

**Christ Church, Lewes  
United Reformed and Methodist**

# **The Cliffe Chapel A historical sketch**

## **Cliff Geering**



**200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Tabernacle congregation  
6 November 2016**

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Cliff Geering was Church Secretary of the Lewes Congregational Church from 1972 to 1977. He began to make a record of congregationalism in Lewes from the founding of the Cliffe Chapel in 1775 in what is still known as Chapel Hill. Cliff died before his work was complete but his daughter Dorothy has donated his notes and research papers to Christ Church. We have used these to produce booklets to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the congregation founded at the Tabernacle in 1816 in what is now the Precinct.

Cliffe Chapel was open for about 100 years. It was not part of the Tabernacle but we have included it in our series in order to provide a more complete account of the Congregational tradition in Non-Conformist Lewes.

The original sources used in the booklets are the minute and vestry books of the church, surviving letters and legal documents, and pieces published in the local press. These form part of the East Sussex Record Office collection deposited in The Keep, Woollards Way, Brighton, BN1 9BP. [thekeep@eastsussex.gov.uk]



Modern map showing location of the chapel. Chapel Hill was formerly called East Street.

## The Countess of Huntington

The Cliffe Chapel was a product of the Evangelical Revival of the 18th century with which the names of George Whitefield and John Wesley are particularly associated. Both were priests in the Church of England, but their doctrine alarmed some bishops and their itinerant preaching was resented by the parish clergy. 'Methodists', as they were called, were often refused ordination; and clergy with Methodist views had difficulty in obtaining livings.

A member of the first Methodist Society that met in Fetter Lane, London, was Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, who after the death of her husband in October 1746, devoted her energy and her fortune to the work of the Revival. Favouring the Calvinism of George Whitefield to the Arminianism of John Wesley, she made him her chaplain; and in her drawing room on Sunday evenings he eloquently proclaimed the message of the Revival to her aristocratic guests.

The Evangelical Revival was a movement that spread across denominational boundaries. Although the Countess was a staunch member of the established church she was always ready to help and encourage evangelicals of other denominations. Among her dissenting friends and correspondents was the famous Independent minister and hymn writer, Dr. Philip Doddridge, to whose Academy at Northampton she gave financial help. In his sermon on 'Spiritual Baptism', Whitefield powerfully expressed the spirit of the movement: 'I do not care whether you go to church or meeting. I am, I confess, a member of the Church of England, and if they will not let me preach in the church, I will preach anywhere. All the world is my parish, and I will preach wherever God gives me the opportunity, but you will never find me disputing about the outward appendages of religion; do not tell me you are a Baptist, an Independent, a Presbyterian, a Dissenter; tell me you are a Christian, that is all I want...'

Lady Huntingdon first came to Brighton in 1755 for the sake of the health of one of her sons and thereafter became a frequent visitor. In 1759 Whitefield preached to a large crowd 'under a tree in a field behind the White Lion Inn', not far from her house in North Street. In 1761 she added a private chapel to her house, to which she admitted members of the public to hear the preaching of her chaplains. So successful was the ministry that in 1767 the chapel had to be enlarged. In 1774 it was completely rebuilt. Soon after the opening of her chapel the Countess was offered the lease of a mansion at Oat Hall, Wivelsfield,

formerly the property of a branch of her family. There, with the purpose of reaching the inhabitants of the rural areas of Sussex, she converted a large hall into a chapel, leaving the upper part of the house for the accommodation of herself and her chaplain; a separate chapel was built in 1778 and still exists, now under the name of Ote Hall.

Among the clergy who served as chaplains to Lady Huntingdon at this time; and who opened her mission to Sussex, were Henry Venn, a former fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge, who had become vicar of Huddersfield in 1759 and John Fletcher, who was of Swiss birth and had been educated at the University of Geneva. Fletcher was converted by the Methodists while working in England and was ordained deacon and priest by the Bishop of Bangor on successive Sundays in 1757, at the Chapel Royal, St. James's. He later became the vicar of Madeley. Martin Madan was the elder brother of the Bishop of Peterborough. While practising as a barrister he heard Wesley preach, intending to 'take him off' to his friends; instead he sought ordination himself. This, with the help of Lady Huntingdon, he obtained and became closely associated with her work. He had preached at the opening of her chapel in Brighton in 1761. He was in charge of the Lock Hospital Chapel near Hyde Park corner. John Berridge, a former don at Cambridge, became vicar of Everton in 1758, and was an active itinerant preacher. William Romaine became a priest in 1738 and had held lectureships in several London churches. In 1750 he was appointed professor of Astronomy at Gresham College. In 1755 he became a follower of Whitefield. When he preached, crowds filled the church, much to the annoyance of the parishioners. In the same year he was appointed chaplain to Lady Huntingdon. Later (in 1766) he became rector of St. Anne's, Blackfriars, with St. Andrew of the Wardrobe, in London.

The Countess's attempts to widen her mission in Sussex by obtaining the pulpits of some of the parish churches had little success, for the clergy were generally unsympathetic, if not actively hostile, to her activities.

'In the beginning of the year 1765 the Countess of Huntingdon... began to concert measures for introducing the Gospel into the town of Lewes, where already her Brighton chaplains had reaped fruit'. Here she was successful in obtaining a pulpit for Mr. Romaine 'where his preaching gave great umbrage'. He afterwards preached in a large room, and ultimately in the open fields. "All gave earnest heed (said her Ladyship) while he applied those solemn words

'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.' I did not see one careless or inattentive person, and there is reason to think that many poor sinners were cut to the heart..."

Later in the year Her Ladyship obtained a pulpit in Lewes for Madan and Fletcher, but 'the clergy opposed them violently and they betook themselves to a large room, where they preached alternately to great numbers.'

Although there is no record of any immediate developments, it appears that, despite the hostility of the clergy, the Countess had no reason to be dissatisfied with the reception her chaplains had received in Lewes.

In 1768 Lady Huntingdon secured a permanent residence in Tunbridge Wells, where in May she was visited by George Whitefield, who was on his way to Lewes and Brighton. For some time she had been planning a college for the training of young men for the ministry and had acquired for this purpose a fine old mansion, Trevecca House, at Talgarth in South Wales. In August she left Tunbridge Wells to be present when the college was opened by Whitefield on her birthday, 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1768. Students at the college, when they had completed the three-year course, were free to enter the ministry of any protestant denomination. The first superintendent was John Fletcher. The new college was given added significance by the expulsion of six students from the university of Oxford in the previous March 'for holding Methodist tenets and taking upon them to pray, read and expound the Scriptures, and singing hymns in private houses.'

In the following year, on 23rd July, Lady Huntingdon attended the opening of her new chapel in Tunbridge Wells. It was reported that twenty young people from Brighton, trained in psalmody, passed through Lewes on their way to Tunbridge Wells. Invitations had been widely distributed and crowds gathered outside her Ladyship's house early in the morning, singing hymns until the chapel was opened. At the service the prayers of the established church were read by Richard de Courcy and the sermon was preached by George Whitefield, who afterwards, because the congregation was so large, also preached in the open air.

Lady Huntingdon, accompanied by de Courcy, then returned to Brighton, stopping at Lewes where de Courcy preached twice in the open air to very large

congregations. Richard de Courcy was a member of an ancient Irish family and was distantly related to Lord Kinsale. After leaving Trinity College, Dublin, he received deacon's orders but was denied priest's orders because he was a Methodist. He had been excluded from the pulpit of St. Andrew's Church, Dublin, by order of the Bishop, and preached instead from a tombstone outside. He later became vicar of St. Alkmund's, Shrewsbury. He was especially popular with young people. During the summer of 1769 he served at Brighton and Oat Hall, and, with support of friends from Ditchling, Oat Hall and Brighton, made preaching excursions to neighbouring towns and villages. At Hurst, in spite of a noisy reception, many were receptive, and a room was offered for future meetings. He was refused admission to the church at Hellingly, but at Laughton he told the Countess: 'I stood up under a branching venerable tree, and preached to a very sweet attentive congregation, though not very numerous... It was a blessed season. Many were much affected.'

The report of an incendiary attack on a private house at the beginning of November 1769 gives another picture of Methodist activity in Lewes and of the local reaction to it. Mrs. Norton, 'the owner of the house, had let it to a Methodist preacher, who had exhibited there twice before to the great annoyance of that neighbourhood and the principal part of the borough; 'twas likewise said that they had rented it on lease to preach twice a week in defiance of the whole town; for which conduct of hers she incurred the displeasure of the multitude, who... had broke her windows and committed other depredations on the house as well as her dwelling house, which is contiguous; however, we hear that she has forbade the preachers coming there any more, which has appeased the wrath of the enraged mob.' Unfortunately the identity of the preacher is not given, but it is safe to assume that he was one of Lady Huntingdon's preachers.

The *Advertiser* for 29th January 1770 reported that 'On Wednesday last a journeyman carpenter who has lately commenced Methodist preaching, was hung in effigy on a signpost in the Cliffe, Lewes, and in the evening taken down and committed to the flames.' This humble preacher was almost certainly George Gilbert of Heathfield, who had become a follower of Wesley while serving in the army, and began to preach in 1767.

In the summer of 1770, Lady Huntingdon sent a young student from Trevecca, James Glazebrook, into Sussex. He is described as the first fruit of Fletcher's

work at Madeley. Once a collier and terror of the neighbourhood, he was the first candidate put forward for admission to Trevecca College. In 1771 he was ordained deacon by Dr. Brownlow North, Bishop of Litchfield and Coventry. Although he was in the neighbourhood of Lewes, it is not clear whether he visited the town. 'Our poor young men', he told the Countess, 'have been sadly used at Rodmell. They threw water, eggs, dirt and stones, till one of them lay down and said, 'Lord, into my hands I commit my spirit and my body into the hands of these uncircumcised Philistines.' They began to stare at each other and left him....I go to Firle tonight and expect some of the smugglers from Rodmell to meet me.'

About this time Lady Huntingdon was offered the use of a house in Chichester as a base for her work in that city and in the countryside round about. She now began to plan the building of local chapels in suitable centres. Some of the responsibility for this was given to the Rev. Henry Peckwell, MA, chaplain to the Marchioness Dowager of Lothian, and later to become Rector of Bloxham-cum-Digby, Lincolnshire. He came to Sussex in October 1773.

### **The opening of the Chapel**

The Countess' following in Lewes appears to have been drawn in the main from Westgate Chapel, where the minister, Ebenezer Johnstone (a student of Dr. Doddridge, who had taken part in his ordination at that chapel in 1742) was now leaning towards Unitarianism, and possibly from the General Baptists in Eastport Lane, who, with their fellows at Ditchling, were moving in the same direction. Letters from Peckwell to the Countess refer to the proposal to build chapels at Chichester and Lewes. The Chichester chapel was opened in 1774. At Lewes, although a site was available, progress was slow.

It was not until 1774 that plans to build a chapel for the Lewes Methodists slowly came to completion. Lady Huntingdon had entrusted the task of overseeing the financial and other arrangements for the project to the Rev. Henry Peckwell. The first response to an appeal for funds (to be raised by voluntary contributions – the usual method adopted for town chapels) was disappointing. The local tradesmen, on whom so much depended, were evidently cautious. On 16th March, 1774, Mr. Peckwell wrote to the Countess: '...Lewes has tried its strength, they cannot raise more than £80 or £100. The Dissenters, though all allow a Chapel will be more fully for God's Glory than a

Meeting House, have half deserted us. They propose building a place *all of wood*, 40 × 28 (i.e. feet) with a little shed-kind of house adjoining it by way of constituting it a chapel under your Ladyship. This they imagine will cost about £200 – but fitting it up and all must come to much more, I think. Do you think, My Lady, that it would be well for me to undertake it? They propose giving your Ladyship a lease for your life; and of bearing all the expenses of the chapel. But their subscription is so small that I am afraid we shall not get money enough to complete it. I have not yet told them how much you will give them to help them out with, nor shall I till I have your opinion. Suppose at most they give £100, your Ladyship £50, and Brighton £30 - £180 and where must the rest be raised? At Chichester we have only your £50, Brighton £30 to pay what will come to at least £200.'

He wrote again on 5th May to advise the Countess, in view of the difficulties at Lewes, to give priority to projects elsewhere: '...With respect to Lewes, My Lady, what can you do, but act upon the motives you have; and return the same answers by letter which you did by me. Dear Madam, what have we to hope but that if we run without an open door we shall hurt ourselves by the resistance? Pray let Chichester, Westminster and Brighton, since it is begun, be finished first. ... If a chapel be built at Lewes it will expect a constant supply. It will not put up with any simple preacher, for they who will not admit Christ without a chapel, must be very whole hearted, and consequently not a little picksort [the modern term might be “picky”, meaning very particular in their requirements].'

