A Brief Account of the History of Lydbrook

with special reference to the Parish Church and Dissenting Chapels

This is a new edition of a short history of Lydbrook and incorporates the Parish Church Guide. I have in a folder a whole wealth of material dealing with Lydbrook's history, but I have attempted to produce an inexpensive edition that is affordable to all. I would like to more fuller history of Lydbrook perhaps worthy of professional publication, but lack the time to research more details. If any volunteers come forward who can share thee task of research I will he happy to collaborate in seeing a fuller account of Lydbrook's past. Also, if any person belongs to a Lydbrook club or society of which the details of its history are not included in this booklet, if the details are sent to the Vicarage, I will includes these details in any update of this publication.

Fr Michael, Vicar November 1991

The year of our lord mxmxci

50 New Pence

A History of Lydbrook

Now a proud part of Gloucestershire, the Forest of Dean was, prior to the 12th Century, part of Herefordshire. Situated on the north west edge of the Forest's present legal boundary proper, lies the Village of Lydbrook with its mile and a half long main street, reputed to be the longest main street of any Village in England.

The area now forming the present village of Lydbrook has been inhabited throughout history. Artifacts from Hangerbarry, Eastbach (on the south west corner of the Parish) and Lower Lydbrook show evidence of widespread activity from the Mesolithic period (Middle Stone Age 10,000 - 4,000 BC) to the present. Lydbrook was inhabited by the Romans as there is evidence of a Roman homestead along Proberts Barn Lane, Lower Lydbrook. The timber building detected on the site may date from the 1st century AD. A later building was constructed with stone walls. This building was still inhabited in the 4th Century. The site was also a farming and agricultural centre in the Roman Period. Flint stone tools from there and surrounding fields confirm that the area was occupied and farmed for more than 4,000 years. There is also evidence of Roman activity at Hangerberry. From traces of Roman pavement, we know that a road came from Ruardean through Lower Lydbrook (tracing the Wye) to English Bicknor, A further ancient road existed between Joys Green and English Blcknor via Bell Hill. Traces of a Roman Road also exist from Worrall Hill to Edge End, These Roman track ways show evidence of following the course of previous prehistoric paths. In 1881 it was reported that a large quantity of Roman coins were found at Lower Lydbrook. Recent excavations by the Dean Archaeological Group in and around Lydbrook have recovered further coins from the Roman period, as well as other artifacts pre-dating and post dating this period.

The present village of Lydbrook seems to have had its beginnings in the thirteenth century. In a record of a sale of Trees in 1256, mention is made of 'the Mill of Lydbrook'. Further early notes on Lydbrook occur in a survey of the Forest of Dean in 1282. The Lyd (a brook, which flows into the River Dye) formed, for part of its travels, the boundary between the Bailiwicks of Bikenore (English Bicknor) and Rywardin (Ruardean). Listed in the entries of those who possessed cultivated land, William of Ludebrok (Lydbrook), appears under the Bailiwick of Bikenore, and under the Bailiwick of Rywardin. Rather than being two separate pieces of land in differing localities, it was probably that William's land will have included the brook, hence his inclusion in the records for both Bailiwicks. In addition, under the entry for Bikenore is recorded, Robert of Stoufeld (Stowfield). Thus the development of Lydbrook began at Lower Lydbrook. The Village takes its name from the brook running its entire length - the 'loud brook 'or lud brook to become Lyd Brook, The Village developed as a site for the local iron and coal industries with the houses as an encroachment into the Forest tracing the Lyd brook which provided the water needed for industry and domestic use. The development of the encroachment, continued into the Bailiwick of Magna Dean (Mitcheldean), the area which became known as Upper Lydbrook and Joys Green. The Village only became a place of population of any size seventeenth century onwards, but grew steadily since to remain static for the last one hundred and forty years at a population of circa 2,500 This is both the figure given by Nicholls in his History of the Forest of Dean in the 1850s and the present estimated population.

Although Lydbrook is now developing as a useful centre for exploring both the Wye Valley and the Forest of Dean with its several Hotels and Bed and Breakfast establishments, its traditional connection is with industry. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the village grow through the rise of industry. The first commercially successful blast furnace was sited in Lydbrook and was working as early as 1608. By the eighteenth century had become important for the production of tin plate, and a book published 1861 compared Lydbrook to Sheffield. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the iron trade was in decline but the coal industry was growing fast. Lydbrook having its own collieries - Arthur & Edward (also called Waterloo as it opened in 1815), The Deep Level, The Old Soot Bag, The Old Engine, Worrail Hill Mine. Lower Lydbrook's situation by the Wye brought about its importance as being a loading place for coal to he taken by barge to Hereford. The fiat bottomed barges were dragged originally by men until the construction of a tow path in 1811. This trade declined after the construction of the Canal from Gloucester to Hereford, but the canal was soon superseded by the railways, which as far as Lydbrook is concerned has 'come and gone'. The Community was served by two Railway Stations and a Halt, Upper Lydbrook, Lower Lydbrook (the Halt) and Lydbrook Junction. Not even the famous Lydbrook Viaduct of Lower Lydbrook remains which enabled the lines from Cinderford via Bilston and Serridge to connect with the Ross to Monmouth line, The Viaduct Rose some 87 feet above the roadway below, linking Forge Hill on the east with Pander on the west. It was built in 1872 and first used for traffic 26th August 1874. The line was closed to passengers in 1929 and to goods in 1951. The Viaduct was dismantled in 1966.

