the sum of £5,000, worth at least 100 times this amount in present day values, and this, together with the money he had earned through the shop and the sum he received from its sale, made him a relatively wealthy man and left him with the freedom to give his time to other things than earning a living. He was just 38 years old.

But something more than affluence prompted John Walker's decision to retire. Although his marriage to Mary seems to have been happy enough she had fragile health, and in 1892, when she was 42, there is the first surviving record of her suffering recurring attacks of disabling schizophrenia, attacks which so grew in frequency and severity that they eventually became impossible to deal with at home and she was admitted as an in-patient at a series of psychiatric clinics in York where she remained for the rest of her life (3).

The clinics had a strong Quaker influence, a skilled staff and a high reputation for compassionate care, and although John visited Mary regularly only someone who has had a similar experience can begin to imagine his private pain. Separated in body and mind from the woman he loved it was a wound he carried with him until death finally claimed them both, and they were laid to rest together. There were no children of the marriage, something which must also have been a matter of sadness to John Walker who, by contemporary accounts, was always at ease in the company of children and who spent many hours in teaching, leading or serving as Superintendent in the Sunday School at the High Street church.

That John would have been the recipient of much prayerful support from his many friends can be taken for granted, but denied the support and companionship of his chosen partner he sought comfort and purpose in his faith and his sense of public duty; and if the once widely used but now largely forgotten phrase "the Protestant work ethic" can be ascribed to anyone it can without contradiction be used of John Walker. As he moved into his 40s, and was relieved of the day to day anxiety for his wife's well being, he committed himself to a life of public service, a life in which his interests and activities were wide ranging and involved him in all the significant organisations and activities connected with the administration and welfare of the town.

A year after his retirement from business, and with the formation of the Berkshire County Council, John began his life of public service when he was elected to the Council as a representative from Maidenhead; he subsequently served on the Council for many years, taking a keen interest in schools and education and becoming in time Chairman of the Education Committee and a county magistrate.

In the church John had succeeded to the posts of Sunday School Superintendent and Choirmaster at High Street on the death of his father, the duties of which he took seriously and to which he committed much of his time, and as a Local Preacher John began to take an active interest in the work and witness of the Local Preachers Mutual Aid Association, a Connexion wide body established to give aid and support to those Preachers who fell on hard times. The Association published a monthly magazine for which John became one of the two voluntary co-editors, and in 1897 he was elected to serve for a year in the post of President of the Association, a reflection of the respect in which he was held by his fellow Preachers.

This active life quickly brought John to a wider public notice and led to a growing reputation as an eloquent and witty orator; and in addition to his formal duties he was soon much in demand as a speaker at public events. It was the custom before 1914 for the *Maidenhead Advertiser* to report important speeches verbatim, and although it is not possible to hear the emphases of the actual delivery the frequent insertions in brackets of words such as "applause", "laughter" or "hear, hear" in the reports of John's speeches show that he had the ability to capture, and keep, the attention and support of his audience.

In 1903, at the age of 55, John was elected to the town Council for the first time and was subsequently elected to the Mayoralty in November 1905. It was for him an especially proud moment, and in his private notebook, now kept in the town library, he recorded the members of his family who had preceded him in that honourable office; his great grandfather (Thomas Cullern), his great uncle (Edward Mackie), his uncle (John Higgs), his father Robert, and his cousin (Edward W. Mackie). John ended the list with his own name followed by a word which can be read as either astonishment or pride, or perhaps both - *me*. Although John might have had to

venture far along the branches of his family tree to make up his list it remains an impressive family record of public service which will probably never be equalled. (4)

As well as being elected to the Council in 1903 it was also the year that John began the negotiations for the purchase of a plot of land for the building of the Cookham Rise Methodist church. It was a congregation established by John's father and a cause which John had always encouraged, and when building work began his generous and steady support was acknowledged by an invitation to lay one of the two major foundation stones.

It might be thought that with his multifarious meetings, with their attendant reading and preparation, his various official duties and other commitments, and with the travelling that they entailed, John would have had little time to pursue a private interest but in the midst of this busy life he somehow managed to research and write the histories for which he is now best remembered.

