

**The Story**  
**Of**  
**Early Methodism in Aberdeen**



by

**ERNEST WILKINSON, M.A.**

## Foreword to this edition

*This copy of the original 1973 booklet was typed to a computer file in 2002. I have tried to keep as far as possible to the original formatting and layout. There are a few editorial additions, but these are signified by being written in italics. The original booklet was written by Ernest Wilkinson, who was one of the stewards at the Aberdeen Methodist Church. I think he was an accountant by profession, and the booklet was written to celebrate the centenary of the Crown Terrace building in 1973.*

*Another addition on the back page of this electronic document to the original booklet is a table listing all the ministers appointed to the Aberdeen church from its beginnings. This is a copy of the hand-written document kept in the vestry, and updated every time there is a new minister appointed.*

*A copy of this booklet was handed to me recently from someone unconnected with the present Methodist Church; I don't know from where she got it. Howard Marshall knew Ernest Wilkinson, though I didn't. He was apparently a Tax Inspector. I thought it sufficiently interesting to type it out so that others could read it, and let Mr. Wilkinson's account survive a few more years.*

*This booklet was produced to mark the centenary of Crown Terrace Methodist Church in 1973. This reprint is done at a time when the sanctuary area is being remodelled, the pews and pipe organ removed, and the floor levelled. We hope that this will mark a renewal in the life of the Methodist Church in Aberdeen in the fourth century it has been in existence.*

*“Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses...”  
(Hebrews 12, v1)*

*Alec Jones*

October 2003.

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## FOREWORD

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This account of early Aberdeen Methodism spans a period of roughly sixty years from the formation of the Aberdeen Society to the opening of Long Acre Chapel.

Meetings of Leaders and Trustees are usually concerned with matters of organisation. As this narrative is based largely on minutes of such meetings, on account books and on deeds of property, there is, perhaps inevitably, a certain lack of perspective which the reader is asked to correct by ever keeping in view the zeal, the sacrifice and devotion of these early Methodists.

To avoid burdening the narrative with footnotes a list of the main sources used is given in an Appendix.

This opportunity is taken to thank more than a score of correspondents who have been good enough to deal with my enquiries on specific points.

E. W.

February 1972

## CHAPTER ONE.

### **The Beginning of Aberdeen Methodism — A General Picture.**

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May we take a brief glimpse of Aberdeen as it was when the Methodist Society was first formed in the City shortly after the middle of the eighteenth century?

According to the “History of Aberdeen” by Walter Thom, published in 1811, the population in 1755, including that of Old Aberdeen, numbered 15,730 – about one-twelfth of the present population. The houses of New Aberdeen, as it is described in the maps of the period, were all within a radius of little more than a quarter of a mile of Marischal College. Westwards the houses reached to Belmont Street, whilst a line drawn through Hadden Street past the foot of Shore Brae would roughly mark the limits in a southerly direction. Gordon’s College stood outside the town. In the rolling countryside, near the spot where Crown Street and Crown Terrace now meet, a windmill boldly spread its sails, no doubt a prominent landmark for many miles around. Away from the town, from the lip of Windmill Brae, the Hardgate ribboned lazily across to the brown waters of the Dee. Thom tells us that in 1756 there was only a single farm-house in Gilcomston. Twenty years later, Gilcomston had grown to a tiny village, a small handful of houses clustering cosily near the Den Burn about the spot where the Grammar School now stands. Forester Hill was still described as being “near Aberdeen”. Mile End was then no more than the first milestone on the road from town: King Street, George Street and Union Street had not been opened up. Barely a quarter of a mile on the sea-ward side of the Gallowgate could still be seen the gallows gaunt and grim on the Gallows Hill. This, then, was the Aberdeen from which Methodism dates its ancestry.

The initiative in forming the Methodist Society in Aberdeen is commonly ascribed to a Dr. Memyss who, after coming into contact with Methodists in Wales, had settled in Aberdeen about 1747. It is related that when on a visit to London between 1756 and 1759, Memyss called on John Wesley, requesting that a Methodist preacher should be sent to Aberdeen. In response Wesley sent Christopher Hopper to the city in 1759, and it was Culloden – that the Methodist Society of Aberdeen was formed. Support for taking the year 1759 is found in the fact that the Steward’s book shows a special collection to have been mentioned that this collection was handed over to the Magistrates, for what purpose we are not told.)

However, whether the Society was, or was not, formed in 1759, it was certainly in existence two years later, for on the occasion of his first visit to Aberdeen in 1761 Wesley records that he “added about twenty to the little Society”, and that on the following day “twenty more came to me, desiring to cast in their lot with us and appearing to be cut to the heart”. Three days later Wesley went on his way, “leaving near ninety members in the Society”.

Altogether Wesley visited Aberdeen in fourteen different years, on the first occasion in 1761, as just mentioned, and on the last in 1790 when he was eighty-six years of age. The vigorous growth of the Society in these early years no doubt owes much to Wesley’s personal inspiration and by 1770 the membership in Aberdeen was the highest in Scotland.

The growth, however, was not only in numbers, for Wesley reports that “many of the people were much alive to God”, and that it was “a Society truly alive, knit together in peace

and love". They were "a people that can feel as well as hear", "many of whom were athirst for full salvation".

On the whole, Wesley and his preachers appear to have been better received in Aberdeen than in many places over the Border. The University authorities and the various ministers of other churches in the town invariably received Wesley with kindness. After preaching in 1761 to a "huge multitude" in the College Close, he comments that "all that could hear seemed to receive the truth in love". Two years later, on his next visit, he again notes "an amazing willingness to hear". "Surely," he writes, "never was there a more open door".

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the path of the Methodist preachers in Aberdeen was strewn with roses. Christopher Hopper preached during 1759-60 every morning at five o'clock on the Castle Hill where "often amid stones and dead animals flying around him he invited his persecutors to flee from the wrath to come".

Wesley himself reports preaching "in the Castle gate on the paved stones" one Sunday morning when he was struck by a potato. "I never saw such brutes in Scotland before," he wrote.

