

## GEORGE HESLOP PICKERING

George Heslop Pickering was born in 1861 in Haydon, Northumberland, the elder son of George Pickering a local farmer. He trained at the then newly-built (1881) Methodist Training College at Handsworth, Birmingham (now a residential hall of the University of Aston).



Along with the rest of Wesleyan ministers he served three years in a variety of locations. During a subsequent stay in South Wales at Mountain Ash he married Lydia Bevan in the summer of 1891 just prior to moving to a three year appointment to the church at St Mary's in the Scilly Isles. This appointment involved an exchange of pulpits on a regular twice monthly basis with the Methodist Church in Penzance.

After a term in Dartford, Kent, in 1896 George was appointed to Nelson in Lancashire, where his only child George was born.

During his stay in Nelson he had the duty of pastoral care following the drowning of five schoolgirls on August 12 1898 on Derwentwater in the lake District. The impact of their deaths hit the town hard. At that time, Nelson was a comparatively young town where Social life revolved around the mill and the churches and everyone knew everyone else. The tragedy was a holiday boating accident. Five pretty mill girls, all members of Carr Road Wesleyan Chapel died when a pleasure boat capsized on Derwentwater. The five had gone on a holiday and were among a party of 70 belonging to the Home Reading Union Holiday Association, who were staying at Portinscale Tower, near Keswick. None of the girls could swim and it is thought the weight of their heavy dresses dragged them down to the water. Three men who were in the boat when it capsized all survived

A telegram was sent to the Superintendent minister at the chapel, the Rev H O Rattenbury. He was not at home to receive the telegram, and it therefore fell to George Pickering, to break the news of the girls' deaths to their families.

The girls' bodies were later returned to the town on a midnight train and police were out in force to control the crowd which gathered at the railway station. The impact of the tragedy on the town was such that flags were flown at half-mast and the bell at St Joseph's church tolled for three hours.

Nine months later a lasting memorial was made as reported:

*“Last Saturday was a memorable day for Carr Road Wesleyans in particular, and also to a lesser degree the inhabitants of Nelson, as on that date was unveiled the memorial stone over the bodies of the victims of the Derwentwater disaster. The elements were inauspicious, but nevertheless a large crowd of people witnessed the ceremony. Which shows that although nine months have passed away since that August day when the intelligence arrived in Nelson, the memory of the calamity is deep-rooted in the minds of the inhabitants. Very appropriate were the tributes paid by the Revs J.R. Gleave and G.H. Pickering to the young departed whose budding lives were not fated to bloom in this life. Considering the tenour of their lives and the pathetic circumstances of their deaths no more suitable lines could have been inscribed over their last resting place than the beautiful lament of David over Saul and Jonathan ‘They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided’ ( Burnley Advertiser 17th May 1899)*

**The large vault and memorial monument in memory of the five young girls remains today**

## FUNERAL OF THE VICTIMS.

All Nelson was in mourning on Tuesday afternoon upon the occasion of the funeral of the five victims of the Derwentwater boating accident. The arrangements for the funeral were very simple. A special memento of the sad event was distributed to the mourners, the preface of which read as follows:—"In loving memory of Eleanor Clogg, aged 21 years; Frances Crossley, aged 21 years; Mary Pickles, aged 20 years; Mary Alice Reed, aged 21 years; Mary Jane Smith, aged 21 years, members of the Wesleyan Church and Sunday School, Carr-road, Nelson, who lost their lives in Lake Derwentwater on August 12th, 1898. Interred in the same grave in Nelson Cemetery, August 16th. For them sudden death became indeed sudden glory. They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided." The funeral service was conducted in Carr-road Wesleyan Church, and for an hour prior to the time fixed for the commencement of the service there were crowds of people awaiting admission to the church, and as only the gallery was thrown open to the public, accommodation was very limited indeed. Thousands of people thronged the streets to watch the bodies brought to the church, and the sight was extremely saddening. The service commenced in the chapel by the Rev. G. H. Pickering, in broken accents, reading the introductory verses of the funeral service. The hymn, "O, God, who from the darkest cloud," especially composed for the occasion by Canon Rawnaley, was next sung, and the Rev. Harvey Field read Psalm xxxix. The Rev. J. H. Wilkinson read Corinthians, 15th chapter, 20th and 58th verses, and the hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way," followed, after which the Rev. H. O. Rathenbury addressed the mourners in sympathetic language. Prayer was offered by the Rev. G. H. Pickering, and the hymn, "What are these arrayed in white?" was sung. At the close of the service the "Dead March" in "Saul" was played. The bodies were then removed to the cemetery, and interred in one grave. The procession to the cemetery was half a mile long, and included the Mayor and Town Clerk of the borough.

In 1909 George was appointed Superintendent of the Windsor and Maidenhead Circuit. The only record so far to hand of his stay in the Slough Windsor and Eton Gazette is as follows:

**WESLEYAN CHAPEL.**  
**Herschel Street, Slough.**

**Harvest Festival.**

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 3rd, 1911,**  
MORNING AT 11.0, PREACHER:  
**Rev. E. P. Blackburn, of Windsor.**

EVENING AT 6.30, PREACHER:  
**Rev. G. H. Pickering, of Maidenhead.**

AFTERNOON AT 3 O'CLOCK,  
**FLOWER SERVICE:**  
Address by Rev. G. H. PICKERING.  
Hymns from New School Hymn Book.

**On Monday, September 4th, at 7.30,**  
**A PUBLIC MEETING.**  
Chairman: Mr. C. SYMONS, of Maidenhead.  
Addresses by Rev. G. H. Pickering, Rev. E. P. Blackburn, Rev. J. Spensley, and others.  
*Special Hymns and Selections of Music.*  
At the close of the Meeting there will be a Sale of Fruit and Vegetables in the Schoolroom.  
*Collections in aid of the Trust Fund.*

Following his stay in the Windsor and Maidenhead circuit, George continued his ministry until he "stood down" in 1928 following his Superintendency in the Cheddar and Banwell Circuit.

George died on the 28th August 1938 at his home Burnside, Birmingham Road, Bordesley, Worcester