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Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland

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Editor: Joshua Thompson
BA, D Phil (Oxon)

Volume 9 (New Series)
2001 - 2002

IRISH BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

(Founded 1968)

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Volume Nine (New Series) 2001-2002

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

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19 Ballinderry Road
Lisburn, BT28 2SA,
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Telephone: (028) 9266 9366
Fax No: (028) 9266 9377
E-mail ABCinI@aol.com

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About Our Contributors:

1. Dr Paul Doherty is a lecturer at the Ulster University

2. David McFarland is the pastor of Moira Baptist Church, Moira

3. Dr Joshua Thompson has been Secretary of the Society since its formation in 1968 to 2001

Editorial

This issue of the Journal marks a milestone in the history of the Society. The Organisation committee of the Association of Churches has simplified the structure of the Association. One decision creates a Training Department charged with widening the opportunities for church members to acquire skills in youth and womens' work. Both the College and our Society will form part of this Training Department. The Society will continue its past functions, but in association with the College. It is hoped that the closer link with the College will extend the usefulness of the Society in coming years.

As to content the Journal contains three interesting papers. The histories of two churches - Moira and Gilnahirk (Belfast) - continue our policy of recording the origins and experiences of establishing and developing local churches. The comparisons and contrasts demonstrate how church-planting policy and methods have changed over a period of thirty years. We are grateful to David MacFarland and Paul Doherty. Dr. Doherty gave us an expert and beautiful 'power-point' graphic presentation which took full advantage of modern technology. He set a standard which will be a benchmark for future speakers. The third paper, 'Reflections' looks back over the years since the Society was founded in 1968. It provides a bird's-eye view of the range and variety of material published in the Journal.

The present Editor has completed over twenty years in office, and has enjoyed the work of producing the Journal year by year. Changes are in the o'ffing, and he takes this opportunity to record his thanks to all the contributors, to the Association office staff and to the various printers who have served us so well. The members of the Society have made up a unique body of people whose enthusiasm and support has sustained interest down the years. It has been an unalloyed pleasure to be associated with them - drawn, as they are, from a wide spectrum of Baptists, some beyond our shores, interested in the history of Baptists in the Emerald Isle.

The Early Years of Gilnahirk Baptist Church:

A Personal Perspective

Paul Doherty
November 2001

I have subtitled this account "A personal perspective", because it is not possible for me to write any other. I spent my early years in the church, met and married my wife in it, and my children spent their first years in Gilnahirk. I was baptized and brought into the fellowship of the church, and served in it as Sunday School teacher, youth leader and organist for many years. But beyond all this, as you will see from this paper, my parents' lives were closely involved with the work in Gilnahirk for almost thirty years. So you will appreciate that this is of necessity a personal account.

My sources have been the Church Minute book, published Annual Church Reports, together with some notes of my father's, and my mother's recollections. Any errors are my own. It is my intention to cover the period from the origin of the work up to the end of Mr. Blayney's pastorate in 1987, with particular emphasis on the early days.

Origins: 1953-1959

My parents, Raymond and Mary Doherty, moved to Gilnahirk from East Belfast with their two young sons, Paul and Ian, in September 1953. They were members of the East End Church at that time. While it is not particularly relevant to our story, it is interesting to note that they purchased their house from a young Church of Ireland curate, then serving in East Belfast, called Herbert Carson. Mr Carson was later to leave the Church of England and become well known in Irish Baptist circles as the pastor of the Hamilton Road Church in Bangor. The house was a semi-detached house on the Lower Braniel Road, looking down Gilnahirk Rise. It was called "Dugort", which I believe is where the Carsons spent their honeymoon. For some time the Carsons held a Sunday School in their wooden garage, which still stands today.

The Gilnahirk that we moved to was very different to the Gilnahirk of today. It was another time, and another place. Our house did not have mains water: we drew beautiful fresh water from a well in the back garden for some years. An old man lived in a caravan in a field just across the river from where the church now stands. The Lower Braniel, Middle Braniel and Gilnahirk Roads had not been widened and realigned, but were narrow twisting country roads. The Braniel and Tullycarnet housing estates had not been built, nor had Gortland Park and much of the private sector housing that exists today, so the area had a very rural aspect. The lovely grounds of the Presbyterian Manse and the Tennis Courts behind had not been developed. The infill development of back gardens, including that of Dugort, which has so destroyed the character of the area, had not taken place. My father wrote in the Irish Baptist of September 1965 "Gilnahirk had, in 1954, a quiet, country village atmosphere. Like other areas on the periphery of the city, it was in the chrysalis stage: land was being bought, houses were being built, new families were moving in. The scene was rapidly changing, an agricultural landscape was being transformed into a modern suburban development".

Shortly after we moved in, we were visited by my uncle, George Boggs, for many years a member of the Hill Street Ballymena church. It was a wet and windy winter's night. As he left, my uncle stood in the front doorway of the house and looked out into the uninviting blackness: there was no street lighting. He commented: "I don't know what brought you here. This is the sort of place they send missionaries to", and ran to his car. My uncle probably spoke in jest, but his words hit home to my parents, and my father commented that it was a very strange thing George had said. As they settled in to their new home, they became aware of the spiritual state of the district in which they now lived, and they came to realise that George Boggs had a point, that Gilnahirk was indeed a mission field. There was only one church in the district at that time, the Presbyterian church, and it was not evangelical. The nearest evangelical witness was a Brethren Hall at Ballyhackamore.

My father had suffered from a duodenal ulcer for some years, and he became seriously ill in the spring of 1954. He was admitted to the Royal Victoria Hospital in May for major surgery, which removed most of his stomach. We didn't have a car, my sister Naomi was only four months old, and it was impossible for my mother to visit him every day, as she would have wished. So my father wrote to her frequently. In one of his letters, he stated that if the Lord should spare him to come out of hospital, he would start a Baptist witness in Gilnahirk if it lay in his strength, and if the Lord willed. The Lord did spare him, and indeed he enjoyed excellent health for the rest of his days. My father began to try to fulfil his promise. He tried all summer to get a Baptist group started, but to no avail.

One Sunday morning in the autumn of that year, my mother set out to take me to East End Church, while my father looked after my brother and sister. We stood at the bus stop at the end of the Lower Braniel and waited for the bus, but in the purposes of God, it did not arrive. My mother got into conversation with a young couple who were also waiting. It transpired that they too were Baptists, and that they were hoping to go to Great Victoria Street Church. They were the newly-wed John and Hettie McMillan, who were to be the parents of Pastor David McMillan. They walked back up the road with us, and my mother invited them in to meet my father. He shared his vision for a Baptist church with them. John McMillan knew of two couples who attended the Bloomfield church, the Nesbitts and Scotts, and he undertook to contact them. These folks met together in "Dugort" on Friday 3rd December 1954, together with two other couples who had been contacted. The pastors of neighbouring churches were also invited, as my father realised the importance of having their support, but only Minnis Mills from Orangefield could come that evening. The group agreed to support a project to commence a Baptist work in Gilnahirk, under God"s guidance. They agreed to meet fortnightly for prayer, and to take up an offering. Pastor Mills said, "Raymond, if you are ever wanting money, never look to the man who has it", and my father learned the truth of these words as the work progressed. The next month he received a gift of £1 from an elderly lady who lived in the district, the first of many gifts from outside the group, and from people who were

not well-off.

During 1955 the Cairns family moved to Canada and the McMillans moved to Dundonald, but the rest of the group continued to meet together for prayer. In September they agreed to ask the Baptist Union of Ireland for the use of the Forbes Memorial Hall No. 1, which was in Stonepark Co. Fermanagh at that time. There were two of these wooden halls, and they were of sectional construction, which enabled them to be moved from place to place. They were lent by the Home Mission to fledgling churches to enable them to have a meeting place until they were able to construct their own building. The Stonepark Church were erecting their own building at that time, and so the group at Gilnahirk anticipated that the Hall would soon become available for use elsewhere. Four of the men therefore met with the Home Mission committee to put the case for moving the hall to Gilnahirk. They pointed out that significant developments were taking place in the district: a large public sector estate of 1000 houses was to be built at Braniel, and substantial private sector building was also getting under way. The mission field was expanding. The meeting with the Mission committee was encouraging, but it was obvious that if a work was to begin, they would need a site on which to place the building, and so they began to look for a suitable plot of land.

George Nesbitt was appointed Treasurer, and at that time there was £67-15-00 in their Bank account. In January 1956, the group agreed that in the matter of the purchase of a site for a building, "it would be in our best interests to ask the Baptist Union Of Ireland Corporation Limited to act as Trustee". Subsequent events were to prove the wisdom of that decision. Various sites were considered, including the sites of the present Library and the Church of Ireland rectory, but there were difficulties in these. They then considered the present site of the church, which at that time was a field known as "the rhubarb patch", about half an acre well situated at the junction of the Lower and Middle Braniel Roads. It was agreed to make an approach to the landowner, a semi-retired farmer called George Brown. My father visited Mr Brown, together with Hugh Hill, a local farmer who was one of the group. It was clear Mr Brown did not want to be bothered with the land, and he offered to rent it for £30 per annum. On the spur of the

moment my father asked if he would sell, and Brown said he would sell it for £400.

At this time there were only eight in the group, their bank balance was £127-14-00, and purchase did not seem possible. However, the church at East End were very active supporters of the project, prayerfully, practically and financially. Their Pastor, Hugh Orr, was a great encourager of my father. In addition, Harry Gribbon, the late President of this Society, was an elder in East End and he was actively involved in the work at Gilnahirk for some time. My father went straight from his meeting with George Brown to the prayer meeting at East End, and shared what was happening. Hugh Orr strongly advised purchase of the land, and the East End Church gave £50. By the end of February 1956 the bank balance had more than doubled to £289-10-00, and a Bank Loan of £200 had been arranged if required, on the security of the Doherty and Nesbitt houses.

No sooner had word broken of the impending purchase, than Mr Brown was approached by a developer who was planning to build Gortland Park in the fields behind the site. He stated that he wished to buy the rhubarb patch to build on, linking Gortland Park through to the Middle Braniel. He offered twice the price for the land, but Mr Brown said he had given his word to the Baptists to sell to them, and that was that as far as he was concerned. In March the purchase was completed, the East End church (and others) continued to give generously, and within a year the debt was cleared.

It should be noted that the original land purchased was not quite the same as the present church site. The Middle Braniel Road has been realigned, giving a better, squarer boundary with the Lower Braniel Road, and additional land at the top of the site was purchased in 1979 to increase and improve the site. This land had some wooden bungalows on it when the initial purchase was made in 1956, but Mr Brown would not sell this land because he did not wish to put the occupants out of their homes.

Shortly after this, George Brown became ill and went into a nursing

home. His housekeeper told my father that he was terminally ill. My father said he would go to visit him, but circumstances prevented him from going straight away. He then heard that Mr Brown had died. This upset him greatly, because he felt he had missed an opportunity to speak to George Brown about his soul. However, some weeks later, after an evening service in East End Church, my father was approached by a lady who said she had been looking out for him. She introduced herself as a nurse who had cared for Mr Brown in the nursing home. Having noted that Mr Brown came from Gilnahirk, she told him that she knew someone who lived in Gilnahirk: Raymond Doherty. Brown told her he also knew Raymond Doherty, and that he had sold him land to build a Baptist church on. This gave her the opportunity to get into conversation with him. She had spoken subsequently to George Brown on several occasions, and had pointed him to the Lord before his death. This was a delight to the folks at Gilnahirk, and Harry Gribbon expressed the opinion that the conversion of George Brown was God"s seal on the work at that time.

