

The “Hut” in Penyard, Merthyr Tydfil.

J. Alan Davies



The “hut” in Penyard as seen from The Avenue [photograph Martin Conisby]

Before the members of the Merthyr Tydfil branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) met in their newly completed chapel in Georgetown from August 1963, their meetings had been held in a wooden hut in Penyard. This held many memories for those who met and worshipped there. None more so than for my father, Emlyn Daniel Davies.



One evening in the mid-1960s my father came home and said he wanted me to know something that had happened. He then related the following story to me and asked me to remember it, saying it was important to him.

My father, Emlyn D. Davies

He explained that in the mid-1930’s there were only a handful of members of the LDS Church in Merthyr. They usually met in the members’ homes and also held meetings in a

room above what he described as a garage at the end of Trevethick Street.

It was decided to build their own chapel in order to have their own meeting place where they could worship. Dad did not know how they chose the site, but it was on the side of the road leading from Merthyr town up to Penyard. The men put in the foundation and then purchased a wooden hut. The hut was erected by the members. It consisted of one large room with two smaller rooms side by side at the back of the hall and had an entrance on the side by the smaller rooms. The one room was used as a cloakroom and the other as a kitchen. The main hall was used as a chapel and for activities. It was during this time that another hut was also erected nearby. This was identical to the LDS chapel but was to be used as a Scout hut.

My father explained that there was great excitement as the members were told that the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was travelling in Europe. He



was planning on visiting Merthyr Tydfil to see the members and he would dedicate the newly finished meeting house (the hut). The members were informed that President Heber J. Grant was on a European tour in 1937 to celebrate the LDS Church being in Europe for one hundred years. As the worldwide president of the LDS Church, President Grant was also considered to be a Prophet of God.

President Heber J. Grant

My father, who was eleven at the time, said that he remembers how President Grant entered the new chapel and how distinguished he looked. He wore a long dark coat, had a large top hat and carried a walking stick with what looked like a silver top. He spoke at the meeting and gave a sermon on paying tithes and offerings to the Church. He promised the members that as they kept God's commandments that they would prosper. My father said that after the meeting he heard a few of the men say they thought the topic was a little insensitive as this was the 1930's and the country, and the world, was in the midst of the 'great depression.' Nearly every member of the branch was currently unemployed. They had used their time to build the chapel and it had been a great sacrifice for them to do so.

Dad said he remembered particularly that when President Grant dedicated the chapel that he seemed to ask God to bless everything. In particular, he specifically said that the building would stand and serve the members for as long as they needed it to worship in.

In the same year the other hut in the area, which was used as the Scout hall, became vandalised and literally fell down. In the meantime the Penyard hut continued to be used by the Church for a number of years. Dad attended there for the rest of the 1930's and into the 1940's until he was called up to serve in the army during the Second World War. On his return from the army he married and was assigned to be the President of the Merthyr Tydfil branch of the Church.

The Penyard chapel was used extensively by the members. As well as the Sunday meetings held throughout the day, it was used for a full programme of meetings and activities: Primary for the children, Relief Society for the women, and the Mutual Improvement Association (MIA) for those from age 12 all met weekly on a designated night during the week.

At one time, they held dances on a Saturday evening to allow non-members to be familiar with the building and the members, and to know more about the church. These were so successful that they had to turn people away because the hut became so full. The hut was now becoming known as a dance hall, when it was firstly and foremost a chapel, so the dances were stopped.

In the late 1950's the Church started a building programme of new chapels in Britain and a new chapel was agreed for the Merthyr Tydfil Branch. The ground-breaking and building work commenced in March 1961. When the building of the chapel was completed, it was dedicated in August 1963 by President David O. McKay, then worldwide president of the LDS Church. The Church was approached by a local charity who asked if they could purchase the now unused hut. The Penyard hut was then sold to the charity for the nominal amount of £1.

Having rehearsed this history to me, my father then explained that he had recently been told the Penyard hut had collapsed. There had been no one in it at the time and so no one was hurt. Dad had gone there to see if it was true and found that it was. He had then come home to tell me about it. He said that as he saw the collapsed old hut he had remembered the words of President Grant when it had been dedicated. He also thought how the other hut built in the area at the same time had collapsed within a year of being completed.

The Penyard hut had been used for the best part of thirty years. It had given the members a focal point, a place to meet and worship and also for them to grow in their faith. Dad said it had been a wonderful place to attend and that he had many fond memories of their times there. But none of his memories were more vivid than hearing President Grant dedicate

the building and saying it would stand and serve the members for as long as they needed it to worship in. Dad said it was a testimony to him of the power of the words of a modern-day prophet.



John Alan Davies.
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