

## Methodism in Walsall Wood

written by Cynthia Dunn and Lewis Turner, 1991

Whilst it is known that Walsall Wood had unknown worshipers meeting at the Horse and Jockey public house around 1813 we cannot claim they were Methodists. We do know that a Benjamin Wheeler with other Methodists held morning Sunday School meetings in a local barn, with services in the afternoon in the 1820s and continued into the 1850s.

The first Wesley Chapel (hereafter-Wesleys) was built in 1857(\*) on the left hand side of Walsall Road, on the South side of the canal. The preaching Plan for 1858/9 tells us that services were held at 10.30 a.m., 6 p.m. with a 7 p.m. meeting on the Thursday, taken by Rev Clark.

Meanwhile, Primitive Methodists ( hereafter-Prims), from Mount Zion (\*)Brownhills were missioning at Walsall Wood. They held meetings in the cottages and eventually decided the time had come to build a Chapel.

Moves were also afoot to build a larger Wesley Chapel and in 1863 a piece of land was purchased on the right-hand side of High Street, just north of the canal. The Chapel built was in the Gothic style.

This was a good year for Methodists in Walsall Wood, as the Primitive Methodists purchased a site in 1863 next to the Oak Park complex in Lichfield Road and built their first Chapel. It had one room and doorway, with accommodation for about 120 people. The music for services was supplied by three violins, a violin cello, flute and clarinet. In 1874 a small gallery was added for the choir, plus a vestry and porch with two doors, which also left the Chapel with a £100 debt. A harmonium was also purchased at the same time. Mr Fred Bradbury was the first organist.

The Prims Trustees consisted of 29 members in 1888 and the Church was growing. By 1890 the Trustees decided that a new Chapel was required and they decided to build it in 1891. Meanwhile the choir was asked to "go out and sing" with the proceeds going for the new building fund.

The start of 1891 saw the Prims accounts show a balance in hand of £140 0 shillings 1 pence On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June the stone-laying of the new Chapel took place, the Brownhills Old Brass Band was present (" to be paid any sum they may ask, not exceeding ten shillings"). A pony and trap was hired to collect the dignitaries and a tent used to cater for 500 people. The builders were Messrs T and E Cresswell. The stones and bricks had a price upon them, from £10 for a stone and ten shillings 6 pence for a brick, all with the donors names thereon. The new Chapel was opened on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1891 and the old Chapel was later converted into a schoolroom after pews had been sold for 5shillings or 4shillings according to size.

In July 1891 the Wesleys had an excursion to Hedesford. They had a procession led by the Pelsall Wesley Drum and Fife Band to Jobern's Warf where 220 children and parents were loaded into three boats pulled by horses, for the trip to Hedesford.

The Prims purchased benches from Norton Canes Methodists in 1892 and asked Clayhanger Methodists if their choir and children would go and sing at Walsall Wood. New "Rules and Byelaws" were drawn up for the Chapel keeper.

Registration for Marriages was given to the Prims in 1893 at a cost of £3. There was a strike in this year and the Chapel was prepared to provide provisions to the families concerned. In 1897 they had to borrow £20 and put the choirmaster in charge of "the large fiddle"!

The Wesleys were looking to the future and a new Chapel in 1899, but the plans received were too grand and a "reducement" in these was requested – the Chapel would then accommodate about 340 persons plus 30 choir and cost about £2,200.

Borrowing was quite the in-thing in those days, for much use was made of loans from the Methodist Chapel Aid Association, the body helping Chapels to develop and local, and loans from members, for in 1901 the Prims borrowed £12 to enable them to purchase the ground at the rear of the Chapel.

By now, 1901, the Wesleys were receiving tenders for their new Chapel, but the prices being too high – up to £3348 –meant a delay for at least one year. Therefore, a temporary vestry and lavatory made from corrugated iron was erected. By the middle of the year, things were looking up for a final agreement was reached to build the new Chapel for £2311. It was agreed that stones could be laid for a donated cost from 25 guineas to 3 guineas. The 18<sup>th</sup> July would be the day of the stone-laying. The present schoolroom would be disposed of for £50. As the building progressed there were problems – the gable arch collapsed and to help support the new arch two windows had to be bricked up.