Rather than let the land lie unused, the group felt that it was a talent that should be used to raise money for the work. So at the beginning of July 1956, my father and Hugh Hill ploughed it with a horse plough, and it was planted with savoy cabbages which were subsequently sold. Later that month a more spiritual venture began, in the form of a Sunday School in Hugh Hill"s farmhouse at Mann's Corner. Charlie Scott and my father were the teachers, and there were 23 children present on the first Sunday. Unfortunately this endeavour was short lived, as in October Charlie Scott returned to the Brethren. Hugh Hill followed him in February 1957, and the Brethren then took over the Sunday School. There were other departures during these early days, as people moved away from the district, which were inevitably disappointments, but equally new people moved in and joined the group from time to time.

The group now found itself in the position of having a site but no building, and they looked to the Home Mission to allocate the Forbes Hall to them. However the fellowship at Cloughfern, who were meeting in an Orange Hall, was also seeking the Forbes Hall, and had already

been offered it. But the Cloughfern fellowship was unable to obtain planning permission to erect the Hall, and as the Gilnahirk folk now had a site, the Mission offered the Hall to them in June 1957. The offer was readily accepted. At this point the group consisted of four couples: the Dohertys and Nesbitts who had been involved from the start, the Walkers who had recently moved from Scotland, and the Lightbodys who had also just moved to the district: plus Harry Gribbon.

The site had been planted with lettuce that year. In the autumn it was prepared for the hall, which was transported from Stonepark and erected on the site by Tommy Dunlop, a builder from Milltown. Water had to be brought up from the Lower Braniel Road, the hall needed wiring and painting inside and out, and the forms that came with the hall had to be varnished. Most of this was done by voluntary labour. There were only five men in the group, but they were greatly helped and encouraged by young men from East End Church who worked alongside them.

At the beginning of November, the district was visited with invitations to the new work, with members of the Maranatha Singers helping in the distribution. The opening service was on Saturday 2nd November 1957 at 3.30 pm. Extra seats had to be provided in the Hall, and over 150 persons were present. The Union President, Pastor Robert Clarke (Monkstown) chaired the meeting, and the Union Secretary, Pastor Joshua Thompson took part. Music was provided by the East End Choir, led by Hugh Ferguson, who also was soloist. Pastor George Weir (Bangor), who was to feature prominently in the history of the church in days to come, also took part in the service. The Home Mission Chairman, Jack Johnston (Bloomfield) preached on Romans 6:13 "Yield yourselves unto God" and Hugh Orr (East End), preached on Exodus 40:33 "So Moses finished the work".

Initially a Sunday School, Sunday evening service, and a Tuesday evening Prayer Meeting were held. There were 16 children at the first Sunday School on 3rd November, including my future wife Valerie and myself. The first evening service was taken by Leslie Brennan and Archie Leinster, of the Maranatha Singers, with 51 present. Subse-

quent services that month were taken by Stuart Neill, William Townley and Pastor Joshua Thompson. In December George Armstrong took all the services, and this began a practice that was followed as much as possible in these early days, namely, of trying to achieve some continuity of ministry by having the same preacher for an entire month. The attendances at this time were between 20 and 30.

In March 1958 the first special effort was made: the Maranatha Singers took the services for the month. Five hundred blotters advertising the meetings were distributed, and attendances increased to between 40 and 50. The Lord blessed the work and souls were saved, the first in the fellowship"s new premises.

June 1958 saw the first Children's Day, another milestone, at which E. B. O"Reilly spoke to afternoon and evening congregations of 68 and 74. Slowly but surely the work was becoming established, and in this month discussion commenced about the possibility of forming a church. However, it was felt that their debt was an obstacle to church formation, and it was agreed to try to clear this by the end of the year. This objective was achieved by December. The fellowship by this time also had begun discussion of a draft Church Constitution, and attendances at the Sunday evening services were in the fifties.

At this time construction of the Braniel housing estate was under way. The Clerk of Works was a Christian who was interested in the developing Baptist work. Each time a house was occupied in the estate, he would call at our house to let my father know, so that the occupants could be visited and invited to the Hall. This practical support was a great encouragement to the fellowship.

In January 1959 a Building Fund was opened, and Tuesday evening Bible Classes commenced, with visiting Pastors speaking on topics relating to church order. Active steps were now being taken towards church formation, and to the commencement of morning services and a youth work.

The church was formed on Tuesday 2nd June 1959, when 14 signed

the minute book. These were: Mary and Raymond Doherty, Grace O"Hara, Lorna and Albert (Ernie) Ashcroft, John (Jack) Adair, Gladys Nesbitt, Roberta and John (Johnny) Huddleston, Violet McAfee, Letitia (Lottie) and Edward (Eddie) Cairns (now returned from Canada), Hazel and Richard (Dick) Bryans. George Nesbitt was unable to attend and he signed subsequently. The Service of Formation was conducted by Pastor Minnis Mills (Orangefield) and the Union Secretary, Pastor Joshua Thompson, preached.

First Years: 1959-1965

As the new church began its morning services in June 1959, it also took steps to achieve as much continuity in ministry as possible. It had become aware of a recently retired pastor from Glasgow, T.J. Harvey, and it invited him to take the morning services from June until October. This period of ministry was later extended with Mr Harvey taking most morning services until the end of March 1960. This was a profitable arrangement, with Pastor Harvey's ministry being much appreciated. He was able to bring his pastoral experience to bear to influence the young church in the way to conduct its affairs. Mr Harvey had strong views on the importance of worship, and would choose his hymns with such care that no two hymns in a service had the same metre. He was a strong advocate of psalm singing, on one occasion exhorting a deacon "Sing the psalms, they're scriptural you know". Pastor Harvey influenced the church to buy the Revised Baptist Hymnal for use in morning services, while Sankey's "Sacred Songs and Solos" continued to be used in the evenings.

During the summer of 1959 another important development took place. One of the members, Mrs Hazel Bryans, held children's meetings in the garden of her house, which was across the road from "Dugort". These went well, and led to regular children's meetings being held in the Forbes Hall on Friday evenings under her leadership from September.

The following month the church had their first Mission, held over four weeks from October 11 to November 8. Mr Currie Brennan, the well-known Home Mission evangelist, was the preacher and he did exten-

sive visitation in the district. Attendances were small, in the mid-thirties, but two souls were saved. One was the husband of a member, the other from the senior Sunday School. Mr Brennan was asked back to conduct the church's first baptismal service on December 3rd, which was held in Dundonald Baptist. Four were baptised, three being children of church members, and the fourth the recently converted husband of a member.

During the second half of 1959 the church took further important steps. They applied for Union membership, and began to consider the need for a permanent building. The first AGM was held in January 1960 and four deacons were elected. During 1960 a League of Church Loyalty was started to encourage children to attend church. In the autumn a Children"s Mission was held for a fortnight, with average attendances of 132, and thirteen professions of faith.

The deacons discussed the need for a pastor, but because of the small size of the fellowship and their limited resources they were unable to progress this matter. However, in October 1960 a letter was received from the Home Mission Secretary, Pastor Thompson, informing the church of a Pastor James Kernohan, formerly of Strandtown but at that time in Australia. For personal reasons Mr Kernohan was coming home, and would be available for a short term temporary pastorate, from mid-December to the end of March 1961. Some financial help from the Mission might be available to assist with this. The deacons recommended this to the church, and the church agreed to ask Pastor Kernohan to take up this temporary role, provided the Mission met half the cost.

Pastor Kernohan accepted and commenced his ministry in January 1961. He was well received by the congregation. The deacons quickly discussed the possibility of calling him as pastor on a permanent basis. A church meeting on February 2nd agreed to extend a call to him, offering to pay the salary recommended by the Mission. They also agreed to make enquiries regarding the availability of housing from the Housing Trust (the precursor of the Housing Executive) and from Castlereagh Rural District Council.

The church met on April 6th to consider Mr Kernohan's response. In his letter he asked: "Would the church be willing to give further consideration to the question of salary so that any doubts on this aspect be fully removed?" This placed the church in an impossible position. They had extended the call to Mr Kernohan on the condition that they would receive financial support from the Home Mission. However, the Mission would only support a salary that was in accordance with their current guidelines. If the church were to offer Mr Kernohan a salary above this level, then no grant would be available, and the church would have to meet the entire cost themselves. As the church was already extending itself and taking a step of faith in making a call conditional on Home Mission support, it was clear that they could not fund a higher salary on their own. After lengthy discussion, a motion to offer an increased salary was defeated, with strong views being expressed both for and against the motion. This was the first time serious differences of opinion were apparent in the minutes. The church reluctantly concluded it could not sustain the call. However, the deacons continued to keep the matter of the pastorate a live issue.

For some time the church had wished to commence a youth work, but suitable leadership could not be found. A youth meeting was started in January 1961, under the leadership of the deacons. At this point there was also a children"s meeting and a women's meeting, and the Sunday School had an enrolment of over 90.

At the church AGM in January 1962, serious dissent emerged over the way the church was being run, and a vote of no confidence in the deacons was proposed. A special meeting was convened to discuss this, but the motion was withdrawn before this meeting could be held. However, damage had been done and by March 1962 one of the four deacons had resigned from the church, and my father and mother (who had been organist) had resigned from office. My parents did not take up office again until March 1965. For three years they experienced great personal difficulty in the church, with allegations being made against them which led to them being prevented from praying publicly during 1964.

It is difficult to encapsulate the nature of the problems at that time. The minutes of deacons" meetings contain some irregularities and give very little indication that there was anything untoward going on, but there were serious internal differences and a number of resignations from the church. The church continued in its search for a pastor, and sought the assistance of the Home Mission. The Mission indicated that they were willing to help, but that the differences within the fellowship needed to be resolved. To this end, a special church meeting was called in February 1963, at which members of the Home Mission committee were present, and which was chaired by Pastor George Weir. The minutes of the meeting record that my father raised two issues. He expressed concern about the Second Blessing teaching, which was being propagated in the church. He also said that "the church had been commenced as a Baptist church, and that this was not being maintained". George Nesbitt, who had been out of the country for some time, said that he had been shocked when he had returned to the church. He said that "it was not so much over Second Blessings, but that Mr and Mrs Doherty had been forced to take a back seat, and that something should be done by the church to remedy this". The meeting was adjourned, and further special meetings were held between the church and representatives of the Mission in an effort to resolve matters. It is clear that the Mission had a key role in getting the church back on a right footing. This was possible because the Mission owned the Forbes Hall, and the Corporation was trustee of the land. The church requested the renewal of the Hall's lease in autumn 1963, but the Mission stated that they were unwilling to do this, "until there was evidence of real and lasting improvement" in the affairs of the church.

However, the problems continued into 1964. The 1964 AGM found it impossible to get nominations for the diaconate. There was little progress made anywhere, membership was low and the church continued to try unsuccessfully to obtain a part-time pastor.

At the 1965 AGM the church secretary stood down from office, and the ban on my parents praying publicly was lifted. At a special church

meeting two months later, my father was re-elected deacon and secretary, positions that he then held until 1983.