Practical jokers too had their fling. On one occasion, in 1763 or 1764, a skeleton taken from the gibbet on Gallows Hill was hung outside the door of the Methodist Meeting House. An account of this, taken from the "Book of Bon Accord" (1839) of which there is a copy in the Aberdeen Public Library, reads as follows:

"One of the last persons who suffered here (i.e. on the gallows) was a sailor who was hung in chains in 1752; many years afterwards his wasted skeleton was taken down by some irreverend men who placed it by the door of the Methodist Meeting House and affixed to it this sorry couplet: –  
"I, William Wast, at the point of damnation,  
request the prayers of this congregation."

Even the faithful ones wavered occasionally. In 1768, Wesley lost part of his congregation to "a company of strolling players". "Poor Scotland! Poor Aberdeen!", he wrote, "this only was wanting to make them as completely irreligious as England." In 1784, he notes that "many were faint and weak from want of morning preaching and prayer meetings", and he himself, at the age of eighty, proceeded to preach at five o'clock the following morning.

Among Wesley's preachers in the early years were several Church of England clergymen, but none of these appears ever to have been stationed in Aberdeen although some (such as Dr. Coke) paid occasional visits. It was not until 1785 that Wesley ordained the first three preachers for service in Scotland. Up to the date of his death in 1791 only eleven had been so ordained. In consequence it was not unusual for members of the Methodist Societies to remain communicant members of the Episcopalian or Presbyterian churches. Wesley insisted at first that his special ordinations from 1785 onwards did not imply the creation of a separate Methodist Church in Scotland. He defended the ordinations on the ground that, not infrequently, unfriendly ministers of the Episcopalian and Presbyterian Churches deprived the Methodists of access to communion and baptismal services.

In the absence of ordained ministers during the first quarter-century of the Methodist Society in Aberdeen, its members were perforce served by a succession of lay preachers

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(“helpers” or “assistants”, as Wesley called them), most of whom came from over the Border. Roads were in a shocking condition and communications were poor. There was, for instance, no stage coach between Edinburgh and Aberdeen until 1788, and for several years thereafter the service was only three times a week. In 1790 an advertisement appeared for the Edinburgh Fly which left Aberdeen at 4.0 a.m. (3.30 in winter), arriving in Edinburgh the following day “in time for dinner”. About the turn of the century a number of caravans, “constantly employed for the accommodation of travellers”, served the county of Aberdeen, which explains the following entry in the accounts of the Aberdeen Society: –

“Jan. 1815. To expenses by caravans, boats, etc. £1. 12. 0”

Wesley himself made most of his earlier visits to Aberdeen on horse-back, but in later years he travelled by chaise. Many of his lay preachers were not so fortunate and were compelled to make their way to Aberdeen on foot. In 1782 Henry Moore

“had like to have met with some rough treatment on his way to Aberdeen. About the time he passed through Stonehaven, something was stolen and they supposed him to be the thief and followed him three miles, took him up and brought him before the magistrates, but when he told them who and what he was they were ashamed and let him go where he pleased. He is now in Aberdeen....”

Owing to difficulties of road transport the preachers’ possessions were sometimes forwarded by sea.

“23 Sept. 1810 Mr. Dunbar’s boxes by sea	10s. 10d.
30 Sept. 1810 S. Kittle’s chests by sea	18s. 2d.
do by road	6s. 6d.”

Some preachers passed northwards through Aberdeen to other stations – usually in the autumn – and the Aberdeen Society’s accounts frequently include charges apparently relating to them.

“3 Sept. 1799 To extra board by preachers	7s. 0d.
8 Sept. 1801 To board for preachers passing through	7s. 6d.
10 Sept. 1804 To Sundries and Preachers passing	£1. 1s. 4d.”

If we might digress a little, let us follow one such preacher on his journey to his first appointment which was at Keith, about that time in the Aberdeen Circuit. In 1805 it took John Brown eight days to travel from Newcastle to Keith. Here is an extract from his own account. The full letter will be found in Swift’s “The Romance of Banffshire Methodism”.

Keith, Sept. 9<sup>th</sup> 1805

Dear Brother and Sister,

Having arrived safely at my appointed place (which is Keith) I have the happiness of relating or giving you a little history of my journey here. On Saturday morning, the day after you left me at Newcastle, we sailed, but only got a little way down the river till Monday, so that I had the pleasure of seeing my uncle and staying there over Sunday. On Monday morning I went on board and we left Shields about twelve o’clock. With great reluctance and with many a wistful look I at last lost sight of my beloved country, while the thought of coming into a strange land brought tears into my languid eyes. We had a safe passage, but a very quick one. We got to Aberdeen on Thursday morning. I was a little sick the first and second

day, but very little. The captain showed all respect to me imaginable, and only charged me thirteen shillings for my passage.

When I got to Aberdeen, I enquired out the preachers Mr. Welbourne and Mr. Fisher, and stayed with them all night and set off again on Friday morning with a young woman who was going on the same road to the same place. That day I came about twenty miles and lodged at a friend's house, but such a place as I was never at before. You have often heard tell of a people living in a house with the fire on the floor and all placed round it: here I saw it full. Add to this the smoke and stench with their big friz'd hair and the great difference of their dialect that for a while I could scarcely tell a word in ten. I thought Lord where have I got to, a stranger in a strange land and among strange people. This cast me down a little, yet the affections of the people far exceeded the inconvenience that I met with here.

Then on Saturday morning I set off again and walked about twenty-five miles and reached Keith on the same day, which is the place where I am appointed to labour a while..."

Wesley was a believer in his preachers not allowing the grass to grow beneath their feet. In 1784 in Aberdeen he

"talked largely with the preachers and showed them the hurt it did, both to them and the people, for any one preacher to stay six or eight weeks together in one place. Neither can he find matter for preaching every morning and evening, nor will the people come to hear him. Hence he grows cold by staying in bed, and so do the people. Whereas if he never stays more than a fortnight in one place, he may find matter enough and the people will gladly hear him."

