

Purton
Primitive
Methodist -
Joseph Sweeper
1834-1911

Born in 1834, Mr. Sweeper is probably more busily engaged in Church work than ever before. He is true at once to the past and to the present. Hence the sphere of his activities widens with the years. On bicycle, on foot, or otherwise, he takes full work as a local preacher in his own Circuit, and for Chapel Anniversaries (one of which he has attended for an unbroken succession of forty years), Sunday School Anniversaries, etc., he is in frequent demand in many places. He has seen many conversions, and at Camp Meetings has witnessed remarkable scenes of spiritual power. Ever since his conversion in 1855 his interest and strength have been given to Sunday School work, and he has been a member of the Connexional Sunday School Union since its formation. In him the Christian Endeavour movement early gained an earnest supporter; a missionary box was his first piece of furniture and lives still. He is a busy temperance worker; by him the sick are visited, the dying comforted, the perplexed and suffering are helped. In his home "workers" of all kinds are heartily welcomed by him and his loyal-hearted wife, and he is never too busy to take counsel with "the minister" re Circuit and Connexional life. Honoured and respected by nearly every one his life is full of friendships and breathes our "good cheer" on all sides. He is a valuable official, firm but not obstinate, and a past-master in finding the middle way wherein all, or nearly all, may walk in harmony. It is no surprise to find that he has been to District Meeting thirteen times and to Conference four times. Ever alert, ever active, he is devoted to the Master's service, and the Lord is with him. W.C.T.

Christian Messenger, 1907

Family And Other Information

Joseph Sweeper was born in 1834 at Chiseldon, Wiltshire, to parents Robert and Sarah. Robert worked the land.

1841 Census: aged 7 at Badbury, Chiseldon, with his parents Robert, 32, Sarah, 31, brother Ralph, 3, in the house of John Hatt, 61.

Joseph's mother Sarah Sweeper died in 1846, and his father remarried in 1847.

1851 Census, aged 17, with father, Robert Sweeper, 43, agricultural labourer, and his wife Lucy Sweeper, aged 23, and brother Ralph, 13.

Joseph's father Robert died in Sept qr. 1851.

Joseph married Jane Waving (Weavin) Smart (1826-1895) in early 1858 in the Highworth Registration District, Wiltshire.

1861 Census at Wroughton, Joseph, 27, post messenger, Jane 35, Sarah Ann, 2 and Ellen, 0.

1871 Census at Wroughton, aged 37, provision dealer and post-master, Jane Sweeper, 45, and daughters Sarah Ann, 12, Ellen, 10 and Mercie, 2, and a servant lad, aged 16.

1881 census at Purton, Joseph, 47, Assistant Overseer and School Attendance Officer, Jane, 55, daughter Mary, 12, and Ellen Parsons Gleed, 6, a visitor.

1891 census, assistant overseer and tax collector, with wife Jane Sweeper and two grandchildren at the Square, Purton.

His wife Jane died, aged 67, in 1895. He remarried in late 1896 to Sarah Burson in the Cricklade Registration District, Wiltshire.

1901 Census at High Street, Purton, Assistant overseer and house agent, aged 67, with wife Sarah and stepson.

1911 Census, age 77, assistant overseer and tax collector.

Census returns identify three children.

- Sarah Ann (1859-1933) – married John Parsons, a market gardener (1911) in 1880
- Ellen (1861-1886)
- Mercy (1868-1890) – married Edward Lance Gardner, a grocer, in 1889
-

Joseph died on 15 April 1911 at Purton, Wiltshire.

Sources: Census and other records

In Memoriam. Mr. Joseph Sweeper

By the death of Joseph Sweeper, the Connexion has lost one of its most loyal sons and the Brinkworth Circuit one of its strongest pillars. Born in Chiseldon, Wilts, on March 3rd, 1834 in early life he lost both father and mother, and was left to make his own way in the world. He was converted in his twenty-first year, and shortly afterwards removed to Wroughton, where he was put on the plan in 1857 in the Brinkworth Circuit, and remained a most acceptable preacher for fifty-four years. In 1870 he removed to Purton. During his forty year's residence here he held many important offices. He was secretary to the trustees thirty-eight years, superintendent of the school and class leader twenty years; he also filled the office of circuit steward. He was a prominent member of the District Committees; one of the first members of the General Sunday School Committee, it was a proud record that during thirty-six years he never missed a meeting; frequently a delegate to District Meetings, and four times to conference. A most acceptable preacher to young people, he was always in great request for school anniversaries. Fifty one times during the last fifty-two years he had taken the anniversary at Langford, in Faringdon Circuit.

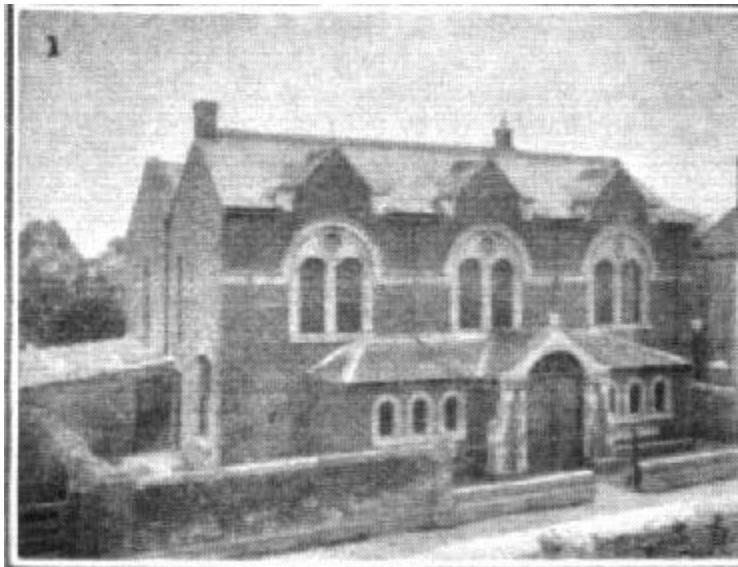
Though advanced in years, he ever retained a youthful spirit. In Purton he held the offices of assistant overseer and tax collector for many years, and was the best-known man in the neighbourhood.

His last public appearance was when the President came to Wootton Bassett on March 22nd, a gathering which he was very anxious not to miss. Rev. S. S. Henshaw partook of his hospitality the same night, and begged him to take care of his health: but the same week he contracted a chill which brought on gastritis. During Good Friday he hovered between life and death, and passed peacefully away on the Saturday morning of a glorious Eastertide.

The funeral, on April 20th, was of a most impressive character; all the public bodies sent deputations. The service in the chapel, which was crowded, was conducted by Rev. E. G. French. Other ministers taking part were J. Brewis, A. Marshall, J. T. Stead, and W. Brass. The address was given by Rev. Danzy Sheen (who attended as representative of the General Sunday School Committee), and made a profound impression. Eight local preachers acted as bearers, and altogether forty local preachers were in the procession. After Rev. E. G. French had read the committal sentences, Rev. W. Brass (Faringdon) and Rev. J. Veysey (vicar of Purton) offered prayer and the vast company sang "There's a Land that is fairer than day."

On the following Sunday a memorial service was held in this chapel, conducted by Rev. E. G. French. Mr. J. Haskins gave a short sketch of his friend's life and work, and Rev. A. Marshall added a few words.

The Primitive Methodist Leader, 11 May 1911



Purton Primitive Methodist Chapel, c. 1907