The period from 1962 to 1964 represented a major setback in the development of the church. Little was achieved, doctrinal differences and an attempt by some to shift the church from its Baptistic position held the work back. The role of the Union and the Home Mission in preventing this was fundamental. Had this attempt to subvert the church been successful, one wonders just what the situation would have been in Gilnahirk today. However, once this attempt to alter the church"s basic position had failed, progress began to take place rapidly.

In April 1965 the deacons became aware that George H. Weir intended to retire from his pastorate in Bangor, and that he would be open to the possibility of giving assistance to a young church which did not have the resources to fund a full-time a full-time pastor. George Weir had become known to the church as a member of the Home Mission delegations which had met with them over the previous couple of years. At a special church meeting in May, it was agreed to ask Mr Weir to engage in pastoral activity in the church, and he readily agreed to do this.

George H. Weir: 1965-1972

Pastor Weir served on a yearly basis from 10 October 1965 until he resigned due to ill-health at the end of September 1972. This period was one of consolidation and growth in all departments, especially amongst the youth, and was characterised by happy fellowship. At the commencement of his ministry the membership was 21. This had risen to 66 at its conclusion seven years later.

Mr Weir said that he had not retired, but rather that he was "re-tyred", and this is certainly a good description of his approach to the work. For a man in his seventies he was remarkable, and he did not spare himself. In all of this he was supported by his devoted wife Maud. I think it is fair to say that while George Weir may not have been an outstanding preacher, he was truly an outstanding pastor. He was a man who was very loving, and he was also deeply loved by his church. He

was very much a "hands on pastor", with his eye on every aspect of the church's work. On a Sunday morning he would check that the chairs were correctly spaced, with a specially marked stick. Even the ladies were unable to organise a social without him checking that the tables were set correctly and that there were sufficient places. Having been a carpenter, he was constantly doing odd jobs about the place. After the dark days of the early 1960s, the church moved into what we now can see as a golden era, in which a great deal was accomplished.

A significant feature of this period was the development of a fruitful relationship with the Irish Baptist College. In 1964 the College had been relocated from Dublin and reconstituted at 67 Sandown Road in Belfast, which was not that far from Gilnahirk. In those days the College was rather different from today in that it was largely residential, and the students were mainly single men. The College was asked to provide suitable leaders for the youth fellowship, as the church was unable to provide its own leadership for this important aspect of their work. The first two students, Alastair Baxter and Stanley Kirby, came to help in the autumn of 1965, around the same time as George Weir commenced his ministry. Other students took their place in subsequent years, and made a significant contribution to the youth work. The church had several student pastors to assist George Weir, including Peter Quigley and Gerald Rodgers. In addition, students preached from time to time and helped in other ways. Two, Trevor Brock and Brian Ferguson, even found wives.

Two points require particular mention in our discussion of Mr Weir"s pastorate: the erection of the church hall, and the development of the youth work. The deacons began discussion of building plans as soon as he arrived. They were mindful that the Forbes Hall was only on loan to them, and they were also aware of its deficiencies: it was quite small, had limited facilities, was not very comfortable especially in cold weather, and it was unattractive. By January 1966 they were looking at plans for a two-stage development of the site, with a multi-purpose hall being erected first, and then when funds permitted, a church building. Outline planning permission was sought, and the church

started to save.

At a special meeting in May 1968, the church unanimously agreed to a proposal to erect a pre-fabricated sectional hall. In December of that year they were informed that as the plans had been refined costs had risen to around £8,000. The building fund stood at just over £4,000. It was agreed to seek a loan of up to £4,000 from the British Baptist Building Fund (as support would not be available from the Irish Baptist Fund for about three years) plus a bank overdraft facility of up to £4,000 if needed. It transpired that British funds were also not immediately available, but the application was processed, and monies from both British and Irish funds were subsequently used to help finance the project.

Building work proceeded rapidly in spring 1969, and the new hall was opened on 24th May. This building continues to serve the church well. The opening was performed by Mrs Maud Weir, and Pastor Joshua Thompson preached on Revelation 3: 7-13, "The Church with Opportunity". The church had received a number of gifts for the occasion. These included a communion table, chairs and Hammond organ donated by Pastor Weir's cousin, in memory of the Pastor's mother, father and daughter, the latter having died in a tragic swimming accident. George Weir made an unusual contribution in that he built the mahogany pulpit himself. The deficit on the building fund was cleared by 1972.

The opening of the hall was followed by a gospel campaign in the autumn, at which Pastor Sam Simpson spoke. Two young people were saved, and two were subsequently converted at the C.E. houseparty in Bangor.

As we have already noted, IBC students came to help in the youth work from 1965. This was a beneficial arrangement, and over time the youth work developed both numerically and spiritually. In 1967, under the leadership of Billy Gardner and Peter Quigley, a Christian Endeavour was formed. This worked on a committee system which involved all of the young people, and which was greatly used by the Lord to de-

velop the young people spiritually. Billy Gardner moved on to a student pastorate elsewhere, but Peter Quigley remained until the autumn of 1970, and exercised a profitable and enduring ministry among the young people.

The number of young people attending and joining the church steadily increased, and the Church Secretary's report to the 1970 Church AGM commented that "Gilnahirk is now looked on as a young people's church", as by this stage almost half the membership was under the age of 25. In the previous year eight young people had decided for Christ as a result of the activities of the CE. By 1971, the numbers of young people were such that the CE was split into Junior and Senior sections. In addition, a Sunday evening after-church fellowship meeting was in operation, with large numbers also coming to it.

In 1970 the CE ran a "Good News for Gilnahirk" campaign, in which they distributed 2,000 copies of John"s Gospel in the Good News version to homes in the district. This was used of God to the salvation of four persons. In 1972, they ran a coffee bar mission at which many young people heard the gospel. Peter Quigley, who by then was working for the BYF and IBSSU, was the speaker.

All this with a pastor in his seventies. While George Weir could not be considered a young person's pastor, he nonetheless had the needs of the young people at heart, and he was respected and loved by them. On one occasion, a deacon complained to him about the young ladies coming to church in their bare heads. Mr Weir's response was brief: "I don"t care if they come in their bare feet as long as they come". Clearly he had the heart of the matter and this was reflected in the success of his ministry. In 1970, 13 were baptized, with 12 the following year, mainly young people. As far as I can see, these were the highest numbers in the history of the church.

In 1970 Mr Weir had a short illness, and the deacons sought to relieve him of some of his duties. In 1971 he suggested that the church should be looking for a younger man, and that he would be happy to give way to him. In 1972 he experienced further illness, and tendered

his resignation in October, bringing to an end a remarkable period of ministry.

Immediately after Mr. Weir's resignation, the officebearers obtained the Church's permission to purchase a manse in anticipation of the appointment of a successor. A Covenant Giving scheme was introduced, which was very beneficial, and the deficit in the building fund was cleared. A manse was purchased in Moyne Park for £5000 in March 1973, and was subsequently let to two young members, Paul and Valerie Doherty.

Also in March 1973, Mr. John Shearer, a student at the IBC, preached in the church. The church asked him to conduct a Baptismal Service on Easter Sunday, so that they could further evaluate his qualities. He was also offered a summer appointment with the church, which included running a Vacation Bible School.

The following month the church issued a call to Mr. Shearer, in which they indicated that they would not wish him to take up his appointment until he had finished his college course. However, this call was declined.

In April 1973, one of the young members, Valerie Greer, was appointed by the Irish Baptist Foreign Mission to work in Brussels on a four-year contract. Valerie had trained as a bi-lingual secretary, and she worked for Pastor Jean Berge, of La Bonne Nouvelle church. This enabled Pastor Berge to give more time to his wide-ranging ministry amongst students and others. Valerie's appointment helped give the church a wider vision, and she was the first of a number of missionaries to be sent out by them.

John Shearer: 1975-1979

In autumn 1974, a fresh call was issued to John Shearer to be taken up on completion of his college course, which he accepted. He was inducted in September 1975 by his predecessor, George Weir, and served until March 1979. At the commencement of his ministry the church had 77 members, the manse had been paid off, and a new

building fund had been started for the second phase of the development, the church building.

At the AGM in January 1976, the church agreed the transfer of the Weirs to the Great Victoria Street Church. The church did not wish the Weirs to leave, such was their affection for them. But as always, the Weirs put the good of the church above any personal considerations. Mr Weir did not want the young pastor feeling he had an older man looking over his shoulder. So they transferred to Great Victoria Street, clearing the decks for the new man, in what for them also was a painful parting, and in which we see, once again, the measure of the Weirs.

At the deacons' meeting in March 1976 the secretary suggested that a feasibility study be conducted into the possibility of opening a church building in November 1982, when the church would be marking the 25th anniversary of the start of the work in the Forbes Hall. This was discussed, but while there was a marked increase in giving to the building fund, the idea did not make much headway at that time, even though outline plans were drawn and planning permission granted in 1977. The Secretary"s Report of 1978 notes that with respect to the building scheme "we lost our way and the whole scheme lost its momentum".

During John Shearer's pastorate, monthly home prayer meetings and a tape ministry were started, while outreach into the district was given a fresh impetus. The Grace Hymnal was purchased for use in the services, reflecting the Pastor's Reformed Theological position, which was also evident in his enthusiastic and soul-searching preaching. Discussion took place on the issue of eldership, but this matter was not resolved for some time.

While the youth work in the church continued to prosper, this was a period when children's work also flourished. In 1976, a children's mission was conducted by Mr Ken Martin, a CEF evangelist. This saw attendances of up to 250 children. As a result the children's meeting recommenced, it having been discontinued only two years previously

due to lack of support. This "6.25 Club" saw average attendances of 100, and had an enthusiastic team of helpers. In summer 1977 they held 39 open air meetings for children in various locations around the church, and in addition a Holiday Bible School was held. Other forms of outreach took place in 1977, with six open air meetings being held, and door to door outreach taking place, with the pastor leading by example.

In 1977, the CE celebrated its tenth anniversary. Nineteen young people from the church were involved in Baptist Youth summer activities, giving an indication of the numbers of young people and their spiritual enthusiasm at that time.

In November 1977, John Shearer was given leave to spend two weeks with Baptist Youth in summer 1978 to lead a BYE Team, having previously led a team in Athlone. Following this team, John informed the deacons in September 1978 of a strong pull to work in evangelism in the south of Ireland.

In June 1978, Mr Johnny Huddleston resigned as Sunday School Superintendent, after twenty years of faithful service. He was much loved by the boys and girls in his care. Under his leadership, the Sunday School was always a consistent on-going work in the life of the church, and numbers attending reached a peak in the early 1970s, when over 100 were on-roll. A foundation member, Mr Huddleston also served the church for many years as a deacon, and as Treasurer for a period.

In September 1978, one of the young people, Rosemary Speirs, gave up her job in the Baptist Union offices and went to study in BTI Glasgow. She subsequently married a fellow student, Roger Gray, and they have been engaged in evangelism in Glasgow with Open Air Campaigners since then.

In March 1979 John Shearer left the church, to take up an appointment with Baptist Missions. At that time the church was going through a difficult spell, with issues of personalities again coming to the fore,

together with discipline problems. John Shearer's pastorate was characterised by a powerful preaching ministry, active outreach into the district, and growth in membership to just over 100, the highest level ever achieved by the church.

