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of

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Editor:

Joshua Thompson, B.A., D. Phil. (Oxon.)

Volume Two (New Series)

1994/95

IRISH BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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CONTENTS

Editorial 5

Church Planting
Derek Baxter 7

Stepping Through God's Open Doors
Ian Grant 17

Limerick: A Light Still Burning
Trevor Ramsey 39

Banbridge: The Earliest Existing Baptist Church in Co. Down
W Kenneth Stewart 55

Annual Report to 1995 Assembly 89

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EDITORIAL

Appropriately, in the centenary year of the Baptist Union of Ireland, the Journal carries articles on church-planting and the Limerick and Banbridge churches, the former celebrating its centenary and the latter its one hundred and fiftieth anniversary.

Pastor Derek Baxter's interesting account of Baptist Missions (Ireland) experiences in its programme of planting new churches is pointed up and sharpened by Ian Grant's lively first-hand account of one such project at Mullaghmeen, Co. Fermanagh.

The edited version of Kenneth Stewart's painstaking account of the beginnings and pastorates preserves a record of how difficult and humble circumstances were overcome through the years in the establishment of a strong respected church in a country town. It also underlines the importance of consistent, continuous evangelism in the upbuilding and growth of any local church. The lesson needs to be re-learned in the 'Nineties when a plateau has been reached in the growth of our Churches as a group. We are grateful for second, third and fourth generation Baptists brought up in our churches, but we are acutely aware that grace does not run in the blood. Our churches will only survive, grow and spread as they are infused with fresh spiritual life in the shape of new converts, more baptisms and dedicated church members.

The revised index of articles and writers for the *Journal* promised for Volume Two (New Series) has alas been delayed again by circumstances outside our control. We apologise and look to Volume Three!

RECENT EXPERIENCES IN CHURCH-PLANTING IN IRELAND

by Derek Baxter

My first problem with the title was to determine "how recent is recent?" (I suppose that depends a lot on your age!). In the end I decided to go back to the mid-1980's for at least four reasons:

1. Around that time a number of local authorities in Northern Ireland published 'Area plans' which gave details of proposed future development. So it was possible to see where there would be a substantial increase in population.

2. In January 1985 Baptist Missions stated in its document, *Strategy for the Future in Ireland* ;

> "We would envisage some use of Team Ministry in church planting situations in the North together with allocating our evangelist to given areas for specific periods of time in order to test the initial response."

The same document identified towns and areas for such church planting exercises. The first three named were Ballymoney, Moira and Saintfield. In order to pursue this strategy a small mobile, church-planting team was formed and headed up by the late Jim Henry.

3. A few churches (both in the North and the South) had a vision for church-planting in 'strawberry plant' fashion to nearby towns and Baptist Missions became the vehicle for achieving that.

4. If I begin with 1986 it allows me to say that Baptist Missions was directly involved in the planting of eight churches in Ireland over the past eight years! The following 'potted history' of how each of them came into being underlines how the Lord had prepared the ground (sometimes over a very long period) and also shows what can be done if we are prepared to launch out and follow His leading.

Ballymoney, Co. Antrim

Records show that a church was formed in Ballymoney in 1820 as an off-shoot of the Tobermore church. This work eventually ceased sometime in the 1860's. Apparently a number of attempts were made to re-establish the church. The Irish Baptist Home Mission placed a worker there in the 1920's under Pastor J W D Freeman of the Coleraine church. In the late 1970's Mr Bill Johnston was located in the town and a small group emerged. Baptist Missions placed Stephen Curry there in March 1985.

Stephen began children's meetings and home bible studies and a later report, looking back, stated 'under God the timing was perfect for a number of families moved into the district and the group began to grow'.

Eventually a site was purchased at Ballybrakes Road. The N.B.A. provided a temporary classroom as a meeting place and Ballymoney Baptist Fellowship was formed and functioned until a Baptist Church was formally constituted with thirteen members on Saturday 20th September 1986. Stephen Curry reviewed the work in the following terms:

"This last year has been one of tremendous advance and encouragement. Within one year a building has been opened, evening services commenced, a church formally constituted, morning services started, a Sunday school commenced with 17 pupils, a B.W.F. formed, a children's meeting with 25-39 attending, a 31% increase in membership and a number of adherents attending regularly." He concludes by saying "God in his grace has been good and we must acknowledge His goodness to us."

Ballymoney church now has a membership of 50 and its own fine new building.

Carrigaline, Co. Cork

Baptist Missions supported Philip Brown for almost ten years, working alongside Pastor Ted Kelly in the Cork church. The church had a vision to establish a work in Carrigaline and, in fellowship with Baptist Missions, Philip was given the responsibility to develop that work.

Meetings began in Carrigaline in 1985 and the Brown family moved to the town in 1986. A programme of activities gradually built up including ladies, children's and Sunday evening meetings. The church was formally constituted on 10th January 1987 with eight foundation members and 200 in attendance from all over Ireland. Philip's report also includes the phrase 'the timing of God was perfect' and he refers to the formation of the church as 'the crowning of a series of God-ordained events.'

This years statistics show that the church has now 28 members, 30 in the Sunday School and 20 in the Youth Fellowship.

Castlederg, Co. Tyrone

The Sion Mills Church developed an increasing interest in commencing a work in Castlederg. They engaged in evangelism through literature distribution, home visitation, open-air evangelism and Bible Studies. Eventually in 1982 they purchased a site on the outskirts of the town and the N.B.A. provided a temporary classroom for that site. Under the auspices of Baptist Missions Winston Jordan was placed there in 1983 to develop the work.

In 1985 it was agreed by all that there should be a loosening of the ties between the Sion Mills church and the group in Castlederg in order to allow them to develop. A change of meeting place to the 'Missionary Centre' and the work continued to develop until the church was formed on 17th November 1987.

Winston Jordan moved to Scotland 1990 and the work has continued despite the fact that Co. Tyrone is sparsely populated and Castlederg has its own particular difficulties, not least because of terrorist activity in the area. Baptist Missions, in conjunction with the Aided Churches Scheme fund and the College will be placing another missionary (Ivor Thompson) there this coming September.

Moira, Co. Armagh

In April 1986 Jim Henry and Cecil Johnston organised some initial house to house visitation in Moira and were greatly encouraged by one lady professing faith in Christ. In July of that year Baptist Missions gave summer appointments to two College students (Stanley Black from Carryduff and David Whitmarsh from Lisburn) to join forces with Jim Henry and Cecil Johnstone. They met together for prayer and resolved 'to have a conversation about Christ with everyone they met in Moira' (Jim reports - 'and they did!').

A thorough home visitation programme was carried out, a tent mission was held in the Demesne from 27th July - 10th August and following that a home was opened for weekly meetings for prayer and Bible study. This led to a cementing together of Baptist folk in the area, the formation of Moira Baptist Fellowship and a growing desire to establish a local Baptist Church. Moira Orange Hall was the only available building in the town and November 1986 saw the beginning of regular Sunday and mid-week services there and a five-fold increase in the numbers that had been attending the house meetings.

The church was constituted on 3rd January 1987 with thirteen foundation members, one of whom was the lady who was converted during the first visitation in April 1986. The Moira church continues to grow and are currently erecting their own suite of buildings.

Saintfield, Co. Down

In the summer of 1987 Jim Henry and the team moved to Saintfield to seek under God to repeat the "Moira experience". Jim Henry and Cecil Johnston were joined by Stanley Black, Evan Williams, Desmond Creelman, Alan Wilson and Sam Best. Intensive home visitation took place, a meeting

was called for those interested in Baptist work in the area and a Tent Mission was held from July 26th-August 8th. During that Mission five people professed faith and one backslider was restored. Following the Mission a weekly house meeting for prayer and Bible study was commenced and Saintfield Baptist Fellowship was formed.

As in Moira, the only available hall in the town was the Orange Hall and regular public meetings were commenced on Sunday 6th September. A programme of activities built up and ultimately a church was constituted on 9th January 1988 with 25 foundation members. Again the Saintfield church has continued to grow apace and has its own suite of fine buildings and its own Pastor.

Donaghadee, Co. Down

David McFarland joined with the others and a similar programme of visitation, tent mission and house meetings was carried through. Donaghadee Baptist Fellowship was formed and regular public meetings held in Moate Street Orange Hall throughout the following winter.

It became obvious that things would not move as quickly in Donaghadee as they had in both Moira and Saintfield and so the summer of 1989 saw another concerted effort in the form of a Tent Mission and visitation. Agreement was reached with the other Baptist churches in North Down that the Millisle church would take responsibility for the continuance of the Donaghadee work. Ultimately, the church was formed on 30th June 1991 with thirty-one members being dismissed by the Millisle church to form Donaghadee. Two of these members professed faith as a result of the tent mission in 1989. Again that church has grown and has its own suite of buildings.

Midleton, Co. Cork

The vision of the Cork church must be commended. After losing some of its members when the Carrigaline church was formed, they expressed a desire to give birth again! Sean Mullan joined Baptist Missions staff towards the end of 1987 and was allocated to work alongside Pastor

Ted Kelly and the Cork church. The idea was that he would seek to help in the building up of the mother church with a view to eventually establishing a work in Midleton.

Our report to the 1989 Assembly stated that a five year time scale was envisaged. The following year it was reported that a small group had been established, that they were meeting on a regular basis and that there were signs of growth both in numbers and in commitment.

The Midleton church was formally constituted on 1st February 1992 with twelve foundation members. They have just this month managed to get an independent meeting place and are currently doing some work on it to make it suitable for public worship.

Cavan Town, Co. Cavan

The Baptist Missions Ireland Committee became increasingly concerned about the border counties of Monaghan and Cavan. David Mc Farland was commissioned to investigate these areas and produce a detailed report. He presented an interim report in November 1990 and a final report in April 1991.

The committee took action on the basis of these reports and asked Pastor Ted Kelly to seek to follow through on the recommendations. Ultimately, a small team taking the name 'Cavan Baptist Outreach' was formed. Plans were made for regular times of prayer and outreach in the Cavan area.

A desire for a regular Sunday meeting was expressed by some believers in the area and a home was offered as a venue. Over forty people attended that first meeting and the report states that there was a very real sense of the Lord's presence. After negotiations with the Mullaghmeen church Ian Grant was asked to co-ordinate the work and this led to various forms of outreach and to the baptism of thirteen people between the ages of 10 and 75 in the Mullaghmeen church on 21st March 1993 and to the formation of the Cavan church in the Farnham Hotel on 27th March 1993.

Again this church continues to grow not only in numbers, but more importantly in influence and we believe it will become the springboard for planting other churches in County Cavan.

Reflection on these projects reveals that they had some things in common:

1. A clear vision and specific goals from the beginning.

2. A programme of evangelism and Bible teaching which moved towards those goals.

3. The early formation of a "loose" Baptist fellowship by a committed core group who shared the vision of planting a local church and were prepared to stick with it.

4. They were bathed in prayer, not only by those involved, but by the wider Baptist constituency.

5. They all needed Baptist Missions to provide the personnel and support.

Eight Churches in Eight Years - Yes! - Praise God!! But, there have been abortive attempts also.

Hillsborough, Co. Down

Attempts were made to establish a work in Hillsborough. A meeting was held (at the request of some Baptist people living in the area) in November 1989 and regular home Bible studies commenced in January 1990. A Tent Mission was held in July of that year and the Bible studies were continued until last year when those involved decided that there was not enough interest to continue but Hillsborough is the only town in the greater Belfast area that does not have a Baptist church.

Macosquin, Co. Londonderry

At the invitation of the Coleraine church we began visitation in Macosquin in January of 1990. Sunday evening meetings were conducted on the first and third Sundays of each month and a Mission was held in April/May.

Jim Henry felt that there was potential, but the Coleraine church decided to abandon the idea towards the end of the year. Jim in his inimitable way maintained that the folk in the Coleraine Church would need to take note of the advice given by C.H. Spurgeon to their first pastor T.W. Medhurst in 1860:

"Allow me to suggest the establishment of Baptist churches in villages around Coleraine, to be supplied by local preachers". After outlining what he was endeavouring to do in England Spurgeon continued, "My own opinion is that if there are only eight or nine (people) in a village, they should be formed into a church and set to work to increase and multiply." He finished the letter by saying "see to it, brother Medhurst".[1]

I will conclude by letting Spurgeon have the last word and quote from his sermon entitled "Home Evangelisation, the work of the Churches", preached in Bloomsbury Chapel on 26th April 1866 at the first anniversary of the uniting of the Baptist Irish Society with the British Baptist Home Mission.

"Much is said about not allowing small churches to be formed where they would not be self-supporting, but the attempt to suppress such modes of action would be more injurious than their permission; and if we attempt always to gather up our strength, and to centralise it too much we might perform an act of spiritual suicide ... If the churches did more in the work of home evangelism it would be a cure for many ills. Fuller said that his Church was in a very sad state and that there was a deal of quarrelling till someone suggested that they should send a missionary to the heathen, and then they had no time to quarrel. If the churches have objects before them to work for, there is not much likelihood that the mighty energy which the Baptists possess will spend itself in internal conflicts, but in the service of God. This work

will also be a means of spiritual edification. There is no making a thorough soldier unless he sees some real service, and there is no hope of making advanced Christians without setting them to some earnest Christian work. The growth that comes only from meditation will be the growth of the conservatory, but if we work hard as well as pray, we shall grow so that the wintry frost will not be able to bite our root nor touch our leaf" [2]

FOOTNOTES

1. The Life and Work of C.H. Spurgeon by G. Holden Pike vol 2 page 362
2. The Life and Work of C.H. Spurgeon by G. Holden Pike vol 3 page 160

"STEPPING THROUGH GOD'S OPEN DOORS"

Church planting in Mullaghmeen and Cavan 1980 - 1994 by Ian Grant

GOD has a great way of opening doors of opportunity, and that is the best way to describe the develop—ment of the two churches that have been planted in Mullagh-meen and in Cavan town in the past few years. In the words of Revelation 3:7-8 it was as if God had laid down a challenge to us:

What I open, no-one can shut; and what I shut, no-one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have set before you an open door that no-one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

The challenge to us was whether we would step through those doors when God presented them or would we say we had enough on our plate, turn down the challenge and miss the open door.

Early Days in Cavan

The story really begins back in 1980. Edward Betts was the pastor of Stonepark Baptist Church, near Brookeborough in Co Fermanagh. Addison and Margaret Clingen were among his congregation in those days. Alan Barker was the pastor of Sligo Baptist Church. A lady called Jane O'Neill had just returned to live in Co Cavan after a time in South Africa. She had returned to Ireland because her husband had just been appointed as a surgeon in Cavan General Hospital. How-ever, shortly after their return he died of a massive brain haemorrhage on the night that their second child Dermot was born. Jane had just been converted before she left South Africa. It was

a letter sent to Pastor Alan Barker from South Africa, telling him about Jane O'Neill and asking him if he would go to visit her in Cavan and seek to encourage her in her faith that started Baptist links with Cavan. Now Sligo and Cavan may look close together on a World Map, but in real terms it is a trip of some 80 miles across some of the worst roads in Ireland. Pastor Barker in his wisdom telephoned Addison and Margaret Clingen who lived in Lisnaskea and asked them if they would go to Cavan and make contact with Jane and try to encourage her. This they did and a lasting friendship ensued. Jane had made good friends with her neighbours in Cavan, and it was not long before she asked for a Bible study to be started in her home. Addison contacted Pastor Betts of Stonepark who agreed to take the study on a fortnightly basis on Tuesday nights. So the Cavan Bible study began. There was quite a turn-over of people attending in those days including some nuns and a Roman Catholic priest, but God's Word was being presented faithfully.