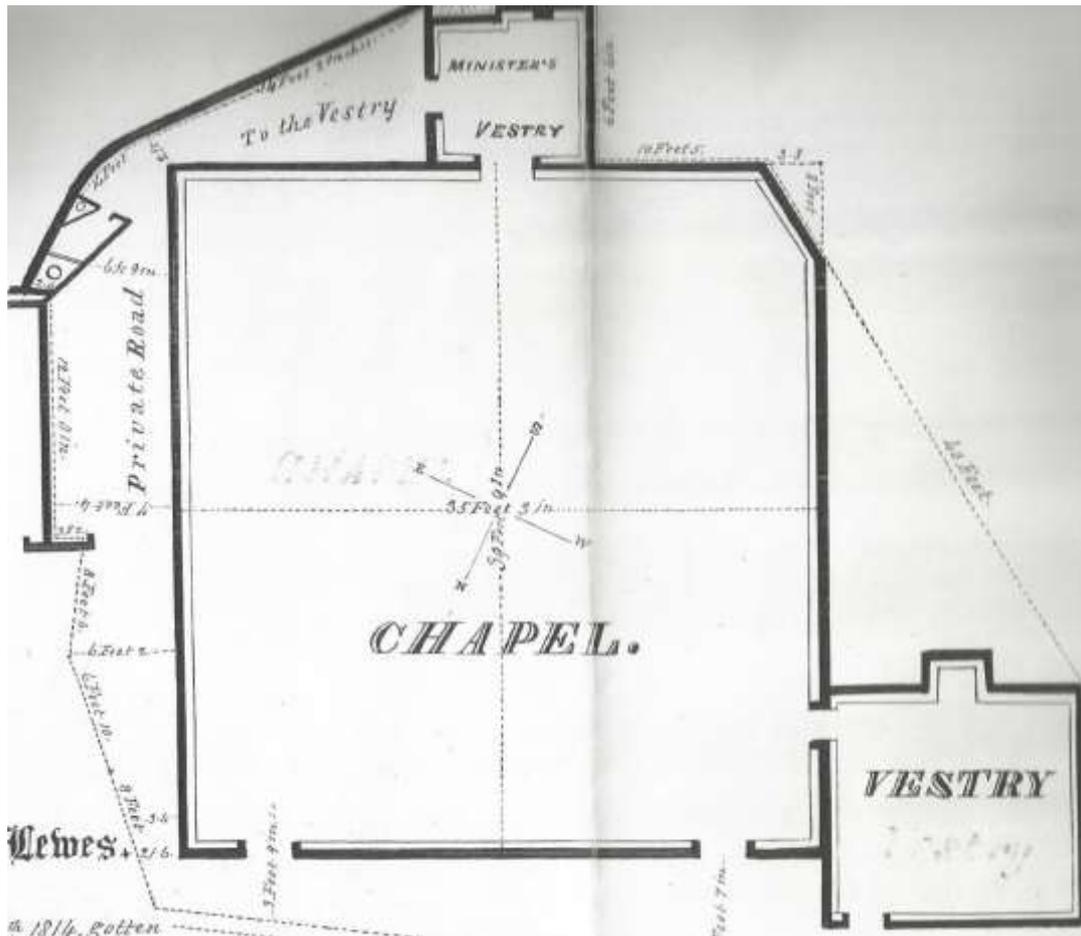
The difficulties, whatever they were, were eventually overcome, and the building was completed in the following year at the cost of £215.1s.9d. The carpentry was done by Mr Wille and the bricklaying by Mr Rusbridge (local tradesmen).

On 26th June, 1775, an application was made at South Malling Deanery for the chapel to be registered under the Toleration Act:

'To the most reverend father in God, Frederick, by Divine Providence, Lord Arch-Bishop of Canterbury.

We, whose names are hereunto subscribed being protestant Dissenters in and about Lewes, do hereby certify that a building in the possession of Thomas Davey, in the Parish of St. Thomas the Martyr, in the Cliffe, Lewes, is intended to be set apart as a meeting house for a congregation of Protestant Dissenters under the denomination of Independents, and we hereby desire the same to be registered. etc. etc.

Signed. J.Ridge, C. Weller, Joseph Morris, William English, Robert Wisdom, Thomas Davey. The names of the signatories match names of subscribers to Westgate Chapel.



### The Cliffe Old Chapel Lewes.

*As taken from*

*Copy of the Title Deed, dated March 9<sup>th</sup> 1814, gotten*

*by Mr. Thomas Berry, from Messrs John & Edgar Blaker,*

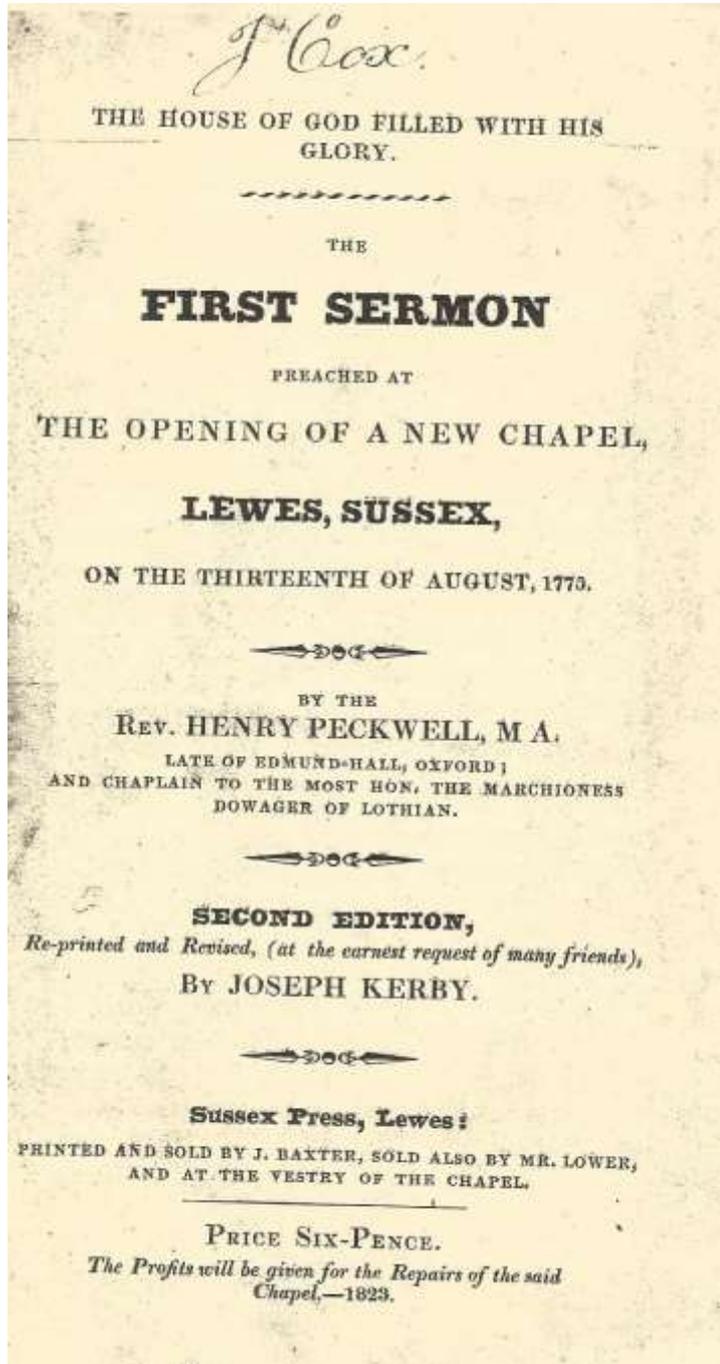
*Solicitors at Law.*

The chapels opened by the Countess of Huntingdon (apart from her private chapels) had no connection with the Church of England, and no long-term Anglican officials, although the liturgy of that church was generally used. The term "Independent" provided a flag of convenience under which they could secure the protection of the Toleration Act.

The chapel was situated outside Lewes itself, about 100 yards from the foot of Cliffe Hill, on the north side of the highway, above the house of Mr. Davey, surgeon and apothecary, and below the pleasure gardens belonging to Thomas Baldy, which with their grottos and bowers were a popular resort. It was a

pleasant situation but not ideal for a chapel unless a measure of seclusion was desired. Worshippers coming from Lewes had to cross the river and approach by the crowded and badly drained West Street (now Cliffe High Street), then obstructed by encroaching buildings and where 'fevers of the most malignant kind have frequently broke out... and spread their contagion to the purer atmosphere of Lewes and Malling.' It was not an inviting route to take by night,

in bad weather, or when, as happened from time to time, floods covered the highway.



The chapel was opened for worship on Monday, 13th August, 1775, when Mr. Peckwell preached in the morning from II Chronicles 5:14: 'For the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God'; and in the evening from II Corinthians 5:20-21: 'Now we are ambassadors for Christ.' In the afternoon the Rev. Thomas Penticross, Rector of St. Mary's, Wallingford, preached on Romans 10:15: 'How shall they preach except they be sent...?' Also present was George Burder, a young member of the Moorfields Tabernacle in London, who later became a distinguished Independent minister, Secretary to the London Missionary Society and editor of the *Evangelical Magazine*.

The trust deed, dated 9th September 1775, described the chapel as 'A building intended for and now in use as a meeting house for the public worship of Almighty God after the manner of Dissenters from the National Established Church and for preaching the Gospel agreeable to the Acts of Toleration upon the principles and tenets which are commonly called Calvinistic.'

The site was leased to the trustees for a term of forty years from Lady Day (25th March) at a rent of 20 shillings per annum, by Thomas Davey, of the Cliffe, Lewes.

The first trustees were:

John Ridge of Kingston near Lewes, gent.	George Willis of Lewes, carpenter
Cruttenden Weller of Lewes, iron chandler	Joseph Farncombe of Ringmer, timber merchant
James Smith of London, gent.	Robert Berry of Ringmer, maltster
Thomas Scutt of Brighton, gent.	Thomas Minger of West Firle, yeoman
Richard Harman of Brighton, timber merchant	John Ollive of Chiltington in Westmeston, yeoman
Philip Mighill of Brighton, gent.	William Ridge of St. Peter and St. Mary, Westout, gent.
William Rice of the Cliffe, timber merchant	Robert Keen of London, woollen draper
Joseph Morris the younger, Lewes, butcher	

The trust deed provided that when the number was reduced by death to ten or less, the surviving trustees should appoint others to make up the number.

It appears that the trustees, or a number of them, formed the committee of management, appointed by the Countess to attend to the affairs of the chapel. They were all men of some standing, some of whom held, or had held, public office in Lewes. They possibly included some of the principal subscribers or their nominees. Thomas Scutt held a responsible position at the Countess' chapel in Brighton. (A Miss Hannah Scutt, described as 'one of a respectable family at Brighton, whose brother was a banker', was for many years a close attendant of the Countess.)

Their duties were not specified; but it was implied that they were responsible for ensuring that the chapel was kept in a state fit for public worship and that the means of worship were provided. They would be able to raise funds for these purposes. If, as seems to have been the case, Lady Huntingdon had obtained the lease of the chapel as suggested in Mr. Peckwell's letter of 16th March, 1774, she would have taken over the responsibility for supplying the pulpit. Such an arrangement may have been a condition of her support.

Amongst the first ministers to serve at the Cliffe Chapel was Thomas Jones, who had entered the college in 1769. After leaving there he settled at the chapel in Ashbourne, Derbyshire, where he remained until 1788, when he became minister at Brighton and Oat Hall, a position he held until his death in 1814. He was then the senior minister in the Connexion. For many years he was a friend and confidant of Rowland Hill, a well-known independent preacher who built his own free chapel, Surrey Chapel, in Blackfriars Road, London (opened in 1783), and after whom the famous instigator of the penny post is said to have been named.

That the enemies of Methodism did not allow the new congregation to worship in peace is shown by the notice of the solicitor Henry Burtenshaw of Lewes published on 28th January 1776:

'THE PROTESTANT DISSENTERS, frequenting the MEETING HOUSE in the CLIFFE near this town, having been divers times disturbed in their Religious Worship by disorderly Persons, who have made a Practice, during Divine Service, of besetting the said Meeting House, and with indecent Noise and Clamour, and by flinging Stones and Bricks against and through the Walls thereof, and lighted Combustibles into the House, interrupting the Congregation in their Devotions, and putting them in Fear of their Lives, in Breach of the Laws and Statutes of this Realm, I am directed by the London Society of Gentlemen, who conduct the Civil Affairs of the Dissenters, and take upon them the Defence of their legal Rights and Privileges, to offer, and I hereby do offer a Reward of TWENTY GUINEAS, for the Discovery and making known to me of any Person or Persons who shall hereafter offend in any of the Kinds aforesaid, so as that he, she or they may by Law be convicted thereof, such Reward to be paid to the Informer on Conviction of any Such Person or Persons...'