George F. Blayney: 1979-1987

In the goodness of God, the gap between pastors was only seven months. In June of that year the church issued a call to Mr. George Blayney, who had just returned to Northern Ireland after a pastorate in Australia. He accepted the call in July, and was inducted to the pastorate on 6th October 1979, Pastor M. Mills preaching. Pastor Blayney's wisdom and experience enabled the difficulties in the church to be quickly resolved at the start of his ministry. The Secretary's Report for the year commented, "We thank God for the wisdom and spiritual maturity which has been evident in his approach to problems which faced us as a church". However, this had been another unhappy period for the fellowship, and 28 persons left the membership in 1979, the largest fall in membership they had experienced. Once again discord in the fellowship had done harm to the work. However, while a harmonious spirit returned, the church was entering a period of retrenchment, as falling membership put strain on the various departments.

The children's work continued strongly at first. In 1979, 45 garden meetings were held during the summer in Braniel, Gilnahirk and Tullycarnet. However, the following year attendances began to drop at the weekly 6.25 Club.

George Blayney felt that outreach should be a priority for 1982, as the church celebrated the 25th anniversary of the commencement of the work in the Forbes Memorial Hall. The Church Secretary noted in his Report at the start of 1982: "It is a disappointment to some that we will not be meeting in our new building and it would seem, humanly speaking, that it will be some time before that goal is achieved. One of the requirements we had agreed on some years ago was sheer physical necessity i.e. inadequacy of the present accommodation. Can all our members not resolve with God's help to commit themselves fully to the advancement of the work in Gilnahirk so that by their regular at-

tendance others might also be attracted to come in under the sound of the gospel and fill seats which are presently unoccupied? This would be a step in the right direction."

The senior young people organised a series of outreach meetings in February 1982 at which the Francis Schaeffer films "Whatever happened to the human race?" were shown. These were followed by useful discussions. The pastor again challenged the members regarding their commitment, especially regarding support for evangelistic services and outreach, and the church report noted that "the church is passing through a famine as far as the teenage group is concerned: but then most churches have these phases".

At the beginning of 1983 my father announced that he was not standing for re-election to the diaconate. He was approaching retirement from employment, and had concluded that the time had come for him to relinquish office in the church, having served as Secretary since the beginning of the work in 1954, apart from the three years out of office in the early 1960s. Having been in office for so long, he felt that it would be best for all if he made a clean break, and accordingly he and my mother moved to Bangor in spring 1983. They had been the last of the foundation members remaining in the church, and their departure was marked by the presentation of a painting.

1983 was marked by two outreaches, a Children's Meeting in October led by five IBC students, and a mission taken by Pastor Gordon Cardwell in November when one person was saved.

While there was disappointment that the 25th anniversary of the commencement of meetings had not been marked by the opening of a new church building, the idea of further development of the site had not died. A special church meeting was held in May 1984 to discuss the matter. No recommendation was made by the office bearers, and various opinions were expressed. Despite the fact that there was not a sheer physical necessity of a new building, and that the church had limited financial resources, the members decided to proceed in faith with the project. Plans were drawn up, and the work commenced. The

new church building was opened on 6th September 1986. Pastor W. McGilton, President of the BUOI, and the General Secretary, Pastor J. R. Grant, took part in the service. Pastor R.C. McMullan, a former elder, preached. This building provided the church with an attractive and comfortable venue for their Sunday services, together with a small minor hall. It completed the two-stage development of the site that had first been discussed twenty years previously.

Pastor Blayney retired from the pastorate the following year, and the erection of the church building is a lasting memorial to his ministry in Gilnahirk.

Conclusion

I have decided to draw a line under the story at this point, and leave its continuation to another, as my parent's connection with the church ended in 1983 and our own connection the following year. Looking over the history of these early years, there are several points worth making in conclusion.

1. At the last meeting of the Society in September, David McFarland commented that if Baptists were to come to Moira today seeking to start a church, they would find it difficult to get land. The same point can be made in relation to Gilnahirk. While the founders were able to consider several available sites, today there is no available land and the district is characterised by backfill development. If land could be obtained, it would be at an astronomical price. But God knew all this, had His plan for the area, and His way of fulfilling that plan.

2. The story of the Gilnahirk church, like so many others, is marred by periods of discord that set the work back. We need to take note of this, we need to learn from it, and we need to "make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

3. The role of neighbouring churches and pastors was vitally important in the early days. Humanly speaking, without their advice and support, the church would not be where it is today, both physically and spiritually. It is worth noting that the church today is closely involved with

other churches in the "Reaching Into Belfast" project.

4. The role of our Union of churches was also significant. The loan of the Forbes Hall, the trusteeship of the land, the advice of the Union Secretaries (Pastors Thompson and Grant) and committees at difficult times, the financial support of the Building Fund, all need to be gratefully acknowledged.

5. Finally, the story of the church can be traced back to the realisation that Gilnahirk was a mission field, in need of a clear evangelical witness. The vision of the founding members has been fulfilled in many respects, in that a Baptist church has been established, a faithful witness has been maintained, and souls have been saved. But is Gilnahirk still a mission field fifty years later? Is there work still to be done? The answer must be "Yes". The population of the area is higher than ever, and while there are now other evangelical witnesses not too far away, there are still many lost souls in the area. The church in Gilnahirk today still has a work to do, and still needs the vision for lost souls that so motivated the founding members. For "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18). Let us continue to pray for the church as it seeks to fulfil its vision in its continued witness in the district, and in its involvement with other churches in the RIB project witnessing to the wider Belfast area.



Forbes Memorial Hall

COME AND HEAR . . .

Maranatha Male Singers

SINGING AND SPEAKING

On Sunday Evenings during March (D.V.)

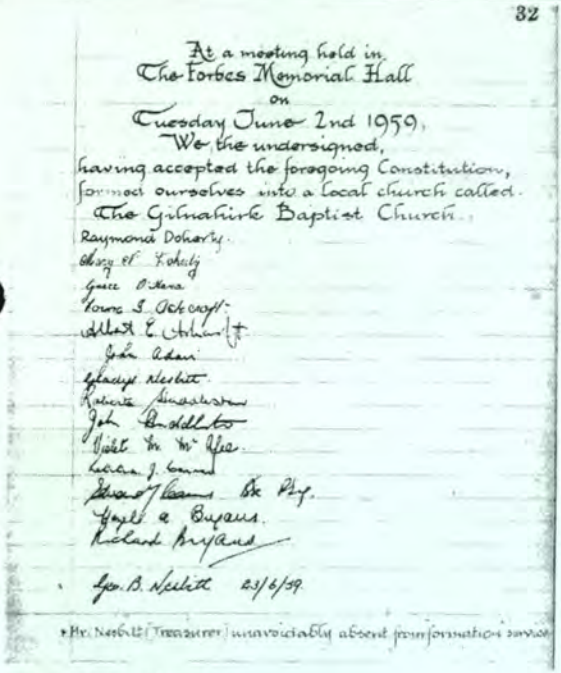
at SEVEN o'clock

In Gilnahirk Baptist Hall (Lower Braniel Road)

YOU ARE VERY WELCOME



Maranatha Singers



32

At a meeting held in
The Forbes Memorial Hall
on
Tuesday June 2nd 1959,
We the undersigned,
having accepted the foregoing Constitution,
formed ourselves into a local church called
The Gilnahirk Baptist Church.

Raymond Doherty
Gladys Nesbitt
Robert Shaddleton
Violet M. McAfee
Gerald A. Bryans
Richard Bryans

Geo. B. Nesbitt 23/6/59

* Mr. Nesbitt (Treasurer) unavoidably absent from formation service

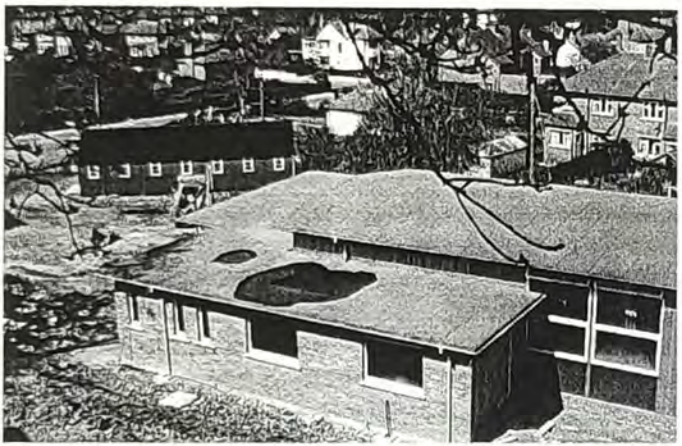
Formation Document



Site of Hall



Building the Church Hall



Ariel view of the Hall



Opening the Hall



The Deacons



John Shearer



Presentation to Raymond Doherty

GILNAHIRK BAPTIST CHURCH

The Officers & Members
invite you to
The Opening and Dedication
of their Church Building
on the 6th September at 3.0 p.m.
and afterwards to tea

Speaker Pastor R. C. McMillan B.A. B.D.



Opening the church

"Moira Marches On"

A History of Moira Baptist Church

David McFarland

"Commander" JC Henry of the new Baptist Missions "expeditionary force", known as the Evangelism and Church Planting Team, reported in the December 1986 issue of the Irish Baptist, under the title - Moira marches on:

> *"On July 1st 1986, the BM team moved into a new field of operation in Moira, seeking to promote the formation of a New Testament Church by means of the New Testament evangelism. By early August, resulting from sucsessful forays using house-to-house tactics combined with a tent crusade, they had established a small but secure bridge-head. These meetings were friendly, inspiring and almost too comfortable. Everyone agreed we must seek to keep moving forward. The only way open at this time was to hire the local Orange Hall for regular public worship services. We did and God greatly blessed the special opening meetings. Saturday night support arrived from all over the country. The hall was packed. By thus going public we have further consolidated our position as a force for God in the community. The volunteers in our still small unit are keen to do their bit for the KING and the extension of His Kingdom. Happily there are others showing a desire to join with us. Pray on for Moira and its little Baptist Fellowship. The battle is just beginning."*

Fifteen years on, we in Moira Baptist Church are thankful to God for victories, yet the battle has only begun. We are still marching on and Jim Henry's battle theme is not inappropriate, as we shall see.

An Ancient Village

Moira has always been a very strategic place. It was a flourishing

village when Lurgan had only a few houses and Belfast was little more than a ford on the river Lagan. Numerous surveys and finds carried out by archaeologists in the past two centuries tell how Moira has been inhabited some thousands of years before the coming of Christ. The ancient village sat on one of the five great roads that led from Tare of the Kings to the great fort of Dunseverick on the coast of North Antrim. Dunseverick was the port from which Irish chieftains travelled to Scotland.

Early in the seventh century, Conal ruled what are now roughly South Antrim and North Down. He fled to Scotland after murdering the High King. On the mainland, he raised a large army of Britons, Saxons, Scots and Picts and after nine years, returned to Ireland with the support of Ulstermen. The opposing army of the new High King met him at Moira. However, in the course of a six day battle on the banks of the Lagan, Conal and the Scottish army was routed and its commander slain. It was one of the most decisive and bloody battles Ireland ever saw. Sir Samuel Ferguson considered it "the greatest battle, whether we regard the numbers engaged, the duration of the combat, or the stake at issue, ever fought within the bounds of Ireland".