The Bible study continued in Jane's home until about six years later when, for various reasons, Jane decided to move to England and the Bible study came to an end for lack of a venue. However, about six months later, the young priest appeared at the Clingen home in Lisnaskea to ask if the Bible study could be re-started because Thomas and Mary Caslin had opened their home for it to be continued. This was quite amazing when you think of it, because in the early days Thomas would not even enter Jane's house when the Bible study was going on, he simply left his wife to the door and then came back for her later. Until one night there was a heavy rain, and Thomas had to stay - in the kitchen! But then the next time he came into the Bible study and began to take a great interest in what was being said. Now the Bible study was to meet in their home! So apart from that gap of six months the Bible study has continued from 1980 until the present day. It was to become the seed bed for the first ever Baptist Church in Cavan some years later.

How did Mullagmeen come into the picture?

Around about 1986 or '87 several Baptist families left Enniskillen Baptist Church for various reasons. Some of these began attending a new church called Erne West Evangelical Church out at Springfield on the western

side of Lower Lough Erne. Others went back to Stonepark Baptist Church which had been the mother church for Enniskillen back in 1967 when it was planted by Rea Grant. The amount of travelling involved for these families on a Sunday, plus the fact that Erne West was adopting a Congregational rather than a Baptist emphasis, meant that from time to time these families thought of forming their own Baptist Church.

This was the situation I was to find when in the summer of 1988 I was given a Baptist Missions summer appointment for seven weeks to work alongside Stonepark Baptist Church. While there I heard about the Bible study that had been going on in Cavan for some years from the Clingen family. Through visitation with the Irwin and Burns families I also heard about the situation in Enniskillen. I can remember that during that summer the idea of forming another Baptist Church in North Fermanagh was suggested from time to time. In fact I was even taken to see the old Mullaghmeen National School property which was lying derelict but had been on the market for sale for some time, Through means of a broken window, I got inside the building and even took pictures of it! It was a mess, and yet little did I know that just two short years later I would be the pastor of a church meeting in that very building!

Mullaghmeen Baptist Church is formed

One year later, after the families involved had thought the whole matter through and discussed it at length with Pastor Betts of Stonepark, Pastor Raymond Compton of Dunamanagh, Co Tyrone, and Winston Jordan (Baptist Missions, Castlederg), they purchased the old Mullaghmeen School property for £22,000 and they constituted themselves as Mullaghmeen Baptist Church on Sunday, September 3 1989 with seven foundation members. They were Victor and Joan Irwin, David and Ivy Burns, Tom and Anna McDaniel and Mrs Dawn Kells. Including their children they numbered about 15 on a Sunday morning and about 12 on a Sunday evening. The building was in a very bad state of repair and so they obtained a portable hall from Pastor Harry Dowds of Craigavon and put it on site. This hall was to be their home for the coming year. They had two Sunday services from the beginning, a Wednesday night Bible study and prayer time, plus a Good News Club on a

Monday night and a Sunday School before the morning service with seven pupils. Quite a programme for seven members to run on their own!.

I can remember being the guest preacher on two Sundays during that first year and I am sure on many occasions they asked themselves "What have we done?" or "Will we ever grow?" I also remember sitting on a BYE committee in Belfast one night in October 1989 when an application was received for a BYE Team from a church in "Mullaghmeen" and the committee looked at each other and said "Where...? Well at least one committee member knew where Mullagh-meen was, so he was asked to be the leader of the team the following summer! You've guessed it - he was Ian Grant!

Ian Grant

From October 1989 until the end of August 1990 I was assistant pastor at Thomas Street Baptist Church, Portadown. Alongside this I was completing my studies for BD Honours. During that year I was, of course, aware of the new church in Mullaghmeen, Co Fermanagh and the Bible study in Cavan. One morning sitting studying in my house in Portadown the Lord gave me a "vision" - or, he formulated a project in my mind to see a line of evangelical churches planted from Enniskillen to Athlone, in each of the major towns along that main road. I got down a map of Ireland and wrote down the names of all those towns which were roughly twenty miles apart. I jotted down a few more ideas about how to go about this project and just kept it in my diary. (I still have it to this day.) But I told nobody about this, because as far as I was concerned I was heading to France to do Church-planting work there when I would finish in Portadown.

Anyhow, summer 1990 arrived and I led the BYE Team to Mullaghmeen, Co Fermanagh. We had an excellent week with a very encouraging Holiday Bible Club of about 60 children each day, encouraging door-to door work, and two or three youth nights which brought in young people from local estates for the first time. We saw a few professions of faith that week and the beginnings of a Youth Fellowship which has met fortnightly on a Saturday night from then on. At the closing Sunday morning service the whole team broke down in tears as they rejoiced and shared with

the church all that the Lord had done through them that week. I even found myself praying,

O use me Lord, use even me,
Just as Thou wilt, and when and where,
Until Thy blessed face I see.
Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glory share.

The team finished on the Sunday and the church members met on the Monday night 16 July 1990 and issued a call to me to become their pastor on a part-time basis with the understanding that I would find a job to supplement my income, the church agreeing to pay me £50 per week. I still was adamant about going to France and wrote back saying I would be pursuing my application for France with Baptist Missions but would come to Mullaghmeen until such times as the Lord opened the door for me to go to France. (That was one of the doors the Lord was not to open for me.) After six weeks looking after my home church in Millisle, Co. Down I arrived in Mullaghmeen on November 25 1990 thinking I would be there for about four months, but the Lord had other plans...!

Tent-making in Mullaghmeen

Since the apostle Paul worked as a tent-maker to supplement his income as he preached the Gospel in places like Corinth, so this term has come to be applied in our generation to those who, though involved in Christian work, still have a part-time secular job to help support themselves and lift the burden off a small church. I left home in Millisle on Friday night November 25 and exactly one week later on Friday December 2 I started work in F Dowler Ltd Lisknaskea as a warehouse hand in their grocery wholesale department.

Four days a week. I did manual labour in a warehouse (36 hours) then the rest of the week I prepared three messages, did visitation and looked after a Youth Fellowship on a fortnightly basis. This lasted for seven weeks. Over Christmas a job was advertised for a part-time Science Technician in Fivemiletown High School (20 hours per week). I had done three science A levels at school and had never used them since, but it was because of these

that I got this job in Fivemiletown. So from January 20 1991 I worked 20 hours a week in the school and the rest of my time was available for the church. The Lord again had opened doors and He proved faithful and never once let me down!

I can remember Addison asking me that first Christmas if I would take over the Bible study in Cavan. At that stage, just a month into my first pastorate and working 36 hours a week as well, I knew enough was enough and said "no". I didn't tell him about my 'vision' at that stage. Anyhow he was able to get Pastor Mark Patterson of Knockconny to look after the Bible study for a year.

Meanwhile in Mullaghmeen, speaking to the same three or four faces on a Wednesday night was the most frustrating part of my work. So, on the first Sunday in January 1991 I announced that on the coming Wednesday night we would be beginning a new series of studies using a little booklet published by Baptist Missions called "The Master and His Disciple". I advertised it as a course for new or young Christians who were looking for teaching and told our people if they knew anybody like that to encourage them to come along on Wednesday night. Wednesday night arrived and so did fifteen people, most of them obviously outsiders. So we began our course. and it "took off". People were getting practical down-to-earth teaching, they were beginning to grow. It was not long before we came across Baptism and the Lord's Table; the nature of the church; church membership, etc. Some people began to express a desire to be baptised.

This is where the growth came from in Mullaghmeen - from the Wednesday night Bible study as people fed on God's Word. The mid-week meeting now rarely drops below fifteen people in Mullaghmeen and we have had as many as thirty there at times.

The Decision to stay

What about my own situation? What about France? How did the Lord convince me to stay in Mullaghmeen? With all these new lives being touched and the church beginning to grow, I was in a dilemma. I met with Baptist Missions in February 1991 and told them just what was happening

in Fermanagh. They were delighted with the news and encouraged me to stay where I was until the Lord definitely led me out of it. They felt it was obvious that there was a work to be done there and that I should carry on. and so my application to France was withdrawn. Another factor that clinched it for me just after this was that God brought a girl all the way from Lyons in France to be the French Assistant teacher in Fivemiletown High School where I was working. One day she was going through some personal difficulties and someone in the school, who knew that I was a pastor, brought her to me to see if I could talk to her and help her. So there in the preparation room of the science department I had to counsel her. This was done in French because others were in the room and she did not want them to hear her problems too! My French was rusty and I thought I had made a mess of it, but she asked for a further meeting at which I gave her a copy of the Bible in French. I told her about a Youth Fellowship meeting we had that night and about the church I worked in, and she wanted to come along. By that evening she had read all of John's Gospel, Romans and Ephesians in her new Bible, and she wanted to know more. She came to every single meeting in Mullaghmeen from then on; she continually asked questions about what we believed and upon her return to France at the end of March she wrote to us to tell us she had trusted Christ as her Saviour! Now she has not had much fellowship since, but the Lord definitely touched her life during those couple of months in Ireland. To me it was as if God was setting His seal upon everything - upon my being in the job in the school, upon my concern for France, yet showing me at the same time that He was bigger than any geographical boundaries, and that He had me where He wanted me. He also used a verse in Galatians 6:9 to keep me in Mullaghmeen: *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."*

Without knowing the significance of it for me, this was the very passage Pastor Derek Hutchinson preached on at my Induction to the pastorate of Mullaghmeen on April 6 1991 now that I had finally decided to stay. It is estimated there were about 280 people present that night at Mullaghmeen - the largest-ever Baptist gathering in Co Fermanagh - a token of the interest there has been in the work from our sister churches over the years. But where did we put 280 people?

Renovating the old Mullaghmeen School

When Mullaghmeen Primary School closed down, it lay derelict for a while until Enniskillen Rugby Club bought it to make it into their club-house. It is interesting that quite a few of our members now in Mullaghmeen can remember dancing the night away in their unsaved days in the same building where they now worship God since their conversion. Eventually the Rugby club moved across the road at Mullaghmeen and erected a new suite of premises. The schoolhouse again fell into a state of disrepair and when I stood in it in summer 1988 it really was a mess. The foundation members of the church bought it in 1989 and by the first week in July 1990, with the help of Mr Winston Jordan (BM) of Castlederg they had converted and refurbished one room approximately 20feet x 20 feet to be used as the meeting room for all our services. This was completed just in time for our first BYE team. A second adjoining room through a partition was hurriedly made ready for the next big event - my induction - on April 6 1991. This involved laying a concrete floor, putting a quick coat of paint on the walls and laying a carpet. With the partition opened we had a straight through room 60 feet x 20 feet in which we housed 280 people - a tight squeeze!

Another interesting story about that night was that the pulpit in which I stood to be inducted to the pastorate had come from Stonepark, the same pulpit in which my father, Rea Grant had started off his ministry nearly 30 years earlier.

It was my father who performed the Act of Induction for me in the same pulpit as he had used, and in the same locality as he had planted a church just 24 years earlier in Enniskillen. Pastor Clifford Morrison (Portadown) chaired the evening. Mr Victor Irwin (Church Secretary) related the history of the call and extended the right hand of fellowship and Pastor Derek Hutchinson, (Ballycrochan, Bangor) was the preacher.

So I became the eighth member of Mullaghmeen Baptist Church, but that was to be only the beginning. Shortly after my induction came the first requests for baptism and church membership. They were Mrs Isobel Coulter, Miss Alison McClean and Mr Darrel Irwin. Miss Valerie Irvine, who had already been baptised also came into membership at the end of June 1991

bring the total membership to twelve. These had all become convinced of these matters through the mid-week Bible study Discipleship course. But where did we baptise them? You've guessed it - another quick renovation!

This time the work was undertaken by Mr Hyland Mitchell of Killadeas and Mr Sam Patterson of Aughnacloy. This phase of the work involved damp-proofing the building, replacing the windows of the main hall, installing a baptismal tank, and erecting a pulpit area and organ platform out of rustic bricks. The cost of the first two phases of renovation work together came to about £10,000. As you can imagine, this too was completed just in time and our first baptismal service was very special indeed. About 90 people were present. There was a second baptismal service in October 1991 and our membership then increased to 19. It was at this point that Addison and Margaret Clingen and their son Barrie came to join us in Mullaghmeen.

The final phase of the renovations was contracted out to Messrs Roland Hurst of Ballinamallard. It involved re-plastering the main sanctuary, creating a new entrance hall and porch, and refurbishing rooms in the remaining wing of the building to give us a Pastor's room, a kitchen, toilets. The two old rugby club changing rooms became two minor halls. We installed a shower room in each of these and they can serve as dormitories for either teams, camps or Youth weekends. This final phase, including the installation of oil heating came to £28,000, making the total cost of our buildings, including the original purchase price, just £60,000. When you see the accommodation we have for that sum and consider what other churches have spent on buildings you will realise that we have got a bargain. At the time of writing our debt to the bank is almost completely wiped out, for which we praise God.

So all renovations including an extension to our car park were completed by summer 1993 and we held a Thanksgiving Service to mark the completion of our buildings to coincide with our Fourth Anniversary Services on Saturday September 4 1993. The buildings are being used to the full and are really serving us well.

Spiritual and numerical growth

Putting up a building is one thing but looking after the spiritual building and seeing it grow is quite another, yet we have to say that just as our physical building was renovated in stages, so the Lord has steadily built up our numbers in significant stages. That second Baptismal service and the members who were added on that occasion in October 1991 brought our membership to 19. We lost just one member in the last five years when Mrs Dawn Kells moved to the far side of the lake and family circumstances made it more sensible for her to attend the church on her door-step, Erne-West Evangelical Church. Apart from that, the numbers continued to increase. By the end of 1991 we had about 35 in attendance on Sunday mornings, 15-30 on Sunday night and around 15 on Wednesday night. With 19 members now, it was a satisfactory situation with which to finish my first year in Mullaghmeen.

It was then that Addison returned with his question. Would I consider taking over the Bible study in Cavan? By then, Mark Patterson had been looking after it for a year doing a hundred mile round trip every other Tuesday night. I was now Addison's pastor; I had my first year behind me, and he obviously felt I was well settled into my work programme. Mark could not make the Bible study on one of the Tuesday nights in late 1991 and so Addison asked me at the last minute to stand in. This I did, and I thoroughly enjoyed meeting with the Cavan folk for the first time. My subject that night was "What is Faith? based on Hebrews 11:1-6. Addison recalls feeling the hairs on the back of his head standing on end as I spoke about "The just shall live by faith" and then asking who had rediscovered that text at the time of the Reformation! (Martin Luther, of course) But he felt there was a good cutting edge to the teaching that night and he asked me if I would consider taking over the Bible study from the beginning of 1992. This time I agreed, and then and only then did I tell him the story about my vision to see a line of evangelical churches planted from Enniskillen to Athlone that I had received back in 1989 in Portadown. He could hardly believe it, and yet we both felt that the Lord had brought our paths together for a reason and something special was about to happen in Cavan.

The key to church growth

So my involvement with Cavan began and from Christmas 1991 I began to work through John's Gospel with them. This was another open door that the Lord had set before us. With the church in Mullaghmeen at the stage it was, and as I was still working 20 hours a week in the school, I could have said, "No, there's enough on my plate." But when the offer was made a second time I knew the Lord was in it and I accepted it gladly. Believe it or not, a new sense of excitement and expectation came over the work at Mullaghmeen at that stage. This cannot be proved by statistics at the time, but I do believe that the added dimension of a small church being involved in something bigger gave a new sense of encouragement to them. Within the next eighteen months we were to see both Mullaghmeen and Cavan taking major strides forward together.

I firmly believe that churches do not grow if they take a very short-sighted view of the community around them. I believe a church will grow when they really take a large leap into evangelistic work, perhaps in an area some distance away or even by getting involved practically in a missionary venture overseas, stretching their vision and capacity to the limit. I believe it is then that God regards our leap of faith and looks after the home-base in a remarkable way that would not otherwise be the case if we were narrowly clutching the small advances we had made on the home front, spending all our time consolidating, and using it as an excuse not to go on reaching out further. Oswald J Smith of The People's Church in Toronto is quoted in his biography *Fire in His Bones* as saying that the key to church growth is to keep Mission firmly at the top of the agenda and if you do that then the Lord will honour you by looking after the Home-base. I think that our experience in Mullaghmeen demonstrates the truth of that.

