

The Re-opening and
Dedication of
The
METHODIST CHURCH
UNION STREET

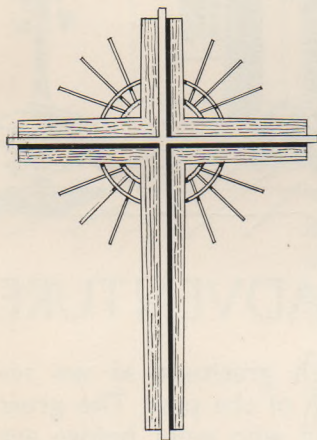
Maidstone, Kent
31st May 1969

THE METHODIST CHURCH

Union Street
Maidstone, Kent

Minister

The Reverend M. Wilson Horswill



RE-OPENING
& DEDICATION
OF THE CHURCH
AFTER RENOVATION
Saturday, 31st. May, 1969

To be dedicated by

*The Chairman of the London South-East
District of the Methodist Church*

The Reverend F. Ronald Ducker, B.Com.
and the Bishop of Maidstone,

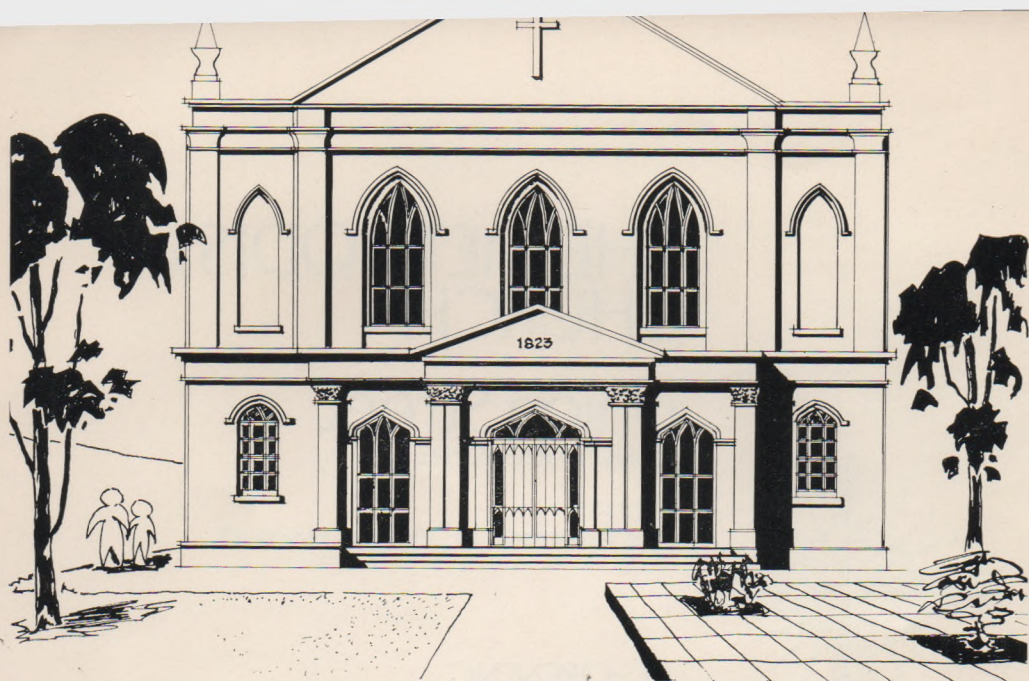
The Right Reverend Geoffrey Tiarcks
and the Maidstone Circuit Ministers

Preacher:

The Reverend Dr. Kenneth G. Greet

THE issue of this brochure celebrates the re-opening of the Union Street Church after extensive alterations. It carries our good wishes and warmest greetings to our many friends all over the world. The church building is almost completely new. We believe that it will offer the opportunity for richer and fuller Christian life for all who wish to share its fellowship.

We trust you will appreciate the contents of this brochure and find it a suitable souvenir of a great occasion in the history of our church.



OPPORTUNITY AND ADVENTURE

We look back with gratitude as we remember the church of the past. The great endeavours of those who went before are an inspiration to us today. For over 180 years, the people called Methodists have worked and worshipped in Maidstone, all serving their respective generations, often at great cost and sacrifice.