The London Society referred to appears to be the body known as the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, set up in 1732 to protect the civil interests of dissenters. It was made up of two deputies from every Presbyterian, Independent and Baptist congregation in London and within a ten mile radius, from whom a managing committee was elected.

The congregation was not deterred by these alarming incidents, and at Easter, 1776, a church was formally established at the chapel by the Rev. Mr. English, minister of the Independent Chapel at Gosport. On Maundy Thursday, 4th April,

a church meeting was held at which the church rules were adopted, and on Good Friday the members celebrated their first communion.

### **Church Rules and Statement of Faith**

The church rules, which are given below, are of some interest. They are prefaced by a text that pictures the ideal church: 'And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayer.' (Acts 2:42). The rules show that matters of church membership, discipline and pastoral care were the responsibility of the whole church; but they do not say who was responsible for bringing these matters before the church, or when; or who would implement the decisions taken. The rules are followed by a summary of the Calvinistic doctrines accepted by the church. It is noticeable that the subject of baptism is not mentioned; the emphasis is on Christian fellowship.

'We the Independent Church of Christ, in the Cliff, near Lewes, having by divine grace, been called out of darkness into God's most marvellous light, see it our great privilege to give up ourselves to each other, in a way of Christian communion, according to the apostolic example: as they first gave themselves up to God, and then to each other by the will of God, trusting by this means to increase our fellowship with the Father, and the Son, by the blessed increase of the Spirit'.

1. We esteem it our great privilege to exercise Christian watchfulness over each other in tender love.
2. We desire, when through temptation we are led aside, to be under, and to be thankful for, the reproofs of each other.
3. We desire that when reproofs are given, on the Lord's advice to be attended to, Matt.xviii.15-17.
4. That little prejudices be guarded against.
5. That we all fill up our places in the church, or if absent, to be subject to give reasons for omitting that may be satisfactory.
6. That loose walkers should be suspended from the Table, and if obstinate, excommunicated.
7. We farther agree, that every person who is to be admitted, be proposed a month before their admission to all the church.
8. That each person be admitted, by the joint consent of the whole. If some persons object, their objections ought, or ought not to be attended to, according to their agreeableness with scripture.
9. Therefore we farther agree, that no person be admitted, but who in the judgment of charity, have a work of grace, made known by the common experience of the

people of God, and an external walk agreeable to the Gospel.

And as unity of sentiment is so requisite to the peace of the Church, we again desire that every person admitted should agree to the following scripture doctrines.

1. The doctrine of the Trinity. Three in One and One in Three. 1 John v.7
2. The total fall, and ruin of man, as by nature a child of wrath. Eph. ii.5
3. That Christ who is God with the Father, came into our nature to redeem us. Gal.iv.5.
4. That by faith in his righteousness we are justified, without any of our works. Rom.iii.28.
5. That those who are justified by the righteousness of Christ, shall be sanctified by God the Spirit. Rom.viii.1.
6. That by grace they shall persevere unto the end. Rom.viii.30
7. That there is a Judgement to come. Heb.ix.27.
8. That the saints shall be with Christ. 1 Thess.iv.19.
9. That the wicked shall be turned into hell. Rev.xx.15.

Fifty nine members, from a mixed denominational background, Anglican, Independent, Presbyterian, subscribed to these rules. Thirty-seven were male and twenty-two were female. Four were trustees. The names are given below:

	Thos. Cheesman	Eliz. Ranger	Jane Wood
Eliz. Towle			
Grace Dennis	Jas. Cheesman	Mary Wisdom	Geo. Best
Eliz. Paine	Eliz. Martin	Jos. Renvil	Tho. Geer
Will Rice	Joh. Vinall	Ann Renvil	Jos. Foster
Jos. Morris Jun.	Eliz. Vinall	Edw. Weller	John Boxall
Tho. Fuller	Ab. Weston	Mary Cheesman	Will. Batchelor
Thos. Monger	Hen. Lawrence	Sar. Child	Abm. Atherall
Thos. Cheesman	Joh. Maxfield	Rich. Pope	Mary English
Sar. Cheesman	Will. Ellis	Thos. Soan	Ruth Foster
Eliz. King	Will. Child	Jas. Kennard	Mary Coomber
Geo. Wille	Will. Wood	Eliz. Fuller	Frances Pain
Dan. Downer	Pet. Tickner	Joh. Berry	Mary Downer
Will. King	Thos. Hill	Joh. Cheesman	Hen. Weller
James Lee	Edw. Henty	Ann Vinall	Sar. Boxall
Alex. Cheale	Jos. Simes	Ann Monger	

The apparent duplication of names may be explained by the custom of passing on the Christian names of parents to their children. These 59 members were part of what was probably a much larger number that worshipped at the chapel. About a quarter of them seem to have been Baptists.

Mr. English apparently remained in Lewes for a time, and according to Horsfield, was succeeded by the Rev. John Townsend, later of Bermondsey, and others.

In February 1777 a new incumbent came into the livings of St. Thomas a Becket and All Saints. This was the Rev. Richard Cecil, whose evangelical ministry brought a change in the religious climate of the town. Mark Anthony Lower includes him among his 'Worthies of Sussex' where he gives a glowing account of his career.

Richard Cecil came from a family of comfortable means: his father, a devout man, was a scarlet dyer for the East India Company. As a young man Cecil passed from a life of pleasure, loose morals and atheism, to a genuine religious conversion; and in his 25th year entered Queen's College, Oxford, to prepare for holy orders. He was ordained deacon in 1776 and took a good BA in the following year. After serving three village churches in Leicestershire, he obtained the two small livings in Lewes, then worth, Lower tells us, a mere £80 a year. He held these for more than twenty years. He became one of the leaders of the evangelical movement in the Church of England and was resident in Lewes for nearly 10 years.

Cecil soon became very popular and drew away the greater part of the congregation of the Cliffe chapel. Attempts were then made to close the chapel. It is possible that some of those who left were former Anglicans who were now hoping to return to the fold.

Those who remained at the chapel, however, struggled to keep it open, and with the help of ministers from the Tabernacle in London and students from Trevecca College, managed to do so.

In 1779 the Countess' work was put into some disarray by a judgment of the Consistory Court of the Diocese of London. This rejected her claim to the right to appoint any number of chaplains and to employ them 'at any time and place and in the most public manner'. Thereupon some of her most distinguished chaplains reluctantly resigned; others seceded from the Church of England. The Countess registered her private chapels under the Toleration Act and from 1783 students from Trevecca were ordained as dissenting ministers. Lady Huntingdon refused to admit that in any doctrinal sense her congregations formed a part of

Dissent. She saw them rather as occupying the middle ground between the established church and dissent. She herself remained a member of the Church of England and in many of her chapels the Anglican liturgy, in a slightly modified form, continued to be used.

In 1780, the congregation thought 'It was ... expedient to invite a minister to settle among them, as the most probable means to revive, unite and increase the languid, distracted and small congregation,' though the Countess was reluctant to allow her ministers to settle at one church.

### **The first minister, Joseph Middleton**

Serving at Brighton about this time was Joseph Middleton, one of Lady Huntingdon's students, who had won a good reputation at Derby. When he came to preach at the chapel on 23rd July 1780 he was favourably received and was asked whether he would accept the pastorate. He agreed to consider the proposal and returned to Lewes in November for a trial period of three months with a stipend of £50 per annum. During this time many new members were added to the church; however, in February 1781, Middleton asked for his trial period to be extended by another three months. The reason for this was given at a church meeting on 12th June. In considering what his duties as pastor might be, Middleton had been troubled by the matter of baptism. For some time he had questioned the validity of infant baptism, and now, after closer consideration, he was convinced that the only scriptural form of baptism was believer's baptism, and that the proper mode was by immersion. The response of the church was to ask him, in time for a church meeting on 19th June, to state on what terms he would be willing to accept the pastorate. Middleton's reply was given in the following letter:

'Dear Brethren,

When I called you together last Tuesday evening, it was only to signify my intention of leaving you, by relating an objection, which as soon as heard, I expected would be sufficient to part us, however, this was not the case, for you seem'd inclined to give the matter a hearing, before you pronounced one way or the other, and also were willing to hear any proposals about settling notwithstanding this objection. I would have you therefore consider the following things.

1. If you think it is the will of God, that I should be your minister, I am willing to answer your request, provided you will permit me to have nothing to do in the baptism of your children.
2. As I do not think the mode or manner of baptism essential to church fellowship myself, I



Confession of Faith	By Mr. Middleton
Ordination prayer	By Mr. Sandys
Hymn	Watts, B.1 cxxviii
Charge, 1 Tim. iv.6	By Mr. Sandys
Hymn	Watts, B.2 cxliv
Prayer	By Mr. Booker
Sermon, Is. xliii, 21	By Mr. Clark
Hymn	'This is the God we adore', etc.
Prayer	Mr. Middleton

Isaac Watts's 'Psalms and Hymns' was widely used by dissenting congregations. The final hymn comes from a hymn by Joseph Hart, the last stanza of which, beginning 'This, this is the God we adore...', was included in a book of 'Psalms and Hymns' published by Martin Madan in 1763.

The presence of Henry Booker is revealing. When George Whitefield came to Brighton in 1759, Booker was a lay preacher at the General Baptist Chapel at Ditchling, which had links with the chapel in Eastport Lane in Lewes. Like many of the General Baptist churches in Sussex, these were then moving towards Unitarianism. With others from the Ditchling chapel, Booker was deeply affected by Whitefield's preaching. Booker himself was evidently a man who spoke his mind, with serious consequences, as a minute of a church meeting at Ditchling on 20th October 1762 reveals: 'Henry Booker having openly declared at this church that he doth not esteem this community to be a true Christian Church and having at the meeting treated the said church, its ministers, and members with indecency and contempt using railing accusations and publicly threatening to tare this said church to pieces, this church of Christ doth therefore withdraw her communion from him according to Gospel order. And with regard to others who have of late adhered to a Methodist ministry, they have as yet behaved with a more Christian temper...' These others were allowed to continue in fellowship subject to their good behaviour.

In the same year Booker and some of his followers from Ditchling began to meet for worship at an old house, 'Fanners', near Wivelsfield. Although responsive to the revival, they held to their old dissenting principles, and in 1763 formed a Particular Baptist Church (the Particular Baptists had separated from the Independents in the early 17th century). In 1768 Booker was ordained as its pastor and also ministered occasionally to a small Particular Baptist Church in Brighton. In 1780 a Meeting House was erected at Wivelsfield.

Although a convert of the revival, Booker consistently viewed Lady Huntingdon and her preachers with suspicion and even hostility. Thomas Dicker tells how Booker persuaded his father to refuse a place offered him at Trevecca College. He was, however, the only Particular Baptist minister in the Lewes area, and it seems safe to assume that it was to him that Middleton turned for advice on the question of baptism. It probable that his influence can be seen in the subsequent history of the chapel. Middleton's own estimate of Booker is given in the biography he wrote after Booker's death in 1799:

‘A man of strong mind - rich in sound scriptural knowledge and possessing great boldness in the faith.’

It soon became evident that Middleton was not satisfied with the situation at the chapel. The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion has been described as more of a missionary association than a distinct denomination: its loose organisation, the management of local chapels by trustees, and the use of itinerant preachers, tended to diminish the authority of the ministry and make difficult the maintenance of good order. One of Middleton's first steps after his ordination was to draw up some new rules to supplement those of 1776. These were adopted by the church in December 1781. Into these rules Middleton introduced a Baptist standard for church order and discipline:

1. We agree to acknowledge the sole and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures; and as a perfect rule and direction, take them for our sovereign guide, both in doctrine and practice, always leaving an appeal open to their infallible testimony and decision.
2. We apprehend the sum of these divine oracles is contained in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, and, as such, we receive that form of sound words as the standard of our doctrinal and religious principles; at the same time allowing and maintaining the right of private judgment, as the result of free enquiry.
3. As to Church Government, we highly approve of the 'Compendium of Social Religion', written by Mr. Dan. Turner of Abingdon in Berkshire; and therefore take him for our guide and familiar friend in matters relating to order and discipline in the house of God, at the same time taking the advice and judgement of other men, and of other churches, on this subject, and even to dissent from them all, if we see scriptural reason to do so.
4. As we consider water baptism, no term of communion, we agree to maintain the general doctrine of toleration, as it is applied to the particular case of free communion.

The Assembly's Shorter Catechism was one of two (the other was the Longer Catechism) based on the Calvinistic Confession of Faith prepared by the Westminster Assembly of Divines set up by the Long Parliament, in 1643.