New Industries replaced the old with the rise of a Cable works, but this closed in 1965, replaced by Reed Corrugated Cases (since mid 1991 re-named SCA Packaging Ltd). Others in Lydbrook found employment with Rank Xerox at Mitcheldean. Other employment in the Village is offered through the existence of a small number of light engineering works and three Saw Mills. The new industries differ from the old because they did not grow out of the Forest because of the minerals, but because of the availability of a work force, Only the Saw Mills (employing a small number of people) represent a connection with traditional Forest Industry. Modern Road Communications with the surrounding areas hay opened the Village up to outsiders with the new phenomena of holiday homes, being once the cottages of the Foresters. The Community has also experienced the loss of its Bakery and a good number of shops as people travel to the nearest towns to the supermarkets when commerce was at its height in Lydbrook there would have been 30 plus shops. The shops which remain today are Post Offices at Worrall Hill, Lydbrook and Joys Green. A Corner Shop on Joys Green and a General Store in Lydbrook. One call to fame of the recent past, which now is thankfully no longer true, is that Humphrey Phelps, in his book on the Forest of Dean recalls that in the 1950s Lydbrook had the highest incidence of tuberculosis in England.

Almost forgotten as a fact was that the first School in Lydbrook was founded by the Church of England, which had provided a series of schools throughout the Forest: Mitcheldean, Christ Church, Drybrook, Woodside, the Hawthornes. Lydbrook, Park End, Cinderford. The School at Lydbrook was founded by the Reverend Henry Berkin, as part of the National Schools, who erected a Chapel School-Room in 1822.

The original building measured 50 feet long by 30 feet wide, and was fitted with benches with railed backs, in the words of Henry Berkin 'will contain about 400 persons'. The chapel School-Room had the double honour of being the first Church in Lydbrook as well as being the first School. After 1851 with the erection of Holy Jesus Church, the Chapel continued as a School and also served as the Church Hall. In 1872, fifty years on from 1822, the allocation of space being more generous per person, the School was (according to the record of the time) enlarged to 'seat 250 pupils'. In 1909 a purpose built School was completed across the main road from the old School on the west side of the Village. The Headmaster, Mr Bishop transferred with the Pupils to begin in the new School 10th September 1909. Joys Green School was erected in 1882 as a result of the Education Act of 1870, and was implemented by the Dean School Board which in those years had the management of the Schools in the area. School Meals began in both Schools in the early 1940's.

The oldest surviving building in Lydbrook is a Tudor house, red bricked and timbered, which at one belonged to Roger Kimble father of Sarah Siddons (nee Kimble -a famous a famous actress 1755-1831). The second oldest house is the Priory, Elizabethan in structure which was once the home of monks. Both these buildings are situated in the oldest part of the Village, Lower Lydbrook. The two largest centres of housing positioned west and east of the valley are Worrall Hill and Joys Green. The former district took its name from the Worrall family of English Bicknor and the name 'Joys Green' came from 'Jay's Green' on account of the numerous Jays seen in that locality.

In the Norman period the Forest had become the preserve or the Crown, and the area now covered by Upper Lydbrook and Joys Green, would have been served by the Church at Mitcheldean. It came under the Forest's Bailiff for Mitcheldean (in other words 'the Magna Dean Bailiwick'), and thus was extra-parochial, or outside of Parish. Lower Lydbrook was divided between the Parishes of English Bicknor and Walford (served by the church of St John the Baptist at Ruardean), with the Lyd forming the boundary. The mid 1800s saw the parochialisation of the Forest. In 1842 Upper Lydbrook and Joys Green came under the newly created Ecclesiastical (Church) district of Holy Trinity (Harry Hill, Drybrook). The civic boundaries of the Forest differed from the Church boundaries and from 1842 Lower Lydbrook and Upper Lydbrook became part of the Township of West Dean, with Joys Green coming within the westmost boundary of the Township of East Dean, the Railway line (constructed later in the 1860s) ran along this boundary. In 1852 Lower Lydbrook, Upper Lydbrook and Joys Green all became part of the newly created Ecclesiastical Parish of Lydbrook.