We are also aware that as we look around and about us,

“New occasions teach new duties”

We are part of something which never stands still. The church today is a movement which must be deeply involved in the life of people. Hence we speak at Union Street of “Church and Community”.

The situation before us at present is a great opportunity which we believe God is giving us now:

“To serve the present age,
Our calling to fulfil;
O may it all my powers engage
To do my Master’s will !”

Through our many organisations we shall continue to serve the people around us. Developments since the opening of the Community and Youth Centre since 1965 have been considerable. Now we have the opportunity of further development in encouraging our community life at the Centre to become also a living part of the worshipping family of the church. Our Centre is a Christian enterprise which must have Christian worship as its focal point. The new church is designed to encourage this. It will enable us to develop worship which is alive and relevant and make full use of all the aids available to us.

We want to see all our people loyal to the ideals of worship, with stimulating and loving fellowship, inclusive of young and old, and which also equips and inspires the highest ideals of Christian service.

There will be room for adventure as we explore the possibilities of our life together in both worship and service. We hope to improve the Sunday morning family worship to include the whole family. In our new church we shall be able to have on occasions visual and dramatic aids in discovering new truth and express our adoration and gratitude as we live and work and pray together. Let all our people be in on this as we accept the challenge of the opportunity and the divine risk of adventure in new ways of worship and service.

The Burial Ground

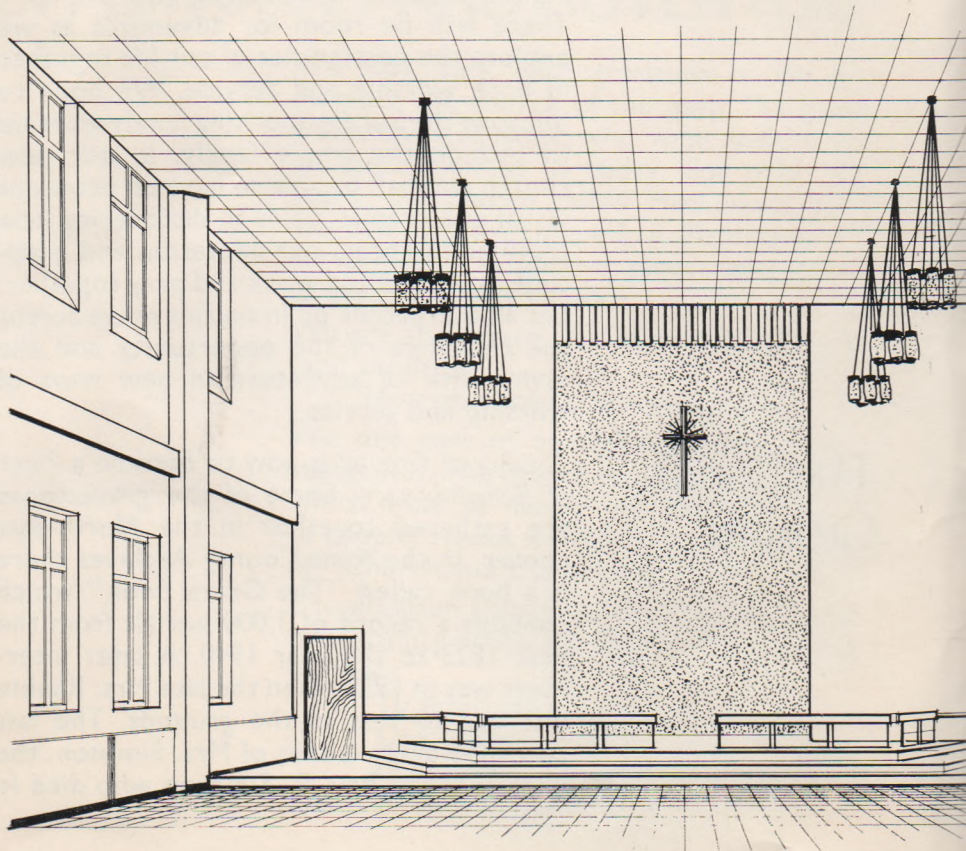
The Burial Ground is now to become a *Place of Remembrance*. Some of the gravestones are gathered together in the North-east corner. In the Kent County Archives there is a book called "The Grave Book" which contains a record of 3,000 burials from the year 1823 to the year 1940. A later interment was in 1959 when the late Mrs. Rankin was laid to rest in the grounds. The last recorded entry is that of Mrs. Simpson, the widow of the Rev. R. Simpson who died in 1901.