We are not surprised then that the Society's accounts contain scores of items such as the following: –

"2 March 1784 To Mr. Suter's Horse from Newburgh	7d.
11 June 1786 To bring a horse from Banff	5d.
21 June 1786 To horse for Mr. Taylor going to, and Mr. Bartholomew returning from, Elgin	7s. 6d.
22 Aug. 1786 To paid for Mr. Lumb's horse per stabler's bill	8s. 6d.
29 May 1787. To horse hyre, expenses, etc. for Mr. Watkinson from Inverurie	5s. 11d.
3 July 1787. To paid Mr. Watkinson Horse Hyre to Edinburgh	£1. 0. 0d
20 Feb. 1795. 8 stone hay	5s. 4d.
31 Jan. 1796. Straw for the horse	4d.
22 Oct. 1799. To Mr. Atherton for a horse to Banff	5s. 0d.
11 March 1906 To a saddle girth	2s. 0d.
30 Sept. 1806. Shoeing the Mare	3s. 4d.
4 Jan. 1813. Corn for the Circuit Horse	£1. 14s. 4d.

Among the places mentioned in the frequent charges for travelling expenses are Newburgh, Inverury (sometimes spelled Inverurie), Meldrum, Elgin, Banff, Brechin, Arbroath and Dundee.

The small societies in the outlying towns and villages looked forward eagerly to the visits of the preachers, but it was no picnic for the preachers. Thomas Rutherford, who was

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the preacher in Aberdeen in 1775, has left us this account of one of his tours from Aberdeen in that year: –

“I set out on the Northern Circuit, which was 150 miles round through a waste and desolate country and bad roads. My first place was Inverurie. Being obliged to go several miles round, on account of the ice on the river, I did not get there until after dark. Tuesday I rode through dreary country and deep roads to Huntly...

...I rode to Banff, which stands on the coast, and preached, and met the Society there. The house in which we lodged was a large gloomy place, with scarcely any furniture in it except a bed on which an old woman lay bedridden. My foot was on the floor near the foot of hers. It had neither posts nor curtains, but that I did not mind: my fear was lest it should not be clean, and indeed appearances were much against it in that respect. Hence I lay down on it with great reluctance, and felt very uncomfortable for some minutes. In a little time I began to think – suppose I had tonight such a bed as I deserve, I should have a bed of flames. Then whether ought I to murmur or be thankful? In the strength of the Lord I will endeavour to be thankful. Lifting up, therefore, my heart to the Lord in praise and prayer, I turned on my side and fell asleep, and did not awake until daylight began to make its appearance, not do I remember in all my life ever to have had a more comfortable night’s rest.”

Many of the preacher’s journeys were made on foot, as the following entries in the Society’s account book bear witness: –

“4 June 1811. Towards walking the Circuit (S Kittle and J. Dunbar)	£1. 0. 0.
July 1812. Allowed to Mr. Bell and Kittle for walking the circuit	£1. 0. 0.

Matthew Lumb, who was stationed in Aberdeen in 1786, has left us an account of one such journey via Elgin, Banff, Fraserburgh and back to Aberdeen, which he “found to be a Goshen indeed” after struggling through deep snow. The following is but a brief extract: –

“...I left Elgin four days before Christmas on foot, in a great snow and a hard frost. The first day the frost so affected my heel that it became a great sore. The next morning I was very lame, and thought I could not walk a quarter of a mile; yet before on the Sabbath night, but was so lame that I stood upon one leg while I preached...”

With this general picture in our mind, we turn back the pages of our Methodist scrapbook to follow a little more closely the domestic affairs of the Aberdeen Society.

## CHAPTER TWO.

### The Queen Street Chapel — Domestic Affairs.

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The first meeting place of the Aberdeen Society was in Barnett's Close, connecting Flour Mill Brae and Guestrow. (*Behind Esslemont and Macintosh.*) As most of the property in Barnett's Close was demolished before the war, it has not been possible to trace this first home of Aberdeen Methodism. In quick succession the Barnett's Close room was exchanged for a house on the north side of Queen Street and that for one in Lodge Walk. These all proved too small for the virile Society and in 1764 the erection of a chapel in Queen Street was commenced. Wesley records having preached in the shell of the building in June 1764 before it was completed, and he frequently preached here on subsequent visits. This Queen Street Chapel remained the home of Aberdeen Methodism until 1818.

The Aberdeen Public Library possesses a splendid series of three maps of Aberdeen in the eighteenth century, on two of which the Methodist Meeting House (as the Queen Street Chapel is described) is shown very clearly. It stood back from the footpath at the North Street end of Queen Street and was midway between Queen Street and Shoe Lane – a site more recently occupied by the North U.F. Church. (*North Church of St. Andrew?*)

Apparently the building was not a pretentious one; at any rate, it was not considered worthy of inclusion in the list of Aberdeen churches which appeared in each year's Aberdeen Almanack in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Neither are the Methodist preachers included in the lists of Aberdeen ministers which graced these pages. Perhaps it is that the Methodists were considered too small fry to merit mention in such an eminently respectable publication which devoted each year considerable space to officers of the royal household and all the crowned heads of Europe.

It has not been possible to trace any illustration of plan of the Queen Street Chapel or to find any contemporary description beyond the statement in Kennedy's "Annals of Aberdeen" (1818) that it was hexagonal in shape. In actual fact, however, it appears to have been octagonal. The feu was owned by the Shoemaker Trade, but efforts to obtain information from the Incorporated Trades have unfortunately not been successful. Imagination must therefore paint the picture with such scanty help as the accounts of the Society offer.

Picture then a chapel which, probably owing to the poverty of its members, was still unfinished more than twenty years after Wesley had first preached within its walls. The chapel had been in regular use since 1764, yet in 1786 the steward wrote John Wesley informing him how it was proposed to obtain funds for "the necessary finishing of the chapel". It was only in that year that the seating was completed ("June 1786 Carpenter's bill for seats £25") and not until the following year that the plastering was done at a cost of £6.6s.

The chapel boasted a cellar and a gallery, but no vestry. The general construction must have been shoddy if we may judge from the heavy expenditure on repairs (e.g. "22 Dec. 1793. To cash paid for repairing chapel £88.5s") and from the fact that when the chapel was sold, less than sixty years after the foundations had been laid, its condition was ruinous. Yet with its walls colour-washed and ceiling white-washed, we doubt not that it was a truly homely kirk. From the fact that the whitewashing in 1788 occupied a man four and a half

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days (at a cost of 1s. 6d. per day), it seems within the bounds of possibility that a part, at any rate, of the exterior was whitewashed too.

The conditions of the streets in the neighbourhood may be inferred when we find 1d. per week regularly expended for sanding the staircase (e.g. May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1797); when in 1787 we find 1s. expended in sanding and “levelling the entry to the chapel”; in 1788, 6d. on a scraper for the door; and in 1789, 16s. 4d. on “making and paving a drain round the Church”.

