

OUTCOME OF FIELD PREACHING

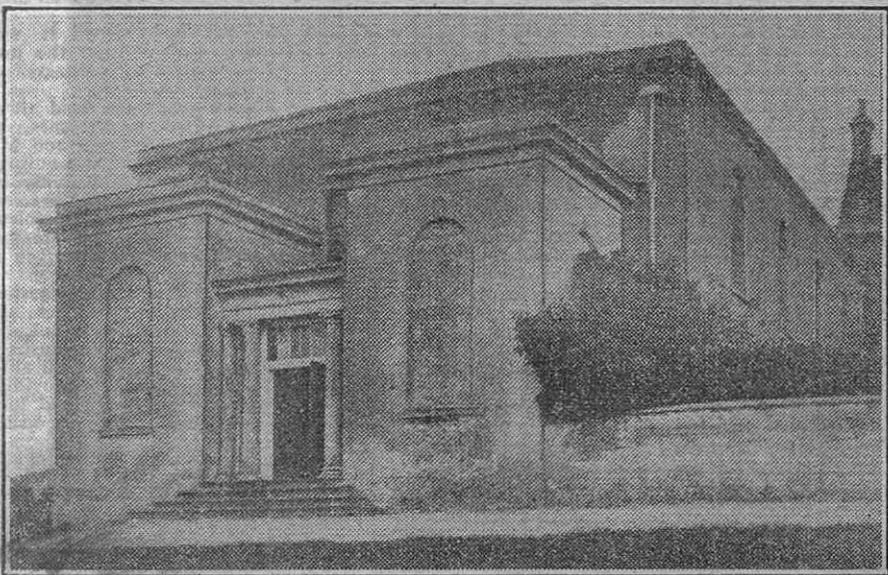
BIRTH OF RODBOROUGH TABERNACLE

VALUE OF CONCENTRATION ON FELLOWSHIP

SPECIAL BY "WANDERING WORSHIPPER"

ALTHOUGH history tells us that the 18th century was born under an unsettled sky, it brought with it bright features, which are still reflected in the life of to-day. It was at the beginning of that troublous century that George Whitefield—who is described in a recent biography, as "the greatest evangelist of the British race"—was born in Gloucester.

On Sunday I went to one of the Churches which owe their foundation to the great Field Preacher, namely Rodborough Tabernacle, and the impression I formed was that if Whitefield could return to this scene of his early labours, he would view with satisfaction the outcome of his work.



The Rodborough Tabernacle.

Continuing his peregrinations to Churches in the county, Wandering Worshipper paid a visit to Rodborough Tabernacle, which owed its establishment to George Whitefield, the great Gloucester Evangelist, on Sunday.

Next Sunday he will be at Upton St. Leonards.

Rodborough Tabernacle came into being when the re-adjustments in religious, social, and industrial life which had been necessitated by the Reformation were not by any means complete. Education was spreading,

Early Life of Whitefield

Before alluding more closely to the foundation of the Tabernacle, it might be of interest to recall something of the early life of Whitefield. As a boy, he was educated at the Gloucester Crypt Grammar School, and subsequently at Oxford he fell in with the two Wesleys and others equally concerned in the religious life of the country, most of whom took orders in the Church of England, as he did. Whitefield was the first of the band to adopt "field preaching," and he aroused Gloucestershire with his eloquence. Wherever he went he was sure of a congregation often numbering thousands. As a young man, he made his first open-air preaching tour in the Stroud district, and it is on record that on June 30th, 1739, he preached "on the bowling-green at Stroud



Members of the Sunday School and Guild.

and, as is so often the case, a "little knowledge" was proving a dangerous thing, provoking a spirit of cheap scepticism. It is recorded that outside the churches this revealed itself in atheism, and within the churches it prompted "deism." Although, as a result, morals were slack and manners were appalling, yet there were not lacking men of keen spiritual vision and fervour.

Revival Shaped

This was the state of affairs when George Whitefield was born in the year 1714 at the Bell Inn, Gloucester. The existing general attitude of dissatisfaction with the prevailing conditions of things revealed itself in the formation of a large number of societies for social and philanthropic purposes. Groups of people met to promote reforms, and it was along the lines of these Societies that the revival shaped its course when it came. In some places preachers found a real response to their call for a new interest in spiritual realities and a spirit of religious renewal began to sweep the country. It was among those whom this movement pushed into leadership that there was found the young minister around whom the early history of Rodborough Tabernacle centred.

to 2,000." He was often at Randwick, and on one occasion the church was quite full, and about 2,000 were in the graveyard, "who, by taking down the window behind the pulpit, were able to listen." On the same day no less than 20,000 assembled on Minchinhampton Common to listen to him. Huge congregations were a common thing, and on a number of occasions between 10,000 and 20,000 people constituted his audience.