A Church Renewed for Worship and Service in the Seventies

The 1960's will long be remembered in the history of the Methodist Church in Union Street, Maidstone. During this period we have seen far reaching changes in the whole pattern of our church life, its work and worship. The first half of this decade reached its climax on 29th January, 1965, with the opening of the new Community and Youth Centre. This brought us face to face with new and big problems of community life with the influx of large numbers of new people, often strangers to us, who had been used to a way of life very different from our accustomed traditional Methodist way.

No sooner had we opened the new premises than we had to face the problem of the old church building (opened in 1823) and a serious outbreak of a destructive form of Dry Rot. The story has often been told. Now at last after nearly four years of planning and contriving we are pleased to be opening our renovated and modernised church for worship once again.

The following sets before us, in summary form, the changes that have been made.



- 1 The burial ground at the front of the church has become a garden of remembrance.
- 2 The area immediately outside the front entrance to the church has been raised and extended.
- 3 A large and well-heated vestibule has been provided which includes book-stall, full toilet facilities, a general purpose store and cloak room.
- 4 A single renewed staircase to the balcony.
- 5 The side balconies have been removed letting in the light and giving the impression of spaciousness.
- 6 The new suspended ceilings in all areas have reduced the excessive height with consequent economy in heating costs.
- 7 300 sturdy upholstered chairs have replaced the pews on the ground floor. The pews remain in the rear gallery.
- 8 Improvements in all things electrical, including lighting, hearing aids and amplification of sound, provision of wiring and power supply for eventual re-installation of the organ console on the ground floor with the organ pipes etc. in the gallery.
- 9 An elevated sanctuary area across the full width of the church in beech wood, with pulpit, lectern, font, communion table and communion rail. All these are removable when necessary for christian dramatic presentations.
- 10 There is a built-in cinema screen and other features for religious films.
- 11 A large high level cross of wood with stainless steel fitted representing the cross of glory on the north wall and suitably illuminated.
- 12 Completely new decor settled by a colour consultant.
- 13 A new minister's vestry which will also be used as the church office.
- 14 A new spacious room between the church and community centre which will be a general purpose room, Sunday school department, coffee bar, snack bar for Wednesday club, etc. This room is to be named "The Gordon Higgins Room" in memory of one of our great-hearted benefactors.
- 15 A considerably improved and enlarged kitchen.
- 16 Several items which we did not at first contemplate have been added to the scheme.
 - (a) The wisdom of removing the pews was realised when we discovered the unsound state of the wooden floor. The new floor of flexible tiles will wear well and be pleasant to the tread.
 - (b) The upper storey window frames and glass had to be renewed.
- 17 The illuminated cross on the front of the church facing Union Street will bear its silent witness by day and night to all those who pass by.

Our chapel stewards have continued to meet during the building operations and have kept a close watch at every stage. They have exercised a valuable stewardship on behalf of the trustees to whom they are responsible.

Members of the Finance Committee have been similarly exercised in their care to ensure that expenditure on the scheme does not rise too far ahead of income.

The minister and members offer them our warmest thanks.



The Higgins Bequest



The late George Gordon Higgins died on the 1st of February, 1961, greatly beloved by his many friends in the churches of the Maidstone Circuit. He was a most faithful steward in his use of all his time, abilities and material possessions. We pay our tribute, all too inadequately, in these few words. It is right and fitting to do so in this publication. Without him the renovation of the church building would not have been possible. We acknowledge with deepest gratitude the financial help we have received from the Gordon Higgins Bequest. The new room on the ground floor has been designated "The Gordon Higgins Room". He had a great belief in the future of the work at Union Street and firmly held the conviction that the youth of the church and town must be provided for. His strong belief found expression in his most generous last gift to the Union Street Trustees which has been used to the great benefit of all the Circuit. The new room which will bear his name will remind us all of his love and devotion to his Lord and Master whom he proclaimed as a faithful preacher in our churches and showed forth in his life.



