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MINING, METHODISM – PRIMITIVE AND UNITED BIBLE CHRISTIAN, WESLEYAN ETC.

By R. Shambrook.

St. Cleer is a large and scattered moorland parish – 10,943 acres, it possessed what must be a record number of chapels for a rural parish. This was largely due to the Bible Christians who first pioneered work at Hedgate in 1817, although the first meeting house was formed there in or about 1812 by the Methodists.

The discovery of South Caradon mine in 1833, West Caradon in 1837, and Marke Valley in 1828, brought on a mining boom; droves of miners and their families immigrated into the area from the declining mines of West Cornwall; some villages were enlarged, others became small towns almost overnight e.g. 'Bodmonland' now known as Pensilva; the population of St. Cleer rose from 1,412 in 1841 to 393] in 1861, whilst entirely new 'townships' were formed at Cheesewring Railway (later called Minions), Tremar Coombe, a Railway Terrace (Darite).

All denominations played an important part in the evangelisation of the miners, but the Bible Christians were far and away the most active in the moorland areas. 'St. Cleer' chapel – later called Hockings House to distinguish it from the ex Free Methodist Chapel in St. Cleer village, was officially opened on 17th Sept. 1846. Further chapels were built at Commonmoor (1857) and Railway Terrace 'Darite' in 1864; one of the stalwarts of the latter was Cap'n John Holman a class teacher at the chapel, who was also joint manager with Cap'n Peter Clymo at South Caradon mine (where Holman's Shaft was named after him.)

Somewhat earlier in 1841, the Wesleyans built The Caradon chapel – later called Crows Nest or the "Cap'n's chapel", this like its Bible Christian counterpart at Darite also had close ties with South Caradon – Tom Rule the "Ranter" (after whom Rules Shaft was named), was a sidesman for many years. The Primitive Methodists or "Primitive" established chapels at Henwood (1856) – a large part of its congregation being Sharptor miners with an additional chapel at Venland near St. Cleer named 'Uriah Rooper's' after a local character. The United Methodist Free Churches in their turn established chapels at Darley (1837) – closed 1917, also at Caradon Town which was used until 1927. The 'Reformers' or Wesleyan Reform had a chapel at Lower Tremar termed the 'Calico' chapel on account of its ceiling being formed by attaching sheets of calico to the rafters and to separate it from the cow house adjacent; Billy Bray the miners' preacher often visited here and at Upton Cross the Wesleyans built a chapel in 1864 for the rapidly increasing population resulting from the flourishing nearby Marke Valley mine.

Relations between the Anglicans and the 'Chapel Folk' were not always on the best of terms however; at St. Neot the local anglican incumbent was so disturbed by the enthusiasm of the Bible Christians that he was heard to exclaim more than once "they may howl as long as they wish until 9 o'clock, but I will call a Policeman and put a stop to it after that".

Across the parish boundary in Linkinhorne, at Minions Village the United Methodist Free Church first held services in the house of Richard Edwards ('Cap'n Dick') of Marke Valley Mine, before building a chapel of their own in 1864.

Membership of all the denominations continued to increase, although the first signs of exodus from the mines were becoming apparent in the 1870s, Ministers' and Pastors' reports often ending with phrases such as "One of the most trying years the circuit has known", "The continued Mining depression", "Unparalleled Mining depression", "Mine closed last week" etc. The Caradon miners mostly emigrated to America; Jack Craze from Pensilva became a leading figure in a 'Caradon' mine in the Black Hills of South Dakota in 1874, others found their way to Arizona, and to Butte Montana; a considerable number were later to be found at Pachuca and the Real del Monte mines in Mexico.

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The effects of the great copper recession 1866 – 1880 can perhaps be no better appreciated than taking Caradon Town as an example. From a thriving village of 500 people, it became a hamlet in a matter of months, numbers of children at the school falling year after year as families moved away, houses becoming derelict, its three inns closing one after another, its one chapel (United Free Methodist) struggled gamely on until 1927, when finally through lack of support, it too closed its doors for the last time.

Competition for 'saving' the souls of miners was always very keen. All the denominations from Bible Christians to the Primitives were always up against 'That Babel' down the "drang". As droves of miners moved into the St. Cleer, Linkinhorne, and St. Ive parishes, so did their "followers". Inns, beer shops, and 'kiddlywinks' abounded; Caradon Town possessed four such houses within an area of 300 yards. The village lock-up at St. Cleer was under the same roof as the 'Sportman's Arms' where the Caradon Miners & Mechanics Frindly Society was formed in 1844. Those brave souls who dared to venture out on Saturday nights seldom returned home without at least – a black eye, or a thorough soaking, from having been thrown into a mine leat. So notorious did some places become that near riot conditions prevailed – St. Pinnock Highway became known as East Taphouse (a name it still retains) for a very good reason.

Often the Anglicans also competed for the souls of the miners. Sam Ough who helped build Hockings House Chapel, St. Cleer in 1844 was also Parish Clerk and for a time had a dual allegiance – church and chapel. He was "converted" shortly after the opening of the chapel; shortly after that whilst attending a service in the church occurred the incident, when he ejaculated "Praise the Lord" in the middle of the Vicar's sermon. The clergyman – John Richard Prettyman Berkeley ordered the churchwarden to remove Sam Ough from the church, but the churchwarden refused. The vicar had underestimated the reputation of his clerk, and to save himself from further indignity brought the service to a premature close with the benediction. The final result was that Sam Ough resigned the office of Parish Clerk which he had held

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for 38 years, and thereafter only attended the Bible Christian chapel, instead of both places of worship.

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