Unexpectedly early developments in Cavan

When I first took over the Bible study in the Caslin's home in Cavan, there were sixteen people in attendance. Eight of these were from a Roman Catholic background and eight from various other church backgrounds. Among the group there were some genuine believers, including Edward and Yvonne Morton who had been converted at a mission held by Sam Workman

in Cavan some years earlier. These believers were coming to this Bible Study looking for Christian teaching and fellowship, but we were viewing this Bible study as purely evangelistic in nature. So I felt there was a need for something more to be done in Cavan. With this in mind six men met together in my home in Tamlaght, near Enniskillen on February 6 1992: Pastor Ted Kelly (Sligo), Pastor Mark Patterson (Knockconny); Mr Dominic Montgomery (BM, Athlone), Mr John Cunningham (an ex-IBC student) plus Addison and myself.

That morning we formed Cavan Baptist Outreach and proceeded to discuss ways and means to reach Co Cavan for Christ. We set down our ideas on a piece of paper, and one of our goals was to see an evangelical fellowship established somewhere in Co Cavan.

Now we thought that was a long-term goal, but it was exactly one week later that Addison and I made our way down to Cavan to do some visitation. This was my first ever visit to Edward and Yvonne in their own home, but just before we got to Derrylane where they lived, Addison and I were discussing whether we would raise the idea of this evangelical fellowship at all or keep it quiet. We decided not to mention it and yet we were no sooner through the door than both Edward and Yvonne offered us their house if we ever wanted to use it for meetings! We took this as the most significant open door the Lord had set before us to date, so we did not miss it. We struck while the iron was hot and there and then planned the start of Derrylane Evangelical Fellowship. It would commence on Sunday March 22 1992 at 3.30 pm. It would meet every week, and Dominic Montgomery from Athlone (50 miles south) and myself from Enniskillen (40 miles north) would speak at it on alternate week. We drew up some little invitations and gave them to Edward and Yvonne who in turn gave them to anyone they thought might be interested. Minutes of a Cavan Baptist Outreach meeting at the time say that we expected about 16 Christians to be interested, but when that first Sunday arrived, to our amazement 42 people turned up and packed out that farmhouse literally in the middle of nowhere.

Where had they come from? Within a very short space of time they were travelling from as far as Bailieborough in East Cavan some 35 miles away and from Ballinamore, some 25 miles to the west. That was quite a

catchment area! There was certainly a need for this type of meeting, and yet sadly we felt those, who were not so keen to have us there, were the mission-hall type people around the countryside. We decided to teach consecutively through the book of Acts on Sunday afternoons, and all the mission-hall people from the area just happened to arrive on the very day we were looking at Acts 2:36-47 when we spoke about the nature of the church, the need for conversion, for believers' baptism followed by addition to church membership and continuing in fellowship with God's people especially around the Lord's Table on a weekly basis. Most of those folk never returned after that, and voiced their opinion through the local grapevine that we should not be seeking to start a new church in an area where all the existing churches were struggling to keep going. At least everybody now knew what we were there for. We never hid the fact that we were ultimately involved in a church-planting exercise and that we were baptistic in our convictions. People knew what we were at and it was up to them to decide if they were going to be with us or not.

Rev. Hugh Jameson of Derrylane

At this stage it is important and just to mention the work of another faithful sower of God's Word for we feel we have reaped to a certain extent what he had sown. Rev. Hugh Jamison, who had been Church of Ireland rector in the three churches of Derrylane, Killashandra and Killegar, was a thoroughly evangelical man who had held home Bible studies not only in the Morton home but also in the home of Tom and Betty Abbot of Killegar (also to become committed to our work). His teaching in these homes laid a great foundation in this rural area for the commencement of our fellowship. Around 1990 Hugh Jamison had retired and gone to live in Glasslough, Co Monaghan from whence he travelled every Sunday to Armagh Baptist Church. Pastor Wesley Crawford had the joy of baptising Mr and Mrs Jamison shortly after their retirement from their life's work in the Church of Ireland. So obviously his departure from Derrylane and surrounding districts had left a void, which our Evangelical Fellowship was now filling.

Baptist Missions involvement in Cavan

In 1990 Baptist Missions Ireland had commissioned Mr David McFarland to survey the border counties of Cavan and Monaghan to find out what Christian work was going on, and to see which areas Baptist Missions could begin to form a strategy to reach into. His report touched on the work of Eddie Betts and Addison Clingen in the Cavan town Bible study and also on Rev. Hugh Jamison's work in the Killashandra area. He also noted the Faith Mission work that had been going on in the two counties for some time, especially noting the "great band of young people" they had meeting on alternate Saturday nights. This Faith Mission "network of contacts" - for there is no other way to describe it - is another factor which made it possible for news of our work to spread so quickly to so many different people. David McFarland recommended that any Baptist Missions work in Co Cavan would need to be in harmony with both the Cavan Bible study and the work of Hugh Jamison in Killashandra. At that time there was no way that David could have envisaged how these two works would dovetail to become the seed-beds for the commencement of Cavan Baptist Church.

As a result of this report and the move of Pastor Ted Kelly to Sligo, Baptist Missions decided to partly support Pastor Kelly so as to enable him to investigate the possibility of church-planting in the border counties. It was because of this that he was at the formation of Cavan Baptist Outreach in February 1992. With my growing involvement in Cavan, first of all through the Bible study and then with the commencement of the Sunday Fellowship meeting, one little tent-maker in Co Fermanagh was being really stretched to the limit: looking after a growing church in Mullaghmeen; working 20 hours a week in Fivemiletown High School and now making a weekly trip to Cavan for visitation and ministry,. It was all just getting too much. So from May 1 1992 Baptist Missions stepped into the breach and decided to pay a third of my salary. The Aided Churches Scheme also agreed pay a third and the Mullaghmeen church would raise the final third. And so, after eighteen months as a "tent-maker", I was finally able to devote myself full-time to the Lord's work and to lay aside my secular job. This proved very timely for the work in Cavan which was set to develop further over the coming summer months of 1992. Also this meant that from May 1992 there is a detailed record of the development of Baptist work in Cavan in the form

of the monthly reports that I have sent since that date to the Baptist Missions Ireland Committee. These now make very interesting reading.

Another precedent was set for Baptist Missions whenever Addison approached them to be considered as an honorary Baptist missions worker. Out of this application was born the "Volunteer Associate Missionary Scheme" which allows retired people to become involved in a voluntary capacity in the work that Baptist Missions is supporting at home or overseas. So Addison Clingen was the first ever Baptist Missions Associate Volunteer Missionary.

Disappointments and Developments

The Evangelical Fellowship started in Derrylane on the March 22 1992. Three months later on June 30 we decided to get some local feed-back on how the people thought things were going, so we held our first Review Meeting. Response was generally very positive with some saying the fellowship was " a breath of fresh air" and another called it "an oasis in the desert" in an area where the faithful preaching of God's Word was scarce. So we had the signal that folk were pleased and that they wanted the work to continue and indeed to see it stepped up. In fact that night we were asked to begin a mid-week Bible study and prayer meeting for the Fellowship. We agreed we would do this from September. It would meet on the alternate Tuesday night to fit in around the evangelistic Bible study in Cavan town, and we would study "The Master and His Disciple" booklet that had proved so useful in Mullaghmeen.

All this was positive, but sadly one family brought up some very negative comments that night. They accused us of preaching from "the wrong Bible", and we were using Mission Praise instead of "a proper hymn book with hymns all about the blood". How sad that in an infant work, in a very needy part of the countryside that some Christians can be so narrow-minded and blinded by traditionalism that they try to threaten the very existence of a new work by bringing up such petty issues. Anyhow they were clearly in the minority that night and to cut a long story short they left us during that summer. The rest of the families pulled together all the more as a result and the work went forward with a new impetus from September

onwards. As the Lord had told us, the doors that He opens no man can shut. This was clearly the Lord's work in this area. The Devil did not like it and so was trying to destroy it, but "greater is He that is in us, than He that is in the world".

Steps towards forming a Church

Some wanted to form a church there and then at that Review meeting, just three months into our existence as a Fellowship. We asked for patience and time to work through the Discipleship booklet. This would allow us to lay the foundational beliefs on the major points of biblical doctrine - the nature of the church, baptism, membership, the Lord's Table etc. So that when it would come to forming a church we would all know what we were committing ourselves to. This they agreed to do, but at a Review meeting in December 1992 we took a decision to move towards the formation of a church. That night the local people decided unanimously that it would be called "Cavan Baptist Church". We outlined the steps that we still needed to take together to make this possible. First of all a Statement of Faith and a constitution would have to be drawn up. This Pastor Kelly and I did in January 1993. Secondly, a baptismal service would have to be planned. This was set for Sunday 21 March 1993 and would be held in Mullaghmeen because there were no other local facilities. Thirdly, a formation service would be arranged. This was to be held on 27 March 1993 and the Farnham Arms Hotel on Main Street, Cavan, was booked for the occasion.

As we moved towards these dates we were not quite sure how many would ask for baptism and how many members we were going to have. Again, we were to be pleasantly surprised.

Baptismal Service for Cavan Believers

On Sunday, 21 March 1993, exactly one year after the formation of Derrylane Evangelical Fellowship, thirteen people from county Cavan came forward for believer's baptism. They ranged from a man of 75 years of age to a boy of ten. They came from every conceivable background - people who formerly belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland, Presbyterians and Methodists. We also already had one lady who had been

baptised by the Brethren. So you could say we had all colours of the rainbow. What a joy it was to see them all baptised and especially to see the Lord honour the Morton family when Edward, Yvonne, their daughter Linda and their son Alan were baptised together. Addison and I had the joy of baptising the candidates that night. Pastor Derek Baxter was the preacher, while Pastor Ted Kelly and Dominic Montgomery also took part.

It was such a joy to have the baptisms in Mullaghmeen because it allowed "mother" and "daughter" to rejoice together over what God was doing in their midst. The Mullaghmeen church had the added delight a fortnight later on Easter Sunday night of baptising nine more people and adding them to the membership. That was twenty-two baptisms in a fortnight and a special era in the lives of these two churches.

Formation of Cavan Baptist Church

The service to mark the formation and constitution of Cavan Baptist Church was held the following week-end on Saturday, 27 March 1993 in a function room of the Farnham Hotel in Cavan Town itself. A congregation of about 130 people filled the room. It was good to see a cross-section of the kind of prayer support and interest there had been in the Cavan work throughout the previous year. After the opening devotions I recounted the history of the work leading to the formation of the church. The Covenant and Statement of Faith were read out and the fourteen foundation members signified their acceptance by adding their signatures. The fourteen were :

Tom and Betty Abbott,
Vivienne Cowan,
John and Helen Foster,
Sam and Gillian Harkness,
Gerry Lynch
Gwen and Floyd McNeill
Edward and Yvonne Morton
Linda Morton
Alan Morton

Pastor Mark Patterson (Knockconny) led in prayer for the new church. Pastor Rea Grant brought a message based on the behaviour and practices of the Church in Acts, stressing the need for us to match our creed with our credibility and suggesting that the all-important link was our own integrity. He urged not to let anybody take that away from us.

From the next day, Sunday 28 March 1993, we were able to hire another room in the hotel for our Sunday services. So the church moved from the farmhouse at Derrylane to the Farnham Hotel in Cavan. The hotel manager only charged us £240 for a whole year's meetings. He and his staff could not have been more helpful to us ever since. We record thanks to God for this tremendous provision, for this further door that He opened for us right into the heart of Cavan town itself.

From that Sunday we began to break bread together for the first time. We started a Sunday School with six children in the class. Thirty-five people were present on the first Sunday. We had lost one or two because we had become a church, but within a few weeks we were back again to about the forty mark as some of our adherents began to return. Numbers stayed at that level consistently until October 1994 when they rose to between fifty and sixty on most Sundays. We had two additions to membership in January 1994 when mother and son, Carmel and Keith Byrne joined us. We have a good number of young people in the church, so from 15 October 1993 we began a Youth Fellowship with between fiften and twenty teenagers attending. We now have two Sunday School classes with some thirteen pupils.

Looking for a more permanent home for the Church

Reports and minutes of various meetings throughout the history of the Fellowship and the Church show that we have always been keeping our eyes open for more permanent premises. A place that the Church could call their own that would enable them without any difficulties to go on developing their programme of outreach and ministry. Both the farmhouse and the hotel have been God's provision to meet the need of the hour, but occasionally we are unable to use the hotel due to Gaelic football matches in the town on a Sunday afternoon. This often meant that at short notice we had to return to the farmhouse at Derrylane. However, if people from the town are

going to be able to drop in to our services on a casual basis we need to be there without fail every Sunday. So this was the real reason for keeping up our search for premises.

Addison and I have lost count of the number of properties and sites we have loked at, but two in particular are worthy of mention here. A site in the town of Ballainagh about 5 miles south of Cavan for which we offered £6,500. When the owner heard that we wanted it for, he doubled the asking price from £10,000 to £20,000 and would not move for us.

Another property we looked at for some time was at Tierquin just one mile from the centre of Cavan town. This consisted of a bungalow on about 1.5 acres with a large garage beside it and a good separate site to the front. It was in a lovely setting and as a church we offered £50,000 for it. The owner was asking £60,000. The bungalow itself would have required a lot of work to bring it up to standard and we would then have had further expenditure either to renovate the garage as a meeting place or to erect a new church building on the site at the front, and therefore we withdrew from the sale.

Since the summer of 1994 the Wedlock family have been attending the church faithfully. Joe is an architectural technician, and he has recently drawn us plans for a new church building. With his help we have approached Cavan Urban Council to purchase a plot of Council land on the Old Dublin Road in Cavan town. Negotiations are under way and if we could purchase this site for around £20000 we believe we could erect a very useful building for about £75000, making a total cost of about £100000. History is still being writtenfor Cavan Baptist Church at this stage.

Our vision for the work in Cavan would be to establish a strong central church in Cavan town to which all our present members would travel from the surrounding towns and villages, such as Bailieborough, Cootehill, Arva, Derrylane, Ballinamore, Belturbet and of course, Cavan town itself. Our aim would be that through evangelistic Bible studies in the homes of the members living in these scattered towns to reach the people of the whole region for Christ. As well as reaching on down towards Athlone through towns like Granard, we would also want to reach across east and west to towns like Bailieborough and Ballinamore to see a line of evangelical

churches established from Dundalk to Sligo. We already have five members living around Bailieborough tot he east and through visitation we have the support of some thirty people in total around the Bailieborough to Carrickmacross region. Since November 1993 an American couple, Andy and Nancy Spohrer have come to live in Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan with the co-operation of our own Baptist Missions and the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Board of America. They have established a Bible study there and have seen a few people saved and it would be their intention to form a fellowship and eventually a church in that town. Andy has been sharing in the ministry of the Cavan Church alongside Dominic and me throughout 1994. You will begin to appreciate the scope of the work that lies ahead of us in this border region of Ireland. To quote from the conclusion of my first ever report to Baptist Missions in May 1992:

The image that keeps coming to my mind is that we have tapped into a spiritual gold-mine stretching practically from Sligo to Dundalk and from Fermanagh to Athlone at a time when nearly all the other prospectors are running down their mining operations. I'm quite sure we'll hit difficulties and snags on many occasions in this work but we must not lose sight of the tremendous opportunities that lie ahead of us and have been given to us as Irish Baptists by the Lord of the Harvest.

What does the future hold for Mullaghmeen and Cavan?

Cavan Baptist Church now has a membership of 16 and a Sunday congregation of about 50 people. Meanwhile Mullaghmeen has continued to grow. The baptismal service on Easter Sunday 1993 brought our membership to 32 and we have had three transfers from other Baptist churches since, bringing our total membership to 35. From a church started with seven members we have seen the membership just five years later grow five-fold. It is also interesting to note that about fourteen of those members have only been converted in the past five years.