It was only in 1935, with the creation of the civic Parish of Lydbrook that Joys Green became a full part of the Parish. The first Parish Council meeting for the newly elected Parish council was Wednesday 10th April 1935 at 6.3Opm. Present were E.J. Flewelling, W.A. Morris, S.W. Hatton, W.J. Edwards, F.E. Cooper, R.J. Morgan, Luke Wilce and William Preece. W.A. Morris was elected as the first Chairman. Mr S.A. Grail was unable to attend due to illness. Mr Morris served for just over a year and resigned, at the meeting October 19th 1936 owing to retirement and his moving away from Lydbrook. Stan Hatton took over as Chairman and remained Chairman until his resignation 14th May 1973. At the first meeting of a newly elected Council,

on the 25th June 1973, Arthur Cooper became Chairman and remained so until May 1991, when Brian Payne took over, followed by Edward Lusty in May 1993.

Lower Lydbrook and Upper Lydbrook had developed as separate communities prior to the 17th Century and remained so, legally until the 18OOs. A few of the older inhabitants of the village report that a toll gate once existed between Lower and Upper Lydbrook. Lower Lydbrook was settled as part of the Parishes of English Bicknor and Ruardean, and was the focus of the iron industry, Upper Lydbrook lay within the Forest boundary which had been part of the Bailiwick of Mitcheldean, and had been encroached, serving as a focus for the mining community. From 1814 onwards until 1852, Upper Lydbrook was served by the Church of Holy Trinity, Harry Hill and became part of the formal Parish of Drybrook from 1842 until 1852.

The following is a list of shops operating in Lydbrook

Wallace Davis Butchers, this became Finn Parsons Boot & Shoe Repairs. The shop became a car garage.
W Preece Ironmongers
Everall - now demolished
Co-operative
Philip Bros Baker, Grocer & Drapers
Mrs Black sold Cakes, became H Evans Mens Hairdresser became L Trigg, Workshop, Now owned by Mrs Jones.
V Wilce Fish & Chips. Demolished to enlarge the Jovials.
Ravenhill became
A Hall became
James became
Evens General Stores.
Curly Jones Fish & Chips now Fisher Builders

There have been numerous centres for Community activities

Old School Rooms. The Church of England Mission Chapel completed in 1822, not only provided a place of Worship, but provided a school (hence its title of the old school rooms) and a Church Hall After 1909 with a new school replacing the building, and a Parish Church replacing it as a Chapel, the Mission Hall served as a Parish Hall with all manner of activities taking place.

Reading Rooms.
Another early meeting place was the old 1 penny Readings Rooms, Mill Lane. The Readings Rooms were provided by the owners of the Tin Plate works which began in the mid 18OOs. The Reading Rooms closed down in 1928/9.

Anchor Hall
The Anchor Hall adjacent to the Anchor Public House provided a meeting place in the early part of the Century. A Cinema was installed in 1914 run by the Albany Ward Company of Lydney, The Anchor Hall closed in the mid 1920s.

Memorial Hall

During the 1914-18 War a Committee was formed to provide items for the welfare of the service men on leave. After the War the Committee was left with £100. The Committee and the Men's Institute (founded in 1892) formed a General Committee and proposed the building of a Memorial Hall. Public subscriptions were sought, and a grant from the United Services Fund of 88 was obtained. The Women's Institute had an original aim of erecting their, own headquarters but joined in with the Memorial Hall Committee providing from their own funds £100. In 1920 the Committee purchased the building and lands known as 'The Poplars' and on the 11th November 1926 the Lydbrook Memorial Hall, Men's and Women's Institute came into being at a cost of £3,150 opened by the blind VC of Coleford, Captain Angus Buchanan.

In times past several Bands entertained the village; the old Trafalgar Band, Arthur and Edward Band - early 1900s, Excelsior Band, Morgan's Band and the Lydbrook Junior Reed and Brass Band - l920s. This latter band became the Onward Band then was renamed the Lydbrook Silver Prize Band in 1924, eventually named the Lydbrook Silver Band or Lydbrook Band. The present Band headquarters was built on the site of the Old Engine Colliery in 1955.

The Scout Group in Lydbrook was founded in 1909 and met in the Reading Rooms at Lower Lydbrook. A Photograph of the Troop exists dated 1912. Apart from a brief reference in the Women's Institute history of Lydbrook published in the late 1950s and the photograph nothing e1se exists on the Troop of this period. A new Troop was founded in 1925 with Howard Roff as Scoutmaster. The Troop may have been disbanded prior to the onset of the Second World War. Howard Roff had retired from the position of Scoutmaster in 1937. The Troop now was attached to the Church and met in the Old Chapel. In the 1950's and in the 1960's Scouts were part of the Church's youth work, but the loss of the Hall in the 1960's caused their eventual demise. The former Troops had all been affiliated to the Boy Scouts Association (post 1967 called 'The Scout Association). In 1989 a Scout Group affiliated to 'The British Boy Scots and British Girl Scouts Association', was formed admitting Girls into membership alongside the Boys and using the church as a base.