Dan. Turner was a Yorkshire miner converted through the Methodist Revival. He later became a Baptist pastor, and in 1770, the leader of the New Connection (Free Grace) General Baptists. His 'Compendium of Social Religion' was first published in 1758; a second edition followed in 1778.

Middleton's view regarding baptism meant in practice that a visiting minister had to be asked to conduct infant baptism at the chapel; in cases where believers' baptism was required, Middleton would have to arrange to perform it outside Lewes – possibly at Wivelsfield or Ringmer.

After Middleton's settlement the church continued to grow, although more slowly. Those new members that came from other churches were almost certainly all dissenters and certainly some were Baptists. Towards the end of 1782, he began to record the transactions of the church meetings in a volume inscribed 'A Book of Remembrance; written for those that fear the Lord'. It opens with a brief account of the foundation and early history of the church. Church meetings, it appears, were not held regularly, but were called by the minister when required. The record of the meetings appears to have been a personal record rather than the minutes of the meetings. They reveal cautious steps towards improving church discipline. Attendance at communion was not as regular as it should have been; the following resolution intended to correct this was agreed by the church: 'Tho we do not make it absolutely a condition of fellowship, for any member to give a reason to the church for his absence at the Lord's Table; yet we request our brethren to consider it a great privilege to have a Pastor and a Church to consult on such occasions, and desire that they make use of this privilege.'

Early in the following year Middleton introduced the subject of deacons, explaining 'the nature, qualifications and duties' of the office. In this context, deacons were laymen appointed by the church meeting to assist the minister in the pastoral and administrative work of the church. One of their duties was to distribute the money collected for the sick and needy at a communion service once a quarter. In February 1783, Joseph Simes (Baptist) John Maxfield and William Wood, all founder members of the church, were elected as deacons for one year. In the following year John Maxfield was replaced by Abraham Weston, the other two being re-elected. Another change apparently made by Middleton about this time was the ending of the 'error' of kneeling at the Lord's table to

receive the elements. This was to avoid any suggestion that worship was being offered to the bread and wine.

These developments were no doubt acceptable to members with a Baptist background; but they aroused misgivings amongst others who had understood that Middleton when he had accepted the pastorate had given an undertaking that the original character of the church would be maintained. The growing unease in the church may explain some changes to the rules for church meetings proposed in 1783. In November the church decided 'That the pastor and ten members be hereafter considered a sufficient number to transact the business of the church if no more attend.'

In December, Mr Maxfield, a Paedo-baptist, presented a petition from the women members, 'praying to be heard in their claim to the privilege of *attending church meetings* and of giving a *silent vote* in all the decisions of the church.' It was agreed by a majority that this petition be heard.

In December 1783 the church meeting gave permission to Robert Smith to bring a charge against the minister alleging that words that he had addressed from the pulpit 'to a few individuals who had lately been baptized' amounted to 'separating the members of the church'.

Although this charge was subsequently dismissed by the church meeting, the incident marked a turning point in the life of the church. The Baptist members, aware of what they called 'the jealousies' of their Paedo-baptist brethren, had already formed a committee in support of the pastor and to promote their own objects: its moderator was Abraham Larwill.

As a tactical measure this committee agreed that resolutions that it wished to put to the church meeting should not be presented always by the same person, lest offence be given and the motion thereby lost. The position of the committee was given in the following proposition:

'No set of Christians can form a regular dissenting church unless their dissent from the Church of England is founded upon principle'. This is clearly a criticism of the ambivalent position of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion after the severing of its links with the Church of England. The Baptists wanted the church to be unambiguously non-conformist.

In its approach to the Countess's followers at the Cliffe, the committee argued

that the church had been founded as an independent mixed communion. They wanted this to be made clear in a new constitution drawn up on non-conformist principles (which means, in view of the changes already made, Baptist principles), which preserved the right of private judgement and free enquiry. Baptists and Paedo-baptists should be equal in the government of the church and should show mutual toleration in every respect. The Baptists undertook not to alter the constitution of the church as a mixed communion as long as a Paedo-baptist remained in it or wished to become a member. They expected a reciprocal undertaking from the Paedo-baptists. They repeated the assurance that the minister would be censurable if he imprudently and unreasonably insisted on believers' baptism. These and other points, all approved by Middleton, were set out in a letter presented to the Paedo-baptists in January 1784.

Before delivering the letter the committee took the precaution of establishing their support within the church. It appears that some of the Paedo-baptists were in sympathy with the Baptists' proposals. Those who opposed were led by a number of the founder members of the church, including one of the trustees. This, as far as it goes, tends to confirm that the issue was not the mode of baptism, but whether the church should adopt a Baptist constitution, thus abandoning the principles of its founders.

In October 1783 the old Friends' Meeting House in Puddle Wharf, Friars Walk, was put on sale. It was to be available to the purchaser as soon as the new meeting house was completed. This was expected to be in April 1784. Middleton and his supporters were already considering the possibility of secession, and in January 1784, their committee resolved, that 'if separation should take place, it should be wholly passive.' In the event, the new meeting house was not ready until June.

In March, the Baptists' committee met to prepare an answer to counter proposals received from the Paedo-baptists. These proposals have not survived, but some idea of their content is given by the terms of the Baptists' reply. They again insisted that the church was founded on a mixed plan and agreed to maintain it; Mr. Middleton was not to be restricted in the discharge of any part of his ministerial duty; a Paedo-baptist minister could be invited to sprinkle children in Lewes and Mr. Middleton was willing to exchange pulpits with him for that purpose; Mr. Middleton would provide a change of minister as often as

convenient at least two months in a year. On the question of whether women should have the right to *vote* in *all* the decisions of the church, the Baptists wished to suspend judgement until the opinion and practice of other churches was known; they agreed that a Baptist should never have a vote in altering the foundation of the church as a mixed communion; they would resist the introduction of voting by proxy at church meetings; and they would move a repeal of the following order of the church made on 8th October 1782: 'That we do not make it a term of fellowship for any member to give a reason or advise with the minister or the church concerning their absence from the Lord's table, etc.'

The Baptists asked for the withdrawal of the final article in their Paedo-baptist brethren's proposals: 'If any of our brethren cannot in point of conscience submit to these articles, we do give them free liberty to withdraw themselves from the Church, etc., etc.' This, they considered 'appears like a genteel way of showing us the door and desiring us to walk out'.

At this meeting Abraham Larwill resigned as moderator of the Baptist secession movement and it was resolved that Mr. Middleton should take his place.

At a church meeting a few days later, in an attempt to resolve the impasse, Mr. Larwill and Mr. Maxfield, representing the two factions, presented addresses urging reconciliation and peace; and at the following church meeting it was unanimously agreed that reconciliation should take place; that Christian affection be cultivated; and that the charge against the minister should be forgotten. The pastor would have full and free liberty to preach the doctrine of baptism and Baptists and Paedo-baptists should enjoy equal privileges in the church. The matter of women voting was postponed as the Baptists had requested.

On 29th March, a day of prayer, fasting and humiliation was observed 'For all our sinfulness and ingratitude'. Mr. Middleton's sermon, preached on that day from Hebrews 13:1 'Let brotherly love continue', was generally approved. During the months that followed this reconciliation was expressed in a number of compromise resolutions adopted by the church meeting.

Although the Baptists objected to voting by proxy, agreement was reached that this should be allowed in extraordinary cases. Women were given a vote in the choice and dismissal of a minister; and were allowed to speak when called

upon in any particular case. At the instance of the Baptists, a stricter rule was applied to absentee members: any member of the church not filling up his place in the church, or omitting to sit down at the Lord's Table three times together, without giving satisfactory reasons to the church for their conduct, was to be subject to censure. The rule for a quorum at the church meeting was amended: all matters brought into the church when ten members with the pastor were present could be finally settled; or else, the church, judging the matter of sufficient importance by a majority of votes, could postpone the matter until another church meeting to allow the absent members to vote in person. Finally, it was agreed that the women members of the church should enjoy all the privileges requested in their petition of 29th December 1783.

Whilst accord was being reached in the church meeting, the Baptists were planning arrangements of their own which were approved at their committee on 22nd June. They re-affirmed their desire to see truth promoted, peace preserved, harmony cultivated and evangelical godliness universally spread in the church; and believed that by meeting together as Baptists they could help the church by putting their own views into a definitive form before bringing them to the church meeting. They could also deal with matters of particular interest to themselves. The following resolutions were unanimously approved:

1. That in this particular association we intend no division in or separation from the whole church.
2. That four persons be chosen to assist the minister, and to act for the whole of the Baptist members in the things hereafter mentioned.
3. That this committee of four persons do from time to time, at the request of the pastor, enquire into the Moral conduct of those who may propose themselves for the ordinance of baptism.
4. That they keep an occasional correspondence with neighbouring Baptists.
5. That they attend all church meetings.
6. That they occasionally visit each member.
7. That they assist the deacons in their duty and admonish them when need of it.
8. That they consult the pastor previous to every church meeting.
9. That they call the whole of the Baptist brethren together when they see occasion.
10. That they do whatever may appear to them and the pastor likely to answer the ends for which they were chosen.
11. That they keep a regular account of all their proceedings.
12. That our brethren Davey, Harmer, Tipping and Larwill be appointed for this purpose. That these brethren shall be accountable to the whole body of Baptists and be removable for misconduct or neglect but not otherwise.
13. That we will do our endeavour to destroy the voting at the church meeting by proxy, as

it appears to us to be destructive of all order and contrary both to scripture and the practice of other churches.

The Baptists were thus setting up an organisation of their own within the church, with the minister at its head. It is difficult to see how such an arrangement could further the cause of peace and harmony: indeed, this and subsequent events show that the accord already achieved was more apparent than real.

In July two church meetings were mainly concerned with matters of discipline. For 'immoral and disorderly conduct' (which could include almost anything) two members of the church were 'deprived of all the privileges of the church' until they reformed. John Maxfield was censured for three months for neglect of the church; and Abraham Weston suffered a similar deprivation for (1) not attending to the rule for bringing a charge before the church (*i.e.* for not giving due notice), (2) in misrepresenting many of the acts of the church, (3) in deserting the service of the church as deacon (he had resigned without notice).

Rob. and Thomas Smith were also censured for withdrawing themselves from the church without consent.

During the war with American colonies Great Britain had come into conflict, for different reasons, with France, Spain and Holland. In May 1784 the final peace treaty (with Holland) was signed, and by Royal Proclamation, Thursday, 29th July was designated a Day of National Thanksgiving for Peace. The church agreed to observe the occasion 'but not in obedience to the civil power'. At the request of the Baptists, a church meeting was called for the afternoon of the same day. At this meeting the minister read a statement of 'our reasons for dissenting from The Church of England, our confession of faith, and the rules, order and government of the church'. If approved, this statement was to be printed for the use of each member.

Abraham Weston and John Maxfield, who were excluded from this church meeting, went instead to Brighton to consult with Thomas Scutt of North Street Chapel and one of the trustees of the chapel in the Cliffe.

It is possible that some letters from the Countess of Huntington to Mr Middleton, still in the hands of Mr Davey in 1855, were written at this time, but

unfortunately their contents are unknown. On 23rd August, some of the trustees met at Mr Rice's in the Cliffe and decided that Middleton should no longer occupy the chapel and that every means should be used to dispossess him. When they asked for the key of the chapel, he, to prevent further trouble, quietly surrendered it to them.

On the 24th August, 26 of Middleton's supporters, both church members and members of the congregation, met at Mr. Davey's house in the Cliffe to draw up the following statement:

'We whose names are hereunto subscribed, esteeming Mr. Middleton, the pastor of the dissenting church in Lewes, a minister of the Gospel of Christ, and approving both of his private life and public ministry, do hereby agree according to our several abilities to encourage and support him in continuing his labours amongst us; to which may the King of saints add his blessing'.

The promised contributions amounted to £7 a quarter, or £28 a year, little more than half the stipend he had been receiving.

The first service of the now avowedly Particular Baptist congregation was held in the former Friends' Meeting House in Friars Walk, on 29th August 1784, when Middleton preached on Ex. 20:24 'In all the places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and I will bless thee.'

At a prayer meeting on 6th September the Baptists asked pardon 'in everything which we have contributed to the late division' (Book of Remembrance, taken by Middleton). The Baptists' records include the following statement:

'The following persons having conceived certain jealousies against the Baptist brethren of the church – their influencing of the trustees of Cliffe Chapel to expel the pastor and the greatest part of the church from that place of worship on account of their being Baptists, and their violent methods to effect a division of the church we think [this] to be unjustifiable conduct, and cannot help looking upon them as disorderly brethren and as such (to prevent further disputes) do hereby withdraw ourselves from them according to the command – 2 Thess. III:6.