For Mullaghmeen our annual Holiday Bible Club and youth outreach during our BYE team each summer has been a very important factor in keeping the church vision lookng out and not in. We also have held an

annual Havest Mission in the month of November. Each of these missions has borne fruit in the months that followed and for this we praise God.

Mullaghmeen would now have a Sunday morning congregation of about 70 people, about 50 on a Sunday night and 20-25 on a Wednesday night. It is important that as a church they continue to reach out and not become complacent and to rest on their laurels, but the time has come for Mullaghmeen to have a full-time pastor of their own. I have only ever been part-time. In the summer of 1995, I and my wife Judith - we were married 9 August 1994 - will, God willing, be moving to Cavan to live and to develop the work of the Church and the Bible studies in he Cavan region, while Mullagh-meen will be loking for a full-time pastor.

The history of these two churches has been very much inter-twined until now, but as they go their separate ways we trust that God will still continue to bless both of then richly and that both Mullaghmeen and Cavan Baptist Churches will continue to step through God's open doors of opportunity.

A LIGHT STILL BURNING

The last hundred years of Limerick Baptist Church

by Trevor Ramsey

It was Saturday, May 29 1993. Limerick's Old Cratloe Road had never seen anything quite like it. The variety of car registration numbers suggested that the audience had gathered from different parts of Ireland. Their purpose was a joyful one to celebrate with the small number of believers in the Baptist Church the opening of their new church building to the glory of God.

As the service of worship progressed they were told that it was only the second Baptist church building constructed on a green field site in the Republic of Ireland this century. The total cost of the project was about £260,000. The special speaker for the occasion, Pastor Stephen Murphy from Dundalk Baptist Church, urged the assembled congregation to "Launch out into the deep".

History was repeating itself, for the city of Limerick had experienced such an occasion before. Almost one hundred years ago a similar scene had been enacted just a few miles away in Military Road near the city centre. On that historic Friday, February 1 1895 another crowded congregation heard that the magnificent new premises had been completed at a cost of £2,400. They listened intently as Pastor Lawrence Tweedie from the Cork Church preached God's Word. His text was Isaiah 1.7, and he said some things relevant to the times:

> "It was in the present day becoming fashionable to pose as broad-minded Christians, belonging to no particular section of the Church, but to all. This might sound very well, but was contrary to Scripture. However pleased God is with the individual believer 'He loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob,' and therefore it was according to His mind that Christians should be gathered into churches."

Sitting on the platform that evening in 1895 was one man to whom the small Limerick church owed an immense debt of gratitude. It was his vision, courage, generosity and influence which provided the impetus for the building project. Pastor Hugh D Brown of Harcourt Street Baptist Church, Dublin, was the driving force behind the circumstances which led to that very special evening.

An Initiative

In the late 1880s a small Independent Church [Congregational] was carrying on a faithful witness to the Gospel in their building in Bedford Row. While numbers attending were sparse, the hearts of the members were big. But one issue dominated discussions at their regular business meetings. This was the debt on the building. At the end of 1890 it stood at £609. No relief seemed imminent and a sense of gloom enveloped the folk as they examined the situation from every angle. Hugh D Brown, however, was not only aware of the church's plight, but he was prepared to make some positive suggestions for their consideration.

The crux of his proposal was an offer to buy the building for £1,000 and to assume responsibility for assisting with the running of the church and its ministry, since a number of the members were Baptists. The proposal posed a considerable problem for the Congregationalists who were paedo-baptists. Pastor Brown met the church members to discuss the position of "non-Baptists and the children of non-baptised members". It was agreed that "any adults who apply for membership, if children of present members and if they state that they honestly believe the doctrine of infant baptism is scriptural, shall be admitted if considered eligible in every other respect."

This was a considerable concession on the part of Brown, but he was looking beyond the generation of the day and taking a longer-term view.

In September 1891 the church accepted Brown's offer and set about severing its links with the Irish Evangelisation Society (IES). The reaction of the IES committee was decidedly unenthusiastic. £1,400 had been raised originally for a Congregational church building and now was being sold to the Baptists. The Congregational Magazine for October 1891 reported:

> "We have heard that the Baptists have purchased the Congregational church in Limerick. Surely, surely, this is not so! Are our Baptist friends so void of all honour as to step in and purchase from a people their buildings without consulting the leaders of the denomination with which that building is connected? If they can act this way they ought to be excommunicated from Christianity. If they can act in such a way, we brand them at once as heretics of the worst kind."

This astonishing outburst met with a mixture of surprise and anger among the small church in Limerick. Obviously, the editor had not heard all the facts, nor was aware of the very considerable, but unsuccessful, efforts the local people had made over a period of years to get the denomination to help them in their need. Neither did he seem to be aware that the church had sent full information of their intentions to the denominational leaders. In response, the secretary of the Limerick church wrote to the editor detailing the steps the church had taken and concluding:

"Upon the wording and spirit of the editorial note we have no desire to comment. For very many years the church has been composed of Independents and Baptists who worked together in unity. We place little import-ance upon whether the building is called Congregational-ist or Baptist having no sympathy with the cries, 'I am of Paul' and 'I am of Apollos'. We place great importance on the preaching of the gospel of Christ, the communion of believers and the furtherance of the Lord's cause here."

The editor published an apology in the next issue. However, before Brown's proposed course of action could be put into effect, there had to be

some further discussion with the IES since legally they had a first charge on the building. In the end the IES decided to redeem the mortgage.

A New Beginning

By the end of the year most of the members had decided to form themselves into a Baptist church, with the help, guidance and practical assistance of Brown. Only two members of the existing church decided in all good conscience not to follow their brethren into the new situation.

On the first Lord's day of 1892 the band of believers met together in the YMCA rooms in Upper Cecil Street, moving within a few weeks to the more suitable premises of the Friends Meeting House. Hugh D Brown undertook to arrange for pulpit supplies. The small group began to look forward with a measure of expectancy to better days ahead.

Their optimism was justified for within a few months three significant events had taken place. First, in April the Baptist church was formally constituted with twenty-two foundation members. Second, the following month a suitable building site had been identified. Third, in August Rev. A Grant Gibb, M.A., of Crown Terrace Baptist Church, Aberdeen, had accepted a call to become the church's first pastor. He stayed nine years and his ministry had a significant influence in seeing the church through its infancy.

The early roll of members contained the names of many who later proved to be stalwart advocates of the Baptist cause in Ireland. George Boyd, an elder from the outset, was held in high esteem far and near. A.B. Hamilton made an immense contribution locally and throughout the churches by his wise and often sharp counsel. He was President of the Baptist Union of Ireland in 1932.

From the beginning, the church was thoroughly evangelistic in spirit. A tent mission was held in the seaside village of Kilkee in Co. Clare in July 1894 conducted by Pastor Frank Eland from Athlone. Meetings were held regularly in Ballinagarry, Co. Limerick. The church members were generous in their support of the Home Mission. In 1894, for example, they gave

£95 to the funds. The *Irish Baptist* at the time commented that "the pastor and the church at Limerick are noted for their evangelistic fervour".

Thus a series of divine providences brought the church to that first Friday in February 1895 when they opened their impressive Gothic-style building on Military Road.

Fruitful Years

Among the first to be baptised by the pastor in the new building was the Rev. R H Cotter, the rector of Kildimo parish in the Church of Ireland. Mr Cotter had, in his own words, "read that unanswerable book, written in the kindest Christian spirit, an 'Essay on Christian Baptism' by the Hon. and Rev. Baptist Noel." This was a notable event but only one of many in the following years of steady upward progress. In May 1896 Pastor Grant Gibb addressed the annual Assembly meetings in Belfast on "The City of the Violated Treaty". The following year the Limerick church hosted the annual Assembly.

In late 1896 Frank Eland, who by then had moved from Athlone to Belfast ,held another gospel mission in the church. Seven conversions were reported. The church's regular ministry extended to the county. Meetings were held in five centres, including a cottge meeting in the picturesque village of Adare. In 1898 such a tide of spiritual blessing was enjoyed during the annual week of prayer that the meetings had to be extended for another week. By the following year the church was very nearly self-supporting. One interesting facet of the church's weekly programme was the pastor's class in New Testament Greek!

The church secretary during these blessed years was William Fitt, whose brother Percy was D L Moody's personal secretary. Percy Fitt often visite the church during these years and gave stirring reports of Mr Moody's evangelistic endeavours.

Times of Change

The resignation of Pastor Grant Gibb in March 1901, possibly because of his persistent health problems, marked a definite close to a happy chapter

in the life of the church. The subsequent years did not see anything like the blessing of those early years, although the pastors who took up the baton laid down by Gibb lacked nothing in terms of ability or zeal.

First of these was David Henderson, another Scot, who ministered from November 1901 to July 1906. He later was pastor of Tobermore, and then of Great Victoria Street church, Belfast. He was followed by W C Cowden who arrived when the membership was 28 with 50 children enrolled in the Sunday-school. His pastorate was brief. In December 1908 W B Meikleham arrived to take pastoral charge. Four years later when he emigrated to Canada, the membership had risen to the mid-thirties. The *Irish Baptist* reported:

> "When Mr Meikleham announced his intention to resign the pastorate some time ago, the intimation was received with great surprise by his many friends in Limerick, especially by those connected with the church amongst whom he laboured, who had learned to appreciate him highly for his uniform kindliness of disposition and earnest Christian character."

The church secretary in his annual report that year must surely earn a reward for brevity: "Struggling on. Losing our pastor who is going to Canada."

James W Pearce

Following Meikleham's departure, the church then called a man who certainly merits a worthy place in its recorded history. J W Pearce was assistant pastor to Hugh D Brown in Harcourt Street, Dublin, when he received the call to Limerick. He arrived in the Treaty City in September 1912 and began the first of two periods as pastor of the church there. It lasted three years during which time much was accomplished. He returned in September 1924 and laboured until 1932. During the intervening nine years he carried on a fruitful ministry in the Phibsborough church in Dublin.

His earlier pastorate i Limerick was noted particularly for his work among the soldiers stationed in the city. A good number of men from the

Royal Army Medical Corps augumented the numbers at the morning and evening services. Their presence was a tribute to Pearce's contacts with them and to his attempts to provide facilities for their total needs. Every eevening, for example, the church building was open for recreational purposes with a quiet spot for letter-writing. An account in the *Irish Baptist* gives something of the flavour of this ministry:

> "Last Thursday so many came to our young people's Bible class that it could not be held in the usual room. The prayer meeting on Wednesday was equally well-attended, some of the soldiers leading in earnest prayer. The very keen interest taken in all our services by these young men is most inspiring. Some of them take notes of each sermon. On Saturday nights we have a Social Tea after which the place is liberty hall for the men for games, songs, writing and conversation. This has afforded me one of my very best opportunities for witness I took an armful of books and tracts to the barracks yesterday and they were eagerly received.. I had to return for a second supply ..."

During Pearce's first pastorate a new manse was purchased. Named "Freiburg" it was situated on Military Road and cost £500, financed by £140 raised by the members, £300 on loan from the Baptist Building Fund and £60 borrowed from the bank.

It was in 1914 that the church lost one of its most esteemed members, when Benjamin Bennett went to be with the Lord. He was the managing director of the well-known firm of Mattersons of Limerick. For may years Mr Bennett was in charge of the Sunday-school for which he had a great love. He left the church some property in his Will.

When Pastor Pearce indicated to the church in 1915 that he would be returning to Dublin, many of the congregation got together to draw up a letter urging him to stay in Limerick. Such was the esteem in which he was held. The soldiers, too, made a presentation to him at the farewell service.

In general terms the war years were difficult ones for the church as it lost five members and their families. The generosity of the members was noteworthy. In 1915 from among its 35 members £100 was raised towards the pastor's salary. For the sake of comparison, the records show that the Banbridge church with 99 members raised £90 and the Milltown church with 71 members, £65. Harry Spelman, a graduate of the Dublin College, moved from Athlone and Moate to take up the pastorate in Limerick. He served for four years before resigning to move to Foulsham in England.

The following years were among the most difficult in the church's history when both membership and Sunday-school enrolment declined. In 1924 the church sent a call to James Pearce to return as pastor. It was Phibsborough's turn to be saddened by his acceptance of this invitation. The *Irish Baptist* carried the following tribute:

> "To those who know but one-sided and lop-sided ministers, Mr Pearce is a revelation of the real all-round man, thoroughly at home on the platform, in the choir, or at the organ, in the kitchen, sickroom or playroom, working in leather, wood or iron, careful and economical yet the first to put his hand deeply in his purse when an appeal is made. Such a man is Mr Pearce. No wonder then that Phibsborough is sad at his going."

Lean Years

Pearce, however, was returning to a difficult station. His difficulties were compounded when during the course of 1925 seven members were forced to emigrate to England. This was always a factor in the life of the church. Indeed no history of any church in the Republic of Ireland could be written without some mention of the signficant effects of emigration. It was a particular problem during the economic depression of the 1920s as a constant stream of people "took the boat", leaving behind gaps in church life which were difficult to fill. Time after time churches were deprived of young people who were showing signs of spiritual maturity and making effective contributions to the local church. It is difficult constantly to bear such losses. Even Pearce, though he never wavered in his constant

endeavours, seems to have been discouraged when he wrote in the *Irish Baptist*, "We sense the importance of keeping a light burning here, even though our membership is small and can show little or no sign of increase." Again in 1930, "For the most part things here are the same year after year. In such a Roman Catholic city it is very difficult to make any evident progress." In 1931 he is brutally frank, "The year 1930 has been without any outstanding event. We have managed to maintain our ground and no more. There are no baptisms to record."

His ministry in Limerick ended on 27 November 1932 when he accepted a call to the church in Wedmore, Somerset. He continued to be held in high esteem by Irish Baptists until his death in 1952.

It was two and a half years before the vacancy was filled. One who assisted the church in the interim was Pastor Isaac P Bell, formerly of Tandragee, who had retired from the active ministry. He spent the summer of 1933 in Limerick and occupied the pulpit with acceptance.

On May 31 1935 Pastor R W Kerr moved from Bloomfield, Belfast, and was inducted as pastor of Limerick. Among other things he was known for his lantern lecture on "How we got our Bible" which he delivered in many of the churches throughout Ireland. Perhaps church members would profit from such teaching in our day. During Mr Kerr's five and a half years' ministry there was a small increase in membership. When he left in November 1940 to become an Army chaplain during World War II, the church had 34 members. At the farewell meeting Mr Kerr received two presents from the crews of two Danish ships then in port, which testified to his wide concern for a variety of people.

Throughout the 1940s the church continued its work and witness in a solid, consistent and unspectacular fashion. It suffered a severe loss when the highly respected A B Hamilton died on July 17 1942. His father had been a foundation member, while he himself had served for many years as an elder until his death. The short pastorate of F W Greer Hutchinson, a member of the Tobermore church and as College graduate lasted just two years. He was followed in 1944 by Pastor Robert Clarke who moved to Limerick from Carrickfergus. During his ministry small beginnings were

made with the formation in 1945 of a branch of the Women's Missionary Auxiliary of the IBFM. In 1948 Mr Clarke accepted a call to the Monkstown church near Belfast where he built a reputation as pastor, author and Editor of the *Irish Baptist.*

A New Opportunity

It was in the 1950s that the Limerick church, along with other churches in the Republic and the Home Mission, saw the growing potential for open-air witness in the towns and villages. Pastor Jim Ritchie, as pastor of the Brannockstown church, Co Kildare, had experience of open-air preaching. He accepted a call to Limerick in 1952. Part of his ministry, by arrangement with the Home Mission, was to pioneer open-air work in the surrounding areas. Unlike today in our post Vatican II era, there was a hostile reaction to open-air preaching, and many of the places visited could not be identified by name in the published reports. Ritchie had the help of Harry James, his brother-in-law who was an evangelist with the Home Mission at that time specialising in personal work among Roman Catholics. The help and encouragement of Glenn Lindsay, a local Christian well-known and respected in Limerick, was invaluable to Ritchie. It is interesting to record that Glenn Linsay's house in Limerick has been turned into flats, but above the front door there is still a Bible text so that he being dead yet speaks!