As an active and respected member of the Maidenhead community, and of many of the institutions which helped it to function, John had ready access to the deeds and documents which formed a necessary part of their activities, and this privileged position prompted him to read through the Borough archives and catalogue them. It was the first time this had been done and he called the result *A Calendar of the Charters and Documents of the Corporation of Maidenhead*; as well as a printed copy the town library also holds the final draft with amendments in John Walker's elegant hand and a title page noting that it was produced in 1908.

It was a logical next step for him to write a history of the town, and this he did with his *History of Maidenhead* published in December 1909. He was not the first to set himself this task; others before him had done it in whole or in part but John does not seem to have been impressed by their efforts, writing in his preface that " *If Maidenhead has not been especially rich in history it has been still less rich in historians* ", and adding that apart from " *the Rev. Charles Gorham's scholarly record of the history of St. Mary's Chapel* " such writing as existed on the history of the town was not always as accurate as might be wished. But, he added, " *every town, like every individual life, has its story* " and it is this story which he sets out to tell. The result is a volume modest in size but large in scope and scholarship, some hint of which can be inferred from the fact that it was thought worthwhile to reprint it in 1931 and again in 1971.

John's history is no dry accumulation of dates and events for he was very aware that people make history, and wherever he could he included pen portraits of the personalities concerned with the events he was describing, often enlivened by his gentle wit and his ability to capture the essence of a character in a few simple words.

So in recording the activities of a lodging house for vagrant labourers in the town in the early 1800s, kept by a seemingly formidable lady called Mother Greengrass, he wrote that her hostelry " *was as well known as her tongue was fluent and her vocabulary rich* " - it is hardly necessary to know more; and in his description of the activities of the Rev. John Dawson, a particularly restless and disputatious chaplain of St. Mary's Church in the first half of the 17th century, John Walker ended his account with the chaplain's death and the words " *Peace to his memory, for there was not much peace about him while he was living.*"

It is also easy to imagine him chuckling over the account of Thomas Ellwood, a devout Quaker arrested one Sunday for riding his horse through the town at a time when England was governed by a Puritan Parliament, and who was immediately taken before the town Magistrate accused of profaning the Sabbath. In his defence Thomas Ellwood argued that as Sunday was generally considered to be the first day of the week it could not also be the Sabbath, since this commemorates the day on which God rested after the six days of creation and was thus the seventh day of the week not the first; at which it seems that the magistrate became " *hot and testy* " and after some debate dismissed Thomas Ellwood with a caution. The irony of a

magistrate arguing points of law on what he considered to be the Sabbath while denying a traveller the right to ride his horse would not have been lost on John Walker.

The *Maidenhead Advertiser* in its review concluded approvingly that this is “ a book without which no local bookcase can be said to be complete.”⁽⁵⁾ Inevitably down the years copies of the original have been lost or destroyed, so a first edition is now a rarity.

In 1919, to coincide with the 90th anniversary of the first Methodist meeting in the town, John wrote and published his second valuable local history, *Methodism in Maidenhead*. It was a book which he was uniquely qualified to write for his uncle and aunt had been instrumental in forming the first Wesleyan Methodist society in Maidenhead in 1829 while his father had played a leading part in consolidating the work that they had begun, and had led the growing band of worshippers in their move to the larger church at the head of High Street which has been the congregation’s spiritual home since 1858.

Unlike his history of the town John’s history of Maidenhead Methodism has no accompanying list of references for the simple reason that a large part of that history was in his own personal experience, and he had known not only the principal actors but also many of the less influential, but no less important, players. His pen portraits of some of them show his awareness of their individual qualities as well as giving a singular glimpse into their lives and times. So the devout life of Charles Cleare, for a time the Maidenhead Postmaster, would probably be unknown were it not for John Walker. Also unknown would be the names of James Wilson with his custom of short but over loud public prayers, and Daniel White who, when money was being raised for the building of the new chapel in Bridge Road, bargained with his wife and, in response to his agreement to give up sugar, gained the sum of five pence per fortnight from the housekeeping budget as his contribution to the funds.

But John’s influence went beyond the recording of church history for, like his father before him, he was conscious that he was also making it, and when the Methodists were building or rebuilding, as they did more than once, father and son encouraged the burying of bottles containing contemporary papers and documents under appropriate foundation stones. John Walker, like his father, was also a careful keeper of the records, books and important ephemera which were part of the life of the church; many of these, some dating back to the 1830s, are deposited with the county archives at Reading and give a singular glimpse into nineteenth century life and times.