Excepting for a small oil lamp on the stairs, the chapel was lighted entirely by candles until about the end of the eighteenth century, when the candles were supplanted to a very small extent by oil lamps. In 1784, six stones of candles were used at a cost of £2.14.5d. That seems to have been about the usual consumption, although the cost had increased by about 4s. a stone before the end of the century. Occasionally the candles must have been home-made for we see items such as the following:-

“16<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1800. Turpentine for candles                      1s. 1½d.”

In 1808 what must have been a perfectly dazzling transformation was wrought when the sum of six guineas was expended on the purchase of a single oil lamp which was presumably suspended from the ceiling (“4<sup>th</sup> July 1809 Lamp Chain £1.3.3.”). In passing it may be noted that in June 1820, after the Queen Street chapel had been vacated, the trustees, with true Aberdeen acumen, resolved to offer this lamp to the trustees of the Banff chapel (built that year) for £2. 10. –, and a sale was effected at that price.

For keeping the chapel clean, the caretaker received the handsome pay of 6s. 3d. a quarter in the early 1780’s, and an increase to 7s. 6d. per quarter in 1785. When, however, in 1786 a new caretaker was appointed, the trustees took the opportunity of dropping the pay to 6s. By 1793 his pay had risen to 10s. per quarter, while in 1818, when Aberdeen Methodism was about to find a new home, his pay had soared to the dizzy height of 15s. per quarter.

There was no musical instrument of any description in the chapel, the praise being led by a precentor whose services were recognised in the 1780’s and 1790’s by a half-yearly payment of 10s. “Methodism was born in song”, says the preface to our (1933) Methodist Hymn Book, and that was certainly true of Aberdeen. The congregational singing of the Queen Street Methodists was something new in the life of the city, a feature which the other churches were not slow to copy. Apparently the precentor was supported by a choir, for we find occasional payments to him in addition to his half-yearly fee of 10s.

“April 1796. Paid James Turrif for his trouble in teaching singing	5s. 0d.
Jan. 1797. Paid James Turrif for teaching singers	5s. 0d.
Mar. 1797. Paid James Turrif for teaching singers	2s. 6d.

Sunday services were held in the morning and evening. Originally evening had been chosen, instead of afternoon, so as not to clash with the services of the Episcopalians. Evening services were an innovation, but so successful did they become that soon the other churches followed the example of the Methodists.

Collections at the services were apparently received at the door on a special collection table covered with green cloth (e.g. March 1786. “A green cloth for collection table 1s. 10d.”). In 1789 a pewter collection dish was bought at a cost of 3s. 4d.

The Methodism of those days derived much of its vitality from the class meeting. In 1795 there were about 10 classes, including one at Footdee. As there was no vestry, the

classes presumably met at first in the cellar or in the body of the church. In 1787 a payment of £1. 13. 0 was made for flooring the garret. It is only after that date that we find any mention of a class-room, and it seems not unlikely that after that time the classes met in the garret of the church. There are many entries in the accounts which give some support to this supposition:—

“Jan. 1788. Coals for the class with a lamp for the staircase	2s. 6d.
Oct. 1794. Carrying up three bolls of coal from the cellar to the class room	7d.

Sacrament was administered quarterly, two preachers usually taking part in the service. Here an event must be chronicled to which only a Charles Dickens could do justice. One bottle of wine costing 1s. 6d. appears to have been adequate for most services. When then in November 1786 we find the communion wine costing 10s. 6d., some explanation is called for. Naively it is explained that “half a dozen bottles of wine was given to Mr. Taylor when sick”. This same Mr. Taylor (one of the first three ordinands for Scotland) was later to become president of the Conference.

From 1795 onwards for a few years the chapel must have had a succession of ministers or stewards in indifferent health for the cost of communion wine averages about 15s. per service. Charitable as we may desire to be, the collections at communion services do not reflect a correspondingly large increase in the number of communicants. Or is the real explanation that the struggle with Napoleon caused an increase in the price of the best port, for port appears to have been the communion wine used?

It may be of interest here to note that as late as 1841, the Methodist Conference, meeting at Manchester, resolved that no unfermented wines were to be used in the administration of the sacrament throughout the Connexion. Judgement upon our Queen Street Methodist forbears in this matter should therefore not be too harsh. It must be admitted, however, that the valiant “men of Preston” in the 1830’s were **not** echoing a clarion call first sounded by the Methodists of Aberdeen. Regretfully it must be confessed that there was little stirring of temperance sentiment in the bosoms of Aberdeen Methodists until well on in the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>. When in 1792 the trustees erected a house close by the chapel, beer was provided for the workmen at the expense of the trustees; e.g.

“3 July 1792. To drink for the men when laying the foundation 1s. 4½d.”

There are more than a dozen similar entries during the course of the building of the house, including a special charge for lintel ale, apparently when the lintels had been reached.

More than twenty years later, the trustees spent 11s. 3d. for porter for the men working in the chapel. This indeed must have been a very special celebration. It was, I surmise, a tardy celebration of the defeat of Napoleon, for the battle of Waterloo had been fought only six weeks previously. Such an event could scarcely pass unmarked, for Britain had been at war for almost forty out of the fifty-six years of the Aberdeen Society’s existence.

Few other links there are with the outside world, but one entry is too good to pass by: —

“17 July 1798. To candles at Nelson’s illumination 2s.”

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<sup>1</sup> This might also be a comment on the quality of the water supply in Aberdeen and its admixture with sewage.

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In July 1791, £1. 4. 1½d was expended on “general and circular postages at and after Wesley’s death”, followed by £2. 2. 0 spent on “mourning furniture for the Chapel.” So frequently had Wesley visited Aberdeen that his death must have seemed much more than a national loss; yet the Society’s debt to Wesley should not blind us to the faithful service rendered by a succession of able Circuit ministers in the eighteenth century. Three of them indeed – William Thompson, Joseph Taylor and William Atherton – attained to the high office of president. Thomas Olivers, whose hymn, “The God of Abraham praise”, appears in almost every hymn book today, also rendered yeoman service. But perhaps the best known of all was Duncan M’Allum, a scholarly Highlander, who was equally at home whether preaching in English or Gaelic, and whose closing years were spent as a supernumary in charge of the Stonehaven Society. A powerful preacher, he sometimes stimulated the interest of his congregations by announcing that he would preach from any text his hearers might choose to call. Apparently the so-called popular service is not a recent innovation! Much of M’Allum’s work was done on Speyside where Methodism is now as dead as the dodo, but several years were spent in Aberdeen.

