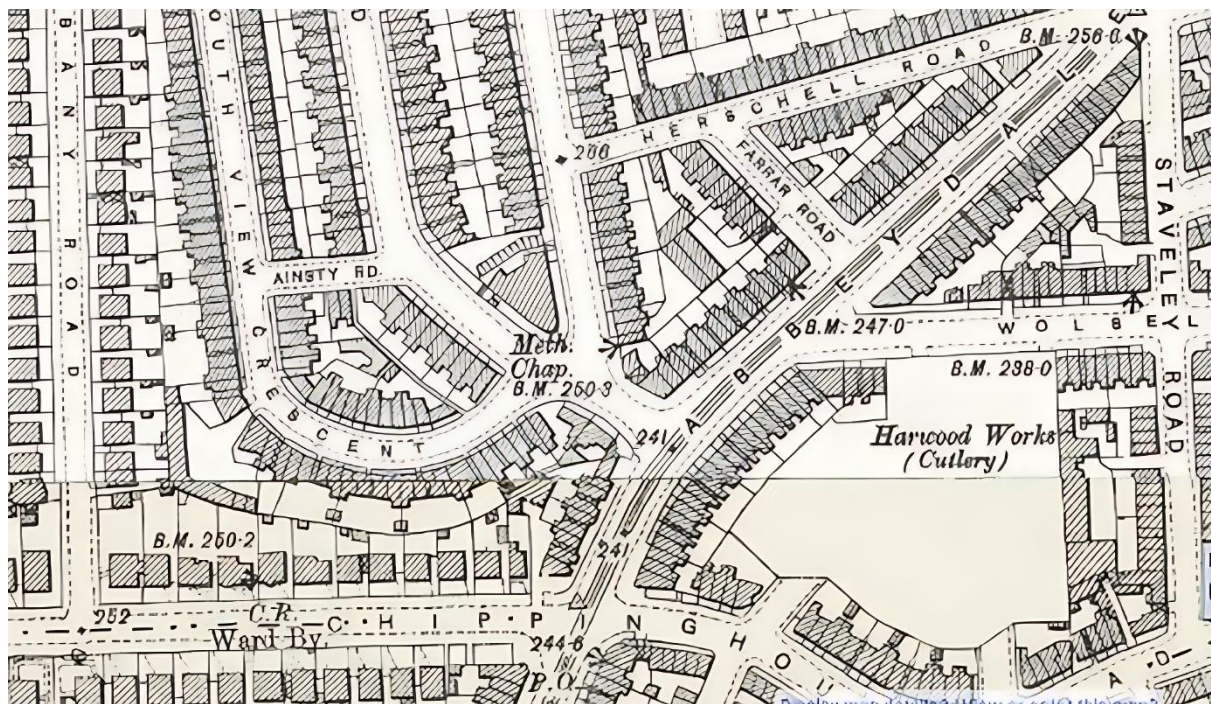


The rise and fall of Abbeydale Primitive Methodist Chapel

Primitive Methodism was a breakaway movement from the main Wesleyan Methodist Church, with the first PM chapel built in Burslem in Staffordshire in 1811. During the 19th century, the movement gained in popularity and grew to such an extent that many more PM churches were built in England and Wales. One of these was Abbeydale Primitive Methodist Chapel.

A plot was found at the junction of South View Road and Vincent Road at Abbeydale in Sheffield. The plot was triangular in shape and was, not surprisingly in Sheffield, on an incline.



This 1900 map can be found at the National Library of Scotland at <https://maps.nls.uk> The NLS has over 200,000 digital maps, free to view, mainly of Scotland, England and Wales.

The foundation stone was laid on 29th August 1891. *'Sir Frederick Mappin, Bart., M.P., on Saturday laid the foundation stone of a new church and schools for the Primitive Methodists in Abbeydale road'* - Sheffield Daily Telegraph 31st August 1891.