A photograph of John Walker taken in his later years shows him with a broad browed oval face framed by a neatly trimmed beard with alert, some might say piercing, eyes gazing out above a luxuriant walrus moustache, and his solidly built, upright and smartly dressed figure was familiar and easily recognisable as he walked from his home at 22 Craufurd Rise to do his business in the town. John’s elegant writing and self confident signature confirm the impression of a man at ease with himself, and the high regard in which he was universally held shows him to have also been a good companion and respectful of others. His long involvement in public affairs also indicates that he enjoyed the confidence and support of his contemporaries and was a man receptive to new ideas and changing circumstances.

In October 1928 in recognition of John’s many contributions to the life and well being of the town the Council, amid much ceremony and with many expressions of esteem, conferred on him the honorary freedom of the Borough of Maidenhead, only the third person to be so honoured since its establishment over 90 years before.

But in addition to his parochial work in the church and town John continued his involvement in the wider world of Methodism where his diligence and wise counsel had also come to be held in high regard, and in the second half of his life he served the church at its highest levels. A *Who’s Who in Methodism* published in 1933 records him as Treasurer of the Connexional Sunday

School Department and Treasurer of Wesley's Chapel, as well as being a member of many Connexional Committees.

In 1933 John celebrated his 85th birthday and understandably began to shed some of his responsibilities, beginning with his decision to step down from his position as an Alderman, although he still took an active interest in the events and people around him. His 90th birthday in 1938 was a time of celebration, especially for the High Street church and to commemorate his lifetime involvement in the church's music making John marked the occasion by paying for the overhaul and rebuilding of the organ; to mark his generosity the Trustees attached a small commemorative plaque to the panelling above the keyboard but this was removed during a later refurbishment of the church and not replaced.

John was to live for another year until, after several months of indifferent health, he died quietly on 7 September 1939, the day after his 91st birthday. As the news became known many public tributes were paid to John's life and work; in its long obituary the *Maidenhead Advertiser* recorded his many achievements and summed them up with the words " *he had been everything by turn and everything any man could possibly be.*" (6).

John's wife Mary had died the previous December and because it was in Maidenhead that they had spent their early happy years of married life John had her body brought back from York, and because the family vault beneath the High Street church was full he had her laid to rest in the cemetery by All Saints' Avenue; four days after his own death, and following a short but emotional service in the church, John's body was buried in the same plot, a spot now marked by a simple stone bearing their names and dates of death.

In more peaceful times John's active and distinguished life might have merited some form of public memorial, but events in Europe in December 1939 meant that people had more pressing concerns. However he is not entirely forgotten. A commemorative stone in the porch at the rear of the High Street church bears his name, as does a board listing the honorary Freemen of the Borough of Maidenhead mounted unobtrusively on a wall outside the Council chamber in the Town Hall; John is also remembered in the naming of the Walker Room, part of the local studies section of the library, while Walker Road on the southern outskirts of the town serves as a commemoration of both John and his father.

The author of John's obituary in the Reading Gazette closed his piece with words John had spoken some time before " *I have tried to do three things in my life - something for my Church, something for my town, and something for my country* "; the writer then added " *He did all three with a thoroughness seldom equalled.*" (7)

It was a fitting memorial.

POSTSCRIPT

With the death of John Wesley Walker the family line of Mary Cullern came to an end. For more than 100 years its members had been a visible, active, influential and benevolent presence in the town and further afield; and although the individual members of the family are now largely forgotten there are reminders of them in the presence of the High Street Methodist church, in the weathered headstone marking the entrance to the family vault and in John Walker's books.

There is nothing especially remarkable about this anonymity for life moves on and times and attitudes change; if there is any lesson to be learned from their lives it might perhaps be best summed up in the recommendations for Christian living set down by John Wesley,

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.

During their lifetimes Mary Cullern's family might justly claim to have tried to follow this wise advice, and if they could have guessed that this was how they would be best remembered in after years then with that they would surely have been content.