April 10<sup>th</sup> 1902 saw the opening of the new Wesley Chapel, although they still had problems with the foundations and sewer workings. However, they forged ahead, adding a kitchen and WC at the old Chapel, which was now being used as a Sunday School. The front Chapel pews were re-rated from 1 shilling 3 pence to 1 shilling 6 pence and £200 from bazaar efforts started a new organ fund.

Expansion at the Prims meant they could do with a new school building and in 1903 they set up a building fund.

The Wesleys, obtaining the necessary 20 householders' support ,were registered for marriages in 1904. They also received £150 donation from Mr Andrew Carnegie towards their organ fund in 1905. The Wesley Cricket Club gave their second annual concert in Shelfield. A great servant of Wesley Methodism died aged 90 years, Mr Benjamin Cresswell. Living in Walsall Wood all his life, he gave nearly 60 years of service to the Chapel.

The Lichfield Prims Circuit Roll Book of 1906 states that the minimum membership of the Walsall Wood Prims was 87, and the maximum was 99. They gave a donation to the Shelfield Chapel building fund of £5 in 1907 even though they had had a fire as records state, "re-opening services after the fire" raised £3 15 shillings. The insurance claim was for £20.

Problems again beset the Wesleys in 1908 for the Chapel structure needed tie rods to keep it safe for use. They were added at a cost of £16 16 shillings. At the same time it was agreed to change the incandescent burners to gas burners. Funds being what they were, the choir were asked to help by providing their own hymn books.

Also in 1908 the Prims gave their new Chapel School contract, on the site of the old Chapel, to Mr J T Wootton, for the sum of £1006 less £31 "for the old place" which, when completed also left them with a bank overdraft of £100

The Wesley problems continued into 1910 with rostrum and communion rail defects due to the damp in the sub-soil. The architect accepted blame for this, but this did not help now, for water was entering through the rear windows of the Chapel and the rear pews were unusable.

The Prims District Synod was held at Bloxwich in 1913 and Prims from Walsall Wood joined in the procession from Pelsall to Bloxwich.

Wartime gave rise to blackout problems and in by 1916 the Wesleys had changed the times of services to start earlier. In 1919 a branch of Girl Guides was started. A year later in 1920 the organist wished to resign due to professional overwork and could no longer give her services free. The Trustees made her an offer of 5 guineas a year. A Mr Hayes asked for use of the school for a Troop of Boy Scouts formed from the Sunday School pupils. By 1921 the girl Guides asked for use of the school for Brownie Guides to start.

The organ tuner told the Wesleys he could no longer make the organ fit for use, so an Organ fund was started. Tenders were put out and Messrs Hawkins tender of £120 was accepted, "with rebate if possible".

In 1922 the Prims were still paying 1 shilling per year to Mr Batkin for "rite of lite restrictions" from the Chapel buildings. Their Institute activities of bagatelle, the library, ping pong, canteen, billiards, newspapers were continuing. They also applied for a tobacco licence which had cost them 2 shillings 7 pence.

In the same year, down at the Wesleys, nothing had been done about the organ tenders but a revised cost of £103 10 shillings from Messrs Hawkins was accepted. The school floor needed repairs and the Sunday School teachers wanted to purchase a hut to extend their work in the Infants Department.

After a discussion about Methodist Union in 1923 they decided that the time was not yet ripe for union. The boiler also needed replacing and in 1924 a new one was inserted by Messrs Mantons, for £30.

Discussions were continuing about Methodist Union and in 1935 the Wesleys voted 6 for, 5 against, 1 neutral. The gas lighting was so bad it was decided to change to electricity.

With the strike of 1926 in operation the Wesleys were ready to take part in any talks if required. The Mellish Road (Walsall) Methodists had donated 30shillings "in aid of miner's distress" and five families received 6 shillings each.

At the Prims, there were Brownie Guides, but in 1929 they moved to the Wesleys. In 1930 Mr Batkin was still receiving “rite to lite restriction” payments, 3 shillings for 3 years. The Prims Footballers held a concert raising £1 18 shillings. A comic football match in 1932 raised £2 11 shillings.

Christmas 1932 at Wesleys saw the payment from their Poor Fund of 5 shillings each to two persons and 3 persons received 10 shillings each. The old school was becoming hard to maintain, the Sunday School Council asked for the property to be repaired, including slates and stonework.