Rob Smith

Thos Smith

John Maxfield

Abm. Weston

Geo. Best

Wm. Misley

John Weller L.

Richard Rose

Mary Weston

Jane Wood

Sar. Hill

Eliz. Donstall

Jas. Diggins  
Wm. Rice  
Wm. Wood R  
Edw. Weller

Richard Verrall  
Jas. Vinall  
Mary Best  
Sar. Weller

Jos. Worley  
Mary Maxfield

'It was thought necessary that now we are separated, we should endeavour to walk more orderly, as to church government, than we possibly could before. With this design our pastor has been desired to draw up some rules which he now read before the church to which the church gave unanimous assent and approbation.'

These rules provided that Paedo-baptists should be permitted to join the church and enjoy all its privileges; that the pastor and deacons should always be Baptists. [*Journal Baptist Association, 1785, The development of open membership and open table*]

The building now used by the Baptists was, as the Friends had already found, by no means satisfactory. It was in bad repair and, with a slaughter house nearby and a turner's workshop next door, was unfortunately situated. It is not surprising that in November the Baptists decided to build a new meeting house. This was opened in Foundry Lane in the Cliffe in August 1785.

In June 1786 the Baptists were able to report to their Association: 'We are happy to have it in our power to say, that notwithstanding all the opposition which we have received, and yet do receive from our brethren, the Methodists, that in our Zion, things go well.'

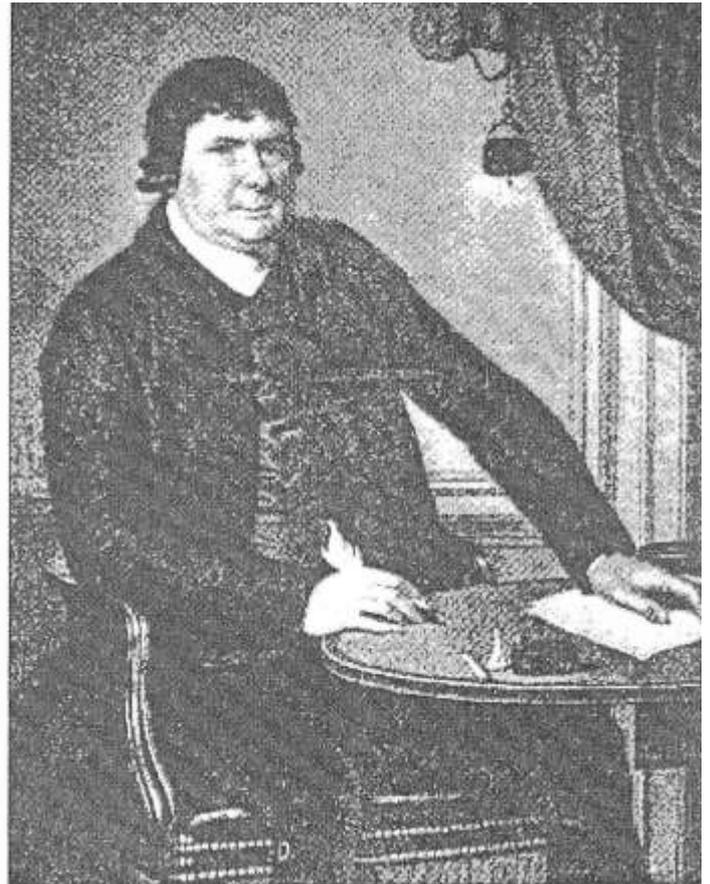
At the Cliffe Chapel the diminishing congregation had to rely on visiting ministers for some years, having appealed for help to the Countess of Huntingdon after the secession of the Baptists.

In 1788, on 25th May, a new chapel was opened in St. Mary's Lane [now Station Street] by the Rev. S. Barnard of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. It had been built at the expense of Thomas Mantell, a devout Methodist (the father of Gideon Mantell). The reasons for its opening are not clear. According to Horsfield, the Independents continued to use it as an occasional place of worship; this may mean that it was intended as 'a chapel of ease' for the benefit of worshippers who found the Cliffe Chapel difficult to reach in bad weather, or because of age or disability.

## Jenkin Jenkins and William Huntington



Jenkin Jenkins



William Huntington

There seems to be no surviving complete record of the ministers serving the chapel after Middleton's departure. In 1788, at the Baptist church an unsuccessful attempt was made to adjourn the church meeting on Wednesday, 3rd September, to allow the members to hear Matthew Wilks, minister of Whitefield's Tabernacle in Moorfields, London, who was to preach at the Cliffe Chapel on the same evening. More frequent visitors between then and 1792 were Griffith Williams, who became the minister of Gate Street Chapel, Lincoln's Inn, Daniel Rowland, and Jenkin Jenkins, who came most often. Both were trained at Trevecca.

During one of his spells in Lewes, in May 1789, Jenkins, with Thomas Berry, Samuel Boys, Henry Pocock, John Berry, Henry Berry, John Weller, George Best and David Tippen, applied for the registration in the Chichester Diocesan Register of a building in Ringmer occupied by John Berry as a place of dissenting worship. This was possibly the origin of the chapel built in Ringmer by members of the Tabernacle in 1835.

The Countess of Huntingdon had evidently shown her concern at the situation in Lewes in a letter to the minister of her chapel at Oat Hall, Thomas Jones, in June 1790, for he had replied: 'I am willing to be at Lewes as much as I can. I shall take care that they shall be supplied by myself and the minister that Your Ladyship will send.' Thomas Jones presumably came to Lewes in 1789 and 1790.

At the time of her letter, the Countess was approaching her 83rd birthday and had drawn up a 'Plan of Association for Uniting and Perpetuating the Connexion' after her death.

This is referred to in the same letter: 'The people here (at Oat Hall) are willing to do respecting the Association as they do in Brighton and Lewes.' Presumably they had all promised their co-operation. Lady Huntingdon died on 17th June 1791 and her place was taken by Lady Erskine. We may therefore suppose that the responsibility for supplying the pulpit at the Cliffe Chapel reverted to the trustees. It appears that the Association was willing to help, for in 1792 Jenkin Jenkins was inducted to the pastorate. He had been trained at Trevecca College, had been ordained in 1782 and was a capable, if fiery, preacher.

It was in the year of his induction that Jenkins first met William Huntington at a meeting held in a large room at the Commercial Inn at Maresfield. Huntington's preaching had for some years been drawing large congregations to Providence Chapel in Titchfield Street, London. He was a man of humble origin and little formal education who as a young man had been converted after an encounter with a strict Calvinist: later he claimed to have received a vision that convinced him that he was one of the elect. He joined the Calvinistic Methodists at Kingston and combined local preaching with a variety of jobs including cobbling and coalheaving ('The coalheaver' was an epithet his critics used against him in later years). Eventually he gave up other work to become an itinerant preacher, relying on the generosity of the congregations in his circuit for his support. In 1782 he moved to London to exchange this hard and precarious living for that of the settled pastor of Providence Chapel, which he opened in 1783. There he gained a great, if not unquestionable reputation. To forestall criticism on account of some episodes in his early life he added the letters 'S.S.' (Sinner Saved) to his name. Huntington's doctrine has been described as 'Calvinism flavoured with Antinomianism'. As his biographer Thomas Wright put it: 'We are saved not by observing the law but by free grace. Repentance is not of the will

of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. Man is drawn to repentance not by a sense of sin, but by a sense of pardon.' It was a doctrine comforting to many worried by the Calvinistic doctrines of 'total depravity' and 'predestination'.

Huntington's views were opposed by a number of divines, including Thomas Penticross and Rowland Hill, who accused him of antinomianism, a charge he denied, claiming the direct inspiration of God and denouncing all who disagreed with him.

Jenkins' encounter with Huntington was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Huntington is said to have written more letters to him than to anyone else; and although only six years his senior called him his 'dear son'. For his part, Jenkins, described as unmarried (his intended bride had married someone else), stout, peevish and pessimistic, became the devoted disciple of Huntington, whose teaching was reflected in his sermons at the Cliffe Chapel. Thomas Gibbs, who attended the chapel in the 1790's, recalled the impression that they made:

'Now great was the uproar for many miles around on account of Mr. Jenkins' preaching; many crying him down and declaring that he was mad and possessed of the devil. My zeal burnt for him against the men who thus treated him.'

In spite of his critics Jenkins gained a large following. In 1801-02 more seating was installed in the chapel.

By 1804 the church was again divided. In September of that year Jenkins bought the plot of land on which Jireh Chapel was to be built. It is not clear whether he decided to leave the Cliffe on his own initiative (perhaps encouraged by William Huntington, whose congregation at Providence Chapel contributed to the £2,500 needed to build the new chapel); or whether he was formally dismissed by the trustees. In any event, the Cliffe trustees found themselves in an awkward position. Only four of the original eighteen now survived, and, since nothing had been done to fill the vacancies, they were in breach of the terms of the trust. One of the surviving trustees was a strong supporter of Jenkins. In spite of their doubtful legal position, a majority of the trustees would have had considerable moral authority, especially if they had the support of others in the Association.

Jireh Chapel was opened by William Huntington on 7th July 1805. It could seat 900 people. The occasion was recorded on a stone tablet:

Jireh Chapel  
Erected by J. Jenkins W.A.  
with the voluntary contributions of  
the citizens of Zion  
AD 1805

Jenkins took the baptismal roll with him.

Meanwhile the trustees of Cliffe Chapel were taking steps to re-establish their position. The surviving trustees were Richard Harmer, Joseph Morris (who followed Jenkins to Jireh Chapel), George Weller and Philip Mighill. On 13th July, 1805, fourteen new trustees were appointed. These included George Wille the younger, merchant; George Adams, warehouseman; Thomas Hill, baker, all of Lewes; Joseph Simes, draper and tailor, of the Cliffe; and ten others from Brighton and elsewhere.

Following the departure of Jenkins and his followers Cliffe Chapel was apparently closed for a time. It reopened on 21st July, when the Rev. G. S. White of Cheshunt conducted the services. (The Countess of Huntingdon's College had moved from Trevecca to a mansion at Cheshunt, Herts, in 1792, when the lease of Trevecca House expired.) Mr. White was still at Lewes in May, 1806, so the chapel was given some continuity in its ministry. In 1807 a Sunday School was opened which by 1809 had 200 children. In May of that year a charity sermon for the Sunday School was preached by Mr. T. Finley, after which the children were given a glass of wine each at the house of Mr G. Wille.

The death of the Countess of Huntingdon may have made it more difficult to obtain the services of ministers of the Connexion; for Mr. White was followed by students from the Evangelical Academy, Hoxton Square, London. This was one of the earliest dissenting academies for students barred from the universities and gave them a better education than the Oxford or Cambridge of that day could provide. It served both Presbyterians and Independents, laying particular stress on classics, theology and philosophy.

Since February 1793 Britain had been at war with France. The threat of

invasion, particularly in 1801 and 1802, had flooded the area with troops whose presence brought both profit and problems. Reporting to their Association in 1800, the Baptists referred to 'the general difficulties of the time, the enormous price of provisions and the calamities of war.' It appears that in time, however, the anxieties led to an increase in church attendance. In May 1808 the Baptists, could report that 'The number of professors has greatly increased in Lewes in the past year, we now have seven dissenting meetings in the town, there is a spirit of hearing among the inhabitants and we trust that much good has been done, but instability, and a love of novelty too much prevails.' During the war the chapel in St. Mary's Lane built by Thomas Mantell was used as a garrison church.

### **Joseph Kerby**

In the spring of 1808, another minister, the Rev. Joseph Kerby VDM<sup>1</sup>, began what was to be the longest pastorate to be held at the chapel. He was almost certainly the Kerby who received training at Northowram Academy, which may not have been altogether to his advantage: for soon after he left, according to Dr. Waddington, the London Society withdrew its support for the Academy and the principal was dismissed for incompetence. Kerby's first pastorate began in 1792 at Atherstone, Warwickshire and he had since served churches at Wigan, Heckmondwike, and Flockton, so he was a man of some experience. The first entry in a baptismal register now in the Public Record Office shows a baptism by Kerby on 8th May, 1808. The register is prefaced by the following statement:

THE OLD CHAPEL, CLIFFE, LEWES  
Founded 1775 - never been dissolved

The church of Christ consists of all those throughout the world who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and are taught by his holy Spirit to adorn his Doctrine by their Walk and Conversation thereby owning Christ as the Head of the Church.

Christ hath given the Ministry and ordinances of the Gospel for the gathering and perfecting of the Saints.

The necessary Qualifications for Persons for admission to Church fellowship are a work of the Spirit of God in the heart - a Belief of the Doctrine of truth and a Conversation becoming the Gospel.