REFERENCES

John Higgs

- 1 Job 37, 14
- 2 Isaiah 59, 17
- 3 In his book *A History of Maidenhead* John Wesley Walker quotes population figures for the town of 945 in 1821 and 3,315 in 1841, but in the absence of any reference to sources it is impossible to know how reliable these might be. As a comparison the 2001 census gives the population of Bray as 8,460 and that of the three Cookhams as 5,419
- 4 J.W.Walker: *Methodism in Holyport*
- 5 Stephen Darby: *Chapters in the history of Cookham*, p. 233
- 6 Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, December 1870: *Memoir of John Higgs*
- 7 Windsor Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 24 June 1867
- 8 Ephesians 3, 19
- 9 Wesleyan Methodist Magazine - *op cit*
- 10 The stones were recovered and set in the walls at the rear entrance to the church during the demolition and rebuilding of 1969 - 73.

Mary Ann Curtis Treffry

- 1 While it was not uncommon for children to be baptised with their mother's maiden name her marriage register shows the maiden name of Mary's mother as Curteis while Mary's forenames in the Cookham baptismal register are shown as Mary Ann Curtis. The spelling of the Curteis / Curtis part of Mary's name in other later documents arbitrarily takes either form and seems to depend solely on the whim of the writer
- 2 Unless otherwise noted quotations are from *Heavenward*, a biography of Mary Treffry by James A. Macdonald published in 1866
- 3 1 Peter 2, 9
- 4 A Wesleyan Methodist ladies society founded to make and distribute new and used clothing to the needy
- 5 Galatians 5, 22 & 23

Robert Walker

- 1 In both the Sunninghill baptismal record for Robert's wife, and in the later birth certificate for his daughter, Ann is spelt with an 'e', but the family always seem to have used the shorter form; whether to add or omit the additional letter seems to have exercised ladies named Ann, and others, since time immemorial.
- 2 Maidenhead Advertiser, 1 February 1871
- 3 Maidenhead Advertiser, January 25 January 1871
- 4 J.W.Walker: *Methodism in Maidenhead*, p.24
- 5 Maidenhead Advertiser, 11 August 1886
- 6 Maidenhead Advertiser, 11 August 1886
- 7 J.W.Walker: *op cit* p. 27
- 8 J.W.Walker: *op cit* p. 28
- 9 Maidenhead Advertiser, 22 July 1896

- 10 A further memorial to Robert in the form of a coloured window bearing the initials RW was placed in the Cookham Methodist church by John Wesley Walker in 1887. This was removed when the church closed in 1910 and refitted into the entrance porch to the Cookham Rise church where it may still be seen.

John Wesley Walker

- 1 Contemporary newspaper reports state that John Walker was educated at Shaw's School, Brixton, but the archives at Brixton in London and Brixton in Devon have no record of a school of that name. However in his book *Methodism in Maidenhead* John Walker notes that part of his father's education was at " a boarding school at Bath kept by a Mr. Shaw " and the Bath archives have references during these years to Mr. Shaw's school sited on the outskirts of the town. Although the school records have not survived it seems reasonable, allowing for the family connection, to assume that this was the school in question.
- 2 John Walker's professional qualifications and other relevant records are in the archives of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.
- 3 Mary Walker's medical records are in the archive of the Borthwick Institute which is part of the University of York.

APPENDIX

**VALEDICTORY SERMON IN MEMORY OF
JOHN HIGGS**

preached by Robert Walker
at
High Street Wesleyan Methodist church
Maidenhead

on 9 June 1867

The late Mr. Higgs was born at Maidenhead on the 25th May in the year 1800, and being the youngest child was the favoured one of his mother.

At the age of 14 he was apprenticed to a Surgeon in the town for 7 years, during which time he had few opportunities of attending the House of God. In three years time his mother died, and he thus gives expression to his feelings, "*If ever I felt sorrow up to this time it was at the loss of my mother; it was then that I began to think of her kind advice and of her fond attachment to me.*" As time, however, rolled on the councils of a mother were forgotten in the indulgence of a natural taste for pastimes and amusements. The father of our departed friend was a man of the world whose motto was "*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*", and his example was imitated by his son John who became passionately fond of the dance, often riding many miles to attend a Ball. Shooting was also a favourite amusement, for his skill in which he was most remarkable.

At the expiration of his apprenticeship he went to London and during two years residence there had only twice the opportunity of attending divine service.