Early Records

The earliest records we have of Methodism in Maidstone date from 1791, the year of John Wesley's death. There is no record of any visit he may have made to our county town. It is likely that he passed this way when travelling on horseback from Sevenoaks to Chatham or Sheerness or Canterbury, but that is just an interesting speculation. Apparently his main interest in Kent was Sevenoaks which he visited numerous times, twenty visits are recorded in the Journal. His first visit appears to have been on Saturday 4th October, 1748. The Journal reads: "We took horse at nine and soon after one came to Sevenoaks. After refreshing ourselves a little, we went to an open place near the Free School, where I declared to a large wild company, 'There is no difference; for all have sinned . . .'. They grew calmer and calmer till I had done, and then went quietly away". How he came to visit Sevenoaks is an interesting story. Both John and Charles Wesley often stayed at Shoreham with the



Vicar, Vincent Perronet, who was a trusted advisor of the Wesleys. Two of his sons became Methodist preachers. Charles Wesley called him: "The Archbishop of the Methodists". The brother, Edward Perronet, was writer of hymn 91 "All hail the power of Jesu's name".

A certain lady of Sevenoaks, Mrs. Amy George, hearing that John Wesley was staying at Shoreham walked over and gave him the invitation which brought Wesley to Sevenoaks.

Wesley also frequently visited the Chatham Barracks, the Fort at Sheerness, Sittingbourne, Canterbury and Rye. It was from the Rye Circuit that the first Methodist ministers visited Maidstone in Wesley's day. The services were held in a building on St. Faith's Green. This building must have served as the Meeting-place for Methodists for many years. We would like to know more about this first chapel in Maidstone.

Preparations are now being made to commence Family Worship with *all children, parents and teachers* meeting together at 11 am. At 11.15 the children and teachers will leave for their separate Sunday School departments. There will of course be a fully staffed creche for those under three years. The first full Sunday Family Service will be held on the 29th June, 1969.

Family Church



Normal Meetings & Activities

Our concern is to serve all people of all ages at all times in all places by all possible means.

SUNDAY

Morning Family Church (including Junior Church and Creche)	11.00 am
Graded Sunday School (after 22nd June at 11 am)	2.45 pm
Evening Worship	6.30 pm

MONDAY

Play Group	9.30 am to noon
Youth Club	7.00 pm

TUESDAY

Play Group	9.30 am to noon
Sisterhood	3.00 pm
Inters' Club	6.00 pm
Tuesday Club	8.00 pm

WEDNESDAY

Play Group	9.30 am to noon
Club for Older Citizens	10.30 am to 4.30 pm
Cub Scouts	6.15 pm
Youth Club	7.00 pm

THURSDAY

Play Group	9.30 am to noon
Young Wives'	
First and Third Weeks	7.45 pm
Mr. Mittell's Class	7.30 pm
Methodist Players (Drama Group)	7.30 pm

FRIDAY

Play Group	9.30 am to noon
Brownie Guides	5.45 pm
Girl Guides	7.15 pm
Scouts	7.00 pm
Choir Practice	7.45 pm

