

Folly Remembered



Folly Methodist Church
1887 - 2004

Folly Methodist Church

**Celebration and Thanksgiving
for the life and witness of**

**The Folly Methodist Church,
Wheathampstead**

1887-2004

God be with you and before you

Anne Brown

London North-West District Chairperson

Thank you for the invitation to preach at this service of Celebration and Thanksgiving and to contribute to this booklet. This will be my first visit to Folly, and although today we shall be giving thanks for the past we will also be looking forward.

For the present members, moving on from a familiar building to worshipping with others in Wheathampstead and other churches, is a step of faith. But as Christians we are called to be a travelling people, to face the challenges of the day and move forward. Those who went before us at Folly led the way. We are now responding to the present age by making stronger ecumenical links and so maintaining our presence in the village.

I pray that the praise and worship of the Folly members will continue and will enrich other congregations as they move forward. With every good wish

Peter Barber

Superintendent Harpenden Circuit

From its conception The Folly was a 'mission' chapel. Mission is always about risk-taking for the sake of the Gospel. The risk of leaving the familiar with only the sense of God calling you to something new; the risk of travelling light and not carrying unnecessary baggage. Risk-taking is unsettling and can seem to shake everything about us and around us, and, if we are honest, none of us likes that!

However, I am reminded of the passage from the book of Hebrews, in which the writer talks about the 'shaking of everything', but reminds the, perhaps bewildered, readers: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks." (12:28)

Folly, true to its roots and true to the Gospel, has faced this shaking and it has not been comfortable. But as a chapel born in mission, you have realised that you are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken and have, once again, responded to the call and challenge of the Gospel – to leave the familiar, to travel light, and to risk all for the sake of that Gospel.

I pray that you will know that sense of God going with you and before you, and that ours is a kingdom that cannot be shaken. As you travel sing Joseph Hart's great hymn (HP277) – verse 2 reads:

'Tis Jesus the first and the last
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We'll praise him for all that is past,
And trust him for all that's to come.

Sarah Lowe Folly (2002-)

Saying goodbye all ways brings with it a sense of bereavement loss and grief. And as the memories in this book are gathered together and read they will stimulate other memories, of people, places and times. All of those things call us to stop, to give thanks and celebrate the people and the experiences that have brought richness to so many through the Folly.

It is also those memories that help us to move forward. As I was writing this I was reminded of a short verse I had come across of a newly bereaved widow writing to her late husband it read

*I thank you for the memories.
For the love you've given me to live today
And the strength to see hope in the future*

In those three short lines is encompasses all that we are. People with memories and events that shape how we cope with today and look to the future. We celebrate all that God has given

through Folly. Encounters that have helped to build Christian faith; the love of people and God that enable us to live in the present and a spirit of the pioneers that brought a place of worship into Folly and now helps us face the challenges of the 21st century. As new encounters lie ahead let us reflect on the words found at the end of the Methodist Holy Communion service for Pentecost:

The Spirit of truth lead us into all truth,
give us grace to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
and to proclaim the word and works of God;
and the blessing of God, Spirit, Son and Father,
remain with us always.

We go into the world in the power of the Spirit
to fulfill our high calling as servants of Christ.
Thanks be to God.

MWB p184

Wynn Young
United Reformed Church, Wheathampstead

On behalf of the members and friends of the United Reformed Church in Wheathampstead I would like to greet the members of Folly Methodist Church.

We give thanks to God for your faithful witness and service over the past 117 years and for the personal sacrifices you have made in order to continue your witness in Wheathampstead.

We look forward with thanksgiving to the riches you will bring to us as we now worship and witness together, having committed ourselves to becoming a joint Methodist / URC in this village.

Together, with our thanksgiving for all that is past, we rejoice in all that is to come as we go forward in Christ's name.

Messages of Greeting

Francis J Woods (1942- 1946)

Thank you for the invitation to the service of Celebration and Thanksgiving - regrettably I shall not be able to attend, owing to my age (I am now over 90!) But you will be in my thoughts and prayers.

In September 1942, when the new Harpenden Circuit was formed I came as second minister and had charge of The Folly, and lodged with Claude and Ethel Deaville for a year. Edna and I married on 7 August, 1943.

In the October of that year, the Rev Dr. Donald Soper came to conduct the Chapel Anniversary, and I was introduced to him. On hearing of my recent marriage, Dr Soper responded, "Oh, they have only just come round from the anaesthetic!"

C. Alan Stephens (1954-1957)

As a former minister of The Folly – fifty years ago! – I am naturally sorry on the one hand to hear of the forthcoming closure of the church; but on the other hand, glad to know of the prospect of sharing worship with the United Reformed Church, Wheathampstead.