At the age of 23 Mr. Higgs commenced business in this town with an energy, industry and self denial which rendered success certain; nevertheless for 4 years he revelled in sinful pleasure, and as often as possible was found at the card table, the ball room, the race course and the cricket field: speaking of this period he says "*Oh that those four years could be blotted out of the book of God's remembrance ! I was indeed a zealous labourer in Satan's cause, and o what reason I have to be thankful that I was not destroyed, but was spared to see my folly. It is true I often felt I was sinning against God, and that the judgement and an awful destiny awaited the ungodly, but these thoughts I strove to banish from my mind.*"

Alas how many are there who, like Mr. Higgs, try to lose themselves in the giddy whirl of pleasures, and to drown all the awakenings of a guilty conscience, and quench the solemn warnings of God's Holy Spirit in the companionship of sinners; who, like the Prodigal, go into a far off country to banish all serious thoughts in sinful levity; or, like another Jonah, take ship for Tarshish hoping to escape from the presence of the Lord.

Towards the end of the year 1827 Mr. Higgs was married to the lady who is now his mourning widow. Mrs. Higgs had been accustomed to attend the plain heart-searching preaching of the Wesleyan Methodists. There were no Methodists in this town then, and so with much persuasion our departed friend records, "*My dear wife got me to drive her over to the Wesleyan Chapel at Windsor. I accompanied her to the Chapel door intending myself to walk on the Terrace, but she took me by the hand and prevailed on me to go in with her, which I did by going into the gallery. The text was "Thou God seest me" and was as a nail fastened in a sure place. I said little on coming home, but I felt much; a secret desire to give my heart to God sprang up but how to break through and get away from my old companions I knew not.*"

At the time much prayer was used that the Holy Spirit might lead our friend to forsake sin and become decided for God, but just as it was with the poor demoniac who, while he was coming to Jesus, was cast down by the devil and wallowed foaming, so Satan would not give up easily the sway he had so long wielded over his faithful servant.

Just then, at this juncture, Mr. Higgs was overwhelmed with the inducements to worldly pleasure - he had a race horse which won a closely contested race and gained no small praise for its owner, in conjunction with a brother tradesman he won a cricket match against two gentlemen of the Marylebone club which excited intense interest in the neighbourhood, and a very valuable gun had been presented to him which no one knew better how to use. "*O*" says Mr. Higgs, "*how Satan held me, he gave me all I wanted but my convictions became stronger and stronger. I was not happy. I sought happiness but went to a broken cistern that would hold no water.*"

Thus the prayers of God's people prevailed, and Mr. Higgs became so intensely miserable in his pleasures that he determined to start for Heaven, and told everyone that spoke to him that though he had no religion he would try to get it. This was the grand turning point of his life, he gave up at once and for ever all his worldly pleasures and associates, not one by one but all at once. He disposed of his race horse, gun and cards never more to be beguiled into the snare of the devil.

He sought the Lord with all his heart, and while with bitter anguish he sorrowed over the sins of a misspent life this promise was applied to his mind "*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*" He was enabled to cast his burdened soul on the infinite love of a dying Saviour who suffered in his room and stead, and who is the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world.

Now he was truly happy, no fear of a future judgement haunted his imagination, no alarm on account of past sins terrified his mind, they were all washed away by faith in the blood of Christ, and being justified by faith he had peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He now exultingly exclaimed

*My God is reconciled,
His pardoning voice I hear,
He owns me for his child,
I can no longer fear.
With confidence I now draw nigh
And Father, Abba, Father cry.*

What a grand thing is religion, how it elevates, ennobles, inspires and comforts its possessor. Our departed friend had now found the pearl of great price, he was a new man in Christ Jesus, old things had passed away, behold all things had become new.

Now he became as earnest in the service of God as he had formerly been in the service of the devil, and his conduct soon attracted the fierce opposition of his old companions, sometimes showing itself in scornful contempt, and at others in sneering mockery or plausible reasonings.