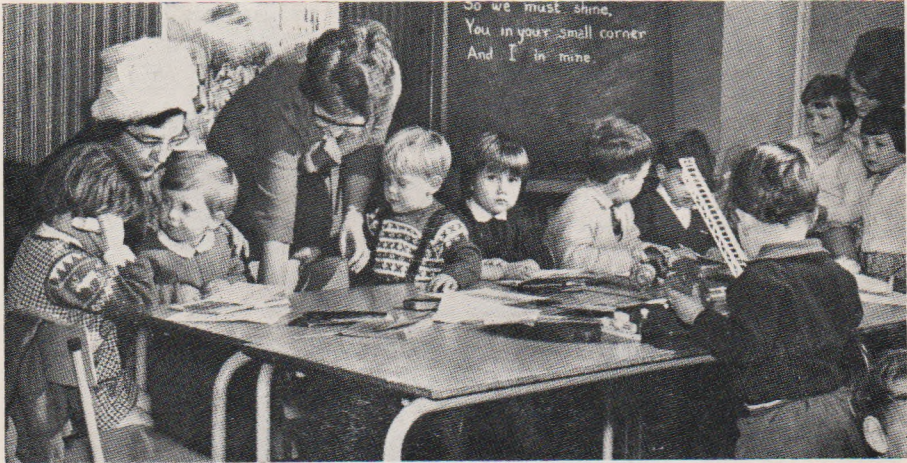
SATURDAY

Morning coffee	10.15 am to noon
Youth Club	7.00 pm

In Christian Worship we offer bread
 we break bread
 we give thanks
 we share bread

This is the sign of our thankful and costly offering of ourselves in the service of others.

This also is the sign that Christ is present and always serving and giving Himself to people in their need—loneliness, hunger, anxiety, sickness, despair and frustration.



In the Name of Jesus Christ the Church offers Christian fellowship, teaching, worship, membership of Christ's Church and the opportunity to serve in an infinite variety of ways the purpose of His Kingdom in the world of which the Church is the servant.

A Sunday School was started in 1823 "to teach the poor to read". After that there are several references to a desire to provide further education. A Committee was formed in 1843 to examine the position and take a census of children likely to attend. A big meeting was held in the Corn Exchange on 15th January 1854. Special sermons were preached by Rev. W. Morley Punshon. The afternoon collection was £7 4s. In addition to £137 subscriptions the evening collection was £50. (how would that work out at today's values). Another rally was held a year later. Teas were provided for 320 people at 6d. each.

The final proposal to open the day school was made at the Sunday School meeting of 9th February 1857. The cost was to be defrayed as follows.:

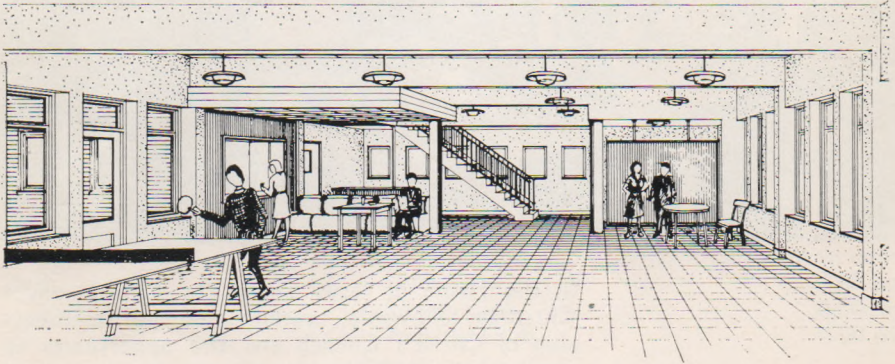
Subscriptions	£425	Stone laying	£20
Old Materials	£100	Opening service	£20
Connexional Grant	£35	Government grant.	£600

The estimated Income and Expenditure was:			
120 children at 3d.	£78	Master's Salary	£75
Anniversary	£15	Mistress for sewing	£10
Subscriptions	£15	Incidental expenses	£20

The Wesleyan Day School

The building was commenced in May 1858 and on the 8th October of that year 120 sat down to tea in the new part of the building! The hope of establishing the day school was not realised until 1869, under the headship of Joseph Odery. During the first 6 years there were five headmasters. In January 1976 Mr. Henry J. Smith was appointed and held the office until the school closed in May 1910. He was an old Westminster student, a man of strong personality. One of his old scholars, Mr. H. Vidler, remembers him well !

Both the Wesleyan School and Holy Trinity School were replaced by the new school—the present Eastborough School in Union Street. The two headmasters were the rival candidates for the new headship. Feeling ran high in the town. At every meeting the Education Committee was equally divided—always 12 votes for each candidate. At last the casting vote of the Mayor went in favour of the Holy Trinity nomination. The controversy was a Tory-Liberal dispute and, unfortunately, developed into a Church v. Chapel affair. We have moved a long way since then in our church relations. One wonders what the fathers of 1910 would think of our present amicable relationships with Methodists regularly worshipping in Holy Trinity Church.