Nine memorial stones were laid on Monday, 19th October 1891. *'The nine memorial stones, which are placed at the base of the turret, were then laid by the following ladies and gentlemen:- Mrs. Briggs (No. 7 circuit), Miss Naylor, Mrs. W.H.Taylor, Mrs. J.Sharpe, Messrs. G.Sivil, jun., H.Clayton, J.Sivil, E.Adams and H.Levick. The trustees of the chapel presented a handsomely-bound hymnal to Mrs. Briggs, a pair of fish carvers to Mrs. Sharpe, and silver-plated trowels, suitably inscribed, to the other persons who laid stones. Mr H.Adams moved a*

vote of thanks to the ladies and gentlemen named, for their services and for subscribing towards the funds of the new church, Mrs. Briggs having given £5, and the others £25 each. Mr. G. Capewell seconded the resolution, which was carried amid applause. - Sheffield Daily Telegraph 20th October 1891. George Capewell is my great grandfather. A further eight memorial stones were laid on Saturday, 20th February 1892.

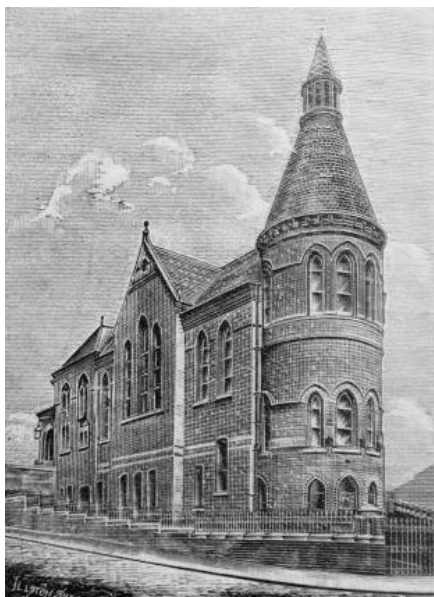


I found an image of the silver-plated trowel given to George Sivil in 1891 on the Sheffield History website at sheffieldhistory.co.uk

The inscription reads, 'PRESENTED TO Mr.G.Sivil Jun ON HIS LAYING A MEMORIAL STONE OF THE PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHURCH & SCHOOL ABBEYDALE ROAD SHEFFIELD Oct^r 19th 1891'.

The embossed figure at the top of the trowel is Hugh Bourne, one of the founders of Primitive Methodism.

Abbeydale Primitive Methodist Chapel's opening ceremony took place on Tuesday, 21st February 1893. *'Yesterday the Primitive Methodists of the John street Circuit opened a handsome and commodious new chapel, just off Abbeydale road. The new chapel is situate(d) at the junction of Vincent and South View roads, and while being sufficiently removed from the dust and traffic of Abbeydale road, it occupies such a commanding position in relation to that thoroughfare that it cannot fail to attract the notice of the numerous passers by. Owing to the unusual shape of the site it has been necessary to build the chapel in triangular form with the apex towards Abbeydale road. The building is of red brick, relieved by terra cotta dressing, very sparsely introduced. It is designed upon early Gothic lines, and the internal arrangements afford every facility for congregational worship, social gatherings and Sunday school purposes, the ground being fully utilised. The apex is treated as a circular apse, which is carried up above the main roof as a turret. On the lower floor are the Sunday school and class rooms, with kitchen and heating apparatus. The upper floor is occupied by the church, providing accomodation for 500 adults.* - Sheffield and Rotherham Independent 22nd February 1893.



The website [My Methodist History at mymethodisthistory.org.uk](http://MyMethodistHistory.org.uk) is a fantastic resource if you have any relatives connected to the religion. This website connects a network of sites linking Primitive Methodism, United Methodism, Wesleyan Methodism and Methodism in Oxford. There are biographies of people, descriptions of chapels, places e.g. Sheffield, topics e.g. education and objects e.g. bibles. A search on the above website, searches all the websites in the network. Using this website, I've been able to find obituaries and images for several direct relatives: - George Capewell, Emma Capewell, Ada Maland and Jane Elizabeth Smith.

This image of Abbeydale Primitive Methodist Chapel is taken from the website, but was originally in the Handbook of the Primitive Methodist Conference 1901, now kept at the Englesea Brook Museum.

The 1893 article continues: - *'Access is obtained from two porches with vestibules, one in Vincent road and the other in South View road. Across this end of the church is a gallery, with staircases thereto from the vestibules. The orchestra and rostrum are at the opposite end, the organ being in the apse already referred to. The shape of the building enables the occupant of the rostrum to command a full view of the congregation, while those sitting in any part of the chapel can see the preacher without turning the head, and the acoustic properties are excellent. The woodwork – seats, gallery, and so forth – is of polished pine. Under the orchestra is a minister's vestry and other accommodation.'*

The cost of the building was about £4500 (£720,000 in today's money according to in2013dollars.com). Henry Adams donated £700 and Henry's wife, Rebecca, donated an organ worth £400. More money was raised by further donations and fund raising events. However, not enough money could be raised to cover the full cost of the new chapel.