It is with the recording of the Battle of Moira in the Annals, that we first hear of Christianity in the area, with a few references to the Abbots of the old Abbey at Magheralin. One thousand years later (late 1600s) the Presbyterians came to Moira. John Wesley visited the village twice - in 1756 and 1760. The latter occasion is recorded in his journal: "I rode to Moira. Soon after twelve, standing on a tombstone near the Church, I called a considerable number of people to 'know God and Jesus Christ whom He had sent'" In the 1820s a Methodist church was formed. But it was to be another 160 years before Jim Henry led his troops into battle and Baptists came to Moira.

Twentieth Century Growth

For many years Moira has been an attractive location. The construction of the Lagan Canal at the end of the eighteenth century brought with it much trade to the area. This was followed in the 1840's by the arrival of the railway, which extended the line from Lisburn to

Lurgan and Portadown. The railway station is still as it was built more than a century and a half ago. The building of the M1 motorway in the 1960's closed the canal and, by taking most of the traffic from the West that once passed through Moira, might have threatened the future of the village. In fact it was the opening of the Moira motorway junction in 1966 that has largely accounted for the growth in population. More and more people were prepared to see Moira as a place from which it is easy to commute to work. A new mission-field was developing. Among those attracted to live there was a growing number of Baptists who had to travel at least five miles to attend a Baptist church. Other believers were finding there was not much "evangelical life" in some of the village churches at that time. The time was right for Church planting.

Baptist Missions Initiative

Baptist Missions interest in Moira began in 1985. In January of that year, the Mission produced a document entitled 'Strategy for the future in Ireland'. Part of that document reads: "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 Mission identified "towns and areas" for such Church planting exercises. The first three named were Ballymoney, Moira and Saintfield. (God has honoured this strategy and within two years of the document being produced, churches were formed in Ballymoney and Moira. Saintfield was to follow soon after.)

A decision was made to send the first church planting team to Moira in the summer of 1986. Its aim was to plant a Church 'through gospel preaching and the "welding together" of Baptists who already were living in the area'. This was done with the knowledge and co-operation of the neighbouring Baptist Churches, some of whom supplied names of their members living in the village and area.

The outreach began in April, with three days of house-to-house visitation as a means of testing of the response. The first call was to a lady who just an hour before had prayed that God would send some-

one to give her spiritual help. That day Mrs Sadie Andrews openly professed saving faith in the Lord and within days, her mother came back to the Lord. What an encouraging beginning the Lord gave! In Jim Henry's report to Baptist Missions for April 1986 he says, "I do believe that a carefully planned programme with the support (enthusiastic!) of local churches could see a church planted and growing in this area. I look forward to the summer months."

On 1st. July, the Moira team came together for the first time. Joining Jim Henry was his BM colleague, Cecil Johnston and two Bible College students. Stanley Black (Carryduff) and David Whitmarsh (Lisburn) had been given summer appointments by the Mission. A thorough visitation programme to every home was carried out with great profit. A Tent Mission was conducted in the Demesne for two weeks from July 27th to August 10th. A number of Baptists in the town supported the outreach and then began immediately to consider how best to bring together the Baptist folk who lived in the area. A significant statement is recorded in the BM report of the summer campaign in the Oct. 1986 issue of the Irish Baptist - "It was our intention that Moira '86 would lead to Moira '87 and beyond, God willing".

A home was opened on Tuesday nights for prayer and Bible study. Some fifteen to twenty people attended those meetings and enjoyed such tremendous fellowship together that nobody wanted to go home. There was real excitement as they considered how to move forward! The desire was to begin Sunday Services and establish a gospel witness on a regular basis and they did not wait too long.

Promoting Fellowship

By October that year the Lisburn Star had printed an article on the Baptists in Moira and announced the beginning of a Baptist Fellowship. Meetings were to be held in the local Orange Hall. To quote the Star, "Jim Henry looks forward to the time when Moira Baptist Fellowship will be a permanent work in the area. It is hoped that a permanent site may be found for the erection of the church building and to serve the growing Baptist community in Moira". Indeed the first publicity leaflets distributed in the village to announce the new services, said,

"We are planning to erect a Church building on a permanent site." Men and women of faith were on the march.

A service of Praise was held on 1st. November with a packed congregation and tea for all was served in the local Primary school. Sunday services commenced the following day and prayer and Bible Study night moved to Wednesday. Those involved in the early days tell of the practical commitment needed by the small fellowship. Each Sunday they had to arrive early to clean up the Orange Hall after the activities of the occupants on the previous evening. A fire had to be lit and kept stoked all day and even then everyone was cold. This, as much as anything, reinforced their conviction that they needed a place of their own soon and so began the search for more suitable accommodation.

Ten days after the first public meeting, representatives of the Fellowship met with men from Baptist Missions and Lisburn Baptist church. The Lisburn church expressed its interest in and commitment to Moira. They disclosed that they had been actively seeking to acquire a site in the town. The men from Moira identified their priorities to be the securing of a site for a suitable meeting place and the formation of a local Baptist Church. They recognised the need to protect their autonomy, yet realised that they were dependent on the goodwill of others. Baptist Missions promised continued support with Pastor Baxter planning to become personally involved. There was recognition that when the Moira Baptist church came into being, it would not be the daughter of any existing church but would be composed of people who already held membership in different Baptist churches.

Within two weeks of that meeting, the Moira Baptist Fellowship decided that it would be best if a church was formed, and notified Baptist Missions that they had set 3rd. January 1987 as the date for constitution. This was just 6 months from the arrival of the BM team! This small force was well and truly on the march! Its income was less than £60 per week and yet they had big visions of having a Pastor and a building of their own. Before the next year was out, they would have the former and be well on their way to having the latter.

Towards the end of 1986, the fellowship sent out a special announcement inviting everyone to "celebrate the formation of Moira Baptist Church". The letter included the line "anyone wishing to join the church may have more information from Mr Allen Cameron" - presumably this was aimed at Baptists living in the village. There was a degree of reluctance by some Baptists and some local churches to support such a new venture. Right from the beginning, Baptist Missions had given the neighbouring Churches notice of their intentions for Moira and had asked for details of "Baptist folk" from Moira who attended their church. In response only four addresses were given and only one couple ever joined the church. One church informed us of two couples getting married and coming to live in the area, and for years both those couples have been deeply committed members. But it has taken years before many Baptists living in Moira have joined the church in their village. To this day a considerable number prefer to worship where they have always worshipped and the friends in Moira will always respect that.

A Local Church Formed

The service on 3rd. January 1987 had one hundred and fifty people present to witness twelve foundation members agree to the principles and doctrines of a Baptist Church and sign the membership book. The local paper said the "Irish President" attended but his name was Pastor Wm. A McGilton, Baptist Union President that year! The speaker was Pastor J Birnie, Chairman of Baptist Missions and Pastor J McBratney of Lisburn brought greetings from the neighbouring churches. The offering of £500.02 that day more than doubled the church's bank balance.

January was a busy month. The first baptismal service was held in the Lisburn Church building on 21st. January. Sadie Andrews was one of two people to be baptised and join the church. On 26th. January the church met for its first Business Meeting. Twelve members were present, Four deacons were elected, Sunday school staff appointed and applications by two new members accepted. The church agreed to set aside offerings on the first Sunday of each month for a

building fund and to apply for membership of the Baptist Union of Ireland. They were subsequently received into the Union on 13th. May 1987.

Within four weeks of being constituted, the membership had risen to sixteen. A Sunday school was started, the women held their first meeting in February and the church reported the conversion of one of those attending the services. Pastor Baxter came alongside and from March to July provided regular ministry and support. Four Baptist Missions workers were involved in door-to-door evangelism in March before moving on to the Saintfield project. On 11th. March, Pastor Henry wrote to thank the church for a gift he had received; "It has been a privilege and a great joy to have been associated with the beginnings of the work in Moira... [I] will always keep Moira in my prayers. Thank you for your interest in Saintfield. Pray God will do it again". We know He did.

The new deacons were quickly at work and showed tremendous vision. In their first meeting they put wheels in motion to acquire a suitable site and intensive negotiations began. In their second meeting they decided to approach the Irish Baptist College about the possibility of having a student for the summer months. By April the church was moving on both fronts. Mr Jonathan Watson, a final year student, was invited to take up a summer appointment that included preaching and visitation. He wrote in response, "I am looking forward immensely to the summer, when I shall be working in the church, as well as outside the church, in an evangelistic capacity."

The months that followed were filled with enthusiastic involvement and far-reaching decisions. The church met on seven occasions during the year to discuss major issues, in addition to those meetings where new members were accepted.

A Building Site Bought

In June a unanimous decision was made to purchase a three-acre site on Clarehill Road. Considerable negotiation had reduced the asking price from £50,000 to £40,000. One shudders to think what would

have happened had the church hesitated then, considering the phenomenal rise in the price of land in Moira since then, and the particularly attractive location. But £40,000 was an enormous figure for sixteen members to commit to. At the time current giving amounted to £400 per month and the balance in the building fund stood at £1,007. In a forward-looking move, outline planning permission was sought "under the description 'Moira Baptist complex' to accommodate any future sub-development on the site". Development envisaged, at that point, included erecting a temporary meeting place and the possibility of the Baptist Housing Association building sheltered dwellings. It was to be another year of protracted negotiations before the site was legally owned. The church was delighted by the Tobermore Church's generous gift of their portable hall.

First Pastor Called

In September, a call was issued to Mr Jonathan Watson to become pastor with a "postal ballot" for those unable to be present. It appears this procedure has not been used since. Mr Watson accepted, saying, "I feel it a high honour to be the first pastor of Moira Baptist Church. Remember my youth and inexperience and pray that these may not hinder my usefulness". His induction service was held on Saturday 14th. November 1987 in the Presbyterian Hall in the village. The preacher was Mr Watson's former Pastor W.J.K. Byers and the Chairman of the meeting was Pastor J.C. Henry.

The purchase of a site and the calling of a pastor in the same year were two enormous steps of faith for a young church with only twenty-four members. Interest in the Moira Church was growing in Irish Baptist circles. News spread through regular articles in the Irish Baptist. A letter was sent to Churches in the Union asking for help and over the next two years quite a number of churches responded generously. The church acknowledged the support of the Aided Churches Tithe Scheme, "without which the church could not even contemplate engaging a full-time worker".

Help from Southern Baptists USA

Imagine the joy in Moira when Pastor J.R. Grant, Union Secretary came in October, bringing a cheque for £21,000. It was a gift from the Southern Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board, Richmond, Virginia, USA. As a result of a conversation with Pastor Grant and Pastor Baxter, the Board's Director for Europe and the Middle East had taken an interest in Baptist Missions Church Planting programme.

The church was growing and two more members were added before the end of 1987. It was truly a year of blessing.

Early Years

1988 began brightly with three new members joining. The 2nd. Annual Church Meeting in February was told planning permission had been granted for permanent dwellings on the new site. This was to be pursued by the office-bearers with the proviso "that same do not dwarf the church". Sketch plans were already being drawn for a permanent church building, though it was recognised that a temporary building would need to be erected in the short term. In May the office-bearers made visits to a number of churches to see recently constructed buildings. Much discussion ensued over what type of building to erect.

The year saw blessing in a number of areas, notably increased attendance at the services. It became obvious that the portable building given by the Tobermore church was not going to be large enough for the church. God again supplied the need when another larger portable building was offered free of charge.