The Community and Youth Centre today provides for young and old alike.

On Sundays our fully graded Sunday School and Children's Church are well maintained. Activities are arranged during the week for all ages. The Youth Hall is shown above. There are several rooms, concert hall, canteen, coffee bar and spacious parlour, all used for all kinds of church and social functions.



The Church's
Witness
To-day



For nearly 200 years the worship and service of the Methodist people have continued in this neighbourhood. Its influence has gone out to many parts of the world.

In recent times we have seen remarkable growth. We are thankfully aware of the great service which, in the name of our Lord and Master, is being given daily through worship and the faithful acceptance of opportunities provided by our Community and Youth Centre at Union Street.

We are also aware of even greater need in the world today for the kind of mission which only the Church can fulfil. At the same time we know that God has given to us an enormous potential of time, abilities and money with which we are to do his work.

A Prayer

We thank you, O Father,
for the bounties of the earth,
for the freedom of our land,
for the fellowship and witness of the church,
for the fidelity of friends,
for the safety and comfort of our homes.

Grant us grace
to share our gratitude for your son, Jesus
Christ, who has kept the light of love and hope
burning in our hearts.

May the remembrance of your mercies fill us
with compassion for those in need,
May the gifts of our hands serve the cause of
your kingdom of love.

**Ministers who have
served Union Street
and the Maidstone
Circuit since 1930**

Rev. F. J. Williams	1930-34
Rev. Franklin G. Smith	(Sup.)
Rev. W. Rendall Britton	(Sup.)
Rev. Peter Welsch	1934-37
Rev. William Kedward	1936-41
Rev. W. Dean Turner	1940-47
Rev. H. Paterson Browell	1947-53
Rev. Albert J. Stanbury	1953-58
Rev. E. Harold Hardy	1958-65
Rev. M. Wilson Horswill	1965-
Rev. Mervyn Russell	1966-68
Rev. R. Layland George	1966-
Rev. David W. Nicholson	1968-
Rev. A. Stanley Beaty	(Sup.)
Rev. Robinson Brunskill	(Sup.)

Primitive Methodism was established in Maidstone in 1838 when a chapel was built in Salem Street. In 1856 four cottages were purchased in Brewer Street and converted into a new chapel. Only 15 years later this was demolished and the building still to be seen on the corner of Camden Street was erected. In 1932 the Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist Churches united to form *The Methodist Church*. The two local churches in Brewer Street and Union Street were amalgamated in 1938 as one church, using the Union Street premises.

A Short History

Items from an old Account Book dated 1st January 1791 to 8th September 1823

Early entries show that preachers' lodgings were provided at about £1 a week.

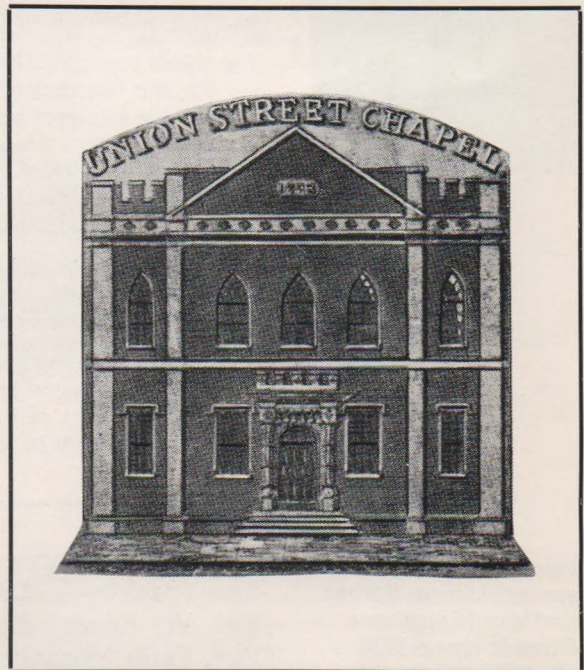
Quarterage was paid to The Circuit in

1794	£4
1814	£8
1820	£12

Class and ticket money in 1820 was £41 18s. 11d. Communion collections in that year were £18 10 11