Space forbids an extensive survey of Whitefield's career as a preacher, of his labours in America, or of his work with the Countess of Huntingdon. It must suffice to say that as the outcome of his work many societies came into being, and among some of the first of these were three local groups which later centred themselves at Rodborough.

Nearly 200 Years Ago

These local Societies met at Hampton, Moreton Hill, and, what was then known as Freke's Mill. The members, finding their work hindered by inadequate accommodation in 1747 planned a central meeting-house. Thomas Adams, one of Whitefield's first converts, had the oversight of arrangements, and a site was selected on the spur of the hill at Rodborough. The building was completed in 1749. Whitefield preaching in it for the first time in the following February. The great preacher paid his last visit to Rodborough in 1769. He died in

Cheshire Independent College in Manchester, and to Manchester University. His first pastorate was at Lymm in Cheshire, and after four years there he went to Oakhill, on the Mendips, where he remained for five years. It was 21 years ago last July that he went to Rodborough, succeeding the Rev. W. J. Shergold. During this long period Mr. Watson has rendered valuable service not only to his own church, but to the whole district. He is a welcomed lecturer, and a writer of real merit. His principal hobbies are music and studying antiquities. He is an able conductor of choral and orchestral works, while his facile pen has produced plays of outstanding value, and one in particular which comes to mind was "Tutankhamen," which was produced several times with great success.

Good Singing

The service on Sunday morning was a very pleasant and helpful one. Like most Non-conformist churches there was some really good singing. The congregation did not leave it entirely to the choir to do this, but joined in heartily. The choir demonstrated that they could do all that was expected of them. They rendered the anthem, "I will lift up mine eyes," to J. Clarke Whitefield's setting, and the parts being nicely balanced and the diction clear, it fell pleasingly on the ear.

limited intellectual equipment and I do not think it is wise to try to bail out an ocean with a pint pot. Some people stopped following Christ because they had not got brains big enough to understand Him."

Cause of Unrest

"There were those who considered that they finished their religious education early in life. Some finished it when leaving the Sunday School; that is just where it ought to begin. So many never advanced in any spiritual conception or realisation after the age of 20 years, but they retained the same ideas of God. I fancy that a good deal of our unrest in spiritual things, our dissatisfaction, and our symptoms of hopelessness are all due to the fact that at the back of our minds we think that we actually know just a little better than Christ. The happy religion is the one which says 'God is, and I will trust Him.' People perish because they think they know better than God."

Strength of Church

It is quite apparent that the strength of Rodborough Tabernacle—which is one of the leading Congregational bodies in the Stroud district—is in its Church fellowship. It is quite apparent that the strength of the place is concentrated upon. The Church has a membership of between 10 and 15 each week, summer and winter alike, they

WHITEFIELD TABERNACLE



Left to right: Messrs. R. White (deacon), E. Daniels (deacon), F. C. Humpidge (deacon), A. A. Horder (deacon and secretary), Mr. Restall (chapel-keeper for fifty years) and Mr. F. Shaylor (deacon).

...the following year, and by his will to his fellow worker Adams. The ... not receive this, however, for he ... month before his renowned leader.

Trial of Early Workers

The ancient workers at Rodborough had to contend with in the early days, and the Tabernacle passed through many trying vicissitudes. There was quite a lot of opposition to the work, and some idea of this can be gathered from the reminiscences of John ... who was known as the "Patriarch of Whiteshill," by being a native of that ... In a letter to the Rev. Benjamin ... who was pastor of Rodborough Tabernacle in 1844, he wrote: "While the Tabernacle at Rodborough was building and nearly up to the roof, a considerable number of wicked men agreed together to go by night and demolish the building. It happened to come to the ears of a man, a servant of Mr. Halliday, of Fromehall, who told the master of the circumstance. The man himself thought it was wrong; the master said it would be a pity to have the building destroyed which these poor people were erecting. 'Well,' said the servant, 'Master, if you will give me a quart of beer I will try to frustrate the design.' The master said 'I will give you the beer and one shilling if you will do as you promise.' I believe it was the same night they all met together at the buildings, and before they began the work of destruction, Mr. Halliday's man said to the others 'Let me go up into the Grove, and if I hear anyone coming I will give you a signal.' He retired for a short time, and then gave a loud whistle which the others hearing, took to their heels and ran away affrighted. Thus God showed His power in counteracting the designs of the enemies of His cause."

