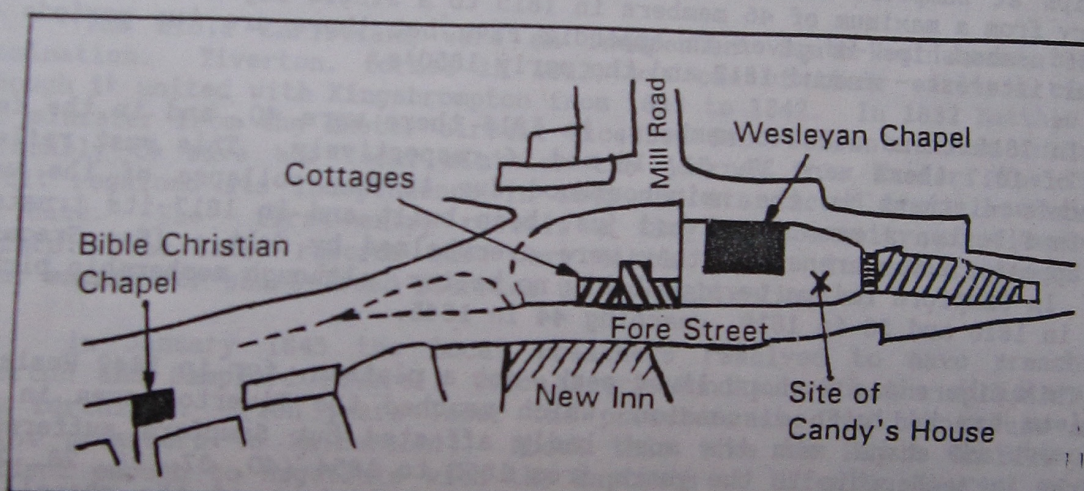


### THE LAST PIECE ...

24 years later the last piece of the site came to market. In 1830 John Curwood and his son Richard had sold the cottages and garden opposite the New Inn to Richard Loosemore of Tiverton. John's father Richard had bought the New Inn and its property in 1802 from Benjamin Dickinson. However Loosemore was adjudged bankrupt in 1842 and his cottages at Sampford were auctioned at the Angel Inn, Tiverton in December 1843 by which time he was dead. The cost of the cottages and their garden was £50 with the rents to be paid to Jane Curwood during her life time. In May 1844 the property was conveyed to the Methodists, who gained two tenants - William Harris and William Bidgood. To make everything certain one of the trustees, a Tiverton solicitor G.W.Cockram, took the deed to the Court of Chancery where it was enrolled.

### THE ASSEMBLED SITE ...

Thus in 1844 the trustees controlled the whole of the present site and in the same year the tithe map was surveyed, showing the chapel clearly but with unknown accuracy. There are differences between the Tithe Map and the later Ordnance Survey maps - are they due to inexact surveying or to building works that altered the chapel and the retaining walls around the site?



EXTRACT FROM TITHE MAP 1844

### TRUSTEES ...

The owner of the site was the body of trustees and in 1844 the local Methodists thought it was time to renew this body as it was already 24 years old. They did this in the manner of the time by conveying the property to a nominee, James Wood, who transferred it to the renewed body. At Sampford, it became a tradition that trusts were renewed with unreasonable delay, so that in 1844 there were only four surviving trustees able to act. Next time the local friends excelled themselves by waiting patiently for all the trustees to die and then had to ask the Charity Commissioners in 1888 to kindly appoint a new trust for them! With masterly inaction a leisurely 32 years passed by before the trust was renewed in 1920; once more there were only four continuing trustees. In 1954 this trust adopted the new model deed and renewed itself in the October with two continuing trustees, a mere 34 years after the previous renewal. Only a brisk 17 years elapsed before the final renewal in 1971, again with four continuing trustees. [See Appendix Three for Trustees' names]



### MORE METHODIST LICENCES ...

The licences produce still more mystery. In June 1807, five years after the chapel was licensed, Samuel Jennings, a schoolmaster, took out a licence for his house in the High Street. (Where does he fit into the Jennings' clan?) A decade later in October 1817 George Hellyer, a grocer, licensed his house. On the tithe map in 1844 George Hellyer was living in the house now next to the east of the school and thus very close to the chapel. With a recently built chapel why were leading Methodists (and their ministers) licensing their houses for worship within a short distance? Was there a problem with access to the chapel because the site had not been conveyed? There are no surviving Wesleyan licences after 1817.