In late 1955 Pastor Ritchie wrote, "I have considered the unanimous call to Armagh, but feel I must stay in the south a little longer... I don't know what the future holds for us." The latter comment expressed, not a concern for any personal search for direction, but his concern for the spiritual state of the land. Indeed, that summer the church enjoyed a time of blessing when a number were saved at a mission conducted by Currie Brennan, a Home Mission evangelist. In 1957 Ritchie accepted a call to the pastorate of a church in Gateshead.

The following year Mr Albert Allen, an evangelist with the Home Mission, was allocated to Limerick. He andhis wife Hazel were to stay for over seventeen years. It was a faithful ministry and one of the longest in the church's history. Albert took his place as aprt of the very active open-air team ministry which regularly took the gospel into previously barren terri-

tory. The church continued its steady pastoral and evangelistic work, although progress was slow.

The Allen's ministry concluded in 1976. They were followed by Colin and Eileen Law, former missionaries with the New Tribes Mission, until 1979 when Colin returned to secular work in the Shannon area.

The Stockil Family

With a small membership, the work owed much in the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies to the Stockil family who made up a major part of the church. They were one of those faithful families who love the Lord and His Word, who bear the burden and heat of the day through many years when the going is tough. The Stockils had a favourable testimony in the whole area. Their hospitality was legendary. Regular customers at their shop on Catherine Street spoke warmly of their genuine Christianity. The present writer often had contact with the owner of a TV and video shop in Catherine Street, who knew the Stockils well and who, because of the affection he felt for them, often lent equipment to the church free of charge for youth and other meetings. No history of the Limerick church would be complete which failed to give proper emphasis to this family.

Memories of Limerick

John and Eleanor McIlvenna from Carrickfergus had been working in the Phibsborough area of north Dublin with Baptist Missions (BM) when they were asked by the committee to assume responsibility for the work in Limerick. The old manse at Ballinacurra was sold and a new one bought in the Caherdavin area. John recalls his period in Limerick:

> "Eleanor and I lived in Limerick from October 1980 to August 1986 when the membership averaged 14 people. My earliest memory of Limerick was September 1972 when Eleanor went to work in the city for fifteen months with the primary purpose of helping the church in its Youth Club, held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Albert Allen wasa the pastor. Sunday services were held in the back room of the church

building. It always seemed strange that we had to walk through the large building to find the folk worshipping in a small prayer room. We got engaged to marry in December 1973, and from then I built up friendships with some of the people in the church. The Stockil's were the main family. I loved to visit George and Denham Stockil, and they often spoke in glowing terms of the help given by the former Secretary of the Union, namely Pastor Joshua Thompson.

The evangelistic service on Sunday evening took the form of an open-air meeting at 9.00 pm in O'Connell Street with David Stevens of the local Brethren Hall. This was a very effectivemeans of reaching people as the streets tended to be busy at that time.

This was the period hwen the hunger strikers in the North caught the headlines, and they had many supporters in Limerick. I can remember seeing men collecting for them and promoting their cause on Saturday mornings in O'Connell Street. Large photographs of Bobby Sands and others were displayed outside one of the major banks at the week-end.

St Patrick's Day parade was a big occasion in the city. The Sunday prior to it was marked by the International Band Parade, when lots of American bands came to Ireland. They marched through Limerick and we had to hold our morning service earlier than usual to avoid being disturbed by band music outside in the street.

During this period a large aluminium plant at Aughinish was under construction. It was the largest construction site in Ireland at the time and employed many workers from all over Ireland and across the world. We were blessed that some of the men were Christians and worshipped with us each Sunday. "Irish" Wallace was a Pentecostal Christian from California and for maybe eighteen months he was with us every Sunday. Bill Myhand and his wife were from Kentucky and they were a

major encouragement to us when we replaced the heating system, and redecorated the church building. Both of them were involved in that venture. Jonathan Simms was a civil engineer from England and belonged to the Strict Baptists. He was also a great encourager. The electrical wiring was found to be faulty and unreliable and had to be replaced. A local contractor gave us an estimate of £6,000 which we were unable even to consider. I decided to invite Christians from other parts ofIreland to help us do the work; for our part we would supply materials and provide accommodation. Four men from Co. Antrim spent a week with us and completed the work, the final cost being under £1,000. This was a big encouragement to the church members and we were deeply grateful to those men for their help.

Baptist Youth Evangelism Teams came to Limerick in the early Eighties. Their fellowship was good for us, and their help inoutreach appreciated. The Youth Club of the Seventies known as "The Way Club" was no longer functioning when I arrived. During my years of outreach and evangelism I met many people who knew of the church because they had attended that youth club. Summertime brought visitors, and most weeks we welcomed folk on holiday to the services. The building was located on a main street and was easy to find.

Evangelism took the form of door-to-door outreach, occasional lectures in the bulding, BYE teams, renting space in a shopping centre for a limited period and setting up a book shop, home Bible studies and Sunday night open-air meetings."

For a year the McIlvennas had the help of Eric and Elizabeth McIlwaine from the Ballynahinch church. Eric's skills were useful in the renovation programme.

The McIlvennas moved on from Limerick early in 1986 when John became Irish secretary for the Scripture Gift Mission. The church turned once more to BM for further pastoral and evangelistic leadership.

Trevor and Sheela Ramsey had joined the staff of BM in March that year and were in Cork on an orientation course. It seemed providential to ask them to go as replacements. Trevor had become familiar with the Limerick church during his time as a student at the Belfast Bible College when he worked with John as part of his field term.

The Ramseys were welcomed two weeks after the farewell service for the McIlvennas on Saturday, August 6. This meant that the tempo of the work was not disturbed.

A New Building

Thoughts about a replacement building began to surface early in 1988 when it became clear to the members that the building in O'Connell Avenue needed substantial renovations to make it a centre of worship and teaching fit for the twenty-first century. In any case the ageing building would need increasingly expensive maintenance which could cripple the small congregation, and would gradually lose its saleability. After much heart searching and consultation the church decided in principle to search for a suitable site and location for a new building, and to investigate the possibility of selling the old building.

Eventually a new site was secured on the Old Cratloe Road just inside the city bondary and strategically adjacent to several housing developments. The old building was sold at auction to High School International for IR£192,000. The contract for the erection of the new building was awarded, after tender, to Gorman & Moran, local builders from Patrickswell, Co. Limerick. The architects were McDonnell & Dixon, Dublin, some of whose partners had associations with the Grosvenor Road Church.

The final services were held in the old building on May 24 1992 after almost a century of worship. The following week the church met for worship in the community centre at Caherdavin. This was a remarkable provision. The committee generously arranged for someone to open and lock the building each week at the appointed times. This continued for a year while the new building was being completed. When the church moved out of the community centre a neighbour expressed regret that she would no longer be

able to hear the hymn singing which she had enjoyed in the comfort of her bedroom.

The new building was completed at a cost of IR£260,000 including site and professional fees. The church testified to the Lord's gracious provision for their every need.

Entering in

With the occupation of the new building another phase in the church's life began. The wheel had turned full circle. Limerick was certainly a very different city, but the believers of 1995 stand for the eternal truths for which those of a century before had stood. New opportunities had opened up, but the message remained unchanged and the self-same principles were still in force.

During the Ramseys eight years in Limerick sixteen people were baptised and the membership grew to 27 before declining to 21. They had the assistance for most of the eight years of Paul and Ruth O'Driscoll, southern Irish believers who joined the BM staff in September 1989. Paul was a member of the Cork church, while Ruth's father, Warren Nelson, was well-known in Irish evangelical circles as Principal of the Irish Bible School. This team ministry worked well. At present the O'Driscolls are involved in a church planting effort in Tipperary town.

In July 1994 the Ramsey family returned to the north of Ireland. Their desire was that the church might become self-supporting and call its own pastor. At the time of writing this process is in train and the light keeps burning.

BANBRIDGE: THE EARLIEST EXISTING BAPTIST CHURCH IN CO. DOWN

by Kenneth Stewart

In 1995 the Baptist church in Banbridge will have been in existence for 150 years. This paper tells a small part of its history. Like the Book of Acts it is unfinished, the last chapter has yet to be written. There were earlier churches in County Down, but they no longer exist.

Down the years the church has been faithfully served by fifteen pastors; ten of them have joined the Church triumphant, while five are still with the Church militant. Six have been Presidents of our Baptist Union and in 1995 our present pastor will become the seventh.

Speaking at the annual meetings of the Irish Baptist Association in Carrickfergus in 1882 on the subject "We are few" Dr R K Eccles, son of William S Eccles a former pastor of Banbridge, said "Though Irish Baptists are few, they have a history". These words can be aptly used concerning the members of the Banbridge church.

The Church formed

In 1845 a dispute arose among the Presbyterians of both Scotland and Ireland as to where Baptism, that is infant sprinkling, should be administered - in the meeting house before the congregation, or as was the prevailing custom at the house of the parents during a pleasant social gathering - a "Christening". At a well-attended meeting of the Banbridge Presbytery the issue came to a head. From the arguments advanced the unscriptural nature of infant sprinkling became apparent to some present. As the ministers at-

tached so much importance to the place of administration, people began to think that the subjects and mode of Baptism were worthy of careful consideration. Some had a desire to hear a Baptist minister give his views on Baptism. So it was that the Rev. Dennis Mulhern, then pastor of the Baptist church in Conlig, a village situated between Bangor and Newtownards (sadly, today there is no church in Conlig), was invited to come to Banbridge and speak on Baptism. He was a good choice for he had already established reputation as a controversialist in a hard battle with the Rev. Wm. Patteson, minister of the Second Presbyterian Church in Bangor on the same issue.

A Methodist chapel in Gospel Lane, then being used only occasionally by its owners, was procured. Mr Mulhern delivered two lectures to large and interested audiences. Among those who were present was the minister of Scarva Street Presbyterian church, the Rev. Robert Anderson, a man of considerable ability; and on the following Sunday he announced from his pulpit that he would answer Mr Mulhern in two discourses. Mr Mulhern went and heard these talks and decided to reply. The Methodist chapel was now refused to the Baptists, even for preaching the Gospel and a place had to be found elsewhere. The only place that could be procured was a n empty grain store In Library Lane, later called Railway Street. It was made ready for the lectures. Under the store-room were dwellings, one of which was occupied by a Roman Catholic, a single man of notorious character, just the person who could be used by those whose purpose was to break up the meetings and drive Mr Mulhern from Banbridge.

The devotional exercises preceding the lecture had hardly commenced when this man, who had been supplied with all the necessary material for his infamous work, including a liberal supply of whiskey to brace him up, commenced a disturbance. Breaking a hole in the floor above him, he exploded fireworks among the people and burned a large quantity of sulphur passing the fumes up through the opening to drive out the people. All this was accompanied by loud curses. There was a stampede for the door by some , but above the sound of trampling feet the voice of the preacher was heard, "I will stand right here and preach the Truth although but one remains to hear me." Mr Mulhern was repeatedly requested by his friends to give up and dismiss the meeting. This he refused to do, saying, "All the demons in hell shall never drive me from preaching the Gospel, and if two individuals

remain I am determined to go through with this discourse". This he did, although his voice was often drowned by the disturbance, his person enveloped in smoke, and his breathing affected by the sulphurous fumes. On account of the interruptions, the service which was intended to last an hour, lasted from 7.00 to 11.00 p.m. almost four hours with a good number remaining to the end.

What took place on the night of this meeting attracted much attention to the Baptist cause. While it seemed to be the aim of some to drive the Baptists out of Banbridge, so there was an equal determination on the part of others that they would not be driven out. Personal influence and threats of boycott of businesses owned by those holding Baptist views were used but failed. All these events made the Baptists better and more widely known, their principles more fully discussed and understood, and helped rather than hindered their cause.

It was some months before another meeting place could be obtained. At length through the kindness of Dr Hawthorne, a large room partly detached from his dwelling and a shop in Newry Street, then in the centre of town, and capable of accommodating two hundred people was secured and fitted up for public worship. Here Mr Mulhern finished his reply to the Presbyterian minister, and proceeded to form a Baptist Church composed of those, who in the interval had been baptised, along with a few others in the district who were already baptised believers.

Banbridge Baptist Church was thus formed in 1845; the same year as the potato famine began in Ireland. Two of its foundation members were Robert Nelson, a jeweller, and Dr Hawthorne.

When it became known that a church had been formed, the first phase of opposition took the form of denunciation by nearly every paedo-baptist church in the town. When it was realised that the "Dippers" as they were called, were so strongly entrenched in truth that they were likely to be victors in a war of words, other tactics were adopted. The room in which the services were held was at the rear of Dr Hawthorne's house, and it is alleged that on one occasion some of the baser sort cut part of the floor, with the result that some of the congregation fell into a stable below.

For the first few months until it had its own pastor, the services were taken by Mr Mulhern and Mr Alexander Hamilton, a young man who had been a student for the Presbyterian ministry and who had been recently baptised.

A little more might be said about Dennis Mulhern. A native of Ballyshannon, Co Donegal, brought up a Roman Catholic, he was converted through the work of the Baptist Irish Society. He served first as a BIS Scripture Reader under John Bates' direction, then in 1838 after a period studying theology with Bates he was seconded to preach at Easkey. In 1840 he moved from Ballina to look after the church at Easkey, Co. Sligo, and the following year he went as pastor of the Conlig Church. In 1849 he and his family emigrated to America where he ministered in several churches. He died in 1897 at Grand Rapids aged 86 years. A few minutes before he died, he said in a distinct voice that he had always tried to preach Christ. He was ever loyal to the truth and the great atonement of the Cross.

John Bates

The first pastor of the church was Rev. John Bates who came to Banbridge from Ballina via Dungannon towards the end of November 1846. Like Mulhern he was an Agent of the BIS. He was born in Bugbrook, Northamptonshire in 1805. When 22 years old he moved to London where he was baptised in and joined Eagle Street Baptist Church, of which Rev. Joseph Ivimey was pastor. Mr Ivimey was also secretary of the BIS. Under his direction John Bates read theology and studied Latin and Greek. On 7 February 1833 he was set apart as an 'itinerant minister in Ireland'. He had offered for service with the BMS in Jamaica but was rejected on health grounds. He crossed to Dublin in 1833 and went to Ballina. There under the guidance of Rev. James Allen another BIS Agent, he learned to speak Irish and continued his studies in company with Thomas Berry. He spent 1835 looking after the small church at Coolaney in the Ox Mountains of Co. Sligo.

This was the man who became the first pastor of the church in Banbridge. He came to Banbridge when the effects of the continuing potato famine were evident. Food was scarce and diseases associated with

malnutrition were spreading. Typhoid and other epidemic diseases were prevalent. John Bates in 1847 reported widespread fever in Ulster with one person in forty affected. He was zealous in both pastoral labours and in the distribution of help to the needy. He was an honoured member of the local relief committee and often presided at its meetings. He was responsible for the distribution of large sums of relief money contributed by Baptists in England and America.

During the winter of 1847 a general depression of trade throughout the British Isles caused further hardship in the industrial north of Ireland. A relief committee of the BIS organised supplies of clothing and bedding for the unemployed poor in the Baptist churches in that area. It is likely that some who attended the Banbridge Church benefited in this way.

In 1848 reporting on the work at Banbridge Bates wrote, "I have several places where I preach in the suburbs of the town; and also at Clare, Milltown, Ballymote (?) and Moneyslane." During his pastorate it became necessary for the church to have its own building and funds were raised for this purpose. As hostility still existed in the town towards Baptists, when the money was raised Robert Nelson purchased a property on what we now call the old building site. Discreetly, he bought the property in his own name and then transferred the title, so securing an excellent location for the new building. Later the building standing on the site was remodelled into a comfortable chapel which served for years.