This is the plan on which the Church is founded here.

The Moral Conduct will be enquired into by proper persons; and if profession and practice agree together they will be admitted by the Minister.

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<sup>1</sup> VDM = Verbi Dei Minister: Preacher of God's Word

After less than 35 years of existence, the chapel is already called 'The Old Chapel'. It was the oldest dissenting chapel in the Cliffe, and the name would come naturally to people who had formerly worshipped there and now belonged to the two congregations that had separated from it. Another name, 'the Underhill Chapel' had appeared by 1825, but did not displace the other.

Kerby's son was the first pupil to be admitted to the new school for the sons of congregational ministers opened in 1811 at Lewisham, which still exists as Caterham School.

Kerby gave his support to a number of evangelical organisations. On 6th April 1814, 'A meeting of Ministers and Congregational Members of various Chapels in the County was convened and held in the Vestry Room of the Cliffe Chapel...and (after solemnly imploring the Divine Assistance) a Society was formed for the purpose of spreading the glorious Gospel of God our Saviour, in the towns and villages of this county. The exertions of this Society are to extend from Shoreham River, to the eastern part of the county, and to such other places as the Society may, from time to time, think proper.' The work of this society was to be maintained by the annual subscriptions of its members in the local churches: the subscription was one guinea. A monthly prayer meeting would be held at each church on behalf of the work.

The Sussex Mission Society was one of many such associations formed by churches of the congregational order in many English counties since the latter part of the eighteenth century. They raised funds for building new churches or to support their ministers, and they assisted poorer churches. The Sussex Mission Society planned, when funds allowed, to appoint an itinerant preacher.

General meetings were to be held on the 2nd Wednesday in April and the 1st Wednesday in October each year at the place decided at the previous general meeting. Each would include at least one public service at which the committee would report. Thus in April 1817 Mr. Kerby was one of the speakers at the half-yearly meeting held at Mr. Winchester's chapel at Hurstmonceux. In the following year the meeting was held at the Cliffe Chapel.

The composition of the committee shows how it worked and gives a useful view of the churches involved. It will be noticed that the Association included Independent chapels other than those of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion.

#### Committee:

The supplying minister of the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel, Brighthelmstone  
Minister or ministers of Wivelsfield and Lindfield Chapels  
Rev. Alexander Start, East Grinstead Chapel  
Rev. Joseph Kerby, Cliffe Chapel  
Rev. George Ashhton, Newhaven and Seaford Chapels  
Rev. George Betts, Alfriston Chapel  
Rev. John Press, Heathfield Chapel  
Rev. Joseph Finley, Tunbridge Wells Chapel  
All the lay preachers within the district  
Two lay members of each congregation  
A collector from each congregation  
The Treasurer - Richard Midley, Brighthelmstone  
The Secretary - Mr. Brooker

Locally, Kerby gave his support to the Friends of the London Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews; to the Sick Man's Friend Society, a branch of which was formed in the town in 1816 to give temporary relief to the destitute stranger and consolation and assistance to the afflicted poor (such a society had been formed in London in the previous century by Henry Peckwell); and to the Lewes Bible Association, established in 1812 and largely managed by a ladies' committee.

One consequence of the war with France was a boom in agriculture in Sussex, which, if it did little for the labouring classes, helped to make the fortunes not only of the farmers but also of some of the trading and professional men of the County town. If they were chapel goers they could afford to be generous to their chapels. Thus it seems the trustees of the Old Chapel were able to purchase the land on which the chapel stood. According to the trust deed the site was held on a forty-year lease from Lady Day, 1775. There is evidence that suggests that by a deed dated 9th March, 1814, the trustees acquired the title, about a year before the lease expired.

In 1816, three prosperous tradesmen from the Old Chapel, George Adams, broker; Charles Wille (son George Wille, who built the Cliffe Chapel), builder; and the ironmonger Nehemiah Wimble; came together to build another chapel, the Tabernacle, at the bottom of Lewes High Street, near the river. The site already belonged to Charles Wille. This move does not appear to reflect any dissension at the Old Chapel but rather a desire to establish in the town a prestigious chapel like the now fashionable London chapels originally opened in

London by George Whitefield. It was to be 'more spacious, handsome and commodious than any of the chapels at present in use here', and thus perhaps more appropriate to the newly-won status of the wealthy tradesmen of the town and in keeping with the new wealth of its patrons. The doctrinal basis of the Tabernacle was similar to that of the Old Chapel. In 1816, John Hyatt, one of the ministers of Whitefield's Tabernacle in Moorfields and of Tottenham Court Chapel, preached at the Old Chapel in April, at the Baptist Chapel in August and at the opening of the Tabernacle in November.

An impression of Kerby's qualities as a preacher is given by a sermon, afterwards printed, delivered in November 1817 to 'improve' the death of the popular Princess Charlotte, daughter of the Prince Regent. The Princess had married Prince Leopold of Saxe-Cobourg in May, 1816. In the following January her 21st birthday was lavishly celebrated in Brighton: in November she died from exhaustion after giving birth to a dead child. The delivery was protracted and her death has been attributed to the then accepted medical opinion that prospective mothers should be prepared for their confinement by fasting and bleeding. Kerby's sermon was based on Isaiah 40:6-8. In the customary manner it draws out moral and general lessons of warning and comfort suggested by the sad event. [Original in East Sussex Record Office]

It concludes:

'No death has been more deeply lamented than that of this amiable princess. She was affable though properly dignified and generous without ostentation. Her poor neighbours shed tears on the intelligence of her death, for they had often shared her liberality. The integrity of her character assured the esteem of all; she was truly charitable, for she selected her objects, and she has left a glorious example for the rich and great to go and do likewise... If this illustrious Princess, the presumptive heiress of the United Kingdom, having all that the world could bestow at her feet, found the way of wisdom, ways of pleasantness, in faith and practice, should it not be a stimulus for us to follow after her example?'

The end of the war with France in 1815 was followed by years of depression as the scale of production was reduced. Labourers and tradesmen lost their jobs, troops were disbanded and vagrancy and crime increased. In December 1814 the barracks at Lewes were put up for auction. Mr Kerby, apparently needing to augment his income, became an agent for the Hope Life and Fire Insurance Company (founded in 1807). This unpromising situation did not prevent improvements from being made to the Old Chapel in 1825. When it re-opened

in October it was said to have room for between 700 and 800 people. This compares with the figure of 600 given in 1824 by Horsfield.

In February 1826 a meeting was requisitioned at the County Hall by some prominent local supporters of the Anti-Slave Trade movement. Four resolutions were adopted as the basis of petitions to both Houses of Parliament urging the implementation of the resolutions already adopted by Parliament in 1823 with regard to colonial slavery. It was especially urged upon 'the Houses of Parliament that they be not led by solicitation of opposition to turn aside for an instant from the course of benevolence and justice, until they have brought the state of slavery to a final termination in every part of His Majesty's dominions'.

The first resolution was moved by Joseph Kerby, the second by Thomas Read Kemp, the third by the Baptist minister, Josiah Denham, and the fourth by Alexander Donovan. After these had been seconded the adoption of the Resolutions was moved by T.W. Horsfield of Westgate Chapel. A letter of support was received from Sir John Shelley. Kemp and Donovan were candidates in the parliamentary elections in June 1826.

Joseph Kerby performed his last baptism at Lewes on 25th June 1826 and resigned later in that year. The next baptism, in February 1827, was performed by Charles Howell, and two others later in the year, in May and August, were conducted by George Betts of Alfriston; two other baptisms took place in February and March 1828 at which the ministers were probably some of the supplies during the interregnum.

### **1830-1860 Discussion of Church Order**

In 1827 the Cliffe vestry applied for an Act of Parliament to widen the Cliffe High Street, as West Street was now called. The work, which included the widening of the bridge over the Ouse, began in 1828; but it was not until 1830 that the last of the encroaching buildings was demolished. So at last one of the approaches to the Old Chapel was improved, although it was still subject to flooding from time to time.

It was not until 1828 that a new minister was appointed. This was Richard Harris, from Highbury College (the former Hoxton Academy). He had visited Lewes as a student in July 1827 and January 1828 when he also conducted a

midweek service at the Tabernacle. He was ordained on 14th May 1828. The service was described by a member of the Tabernacle, Esther Morris: 'The ordination of the Revd. R. Harris took place at the Cliffe Chapel this morning, over which church he is now become the pastor. A very interesting service. The Rev. J. Turnbull delivered the introductory address shewing in a scriptural way the nature of a Christian church, and also asked the usual questions. To which Mr. Harris gave the most ingenuous, *frank* and satisfactory *answers*, in a most feeling, energetic and *impressive* manner.' The Revd. T. Young of Margate offered the ordination prayer - Rev. Dr. Harris gave the charge from 1 Timothy, 6:11. The Revd. Lewis Winchester of Worthing addressed the church and congregation from' – (here her memory fails). Richard Harris did not remain long in Lewes. He performed his last baptism in November 1829 and moved soon after to Fareham in Hampshire.

Harris's successor, Samuel Franklin, began his pastorate in the first half of 1830 and was one of the dissenting ministers presented to the King during the Royal Visit in October. He was another product of Cheshunt College, where he had been a mature student. He was about 38 years of age when he was ordained at Ashbourne in Derbyshire in 1807. His ministry at the Cliffe covered a period of local and national agitation for parliamentary reform. At the chapel, life followed a familiar pattern. An organ built by Snelgrove of Arundel was installed in January 1832. The younger Charles Wille records a visit to the chapel to hear Hyam Isaacs speak on the work of the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. On 23rd November 1837 Franklin's son Benjamin, who had entered Cheshunt College in 1833, was ordained at the chapel before commencing work in Jamaica for the London Missionary Society. He had previously, on 8 February 1837, taken a Wednesday evening meeting at the Tabernacle.

It may have been about this time that a Juvenile Auxiliary to the LMS was started. A similar auxiliary, claimed to be the oldest in Sussex, had been set up at the Tabernacle in 1817. These auxiliaries were essentially collecting societies enabling less affluent members of congregations to support the local LMS by small but regular contributions. The young members of an auxiliary (usually the females) acted as collectors. Annual missionary meetings were held to stimulate interest when a missionary on furlough could give a first-hand account of his work.

On 27th April 1837 Mr. Franklin, in compliance with the Registration Act of

1836, sent a copy of the register of births and baptisms to the Registrar General. This included all baptisms since the Rev. J. Kerby became pastor. It appears that earlier registers had been removed: some were in the possession of Jireh Chapel. It was a question of whether the registers belonged to the minister or the chapel.

On Christmas day, 1837, the Rev. T. Wells of Brighton preached in the chapel to the Lewes Temperance Society; and during Lent 1839, the Rev. Evan Jones of the Tabernacle preached at a mid-week service.

It was about Easter time in 1839 that a train of events began at the Tabernacle that was to have repercussions in a number of other local dissenting chapels in the neighbourhood. An attempt was made to discredit and eject the minister, the Rev. Evan Jones. The campaign was led by some of the influential members of the church, including some of the trustees. Although this was eventually frustrated by Mr. Jones's supporters, the episode caused considerable damage to the Tabernacle cause. Many of the respectable members left for other places of worship, followed in due course by the disaffected trustees with their families and friends. A number of these attached themselves to the Cliffe Chapel, which in 1840/1 gained 22 new members. From the account of events given by Charles Wille Jnr., it appears that at that time the health of Mr. Franklin was failing and that supplies were engaged to give him some relief. Towards the end of November 1839 he attended the Anniversary meetings at the Wesleyan Chapel in St. Mary's Lane. On 28th December he was taken ill and died on 2nd January, 1840, at the age of 65. Mr Oates of Lindfield preached at the chapel on the following Sunday.

Mr. Franklin was buried in South Malling churchyard on 8th January 1840. Six of the principal members of his church carried the coffin, followed by 40 of the church and congregation. On the next Sunday evening the Rev. Mr. Bloomfield of London preached the funeral sermon at the chapel. Esther Morris, a member of the Tabernacle, distressed and confused by all that had happened, found the death of Mr. Franklin 'a solemn and at this time remarkable dispensation of providence.'

At this period, Easter, in addition to its importance in the Christian Calendar, had a special importance for the Sunday School. In 1840, for example, some 180 teachers and others gathered for the good fare and speeches of the annual tea

meeting, at which the Rev. William Woodhouse of London presided. On the morning of Easter Sunday he preached on behalf of the school, a collection for its work being taken at the door after the service. In the afternoon he examined the children. The examination would have been based on the Assembly's *Shorter Catechism* or possibly on the simplified versions for children prepared by Isaac Watts. It was remarked that 'Mr. Woodhouse, by his peculiarly interesting mode of addressing them, fixed the attention of the congregation. The questions were extemporaneous and the answers were very correct.'