Virile Church Life

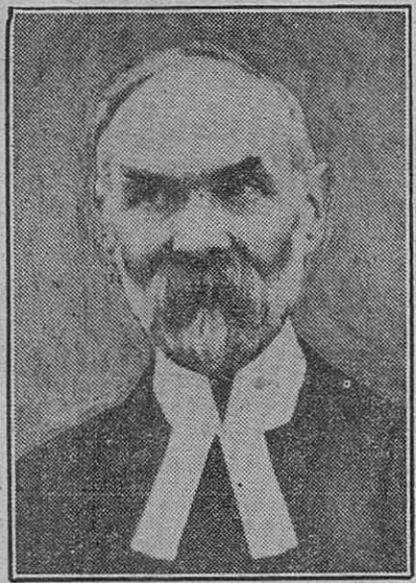
Many have been the self-sacrificing workers connected with Rodborough Tabernacle since those early days, but probably never has the church life there been so virile and active as it is to-day. It is rich in young life—there are something like 230 in the Sunday School, and it has a particularly strong church fellowship.

Pastor for 21 Years

The church is fortunate in having the Rev. C. E. Watson as its pastor. It is not necessary to be intimately acquainted with him to discern the real man. He possesses a pair of the most kindly, albeit shrewd and humorous eyes which, looking out from under his bushy eyebrows, convey an instant impression of sympathetic friendliness. All who are privileged to know Mr. Watson are conscious of having a real friend. There is nothing petty or narrow about him, for his whole bearing speaks of broad-mindedness and tolerance.

The consideration shown to the children was another nice feature of the service. Most, if not all of them, had been to Sunday School, and they had filed into the Church with their Tri-Sigma banner. There was a little address for their benefit, and before the sermon began they were allowed to leave the building. This they did as quietly as could be expected.

In the course of his sermon, Mr. Watson remarked that at the crown of His fame, Christ always had a large crowd to follow Him, but for different reasons they forsook



The Rev. C. E. Watson.

Him one by one until at last He mounted Calvary alone. "It may very well be that in that crowd, each one of us might see someone who, but for the Grace of God might be like ourselves," said Mr. Watson. "So many people only have faith in God up to a point. They lose faith when the limit of their understanding is reached. Some lose it when they have pain and illness and will not say 'God must be good in spite of everything.' They say, 'I cannot understand it.' How many people said the War killed their faith. They meant that it killed what they called their faith, which only went up to a certain point. Because God did not cease to be God and just become an interposer—a bit of machinery—and alter by a divine act what human desire and will had agreed to, some people said there was no God. Any great calamity would find a lot of people saying, 'I cannot understand; there cannot be a God.' They did not understand that there was no understanding of God. "People to-day said they could not understand a miracle. Of course not, it would not be a miracle. People asked, 'How can God be God and man?' I am glad that I do not know. If I understood it, I should be a god myself. I am a human being with a very

have a meeting of a devotional rather than administrative character, although administration comes into it occasionally, and this regularly attracts an attendance of between 50 and 70 members. It would be difficult to find a more hard-working general congregation than at Rodborough, and this helps to explain its success in all the departments of its work.

Among the young in particular, good work is being done. In 1917 the Guild of the Tri-Sigma was formed from the Sunday School, and this is a very vigorous organisation. It has many sections, some of which meet on Sundays, and others on week-days. The Young People's Guild, like the Church itself, is run on fellowship lines, and there are about 90 members, all of whom are over 14 years.

A Successful Plan

The Guild meets in what is known as the Little Chapel, a delightful little building which in 1925 was constructed and equipped by a gift of Mr. Reginald Tyrell. Other bodies connected with the Church include the Women's Guild, and there are meetings for young folk in the way of clubs and classes. Mr. Watson told me that they concentrated more on the religious side of the work than on the social side. "The latter," he said, "cares for itself, our principle being that if the religious side is right the social life will arise out of it and not the opposite. We find that this plan works very successfully."

The Tabernacle has its troops of Scouts and Guides. Mr. Cyril Taylor is the Scoutmaster, and Mr. Harry Haines the assistant scoutmaster, while the captain of the Guides is Miss Mildred Humpidge, who has Misses Nes'a Beard and Phyllis Beard as her lieutenants.

Some of the Officers

The Tabernacle has reason to congratulate itself on having an excellent body of officers. The Church Secretary is Mr. A. A. Horder, who has been connected with the church for at least 30 years. Mr. Horder, who radiates geniality, is very active in church work, and he is also responsible for the Young Men's Bible Class on Sunday afternoons. Mr. Fred L. Daniels, who is one of the managing directors of the firm of Messrs. T. H. and J. Daniels, Ltd., engineers, of Lightpill, is the Church treasurer. He has been associated with the Tabernacle all his life, and is an enthusiastic Congregationalist, having occupied the position of President of the Gloucestershire and Herefordshire Congregational Union. The diaconate consists of nine deacons and nine deaconesses and there is one elder, Mr. M. T. Antill, who has been at Rodborough for about 10 years, and he was formerly a manager for Siemens, the electrical firm.

Mr. Harry W. Stephens is choirmaster, and the organist is Mrs. Tooze. Included in the Church membership is Mr. A. B. Cooke, the County Councillor for Painswick and Whiteshill.

TO TAKE HIS TRIAL