In 1848 Mr Bates made a short visit to the United States of America to raise funds for the Banbridge building project. The following year he and his family left Banbridge for America. He settled in Cascade, Ohio, moving after a few years to Canada where he pastored several churches. He died at Woodstock, Ontario in December 1877 or January 1878.

The Banbridge Church not only lost its first pastor through emigration in 1849 but twenty members of the church left Banbridge because of the depression to seek a new life elsewhere. Like the church in Jerusalem many of its active members were 'scattered abroad' some moving to Belfast, others to Australia, Canada and the U.S.A. Possibly Robert Nelson, the jeweller,

emigrated at this time. A report in the *Irish Baptist* of October, 1880, forty years later, reads:

> "Mr Robert Nelson of Dunkirk, New York, is at present contributing a series of articles to the *National Baptist*, Philadelphia, proving that the earliest Irish Churches were Baptist churches."

A footnote to the report says that the author was a member of the Banbridge church during the pastorate of Mr John Bates.

Thomas D Bain

Although badly depleted in numbers, the church managed to maintain its witness. In 1851 Thomas D Bain became pastor. Originally from Belfast, Mr Bain had emigrated to Massachusetts during the 1840s and had been pastor of a Baptist church there. On a visit home to Ireland in 1851 he preached in the Banbridge church and was persuaded to stay as pastor. During his stay in Banbridge he was supported by the BIS. He did much to consolidate the work and organise the church on a proper basis. A code of rules was drawn up in 1853 which almost in its entirety would serve our churches today. Mr Bain baptised Samuel Willett a former Primitive Methodist minister who subsequently was employed by the BIS in counties Mayo and Sligo until 1862. Bain commented that because of the preponderance of Presbyterians and Anglicans "Banbridge was soil not congenial for Baptist labour. He resigned in 1857 possibly to return to America.

William Sloan Eccles

An account of a Sunday School service in the church on 15 July 1847 notes that Rev. W S Eccles, Belfast was one of the speakers. During the next ten years he gave help and counsel to the church in times of perplexity. The members of the church held him in high esteem, and in 1858 became their next pastor. Following pastorates in Coleraine and Academy Street, Belfast, he was assigned by the BIS to Banbridge. He was 42 years old. The Baptist witness in the town had declined, and the meeting house was virtually

closed. His first congregation numbered three besides his own family. He began his work with vigour and prayerfulness, combining his pastoral work with evangelistic tours which ranged all over the province.

God richly blessed his labours in Banbridge. The congregations increased rapidly, and it has been said that "many in that apparently sterile sphere were saving brought to the Lord through his instrumentality".

Times of Revival

The spiritual awakening of 1858 in America spread to Ireland in 1859, beginning in Kells, Co. Antrim, spreading to all denominations and touching all sections of the community When the revival reached Banbridge the Baptist church, led by a competent minister accustomed to a strenuous programme of evangelistic preaching was well-placed to exploit public interest in the gospel. On the green lawn of Daisy hill which was his residence, the big white kitchen table served as a pulpit from which Eccles and others preached almost daily to dense crowds of people who listened, sung and swayed, and many sank to the ground pierced by the arrow of conviction of sin. At times two thousand people gathered on the lawn and the adjoining meadow. Scores of people were converted in the little chapel and the congregations became so large a gallery was erected around three sides of the building to accommodate them.

The church members undertook extensive, systematic distribution of religious literature which was in great demand. So many converts wanted to be baptised that some of the men had to assist Eccles with the baptisms. The baptistery was filled with water drawn from a stream running alongside the building and diverted by a channel. The church membership grew to 83 in 1860, and to 114 in 1861.

Pastor Eccles received and accepted a call to the Ballymena church in 1864, moving there in August. A few months later he became pastor of the Grange church. On 24 July 1878 Mr Eccles died at the comparatively early age of 62. He had suffered from heart trouble for some years but remained active to the end. he is buried in Templemoyle near Grange.

Samuel J Banks

The BIS sent Samuel J Banks as Eccles' successor in Banbridge. Mr Banks became widely known and respected among Irish Baptists. A native of Ashford, Kent, and the youngest of a family of seven, he was apprenticed to the drapery business and lived in Canterbury where his conversion took place. He became a member of King Street Chapel where the Rev Charles Kirtland was pastor, then after a time a local preacher and Superintendent of the Sunday School.

A diligent student, Samuel Banks received a unanimous call to a small church at Smarden, where he remained four years. In 1863 C J Middleditch, secretary of the BIS, was searching for suitable men for the work in Ireland. Charles Kirtland who had a deep interest in Ireland recommended Banks. He was accepted and came to Ireland and was settled in Banbridge to take pastoral care of the church. His ministry was to last twenty-seven years and become the second longest in the history of the church.

Concerning the early days of his ministry in Banbridge only a few facts are known. He was the special speaker at the opening of the Tandragee Church building on 22 December 1867 and preached "two excellent sermons". In 1869 the annual staff conference of the British and Irish Baptist Home Mission (a merger of the BIS and its English counterpart) was held in Banbridge attended by Charles Kirtland who had become its secretary in 1865. Kirtland was impressed "to see the staff, old and young, with their Greek New Testaments, able to read the Word in the original and by no means unacquainted with the rules of biblical criticism."

During his years as pastor, Banks baptised and received numbers into church fellowship. Notable among them was Dr Robert Brown McClelland, who had one of the largest medical practices in the Banbridge district. A former member of Scarva Street Presbyterian Church, he was baptised and joined the Baptist church in either 1874 or 1875. He was a real asset to the Baptist cause. Not only was he highly respected in the town, but he had a great love for music and formed a church choir which sang on special occasions. Another notable addition in 1875 was Mr Henry Kirker.

Writing about the work in 1878 Mr Banks said:

> "We have had very encouraging congregations all through the winter, and things in general have looked healthy, in attendance, in contributions, and the peaceful state of the church. But we have not realised the increased strength we had hoped and this has depressed me and some of our more ardent members, who still pray that we a s a church may become prosperous. On the other hand, we have goodly number of young people coming among us, who give signs of much thoughtfulness, and we hope that from them we shall reap fruit to cheer us on, and increase our little band whose hearts God has touched."

At this time the church had a membership of 60 with at least four other places where services were held. Mr Banks saw the church as a centre from which to evangelise in surrounding towns. One town was Lurgan. A report in the *Irish Baptist Magazine* in October 1878 reads:

> "For some time the Rev. S J Banks, Banbridge, has been doing, missionary work in Lurgan. aided by a goodly band of earnest brethren, Open-air meetings, tract distribution, house to house visitation, and preaching in the Mechanics Institute have been the means used with considerable success.."

A Baptist church was formed in Lurgan in 1881, and until it had its own pastor in 1885 Pastor Banks was responsible for supplying speakers - mostly from his own congregation.

He also tried to establish a Baptist witness in Dromore in 1878 where he conducted "a service every Wednesday evening in a room belonging to Mr J Dickson, and has good congregations". Mr Dickson was a solicitor and had built Assembly Rooms to accommodate gospel meetings. He made them available to Mr banks free of charge for two services each week. However, no Baptist church was formed during this period.

In Banbridge during 1880 there were 9 baptisms. The church had 64 members, 140 Sunday School scholars with 14 teachers. The church had ten preaching stations, like the tribe of Joseph "their branches ran over the wall".

During Mr Banks' pastorate a social evening called "A Soirée" was held early each year, usually on a Thursday evening, this being the early-closing day for shops in the town. After tea was served there would be a programme lasting generally for over two hours - addresses by invited speakers interspersed with singing and musical items. The speakers were usually Baptist pastors, but sometimes ministers from the local Presbyterian, Covenanting and Methodist churches.

In the denomination and among his ministerial brethren Mr Banks was highly esteemed. He was affectionately known as "Banks of Banbridge" throughout the churches, an apt title for one who was pastor in Banbridge for nearly twenty-seven years. In 1877 at the annual meetings of the Irish Baptist Association in Belfast, he was elected Association Secretary a position he held until 1890 when he resigned owing to feeble health. In token of their esteem his brethren elected him Vice-President of the Association. He became President in October 1878 and his short Presidential address was entitled "Love as Brethren". The following year the IBA annual meetings were held in Banbridge, but the President-elect, Rev. R H Carson, was ill and unable to take office, so Mr Banks was asked to continue as President for the next year.

In 1880 the church who greatly respected and loved their pastor expressed their feelings at a Social tea-meeting on Friday 13 August. Mr T D Card, B.A. on behalf of the congregation , presented Mr Banks with eight handsomely bound volumes - Chamber's *Book of Days*, Farrar's *Life of Christ*, Wylie's *History of Protestantism*, and Matthew Henry's *Works*. To their pastor these gifts expressed kind deeds so often manifested by them, both public and private, during their sixteen years of peaceful union together.

The twenty-first year of his ministry in 1885 was marked by a presentation in appreciation of his service in Banbridge from his many friends in other denominations. The presentation, "a purse containing 50 gold

sovereigns" was made by the Rev. Thomas Boyd, minister of Scarva Street Presbyterian church in the name of the subscribers, and was a mark of the deep respect Mr Banks commanded in and around Banbridge.

Chapel Improvements

During Mr Banks' ministry improvements were made to the church property. In 1880, Thomas Card, solicitor, at his own expense had the porch floored with ornamental tiles. The same year the schoolroom at the rear of the chapel was improved and painted. Sunday, 1 January 1882 was a special day for the church when a beautiful harmonium donated by Dr R B McClelland, was used for the first time, the organist being Miss Hutchinson. The pastor preached two sermons on "The Past" and "The Future".

When Dr McClelland joined the church, the meeting house was described as being beautiful only by reason of its repulsiveness - a white-washed gable faced the road surrounded by a ditch wall and an old wooden paling. The roof was flat inside and could easily have been touched by anyone standing in the gallery. Dr McClelland felt that its appearance should be improved and contributing liberally himself raised about £320 for the purpose. At the annual social meeting in February 1884 he mentioned the contemplated improvements which would give them more room to enjoy their next social. The renovations were carried out during 1884 and completed early in 1885. Dr Trestrail of London was the speaker at the re-opening services.

The improvements were described as follows:

> "In front of the edifice a handsome tower and turret 54 feet high has been erected. It forms, in conjunction with the porch, the principal vestibule and entrance, and contains a suitable staircase leading to the galleries. Inside the chapel which has been entirely renovated, an open ceiling with principal timbers exposed takes the place of the former flat ceiling and, besides adding to the comfort of the congregation, greatly improves the general appearance of the internal arrangements. The tower windows have been fitted with Webb's patent iron sashes filled with cathedral glass. The character of the chapel

being Gothic, the railing enclosure in front is of appropriate design wrought in malleable iron and erected on a cut stone base. The architectural improvements were designed by Mr W J McKeown, CE and reflect credit on his good taste and practical ability. Mr John Harkness efficiently discharged his duties as builder."

Pastor Banks had long felt the need for suitable Sunday School accommodation. This was made known in the *Irish Baptist Magazine* in April 1890:

"Banbridge: The present pastor, S J Banks, who has laboured in connection with the Banbridge Baptist Church for a quarter of a century, is most anxious to provide a separate schoolroom for the Sabbath School. It is therefore with strong faith in Christian sympathy that he now ventures to solicit the aid of many towards the completion of the much-needed improvements. In addition to the cash contributions solicited, it is proposed to hold a Sale of Work on the 7th and 8th of May, 1890 to which the pastor, in sympathy with a number of co-workers in the same cause, very earnestly calls attention, and for which he solicits the help needed to render the whole a great success. Contributions will be thankfully received and acknowledged by the pastor or by the treasurer, R B McClelland, MD, JP, Banbridge."

This would appear to be the only time in its history that the church publicly made an appeal for funds. It must be remembered however that since its formation and up to this time the church had been aided in support of their pastor by the BIS and later the Home Mission. Whether the Sale of Work or the wider appeal proved more successful is not known, but in February 1891 Dr Usher, pastor of Great Victoria Street Church, Belfast, noted with pleasure the extensions being made to the Banbridge Church premises to accommodate the Sunday School, and that the money was nearly all in hand to pay for the work when completed.

Church Activities

Four missions were held during the years 1884-1890 - two were tent missions, two were held in the church. Matthew Simpson, the blind evangelist, held one in what was known as the "Scotch Tent" in July 1884.

According to the Irish Baptist Magazine of February 1887, Banbridge was one of eight Baptist churches in Ireland which had a Band of Hope (a branch of the Total Abstinence Society), but it is not mentioned among eight other Baptist churches in which unfermented wine was used at the Lord's Table!

The statistics for 1890 shew 9 baptisms, 53 baptised members, 70 in total fellowship, SS 90 scholars and 10 teachers, 5 outstations and 2 local preachers. "Total fellowship" included those who met with the church for Breaking of Bread, but who were either not baptised, or being baptised have not seen their way to accept full responsibilities of church membership. Writing in 1890 what was to be his last report Mr Banks spoke of the past year "as being to us as a church an eventful one. Emigration, sickness and death have diminished the numbers, still good and lasting work is thankfully recorded".

With advancing years Pastor Banks had not had good health during 1890 and was unable to occupy the pulpit during the closing months of the year. Realising the time had come for him to relinquish his pastorate, he felt unable to stand publicly and tender his resignation. Instead he sent a letter dated 27 December 1890 addressed "To the Members of the Baptist Church meeting in Newry Street" presenting his resignation.

His years had been blessed and peaceful years for the church, the Baptist cause had been much advanced, and the work of God had flourished. Yet for himself and his family along with the joy of service had come the sorrows and sadness of life. For the only time in the history of the church there were two funeral services from the home of the pastor. On 3 April 1882 his youngest son Charles Benjamin (Charlie) aged 17 fell asleep in Jesus after a trying illness; and on 20 December 1885 his eldest daughter

Eliza J (Lizzie) who had been ill for over a year died. She was just 34 years of age.

After his retirement from the pastorate he and his wife and daughter moved from Banbridge to Belfast where they attended the Great Victoria Street church. As health permitted and opportunity arose, Mr Banks continued to preach the Word. A few days before Christmas 1892 Mrs Banks after a few days illness passed to the other side. It was a tremendous blow to fall on Mr Banks after 47 years of happy married life. The morning she died the old man opened the Bible which they had read together for so many years. He read from Psalm 69 verse 29, "I am poor and sorrowful; let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high". That prayer will one day have a complete answer. He himself lived until 6 February 1900. He was buried in the cemetery of the Tandragee Baptist Church where his wife, eldest daughter and youngest son are also buried.

George Marshall

Towards the end of 1890 the officers of the church asked Mr David Gracey, then Principal of the Metropolitan College founded by C H Spurgeon, to recommend a student for the work at Banbridge. David Gracey had been brought up near Banbridge as a Presbyterian. When a student at Glasgow University he had come into contact with Spurgeon and changed his views on baptism. Principal Gracey had a deep interest in the Irish Baptist churches and often pressed the claims of Ireland on his students. He passed the letter to George Marshall, one of his students, with the remark, "The church in the old town where he was born required a pastor, sixteen ounces to the pound, and he considered he was the man for them". Mr Marshall supplied the Banbridge pulpit with a view during December 1890, and before returning to London received a hearty and unanimous call, which he accepted.

The recognition service for George Marshall was held at the annual social meeting on 17 March 1891. The chapel was crowded for the occasion and the company included representatives of the other Protestant churches. The platform party consisted of Mr Marshall accompanied by Pastors W Usher, M.D., Belfast, H D Brown, M.A., Dublin, A G Haste, Carrickfergus, J Taylor, Tandragee, and R W McCullough, Derryneil. Mr Banks was not

present owing to the delicate state of his health. Mr Marshall made a brief statement about his conversion, call to the ministry, the truths "he held dear" and which he intended to preach. Pastor Brown delivered an eloquent and striking address on the pastor's duties towards his congregation. Pastor Haste offered the induction prayer and Dr Usher gave an impressive charge to the people. The choir under Dr McClelland provided a musical programme.