In 1795 we find the following entries:

2 doz Candles	17	0
5 wks lodging for preacher	17	6
21 wks ditto	3	13 6
41 wks keep of horse	9	12 0
Mr. Edwards for looking after the chapel	1	1 0
1 doz wine	1	7 0
Bread	2	6
Washing	1	10
A broom	2	0



In 1805 some land was purchased in Tyler's Lane (now called Union Street). It is believed that the name Tyler's Lane is derived from the famous rebel Wat Tyler who led his company through Maidstone down Tyler's Lane to the Archbishop's Palace in 1381 and rescued the "mad priest of Kent", John Ball, from Archbishop Sudbury's prison, possible what are now called "The Dungeons".

A small Methodist Chapel was built on this site

The minute books of the circuit reach back to 1843 the first minister mentioned being Thos. Self. His salary was 6s. per week with an allowance of 2s. 6d. per week for lodging, and 4s. per week for his "meat bill". The first quarter's expenditure recorded was £8 11s., of which Hull had to find £4 10s.

William Brown, a local preacher of Offham, who would roll on the floor in an agony of supplication while he was praying in public, walked by the wagon the whole of the way to Gravesend rather than break the Sabbath by accepting a lift.

Brabourne Lees was given up because the landlord of the preaching room had been bribed with "coals, blankets and soup" to turn them out.

facing Tyler's Lane, but it soon proved to be too small to accommodate the fast growing congregation. It only lasted until 1823 when it was pulled down and the present building erected with seating accommodation for 800 people. The present front entrance was added later. The original arches over the main entrances were recently uncovered during reconstruction operations. The doors led straight into the church from outside—apparently no vestibule or porch. The cause soon prospered and more land was bought. The existing porch, the new gallery entrances, the name 'Wesleyan Chapel' and date '1823' were added in 1865.

Messrs. John Brenchley, William Henry and Courtney Stacey, brewers, laid out a new street in 1829 which they appropriately called Brewer Street, and the Methodists (Wesleyans in those days) anxious no doubt to have the benefit of access from the new street, bought a plot of land which connected Union Street with Brewer Street.

A schoolroom had been added but this also was pulled down in 1858 and a new more spacious place built which lasted for over 100 years. It was built with the intention of establishing a day school. The day school began in 1869, exactly 100 years ago, and continued an important educational work until 1907 when the Union Street Council School was opened. There are people in Maidstone who



probably still remember their school days under the headmastership of Mr. Henry J. Smith.

It is unusual to find a burial ground attached to a Methodist Church, but from 1823 onwards the ground in front of and at the rear of the Church became the principal Nonconformist burial ground in Maidstone. Interments, except in family graves,

The credit of introducing Primitive Methodism into Maidstone is ascribed to John Ride, an extraordinarily successful evangelist.

He was sent here by the Primitive Methodists of Hull in Yorkshire.

Regular open-air meetings were begun at the Fountain, Barming. Persecution was met with and police protection had to be sought.

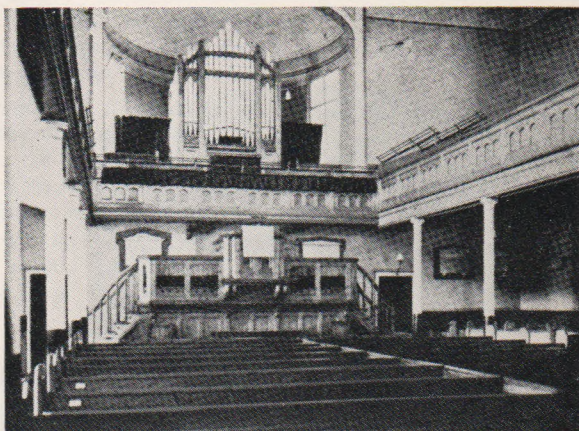
**Nor should their deeds be e'er forgot,
For noble souls were they,
Who struggled hard for sacred rights
And bravely won the day.**

practically ceased in 1856 with the opening of Maidstone Cemetery.