"*Higgs is gone mad ! !*" " *No* " replied our friend, "*I have been a madman all my life, and have only just now found my senses.*"

"*Higgs is a fool, he is cutting off his best friends and will lose his business.*" " *So be it* " was the reply, "*I had better lose my business than my soul ! For what shall a man gain in exchange for his soul ?*"

No one would imagine the persecution this young soldier of the cross had to submit to, and among his bitterest persecutors were his own father and family who all prognosticated his speedy ruin. At this time his faith was most severely tested for when the world found he was in earnest his business did indeed fall off, and he was forced to sell his horse and chaise; and together with his heroic wife, who was truly a helpmeet to him in this hour of trial, to submit to privations and to practice self denials such as none but his Heavenly Father knew of, and but few would imagine.

But the trial of his faith was crowned with success in this life for the blessing of God which maketh rich and addeth no sorrow rested on the life of the godly man, and he found it to be better than the revenues of the wicked,

Amid all this opposition Mr. Higgs invited the Methodists to Maidenhead, and obtained the Town Hall to the amazement of everybody for the preaching of the gospel, this was on the 2nd July 1829. The Mayor was roundly rated for granting the Hall for such a purpose; thank God that species of opposition has long since passed away. This event is very graphically narrated in the memoirs of Mrs. Treffry, sister of Mr. Higgs.

The kitchen of a house occupied by Mrs. Andrews was hired at 2/- a week for a service on Thursday evening, and of the little company assembled there few are left besides her who mourns the departure of her beloved husband, and an individual now present who testifies that in that humble meeting the power of God was often graciously manifested in the salvation of souls.

The little society found it needful to extend their borders and take a larger room which was opened for Sabbath and week evening services, towards the fitting out of which the first £50 Mr. Higgs had saved from his business was gratefully devoted. “ *Honor the Lord with thy first fruits so shall thy barns be filled with plenty and thy presses burst forth with new wine.*”

In 1833 a new Wesleyan Chapel was opened and as the cause advanced Mr. Higgs was called upon to sustain the important offices of Local Preacher and Class Leader; in these departments he laboured to the end of life with unwearied diligence, affection and zeal. Many were converted under his ministry and nurtured in the things of God by the judicious counsels of their leader. For several years he was one of the chief supporters of Methodism in the Windsor Circuit, bearing its pecuniary burdens while others laid aside the yoke, and standing almost alone in perilous times a faithful witness for Christ.

It was his joy to witness the Wesleyan Church in this place reach its present prosperous condition, and as he remembered all the way the Lord had led him these forty years in the wilderness he would gratefully give utterance to his well know motto, “ *Let us be thankful .*”

In November 1844 he was chosen in the office of Mayor of Maidenhead, on which occasion he thus writes, “ *A new era in my life - I am just chosen Mayor of the town. Oh what responsibilities await me. I have often thought God’s Sabbath in this place can be better observed, I must try what I can do. Oh Lord help thy unworthy servant to glorify thee in this important office.*” Mr. Higgs’s influence was sufficient to induce all who had kept open their shops to close them on the Lord’s day and we have to be thankful that we are still saved from the demoralising scenes of Sabbath desecration witnessed in many towns.

As a Councillor or Alderman, as a Magistrate of this Borough, as a Trustee of the public charities, and indeed in many other offices he tried to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with his God. He was a decided peacemaker, always striving to heal a breach rather than to irritate contending parties, and many times did he succeed in banishing strife. He was a happy, thankful Christian man and tried to make others happy around him, while the thoroughly genuine transparency of his character secured the confidence and respect of those with whom he came in contact.

Mr. Higgs was a witness for Jesus, and whether with the titled nobleman or the humble peasant he continually sought to lead them to the contemplation of eternal realities and the importance of salvation, invariably winding up his efforts by teaching them and extorting a promise they would pray his prayer of five words, “ *Lord Jesus, convert my soul.*” Many of the gentry in this neighbourhood and in other places have been led by that simple petition to seek for salvation, and amongst several known instances of good resulting was one Mr. Higgs has placed upon record in the form of a tract, copies of which are now respectfully presented to this congregation - that tract has led others to Jesus, may it lead many more.