1932 saw Methodist Union taking place, and the Prims Chapel was re-named Ebenezer Methodist Church and they purchased a pipe organ from Queen Street Church for £120.

The Poor Fund at Wesleys in 1935 paid out 8 gifts of 5shillings and one gift of 10 shillings

Subsidence was done to the Prims property and damages were claimed in 1939 from Walsall Wood Colliery. Discussions were ongoing about the property frontage;- taking down the wall, tarmac the ground, leave the wall, take down the iron railings, build the wall higher, have two gates entrance in place of one.!

In 1940 due to repairs being done to the Church and school of the Prims, they had an overdraft of £100. They rented the Institute to the Air Raid precautions ( A R P ) for ten shillings per week plus lighting. The railings had now been taken down, substituted by a low wall and oak gates. Discussions for the Jubilees of the new Church were now taking place and permission was given for a tea by the Women's own in aid of the Spitfire Fund. They sold a billiard table to the Working Men's Cub for £59 and another to the Home Guard for £30.

The Jubilee Year for the Prims was in 1941, with children and grand-children of the founders at the celebrations, and special services by the Rev Tom Sykes. The choir rendered the Cantata, “The Better Land” with the conductor Mr E T Smith and chairman Mr A B Whitehouse. A birthday tea was held with a cake adorned by 50 candles, made by Mr W I Smith. An electric organ blower was dedicated on October 11<sup>th</sup> 1942. Wartime matters continued, with the County Council paying rent for the ARP room usage, sending out soldiers' gifts, collecting for the Forces Funds, seeing the completion of the Air Raid shelter and obtaining a long ladder for the fire-watchers.

In April 1943 a gale raged and blew down a chimney through the roof and on to the stage, smashing a communion chair, heating material, and the kitchen ceiling. However, by June this was almost forgotten by the burning of their mortgage deed during the singing of the doxology- the Prims Church was free from debt for the first time since 1908.

Activities continued at the Prims for they started a new organ fund in 1945, the Girls Life Brigade and the Boys Brigade started, and they purchased the Air Raid Shelter from the County Council together with the partition and washroom.

In 1945 the Wesleys gave £15 to the Daw End Methodist Scheme. Sadly, the old and first Wesley Chapel was taken over in 1946 by Messrs Hawkins for organ-making. £23 was received from the War Damage Fund

1948 saw the Prims forming a new body of trustees. A new hymn board was presented to the Church by Mrs William Humphries in 1949, also a new Holy Bible by Mr and Mrs Charles Knowles and Mr and Mrs George Seedhouse.

The Diamond Jubilee of the Prims was celebrated in 1951 with a special brochure, some details of which have been used within these pages. The Church had a membership of 130 with a 200 in the Sunday School.

The years passed until tragically, in 1959 the Wesley Church was closed and demolished .It was now up to the Ebenezer Church to carry on the torch of Methodism in Walsall Wood.

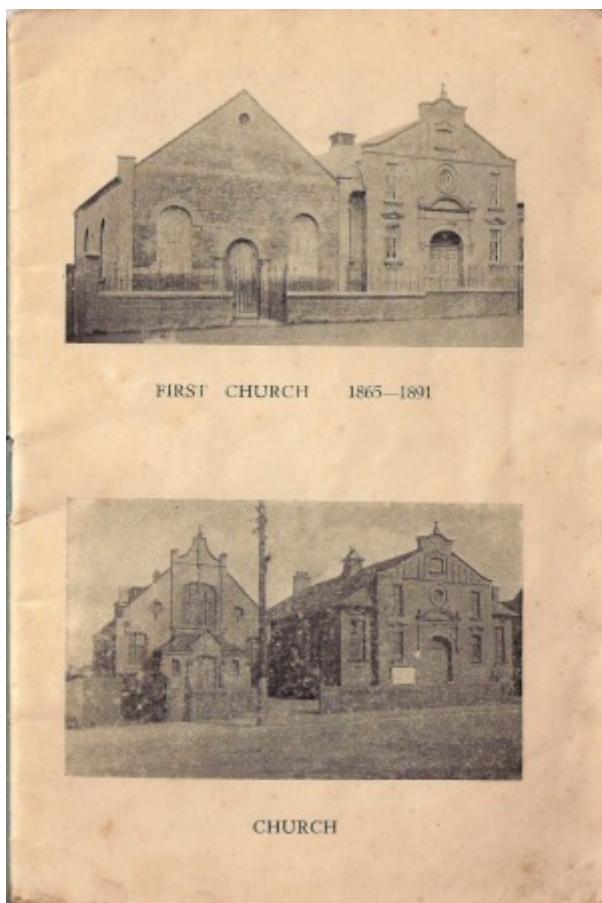
This is being faithfully done, and will continue, even though in 1989 problems arose with the Church building, which have continued in to our Centenary year, 1991.