I recall the Sunday services at 11am and 6pm; the Sunday School at 10am before morning service, under the superintendency of Mr Grey and Mr Deaville; my Tuesday Fellowship at 7.45pm, alternating with the Methodist Guild led by Pat Taylor.

Apart from the meetings in the church, it was my privilege to visit members and other friends in their homes, always made warmly welcome – as well as to conduct weddings and funerals.

Above all, as a preacher, I treasured the opportunities of sharing the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in all its transforming power – which, thankfully, the Lord is still allowing me to do in my second retirement.

As the Lord has so richly blessed The Folly in the past, may He continue to do so in all the vistas of worship, work and witness in the future collaboration with the United Reformed Church.

Bryan Rippin (In circuit during 1950s)

It is fifty years since, as a local preacher on trial, I first preached at The Folly, and then on two occasions later, was one of your guest preachers at the Church Anniversary. I have happy memories of the faithful members who maintained the life of a church that was so much part of their lives and the life of the wider community. I learned from you and the other 'country' churches in the Circuit, the worth and integrity of smaller churches and their valued place in the neighbourhood around them.

My strongest link, however was through my contact with the Deavilles : Ethel my good friend, Claude my truth-telling mentor - their home a second home for me and many others. Quite remarkable people, they moved from the totally different world of London and Donald Soper's ministry at the West London Mission, and immersed themselves in their new local church bringing with them the enthusiasm and dedication that inspired the Order of Christian Witness group they began and which led to the re-direction of my life and that of many others. My grateful and fond memory of them is indistinguishable from my good remembrances of The Folly.

So, as I salute the faithful discipleship of many people over the years, I also honour two dear friends who personified for me so much of the mission and life of the Folly Methodist Church.

Good wishes to you in your continued ministry!

Cliff & Val Warren (In Circuit during 1960s)

We both look back with fond memories to our time at Folly Methodist Church in the early sixties. Having then recently married, we found a warm welcome awaiting us and made many good friends there.

Although we are naturally sad to learn of the impending closure, we are nevertheless delighted to hear about the plans for sharing worship at Wheathampstead United Reformed Church and the opportunity this will present for furthering ecumenical relations in the village as a whole.

Ian Pruden (Child of The Folly b. 1967)

The Folly has been my family's spiritual home since its opening. Without The Folly and her witness, I do not think I would be doing the work I am doing in the Church today; such was the importance in my growing up of nurture and fellowship. There are many people I am thinking about at the moment as the cause moves on – especially in the family faith-sharing from my Mum, Gill, and my late Dad, Gordon, Gran and Grandad Smith and Auntie Ede French.

The Folly has always been a community where the faithfulness of God's people going about their work quietly and effectively has been a wonderful thing to see.

As you celebrate what has been, and remember at this time, I know there are many people around the country, like me, who have great reason to be thankful for the work and witness of this little place.

Claire and I send you greetings. We pray most of all that the God who has been faithful to this church over the past 117 years, will travel with you into what is yet to be.

David F Willie (1973-1978)

Daphne and I have happy memories of our time when I was minister at Folly. We were interested to read of the proposed developments and the possibility of establishing a partnership with the United Reformed Church in Wheathampstead. In my time there I, too, explored this possibility with the Rev Phipps Jones, URC minister, but at that time we did not pursue further.

We look forward to sharing in the service of Celebration as you thank God for your journey of faith so far and as you commit yourselves to him for a new and exciting phase of the journey. With our best wishes.

Geoff Hawkrige (1978-1985)

Although, regretfully, I am unable to be present today, I shall be thinking of you and remembering, with gratitude, those friends, past and present, who have served and supported the chapel, and whose fellowship my dear wife and I were privileged to share during my term as minister.

Despite being small in number, the members made up for that by their love for their place of worship and the work they did to maintain its witness. Now a new chapter is opening, and the work goes on, albeit in another place and form.

It is gratifying to realise that even in its last decade, Folly has given Methodism a fine young superintendent minister, and I am sure that in many spheres of Christian service and witness far beyond the area surrounding the little 'Bethel', its spiritual children will continue to thank God for all that the wayside shrine has meant to them. God bless you all.

Michael Waring (1981-1988)

Thank you for inviting me to comment and participate at this important moment in your life.

I have some very happy memories of Folly Methodist Church. It was always a pleasure to lead worship and to experience the warm friendship of the congregation. I was Superintendent of the Harpenden Circuit during the years 1981-88. This meant that the Centenary Celebrations at Folly took place during my time (1987). I still remember the joyful occasion when a packed house gave thanks for so many years of faithful witness. I can hardly believe that it is 17 years ago!

You are now facing a new and exciting venture in mission together with our friends at the United Reformed Church in Wheathampstead. I have knowledge and experience of some fine ecumenical partnerships with the United Reformed Church in other places, and I trust that the relationship will deepen and develop in your own area to the mutual benefit of both churches and the community as a whole. A witness to one Church, one faith & one Lord can speak volumes.