## CHAPTER THREE.

### SOME FINANCIAL AND OTHER TROUBLES.

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That the Aberdeen Society was poor has already been mentioned. Wesley himself notes the fact in his Journal. Matters of finance therefore exercised the members not a little. In 1784, the total income from all sources, exclusive of a loan of £3 and a contribution of the same amount by Conference, was £48. 10. 2d. More than half of this total was derived from class and ticket money (£18. 7. 4½d.) and seat rents (£9. 18. 6d.). Collections totalled £18. 0. 1¾d., an average of less than 7s. per week. Only on one occasion in that year did the Society's collections exceed £1, which was when John Wesley preached, the total on that Sunday being £1. 1. 2¼d.

The largest item of expenditure that year was the preacher's allowance, which amounted to 6s. 9d. per week, equivalent to £17. 11. 0. for the year. In addition he received each quarter an allowance described as quarterage. This quarterage was apparently intended to be a small fixed sum, but, as funds were often inadequate, it sometimes ended by the preacher receiving – and having to be content with – whatever was available. Thus in the year which we are considering, the total quarterage for the year amounted to £3. 7. 9¼d., which made his total receipts throughout the year average about 8s. per week.

On occasion the Society was in the sad position of out-spending its income. When in October 1784, the account showed an adverse balance of 29s. 2d., it wrung forth the anguished cry, "Lord, save Thy people", written across the cash book in what appears to be the handwriting of the preacher, Matthew Lumb, of whom we have already heard in Chapter One.

In addition to paying the preacher his quarterage and his 6s.9d per week, the Society also paid the rent of his house (£2.15.–. per annum) and the cost of his washing, candles, coals and postages. In 1786 the Society also paid the sum of 1s.4d. to have the preacher's wig dressed! Out of his 6s.9d. the preacher had to pay the wages and board of his servant as well as the cost of his own board, etc. Specimen prices ruling in the Aberdeen market at that time help one to appreciate the position. Eggs sold at 3d. per dozen; beef and mutton ranged from 1½d. to 3d. per pound of 17½ ozs.; cheese cost 4s. per stone, whilst butter sold at 6d. per lb. of 28 ozs. Yet even with these low prices, the preacher must have had considerable difficulty in making ends meet.

The position was obviously unsatisfactory; the need for an improvement was felt. Accordingly the matter was discussed with John Wesley on the occasion of his visit to Aberdeen in 1786, the stewards submitting proposals in writing to Wesley for his approval. The original of this letter now hangs in the minister's vestry at Crown Terrace and is one of two Wesley relics prized by the Church.<sup>2</sup>

Reverend Sir,

As a gracious God has now pointed out a way, which he has (blessed), and we cannot doubt, but He will continue to bless: we beg leave to lay the

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<sup>2</sup> The other is "John Wesley's Chair", kept in the Sanctuary as a Minister's Chair.

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following proposal before you, for your approbation, and if you approve thereof, put your name to it, and it shall be immediately adopted. We desire, as far as in our power lies, to do every thing for promoting the work, as well as for the comfort of our Preachers.

First to borrow money and build a House for them to live in; and as far as we can, provide a fund to pay the money borrowed; and we think it can be done as follows.

Viz. We have heard of the Plan adopted (sic) by our Dublin Brethren; of allowing their Preacher £40 a year. We would do the same as follows. Viz. Give them weekly 11/- which is £28.12.– a year and £3 each quarter which is £12. This makes £40.12.– and out of this let them provide for themselves Meat, Drink, washing Attendance, Coals, Candles, Letters, &c, &c, &c. and we will provide them Lodging and all necessary Furniture. We purpose to provide this sum without the Seat money or the rent of the Shop to be built; reserving this for Interest money, Ground Rent and reducing the money borrowed for Building the House, and other necessary finishing of the Chapel.

I am, Rev<sup>d</sup> Sir,

For Myself and Breth<sup>n</sup> The Trustees and Leaders  
Yours affectionately &c.

Aberdeen 23rd May 1786

Rob<sup>t</sup> Imlach Steward

I entirely approve of this

Signed.

John Wesley

The agreement was duly brought into operation as the following entry indicates: –

“13 June 1786. To the Preachers’ Weekly Allowance

Agreeable to the plan adopted this day

11s.

The rising cost of living occasioned by the war with France made a modification of the arrangement necessary in 1794. The new arrangement does not mention quarterage, but the cash book shows that the £3 per quarter continued to be paid. The net result of the change was therefore an increase of 3s. per week. The minute of the new arrangement reads as follows: –

“25<sup>th</sup> June 1794.

This evening there was a full meeting of leaders and elders to consult about the best manner of supplying the wants of the preachers, when the following was agreed upon by the unanimous consent of the whole, viz: –

Eight shillings for board

Two shillings coal and candles

Two shillings for a servant

One and sixpence for letters and washing

Sixd. extra for removal to circuit and every other occasional expenses,

in all fourteen shillings every week being everything the preacher can claim excepting a free house, necessary furniture, and what the horse may cost when in town.

Alexr. Kilham, Minister,

John Townsend,

William Simpson,

James Bruce,

Patrick Morison,

Robt. Imlach,

Alex. Clinterty,

William Stephen,  
Robt. Johnston,  
Robert Ogg,  
James Stewart.”

As the cost of living rose, further adjustments were made from time to time. In 1817, towards the end of the Queen Street chapel days, the weekly allowance had risen to £1.

It has not been possible to discover the whereabouts of the manse before 1787, but during the winter of 1786/7 a house was built in Queen Street close to the chapel, in accordance with the arrangement which John Wesley had approved. The upper flat of this house remained the manse for thirty years, after which a manse in Mounthooly was rented. In this Queen Street flat the minister was installed at Whitsunday 1787, the expenses attending the flitting being one shilling. The accounts contain many interesting items relating to the furnishing of this house, from “a bedstead mounted with curtain” costing £2.10.0d., to items such as “a mugg”, a mustard pot and a “wash tubb”. Nine yards of linen was bought at 1s.2½d. per yard to make into a pair of sheets, the making up costing threepence.