Lydbrook Senior Citizens Committee

This Committee is at present and has been for a number of years the only welfare organisation in Lydbrook. The Committee was formed in 1952 and known as the Lydbrook Old Folks Committee. The funds were raised throughout the Public Houses and Clubs but the headquarters was the Jovial Colliers. Original fund raising events included Smoking Concerts, Dances, Fetes, Sponsored walks, Bazaars. Collection bottles and boxes were placed in all the Public houses. A Bank account was first opened in 1957, Lloyds Bank at Cinderford. At this time Mr J Duggan was Chairman, Mr A Harris Secretary and Mr C Nadley Treasurer, Each year the Pensioners of the village aged 65 and over received a parcel of groceries to the value of 7/6 or seven shillings and sixpence (37 1/2 new pence). This became too complicated to deliver and vouchers to the same value were issued to be redeemed in the local shops. Those able were in addition treated to a Summer outing, with those unable to travel presented with an additional voucher. The value of the voucher has been in recent years £8. Present fund raising consists of coffee Mornings, Skittle matches, Bingo and Harvest Auctions at Public Houses and Social Clubs during Autumn.

Lydbrook Players

In 1985 a group of parents got together and put on a short play for children of Lydbrook School, The Pantomime was the Queen of Hearts. In following year the same group, plus a few more performed the Pied Piper on the Recreation Ground in aid of the Recreation Ground Fund for the new playground equipment. After that event it was decided to formally start 'The Lydbrook Players' and a Committee was elected and a constitution drawn up. A grant from the Council in 1986 aided the Players to get off to a good start. The first public production was in 1986 with Dick Whittington. A spring production complements the annual pantomime. Charity work is also included within the organisations scope. Other Pantomimes have been Alladin - 1987, Cinderella - 1988, Jack and the Beanstalk - 1989, Robinson Crusoe 1990, Robin Hood - 1991, and Snow White in 1992.

The History of Christian Worship in Lydbrook

A Roman coin found in Hangerberry dated 353 has a Christogram on the reverse side (X+P Chi-Rio the Roman initials for Christ), demonstrating that the Roman Empire was a Christian Empire in this period. This provides a likelihood of Roman Christians in Lydbrook in the 4th Century. The possibility of a Christian place of worship in the area is more difficult to establish. The name Stowfield would suggest a Roman Temple site, although no archaeological work has taken place to affirm or disprove this. If this was the case by the 4th Century with the conversion of the Empire to Christianity, a Christian place of worship would have supplanted a previous pagan shrine. A portion of a bronze Cross 10th/11th Century was found on the River Bank at Lower Lydbrook, evidence of Christian activity in Lydbrook late Saxon/early Norman period. At Eastbach a district on the boundary of the Parish with English Bicknor a stone Holy Water Stoop was found, adorned with a face and crosses. The dating is 11th Century or earlier, indicating cit her a Church or Private Chapel of this period existing at Eastbach. From the Norman period onwards Lower Lydbrook on the west side of the brook was part of the Parish of English Bicknor and served by the Church of St Mary. The east side of the main road was covered by a Chapel of Ease to Walford Parish at Ruardean, served by the Church of St John Baptist.

Roman Catholics in the Elizabethan period might have been catered for by the Priory. Although a local history produced circa 1958 discounted the idea of a tunnel from the Priory to Courtfield, the centre of a Roman Catholic settlement, sponsored by the Vaughan Family, a recent tale suggest that 25 years ago workmen found a brick lined tunnel but filled it in end left it unreported so as not to hold up the building programme. Given the mining expertise in the area such a project would not have been too difficult. Until the late 1960s, a group of people could be seen crossing the river from Lower Lydbrook by ferry to attend Mass at Courtfield. Also within reach over the Wye stands Welsh Bicknor Church. A Church was founded on the site in the 6th Century with a further structure built in the early Norman period. These Churches are still within reach over the railway bridge now a footpath.

Nonconformist places of worship began in the Forest from the late 17th Century with the arrival of the Society of Friends (Quakers). Ejected Clergy of the Established Church such as Thomas Smith, Vicar of Longhope who registered as a Presbyterian

Minister in 1672, at Longhope furthered the cause of Presbyterianism. Little survived of these causes into the 18th Century, The Independents (Congregationalists) provided early successes with a base at Mitcheldean with its Chapel founded in 1662 by an ejected Established Clergyman, named Stringer. The Independents continued with modest successes into the 20th Century. The Baptists provided a bridgehead into the Forest with a Chapel at Coleford where the Baptist cause began in the late 17th Century. Methodism in the Forest although having tentative beginnings in the second half of the 18th Century, only really gained a strong foothold in the early 19th Century and thus was late on the scene with the establishment of several Circuits by the competing Methodist denominations.