Elizabeth joins me in sending warm greetings

George Kenny (1985-1995)

I send you greetings from Shirley and myself, as you prepare to embark on a new ecumenical venture in Wheathampstead.

Some weeks ago there was an article in *The Methodist Recorder* entitled "The Cost of folly" – folly with a small "f", because it referred to the folly of war. But the title seems quite apt when we remember the history and mission of Folly Methodist Church over the years. There has been a cost: in terms of generous giving and support; in terms of dedication in ministry; in the maintenance of, not only the building, but the witness in your part of God's Kingdom.

... I remember a band of faithful folk who cared for people and the church building, and who welcomed everyone most warmly. I remember, too, the contribution made by many towards the social events....

I remember many members, past and present, whose loyal service will long be remembered, and I will always be grateful for the depth and the true spirit of worship as we acknowledged the presence of God.

He travels forward with you into the future. May it be a time of rich, hopeful and worthy ministry, in thankfulness for all that is past.

John Walker (1988-1991)

Janet and I send warm greetings to the continuing congregation, with fond memories of the Folly of yesteryear.

I remember leading house-groups at Ethel Deville's, which were marked by lively conversation, hymn-singing and a good tea! The atmosphere in the church was always helpful to the preacher because of the listening attention of the congregation and the hymns, which were sung at a good pace.

With every good wish for the transition.

Sheila Russell (1995-2001)

I am very grateful to have this opportunity of sending my prayers and good wishes to my friends at Folly.

I know it has not been an easy decision for you to close your much-loved chapel, where most of you have worshipped for many years. I got to know you all so well during my very enjoyable time as your minister, and I believe the faith and courage I saw in you during that time will continue to sustain you in the days to come.

May God bless you all, wherever you may continue to worship Him, in the coming weeks and months.

Philip and Christine Barker (1997-2002)

We have happy memories of the warm fellowship at The Folly, expressed in Sunday services, weekday fellowships and at more social occasions like lunches and coffee mornings. We acknowledge the commitment and faithfulness of the people there over many years, and their determination to maintain a valid Christian witness in their community.

Be assured, Friends at Folly, of our thoughts and prayers today and over the coming weeks.

Frieder Kreschnak (2001-2002)

It is with sadness that I learnt of the impending closure of the chapel. Although I was your minister for only one year, that year holds fond memories for me. The fellowship I shared with you was always warm, and your hospitality (catering for a vegetarian and diabetic oddity like me!) is truly, something you always excelled in.

I admire the faithfulness with which you have kept going, so often against the odds. Please do not look upon the closure of the chapel as failure, because the work of God's Kingdom continues unabated. God cannot be thrown off course because of the closure of a building. His Church worldwide is growing at a phenomenal rate, faster than ever before in all of church history – and you are part of that great movement still – despite the juncture at which you have arrived.

Grace joins me in wishing you every blessing for your exciting partnership in mission with the United Reformed Church. May it mark a new beginning in your witness to Christ in the village.

**Linda Hillier, Ruth Wren, Len Fowler, Peter Syson
(Harpden Circuit Local Preachers Team)**

Since February 2001 we have been privileged to lead worship every quarter as members of a preaching team attached to The Folly. The people at Folly have become close friends, most especially in the last year, as we have journeyed with them in the major decisions they have faced.

The whole experience has been both challenging and invigorating; we are glad that our regular appearances have been so appreciated. On occasions we have been planned in successive weeks and on others, two of us have been present. On one occasion all four of us were planned to take part in the same service! This was in response to a request from the Church Council that the team should take their Church Anniversary (which proved to be the last one).

As the people of Folly move on in their Christian pilgrimage, we pay tribute to their courage and resolve, and we pray that they will find rich blessings in new places of worship as they venture on in the name of the Lord.

May God's peace be yours.

Harpenden Circuit Local Preachers

On behalf of the local preachers I am writing to express the profound appreciation of all the preachers for the faith and worship of the people at Folly. Be assured that you have been in our prayers and we will continue to support you as you journey on.

We have been deeply grateful for our reception at Folly and are full of admiration for the work that has been done. Blessings for the future.

Andrew Doye - Rector of St Helen's, Wheathampstead

It is with genuine sadness that I have learned of the closure of the Methodist church at Folly, but at the same time, I congratulate you on the hopeful plans for future collaboration with the United Reformed Church locally. I wish those plans every success, and that through them, the individuals may find their faith enriched and the Christian witness to our village be strengthened for future years.

Folly Methodists have reason to be proud of all they have offered to Wheathampstead over 117 years. At times, the Folly church has been very strong numerically. Always – and running into my own time here – it will have added spice and theological insight to the expression of faith in our village.