Before the building of the manse in 1786/7 the Society appears to have been free from debt. The building of the manse and the finishing of the chapel placed the Society in debt to the extent of £130; from this point until 1860, the Society was constantly struggling with debt. In 1792/3, a tenement house in Queen Street was built at a cost of over £400, the rents from which probably provided a good return. The building of that house and the heavy chapel repairs, however, soon increased the total debt to about £600, below which sum it was not to fall for a few decades.

Notwithstanding the incubus of this debt, the members showed a commendable interest in the wider sphere of Methodism. Before the death of Wesley they had already begun regular contributions to the Kingswood Schools. Before the end of the eighteenth century, collections for missionary work had begun. In Dec. 1805, the missionary collection amounted to £6. 2. 6d. at a time when the normal Sunday collection was still only about £1. The following advertisement appeared in the Aberdeen Journal for Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1808 for which the cash book shows a payment of 3s. :-

“A sermon is to be preached at the Methodist Chapel, Queen Street, the next Sabbath evening for the benefit of the West India Mission by the Rev. Jos. Kitchen. Service to begin at six o'clock”.

The cash book indicates that this resulted in the sum of £7 being sent to the West India Mission.

Herself in need, the Queen Street chapel was ever ready to help others, e.g.: –

“5 March 1707. Cash sent to Inverness for new chapel	£3. 3. –.
21 June 1808. To Maryport Chapel	£1.16.10.
5 April 1808. To the Bible Society	£3.14.0¾.
4 Feb. 1812. Given to Paisley Chapel	£4. –. –
7 March 1815. To Seven New Chapels in Scotland	£6. 6. –.”

Within the Society, the needs of the poor were not overlooked. In 1817, a shilling was expended for a chair to take a sick woman to the infirmary. Collections at sacrament were regularly taken for the poor. When Brother Smith died in 1791, the Society bore the

## Early Methodism in Aberdeen

funeral expenses amounting to 16s. 4d. Bills of the doctor for attendance were paid as a debt of love, e.g.: –

“11 Dec. 1707. Paid Dr. French for Mr. Stevenson	£1. 1. –.
10 Sept. 1798. To Dr. French for Mrs. Doncaster	15s. 6d.
28 Oct. 1808. Drs. attendance on Mr. Wellbourne	£1. 1. –.
25 Dec. 1810. Towards wife’s (Mrs. Kittle) lying in	£1. 12. –.

Frequent contributions were made to the infirmary (e.g. 14 Jan. 1799 £2. 10, 1.), the dispensary (e.g. 13 April 1798, 10s. 6d.), the workhouse (e.g. 9 Feb. 1801, 10s.), and the lunatic hospital (e.g. 24 Aug. 1802, £2. 6. 6.). At a public mid-week meeting in Feb. 1808, £2. – 4d. was collected for “the publick kitchen”. Items such as these were not rare incidents; they are scattered throughout the cash books in the Queen Street chapel days.

The struggling Methodist Societies or groups at Woodside, Bucksburn, “the cove in Nigg”, Newburgh, Mounie, Meldrum, Ellon, Peterhead, Inverurie, Fordie (near Torphins), and Stonehaven were frequently helped by these warm-hearted Aberdeen Methodists, e.g.: –

“22 June 1794. Deficiency of County Quarterages	£6. 13. 6.
28 June 1795. County Quarterages deficient	£6. 13. –.
10 July 1798. Deficiencies in the Country	£2. –. –.
12 July 1803. Allowed towards the deficiencies of the Circuit	£25. –. –.
25 June 1805. Mounie Board	£4. 13. –.
25 June 1805. Inverury Deficiencies	£1. 4. –.
2 July 1810. To help Meldrum	£2. 1. 10.
17 Oct. 1815. Given to Peterhead Chapel	£10. –. –.

Yet financial worries were not the only ones facing the Society. Wesley had written of the Aberdeen Society as “knit together in peace and love”, but the waters were occasionally troubled. One is intrigued to know what is behind the following: –

“Aberdeen, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1786.

It is agreed this day by us the under Subscribers, Preachers, Leaders and Stewards of the Methodist Society here, that all matters necessary to be kept secret for the good order of Society that may be canvassed in this Meeting, shall not be revealed by any of us under no less penalty than pay five shillings for each offence into the common stock of Society.

Jos, Taylor,  
Richd. Watkinson,  
Robt. Imlach,  
Wm. Milne,  
William Berry,  
Robt. Johnston,  
Patrick Morison,  
William Simpson.”.

Could it be that there was already an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the rigid discipline imposed by Wesley and that there was a seeking after greater freedom in matters of church government? When, however, Alexander Kilham (who in 1797 broke away to form the Methodist New Connexion, becoming its first secretary) tried to foster these views, he met with little immediate success – although his influence may have been at work in the small secession of 1798. Conference in 1797 had rejected a proposal to admit lay representatives to District meetings and in 1798 a number of the Queen Street members joined with a few from churches of other denominations to form the first Congregational

church in Aberdeen – incidentally the first in Scotland. The initiative seems to have been that of George Moir who had been a prominent Methodist. The group erected a chapel in George Street which was later replaced by one in Belmont Street.

A more serious threat to the Society came in 1816, arising out of differences between minister and members in regard to church government. The minister, Joshua Bryan, unable to win over the people to compass Jericho, determined to assail the city alone. Denouncing the members in a fiery sermon from the Queen Street pulpit one Sunday evening, he declared that the Aberdeen Methodist Society had ceased to exist. With a sense of the dramatic, the reverend gentleman tore all the Society class papers to shreds before the eyes of his astonished congregation, declaring his intention of forming a new society founded on rules conforming to his own views. But the Society which was declared dead refused to lie down. A District meeting of ministers, called to investigate the trouble, heard evidence from Mr. Bryan and members of the church. The enquiry resulted in the suspension of Joshua as a minister until the following year's Conference.