George Marshall, accompanied by Philip Hudgell, Waterford, another former student at Spurgeon's College, attended the funeral of Charles Haddon Spurgeon to Norwood Cemetery, London, on Thursday, 11 February 1892.

On 2 March 1892 Mr Marshall was married at Wood Green church to Miss Pentelow from Huntingdonshire. Her father was a deacon in Somersham Baptist chapel. At the annual social meeting which was the first anniversary of Mr Marshall's pastorate, he and his wife were presented with a hall clock and lamps. Making the presentation, Mr Henry Kirker said,

> "...The clock, by its constant ticking, will remind you of the rapid flight of time, and as it is a regulator we trust it will teach us all that our lives require to be regulated by the great Father of our spirits. ...The lamps remind us of the statement by the Psalmist of old 'Thy word shall be a lamp to my feet and a light to my path".

In his response Mr Marshall said,

> "... While I am amongst you, I intend to preach the gospel of the grace of God, which is dearer to me than life. I would rather part with my life than give up that gospel. I am a slave to Jesus Christ but not to men; I am Christ's slave and the servant of you all."

During the first year of Mr Marshall's ministry the witness of the church had begun to flourish again. In 1891 he baptised seven persons, and the membership stood at 67, and money raised for all purposes amounted to £76. His report to the Home Mission reflected this:

> "The services are better attended especially on Sunday evenings when many come to hear the gospel. There are many signs of quickening in our midst. We have just opened a mission room at Seapatrick and the services there are very encouraging. Our Bible class, lately formed, has given good evidence of a need long-felt being met. Looking at the work all-round, though we have not seen all we desired, we can thank God and take courage. In the language of our motto, we mean God helping us to 'Go Forward'."

One of the political issues during 1893 was home rule for Ireland. Mr Gladstone's Home Rule Bill stirred the loyalists to an unprecedented extent. The Protestant denominations declared their opposition to the measure. Pastor Banks wrote against the Home Rule Bill, while Pastor Marshall, although personally not opposed to self-government for Ireland, commented, "Banbridge Church is unanimous against Home Rule."

The 1893 report to the Home Mission was optimistic.

> "The fires of love and zeal are still burning, and the Lord's spirit is revealing Himself mightily in our midst. Our congregations have been well sustained, prayer meetings well attended, and large numbers have gathered at our out stations. We open on Thursday next the second mission-room ... and from indications of providence and grace it will be, we doubt not, a place of blessing and salvation to many. Our friends are united, loyal to the truth and to Christ; they are anxious for the gathering into the fold of Christ the sheep that are lost. Our membership has increased by ten during the past year."

Speaking the following year at the Irish Baptist Association meetings in Coleraine, Mr Marshall mentioned the large attendance at the weekly prayer meeting in Banbridge when 60 out of a membership of 86 attended.

Two missions were held during Mr Marshall's pastorate, the evangelist on both occasions was Mr Alexander Jardine. The first in the chapel in 1892 lasted three weeks and was owned of God in that souls got saved.. The

second was in a tent pitched at Ballymoney, a district about two miles from Banbridge, from 17 June to 15 July. Henry Kirker reported:

> "Each evening the tent was filled as Mr Jardine preached the Word with power. The closing service was the largest and best. It will be long remembered as one in which the Lord manifested His power to save. Fully half of those present remained for prayer and conversation. Quite a number professed to have found peace in believing."

Opposition to the mission was expressed by a Presbyterian elder who went among those attending distributing an indecent pamphlet entitled *Peggy and the Preacher or Dipping and Sprinkling.*

In September 1894 Mr Marshall received and accepted a call to succeed Robert Haldane Carson as pastor of the Tobermore church. During his short ministry of three and a half years he had baptised 44, and saw the membership increase to 86. His ministry concluded towards the end of 1894, although a formal farewell was not held until 20 February 1895. An illuminated address was presented and tributes were paid by two elders, Henry Kirker and Thomas Senior. The latter remarked, "There is one thing I noticed about Mr Marshall and that was wherever he went I never knew him to give any hints about one of our peculiarities, and this in itself showed him to be a true gentleman."

John Bennett

The *Irish Baptist Magazine* of May 1895 reported that

> "Mr John Bennett, a native of Belfast, who has been working for over a year in connection with mission work at Kirkintilloch, near Glasgow, ...has accepted a call to the pastorate of Banbridge. He comes highly commended."

Not a great deal is known about Mr Bennett for his stay was the shortest in the history of the church, just over a year. In that time he baptised four, held two missions one of which led to the opening of extension work at Milltown, near Banbridge.

Moreton Vesey Fitzgerald Dawson, M.A.

Mr Dawson had been pastor of the Carrickfergus church for just eight months when he accepted the call to Banbridge in July 1896. Born in Omagh in 1872 Moreton Dawson was not quite twenty-four years old when he came to Banbridge. His father was Colonel Richard Dawson of the Gordon Highlanders. Much of the blessing that was his in later years was attributed to his sister's ability and Christian character. She tutored him at home until he matriculated at Trinity College, Dublin, and entered college when 151/2 years of age. While poor health prevented him reading for an honours degree he graduated successfully, and for a time worked as a private tutor. In 1892 he obtained the Divinity Testimonium and certificate in Pastoral Theology, and planned to enter the Anglican ministry. In 1895 while studying the subject of Baptism he concluded that the immersion of believers was the only Scriptural baptism, and was baptised in Harcourt Chapel, Dublin by Pastor Hugh D Brown. He was appointed an evangelist in connection with Harcourt Street church and in 1896 went to Carrickfergus.

His ministry in Banbridge began in August 1896 and he was married the next month. One of his first actions as pastor was to form a Christian Endeavour Society who "did not just sit and sing themselves away to everlasting bliss; instead each week they circulated 300 sermons of C H Spurgeon". During the summer open-air services were held each Saturday evening in front of the Crozier monument in Church Square. Mr Dawson himself had been influenced in earlier years by an open-air witness in Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire) where his family lived. Mrs Dawson was an enthusiastic helper with this work. During the early twilight of late summer when people preferred to listen in the dusk, Pastor Dawson used a large portable lamp to attract passers-by and enable the workers to see the hymn and read the Scriptures. On one side of the lamp were the words "Banbridge Baptist Church", and on the other "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world."

The secretary of the Home Mission, T R Warner, visited Banbridge towards the end of 1896. He reported that a series of addresses by Pastor Dawson on special subjects was attracting large audiences which filled the

building. The next year the old square pews were replaced by open seats of pitch pine; metal supporting pillars were placed to support the gallery which had ornamental panels with crimson cloth to enclose it along the front; the walls were painted and stencilled. A new stove costing £12 was installed.

Remedial work lasting two months and costing £140 was done to the building in August - September, 1900, services being held in the Town Hall for that period. The re-opening was marked by a visit from Pastor E T Mateer (Londonderry) and by the donation to the church of a new communion service and linen. Collections at the services came to £24 supplemented by gifts from other Baptist friends and a donation from the local M.P., Captain Arthur Hill. A report commented, "We could not have realised so much of a money profit only that Pastor Mateer gave his services free."

The Northern Baptist Association meetings were held in Banbridge for the first time in October 1899 and were addressed by Pastor S J Reid (Shankill) and R F Jeffrey (Mountpottinger).

Pastor Dawson was a not only an effective speaker, he had a fine singing voice, and often sang solos at the church services. He had a singing class for members.

Revival Blessing

1901 began with a period of revival blessing in the church during a mission conducted by Mr Alexander Jardine. The mission started on Sunday, 20 January. An account in the *Irish Baptist Magazine* reads:

> "The first tokens of the outpouring of blessing were manifested by definite conversions on the following Tuesday. When the after-meetings were begun it was marvellous to see how readily the people remained and how eager they were to find salvation. It soon became a frequent thing to see the young people in tears at the close of the first service; and without any pressure or sensational efforts, souls turned to God for salvation almost every night.

Realising that God was opening a wide door in Banbridge, Mr Jardine telegraphed to Pastor Mateer of Derry 'to postpone all arrangements for the mission that was to be commenced there in a fortnight'. The result fully justified this step, as the work continued to grow and to prosper for a few weeks. On the last Sunday night there were more fruitful services than ever before. Nor was the blessing confined to the services; souls were being aroused and saved in the factories and some anxious ones had to leave their work at midday through the burden of their sins pressing hard upon them.

Meanwhile, another evangelist,working on undenominational lines, was having a soul-saving time in another hall in Banbridge, and the whole town seemed stirred. Open-air meetings, mid frost and snow and all weathers, were held every night with large and interested audiences of non-churchgoing people eagerly listening to the old Gospel that is ever new.

A testimony meeting held on Wednesday, 20 February, was marked by twenty-six people rising to their feet to testify to their having been saved during the services, while others who had also found eternal life were unable to be present. Most of the new converts are young people from the Sunday School, and the families of members or others who attend the church. At this service an illuminated address read by the church secretary, W S Carson, and a gold-mounted Swan fountain pen were presented to Mr Jardine by Henry Kirker as a momento of the blessed season of refreshing."

The End of a Fruitful Ministry

That same year Mr Dawson secured second place in the law examinations at Dublin University graduating LL.B., later passing the final examination for LL.D. While studying for this degree, he carried on all his church work, a testimony to his mental ability.

Early in 1902 the church granted Pastor Dawson liberty to give private tuition, and in October he resigned as pastor in order to devote his time to education in Banbridge. At a farewell meeting in January 1903 an illuminated address and a purse of sovereigns were presented to Dr and Mrs Dawson.

A report to the Assembly of the Baptist Union of Ireland on changes in the pastorates commented,

> "Pastor M V F Dawson, M.A., LL.D. resigned the church at Banbridge in order to devote himself to scholastic labours. An interest in the sympathy and prayers is asked for him that although his work may now be largely secular, he may find opportunities for the exercise of his preaching abilities in the service of the churches."

After his resignation, Dr Dawson at first gave private tuition in a variety of subjects preparing students for university, banking and other preliminary examinations. In 1904 he opened the Excelsior Academy in the Temperance Hall. In doing so he went into competition with Banbridge Academy which was founded by Andy Mullan in 1833. The Excelsior Academy had a number of teachers with Dr Dawson as Principal. It provided intermediate education, but also had kindergarten and preparatory departments, and offered special tuition for backward children. The Excelsior Academy compared favourably with schools in larger towns, and achieved a great number of successes in public examinations. Dr Dawson resigned as Principal c. 1909, and emigrated to Canada where he obtained a civil appointment in Calgary. The Excelsior Academy continued until 1914 when it amalgamated with the Banbridge Academy.

As far as the church was concerned, Mr Henry Kirker, one of the elders, supplied the pulpit for most of the vacancy following Dr Dawson's resignation.

Thomas John Harvey

Mr Harvey, a member of the Antrim Road church, Belfast, came to Banbridge as pastor in January 1904. He had just completed his theological

studies at the Baptist College, Dublin and was still unmarried. At his induction service chaired by Pastor Alexander Jardine (Mountpottinger, Belfast) and addressed by Pastors C S Donald (Antrim Road, Belfast), J Hodge (Ballykeel), H Kane (Derryneil) and J H McKnight (Poyntzpass), opportunity was taken to present a hall clock to Henry Kirker in appreciation of his leadership.

During his first year as pastor, Mr Harvey baptised 23 people, and the membership rose to 118 with a Sunday School of 130 scholars and 12 teachers. His weekly Bible class had 100 members. The next three years were marked by well-attended missions conducted by Pastors A Jardine, J H McKnight, James Shields and George Marshall.

In response to an appeal at the NBA annual meetings held in Banbridge in 1906 the ladies of Banbridge church organised a fortnightly Zenana sewing meeting. Attended by 30-40 ladies, the group supported missionary work in India. The church at this time lost a number through death and emigration. Emigration, in particular, "thinned the ranks", and membership declined from 124 to 106 in 1906, and losses continued through 1908. George Haire who had been Sunday School superintendent for some years and church secretary since 1904, emigrated to California. The previous secretary W S Carson had also emigrated a year earlier, and served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Brownsville, USA. The *Irish Baptist Magazine* of March/April 1923 carried notes of a sermon of his on "The Joy of Christ's Salvation".

Pastor Harvey accepted a call to Bellshill Baptist Church, Glasgow and left Banbridge in August 1908. In 1909 he married a lady from Gilford, Co. Down, who had been converted during a mission in that village at which Rev. J Stuart Holden was the evangelist.

Henry Kirker was appointed church secretary following George Haire, but still functioned as an elder. His report for 1909 regretted the absence of conversions, indicated that the pulpit supplies were mainly from Belfast, and hoped for the Lord's provision of a shepherd to feed the flock of God.

Thomas M Carleton

The Lord did provide a shepherd in the person of Mr Thomas M Carleton in January 1910. His pastorate of thirty years was to prove the longest in the church's history. A native of Co. Tyrone, he had worked in the south and west of Ireland with the Irish Evangelisation Society, where his clear and gracious presentation of the Gospel had led many to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their own, personal Saviour. James Barton, IES secretary, wrote of Mr Carleton, "He is one of our most popular and valued evangelists."

The church had 101 members at the time. His first year as pastor was marked by large congregations at the evening services, attracted by his Gospel preaching. He held several missions in outlying parts of the Banbridge district in a tent provided by a friend. Creevy, Corbet and Mount Ida are mentioned in the annual report. There were several candidates for baptism.

Mr Carleton spent his summer holiday evangelising in the south of Ireland. December saw him in Scotland visiting churches on behalf of the Home Mission.

A two-story red brick manse was completed in 1911 on a prominent site on the Newry Road. Pastor and Mrs Carleton went to live there in May 1911. Until it was sold in 1980 it was home to six pastors. When building work began in 1910 the church had raised over £200 towards the cost. The rest of the money for its completion was borrowed from the Board of Works. Young ladies in the church collected weekly subscriptions towards reducing the debt which was paid off in 1912.

A suggestion by the pastor in 1912 that the church should purchase a tent for Gospel work became a reality in 1914, when missions were held in it at both ends of the town.

World War I affected the church as it did the whole of life. Eleven members joined "the Armed Forces". A young man from Banbridge, Frank Forbes, was studying for the ministry at the Irish Baptist College in Dublin. He was given leave of absence from study to work among soldiers stationed at the Curragh under the auspices of the YMCA.

Meanwhile in Banbridge Pastor Carleton was busy with missions. Twice he visited Poyntzpass in 1916 in the Baptist church, and 1917 in a tent. In addition, he served as the Corey Trust during the summer of 1917. He continued to hold summer tent missions all around the area for several years afterwards. He used a bicycle to travel to the meetings, and was a well known figure.

Statistics for 1923 show 3 baptisms, 93 members, 20 SS teachers with 200 scholars, 90 in the Band of Hope, 6 local preachers and 3 sub-stations. The following year the Schoolhouse was enlarged to meet the increased attendance at the Sunday School, and a new heating system was installed for both the church and hall at a cost of £330.

The NBA annual meetings were held in Banbridge in 1930 when Pastor Carleton was elected Vice-Chairman to succeed Pastor George H Weir at the meetings the following year in Ballymena. Predictably, his Chairman's address was on "Soul Winning". A further honour came Mr Carleton's way in 1936 when he was elected Vice-President of the Baptist Union of Ireland. His Presidential address to the Baptist Assembly in Great Victoria Street Church, Belfast, was entitled "Love - the first fruit of the Spirit". During his Presidential year he declared open the McKillen Memorial Hall in Carndaisy Glen on 30 June. In September he attended the SBA meetings in Limerick. On 22 January 1938 he offered the dedicatory prayer at the laying of the foundation stone for the new church building at Bloomfield. He attended the opening of the completed building on 7 May 1938.

Pastor Carleton retired in 1940 after thirty years of faithful service. At a special meeting on 25 April tributes were paid to Mr and Mrs Carleton by Thomas McCrum, elder, and others. Pastor Frank Forbes, by now secretary of the Baptist Union of Ireland, presented Mr Carleton with a wallet of notes on behalf of the church, while Mrs Forbes, on behalf of the ladies, presented Mrs Carleton with a handbag containing a purse with notes. This was a fitting close to what had been a harmonious relationship between pastor and people.