The 1893 article continues: - *'The new chapel was formally opened yesterday by Mrs. Henry Adams, of Sharrow. Amongst those present were the Revs. J.Slater, P.Peacock, W.Cutts, and F.Jeffs, Messrs. J.Toplis, H.Levick, W.Hill, J.Webster, G.Sivil, J.Sivil, W.H.Taylor, H.Adams and E.Adams. The duty Mrs. Adams was called upon to perform consisted of unlocking the two doors with a golden key, which was presented to her on behalf of the circuit by Rev. J.Slater. On one side the key bore the following inscription: - "Presented to Mrs. Adams, Sharrow, on the occasion of her opening the Abbeydale P.M. Church, February 21st, 1893;"*

and on the other side, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise"'.(Psalm 100 Verse 4).

Searches for Henry Adams, Rebecca Adams and John Slater in **mymethodisthistory.org.uk** give photographs, biographies and obituaries. Unfortunately I couldn't find a photograph of the golden key.

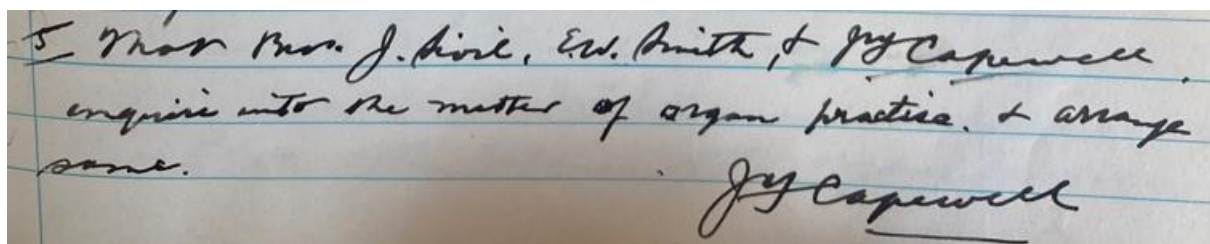
After 1893, the chapel went from strength to strength. In 1900, for example, the congregation membership was 188, the Sunday School had 404 scholars and 47 teachers, a branch of the Bible and Prayer Union had 100 members and a Christian Endeavour Society had 136 active members. The enthusiasm of the members at the chapel is reflected in the number of events, possibly needed to reduce the building debt, that were held including annual choir festivals, song recitals, concerts, operettas, bazaars and garden parties. These events are covered in detail in the local newspapers, which can be accessed through the British Newspaper Archive at **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk** or Find My Past at **findmypast.co.uk** although you will need a subscription to view the articles.

There were annual performances of Handel's Messiah and other musical renditions included Mendelssohn's 13th Psalm and Elijah.

'ELIJAH' - EXCELLENT RENDERING AT THE ABBEYDALE P.M. CHURCH. The promoters of the rendering of 'Elijah' at the Abbeydale Primitive Methodist Church, Sheffield, yesterday afternoon, deserve thanks for providing many working people who do not go to the Musical Union concerts with an opportunity of hearing such a work so excellently rendered. As a rule the 'Messiah' monopolises these Sunday afternoon chapel performances, but the 'Elijah' was a desirable change, and greatly appreciated by a crowded congregation.

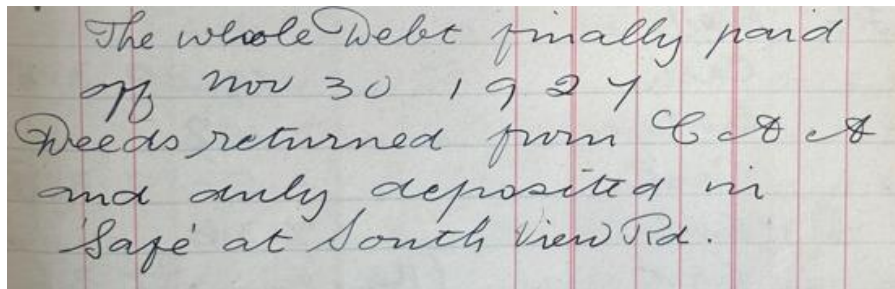
- Sheffield Daily Independent Monday, 26th February 1912.