Compiled from;—

The Archives, and Members and Friends of the Methodist Church in Walsall Wood

April 11<sup>th</sup> 1991

Other materials, not included in the original 1991 booklet



Top image shows the first Primitive Methodist chapel, and the second, Ebenezer, built in 1891

The second image shows the Sunday School 1908, which was built to replace the first small church

Source; 1951 Commemorative booklet, Ebenezer Methodist Church, Walsall Wood



The old Westley Church built in 1878. After its closure it was used by Hawkins & Son as an organ factory from 1946. It was also used as a Sunday School for a short time after the new one was built.



There were many soup kitchens in the 1926 strike. This one giving out soup and bread to children, was outside the old Westley Church.

Two images of the first Wesleyan Methodist Church in Walsall Road, near the junction with Hall Lane

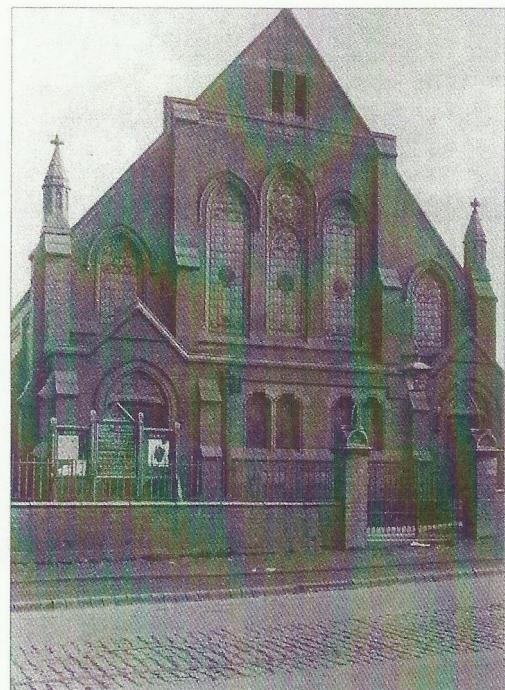
Note \* the first Wesleyan church was built in 1862, and cost £400

balances was quite sufficient without paying a salary, and he was sure that no private individual would pay a salary to have such a banking account kept. He moved that the Clerk be requested to write to the Chairman of Quarter Sessions and direct his attention to the matter. The motion was agreed to, and after the transaction of some merely formal business the board adjourned.

**NEW WESLEYAN CHAPEL AT WALSEND WOOD.—**On Monday last the first stone of a new Wesleyan Chapel was laid at Wal-sall Wood by Mrs. B. Bloomer, of the Grove, Pelsall. A very handsome silver trowel and a mahogany mallet had been provided by a number of ladies, and were presented to Mrs. Bloomer by Mr. John Brewer. After the stone was laid the Rev. Wm. Naylor, the chairman of the Birmingham District, and the oldest minister in the Methodist church, delivered a most impressive address, and gave a most comprehensive summary of the Methodist doctrine. At the close of the address a collection was made, the National Anthem was sung, and the proceedings were closed with prayer by the Rev. G. F. White. Immediately after nearly 400 persons sat down to tea in a spacious marquee, and after tea a public meeting was held, Mr. Brewer in the chair. Addresses were successively delivered by the Revs. R. Hardy, John Connor, J. Holmes, and G. F. White; also by Capt. Mills, Mr. Parker, and Mr. James Hathaway. A vote of thanks to the ladies who provided tea, and to the chairman ended the proceedings. About £32 was received during the day. The design of the chapel is of the Early English style of architecture, and it will cost about £400, nearly £300 of which has been promised.