For two years the chapel was served by ministers of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. During that time many who had left the Tabernacle became members of the church at the Old Chapel. Among these was the retired schoolmaster, John Jones; the bookseller and stationer, Reuben William Lower, who was also the local agent for the Bible Society; Arthur Morris, provision merchant and later, postmaster, who was a trustee of the Tabernacle; and John Smith, draper. In 1843 Arthur Morris became a deacon of the chapel, as in due course did the other three. By 1854 they were all trustees of the chapel. The widow of John Adams, another Tabernacle trustee, also joined the chapel at this time with her eldest son, George. When John Adams died in 1843, Sarah Adams and her son George together carried on the family business of Cabinet making and upholstery. The best known of all was Mark Anthony Lower, who in 1837 had taken over the school for young gentlemen run by John Jones. A historian and archaeologist, he was one of the founders, in 1846, of the Sussex Archaeological Society.

In due course the newcomers gradually gained control of the Chapel. Some of them were prominent in public life and would have been tended to be more tolerant than most in matters of Christian conduct, and consequently more sensitive to questions of church discipline, which was strict at that time. Although their arrival brought welcome financial support to the church, it is likely that it brought also the seeds of future dissension.

In January 1842 William Powell began his ministry at the Old Chapel. He came to Lewes from Folkestone, where he had been ordained in 1838 after leaving Cheshunt College. He appears to have been a popular and effective preacher, for in his first three years forty new members were added to the church. In April, 1843, he was asked to move the resolution against the educational clauses of Graham's Factory Bill at a meeting called by local dissenters at County Hall.

In 1843 some re-organisation of the Lewes Benevolent Society became necessary. In that year the Tabernacle, one of the three chapels then involved in its work, ceased to have any formal connection with the Society. The treasurer, George Adams Snr., a former member of the Tabernacle, died, and thereafter it was supported by the Baptists at Eastgate and by the Old Chapel. William Button, a deacon at Eastgate, was elected treasurer, and R.W. Lower, another former member of the Tabernacle now at the Cliffe, became secretary. In 1844, when a heavy wave of sickness hit the town, the society's funds were exhausted and the ministers of the two chapels appealed to their congregations for help. Powell was also asked to select suitable books for a small library.

At the Sunday School anniversary in 1843 it was reported that there were now 148 children. The drop in number was possibly due to the greater number of Sunday Schools in the neighbourhood. In 1845, according to Lower's Handbook of Lewes, there was also a branch Sunday School at Southover.

During this period the Auxiliary to the L.M.S. still carried on its work, and sometimes, when deputations came to the Tabernacle, the visiting speakers also came to the Old Chapel. William Powell was one of the ministers who took part at the burial of the Rev. J.D. Ellis, a former missionary of the Baptist Missionary Society in Calcutta, when he was buried in the forecourt of the rebuilt Baptist chapel in February, 1845. This was the first interment within the precincts of that chapel.

About this time the church again became preoccupied with the divisive question of church order and in April 1845 'The following rules were unanimously adopted by the Church of the Old Chapel, Cliffe, Lewes, for their better order and prosperity.'

1. 'That such persons only be eligible to Fellowship with this Church as, in judgment of charity, give evidence of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ; and that such persons be received after the usual probation.
2. 'That if any member be found conducting himself in a manner inconsistent with the nature of his sacred profession – either by the practice of known sin or the indulgence of personal animosity or the display of improper feeling, so giving offence to all pious persons, causing the ungodly to blaspheme, disturbing the peace and injuring the interests of the Church – such an one shall be affectionately admonished by Persons whom the Church shall appoint for this purpose. If, after such admonition, the offence be repeated, the offending party shall be excluded from all the privileges of Communion; and if contrition and a

promise of amendment be not expressed within the space of three months, be no longer considered a Member of this Church.

3. 'That any Member habitually neglecting the public worship of God in this place, or absenting himself for three months successively from the Table of the Lord, without, in each instance, giving such reasons for his conduct as shall prove satisfactory to the Church, shall be remonstrated with by Persons delegated by the Church, and, upon the continuance or repetition of such criminal neglect, be excluded from Church Fellowship.
4. 'That any Member, desirous of removing to another church, shall be transferred by a Letter to the Church with which he intends to unite: and that satisfactory testimonials be required with any person being a, member of another Church, who may be desirous of connecting himself with this Christian Society.
5. 'That in the admission of Members, or any other matter brought before the Church, in case a division of sentiment should arise, the votes of the majority of the Members present at the Church Meeting shall be decisive on the point in question.
6. 'That no business be brought before the Church by any Member, unless the nature of it has been laid before the Minister and Deacons a week previously to the Church Meeting.
7. 'That any Member making known any matters of private business transacted at the Church Meeting to any who are not Members of the same Church, shall be considered guilty of a breach of confidence.
8. 'That a statement of the finances be annually presented to the Church in the month of January or February.'

The unanimous approval of these rules needs to be set beside a terse note made by Charles Wille of the Tabernacle. Of Rev. Mr. Powell he remarked 'He was the cause of contention about rules and officers and some long standing members of the chapel left.' The true situation can perhaps be inferred from the rules themselves. Most of these call for no special comment: rule 3 is a variation of one proposed before, but rules 2 and 7 are significant. The particular references to 'the indulgence of personal animosity' and to 'the display of improper feeling' in rule 2; and to 'breach of confidence' in rule 7, suggest that these are personal allusions. It is understandable that an age, when to rise in the social scale depended so much on personal effort, should produce men of strong and assertive personality. It has been noticed that some who joined the churches as a result of the evangelical revival had little interest in church order, being more concerned with the salvation of souls.

In 1845 only four new members joined the church. This may have been due in part to the circumstances already mentioned. In the following year the situation

improved, but Powell himself seems to have become dissatisfied with his experience of dissent and decided to join the established church. On 6th December 1846 he preached his farewell sermon at the Cliffe and on the following Sunday he attended the Tabernacle with several of his congregation. He was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Chichester in the cathedral on the last Sunday in May, 1847; and a year later he was ordained priest.

A notable visitor came to the chapel on a Thursday afternoon in November 1847. This was the Rev. John Stair, one of the missionary pioneers in the Pacific. He came to speak to the children about the advancement of civilization in the Navigator's Islands. Formerly a printer, he had spent some years superintending the translation of the scripture into the Samoan language. He had been compelled to return home by ill health. Although he had recently been a member of a deputation to the Tabernacle, the chapel was crowded, with twelve ministers on the platform.

In due course William Powell was succeeded by John Parry. After studying at Blackburn Academy he had been ordained at East Cowes in 1841 and served there until he came to Lewes in 1848. Little is known of his ministry, but according to Mark Anthony Lower, 'His amiable character and literary tastes endeared him to a large circle of friends.'

On 6 May 1848, local churches formed a Sunday School Union.

In September 1849 a Day of Prayer and Humiliation was observed because of outbreaks of cholera in London and elsewhere, and subscriptions were taken after church services for relief purposes should the epidemic reach Lewes. No deaths were reported in the town and in November a Day of Thanksgiving was observed. It may be significant that the services at the Old Chapel on that day were conducted by visiting ministers and not by John Parry. In his diary, Gideon Mantell dryly noted: 'Thanksgiving day for the departure of the cholera which has not departed. My friend the Dean's (Dr. Buckland of St. Paul's) text was the best - 'Wash and be clean.'

John Parry's ministry was terminated by his death on 4th August 1850, at the age of thirty. His absence from the pulpit on the Day of Thanksgiving in 1849 may indicate that he did not enjoy good health.

## **Involvement in national and international issues**

In November 1850, R.W. Lower was elected Junior Constable of the Borough of Lewes. In that month, with the Senior Constable, Henry Davey, he signed the Loyal Address to the Queen (that had been approved at a special town meeting), protesting against the appointment of Roman Catholic Bishops. In the following February, the two High Constables, accompanied by the Hon. Henry Fitzroy, one of the members of Parliament for the borough, attended a public levee at St. James's Palace, 'when they presented the Address to Her Majesty who was graciously pleased to receive the same and to allow them the honour of kissing Her Majesty's hand.'

It was as a deacon of the chapel that Lower signed the return for the Religious Census taken on 30th March, 1851, the chapel still being without a minister. The return showed a congregation of 232 in the morning and 272 in the evening. There were 150 free seats and 305 others, with standing room for 100. This accommodation is somewhat less than had previously been stated, which may indicate that some rearrangement of seating had been made.

A rough estimate based on the number of new members who joined the church from 1811 to 1850 gives a figure of about 100 church members at the date of the census. Crude though this estimate is, it shows that the members formed a minority of the regular congregation.

Among the ministers considered for the pastorate during the eighteen months interregnum was John Irving Dunlop. The second son of an apparently prosperous artisan of County Armagh, he had matriculated in 1840 and studied at the University of Glasgow without taking a degree. In 1843 he was set apart to preach the Gospel by the Associated Presbytery in Northern Ireland of the Session Church of Scotland (which in 1847 joined with the Relief Kirk to form the United Presbyterian Church). After leaving Ireland, probably during the famine, he was ordained minister of an Independent Church in Painswick, Gloucestershire, in September 1848. In 1850 he moved to Maldon in Essex, leaving in the following year. Probably because of his Presbyterian background opinion at the Cliffe Chapel was divided about offering him the pastorate; and when it was decided to call him an influential section of the congregation, led by R. W. Lower and John Smith (both of whom were deacons and trustees), left the chapel, and on Sunday, 7th March 1852, met for worship at the warehouse in

Market St. belonging to Mrs. Sarah Adams. So far as they can be identified the families that left were some of those that had seceded from the Tabernacle in 1840-41. Some of them later joined the congregation at the Baptist Chapel at Eastgate.

Mr Dunlop's appointment was subject to a probationary period of six weeks and this he satisfactorily completed. He came to Lewes when public feelings were still inflamed by the 'Catholic Aggression' of 1850. Only recently, in February 1852, the borough of Lewes, with the support of all the Protestant denominations, had addressed a petition to the House of Commons asking for the repeal of the Maynooth Endowment Act and for the withdrawal of all state grants to Roman Catholics in Ireland 'or in any other part of the British Commons'. In June, the Queen's proclamation against Roman Catholic processions was publicly read in Lewes. In this climate Mr. Dunlop was thoroughly at home. As an evangelist in Ireland he had strongly opposed the 1845 Act and had suffered harassment in consequence. In October he was one of the speakers at a Missionary Meeting at the Wesleyan Chapel in St. Mary's Lane, when he 'exposed the evils of Popery in that country and gave gratifying proofs of the spread of Protestant principles.'

Mr. Dunlop found the affairs of the chapel in some disorder. Mr. Lower had not handed over the church books in his possession (perhaps because he considered them to be his own property). The loss of some of the more prosperous members clearly had a serious effect on the chapel's income. It was already in debt, although the reason for this is not clear. A committee for the liquidation of the church debt (apparently already in existence) was forced to recommend some drastic measures. In December 1852 the church was asked to agree to the sale of the organ; and in the following September to allow a part of the surplus of the ordinance fund (the fund normally used to help needy members of the congregation) to pay off the balance of the debt. By this means the church papers were recovered and lodged once more with Messrs. Blaker, the solicitors.

The departure of two deacons left the church with Arthur Morris, another former member of the Tabernacle, as the only deacon; when he died in December 1852, a former deacon, John Jones, who had earlier resigned, was persuaded to take up the office again. No attempt was made at that time to appoint additional deacons.

In 1853 Mr. Dunlop was invited to take part in a great Protestant Mission to the South of Ireland involving a hundred missionaries of different denominations. The aim was to preach the gospel, wherever possible, in the open air. Mr. Dunlop had been chosen because of his past success in such work. With the approval of the church, he left for Dublin on 27th July. On his return a month later he had to report that the mission had not been as successful as had been hoped, but that much good would doubtless come from it.

About the end of 1853, John Jones left Lewes for Brighton. He was persuaded to remain as deacon with Mr. Weston and Mr. A. Morris (the son of the late deacon) to assist him. In December 1853 steps were also taken to appoint a treasurer. His duties are not mentioned but probably would have included looking after the ordinance fund and the collection of pew rents. Soon afterwards the church meeting agreed that any amount remaining in the ordinance fund at the end of each quarter in excess of £5 should be handed to the trustees for the general fund.

By this time the chapel was badly in need of repair. It was probably this that drew attention to the fact that the surviving trustees, now numbering only seven (including the two who had seceded), had failed to observe the terms of the trust deed, which required them, when their number was reduced by death to ten, to appoint new trustees to make up their number to fifteen. In response to a request from the church meeting, the new trustees were appointed on 31st March 1854

The trustees of the chapel were now

*Existing trustees:*

Thomas Jenner of Lee, Kent, gent.

