

A Missionary on the Coke Circuit

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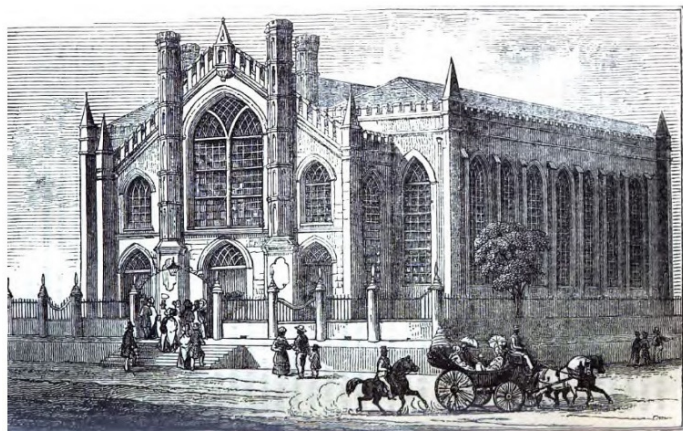


No, this is nothing to do with drug trafficking. The Coke refers to the father of Wesleyan Missionary work, Brecon born Thomas COKE (1747-1814), who incidentally attended the author's Alma Mater of Jesus College, Oxford. A circuit is part of Methodism's organisational structure, similar to a diocese in the Anglican church. All will now be explained.

This is the story of Anthony Taylor SKYRME (1882-1955). The son of Llangwm born John Brown SKYRME (1845-1924) and Elizabeth née ROWLANDS. Although his father and elder brother Rowland had interesting lives, it was the unravelling of the movements of Anthony that grabbed my interest. He was born in Pembroke Dock in January 1882, where his father was a shipwright (like many of my ancestors) at the Royal Naval Dockyard. His teenage years were spent in Llangwm by the Cleddau, but then he got the travel lust. He became a Wesleyan (Methodist) Minister in his early 20s. The 1911 census finds him lodging in the house of carpenter and undertaker Richard SCHOLLES in Stamford, Lincolnshire. A year later he was appointed to the Wesleyan Station at Whittlesey in the Cambridgeshire Fens.

In 1927 we find him living in Callington, Cornwall along with his sister Norah (1885-1983) before they both headed for Jamaica on 5th September, Anthony as a missionary, and Norah as his housekeeper. Both Anthony and Norah remained single all their lives. The two of them travelled on the banana ship *Changuinola* of Elders and Fyffes Ltd from Avonmouth to Kingston, Jamaica. Also on the voyage was another missionary Ethel THARLE from Surrey. Jamaica had seen the presence of Wesleyan Missionaries since the visit in 1789 of Thomas COKE and a strong missionary tradition ensued. The picture is of the Coke Chapel, Kingston, Jamaica in 1852. Wikipedia and the Wesleyan Missionary Society have a lot more information about Thomas Coke and his followers' missionary work in Jamaica.

Whilst in Jamaica, Anthony wrote the book *The Unthroned King and Other Musings* which was initially published in 1929 privately at 81, Hanover Street, Jamaica and subsequently by Wyman & Sons, London. A reseller's note (abebooks.co.uk) says: "The Rev. Anthony T. Skyrme self-published this slim book of his religious poetry in Kingston, Jamaica and dedicated



COKE CHAPEL.

the proceeds toward missionary work in the Coke Circuit of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. The foreword is by E. W. Thompson."

Anthony and Norah returned to England in 1933 on another banana boat the SS Banyano. He cites his intended UK address as the Missionary Guest House, Selly Oak, Birmingham. But, ever the traveller, we find him in St Helier, Jersey in 1941 where he and Norah are in the registration records for German occupation. A Cornish newspaper report in August 1945 headed "Callington welcomes former minister" describes a visit after returning from seven years in Jersey. Later references find him in Yarm, Teesside (1947), and then Tipton, Staffordshire where he died in 1955 leaving an estate worth £1,122, worth over £25,000 in today's money. Norah died in Llangwm in 1983 aged 93.

Throughout his life Anthony features in many newspaper reports of his preaching and missionary work. A far cry from following in the footsteps of his Llangwm shipwright ancestors and remaining in the area. That said, his father was a lay preacher and key person in the activities of Llangwm Methodist Church (perhaps the subject of another short article in a future journal).

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