The year was not all taken up with property and planning applications. The church sought to strengthen fellowship with a church dinner in May and an outing to Co.Tyrone in August. Concern for the young people of the church and community led to the formation of a Baptist Youth Fellowship, though its beginnings were small, and a Junior Bible Class on Sunday mornings. Open-air outreach was a feature of the summer with the evening service being cancelled on the second Sunday of each month and a meeting held in the Demesne and other sites in the village. A small team engaged in door-to-door visitation on Monday evenings.

Office-bearers grappled with a number of issues not unfamiliar in any new church. In October, a number of changes were made to the constitution.

Seventeen new members were added during the year making the total thirty-five but it was with regret that the church learned of the departure of eight members, including some foundation members. In fact the first six people to sign the Covenant of membership in January 1987, resigned before the end of 1988. This, combined with other factors, made the following year a quiet one.

The members entered 1989 with hopes that it would be a year of new things. At the AGM the church appointed two elders. Some suggested starting a Campaigners' Clan. The church looked forward to the visit of a BYE team in the summer. A bimonthly Men's fellowship was commenced and this has proved a most popular meeting over the years. Men began to meet on Saturday mornings for a prayer breakfast.

Considerable work needed to be done to make the portable building into a suitable meeting place. While grateful for the use of the Orange hall as a meeting place, lack of suitable accommodation restricted church activities. A team of members and friends worked enthusiastically and sacrificially on the new portable hall, determined to have it ready for the summer. After a marathon effort, that saved a great deal of expense, the hall was ready for use and invitations sent out. The letter of invitation said, "like any new work it is difficult at times but well worthwhile". On 22nd. September, a large congregation gathered in the new hall. The preacher was Pastor Alec Judd from Lurgan. It was a great feeling to enter another winter programme with accommodation in which to grow and develop.

The summer visit of the BYE team had been a "resounding success". It had bound the young people in the church together and was instrumental in leading two young men in the church to request baptism. They were baptised on the first Sunday in the new building.

As the Pastor's Letter to Members at the end of the year shows, the church had grown "three-fold" in three years but a definite slow-down was evident. Concern was expressed at the fall in giving to the church. Despite the high profile of the church in the community in 1989, only two new members joined that year and two left. There were still thirty-five members though two of the young people were about to join at the start of 1990.

Reaching Children and Young People

Minute books record a distinct emphasis on meeting the needs of children and young people. At the 1990 AGM, much discussion centred once again on forming a Campaigner's group but some office-bearers had reservations and most agreed the time was not right. One member pleaded for immediate attention to be given to some form of meeting for children during the week. And so began something for which the church has been recognised over the years - a deep interest in the evangelism and nurture of children.

By the end of May plans had been agreed for the Youth Fellowship to move to Sunday evenings and for a Friday programme of Junior and Senior Youth clubs to meet on alternate weeks. Both were to include games, outings and other activities with an evangelistic epilogue. It was also proposed to begin a Good News Club for children. Over the summer months great effort went into looking for leaders for this programme. At the same time the number of very young children attending made the church consider a second creche. Once more Baptist Youth helped the church by providing a BYE team and it was reported that at least one child had been saved as a result of the team's ministry.

Sheltered Dwelling Scheme

The development of the site for sheltered dwelling led to much discussion with the Baptist Housing Association and Planning Service. The Historic Buildings Branch were anxious to keep the proposed dwellings away from the listed St John's Church of Ireland building and the Baptist Church was anxious to keep the development as close

to the West corner of the site as possible to leave adequate scope for their buildings and for future developments.

As the year drew to a close, the church met to consider how to more effectively evangelise the community. One elder stated that the "unsaved quite simply were not coming into our services" and "it was up to us to go out to them". A Mother and Toddler group was just one suggestion, again thinking of families and children. Four more members joined during the year, two resigned and one member had to be dismissed after lengthy but fruitless attempts to persuade him to repent of serious sin.

In February 1991, the church agreed to accept an offer of £39,000 by the Baptist Housing Association for part of the site on which to erect a sheltered dwelling scheme. Negotiations had ensured that both buildings on the site would benefit in the overall development. The housing complex was to be known as Clarehill House. The church office-bearers began to think of what type of church building should be erected, thought they knew its construction was some way off.

A Period of Change and Growth

However this was overtaken by events when, in early April 1991, Pastor Watson informed the Elders that he was resigning. While expressing his sorrow at leaving many good friends, he said, "I really do feel that my ministry in the church has come to an end. I believe that a new and fresh ministry is required to encourage and build up God's people in Moira and to steer them through what seems to be an exciting and happy future. I now know that my portion lies elsewhere." He preached for the final time as Pastor on Sunday 19th. May.

A new church struggling to make an impact on a small community was well aware of being in the spotlight. There were plenty of people ready to say, "I told you so". The church was anxious to continue a clear gospel witness and concerned that their witness should be relevant and challenging. They accepted an invitation to conduct a Sunday service in Laganvale Clinic, a local Nursing home. For years, on one Sunday per month, the evening service moved out of the church

hall to meet in the Home. The early meetings were well attended and much appreciated by the residents and staff. The monthly service in the home continues to this day but on a weekday morning at the request of the management.

A Mothers and Toddlers Group was formed and was immediately successful. Up to twenty mothers attended with their children. This means of outreach has developed enormously over the years, being recognised and appreciated throughout the community. It is still a very powerful means of contact with those who do not normally come to church.

The Junior Youth Club grew and the number older of children necessitated the opening of a Senior club, despite the difficulties of getting enough leaders. A Good News Club for children was also in operation. A caravan had to be acquired to provide additional space for the creche and children's church during the Sunday morning service.

Before the year ended, the office-bearers were again talking about plans for a building, suggesting multi-purpose accommodation to seat one hundred and fifty and costing around £100,000. Sketches were provided for the 1992 AGM and an architect chosen. Over the next year the design was refined, plans submitted and the project put out to tender. Meanwhile construction work on the Housing scheme had commenced in the spring of 1992 and was expected to be completed in August 1993.

Finding a New Pastor

But the church leaders were not only looking to build a bricks and mortar structure; their desire was to see the church built spiritually and a strong gospel witness maintained. From the beginning of the vacancy, the elders were exercised about finding God's man to be the new Pastor and knowing God's timing. They had the dilemma of urgently needing both a permanent building and pastoral care. A couple of pastors' names had been carefully considered during the year and a tentative approach made, but an idea was growing that possibly a part-time pastor could meet the need. At the AGM in February 1993,

they brought a proposal to the church. They recommended that Pastor Jack Bradley, formerly of Dunseverick, Rathcoole and Cliftonpark churches and now retired, would come alongside for six months to help with visitation, midweek meetings and some Sunday preaching. He would not have a contract of employment or become a church member. The church wholeheartedly accepted his appointment. Jack was to provide this support to the church for the whole of 1993 and indeed continued voluntarily to be involved in visitation in the village well into the following year. His contribution to Moira was greatly appreciated. He was not seen as a part-time pastor, though the possibility of having one was still being seriously pursued. Indeed it was agreed that pastoral care was a priority, despite the pressing need for a new building.

The office-bearers got a shock when they received quotations for erecting the new building. The lowest was over £100,000 more than the church had budgeted for and so a number of options were considered to reduce cost. The contractor with the lowest tender was chosen but the project was revised to allow only the minor hall to be completed and used as a multi purpose facility. The whole building was going to be much larger than the church had first envisaged, but it would be erected in such a way that it could be completed in stages, as accommodation needs and finances dictated. Building began in the summer of 1993 with the cost to be £134,248 and hopefully be ready in the autumn of 1994. The present structure is a testimony to the faith of those began the project in the first year of the church. But now, seeing the growth in recent years, those men would recognise that even their faith was too small and considerable development is urgently needed.

Over two years had gone by since Pastor Watson's departure and the fact that no name had been brought to the church for consideration had begun to cause a stir among some office-bearers. Assurances had been given that the calling of a pastor was number one priority but agreement was hard to come by. Several names were mentioned regularly and some were invited to preach, in one case for a series of services, but there was no conviction that any one was God's

choice. A church meeting was held at the end of 1993 in which the elders explained how they were approaching the matter of the vacancy, particularly with reference to two names that some had considered possible pastoral candidates. By then, the elders and deacons had moved away from the idea of a part-time pastor and recognised that, despite financial constraints, there was a need for a man to pastor the church full time.

Two and a half years without a pastor had left a heavy burden for the elders but there were encouraging signs. Attendances had improved, bringing a need of more chairs and new hymnbooks. Membership grew to forty-seven and hopes were high, but beneath the surface a number of issues were causing concern and 1994 was to be another year of falling membership, falling income and falling attendances.

Difficulties arose during eldership elections at the 1994 AGM, leaving some ill feeling and a degree of division that continued for a good part of the year. For a number of months, internal issues detracted from the search for a new pastor, though the elders were beginning to focus on one man. This man had been approached within the first year of the vacancy but had felt it was not the Lord's time for him to move. When concerns were expressed that "little or no progress was being made" in the search for a pastor, the elders intimated that the man they were considering approaching was Pastor David McFarland, who had been assistant to Pastor Judd in Lurgan since 1991. Office-bearers encouraged the elders to again make tentative enquiries. A remarkable series of providences showed both parties that God was at work in the matter and subsequently the Moira office-bearers were informed that Pastor McFarland was prepared to consider a call. The office-bearers met every week during July to pray for guidance in the matter. In August they unanimously agreed to take the matter further and met with David. A growing conviction that this was the way forward made the office-bearers give careful consideration to the financial implications of calling a pastor. While financial matters had never been discussed with Pastor McFarland, it was noted that giving would need to increase by around £150 per week or 50% to meet the pro-

jected needs. But once again the office-bearers were prepared to encourage the church in another step of faith. I quote: "The general consensus however was that a step of faith was required and that, with £8,000 in the General Fund and the possibility of a new pastor generating additional numbers, we should go forward". Through all this period of decision-making, the church had benefited greatly under the ministry of David Strachan in July and Andrew Reid in August. One particular Sunday the message was "to go through the door of opportunity, even if it was not always certain that we would have the resources to do so". History and financial records show how God honoured the step of faith.

A New Pastor and New Beginnings

On 28th September 1994, the church met and agreed by a large majority to invite Pastor McFarland to come to Moira. He indicated that he would prayerfully consider the matter and hopefully respond within four or five weeks. However he had an accident and the resulting complications that lasted for many weeks left him very unwell. He accepted advice not to make a decision in such a condition and it was over eight weeks before the church in Moira was told on 3rd December that he had accepted the call. The church understood that David had given an undertaking to Pastor Judd to carry extra responsibility in Lurgan during his year as President of the Baptist Union of Ireland. It was agreed that he would come in the spring of 1995. This gave the church time to concentrate on the building.

The work had been progressing, though more slowly than was hoped, due in part to the contractor also being involved in the construction of a neighbouring Baptist church building! Every effort was now put in to have it ready for the Induction service in April.

Meanwhile the housing complex was opened on 22nd. September 1994, although some residents had moved in as early as August 1993. It was named "Henry Court" in memory of the late J.C. Henry who had done so much in bringing Moira Baptist Church into being. His widow, Maureen, performed the opening ceremony and Pastor Judd was once again the guest preacher. The church continues to

take a vital and practical interest in Henry Court and benefits enormously from those who live there and worship with us. At present we have around nine who attend regularly and six of them are members.

