

An account of Alexander Pearce's involvement with Rock's Hill Primitive Methodist chapel (Known as Hill Street P.M. Chapel from 1891) from "Truly Together A History of Methodism in Brierley Hill", Peter D. Bloor (1979)

The Rock's Hill Primitive Methodist Chapel.

In the late 1830's, the members of Round Oak Chapel established a class meeting at Rock's Hill consisting of about 14 or 15 members. Mr. James Fisher, a local preacher, was appointed to lead it but on account of his having a class at the Round Oak Chapel as well, he gave it up. Two other leaders were sent from Round Oak Chapel to take charge of it. The class met initially in Potter Street and a service was held also there at 9 o'clock on a Sunday morning.

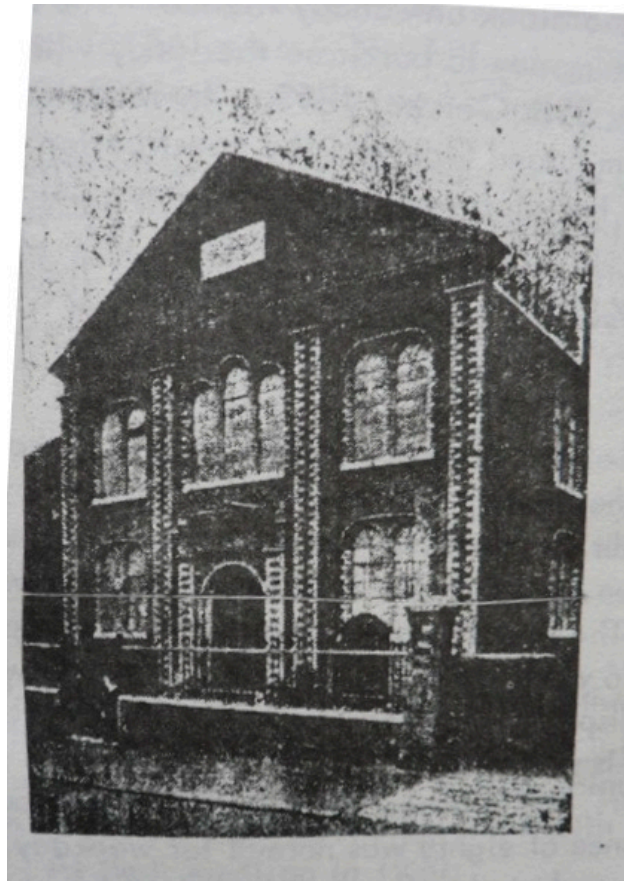
Mr, Alexander Pearce and Mr. Simon Bennett (of whom we have read with respect to his church building and repair work), having lived in the neighbourhood for some time thought it was time to build a place to worship. They brought the matter before the Quarterly Meeting, but their proposal met with great opposition, indeed so much so that the scheme was dropped. As a result, the class and preaching were given up and thus the progress of the cause in this area was retarded for some time.

Messrs. Bennett and Pearce, with others, in 1847 began to mission again in the neighbourhood and to hold meetings. As these were well attended, a regular class meeting was started with Messrs. Pearce and Hickman being appointed to lead it. The class met on Sunday mornings at 7 o'clock. By 1849, the class contained 45 members. In 1850, another class was started on Thursday evenings, this class containing about thirty members.

The Rock's Hill cause did not appear in the list of places of worship when the Dudley Circuit divided in 1849, probably because it was considered as part of the Round Oak Chapel. Its existence is confirmed by the Quarterly Minutes of June 1850 which concluded that there "ought to be a Chapel at Rock's Hill and Harts Hill but one preferred first". The next resolution in the minutes indicates that Harts Hill was the place selected. However, the members at Rock's Hill must have been active for at the next Quarterly Meeting in September it was resolved that "the Rock's Hill friends be recommended to begin to beg for the Purchase of Land for a New Chapel at Rock's Hill".

