

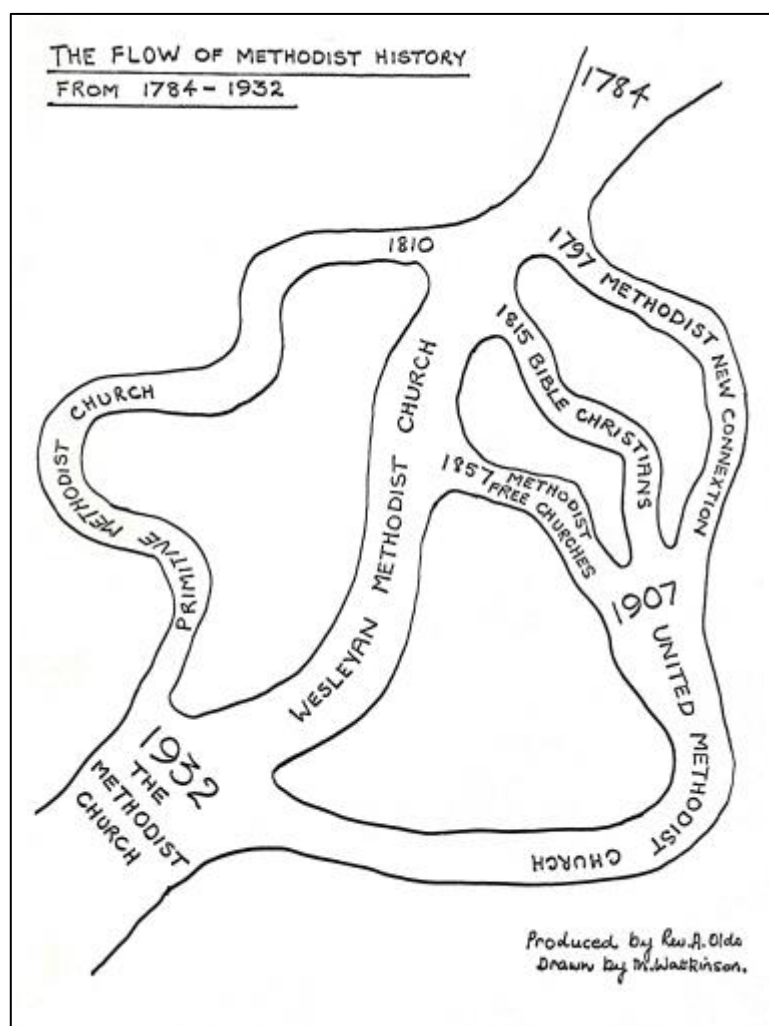
# Early Methodism in Chepstow

The records of the early days after Wesley's visits are scarce. One of the first, if not the first, of the Methodist Preachers appointed to Wales, was a young man from Yorkshire called Thomas Taylor.

As John Wesley aged, he was worried that after his death, a quarter of Methodists would procure preferment in the Church, and others would become Independents, with separate congregations. In the event, Wesley was wrong in his fear- the Methodists separated from the Anglican Church and their numbers increased. However when Wesley died in 1788, there were already some in Methodism who did not altogether hold with some of his ideas, and 'splits' occurred. By now, factions were breaking away, mainly on differing views of doctrinal matters from John Wesley.

## Divisions

The first breakaway was "The New Connexion" in 1797, mainly in the North of England. Then in 1806 the "Independent Methodists" broke away (still separate today) and in 1807 two men from Stoke and Burslem started having open air meetings again called 'Camp Meetings'. Conference did not like them, and eventually in 1811, the two men were expelled by Conference and the Primitive Methodists were formed. They became the largest and third offshoot from the Methodists (now called Wesleyans) and spread throughout the country from their beginnings in Staffordshire and Cheshire. The nearest 'Prims" to Chepstow, as they were known, were at Monmouth.



### **The Oxford Street building**

In 1801, a Methodist Chapel was built in what we now as Oxford Street. This lane was originally known as Little Lane, but after a number of years following the building of the Chapel it became known as Chapel Lane. As the years went by, the lane became known as Hawkesford Street, and at the present day, Oxford Street. It was described as "A proper place for Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England called Methodists", as recorded in the Bishops Register on August 4th 1801. Part of the chapel can still be seen at the back of Herbert Lewis' Store.