Up until the 19th Century the religious aspirations of the people of Lydbrook both conformists and nonconformists were served by various places of worship all within a few miles distance. The establishment of direct religious teaching and worship in Lydbrook developed in an 80 year period spanning most of the 19th Century. As to which denomination could claim to he the first is a matter of conjecture The mode of establishing a new Church was common amongst all of the Denominations. Working from an established base just outside the Forest a Minister or Layman would start a Cottage meeting. As soon as the Congregation was strong enough a separate Church would be formed.

The Church of England and the Lydbrook Mission Chapel

In 1809 the Reverend Henry Berkin began his appointment as an Assistant Curate of the Parish of Mitchel Dean, Adjoining this Parish were Forest areas which have since become the Parishes of Drybrook and Lydbrook. Henry Berkin became concerned as to the Plight of the Foresters 'destitute of churches or ministers whom they could call their own'. In 1812 he travelled around the areas of Forest adjoining his Parish, visiting cottages where families would gather to hear him teach. Large crowds of up to 200, would gather in some places to hear him explaining the Holy Scriptures. In 1814. Henry Berkin moved to a Curacy at Weston-under-Penyard, but maintained a connection with the Forest. At Harry Hill, the Foresters encouraged him to build a large place for a regular meeting. After meeting with the Bishop Dr Ryder, Henry Berkin set about building a Church, the Foresters could call their own and in 1817 Holy Trinity Church was built, serving both Drybrook and Lydbrook. Henry Berkin becoming the first Perpetual Curate (now styled 'Vicar'). The missionary work still continued in the cottages at Lydbrook, but it was not too long before Henry Berkin built a small Mission Chapel to serve Lydbrook in 1821, completed in 1822 (on the site of the present Vicarage). The Chapel functioned as a School, a place of Worship and as a place for social gatherings. It was served by the assistant Priests appointed by Henry Berkin, with residence in Lydbrook. The Salary of the Curate at Lydbrook was at least in 1825, according to the records, was supplied by a Gentleman who was above 90 years of age. Lydbrook Chapel was the fourth Church in the Forest. (Upper Lydbrook being within the Forest boundary). The first Church within the Forest was Christ Church in 1816 The second being Holy Trinity. The third Church within the Forest was St Paul's, Park End completed at the beginning of 1822.

The Methodist Church

In the second decade of the 1800s, the Reverend William Woodall, Wesleyan Methodist Minister of Monmouth had established a preaching circuit within the Forest of Dean and as part of this venture, a house was registered for worship in Lydbrook

on May 15th 1812 Despite this early foothold, it took until 1864 to build a small Chapel in Lower Lydbrook The Chapel was situated almost under the Viaduct.

From 1824, James Roles of the Oakengates Primitive Methodist Circuit had established a circuit of cottage meetings at Pillowell, Lydbrook, Broad Oak, Little Birch West Hide, Shecknal, Coppice Wood, Garroway Common, and Yorkley. The usual custom of the of the Primitive Methodists was to name the Chapels after Old Testament place names. By 1828 the Primitive Methodist had built the 'Ebenezer Chapel' at Upper Lydbrook. It had the honour of being the first Methodist Church in the Forest. It was first enlarged in 1852 (the same year the new Parish Church was opened). The year after, in 1853 Charles Dickens had published his 'Christmas Stories' containing the 'Christmas Carol' which portrayed the Character 'Ebenezer Scrooge' associating the name with a foreboding character. The Chapel was further enlarged bringing about the present building completed in 1912, with the name 'Ebenezer' being omitted. A second Primitive Methodist Chapel 'Mount Tabor' was built at the Reddings in 1862. School Rooms were added in 1892. The Wesleyan Chapel closed in 1956. The congregation and cause of the Wesleyans had never been very large in Lydbrook. The redundant Wesleyan Chapel served as a Warehouse until its demolition in 1966. After 1934 with the Methodist Church Union all the chapels belonged to the same denomination and were served by the same Minister and two Chapels still served the area. Mount Tabor Chapel closed in 1960 and was sold and is currently being turned into flats. Sadly on Sunday 28th July 1991 the last of the Methodist Chapels in Lydbrook closed. One consolation was that the Sunday School 'Sandra's group' as it was known transferred to the Parish Church to become 'The Sunday Club'.