The fact that the vacancy was coming to an end generated some enthusiasm but the problems encountered earlier in the year were still causing unhappiness and in the last six months of the year six members resigned. Vacancies are often difficult times in any church and Moira is no exception. While twenty-two new members were added in those four years, sixteen members left and one went home to meet her Saviour - a net increase of five. Indeed statistics show that while there were forty three members at the end of the vacancy, the church had lost a total of thirty members in nine years - one through death, one through transfer, one through dismissal and twenty-seven through resignation! The church was praying that in the new building and with a new pastor, they would again see days of blessing and growth. An article on Moira in the Newscene column of the Irish Baptist in January 1995 expressed it like this, "1995, a new year, a new start, a new era, moving on, moving ahead - a step of faith " and concluded, "Please pray for us and with us in 1995 as we believe exciting times lie ahead if we continue to be faithful to God's Word"

The Induction Service was to be the first major meeting in the new hall. Members and friends worked long hours to have the building ready in time but it was a very different service that first filled the hall. Ernie and Peggy Condy had joined the church in 1990 and immediately endeared themselves to the fellowship. Their faithfulness and willingness to work was an inspiration to everyone. Being more mature than most of the church, they were looked to for wisdom and guidance. Ernie was on the building committee and, with his incredible skills, spent an enormous amount of time working on the new building. All this was done despite devotedly caring for Peggy who had very poor health. She was looking forward to the coming of the new pastor, who had grown up calling her "auntie" Peggy - she was a cousin of the pastor's mother. But it was not to be and she went to be with the Lord. Exactly two weeks before the induction, the new hall was used for the first time and was packed for her funeral service and to thank God for

her life and testimony. The new pastor's first duty was to bury one of his flock.

The headline of an article in a local paper read - "A double boost for Moira Baptists." "Moira Baptist Church will have cause for celebration on Friday, April 28. For not only will they have their first pastor for four years but also a new building to worship in." That evening the building was packed again with church folk and visitors who came for the induction service. The Irish Baptist reported, "So large was the number that some one hundred folk were seated in the overflow building. However in spite of today's modern technology, a technical hitch with the CCTV necessitated a break in proceedings of the main service in order to pack everyone in. In the end three hundred people , a bit like sardines in a tin, were packed into the main church building". What the magazine did not know was that quite a few had given up and gone home. The preacher once again was Pastor Alec Judd! (He must have enjoyed the place, for after his retirement from Lurgan, he joined the Church in Moira.) Some of us thought that, had Jim Henry been still with us, he would have had one of his usual interesting comments to make. Jim had been called home suddenly in September 1991. His co-evangelist on the Church planting team from 1988 to 1991 was now pastor of the church he (Jim) had done so much to plant.

Encouragements

And so a new chapter began in the life of Moira Baptist Church. The story from there ought to be told by someone else and perhaps one day it will be. It is a story of the great goodness of God. We have seen remarkable growth in numbers. The Sunday morning congregation has risen from around fifty or sixty to an average of one hundred and seventy. Last Sunday (9th. September 2001) we had around two hundred with extra seats having to be placed in the aisles. We have a large number of young families and lots of babies (!). Membership has risen to ninety-two and we are processing a number of requests that may soon lead to us reaching one hundred or more.

Within the first year we began a programme of voluntary work on

the main building. Since the external work had already been completed in April 1995, we were able to work during the winter months on plastering and fixing ceilings. On 4th. May 1996 one of our deacons, Ronnie Baxter suffered horrendous injuries in a fall from the ceiling. His life hung in the balance for weeks but God answered prayer in a remarkable way. Ronnie still suffers greatly from his injuries and recently has had to give up work but is still totally committed to the work and witness in Moira Baptist.

The new building was opened on 25th. October 1997. As we meet work continues to complete the next phase. The balcony will give us. an additional 90 seats. And as I said earlier, we are already having to look at extending our facilities for young people. We have not enough space for Sunday school or youth activities. Sunday morning is a particular problem with insufficient room for children's church and creche. Our present debt prevents us moving too quickly but one of these days we may have to take another great step of faith.

We are continually seeking ways to bring the gospel to a community that largely is materialistic and ambivalent religiously. We want to show the community that we care; that we are a church with a heart. We are deeply concerned, for example, to impact the lives of young people who have nothing to do but spent their evenings in the demesne drinking and taking drugs. Over the past year we have become actively involved in building relationships with them and this summer had a very successful week of outreach to them. We are seeking to know how best to move this forward.

Another means of contact has been our website. We were one of the first Irish Baptist churches to be online and we use the web address on all our publicity. Only eternity will reveal its full impact but we have at least two families worshipping with us as a result of our Internet presence. Today on our website we celebrate the first birthday of little Jed Taylor. He was born prematurely to a couple of members who had had a tremendously difficult year. Daily email prayer requests kept the church informed through all the dark days and we soon discovered that people were logging in right around the world and telling

us that they were praying. Jed's miraculous progress is testimony to fellowship in prayer. As a result we are regularly being asked to pray for people in need in the community and far beyond, particularly ill children.

We have raised our horizons with a strong missionary interest in Baptist Missions and other agencies. One of our members served two years as short-term missionary in India and we have a continuing involvement both there and in Romania. We were thrilled when God called one of our young men, David McCavery into the ministry. Today we have three more young men undergoing training for service; two of them have begun classes at the Irish Baptist College. The coming of the Irish Baptist College to the Moira area is anticipated with great interest. The church has always been a supporter of the college. We hope its proximity will enable us to benefit from the input of staff and students into the area as we seek to reach out to a number of rapidly expanding villages all around us. We are looking at how we can best impact communities where we have significant numbers of our folk living; places such as Donaghcloney, Dollingstown, Magheralin, Aghalee, Ballinderry and Maghaberry.

An Assessment

Today the evangelical situation in Moira is radically different to what it was fifteen years ago when "Commander" Henry led his "troops" into Moira. The installation of a new minister in the Presbyterian Church last week has completed a circle where we now have committed evangelical clergy in all the churches. (We do not count the Unitarians). Moira Baptists can no longer expect to benefit so much from the attendance of believers unhappy with the lack of spiritual food and evangelical fervour in their own church. Christians in Moira have a wider choice of places to worship and serve than ever before. But what a privilege it is to have the support and practical help of godly ministers in the work of the gospel in Moira in the twenty-first century. We began the new millennium with a joint outreach using the "Jesus" video and I am sure we can work together even more effectively in days to come. We are Baptists and committed to our distinctives and will continue to exercise a fervent witness to our community but there is a big

difference between now and the past. Baptists are no longer seen as a few people who were coming "to steal sheep" and to criticise the other churches in the village. We are recognised for our commitment to the gospel and to our community. Moira Baptists are respected by most of the believers in the area and most unbelievers have heard about us and from us. Our prayer is that we will be faithful to God and that He will come among us in power as we try to tell them of Jesus. We are still in a battle for souls and the enemy is not giving up but we ιow that our King will give us the victory.

Reflections on the Historical Society since 1968
by Joshua Thompson

Our annual meeting on Tuesday 14 May, 2002 will be a milestone in the history of the Society. On that date the Historical Society will cease to be a separate department of the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland and will pass under the aegis of the Irish Baptist College in the new Training Department.

Under this arrangement, the Society will retain its identity and will continue, as far as possible, in its familiar format. The Journal will be published annually as at present. The Society membership will nominate the IBHS sub-committee for appointment by the College Board.

As far as the officers of the Society are concerned, this change offers an excellent opportunity to introduce new blood. To ensure a smooth transfer and to continue our current activities several appointments are required immediately - a secretary/treasurer, and an editor for the Journal.

On a personal note I appreciated the action of the members last year in appointing me to succeed our late President, Dr Harry Gribbon. However personal circumstances indicate that I should reduce my commitments, so I have decided to retire as President of the Society, with effect from 14 May. It would be a kindness if the members will accept my decision as final.

Bearing these changes in mind, I thought it would be appropriate and encouraging if, we looked back on the work of the Society since its formation in 1968. Hence the title of my paper.

Beginnings

On 2nd November 1967 a group of nine people met informally in the College to discuss the formation of a Historical Society. They were - Robert A Boggs, Louis E Deens, Robert J Fitzpatrick, Harry D Gribbon, Jim Gribben, Robert A Heak, Robert W Kerr, David P. Kingdon and Joshua Thompson. Dane Skilling and Joe Wray who had

been invited to the meeting both wrote expressing their support although unable to attend.

A Constitution was drawn up for approval by the Baptist Union Council. This set out the seven aims of the proposed Society:

1. To encourage the study of the history of the Baptist witness in Ireland.
2. To preserve and record material relating to the above.
3. To co-ordinate where possible research into Irish Baptist history.
4. To sponsor publication of suitable books and pamphlets on Irish Baptist history.
5. To provide a depository for historical material relating to Irish Baptist history.
6. To advise Baptist Churches on the preservation and care of historical documents in their possession.
7. To provide information about Irish Baptist history to enquiring Churches and individuals.

The Society was launched at the Assembly on Tuesday 14 May 1968 - exactly 34 years ago - with a talk from Principal Kingdon on the value of the study of Irish Baptist history and a paper by Dr Harry Gribbon on the 'Cork Church Book'. Membership was open to Irish Baptists and others interested in their history. An article was published in the Irish Baptist promoting the Society. By December that year membership was 30 (26 Irish, 4 overseas) each paying a modest subscription of £1 a year which included a copy of the Journal.

Volume One of the Irish Baptist Historical Journal contained four papers by members and a review of an article on Baptist Irish Society schools culled from The Baptist Quarterly. It set a high standard for subsequent years. One notable contribution in Volume Two was by Rev. Dr. Barry White of Regent's Park College, Oxford on "Thomas Patient in England and Ireland". Papers on local churches appeared each year and together they provide a unique resource for future historians. Already researchers were discovering the usefulness of the Journal for source material.

Dr Gribbon in an editorial to Volume Four assessed the work and progress of the Society to date:

> *"In the sense that it has provided a forum for discussion of Irish Baptist history and a vehicle for publication of results of study by individuals the Society seems to have achieved a useful objective. ... That the Society is not entirely parochial in outlook is illustrated [by the paper on "Anabaptists - Theological and Political"]"*

Later we were to hear papers on "Early American Baptists and Religious Liberty"; "John Knox and the Reformation in Scotland"; "Bunyan's Bridge of Dreams"; "The Radical Reformation"; "John Cennick in Ireland"; "Irish Congregationalism"; "Anabaptism in England during the reign of Elizabeth I"; "Towards a Theology of the Child"; "The New Age Movement"; "Russian Baptists"; "The Origin of Cults"; "Back to the Future: making sense of Revelation"; "The Significance of Adult Baptism in the Reformation Period"; "Narrowers of the Narrow Way: Edward Cooney and the Cooneyites"; "The Importance of Baptist Principles to-day"; "Irish Baptists and Orangeism"; "Evangelical Catholicism". Certainly, the members could not complain of a monotonous diet!

The main fare, however, during the past 34 years was directly related to Irish Baptist history - distributed between local churches, outstanding personalities, and reminiscences like those of the late Pastor David Burrows: "Fifty Years of Belfast [Baptist] Work."

To date the histories of 32 local churches have been written. Appreciations of 33 personalities have appeared. On fifteen occasions members contributed their memories of the past, and these will prove a useful resource in years to come. The Society has also provided opportunities to record the histories of various Union organisations. ·e paper dealt with extinct churches of the nineteenth century.

