

## THE STORY OF ANN CUTLER of THORNLEY, 1759 - 1794

### METHODIST MISSIONER

Ann Cutler is mentioned in all the books on local Methodist history, but has long been forgotten in our area except for a footnote on page 180 of Tom Smith's "History of Chipping", itself now over a hundred years old. Ann's baptism is not in the registers of St. Bartholomew's, Chipping parish church, so even her parentage might have remained unknown but for a suggestion from Methodist historians that the John Rylands Library in Deansgate, Manchester, might be able to help.

The library was indeed helpful, and produced "A short account of the life and death of Ann Cutler" written by a colleague, William Bramwell, soon after her death and printed in Sheffield in 1796. But, alas, the very first words in this 35 page booklet are "Ann Cutler was born near Preston in Lancashire in 1759", and Bramwell does not give any further personal information. However, he quotes Ann's words, "Last Christmas I went to see my mother, but now she is in glory - -". This statement is the essential clue to the identity of Ann Cutler. Her stepmother, Ellin, buried 10th June 1794, was the wife of Richard Cutler of Higher House, Thornley.

Ann grew up in a family which had already been settled at Lower House (near the Arbour) and Higher House farms in Thornley for more than a hundred and twenty years. The Cutlers had often given public service as churchwardens of Chipping parish, which includes Thornley. The first record is for Lawrence Cutler in 1599. In 1712 a William Cutler was co-opted as one of the four trustees of Brabin's charity (founded 1683) which ran Chipping Free School and the almshouses and apprenticeship scheme. Possibly he was Ann's grandfather. The Lancs Record Office has the will (1806) of Richard Cutler, farmer, of Higher House, Thornley. The story seems to be that Richard married Anne Goodwin at Chipping on 27th December 1751 and their surviving children were Ann and William. He married again on 19th May 1767 at Garstang, Ellin Moss, who therefore was Ann's stepmother. The will and the register of baptisms show their family as Elizabeth, Dorothy, Ellen and Richard junior.

The vicar of Chipping during Richard Cutler's early life was the Rev John Milner, who was an intimate friend of John Wesley. In April 1751 Milner first brought Wesley to stay overnight at Chipping vicarage, and it was in the December of that year that Richard Cutler married Anne Goodwin. Both Wesley and Milner remained in the Church of England all their lives, and there is no suggestion that there was a Methodist group in the Chipping area in 1751.

By 1780 there was a lively Methodist Society in Preston. A formal petition to the magistrates for a Methodist meeting house near Longridge was made in 1783, and in 1785 for one at Ribchester and for another near Longridge. One of the petitioners for this second meeting house near Longridge was a William Cutler, quite likely Ann's brother. It was about this time, in 1785 when Ann was about 26 years old, that she was "converted" at a Methodist meeting (either at Ribchester or near Longridge) led by the local preacher William Bramwell who got to know her well and later wrote the account of her life. Membership lists show Ann (Nancy) Cutler as a member of the Ribchester meeting in 1788-1790 and of Longridge in 1792. The other Cutlers in the Ribchester and Longridge lists (Betty, Ellen, Dorothy, Richard and a married Ellen) are almost certainly Ann's half-sisters and half-brother and her stepmother.

In his biography William Bramwell wrote that Ann's early life had been strict and serious. Soon after her conversion she began to pray in the meetings, and this action by a woman met with some opposition, but she was able to convert others by her simple and sincere prayer, and felt led to become a travelling missionary herself. This was early in the industrial revolution, when the new factories were drawing workers into towns and away from their traditions of family life. It was amongst these rootless and sometimes lawless people that Methodism made considerable impact. For two years William Bramwell tried to persuade Ann to give up the thought of travelling, but she was determined, and soon became well known in Lancashire and beyond. Bramwell wrote that although she was often out late at night, no-one was ever able to report any scandal about her. "I never