**ALDRIDGE.—**At a meeting of the trustees of the Free

1862 local press article



The Westley Church, built 1902 and closed in 1959. It stood on the right just over the Canal Bridge coming from the direction of Shelfield

The second Wesleyan Methodist Church stood in High Street Walsall Wood, near the junction with Beech Tree Road.

Images courtesy of Bill Mayo and John Sale, from their book "Memories of Old Walsall Wood", published in 2000.

# WALSALL WOOD WESLEY C.C.

## LIST OF FIXTURES.

### FIRST TEAM.

May 2	F	Walsall Trinity	.....	home
May 9	F	Walsall Brotherhood	.....	home
May 16	L	Boney Hay	.....	away
May 23	L	Boney Hay	.....	home
May 30	L	Norton Guild	.....	away
June 6	L	Brownhills	.....	home
June 13	L	Wimblebury	.....	away
June 20	L	Wimblebury	.....	home
June 27	L	Heath Hayes Unity	.....	away
July 4	L	Norton Guild	.....	home
July 11	L	Chase Terrace	.....	away
July 18	L	Heath Hayes Unity	.....	home
July 25	L	Brownhills	.....	away
Aug. 1	L	Chase Terrace	.....	home
Aug. 8	F	Izon's, West Bromwich	.....	home
Aug. 15	L	Chadsmoor	.....	home
Aug. 22	L	Chadsmoor	.....	away
Aug. 29	F	Izon's, West Bromwich	.....	away
Sep. 5	F	Walsall Brotherhood	.....	away
	L—	Cannock Chase League.		
	F—	Friendly.		

### SECOND TEAM.

May 9		Boney Hay II.	.....	away
May 16		Vicarage Walk	.....	home
May 23		Goodall Street	.....	away
May 30		Ryecroft Congregational	.....	home
June 27		Boney Hay II.	.....	home
June 13		Chase Terrace	.....	home
June 20		Leamore	.....	away
June 27		Boney Hay II.	.....	home
July 11		Walsall Y.M.C.A.	.....	home
July 18		Ryecroft Congregational	.....	away
July 25		Goodall Street	.....	home
Aug. 1		Walsall Y.M.C.A.	.....	away
Aug. 15		Chase Terrace	.....	away
Aug. 22		Leamore	.....	home

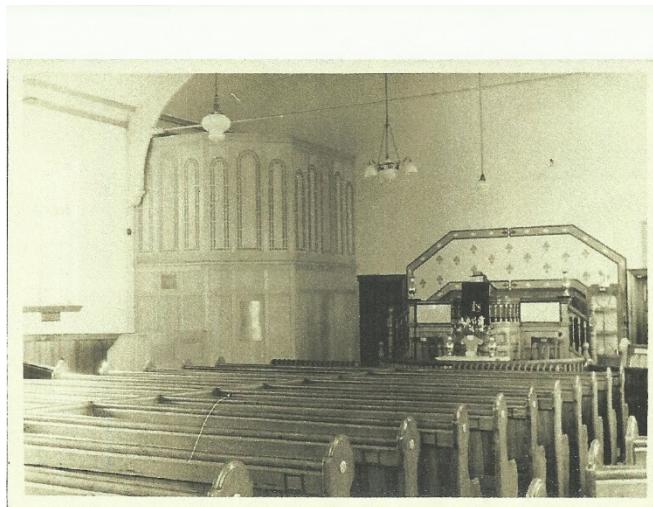
1908 Wesley Cricket Club team fixture list



Walsall Wood YMFC (Young Mens Fellowship ..the "Prims", 1912,1913 season ), courtesy of Walsall Wood Football Club



Ebenezer Methodist and Sunday School c 1990. Image courtesy of Bill Mayo



Ebenezer, new organ, 1950s. Image courtesy of Mr Roland Holland

Note. \* “The first Mount Zion Primitive Methodist Chapel ( in Brownhills ) had been built upon the site in 1856. It was twice enlarged before it was completely rebuilt in 1895. The final service there was held on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1964”

Gerald Reece book “ Brownhills. A Walk into History with Gerald Reece”, page 48

My grateful thanks are extended to Mr Peter Cutler, Mr Bill Mayo, Mr John Sale, Mr Roland Holland , to Walsall Wood Football Club, to Mrs Cynthia Dunne and , posthumously to Mr Lewis Turner.

David Evans, September 2016