### **The Bible Christians**

In 1815, starting in Cornwall, the Bible Christians broke away from the Methodist Church. Their name came from the conviction that all problems can be solved by recourse to the Bible. Their style of Worship, theological emphases, and organisation, were very similar to the Primitive Methodists. Most of the 15,000 members of the Bible Christian churches of 1851, lived in Devon and Cornwall, though at the time of the 1851 Census, there were fourteen Bible Christian churches in South Wales, six in the Chepstow Area, four in the Trellech and Cwmcarvan area, one in Pontypool, two in Newport, and one in Aberavon. It would seem that the Bible Christians arrived in Chepstow in the 1860's.

The Bible Christian Movement seems to have used meeting rooms at No. 12, St Mary Street in Chepstow. An entry in their register of baptisms on January 4th 1859 shows the christening of Charlotte, daughter of Nathaniel and Maria Baker at her parents' house. Another entry on March 11th 1859, records a ceremony at the Bible Christian Chapel, Chepstow. The Chepstow Weekly Advertiser of July 21st 1877 records the laying of the foundation stone of a new Chapel. This was located on the site of the Old Swan Inn, now occupied by Moor Street Conservative Club.

#### ***From Chepstow Weekly Advertiser 21st July 1877***

*A NEW CHAPEL - On Monday last, the foundation stone of a new chapel in connection with the Bible Christian denomination, was laid on the site of the old Swan inn, Moor-street. The ceremony was performed in the presence of a large congregation, by Mr. W. Terrett, of Bristol, although the rain fell heavily, and the proceedings were interrupted by some rude fellow blowing lustily upon a brass instrument in a garden near. At three o'clock the party adjourned to the Wesleyan Chapel, where a sermon was preached by the Rev. T.P. Oliver, Chairman of the District, and after this a tea and public meeting took place, which was largely attended. It can be noted that at this time, the Wesleyans made their relatively new premises in Albion Square, available to the Bible Christians for their celebrations.*

***From Chepstow Weekly Advertiser of August 14th 1880 and May 19th 1883***

*"A Dwelling house and Shop at No. 12 for sale, and the Freehold Building recently used by the Nonconformist body called Bible Christians as a chapel for Divine Services".*

In 1907, The Bible Christian Methodists came together with several other small Methodist factions, to form the United Methodist Church. At this stage, this did not include the Wesleyans or the Prims. So the Church in Moor Street, now belonged to the United Methodist Church. (The final uniting of the various Methodist denominations did not come together until the 1932 Act of Union, when the United Methodist Church, the Wesleyans, and the Primitive Methodists united under the Methodist Conference and formed The Methodist Church as it is today).

**Wesleyan Methodists**

Whilst the first Methodist Chapel to be built in Wales was Earlswood Valley (1791) (see Earlswood Valley 200th anniversary booklet, for details on its history), Methodists in Chepstow (our Society) must have been meeting together in the 1800's, for it is recorded in Chepstow Weekly Advertiser - 29th September 1855 that the 50th (Jubilee) Anniversary was celebrated, (it must have been the Anniversary of the Society).

***From Chepstow Weekly Advertiser - 29th September 1855***

*ANNIVERSARIES - On Sunday last, the Wesleyan Methodists held their 50th (Jubilee) Anniversary. In the morning the Rev. John Harding, of Newport preached. T. Thompson, Esq. of Piercefield Park, in the afternoon addressed the children of the Sunday School who, on this occasion sang three appropriate hymns.*

**New Premises in Albion Square**

By 1855 (some 54 years later), the Wesleyan, as it was then called, in Oxford Street, had become too small for the congregation, and so it was decided to sell the premises, and build new premises in Albion Square. In the issue of the Chepstow Weekly Advertiser, dated June 23rd 1855, the Oxford St church placed an advertisement for the sale of the premises.



The site chosen for the new church was in Thomas Street, which was in a poor area of Chepstow. There is some evidence to suggest that there had been excavation work, probably to recover rock for building purposes, the resulting space then apparently being used as an ash tip. Before the completion of the sale, work had already commenced on the Albion Square Church, constructed in the Gothic Revival Style. Inscribed in stone over the front doorway of the new premises, was the date **1855** and the words "**Wesleyan Chapel**". The date over the existing doorway of our Church today still reads 1855, but the wording is now covered up with a board inscribed "**Methodist Church**" otherwise the building appears in it's original state.