James Funnell, Lewes, gent.

Rueben William Lower, Lewes, stationer

John Smith, Lewes, draper

George Harman, Lewes, builder

Thomas Berry, Lewes, spirit merchant

James Pelling, Lewes, plumber, glazier

*New trustees:*

William Jenner, Lewes, merchant

John Jones, Hove, schoolmaster

Thomas Tickner Cox, Lewes, grocer

John Jenner of Tarring, farmer

Arthur Morris, Lewes, Master of Lewes Post Office

William Francis Smith, Lewes, tailor

Thomas Rouse, Cliffe, hardwaresman

Samuel Wood, S. Malling, Lewes, tanner

Not all these were church members. It is unlikely that R. W. Lower and John Smith now took any active part.

Now that the trustees were properly constituted they could put the necessary work in hand. This included the repair and repainting of the building; the lowering of the pulpit and the strengthening of the floor below it! The total cost would be £35. A committee of ten ladies (including Mrs. Dunlop) was formed to receive contributions.

Not all church meetings were concerned with the problems of church order. Membership matters were a regular feature. Sometimes there was no business to be discussed: and then there might instead have been a devotional meeting. In December 1853 Mr. Dunlop had introduced the Evangelical Alliance, which had been formed in 1846 to bring together individual evangelicals, of whatever denomination, for fellowship and prayer. It took as its motto 'All one in Christ'. Its formation was in part a response to the Anglo-catholic movement in the Church of England. Mr. Dunlop was a member and urged others to join.

During 1854, R. W. Lower produced a list of church members from 1811 to 1852. The names were entered in a newly acquired church book, Congregational Church Records published by the Congregational Union, which covered all aspects of church life. These records, including the minutes of church meetings, appear to have been written by the minister himself. The minutes were approved by the church meeting, usually for several meetings at a time, and signed by the minister. Soon afterwards Mr. Dunlop received from Mr. Lower a book entitled 'Minutes of Meetings of the Church assembling at the Old Chapel, Lewes, from 1840 to 1852'. This, it appeared, 'was nothing more than an account of the proceedings of the church during that time, kept by private individuals, it may be with the sanction of the church, but... it does not appear that the said minutes received, at any time, the sanction of the church.'

To remove any uncertainty as to the ownership of this book, a statement asserting that it was the common property of all the members of the church; or, in the case of a division those who have the possession of the chapel, was inscribed on the flyleaf.

During 1855, two of the trustees were asked to call on Mr. Davey, of School Hill,

to request him to lend for copying letters written by the Countess of Huntingdon to Mr. Middleton. This he agreed to do. Unfortunately these copies have been lost.

On 28th November 1855, the deacon John Jones died suddenly at Brighton, and once again temporary arrangements had to be made for managing the church affairs until new deacons could be elected. Meanwhile, Thomas Berry and Arthur Morris were asked to consult their fellow trustees regarding the nature and extent of their authority. This was a matter on which the trust deed was not explicit. In reply the trustees indicated their desire to meet the wishes of the church so far as the trust deed permitted.

In June 1856 the church meeting asked the trustees to make the following temporary appointments:

Mr. Thomas Rouse – Treasurer and collector of pew rents

Mr. T. Cox, Mr. Rouse, Mr. F. Smith, Mr. S. Wood – Committee for General Management

Mr. A. Morris, Mr. Weston, Mr. T. Rouse, D. Wells, S. Wood, T. Berry, R. Stevens – to hold plates at collections.

In April 1857, Messrs. Thomas Berry, A. Morris, T. Weston and T. Rouse were elected deacons.

Like other ministers in the town, Mr. Dunlop gave support to a number of local causes. In November, 1852, he gave the first of a series of popular lectures for the Working Man's Educational Union on 'Christianity, the only religion fitted for mankind' at the Old Chapel. In the April following he spoke on 'Popular Prejudices' at the Mechanics Institute. A debate on 'Capital Punishment' at the Mechanics Institute in October 1855 between Mr. Dunlop and a Mr. Dymond was of considerable local interest. As recently as 1851 a woman had been publicly hanged outside the prison in North Street. Mr. Dunlop spoke in support of Capital Punishment and Mr. Dymond against. Each was given an hour to introduce his case, and a further twenty minutes for further comments. Unfortunately, according to the Sussex Express, 'the discussion towards the end became exceedingly personal, each gentleman accusing the other of blasphemy and Mr. Dymond warning the congregation of the Old Hill Chapel that the God taught by their pastor was a Moloch – a God of vengeance not of love.'

Not surprisingly Mr Dunlop was present at a meeting in May 1857 for the

purpose of forming a Protestant Association in Lewes, when the motion: 'That it is the manifest duty of Protestants of all denominations to unite in strenuous opposition to Romish and anti-Christian error, whether masked in the guise of the Church of England, or unmasked in the direct teaching of the priests of the Papal Corporation, a system which is destructive of social happiness in the people, opposed to the interests of nations and contrary to the word of God' was carried unanimously. At the chapel, in the February following, he gave a lecture on the Reformation in England to more than five hundred young people, in the main scholars from the local dissenting Sunday Schools. This was 'illustrated by fifteen beautiful diagrams' probably the work of Dunlop himself, who had some talent as a draughtsman, as is shown by a surviving plan of the Old Chapel by his hand. It was reported that valuable instruction was given and much attention paid by the young people. When the Royal Sussex Artillery Militia was called up for training in July 1859 Mr. Dunlop preached at one of the Sunday services in the Gun Shed at Southover.

One of Mr. Dunlop's last acts of interdenominational co-operation in Lewes was to join with other nonconformist ministers to lead a series of united meetings of prayer for revival that began in February 1860 and continued until Holy Week. These meetings, held at the British School, the Baptist and Wesleyan chapels and the Tabernacle, were inspired by the 'Second Evangelical Awakening' that began in the United States in 1857. This spread to the British Isles in 1859 and led to the Irish Revival in the same year.

The 1850s were difficult years for Lewes. The growing imports of foreign grain that followed the repeal of the Corn Laws had hit agriculture in the South East; and the coming of the railways had contributed to the decline of the town as a centre of trade. Severe flooding in the Cliffe in the autumn and winter of 1852 caused much hardship amongst the poor living in the low-lying areas. In 1856 the local Sunday School Union saw the need for a Ragged School. The minister of the Tabernacle, Evan Jones, who had accepted a reduction of his stipend as a result of a large secession in 1839-40, had it further reduced in the 1850s.

The Old Chapel also had its problems. During the 1840s it had benefited from the large influx of new members resulting from the secession from the Tabernacle and from the ministry of Mr. Powell. The secession from the Old Chapel in 1852 had removed some of these and also their contributions to the chapel's income. In the years following the number of new members was much reduced. It is likely that the changes in the membership of the church

corresponded to the changes in the size of the congregation as a whole.

In 1856, one of the trustees, Thomas Berry, proposed that the whole church should have 'friendly intercourse with the Baptists', by which he seems to have meant some sort of union; though whether he meant occasional united services or complete union is not clear. Although his proposition was not taken up, it may have been seen as one way with dealing with a difficult situation.

In April 1857 Mr. Dunlop sent a letter to the treasurer that was brought to a special church meeting in June. It appeared that because of the reduced finances of the church, he was prepared to forgo the £80 per annum paid to him, subject to six months' notice. In accepting this offer the church meeting acknowledged the valuable service of the minister and asked him to continue as long as he was able to. It may be supposed that Mr. Dunlop could rely on another source of income, at least for a time.

The latter part of Mr. Dunlop's ministry seems to have been affected by failing health 'brought on by over-exertion and anxiety occasioned chiefly by the persecution and annoyance' he had suffered because of his stand on the Maynooth question. This may account for his irritable state of mind revealed by two entries in his private notebook in 1858: 'the singers, with their notebooks and fiddles, annoyed me very much while preaching.' And in September: 'In the afternoon about 2 o'clock my gown was stolen from the vestry. The thief was apprehended by the police the same evening and brought before the magistrates the next day. The case was finally referred to the Sessions, and the wretched drunken woman who did it was punished. She was from Brighton.'

On 26th March 1860 he announced that on account of his health he was unable to continue his ministry and 'therefore intended in the course of a few weeks to give up possession of the chapel to the trustees'. This he did on 14th May. He had already, on 14th June 1859, been formally admitted a member of the Presbytery of London, in connection with the Presbyterian Church in England. His ministry at the Old Chapel ceased on Monday, 14th May 1860. Following the resignation of Mr. Dunlop, the church applied to the Presbytery of London for the supply of divine ordinances, and on Sunday, 17th June, the Rev. H. Gamble of Windsor conducted the services and announced that the Presbytery had unanimously acceded to the request. The Rev. P. R. Crole of Guernsey, 'a gifted and acceptable preacher' would shortly occupy the pulpit for a time. Mr. Crole was succeeded by Rev. Alexander Salmon, who was one of the speakers at the

celebration at the Tabernacle of the fifty years in the ministry completed by its pastor, the Rev. Evan Jones. He was also one of the group of ministers which led the procession at Mr. Jones' funeral in January 1864.

The Sunday school had its 54th anniversary in June 1861, when the Rev. T. A. Alexander, M.A., of Ranleigh Presbyterian Chapel, Chelsea, conducted the three services. Following what by now seems to have become a local custom, the children of other local Sunday Schools joined the celebration in the afternoon. Mr. Alexander also preached in February 1862, in aid of the families and victims of the disaster at Hartley Colliery.

A public meeting was held on 24th September 1863 to express sympathy and concern at the 'present sufferings of the Poles under the oppression of the Russian government', when Mr. Salmon moved one of the resolutions. He had a similar part in another such meeting on 13th Jan. 1864, called to offer congratulations to the Queen and the Prince and Princess of Wales on the birth of an heir to the throne. Later in that year Mr. Salmon was succeeded for a short time by Rev. P. Maclaren.

### **The final years**

The last minister to serve at the Cliffe Chapel was John Prentice. A probationer of the English Presbyterian Church, he studied at the Queen's Square College and was ordained at Lewes on 13th Oct 1864, when he was in his early thirties. He soon formed good relations with his congregation and began to re-establish the Presbyterian cause in the town. Indeed the church now supported the English Presbyterian Foreign Missionary Society and a meeting for the society was addressed by Rev. John Webb of the Tabernacle and by other dissenting ministers.

Early in 1866 Prentice began a series of special Sunday afternoon services for children, held on the last Sunday of each month, at which he gave the address, the hymns being taken from Bateman's Hymn Book.

An interesting visitor in March 1866 was the evangelist Brownlow North. His father was the Rev. Charles Augustus North, Rector of Alverstone, Hants and Prebend of Winchester. The Bishop of Winchester was his grandfather and his grand uncle was Frederick, Lord North, second earl of Guildford.

In spite of this respectable background, his own life was far from exemplary and as a young man he had a reputation for fast living. In 1839, however, he resolved to take holy orders and graduated at Magdalene College in 1842, but he then reverted to his old ways. His course was arrested by a sudden illness, which led him to join a religious society. He then became a successful evangelist and in 1859 was recognised as such by the Free Church of Scotland. In the same year he took part in the revivalist meetings in Ulster. With the minister of the Tabernacle, John Webb, North helped to pioneer the work of YMCA and YWCA in Lewes, Associations being established at both churches.

The isolated position of the chapel on the edge of the town created problems that could only be solved by building a new chapel elsewhere. To this Mr. Prentice soon devoted his energies. As early as May 1866 the ladies were working for a bazaar and a fancy fair to raise money for a new chapel; and no doubt other methods of fund raising were adopted. A site for the new chapel was found in Market Street (Was this Mr. Adams' warehouse?), and in January 1868 it was reported that it would be known as the Hamilton English Presbyterian Church, so named in honour of a friend of Mr. Prentice, Dr. James Hamilton, minister of the Presbyterian Church in Regent Square, London. The foundation stone was laid on 25th June 1868 by Donald Matheson Esq. of Holmwood, Dorking. This seems to be the building that subsequently became a skirt factory and is currently (2016) the Lewes Flea Market (opened in 1992), although there is no obvious sign of a foundation stone on the current building. The new building in the Lombardic style included a school room, a classroom, session house, a vestry and a bell tower: it cost £2,200 and was opened on Sunday, 1st December 1868.

John Prentice was at the funeral of John Webb in November 1867. He died on 17th March 1877.

With the opening of the new Presbyterian chapel the story of the Old Chapel in the Cliffe comes to an end. It was eventually sold and demolished. In June 1879, the Charity Commissioners divided the proceeds between Jireh Chapel and the Tabernacle, these being the nearest in doctrine to the Old Chapel. Each received £52.5s.4d.