The Baptist Church

The Baptist Church at Lower Lydbrook did not owe its impulse to the Coleford mission but to work carried out in Herefordshire. Mr Edward Goff who died in 1813 had left eleven thousand pounds to establish schools for the benefit of poor children in Herefordshire and places contingent. Schoolmasters were employed during the week for the education of the Children and on the Sunday were employed for preaching A Mr Wright had established a Schoolroom-Chapel in the early 1920s. The local WI History gives a foundation date of November 7th 1823 for the Baptist Chapel, but information from research on the Goff Endowment Schools provides a date of 1920. The work continued in Lydbrook until sometime in the late 1830s. For nearly two decades there existed two Chapel Schoolrooms. The Mission Chapel at Upper Lydbrook would have been the larger of the two and by 1935 had grown to such a large size in congregation thoughts were on enlarging the building. The fortunes of the Baptist cause may not have fared so well as the endowment grant was transferred to Lay Hill Baptist Church in Herefordshire proper. Whilst the loss of the Schoolmaster meant the loss of a lull time worker for the Baptist cause in Lydbrook, the main concern of the Goff Charity was education, and this was probably being served by the Anglican Mission Chapel founded about the same time. In addition by the middle 1820s the Baptist were competing for the affections of the resident population with four other denominations (Anglican, Wesleyan Methodist, Primitive Methodist, Independent). The Church did not survive the loss of the School and Schoolmaster.

In 1857 twelve members separated from Lays Hill Baptist and re-formed the Lydbrook Baptist Church in the old Reading Rooms. In 1863 the Church appointed its first Minister, and the services at the old Reading Room were packed to capacity, so land was purchased at Lower Lydbrook, and a Church completed and opened in November 1864 at the cost of £7OO, In the spring of 1872 a foundation stone of an enlarged Chapel was laid, but. the work was held up owing to the local navies taking up work with the creation of Lydbrook Branch Railway (presumably better paid) The line was completed in August 1874 and allowed the building of the enlarged Chapel to continue, and this was completed in September 1875.

United Reformed Church / Congregational

The founding of an Independent Chapel in Lydbrook may well owe itself to a former Anglican Priest. On March 11th 1821, the Reverend Isaac Bridgeman was appointed assistant Curate to The Reverend Henry Berkin. In addition to the mission work at Lydbrook, Henry Berkin had founded a Chapel-Schoolroom at Little Dean Hill. Curates to Berkin served at both Mission Chapels, but were based at Littledean. Bridgeman had developed an affection for nonconformists and often worshipped and worked with them. Due to this 'irregularity' on November 4th 1822, the Bishop of Gloucester revoked his licence and interdicted him from officiating in any church in the Diocese of Gloucester. Bridgeman stayed within the Forest and by 1873 had built up five congregations, one of which was sufficiently large enough to build a Chapel 'The tabernacle' at Brains Green, Blakeney Hill, this becoming Bridgeman's mission base. The Congregation at Lydbrook met at the house of James Russell, Iron Master. Bridgeman will have used the following he built up at the Lydbrook Mission Chapel to create the Independent congregation. Initially Bridgeman used the Church of England Liturgy but by 1825 had joined himself to the Congregationalists and thus further their missionary endeavours within the Forest. of Dean. It was a further sixty one years before the Congregational Chapel was built at Worrail Hill in 1884. The Chapel was enlarged in 1888. In 1972 it became part of the United Reform Church with the Union of the Congregational Church and Presbyterian Church.

The Mission Chapel Forge Hill

The last of the seven Church buildings to he erected in Lydbrook was the independent Mission Chapel on Forge Hill, built in 1889. The Reverend Arthur William Latham Baptist Minister at Lydbrook l883-l900 appears on the Deeds as a Trustee and is also mentioned throughout the account rendered by the Solicitor to the Trustees. The Baptist involvement was probably due to a dispute between the founders of the Mission as to whether there should be a Trust Deed or not. Mr Latham Baptist Minister for Lydbrook was called in to advise on the Trust Deed. The mission seams to have been, and remained a joint venture between non-conformists. It certainly always remained an independent venture. Once full to capacity, over the length of years the congregation declined to such a point where only occasional services were held, and the building eventually fell into disuse. Previously to this decline services were hold most Sunday Afternoons, with an average attendance of 8. A Ladies meeting was held on Thursday evenings. The Chapel closed in 1980. When the last remaining Trustee of the Mission died (Alderman Stan Hatton) , the Charity commission approached the Vicar of Lydbrook (The Reverend Stuart Parker) who organised four new trustees (one from each of the four Lydbrook Churches) to consider the Charities future

The Church at Joys Green

On 20th August 1989 the first of a series of monthly Church services was held at 6pm at Joys Green School, sponsored by the Parish Church. The frequency was increased to fortnightly in October 1991. In the Summer of 1991 the Baptist followed holding a monthly morning Service in the School.