### NUMBERING THE PEOPLE ...

Methodism began as a connexion of Religious Societies to which people belonged as members. When this connexion of Societies grew into a national church membership was given to the accepted and committed. Thus congregations at public worship were greater than the formal membership, although probably this has not been the case since the war. The Circuit Records include the memberships at Sampford for odd years from 1777 and then from 1805 onwards. These vary from a maximum of 46 members in 1815 to a single figure of 9 in 1945. A list of memberships is given in Appendix Five but there are two periods of particular interest - around 1817 and the early 1850's.

In 1815 there were 46 members, in 1816 there were 40, and in the four quarters of 1817 there were 37, 31, 16 and 16 respectively. This must reflect the economic distress in the neighbourhood due to the collapse of the wool trade. In Tiverton a new chapel had just been built and in 1817 its trustees sent an appeal to Conference as they were overwhelmed by debt. [See Gregory, page 16] In Sampford things were probably no better, although membership picked up to 22 in 1818 and 30 in 1819, reaching 44 in 1845.

This figure was a short lived peak, not a plateau, for in 1849 Wesleyan Methodism was racked with dissension, which reached the Tiverton area in the 1850's. Willand chapel was the most badly affected but Sampford suffered a severe drop in membership in the years from 1850 to 1854 (40, 37, 28, 28, 20). 1855 saw an increase to 26 but in the subsequent history of the chapel the membership has never exceeded 30. Today it is 19, as it was in 1778.

Some members left Sampford a few years later when a little cause was started a mile away at Whitnage, near Uplozman. Services first appeared on the plan in January 1888 and the red-brick chapel was opened in 1889.

Some statistics survive for the Sunday schools in the circuit which show that attendances were not quite as big as distant memories suggests!

1876 - 40 in morning, 60 in afternoon.

1899 - 32 in the afternoon.

1925 - 16 1/2 in the afternoon (an average of course!)



### THE BAPTISTS

In 1821 the Bishop of Exeter asked his clergy for details of their parishes. [See Cook] In reply Rector Simon Pidsley complained that Sampford church was dilapidated and not safe to be used. The canal company had pulled down part of his rectory and built the canal through his garden but they had not got round to building his new rectory. About the local dissenters he was remarkably uninformative, "There are no papists, but Methodists, and a few anabaptists - I have no means of knowing whether they are licensed or not."

In 1799 John Helier's [sic] house was licensed for an unidentified group, which may have been Baptist. Six years later Catherine Webber's house was certainly licensed by Baptists and in 1806 a Baptist Chapel was licensed. Despite these signs of Baptist home-mission work, there was no permanent success locally except at Uffculme. There were Baptists known to the Rector in 1821 but there was no reference to Sampford in a national list of Baptist chapels in 1827 [See Baptist]. The future of their chapel lay with the Methodists, but not the local ones.

### THE OTHER METHODISTS

The Bible Christians were an independent South-West based Methodist denomination. Tiverton, formed in 1822, was one of their earliest circuits, although it united with Kingsbrompton from 1823 to 1842. In 1832 Matthew Robins a BC minister from the Exeter circuit licensed John Goffin's house in Sampford - probably to save the local minister the journey into Exeter. The Tiverton circuit regained its independence in 1842 and its record books survive from that date. The first entry reveals a tiny BC community of 4 members at Sampford. The later records show very little change in membership in twenty years, except for short-lived flurries up to double figures.

