



# Non- Conformist News

*Dilton Marsh*

## *The History of the first 50 years of Penknapp Providence Chapel*

The original Penknapp members had previously worshipped in Westbury Leigh Baptist Chapel but differences arose there after the death of Pastor Marshman. For over forty years he had served the congregation but by 1806 he was old and infirm and needed help. The Rev. George Phillips, of Birmingham, was chosen as co-pastor, and commenced his ministry on 10th August 1806. On the 24th of August that year Mr. Marshman died at the age of 71 years. After Mr. Marshman's death Mr. Phillips claimed the sole pastorate of the Church, but some members were unhappy about this as they accused him of formally being a Wesleyan minister. After four years of unpleasantness Mr. Phillips, his friends and supporters left the Chapel, and planned the formation of a new Baptist Chapel in Dilton Marsh which became Penknapp Providence Chapel.

The Leigh Chapel did not want any bitterness so the deacons agreed to give Mr. Phillips, as soon as he resigned, the sum of £90, as remuneration for any loss he might sustain in having to move his family. They also decided to give Mrs. Phillips a present of £60. Mr. Phillips received a letter of dismission (as did each of the brethren and sisters named below) recommending him to any other Church. This was signed on 12th April 1810 by the deacons of Westbury Leigh who at that time were Samuel Barnes, James Edwards, Richard Holloway, Samuel Smith, Richard Dunning, and William Wilkins.

On the day the letters were signed, i.e. 12th of April, 1810, Mr. Phillips preached in the open air at Upton to a large group of people. At the close of that service a number of his friends invited him to preach, on the next Sabbath at Isaac Hillman's Court at Dilton Marsh. He agreed to do this, and so began six months of open air services twice each Sabbath. They had to be held in the open as the house and barn were too small to hold the congregation. This situation continued until 14th October during which time Mr. Phillips noted, "We were not once hindered by rain, so kind was God to us in that respect."

Mr. Stephen Applegate then offered them a piece of land on which to build a new Chapel. The name of the field was "Penknap." As they thought their good fortune with the weather each Sabbath had been the will of Providence they decided to call the new Chapel - Penknap Providence Chapel. Under the gallery in the chapel is a tablet erected to Stephen Applegate. It carries the following inscription:

"To the memory of STEPHEN APPLGATE, yeoman, of this parish who died 25th January 1823, aged 72, and whose remains are interred in the yard of this chapel"

Mr. Phillips was still living in the minister's house at Leigh whilst the chapel was being built. On the 29th day of August, 1810 the members who had left Westbury Leigh with him met there, and formed themselves into a Church of Christ, choosing Mr. Phillips as their pastor. Articles of faith were drawn up and agreed to by all, and signed by Mr. Phillips - as their pastor. The names of 13 brethren and 17 sisters were entered in the new Church book, and numbered in the following order:

1. Samuel Deacon,
2. Felix Hall,
3. Robert Millgrove Snr.,
4. Jeremiah Hewitt,
5. Thomas Jeffers,
6. Abraham Dew,
7. Thomas Bailey,
8. John Hopkins,
9. Nicholas Hopkins,
10. Thomas Curtis,
11. Robert Millgrove Jnr.,
12. James Hopkins,
13. William Richardson,
14. Ann Oxley,
15. Hannah Palmore,
16. Rebecca Langley,
17. Sarah Hall (wife of Felix),
18. Sarah Tucker,
19. Sarah Mills,
20. Sarah Harris,
21. Sarah Deacon (wife of Samuel),
22. Hannah Bailey,

23. Hannah Gunstone,
24. Mary Hague,
25. Lucy Hopkins (wife of John),
26. Mary Edwards
27. Leah Richardson
28. Jane Hopkins
29. Rachel Hall
30. Susan Evers

After the church was formed they proceeded to elect the first five deacons who were Samuel Deacon, Felix Hall, Jeremiah Hewitt, Nicholas Hopkins, and Thomas Curtis.

Seventeen weeks after the laying of the foundation stone the walls were erected, and the roof put on. The congregation first assembled in the new Chapel on 14th October 1810 even though it was not finished (it had no windows etc.) There was a short early prayer meeting within its walls, after which the congregation moved to the waters by Boyer's Factory. On that day in 1810 Mr. Phillips baptised 12 new members, and at half-past ten in the morning the chapel was crowded for the first time. The Chapel now had 42 members.

The Sabbath School commenced while the chapel was being erected in 1810. Until it was comfortably fitted up with pews and galleries, the school was conducted every Sabbath in unoccupied shops near Pippin's Bridge, belonging to Mrs. Ballard, who was a great friend of the chapel. It appears this was the first Sunday school on that side of Westbury. Within a few Sundays, however, another Sabbath school was established at Leigh Chapel. The Penknapp Sabbath School moved into the Chapel at the end of 1810, and lessons took place twice every Sabbath for 25 years. The first Superintendent was Mr. Stephen Adlam. He was paid annually for his services. After him came Thomas Curtis, Samuel Tucker, then John Harris and William Ball superintended on alternate Sabbaths, and next came Mr. Elias Millard.

On Whit Tuesday in 1812, nearly two years after the Chapel was finished the property was conveyed by a trust deed to a congregation of Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England, called Particular Baptists. Thirteen trustees were named. They were. Stephen Applegate, Nicholas Hopkins, William Ball, Isaac Hillman, Thomas Applegate, Abraham Dew, Joel Hague, John Harris (of Clay Close), John Harris (of Hisomley), Thomas Curtis, Samuel Tucker, John Hopkins, and Robert Mulgrove.

In 1827 it was discovered that the roof of the chapel was defective, and this was at once repaired, at a cost of £80, which was soon paid for out of Chapel collections. Mr. Phillip's ministry lasted 23 years, during which time 232 persons were baptized. Mr. Phillips died on 12th March 1833, aged 82 years. He left the Chapel with

175 members and the chapel property was clear of debt. A tablet to his memory was erected by his friends near the pulpit. The inscription is as follows:

"This tablet is inscribed by an affectionate people to the memory of their much esteemed, long tried, and faithful pastor, the REV. GEORGE PHILLIPS, whose ardent zeal originated this place of worship, for the glory of Jehovah ; twenty-three years pastor of the Church formed under his ministry, amongst whom he lived in peace and fellowship of the Gospel, highly esteemed for his work's sake, and called to his rest in the mansion of bliss, after labouring nearly half a century in the ministry, 11th of March, 1833, aged 82. "He being dead yet speaketh.""

In 1853 the chapel was again renovated. The pews under the galleries were altered, and two new classrooms were added, with a small vestry separated from the schoolroom by folding doors. Special services were held after this had been carried out. These were to raise money to defray the expenses.

Mr. Shem Evans took over after the death of Mr. Phillips. He resigned the pastorate on the 31st of December, 1854, after 21 years of successful ministry.

Mr. Joseph Hurlstone, of Corton, near Warminster, was unanimously chosen as the next Pastor and commenced his service on 26th August 1855. In November, 1859, the Great Western Railway Company offered the deacons two pieces of land for sale, adjoining the graveyard. This was purchased for £10, and added to the burial ground where so many of the past worshippers had been buried.

Jubilee services of the formation of the Church were held on August 29th, 1860, and were well attended. And so ends the story of the first 50 years of Penknapp Providence Chapel.