The Church of Holy Jesus and the Parish of Lydbrook

In 1842 the Crown divided the Forest into Ecclesiastical District, one of which was the Holy Trinity District. Within that district, the Forest Church served the Village of Drybrook and the daughter Church, the Mission Chapel served Upper Lydbrook. By the middle 1830's the congregation at the Lydbrook Mission Chapel had so grown, that in 1635 at a meeting of the Dean Forest Commissioners, following representations from the Bishop of the Diocese and Clergy of the Forest, it was recommended that the Mission Chapel at Lydbrook be enlarged to the status of a Church. Although this recommendation was not followed through, in the late 1840's a new Church was planned. The work on Lydbrook Parish Church began in 1850 and was completed in 1851, when Lydbrook became a Parish in its own rights and with its own Vicar. Although the first building for worship in Lydbrook was erected in 1822 the Church began well before then with Henry Berkin's itinerant preaching starting in 1812.

On Sunday 12th August 1850 the foundation stone of the new Church was laid. The Reverend J Burdon, Rector of English Bicknor (who was responsible for the spiritual welfare of those living in the area of Lower Lydbrook within his Parish) had worked hard to accomplish the building of the Church, collaborating with the Reverend H G Nichcholls, Perpetual Curate of Drybrook, the Reverend William Penfold, Perpetual Curate of Ruardean (appointed March 1851, Ruardean having become an ecclesiastical Parish in its own rights in 1844), and the Reverend E Machen, Rector of Mitcheldean, The building cost the grand sum of £3,500. The largest proportion of this money -a generous donation of £2,000 was a gift from the Edward T Machen, Deputy surveyor of the Royal Forest (father of the Rector of Mitcheldean) and his relatives. Messrs Alloway & Partridge gave £250 and a grant of £230 given by the 'Incorporated Society for Promoting the Enlargement, Building and Repairing of Churches and Chapels on the condition that the seats were to be free for the poor for ever. The word 'Free' was to be painted in a conspicuous manner on each seat.

The cost of the church was met as follows:

Edward T Machen and family	£2000
Her Majesty's Commissioners of Woods	£ 250
Her Majesty's Church Building Commissioners	£ 100
Incorporated Society for Building Churches	£ 230
Diocesan Funds	£ 200
Messers. Alloway and Partridge	£ 250
Private Donations	£ 470

	£3500

As the foundation stone was laid just after the feast of the Name of Jesus (August 7th) the dedication became 'The Holy Jesus', The only other Church of a similar dedication is a Roman Catholic Church in Manchester built: in 1869-1872 by the Architects J.A. & J ,S. Harrson which was dedicated to the Holy Name of Jesus. The Church was consecrated on the 4th December 1851 by Dr Ollivant, Bishop of Llandaff (Dr Monk, the Bishop of Gloucester being to ill to attend). Upwards of a 1,000 people attended, 50 of these being Clergy.

From then on Lydbrook was a Parish on its own. In 1858 the reported attendance was 150 attending Matins and 250 attending Evensong. The number of Communicants for the Parish in that year is given as 40 per week. The present day figure stands at around 40, with a higher average throughout the year of about 60 per week.

The original Chapel served as a National Day School until 1909 and was used for Church functions until its dilapidation in the 1960's. In 1975 it was demolished to make way for the present Vicarage which is the third in the Village. The first Vicarage, built in stone stands to the south east of the Church 500 yards south, down the course of the old railway line. In May 1879, the Vicar, the Reverend Henry Hoitt applied for permission to walk on the line from the Vicarage to the Church and Schools. The Severn & Wye Railway granted this request but limited to Sundays only. The Vicarage was sold in 1961 due to extensive repairs needed. A new house was purchased, 'Mirey Stock' in 1962, 3/4 mile south of the Church. This served as the second Vicarage. Its distance from the Church in severe weather proved impracticable, hence the building of the present Vicarage in 1975.

The Patronage (or the right to present a Priest for appointment, as Vicar) originally belonged. jointly to the Crown and Queen's College, Oxford. The two Patrons took turns in presenting new Vicars. In 1884 the alternate right of Patronage was transferred from Queen's College to the Bishop. In 1961 the Crown transferred its interest in the Patronage to the Bishop, leaving the Bishop of the Diocese as the sole Patron. Although legally, the Bishop has the right to appoint, advice has to he sought from representatives of the Parochial Church Council.

Church Guide

The greater part of the Church was built in 1850/1. It is in the style of the 14th Century Decorated period. The Architect was Henry Woodyer, a flamboyant Character. Whilst the Church was being built, an article in 'Ecclesiologist' new series XLV December 1850, heavily criticised Woodyer's design. The long length of Pews in each aisle of the nave, with access to the secondary portion being via a passage by the side of the wall was particularly criticised. A passage up the middle of each aisles preferred. instead. The article concludes as the most objectionable feature, the two floating buttresses to the rear of the tower, 'which seem to penetrate, the lofty roof of the nave and lead one to expect a most substantial substructure within. But alas! internally they are found to be corbelled off above the westermost clerestory windows.'