Our departed friend was an ardent lover of Wesley’s hymns and used to sing them in his own peculiar way with great energy and delight. Love of the Brethren was one great characteristic of Mr. Higgs. He loved all who love Jesus, and of those who did not it may truly be said, “ *He was the friend of all and the enemy of none.*”

It was the daily habit of Mr. Higgs to retire at midday into his closet for private prayer and this duty he constantly enjoined on the members of his class. It was his custom at such times to read God’s word on his knees and claim the promises of a covenant keeping God. Indeed the word of

God was his great delight; the 23rd Psalm was a special favourite, and many will remember his constant quotation of the last verse, “ *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*”

At the commencement of 1864 failing health induced him to change his residence, that he might be able to attend public worship, and especially the Sunday morning prayer meeting, a means of grace he was never unavoidably absent from, and it was no unusual thing for him to call up other members of the church to join him; our friends will remember his earnest entreaties that the early prayer meeting might never be neglected.

Among the many plans in operation for the benefit of man the Teetotal scheme attracted Mr. Higgs’s attention and 12 years ago he signed the pledge, and was the means of inducing many to abandon the cup of woe as well as leading on the Band of Hope children in the paths of temperance and religion.

Though he considered himself not adapted to teach in the Sabbath School he was the firm friend of a scriptural education of which the adjoining School Rooms, the last built of which especially bears his impress, fully testify - and greatly did he rejoice in the salvation of the young.

That Mr. Higgs had his failings we do not deny, but would shroud them in loving forgetfulness while we remember all we can of his good qualities, and glorify God in him. The last time he preached was at the Watchnight, taking the text “ *What is your life ?*” and the last public Service he attended was one of the united prayer meetings last January, from which time wearisome days and nights were appointed him. His cheerfulness never forsook him though his sufferings were at times intensely great, and he was often heard in prayer for a revival of the work of God, and that God would bless our little Israel.

For a long time Satan was permitted to assault our beloved friend with many and sore temptations, but his faith triumphed at last and for days he would request his friends to join in singing

*I can, I will, I do believe
That Jesus died for me*

and

*The blood of Jesus cleanseth me
The moment I believe*

During the last fortnight of his life it was remarked that not a single prayer escaped his lips, it was all praise. He stood on the borders of the better land and seemed to catch the music of the skies; his soul was inspired with joy and his triumphant utterance for days was “ *Blessed be the name of the Lord.*”

On the morning of the 5th June, surrounded by his beloved wife and friends, he calmly ceased to breath and passed away without a struggle leaving behind a blessed testimony that while absent from the body he is present with the Lord.

While bending over his tomb with loving tenderness this bereaved church mourns the loss of her devoted head; let faith catch a glimpse of our departing Elijah and may his mantle fall upon many this evening. Behold that veteran warrior, that soldier of Christ, robed in the beauties of holiness and waving the victor’s palm as he approaches the celestial city of the great King, to enjoy his triumph and receive his crown of life. Whole myriads meet him at the pearly gates to greet him on his safe arrival. See what millions throng the golden street as he passes along in his triumphal car of excessive glory.

Contemplate his unutterable sensations when, for the first time, he beholds the innumerable company of the redeemed, tell his transport of joy as he distinctly recognises his sainted sister,

Mrs. Treffry, sweeping her celestial lyre, and her little granddaughter striking the timbrels of heaven; with Samuel Andrews tuning the golden harp and many more saints from this and other congregations in this town whom on earth he loved and with whom he took sweet fellowship all swelling the hallelujah choruses of redemption. See him range the sweet plains on the banks of the river with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God.

But the most beatific sight is the glory of our redeeming God ! O the ineffable glory of Christ ! The first sight of the “ *Lamb as it had been slain* ”, of Him who wept, bled and died to save mankind from anguish and woe. Our brother sees him now, the fairest first born of Heaven, not as he was, the persecuted despised Nazarene, but as he is in his exaltation and glory. O how overwhelming is the vision of the ever blessed and glorious Trinity. How blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

Farewell beloved one, thy cloudy and dark days are over, thy blustering winds of agitation, thy waves of affliction are over for ever; thou hast entered into the rest which remains for the people of God. And we shall soon join thee, if faithful, we who now bear the cross and fight the foe shall soon meet our beloved Father in Israel.

*O what a joyful meeting there,
In robes of white arrayed,
Palms in our hands we all shall bear,
And crowns upon our heads.*

*Then let us hasten to the day
When all shall be brought home,
Come, O Redeemer, come away,
O Jesus quickly come.*