Pastor and Mrs Carleton retired to Bangor to live with their daughter, Mrs Kimber. It was to be a short retirement for Mr Carleton was 'called home' on 24 November 1940.

Robert Campbell

On 17 October 1940 the church welcomed Mr Robert Campbell as their new minister. His ministry throughout the remainder of the Second World War and until November 1950.

Originally from Belfast, Mr Campbell was converted to Christ in 1923. He heard God's call to His service and in September 1932 went to the South Wales Bible Institute for a two year course. This was followed by a summer appoint-ment with the NBA as evangelist in the Grange district where he held two fruitful missions before entering the Irish Baptist College in 1934 to complete his ministerial training. His first pastorate was Armagh Baptist church where he had served since 1936.

His ministry was characterised by a stress on evangelism. It was said of him that when he was not holding a mission, he was planning one. Among his misions were those at Rathfriland and Scarva. A memorable mission in the church was in October 1944 with Pastor H H Orr, who had just been appointed a Home Mission evangelist. Altogether thirty-two people professed faith in Christ and five back-sliders were restored to fellowship. One complete family came to Christ, aas did an old man over eighty years of age. Pastor Campbell recruited the servces of evangelists who were being used of God among the churches as part of the Home Mission evangelistic programme. Mr William Mullan in February 1948 when twelve people were converted, six of whom were baptised and joined the church. Later, in March 1950 Pastor John Johnston (Ballymena) when some professed faith in Christ as a result of his messages delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The church celebrated its centenary in 1945 witha week of special meetigs addressed by Pastor L E Deens (then President, Baptist Union of Ireland) on his first visit to Banbridge, and Pastors John Ravey (Shankill, Belfast) and George H Weir (East End, Belfast). The next year Pastor Campbell was elected Chairman of the NBA

A Missionary Member

In October 1946 Miss Sadie Porter SRN, SCM entered training for missionary service at the Missionary Training School set up by the Baptist Union to promote a supply of missionaries for the IBFM following the war. She completed her course in June 1948 and was acceptd for service in Peru. A valedictory service was held in Banbridge on 30 January 1949 for Miss Porter and her fianc ée, Mr Hugh Mitchell. A few days later a coach load of Banbridge friends joined with others to wish them Godspeed as they left Belfast on the Heysham steamer.

In October 1950 Pastor Campbell accepted a call to Tandragee Baptist church and he and Mrs Campbell were given suitable presents at a farewell meeting on 9 November. Opportunity was taken to acknowledge the services of Miss Amy Wright as church organist.

John Johnston

The church had not forgotten Pastor Johnston's mission and invited him to become their pastor in 1951. Well-known as pastor and evangelist among the churches Mr Johnston brought a wealth of experience to the work. When he came he was already Vice-Chairman of the NBA and in May 1952 was elected Vice-President of the Baptist Union, perhaps the only time when one person held both offices simultaneously.

Urged by Mr Johnston the church bought a tent for Gospel missions in 1952, and in August he sited it at Newry Road. There was interest from the beginning and a number of people professed faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. During this mission Pastor Johnston spoke on "Jehovah's Witnesses" and his address received wide publicity in the local press. Children's meetings were another feature of the mission with an attendance of seventy-five. The mission ran for five weeks, and during the last week Pastor Irvine (Dromore) shared the preaching.

While in Banbridge Mr Johnston held two further missions in the tent - one at Corbet when two elderly men were led to trust Christ. The church was strengthened by conversions, baptisms and additions to the membership.

Its interests were expanded by the introduction of Thanksgiving services followed by a week of convention meetings and concluding with a missionary meeting.

In September 1954 Mr Johnston left Banbridge to become pastor of Bloomfield church, Belfast, the occasion was marked by a farewell meeting, and by large congregations which gathered to hear his farewell sermons.

John A Coleman

During a vacancy which lasted almost three years, Mr James Armstrong held a successful mission in the church in March 1955. About twenty people professed faith in Christ. The speaker at the Thanksgiving week-end in November 1956 was Mr John Coleman. Within a few weeks a unanimous call to the pastorate was sent to him. This he accepted and was inducted as pastor on 6 June 1957. "I want", he said on that occasion, "to assure you of a ministry that is sane, sober, solid and scriptural." Opportunity was taken to mark Mr John Clyde's services as church secretary during the vacancy.

Mr Coleman and his wife were both Londoners from a Brethren background. He was in business when God called him to full-time service. He spent a period at a Bible College and had subsequently engaged for seven years in evangelistic work in the British Isles. He quickly settled into pastoral work and in September baptised and received twelve into membership. The report for 1957 speaks of many unsaved attending the Sunday evening service, mostly young people; seventy at the weekly prayer meeting, a Saturday night outreach; a women's meeting on Tuesday afternoons.

The new pastor loved the youth work. He taught a Bible class on Sunday afternoons, and was active in the Youth Fellowship, encouraged young men and women to take part in the Lord's work, often taking them with him to sing and testify at services where he was speaker.

He organised a mission in February 1962 which created a great deal of interest. The Sunday evening services could not be accommodated in the church building and the local Orange Hall was rented. Pastor William Mullan

was the speaker during the first week, and when illness intervened, his place was taken for the next two weeks by Mr James Armstrong, Armagh. Some twenty-four people were brought to Christ. Mr Coleman himself had missions in the Bangor and Shankill churches during his pastorate. Well-liked in the town, he addressed the local Presbyterian ministers' Fraternal on "The Second Coming of Christ". He contributed a series of articles to the Banbridge Chronicle under the penname JayCee.

His ministry ended in early 1963 when he accepted a call to Bethesda Free Church (Baptist), South Shields, England, and his farewell address was on John 1.29, and at the close of the service a young man trusted the Saviour. In 1964 Pastor and Mrs Coleman with their twin daughters, Carol and Vivienne, and their son David, emigrated to Australia where he had pastorates in Perth, Adelaide and Melbourne.

Samuel H Simpson

The church invited a business man who had been honorary pastor of the Carryduff church, Belfast for four years to be their pastor. He was sales manager of Messrs E T Green, a well-known maker of animal feeds. Roamer writing in lighter vein in the *Irish Baptist* of October 1964 commented, "Banbridge Church should be well-fed in the future. Judging from the experience of their new pastor in his business life they are assured of a suitable diet for every stage of growth."

God blessed his ministry. On one occasion he baptised fifteen candidates, and received twenty-two into membership - this being the largest number to be received into fellowship on one occasion. He had a successful mission at Brague about three miles from the town when six people were converted, and subsequently a monthly evening service was held in Brague Orange Hall for a number of years. Active in evangelism he had missions in nearby Seapatrick and Creevy, and also in two Belfast churches - Windsor and Cliftonpark. His interest in overseas missionary work led to the annual Missionary Convention in the church which still continues today. Two lady-members of the church were set apart for missionary service. Miss Margaret Draffin, a nurse, trained at the Irish Baptist College and went to Thailand with the Overseas Missionary Fellowship in October 1970. Miss Belle Purdy,

on completing her nursing training, went to the WEC Missionary Training College in 1969 to prepare for work in the Congo.

For the first time on Sunday 7 January 1968 the morning service was broadcast live on BBC Radio 4, with Mr Simpson as the preacher. His public ministry was enhanced by his beautiful singing voice.

Under his leadership, the church in 1969 decided to erect a new building, the existing building being in need of extensive repairs. An architect Mr McCrum was instructed to prepare plans, and a building fund was launched.

In June 1971 Pastor Simpson accepted a call to Bellshill Baptist church, Glasgow. This was the second time Bellshill had taken the pastor from Banbridge, T J Harvey having responded to their call in 1908.

William B Kennedy

If they lost their pastor to a Scottish church, their next pastor came from Kilsyth Congregational church about twelve miles from Glasgow. A native of Lurgan, William Kennedy played football for the well-known Linfield club and had been capped as an amateur international for Ireland. He was converted under the preaching of Pastor Mullan in his home town. He was educated for Christian service at the Bible Training Institute, Glasgow going to Green Lane, Liverpool for seven years and moving to Kilsyth where he ministered for nearly eight years. He was inducted to Banbridge on 27 September 1973, Pastor Mullan being the preacher.

An experienced personal worker Pastor Kennedy enjoyed visitation. He held a number of missions including campaigns in Brague, Seapatrick, Lenaderg and Thomas Street church, Portadown. He gave religious instruction weekly in Abercorn primary and Banbridge High Schools during his time in Banbridge.

In 1975 work commenced on the new building, the first stage being done on a voluntary basis, the building being completed by a contractor and opened on 8 October 1977 by Mrs Martha Giniff. Pastor Kennedy shared

the opening services with two former pastors - Robert Campbell and S H Simpson - the guest speakers were Pastors James Garrett. BA, (Dunseverick) and James Irvine, Newcastle.

The new building of autumn brown clay brick with stained glass windows and a spire 28 feet above roof level was sited to take account of plans to build a new road nearby. A large car park was constructed on the site. Inside the building is fan shaped four rows of pine pews, converging on a spacious pulpit, with a gallery seating 100 people. A raised open baptistery for the immersion of believers is on one side of the pulpit with an organ and piano on the other.

Used for the first time on Sunday, 9 October the new building was inaugurated by a three weeks' mission led by Pastor Irvine, who preached the Gospel with power

A year later in November 1978 Pastor Kennedy resigned having accepted a call to Coatbridge Baptist church. At that time the re were 167 members, 15 Sunday School teachers with 115 scholars and 44 in the Youth Fellowship. During that year there had been 34 baptisms.

Samuel T Carson

During the vacancy the services were well-maintained with supply preachers. At the annual members' meeting in March 1980 the church unanimously renewed an invitation previously given to Pastor S T Carson, Newtownards to be their pastor. Mr Carson accepted and the present pastorate commenced on 3 August 1980.

In the early days of his ministry Mr Carson introduced some new features to church life as well as restoring some which had lapsed. A Watchnight service was held and drew good attendances, those present being encouraged to share in the service by song or testimony. A Prophetic Rally is held occasionally on Sunday evenings with hymns and a sermon based on a prophetic theme and draws good attendances.

The original building plans drawn by Mr McCrum provided for a church hall and Sunday school accommodation underneath the main building. Site restrictions and building costs led the members to erect the church building alone. In 1982 they realised that the provision of a new church hall, Sunday school and kitchen facilities was necessary. The existing hall were inadequate and in need of repair. Plans were drawn up and approved in January 1984. The building work was completed and came into service on 30 August 1985. The Hall seats 260 and can be sub-divided by acoustic partitions. A well-appointed kitchen, cloakroom accommod-ation with facilities for disabled persons, and ten smaller rooms for Sunday school work completes the project. The Building matches the main building and is easily accessible being on the same level as the car park.

Since then the new link road between Kenlis Street and Newry Road has been constructed and runs alongside the church site. Accommodation works included the construction of a new matching brick wall with railings and extension to the car park by the addition of some small gardens.

The vestibule and gallery were enlarged early in 1994, and today the Banbridge Church possesses a fine suite of buildings on a prominent site on the south side of the shopping area of the town.

Sad Days

Tragedy struck twice during the years 1982 and 1989. On 15 March 1982 and IRA car bomb exploded in Bridge Street, a main shopping area. No warning had been given. Alan, the eleven year old son of Ella and David McCrum, a deacon of the church, was standing in a shop across the street. A piece of metal hurled from the car by the blast of the 500lb. bomb hit Alan killing him instantly. The townspeople were stunned by the effects of the bomb. At Alan's funeral service on 18 March the church building was packed to capacity, many who could not get into the building overflowed into the car park. The service was attended by ministers, councillors and people from all denominations expressing sympathy with the family in their grief.

Then on 5 June 1989 Mrs Sadie Mitchell, our only serving missionary, and her husband Hugh were killed in a car accident in Perú. They were

returning to their home in Moquegua after visiting at Cuajones when the car went out of control, left the road and plunged down the mountainside. Hugh and Sadie were thrown from the car at different points. Sadie was killed instantly while Hugh died a short time later. A memorial service was held in the church on 18 June 1989.

Civic Recognition

The church hosted the annual meetings of the NBA for the fifth time on 15 September 1992, when a member of the Banbridge church [Mr Kenneth Stewart] was elected chair-man. In the evening the NBA Committee visited the Civic Buildings when they were received by Mr Nelson, the Chairman of Banbridge District Council, who explained the working of the Council and took them around the building. Before leaving Mr Stewart presented Mr Nelson with a suitably inscribed Bible to mark their visit. Mr Nelson in his turn presented Mr Stewart with a plaque depicting the Banbridge Coat of Arms.

Conclusion

Our present pastor, Mr Carson, has been with us now for fourteen years and has become the longest-serving pastor in the history of the church. His pulpit ministry has been of a high standard. Like his predecessors he has sought to evangelise in the district holding missions in Corbet and Magherally. Three missions have been held in the church with visiting evangelists - Pastor Jack Hughes, Pastor Victor Maxwell and Mr Roger Carswell (Leeds). Similar efforts have been made among the children and young people.

In May 1994 Mr Carson was elected Vice-President of our Union of Churches, becoming the seventh pastor of the church to be President in the Union's centenary year.

In 1995 the church will celebrates 150 years of Baptist witness in Co. Down. As we look back we give thanks to God for all His faithfulness through the years, and for men who in the early years laboured despite much opposition and discouragement. They were men of grit and yet men of grace.

As we look to the future it is with confidence in our God, and with the desire to be a church that is not only evangelical but also evangelistic.

REPORT TO ANNUAL ASSEMBLY 1995

The year passed has been one of quiet progress. Four meetings were held during 1993 and were well-supported. In March the honorary secretary read a paper on "Authority in the Local Church". This was in place of a paper on "The Pastorate - Past and Present" which had to be postponed due to the regretted illness of Pastor J R Grant. Mr Grant will present his paper at a meeting at a later date. At the annual Assembly, an excellent and stimulating account by Pastor Derek Baxter (Secretary of Baptist Missions) of "Recent experiences in church planting in Ireland" was enjoyed by a responsive audience. In September, Mr Kenneth Stewart read a thoroughly prepared paper on the history of the Banbridge Church. This continued the Society's policy of encouraging the production of accounts of our churches. The December meeting was addressed by Pastor Ian Grant on "Stepping through God's open doors". This was a stirring, first-hand account of church planting in counties Fermanagh and Cavan since 1980. Accompanying Mr Grant was Mr Addison Clingan who was closely involved in the enterprise. At the close of the meeting an offering amounting to £181 was contributed to this work.

The new format of the Society's *Journal* in the modern A5 size has been welcomed. To mark the completion of twenty-five years publication, the first volume of the new format has been denominated "Series Two Volume 1". The history of the Union entitled *Century of Grace* being published in connection with the Baptist Union centenary celebrations marks the completion of the project launched three years ago.

On 24 August, the Society was represented by the President and Secretary at the unveiling of a plaque placed on a wall of "Solitude", the home of Alexander Carson located near Tobermore to mark the 150th anniversary of his death. This was on the initiative of the present owner Mr

Kevin Murphy who is a member of the local Historical Society. Mrs Victoria Graham, a great-granddaughter of Carson, performed the unveiling. A large group of people was present, and after a visit to Carson's grave, they assembled in the Carson Memorial Church, Tobermore, to hear a talk on Carson by Dr J Thompson.

The Society continues to build archives of importance and relevance to Irish Baptist history, and welcomes deposits of correspondence, minute books, photographs and other literature. The honorary secretary plans to spend some time during 1995 creating a database of material relating to the Baptist Irish Society, and the British and Irish Home Mission. Archival material received during the year includes a substantial collection of MS. sermons by the late Richard Hodgett, the Rockefeller House Minute Book, and some material relating to the Carson family of Tobermore.

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(Formed 1968)

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