I salute Folly Methodists for their past achievements and loving service. I rejoice in the warm affection in which your chapel community has been held, particularly by those in Folly Fields and

the neighbouring roads. I thank you for your evident ecumenical commitment.

Finally, I pray that Methodism may continue to flourish in these parts, and to speak eloquently to all our churches in the coming generations.

Father Brian - St Thomas More, Wheathampstead

May the Lord be with all at Folly Methodist as you finish one stage and set out on another of your pilgrim journey. May I wish you the blessing that God gave to his people as they set out on their journey of faith so long ago.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord uncover his face and bring you peace.

Born for Mission

The first church building in the hamlet of Folly was opened on 17 October 1887, and it was known then as The Folly Wesleyan Mission. Throughout one hundred and seventeen years, faithful congregations have worshipped and witnessed in that same building – albeit it with many added embellishments over the years!

There have been many milestone events in the history of Folly Methodist Church and some are highlighted below. There has been a host worshippers at Folly and many have passed on to join the saints who have gone before – people that many of you will remember - because it is, in fact, the people that are 'the church'. So many people - attending morning Sunday School, meeting in the afternoons and evenings for worship and gathering for fellowship during the week. Some whose names you will already

Following the 9 o'clock news ...

- 1937 - The Golden Jubilee** – to commemorate this event a new room for the Primary Department of the Sunday School was built.
- 1942 – The Harpenden Circuit** formed thus severing the original connection with the Luton Circuit.
- 1967 – More acquisitions in the church:** curtains, an electric clock, a pulpit fall, the New English Bible, and an electronic organ.
- 1985 – The central heating system froze**, followed by burst pipes and radiators!
- 1986 – Preparations begin for the Centenary Celebration** – redecoration to make all things new!
- 1987 – Centenary Year** – throughout the year many services and events took place, including a Centenary Meeting in May attended by Lord Soper, a Reunion Weekend, Songs of Praise, and a Flower Festival. Celebrations drew to a close with a party on 17 October to celebrate the Church Anniversary
- 1997 - Encouraged by the Rev Sheila Russell** coffee mornings were started again, drawing in friends from Folly Fields.

Memories

The remaining members of Folly are mainly descendants of the families who have worshipped in the chapel during the past 117 years. They were all bought up at Folly, baptised here, attended Sunday School here, some even were married here, and had their children baptised here. For all of them there are memories of a powerful fellowship centred on the chapel - and for all of them Folly has been their spiritual home for 60 years, 70 years and for Enid Jumont, more than 80 years – a lifetime in fact.

Mrs Elsie Defty, aged 95 years, is the oldest member at Folly and has worshipped here for 68 years. She and her husband, Arthur, transferred their membership to The Folly in 1938, when Arthur, a miner, was moved down from Durham. From that time onwards, Folly has been the mainstay of Elsie's life – a place where she not only worshipped her God, but, as caretaker, scrubbed the floors on her hands and knees, "trod the boards" in the various plays produced by the church members, and took an active part in the life and fellowship at Folly.



Cast of "His Master's Cup" performed on Good Friday 1939
Elsie Defty extreme right. Arthur Defty 2nd left

She recalls times past when Folly flourished in the village. Time was, when one had to arrive early at Folly to get a seat; when the Sunday School was packed to overflowing – especially during WW2 when many evacuees came to the village; when the charabanc came from Kimpton to pick up worshippers from Folly, Batford, Southdown and High Street churches to take them to circuit services on the “West Side”. More recently, she has seen the young people moving away from the village as they seek employment and homes elsewhere, and her contemporaries passing on at the end of their days.

Elsie’s favourite hymn contains the chorus:

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed thy hand has provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me. H&P 66

And to Elsie, Enid, and the host of witnesses, present and past, we must echo “Great indeed is thy faithfulness”.

The Future

In 1987, for the Centenary booklet, the Rev Francis Woods (Minister 1942-1946) wrote the following:

“These are difficult days for the Church and we face a harder task than our forefathers did 100 years ago.”

Those words still ring true, and today they are a poignant reminder of the difficulties that the members of Folly have had to face in recent years. However, the closure of a building does not mean the end of the work of witness. The members of Folly now move on – ever forwards, into the future.

Discussions are taking place with the United Reformed Church in Wheathampstead with a view to forming a joint URC – Methodist Church, which will meet in the URC building on Brewhouse Hill. There are already 400 such joint churches in England and statutes are in place for running them.

In the meantime, some of the Folly members have begun to worship there. Others have moved to Methodist churches nearer to their homes. But wherever the Folly folk go, be assured that they will continue to worship and praise the Lord.

**And so I am sure that God, who began this good work in you,
will carry it on until it is finished on the Day of Christ Jesus.**

Philippians 1:6