The 1860's were significant years in the development of the work at Union Street. A lot of hard work was put into the advocacy for the Day school. Also in 1865 the new vestibule was built and separate entrances to the galleries were made and the front cemented at a cost of £200.

It was in the 1860's too that work was begun which led to the building of Tonbridge Road Church.

In 1868 five old cottages which stood at the Union Street end of Chapel Place were bought and demolished at the cost of £190. This was the last addition made to the site.



There was further renovation in 1891 when the interior was re-seated, the gallery reconstructed and the organ improved at total cost of £1,000. Ten years later the heating system was improved, the chapel keeper's cottage pulled down and new classrooms and church parlour built for £1,100.

The next main item was the renovation of 1910 when electric lighting was installed at the cost of £690.

And so it is that for nearly 200 years the Methodist Church in Union Street has made its influence felt in the Maidstone Circuit. Today it is more vigorous than ever before and together with its lively sister churches in Tonbridge Road and Larkfield and eight country churches with three ministers, a full time youth leader and two active retired ministers, we believe that, with God's blessing and the help and guidance of His Spirit, it will go from strength to strength.

The Church Rebuilds 1959-1969

We know that you will be pleased with our new modernised church when it is opened on 31st May 1969. It is timely to have a look at some of the financial detail both of the work on our worship centre and the past work on our community centre.

<i>The Community Centre</i>	£	<i>The Church Building</i>	£
Fetes and Fayres 1960-65 -	3,293	Gift Days and Fayre 1965-69	1,514
Gift Days - - - -	647	Stewardship income - -	901
Other Church efforts and donations - - - -	3,393	Grants:	
Grants:		Joseph Rank Benevolent Trust - - - - -	14,000
Dept. of Ed. and Sc. - -	18,221	London Mission Committee	2,000
Kent Education Committee	9,111	General Chapel Fund -	1,000
Joseph Rank Benevolent Trust - -	5,000	Higgins' Bequest (including sale of Wesley House) -	8,950
London Mission Committee	1,000		<u>£28,365</u>
General Chapel Fund -	1,000		
Higgins' Bequest - - -	2,131		
	<u>£43,795</u>		

To complete the church building scheme £900 is still needed from May Fair on 17th May and a further contribution from stewardship income.

Ways in which you can help

By contributing an amount regularly each week through our Christian Stewardship Envelope Scheme.

By making regular donation.

By covenanting your gift whereby every £1 is worth £1 14s. to the church.

NAME

ADDRESS

In acknowledgment of our gratitude to God, and for the work of His Church in and through the Methodist Church, Union Street, Maidstone

I/We will try to give £ s. d. each week/month/quarter/year.

I/We will covenant my/our Gift..... (initials here).

SIGNED..... DATE.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the work of:

The Architect: Gordon Bonner, ARIBA, FRSA,
of Lerche-Thomson, Murray & Bonner of Maidstone.

The Building Contractors: H. Goodsell & Son Limited, Maidstone.

Electricians: Oswald Jones & Company, Rose Yard, Maidstone.

Consultant Engineer: Michael Elliott, MA, Cantab, FICE
of Roughton & Partners, Maidstone.

Heating Engineers: J. E. Leaney, 30 Arden Street, Gillingham.

Ceiling Contractors: Anderson Construction Company Ltd., Twickenham.

Flooring and Roofing Contractors: Amalgamated Ashphalte Company Ltd.,
Ditton Place, Larkfield.

Ironwork Constructor: Mr. Ken. Avery, Maidstone.

Beech Flooring: Junckers (London) Limited, Chelmsford, Essex.

Demolition Work: Dick Brown of Maidstone.

Treatment of Dry Rot: W. R. Crow & Son Limited, Belvedere.

Paints and Colour Consultant: Lewis Berger (G.B.) Limited,
Berger House, Berkeley Square, W.1.

Audio Visual Aids: The Rank Organisation, 613 Woodger Road, London, W.12.

Turfing Contractors: Fairview Nurseries (Gillingham) Limited,
Blind Lane, Rainham, Kent.

We are indebted to the Architect for the two church interior and exterior drawings, specially prepared for this brochure