

## Rev. Joseph Shepard

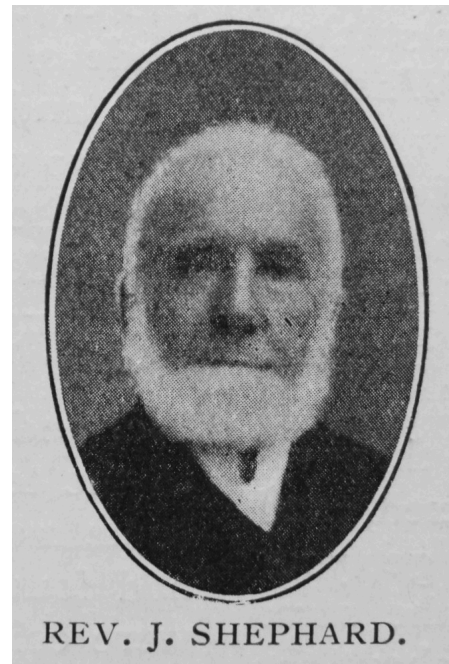
### Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by L.J. Harvey

With the passing of Mr. Shepard there has disappeared from the ranks of the ministry of our Church another of those good men and true to whom Primitive Methodism owes so much of its past history and its present proud position among the Christian Churches in this country. A man to whom little recognition has been given and small appreciation shown, for he never stood in the high places of officialism; his supreme glory being to publish the everlasting gospel of redeeming love.

His life commenced on February 13th, 1835, at Dawley Green, in Shropshire, in a humble cottage, for his parents were lowly folk; he was one of a large family, and the struggle for life was a daily experience. Though neither father nor mother was a member of any congregation, they insisted on their children habitually going to the services of Madeley Parish Church and the Sunday School connected therewith. The incumbent during the ladhood of our friend was a very able, evangelical, and extempore preacher, and the Vicar now in charge was on intimate terms with him, and came to the funeral. Little schooling was the privilege of the boy Joseph, for when young, far too young, he was compelled to work in the coal mine and so help to provide for the household needs. However, he sought instruction at a night school, and so endeavoured in some measure to atone for his lack of early education.

His conversion was an unmistakable event, to him it was a new birth unto righteousness, and took place during revival services which were held in a small room prior to the erection of a chapel at Madeley. No sooner had he entered the Kingdom of God than he became an active member of the Church, and manifest gifts and graces justified his being commissioned to preach the evangel of Jesus Christ. In 1858 he was recommended for the ministry, and the same year commenced his life's "chief business" in Hereford Circuit. He threw the whole powers of his body, mind and heart into his vocation, often preaching eight times in a week, and after spending several days in the country would return late on Friday night to the city and toil at his books all Saturday and on until the dawn of Sunday; preparing himself for the pulpit, for from the first he resolved to be a workman the! needed not to be ashamed.

During formative years of the public life he was happily associated with such able, wise and prudent superintendents as Revs. T. Hobson and W. Harvey. He lived for a while in the house of the latter, and often in after days referred to that helpful period and the benign influence exerted over him by his super and the saintly Mrs. Harvey. The thirty-nine years of his strenuous ministry were spent in the following Circuits—in five of which more than one-half of his ministerial term was served—viz., St. Austell, St. Day, Swansea, Penzance, Frome, St. Ives, Chippenham, Brynmawr, Talke, Tipton, Barnsley, Bristol, and when in shattered health he went to Sileby, where he stayed only a very short time.



He was ever in labours more abundant, no part of his duty was neglected or lightly treated, every preaching appointment he regarded as a sacred more abundant, no part of his duty was neglected or lightly treated, every preaching appointment he regarded as a sacred engagement, and neither foul weather nor long distance prevented his going, even though the place was insignificant and the congregation small. It is distinctly remembered that on a stormy winter's Sunday afternoon he preached in a little country chapel on the rugged coast of Cornwall to a single individual. His sermons were most carefully prepared (he never gave to his hearers that which had cost him nothing), and were mostly delivered with a pathos and power altogether his own. Revivals of immense influence, when hundreds of converts were gathered in, were witnessed on some of his stations, and on others not a few were led into the light by his lucid and forceful expositions of Gospel truth, besides which numberless hearts were comforted and strengthened, and lives refreshed and helped, as he told forth what he believed and knew of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

He kept himself well versed in the current topics of the day, and could discuss the political and social situation wisely and well, and he read more or less extensively, but always with a view of being able intelligently to teach and lead his people into all truth; and he was ever careful to feed the folk of God; for never did hungry souls wait on his ministry and receive stones for bread. When in health he was of a bright and cheerful disposition and almost boyish in his frolicsome gaiety, but he was never known to trifle when conducting worship; seriousness ever marked his public work and life. He had a tender heart and was full of compassion; his generosity was only circumscribed by his means; he was at times too free and open-handed. To some who did not know him well, he appeared super-sensitive, and possibly on some points and occasions he was, but a nature which was itself so noble and kind and gentle could not fail to feel a slight acutely. To his friends he was ever loyal, and was never known to betray a brother. His character was worthy of his high position, for he wore the white flower of a blameless life.

When he superannuated in 1897 he returned to his native Shropshire; during the fourteen years of his retirement he suffered greatly both mentally and physically, and chiefly abode in seclusion. But it was a great joy to his daughter and his faithful and devoted wife when, some three years ago, he was again able to preach, and for many months he conducted an adult Bible Class. This was a great delight to him, and a benefit to all who attended. The intense heat of last summer proved too exhausting for him, and he succumbed to weakness, and for several weeks suffered severely, until, on November the 13th, he quietly passed into the light and rest of God's painless heaven, saying, only a few hours before his exit from earth, that he needed no one but Jesus.

Not many itinerant preachers are born and buried in the same parish, but this was the favoured lot of our friend. He was interred in Madeley Churchyard, not far from the tomb of John and Mary Fletcher, the friends of the Wesleys. The Rev. I. Brentnall conducted a most impressive memorial service in Madeley Chapel on Sunday, December 17th. May the widow, who for more than forty-eight years was his true helpmeet, so patient, so fond, so tender, be graciously sustained until reunited with her beloved in God's home on high.

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## References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1912/158