With all these troubles – financial and other – is it any wonder that we hear an occasional murmur of complaint such as is recorded in the minutes of the March Quarterly meeting of stewards and leaders in 1817: –

“. . . they have agreed that the other country parts that have long burdened Aberdeen be laid before the meeting as necessary to be cut off unless they make a way to support themselves; have agreed further that, having learned that all our present preachers are leaving us, to send a letter to Conference relating the present state of our affairs, etc., etc.

Signed.            J. Smetham  
                          J. Thomson  
                          R. Jaffray

The answer of Conference was to send Valentine Ward, Chairman of the District, whose preaching attracted crowds as great as Wesley had done. We shall hear more of him in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR.

### The Long Acre Chapel.

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The Rev. Valentine Ward appears to have been a man of forceful personality whose consuming passion was the purchase or erection of chapels. In the seven years to 1819 he was responsible for the building or purchase of fourteen chapels (including Nicolson Square, Edinburgh) in Scotland at a time when there were less than four thousand members and less than thirty preachers north of the Border.

In 1705 the Episcopalians had built St. Andrew's church in Long Acre – at that time a cul de sac approached from King Street. This they replaced with a new St. Andrew's in King Street, which was consecrated in July, 1817.

The Queen Street chapel at this time (1817) was quite inadequate to accommodate the huge crowds which gathered in the street an hour before the Sunday evening services. Moreover, the chapel was in a very poor state of repair. What more natural, then, than that the Methodists should cast a covetous eye on the vacant St. Andrew's in Long Acre. The outcome was that St. Andrew's was bought, payment of the purchase price of £680 being authorised by the Trustees in Dec. 1818. A condition of the sale was that the Methodists should not use the name "St. Andrew's". This is the chapel of which a picture hangs in the minister's vestry at Crown Terrace. The Methodists had no use for the organ (indeed it was not before the Crown Terrace days that they aspired even to a harmonium!) which was taken out and sold to Gordon's Hospital. In passing it may be mentioned that Wesley had written of his visit to Gordon's Hospital in his Journal:—

25<sup>th</sup> May 1763. "About noon I went to Gordon's Hospital, built near the town for poor children. It is an exceeding handsome building, and (what is not common) kept exceeding clean. The gardens are pleasant, well laid out, and in extremely good order; but the old bachelor who founded it, has expressly provided that no woman should ever be there."

But the acquisition of the Long Acre chapel was not enough for the doughty Valentine Ward. Although the seating capacity of the old St. Andrew's was eight hundred and eighty (as shown in the register of seat rents kept by the Methodists after the take over), Ward planned to built an even larger chapel in King Street, near where Summerfield Terrace was later opened up. The acquisition of the Long Acre chapel was looked upon merely as a temporary expedient. Even before the Society had moved into the Long Acre chapel, Ward had already attended a public roup on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1818 to acquire the King Street feu.

"The articles and conditions of roup therein referred to having been read over and a sand-glass set up by the judge ... Rev. Valentine Ward (was) declared the purchaser".

One surmises that the business acumen of the trustees had not survived the onslaught of Mr. Ward. Here was a Society burdened with two chapels (for the Queen Street chapel had still not been sold) and a piece of land on which it was committed to build a new chapel within a short specified period – subject to a penalty in the event of failure to do so.

Ernest Wilkinson M.A.

To dispose of the Queen Street chapel proved no easy matter. In October 1818 the idea of selling it to “the congregation belonging to Rev. M. Angus” (whoever he was!) was broached but nothing came of it. Five months later the chapel “excepting the wood in the body of the chapel and the pulpit” was offered unavailingly to a Mr. Watt for £280. An abortive advertisement appeared in the Chronicle in June 1819, followed by another in the Aberdeen Journal in April 1820.

But the difficult financial position daunted neither Valentine Ward nor the trustees for on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1819 it was resolved “to procure a plan and specification for elevating the chapel so as to admit another gallery” — this to a chapel intended to be used only temporarily! One wonders whether Dr. Jabez Bunting (four times president of the Conference and its secretary from 1814 to 1819 and from 1824 to 1827) had Aberdeen in mind when he wrote regarding Scottish Methodism north of Dundee: –

“I think if Methodism in Scotland were put up for auction, it would be the best thing that could be done with it ... We have spent more money in Scotland than we can account for to God, or to our people”.

Gradually sanity returned. The Queen Street chapel (the first Methodist chapel to be built in Scotland) was ultimately sold. The idea of building a new chapel in King Street was abandoned, although it was not until 1826 that Valentine Ward (no longer a minister in Aberdeen) wrote as follows to regularise the position.

“Leeds, 25/2/1826

Sirs,

I hereby renounce all right and title to the piece of ground on the east side of King Street, Aberdeen feued out to me for behoof of the Methodist Society in Aberdeen upon the 31<sup>st</sup> day of January 1818 in case you should be pleased to accept of the same.

I am,

Your obedient Servant.  
Valentine Ward

To the Hon. the Magistrates  
of Aberdeen”

With the departure of Valentine Ward from Aberdeen, the Society appears to have settled down to a period of realism and consolidation, and, starting with a membership of rather more than three hundred in seventeen Society classes, there followed more than half a century of work and worship in the Long Acre chapel. After that period came the removal to Crown Terrace in 1873.

In January 1901 the trustees decided to consider the possibility of building new premises in a “thoroughly central position” on central hall lines, but the idea was abandoned when it was learned that the cost would exceed £3,000. Today the Society still bears its witness in the Crown Terrace chapel which in December 1973 will celebrate its centenary.

A fascinating story could be told of the century and a half since the opening of the Long Acre chapel, but that is not within the compass of this small booklet. We close the pages of our scrapbook in admiration, in gratitude and in humility. Great is our debt to these early Aberdeen Methodists. As heirs of the past and custodians of the present, may we realise our obligations as architects of the future.

## Early Methodism in Aberdeen

### **APPENDIX NO. 1.**

#### **SOURCES.**

JOHN WESLEY, "Journal"

Deeds, minute books, account books, and records of baptisms and marriages.

Deeds of 9, Arbuthnott Street, Stonehaven.

Aberdeen Almanacs and Directories in the University Library, Aberdeen.

Old maps of Aberdeen in the Aberdeen Public Library.

Copies of newspapers ("Chronicle" and "Aberdeen Journal") of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the Aberdeen Public Library.

Papers in the Aberdeen Town House regarding Valentine Ward and the proposed chapel in King Street.