The interior end ornamental parts are built of Bath Stone, the exterior being of the grit, stone of the neighbourhood. The Clerestoriel Nave of five bays is approximately

50ft in height, 56ft long and 50ft wide The arcades are of cylindrical columns rising to pointed arches. The windows are in the Geometrical Decorated style. The roof is a forest of wind bracing wooden trusses and is unique. The chancel roof consists of scissors-beam trusses.

The stained glass window at the East end of the South Aisle is a memorial to the. Reverend H T Hoitt end given by his wife. The Lady Chapel was refurnished by the Reverend David Lovell and Mrs Lovell. The Chancel is light and airy. The East window given by the Thomas Family depicts the four Evangelists - Matthew Mark, Luke and John, with Christ the King at the centre. The Sedilia (stone seats) in the south wall of the Sanctuary are worth noticing for the delicate one traceried rere-arch above them. Behind the Altar lies some attractive stone carving.

The Tower of the Church is 80ft in height, the saddle back roof being an unusual feature for the Forest, but quite common elsewhere in Gloucestershire, such as St Margaret's, Bagendon.

Although the Church seems to have a timeless quality things have never stood still, as each generation used the building to serve its needs The Church was restored in 1904 by M H Medland. The Organ once stood where the war memorial, stands today. In 1912 further extensions to the Church were added by A H Pearson, the Choir Vestry on the north side complimenting the south porch and Oman Chamber continuing the south aisle eastwards.

The Font originally stood on the left hand side of the South Porch entrance but during the early part of this century it was moved to the present position on the right hand side at the back of the South Aisle. Between the Chancel and the Nave of the Church stood a wooden choir screen original to the Church, but in 1966 this had to be removed due to woodworm. The overall effect has opened up the Church bringing together Priest, Choir end Congregation. In 1964 the first four pews in the North Aisle were removed to allow room for children's work as by that time the Church Schoolrooms were dilapidated and unable to be used.

In 1991 a water supply was brought into Church, a milestone in itself followed by the installation in March 1992 of toilets and a kitchen unit using the Choir Vestry. Further meeting space was created by the removal of the back four rows of pews. These were replaced with good quality wooden chairs. The original space created in the North Aisle became an area in which to place the Chairs when they were not in use. The South Porch had been since the building of the Church in 1851 an external entrance and represented a covered approach to the Church. In June of 1992 external doors were fitted to the Porch creating a further small meeting room.

Only three stone memorials adorn the walls of the Church, the War Memorial by the Lady Chapel Altar, a memorial to Caroline Hodges (d.1920) who was for 36 years a nurse in Lydbrook. The memorial is placed by the font, where many of the babies she delivered were baptised. The third memorial is to Jack Priest (d. 1983) who was a member of the Choir and a Churchwarden.

A Brass Plate mounted on the Wall below the Lads Altar Window (itself dedicated to

the Reverend H T Hoitt) commemorates Annie Mabel Hoitt his daughter and Benefactress of the Church (d. 1967)

The Church's Silver consists of a Chalice, Paten and Flagon, made by the silversmith John Keith in 1850 to Butterfields design, and the presently used Chalice and Paten given in memory of Dorothy Joan Harris by her family.

The Priests of Lydbrook

Curates of Holy Trinity serving at the Lydbrook Mission Chapel

1821	Isaac Bridgeman
1822	J Herbert
1822	W Marshall
1824	W Burkitt
1827	J Chell
1840	R T Budd
1844	W C Badger
1846	J G Croker
1848	G Tatam
1851	H Algar

The Vicars of Lydbrook

1851	William Deering
1852	Temple H Chase
1866	Henry T Hott
1908	Fredereck N Bidwell
1912	Geoffrey A Hopkins
1926	Henry Thompson
1933	Reginald W E Robinson
1942	Bert Prime
1951	Reginald F Hibbs
1961	Eric J Hoskin (Priest-in-Charge)
1963	Ernest Rutter
1964	John C Wilson
1967	David J Lovell
1973	Wilfred D Varney
1977	Dennis Bowler
1982	W A Stuart Parker
1989	Michael J Foster

Church Service times for the Church of England in Lydbrook

Every Sunday at Holy Jesus Parish Church, Church Road., Upper Lydbrook

9.00 am Holy Communion

10.00 am Family Communion

1st & 3rd Sundays in the Month at Joys Green School, School Road, Joys Green
6.00 pm Evensong and Communion

The Book of Remembrance

On permanent display in the Church is a book of Remembrance. Details of entry of names can be gained from the Vicar.