In January 1845 the Local Preachers resolved to have preaching at Halberton and Sampford Peverell twice every Sunday, with the ministers there every fortnight. (Ten years later the preachers resolved it was useless to appoint preachers to Halberton.) About this time the Bible Christians felt confident enough to negotiate with the Baptists at Uffculme to rent or borrow the disused Sampford chapel. Soon the Baptists wanted their chapel back for their own preaching and in March 1849 the preachers resolved to stop preaching in Sampford, for a while at least. Presumably the Baptists met with no success for in December 1849 the BC Quarterly Meeting decided to approach the Baptists at Uffculme again, this time to buy the chapel.

In March 1850 it was resolved to buy the chapel and borrow what was not subscribed but in June that resolution was rescinded and it was agreed that the circuit would buy the chapel for £12 and rent it to the congregation for 10 shillings a quarter - which was never paid. In the BC circuit book there is a list, dated 1855, of the trustees of the chapels in the circuit. For Sampford there is a note "Freehold to the minister and circuit stewards for the time being. Sampford chapel settled as above. No trustees."

In January 1851 it was agreed to rent to Mr Goffin the "spot of land" connected with the chapel for 3 shillings a year for ten years, but in June he was to buy it for £3. However something was not quite right for in the October this sale was rescinded as the amount of land was greater than the Meeting had been made aware of!



Temporarily ceasing the preaching affected the BC cause in Sampford and in 1849 and 1850 there was only a solitary member. Their return to the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census commented, "This chapel was not opened for public worship for nearly two years but was reopened about six months since ...". After this numbers rose to as many as 8 or 9 during the 1850's and there was a burst into double figures in the early 1860's. This tailed off to 7 in 1865 and 2 in September 1870, when the Quarterly Meeting 1870 resolved to leave Sampford off the plan. In December it resolved to sell the chapel by tender.

The chapel is shown on the tithe map of 1844 as "Bryonite chapel and waste", then in the ownership of William Wood and occupied by himself. ("Bryanite" was a popular name for the Bible Christians, referring to their first leader William O'Bryan) It survives on the south side of Fore Street, 80 yards west of the present chapel and is now the garage of the adjacent house. A note in the circuit records says it was 21 feet by 13 feet by 12 feet high - internal measurements corresponding with the chapel today. On the road side is a single arched lancet window and on the house side are two arched doorways. There is virtually no indication inside of its former use as a chapel although it is likely that the pulpit was at the west end. The east end was blank until its recent conversion to a garage, so it is possible that one of the two arched doors is original and the other is a window cut down. Until recently it was divided by a partition which explains the two doors. Almost certainly the Baptists built the tiny chapel in 1806 with square-headed windows and with equal certainty the BC's gave them arched tops, probably in the 1860's.

#### SAMPFORD METHODIST CHAPEL



This map of 1904 shows the present site with the mill-pond to the north. The former Baptist / Bible Christian chapel is marked "BC". "Fore Street" is the name given in the deeds but most people just refer to "Higher Town". At this date the cottages east of the chapel survive. One projects well into the road to the south and to the north it forms a bridge over the mill road. [See Sampford, page (6)] The houses next to the school are also shown.

#### THE BUILDING ...

This is a plain, rendered building on a sloping site between the two roads. The north wall of the chapel sits on the masonry and brick retaining wall that is the boundary of the site. In 1993 the premises comprise the chapel, its porch and the later Sunday school built on to the west end of the chapel. The modern kitchen built at the north-west corner of the school replaces a more primitive arrangement. West and east of the building are graves, but the land at the side is too steep. The scanty evidence for the history of the building is the building itself, the tithe map and a little documentary evidence.

The rendered and pedimented open porch, with the date 1803, gives access to a narrow vestibule within the chapel, at each end of which are stairs to the