

..... Booker Past

BOOKER WESLEYAN METHODIST CHAPEL

Methodism arrived in Booker in 1832 which was 16 years before the first Chapel opened and Services were held in a cottage on Booker Common occupied by a Mr Easden. In 1843, Jonathan Fryer and Daniel Smith held open air services on the Common then in 1844, started to preach in Sun Cottage which was occupied by Samuel Beesley, the village shoemaker.

In 1847, Mrs Mary Giles, widow of George Giles who died 1844, donated a plot of land for the Chapel. Members collected flint stones the Common to build the Chapel and they had a goodly heap, gathered round held a Prayer Meeting, asking the Lord save as many souls as stones they had collected. The Chapel, which cost about £78 to build, was opened on 18th January 1848 with three services held that day.

In 1885, it was decided to build a new Chapel. Plans were drawn up, tenders invited and the contract was awarded to Mr H Harris of Bolter End who quoted £383-10s-0d. The first Chapel was demolished, except for a section of the east wall, which still exists with the flint stones clearly visible. On the 27th April 1886, a Subscription Stone was laid by Robert Walker Esq. of Maidenhead. Other inscribed memorial stones and bricks, were laid by members with well known Booker surnames -Brooker/Crook/Giles/Goodearl/Pearce/Piercey/Sherwood/Silvey/Smith/Weller. The opening service was held on 2nd August 1886.

In 1907 a new schoolroom was added at a cost of £389 and in 1935 electric lighting was installed at a cost of 10 guineas. On 5th April 1952, a new organ at a cost of £1,116 was unlocked and declared open by the oldest member – C W (Charlie) Pearce. The schoolroom was also used for Flower Festivals, table tennis and meetings of various groups including the 'Ladies Perseverance Guild' run by Hilda Saunders. From 1943 to 1950, Mrs Florence Kenyon ran a private school in the schoolroom for local children aged 5 to 14 years.

In 1898, a national appeal was launched by the Wesleyan Methodist Society to raise one million



*Chapel orchestra (1930s). (Left to Right):
Back row: ?, George Seymour, Eddie Pearce, Bert Jeskins, George Pearce, Mr Harris, ?
Mid. row: Mr Sherwood, Mr Murcott, Mr Williams, Alec Burnham, ?
Front row: Mr West, Florrie Murcott, Ella Shingleton, Jim Crook*

guineas and pages were distributed to all Chapels for donors to add their names. Members could only donate one guinea but could also make donations in memoriam for loved ones who had died. When the fund closed in 1912, over £1,073,000 had been raised which was used to buy land and build Westminster Wesleyan Methodist Central Hall in London which stands opposite Westminster Abbey. Central Hall houses 50 volumes which make up the Historic Roll and the page for Booker lists 21 with well known Booker surnames – Brooker, Crook, Goldswain, Pearce, Seymour, Sherwood, Shingleton & Southam.

The Sunday School started in 1848 and by 1912 the number of children had swelled to 100. In the 1920s a school treat was arranged each summer which included sports on the Common and each child was given a half pound cake. In the 1950s, the treat was changed to a coach trip to the seaside. The number of children gradually dwindled then in 1968 it closed because of lack of numbers. In 1980, Ken & Rosemary Acton became members of the Chapel and resurrected the Sunday School. It flourished under their guidance and in 1984,

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Rosemary encouraged eleven children to play musical instruments for one day only. They raised £100 towards an appeal in South Bucks for famine relief in Ethiopia.

An enthusiastic and successful Chapel Choir, which was formed in 1892, used to provide concerts at Booker and other Chapels in High Wycombe Circuit. It occasionally took part in the annual 'Crystal Palace Choir Festival'. The Conductor was George James Sherwood and the Organist, Henry Crook.

In the 1920s, a Chapel Orchestra was founded with William Murcott as the Conductor. It was very popular and played in many Chapels in and around High Wycombe. Unfortunately, in 1939, the start of World War Two caused it to be disbanded. A violinist in the Orchestra was James Henry Crook who was one of the family running 'Crooks Coaches' at Booker. He died in 1992 at the ripe old age of 103 and in his Will, as well as other legacies, he left £1,000 to Booker Methodist Chapel. ('Jim' Crook front row right – full list below)

William C. Pearce is listed on a Memorial Plaque in Booker Memorial Hall as one of those killed in the First World War. A Memorial Stone was made in his honour and mounted on the wall beside the pulpit in the Chapel. When the Chapel closed in 1998, the stone disappeared then in 2008 it reappeared, broken into pieces, at Aylesbury TA Centre. It was restored and mounted in the TA Centre with a Re-Dedication Service on 31st May 2008.

Snowden David Fiskin (Snowie) moved to Booker and became a member of the Chapel in 1987. In WW2, he was a Japanese POW following the fall of Singapore in 1942 and was forced to help build the Burma Railway then work in the Japanese coal mines till the end of the war. In 1999 he became a Chelsea Pensioner and on occasions returned to High Wycombe in his uniform. He died in 2004 at the age of 85.



*Opening of the chapel organ – 1952
Rev George Maland, Charlie Pearce, George Pearce (tall man at back), Frank Collins, Hilda Saunders*

The first Baptism in the Chapel was that of Charlotte Butler on 12th April 1849 and the last was Montanna April Snook on 16th August 1998. Two Baptisms were of boys with the middle name 'Wesley' after John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Society so their parents were obviously staunch Methodists. The first was Frank Wesley Sherwood on 22nd March 1881 and the other was John Wesley Seymour on 8th September 1896.

The Chapel was not licensed for marriages until 1934. The first marriage in the Chapel was on 31st March 1934 between William Forrest & Ivy Pearce. The last marriage was between Neil John Hoing & Helen Louise Waugh on 20th September 1997.

The Chapel did not have a graveyard but many funeral services were held there. Burials took place at West Wycombe or High Wycombe Cemetery and others were cremated. Three long serving and devoted members of the Chapel, who were cremated, had their ashes buried in the garden at the front of the Chapel, with bushes planted on top of them. They were Mrs Rose Ager in 1994, Mrs Ivy Forrest (nee Pearce) in 1991 and her husband William Forrest in 1995.

The Chapel closed in 1998 when the final service was held in conjunction with the Harvest Festival on 13th September 1998. The building was sold to a Building Developer then in January 2001, it was sold on to Jim Machin. When Jim was converting the Chapel into a dwelling house, he found buried in the wall, a 'Time Capsule' in the form of a bottle sealed with wax. The bottle contained two newspapers of April 1886 – The South Bucks Free Press and The Methodist Recorder, plus six other documents relating to High Wycombe Wesleyan Methodist Circuit/Booker Chapel. There was also a handwritten script entitled "Introduction & History of Wesleyan Methodism at Booker", written and signed by Henry J Quilter.