The Sheffield Archives catalogue can be accessed at **sheffield.gov.uk/archives** Searching for Abbeydale Primitive Methodist Church gave this result: - *Abbeydale Primitive Methodist Church: trustees minutes and accounts.* After checking the opening hours, a visit to the Archives gave me the opportunity to read these documents. The minutes give an insight to life at the church and to my surprise, my grandfather John Frederick Capewell was the joint minute secretary for three years from January 1906 to January 1909. There are copious examples of his 'just about readable' handwriting in the minutes.



5. That Messrs J. Birch, Ed. Smith, & J. F. Capewell enquire into the matter of organ practice, & arrange same. J. F. Capewell

There is very little information in the newspapers about the chapel after the WW1, but in 1927 the building debt was finally paid off. The minutes reflect the sense of relief that all the fund raising for over 30 years had finally achieved the target.



After the Methodist unification reorganisation in 1932, the chapel was renamed Abbeydale Methodist Church.

Baptisms began in 1895 and continued to 1946. Marriages began in 1900 and finished in 1949. The table of the 161 marriages shows a significant decline of the chapel membership through the years.

Years	Frequency
1900-1909	41
1910-1919	41
1920-1929	42
1930-1939	22
1940-1949	15

The baptism records can be downloaded from the SDFHS shop website at sheffieldfhs.org.uk/shop The Product Reference is SHE-G505 and the cost is £7.50. The download also includes baptisms from eight other Primitive Methodist Chapels. The marriage records can also be downloaded from the SDFHS shop. The Product Reference is SHE-G510 and the cost is £4.00. The download also includes marriages from 86 other Methodist Chapels. Please note that Abbeydale Primitive Methodist Church is named as Vincent Road, Abbeydale on this download.

The marriage record transcriptions for Abbeydale PM Chapel are also available at the excellent Sheffield Indexers website at sheffieldindexers.com Follow the link Parish Records, then Marriages, then use the Search options. The Abbeydale PM Chapel baptism records are not on this site. The baptism and marriage records for Abbeydale PM Chapel are also available at findmypast.co.uk but you will need a subscription to view the transcriptions. The baptism and marriage records can also be viewed at the Sheffield Archives and of course the Archives have a FMP subscription. The SDFHS CD of the Sheffield Methodist baptisms and marriages is held at the Archives.

Due to falling numbers, the church was closed in 1949. The trustees had the responsibility of disposing of the goods and chattels of the church. Amongst the minutes and accounts at the Archives was a document detailing the distribution of the goods to other Methodist churches in the same Circuit; in this case, a group

of Methodist churches within an area of Sheffield. Eleven churches benefited from donations of hymn books, crockery, table cloths, tea cloths, a tea urn, glassware, buckets, two pianos, steps etc.

DORE.
10/15 Primary Chairs.
10 Hymn Books (Words)
Front stage curtains and pelmet.
4 Tables 4 trestles.
Table tennis table
Crockery and Cutlery
Bucket
Communion Set
Door mat
Capewell Shield.

One of the churches to receive items was Dore Methodist Church. As well as the usual chairs and hymn books, the last item in the list reads **Capewell Shield**. If I hadn't been in the quiet environment of the Archives, I might have shouted out but I suppressed my astonishment and let out a slight gasp.

'It's not what you know, but who you know' is often quoted. Phone calls to the Sheffield Methodist Office, a very helpful Methodist archivist in Chesterfield, a Trustee at Dore Methodist Church, a minister and a Trustee at Topley Rise Methodist Church failed to give me any information about the shield. Then embarrassingly, I remembered being given a shield or cup over 20 years ago, because of my surname. I'd put it in the loft and forgotten about it!



The shield is showing signs of neglect. It is heavy, unwieldy and large, measuring 18" (46 cm) by 13" (33 cm).

It is inscribed as follows: -

*ECCLESALL METHODIST CIRCUIT
YOUTH COUNCIL
THE CAPEWELL SHIELD
ARTS FESTIVAL
SECTION 2*

Previous winners are shown on the small shields as Endcliffe (1955-57), Millhouses (1961) and Topley Rise (1964).