New Statistical Account of Scotland.

"Verbatim accounts of the early beginnings of the Wesleyan Methodists in Aberdeen up to the year 1822 by a chronicler of that year" (Writer unknown).

SWIFT, "Romance of Banffshire Methodism" (1927).

SWIFT, "Methodism in Scotland" (1947).

DIACK, "Sketch of Methodism in Aberdeen" (1901).

MARTIN, "Ministers and probationers of the Methodist Church" (1957).

GAMMIE, "The Churches of Aberdeen" (1909).

BULLOCK, "Centenary Memorials of the First Congregational Church, Aberdeen" (1898).

THOM, "History of Aberdeen" (1811).

KENNEDY, "Annals of Aberdeen" (1818).

SMITH, "A New History of Aberdeenshire" (1875).

MORGAN, "Annals of Woodside and Newhills" (1886).

FINDLAY, "A History of Peterhead" (1922).

MURRAY, "History of the Lodge of Stonehaven No. 65 (formerly No. 78)" (1922).

ANDERSON, "History of Gordon's Hospital" (1896).

"The Book of Bon Accord" (1939).

## APPENDIX NO. 2.

### A FEW INTERESTING ITEMS FROM THE ACCOUNTS OF THE ABERDEEN SOCIETY.

- (1) **Sept. 1786. “Pewter for tokens 2s.”**  
The tokens were presumably evidence of membership of the Society or of being on the roll of communicants.
- (2) **Nov. 1783 “Sealing wax for seat tickets 6d.”**  
Apparently the letting of sittings was an important matter!
- (3) **July 1809 “His Majesty’s Subsidy 3s. 8d.”**  
There are almost annual similar items from 1790 onwards. This was a tax granted by the House of Commons to the King “for urgent needs of the Kingdom”. Presumably the urgent need here was occasioned by the Napoleonic War.
- (4) **May 1793 “Cash paid for police tax 5s.”**  
There are similar items in most subsequent years. Scotland had a Light and Watching Act much earlier than England. Its application was optional. Where a parish decided to have lighted streets and police protection, the cost was met by a rate on land and buildings.
- (5) **Dec. 1913 “Militia Men’s Wives 12s. 9d.”**  
July 1816 “Militia Tax 2s. 9d.”  
These are two of several similar charges, the money being paid to the Land Tax collector in Aberdeen. Under an Act of 1757 the obligation of providing men for the Militia had been placed on a county and parish basis, the cost being met by owners of property.
- (6) **6<sup>th</sup> March 1810 “Collection on the King’s Fast Day (given to the poor) £1.10.3.**  
In addition to the fast days appointed by the Christian Church, certain fast days were fixed from time to time by royal proclamation at times of national calamities, or national thanksgiving. According to “Wharton’s Law Lexicon”, the last day so appointed was enjoined during the Indian Mutiny by royal proclamation in the London Gazette of 25<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1857. It has not been possible to ascertain the circumstances of the fast day observed by the Aberdeen Methodist Society on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1810. Could it have been connected with a return of the madness of King George III?

*The Long Acre chapel was used until 1873, when the Society moved to their present premises in Crown Terrace. The building was demolished in 1904 to make way for an extension to Marishall College. The painting of the Long Acre building is still in the vestry in 2003.*

Original version printed by K. B. Printers, Bournemouth

## Early Methodism in Aberdeen

*The Ministers  
of the Methodist Church in Aberdeen  
founded by the Apostle of God  
John Wesley in 1759*

1759 Christopher Hopper	1817 Valentine Ward	1901 Herbert Workman
1760 James Kershaw	1820 Thomas Bridgeman	1903 Benjamin Hawkins
1761 William Fugill	1823 Benjamin Andrews	1905 Arthur Hoyle
1762 William Thompson	1825 John Shipman	1911 John Leedal
1763 Thomas Hanby	1827 Robert Nicholson	1914 Warburton Lewis M.A.
1765 Joseph Thomson	1830 Thomas Cocking	1919 Charles Hunter B.A
1766 Thomas Taylor	1832 Robert Thompson	1923 James Dixon
1767 James Brownfield	1834 William Constable	1924 Ernest Trounson
1770 George Storey	1836 James Rosser	1927 Vincent Taylor Ph.D. D.D
1772 Duncan Wright	1838 William France	1930 Herbert Benson
1773 Thomas Dixon	1840 William Wears	1934 Horrocks Howard
1774 Robert Wilkinson	1842 William Lindley	1938 Lamplough Doughty B.A. B.D.
1775 William Eels	1845 George Scott D.D.	1944 Fred James
1777 Francis Wrigley	1848 Peter Samuel	1949 Harry Whitehead
1778 Joseph Saunderson	1850 John Hannah	1954 John Walsh B.A.
1781 Peter Mill	1852 Jabez Palmer	1960 James Gaskell
1782 Andrew Inglis	1855 William Hales	1964 Douglas Spear C.B.E. M.A.
1783 Duncan M'Allum	1857 John Drake	1970 Haydn Wainwright
1785 Joseph Taylor	1860 John Reacher	1977 David Hall M.A. M.Th.
1787 Robert Johnson	1863 Thomas Parker	1983 Harold Bowes BD
1789 Duncan M'Allum	1866 John Holmes	1988 Gerald Bostock MA PhD
1791 Thomas Vasey	1869 John Bell	1996 David Collinson M.Th.
1792 Alexander Kilhorn	1871 Newton Penny	2001 Colin Wilson B.A.
1795 William Stephenson	1872 William Brewins	2005 Ian Anderson B.A.
1797 John Doncaster	1873 Inglis Walsh	
1798 Duncan M'Allum	1876 Thomas Hornell	
1800 John Saunderson	1879 Woodward Spencer	
1802 John Townsend	1882 Samuel Sheard	
1804 William Welborne	1883 John Judge	
1806 John Phillips	1886 John Pater	
1808 Joseph Kitchen	1889 John Barrow-Clough B.D	
1810 Samuel Kittle	1892 Benjamin Bear	
1812 Duncan M'Allum	1895 James Nattrass B.A.	
1815 Joshua Bryan	1898 Frederic Platt M.A. B.D.	

List of Ministers of the Methodist Church in Aberdeen, as kept in the vestry.