Rock's Hill came on to the plan in October 1850 with a service at 6 o'clock on Sunday nights. The members began to raise money to purchase the land, which they did for £50 on the 25th October 1852. In 1853, Rock's Hill separated from Round Oak and the construction of a chapel began. The building work must have been delayed for initially the opening was set for August, then October. It was finally opened on the 5th November 1854. In December 1854 it was agreed by the Quarterly Meeting that a Sunday School could be started.

The cost of the Chapel was £467 and it is thought that the cost of the Sunday School was about another £300. The total debt on the Chapel when it was finished was £324. When the Chapel was built there were twenty six members. The Church could accommodate 506 people, of which 176 were in sittings and pews and 330 were free. Again the disparity between members and the average attendance is seen, for in 1865 when there were seventy five members, the average congregation was about 320. An attendance of eighty was normal for weekday meetings. One of the early tasks after building the Chapel was to purchase an organ and the Quarterly Meeting agreed in 1856 for there to be an opening in order to cover the expenses of its purchase. The Church was enlarged in 1877 and a new organ introduced, purchased from Messrs. Brindley and Foster of Sheffield. The older organ was then relegated to the Schoolroom. It was not until 1891 that the name Hill Street was adopted for the Church.



Hill Street Primitive Methodist Chapel,
taken from a print in an 1875 Circuit Plan.

Around 1893, a scheme for structural alterations, re-pewing and decorations was put in hand. The Church received their instructions from the Quarterly Meeting that the cost should not exceed £300 and that no more than £50 of debt should remain. The actual cost was, however, £400 but the entire cost of the work was raised by a variety of events.

Alexander Pearce, one of the founders of the Church, died in September 1900, having been the Superintendent of the Sunday School for many years and having been a Local Preacher for 56 years. The following Easter Sunday memorial windows were unveiled in his memory.

The installation of electric lighting in the Church in the 1930's seemed to have been a most debated subject, in view of the cost - £55. The scheme was first proposed in 1929 and it was decided to carry out the work in the memory of Mr. James Applebey who had died ten years previously. James Applebey had been an official of the Church for many years and had served as a local Preacher for forty three years. However, the scheme was delayed, first because of expenses associated with frost damage to the heating apparatus and then because of the cost of necessary repairs to the organ.

In 1930, the electric light scheme was further considered. However, the Trustees had the future very much in mind and appear to be the only ones to record in their minutes comments in respect of the impending union with the Wesleyans. At their meeting in 1930:

"The question of what effect Methodist Union and what might happen in consequence either through or possible closing of some of them, it would be advisable to spend any large sum of money on electric lighting".

Whether they envisaged the further thirty five years before complete union is not known. They did, however, at this meeting decide to spend the money and proceed with the scheme.

The installation of the lighting was coupled with redecorating the church and other improvements. The redecoration was carried out by twenty young men and women of the church. The cost of the electric lighting was £55 and the redecorating £15. Of this £52 was raised before the reopening of the church on the 20th September 1930.

In 1953, consideration was given to the arrangements for the Centenary year of 1954. It was hoped that by various activities money could be raised to carry out a number of improvements and to reduce the debts. Arrangements were made for a visit by the Rev. Donald Soper in October 1954. The visit, on the 29th October, was somewhat disappointing since it had been hoped that the church would be packed, but this was not so.

Efforts had begun some three years previously to find a suitable site for the building of a new Sunday School. By 1956, the School fund stood at £740 rising to £1100 in 1961 when the cost of the new schools was estimated to be £6000. There was much discussion regarding the housing demolition in the area, with its resultant loss of scholars from the Sunday School, and the possible potential from the new multi-storey flats when they were completed in some eighteen months time. The housing redevelopment was one of the major factors to influence the closing of the Hill Street Chapel which never actually built its Sunday School. However, as early as 1953 there had been a discussion between Hill Street and the Silver Street Chapel about the possibility of joining together to build a new church. Approval was given to approaching Brierley Hill Council regarding the possible purchase of land at Silver End but the scheme did not go through. There was, as one would expect, much discussion over the proposed merger of all the Brierley Hill Methodist Churches in the 1960's, but at a meeting in 1964 full backing was given to the scheme for one Brierley Hill Methodist Church. The old Chapel was sold to the Local Council and later demolished as part of the redevelopment scheme.