The dates do not correspond to the years of Abbeydale Methodist Church, but I believe this was the Capewell Shield mentioned in the inventory for Dore Methodist Church in 1949.

The church building had several uses after the closure in 1949. In 1973, Kelly's Directory of Sheffield and Rotherham lists the building as the Second Church of Christ Scientist and Reading Room. Then in approximately 2006, the building

was a Sufi Centre called the Naqshbandi House Mosque. Sufism is a form of Islamic religion.



This is the view of Abbeydale Methodist Church in 2007 taken from the Sheffield History website at sheffieldhistory.co.uk

If you fancy a trip down memory lane, I can recommend this site. There are pictures and reminiscences of everything concerning Sheffield and the surrounding area.

This is the view of Abbeydale PM Chapel that I remember, as this was taken at about the time that I first started my interest in family history.

At some stage the building became Grade II listed and there were redevelopment plans to convert the building to apartments. The scaffolding was erected, but unfortunately there was a fire in April 2008. There are numerous photographs of the fire on the Sheffield Forum website at sheffieldforum.co.uk/topic/124504-fire-near-abbeydale-rd



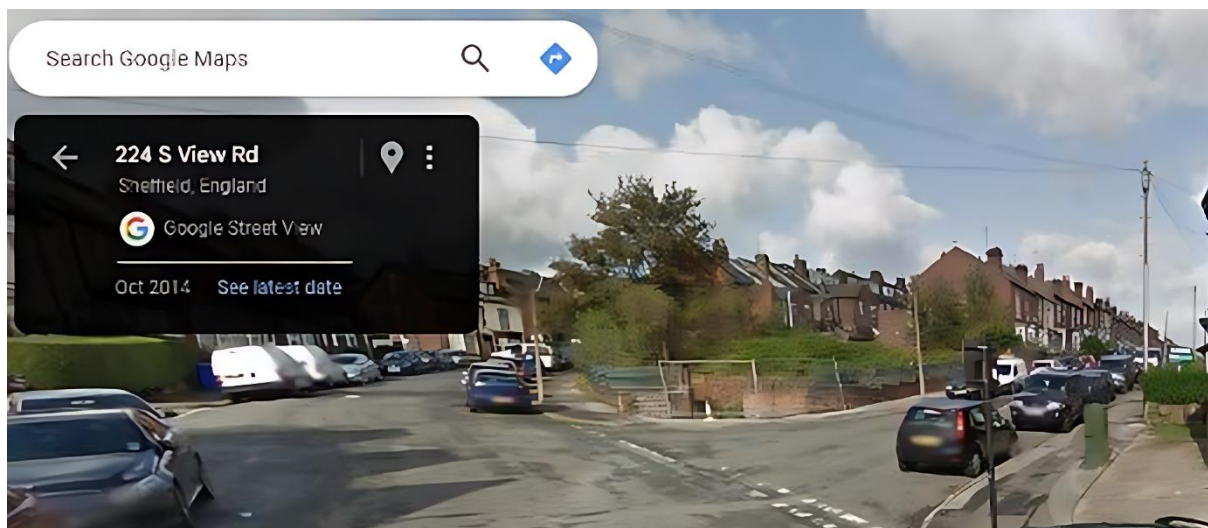
The fire left the walls of the building intact, but with the interior completely gutted.

Surprisingly the structure was left in this dangerous state for almost five years. This view from picturesheffield.com Image c04430, taken in the early months of 2013, shows the dome and the triangular brickwork on the Vincent Road side of the building have been removed. The demolition had started.



By March 2013, the building had been completely demolished.

When I was using Google Maps at google.com/maps recently, I spotted a very useful feature. If you find the Google Street View that you are interested in, there



is an option to ‘see more dates’ when previous views were photographed. This allows you to go back in time.

This is the view from October 2014, which shows a derelict and overgrown tract of land.

Ten years later, the plot is even more overgrown. This is my photograph taken in August 2024.



The title of this article is ‘The rise and fall of Abbeydale Primitive Methodist Chapel’. The building has now definitely fallen. The fevour and enthusiasm, the spiritual endeavour, the vigorous life of the church are in the past. However, the community lives on. There will now be other organisations giving opportunities in different ways to the present residents of this part of Sheffield.

Dave Capewell
August 2024