The Journal in appearance and layout reflects the growth of the Society. The first five volumes were produced by the office staff of the Baptist Union in quarto size from wax stencils cut on a typewriter, with

the cover printed and "pulled on" by Thomas Johnstone who printed the "Irish Baptist" magazine. Volumes 6 - 13 were also produced by the Office staff , and I take this opportunity to record our thanks to the late Freda Pearson, and to Edna McClelland and Maureen McMaw for their practical assistance each year.

The Journal has had three Editors during its 34 years: Dr. H.D. Gribbon - volumes 1-10 (1968 - 1978); Dr. Maurice Dowling - volumes 11-13 (1979 - 1981); and Dr. Joshua Thompson - volumes 14 - 25 (1982 - 1993) and volumes 1 - 9 [new series] (1994 - 2002).

Attendances at the regular meetings of the Society have been modest with a peak of c. 50, [see Appendix 1] although the annual meeting at the Assembly has always attracted attendances c.100, helped by the format of a tea-table conference.

One feature of our meetings cannot go unremarked - that is, the warmth of friendship and fellowship among the members. The interest and enthusiasm of the enrolled members has been noteworthy. The Society has sought to promote interest in Baptist history among our churches, but has never succeeded in attracting a wider membership among young people in the churches. It is to be hoped that the closer relationship with the College will bear fruit in stimulating an abiding interest in Irish Baptist history among the rising generation of leaders in the churches.

Changes through time

The following major changes in the Officers of the Society took place over the period.

1. December 1978, after ten years as Secretary Dr Gribbon resigned on his removal to North Wales.

2. March 1979, Pastor L E Deens was elected President. Mr Maurice Dowling was appointed Secretary and Mr Trevor Lyttle as Treasurer.

3. December 1980 Mr Dowling and Mr Lyttle resigned their positions.

4 January 1982 Dr J Thompson was appointed Secretary/Treasurer

and Editor.

5. April 1984 death of Pastor L E Deens, President of IBHS.

6. Dr H D Gribbon was appointed President in May 1984, and distinguished this office until his death sixteen years later in April 2000.

graphies

Useful and (often) detailed accounts of the individuals named below may be found in the IBHS Journal at the locations noted against the name. The figures in brackets indicate the volume followed by page numbers. Names are in alphabetical order.

Thomas Berry	(1805 - 1877)	[19. 21-30]
Alexander Carson	(1776 - 1844)	[9. 14-38]
Louis Edward Deens	(1889 - 1984)	[17. 37-41]
Charles Smith Donald	(1855 - 1940)	[15. 12-20]
William George Frizelle	(1853 - 1936)	[5. 18-22]
Frank H Forbes [in "Union Secretaries I have known"]		
	(1886 - 1952)	[6. 18-25]
Frank H Forbes	(1886 - 1952)	[24. 15-21]
John Dinnen Gilmore [in "Union Secretaries I have known"		
	(1857 - 1929)	[6. 18-25]
Robert Graham Glendinning	(1844 - 1928)	[15. 4 - 11]
Fred W Gracey	(1883 - 1950)	[21. 30-46]
Henry Derwent Gribbon	(1917 - 2000)	[7 (n.s.) 37]
Charles Hardcastle	(1793 - 1847)	[2. 5-16]
James Hodge	(1856 - 1928	
James Irvine	(1914 - 1982)	[21. 54-61]
Henry Arthur Johnston	(1883 - 1959)	[22. 22-28]
John La Touche	(1814 - 1904)	[3. 5-20]
Hugh and Sadie Mitchell	(d. 5 June 1989)	[1 (n.s.) 21-48]
E. Moore	(1752 - 1840)	[14. 35-48]
Minnis Mills [in "Minnis Mills Diaries"]		
	(1904 - 1982)	[5 (n.s.) 7-48]
Alex McCay	(1844 - 1938)	[5. 23-37]
David Macrory	(1821 - 1887)	[17. 11-17]

Hugh Henry Orr	(1904 - 1973)	[21. 47-53]
Thomas Patient	(d. 1666)	[2. 36-48]
Henry Phillips	(1719 - 1789)	[17. 32-36]
John Ravey	(d. 1977)	[13. 21-28]
Roy N Shaw	(1913 - 1974)	[13. 42-65]
John Storey	(1817 - 1916)	[20. 20-25]
Charles Haddon Spurgeon	(1834 - 1893)	[25. 17-30]
George M Young		[7. 35-47]
George Henderson		
Charles and James Willoughby		[10. 36-51]
William Wilson	(1900 - 1986)	[3 (n.s.). 50-70]
"Prominent Irish Baptists of the Eighteenth Century"		[4 (n.s.). 25-44]
"Dublin Baptists from 1650 onwards"		[21. 5-16]
List of Presidents of the Baptist Union of Ireland 1862-1964		[22. 29-33]

Local Church Histories

Below is an alphabetical list of local churches whose histories appear in the Journal .

Banbridge	[2 (n.s.) 55-88]
Brannockstown	[3. 5-20]
Carrickfergus	[11. 3-14]
Cloghjordan (Tipperary)	[16. 28-37]
Clough, Co. Antrim	[1 (n.s.) 64-65]
Conlig	[18. 45]
Cork	[1. 5-18]
Dungannon	[6. 27-60]
Dunseverick	[18. 34-45]
Gilnahirk, Belfast	[9 (n.s.) 37-67]
Grange	[1. 31- 43]
Grove, Belfast	[12. 19-28]
Hamilton Rd., Bangor	[16. 38-42]
Harcourt Street, Dublin	[14. 23-34]
Holywood	[24. 37-52]
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Tandragee	[1. 45-52]
Thomas St. Portadown	[23. 13-25]
Tobermore	[1. 19-0; 13. 3-20]
Waterford	[5. 5-17]

Reminiscences -

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"Union Secretaries I have known"	[6. 18-26]
"Recollections of George M Young, Colporteur"	[7. 35-47]
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Articles on Organisations -

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The Irish Baptist College: the Belfast Years 1964-1991 [24. 53-60]
List of Students at the Irish Baptist College 1964-1991 [24. 61-69]
The Northern Baptist Association [6. 5-17]
Belfast & District Baptist Council [7. 6-18]
South Derry Evangelistic Association [11. 15-21]
The Baptist Corporations: 1902 and 1924 [15. 30-32]
The Irish Baptist Association in the Eighteenth Century [17. 18-31]
A History of the Baptist Irish Society [3. 55-61]

Miscellaneous:

"Irish Baptists: urban and rural" [2. 49-50]
"The Theology of Alexander Carson" [2. 51-61]
"Baptist Education in Ireland" [3. 21-54]
"John Bates: BIS itinerant minister" [3. 62-65]
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"Future of the Irish Baptist Historical Society" [12. 4-8]
"Post-Alexander Carson Period in Tobermore" [13. 3-20]
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"Survey of Effects of 'the troubles' on Irish Baptist Churches (II)" [10. 52-66]

"Irish Baptists and the Revival of 1859 with special reference to Tobermore" [1. 19-30]
"Irish Baptists and the 1859 Revival" [17. 4-10]
"Irish Baptists and Orangeism" [18. 4-17]
"Irish Baptists and War" [13. 49-63]
"The Waterford Church Book 1805-1914" [5. 5-17]
"Church Discipline" [5. 48-66]
"References to Baptists in J S Reid's History of Irish Presbyterians" [14. 17-22]
"Understanding Our Roots" [16. 42]
"Census Concern": [22. 34-35]
(An Analysis of a Census of Irish Baptist Churches taken in September 1988)
"Amateur Dabblings in History" {a brief report} [22. 36]
"Liberty of Conscience: A Pertinent Issue" [23. 5-12]
"History is not bunk" [25. 5-16]
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"Our Task in a Changing Ireland" [3 (n.s.)28-37]
"Christ not a Patch" [8 (n.s.)34-37]

Conclusion:

When we consider the achievements of the Society over the past 34 years we feel obliged to record our thanks to the nine initiators - especially Dr Gribbon and Principal David Kingdon - for their vision, enthusiasm and dedication in launching the enterprise. Also we must record the loyalty and enthusiasm of others who joined and supported the Society down through the years.

Appendix 1

Record of attendance at Society meetings

1968	Jan - 9;	Apr - 5;	Sep - 8;	Dec - 11*
1969	Mar - 14;	Jun - 15;	Sep - 8;	Dec - 12
1970	Mar - 10;	Jun - 13;	Sep - 14;	Dec - 13
1971	Mar - 10;	Jun - 10;	Sep - 9;	Dec - 14
1972	Mar - 9;	Jun - 6;	Oct - 9;	Dec - 7
1973	Mar - 9;	Jun - 7;	Sep - 8;	Dec - 5
1974	Mar - 10;	Jun - 11;	Oct - 10;	Dec - 11*
1975	Mar - 10;	Jun - 7;	Sep - 11;	Dec - 16*
1976	Mar - 9;	Jun - 11;	Sep - 6;	Dec - 12
1977	Mar - 17;	Jun - 17;	Sep - 11;	Dec - 14
1978	Mar - 12;	Jun - 6*;	Sep - 14 *;	Dec - 13
1979	Mar - 13;	Jun - 12;	Sep - 22;	Dec - 10
1980	Mar - 18;	Jun - 14;	Sep - 21;	Dec - 10
1981	Mar - 15;	Jun - 10;	Sep - 16;	Dec - 19
1982	Mar - 17;	Jun - 10;	Sep - 19;	Dec - 17
1983	Mar - 16;	Jun - 16;	Sep - 11;	Dec - 11
1984	Feb - 11; #			
1985	Mar - 9;		Sep - 28¤;	Dec - 8
1986	Mar - 21;		Sep - 17¤;	Dec - 17
1987	Mar - 14;	Jun - 18;	Sep - 15;	Dec - 23
1988	Mar - 22;	Jun - 19;	Sep - 28;	Dec - 22
1989	Mar - 24;	Jun - 17;	Sep - 28;	Dec - 19*
1990	Mar - 16;	Jun - 21;		
1991	Mar - 53*;		Sep - 24;	Dec - 27
1992	Mar - 18;		Sep - 25;¦	
1993			Sep - 45	
1994	Mar - 39;		Sep - 24	
1995	Mar - 25;		Sep - 33;	Dec - 34
1996	Mar - 31;		Sep - 27	
1997	Mar - 32;		Sep - 24;	Dec - 30
1998	Mar - 36;		Sep - 51;	Dec - 29
1999			Sep - 23;	Nov - 26
2000	Mar - 37;			
2001	Mar - 19;		Sep - 31;	Nov - 27

(For notes see next page)

* ("and a number of visitors")
# No minutes are recorded for remainder of 1984.
¤ The topics were "Irish Baptists and Orangeism" and "Irish Congregationalism" and "Liberty of Conscience: A Pertinent Issue" respectively
¦ The minute book ceased to record attendances at the public meetings after September 1992 when an IBHS Committee was appointed. Members and visitors were asked to sign an attendance sheet, from which data has been drawn from December 1992 to date.

Irish Baptist Historical Society

Annual Report 2002

Attendances at the meetings during the past year were maintained and characterized by the enthusiasm of the members. Three papers were given by Pastor David MacFarland, Dr Paul Doherty and the Society's Secretary. Two were on the histories of the Moira and Gilnahirk (Belfast) churches and offered an interesting comparison and contrast. The Secretary's paper entitled 'Reflections' was a review of the Society's activities since its inception in 1968.

In anticipation of the proposed changes in the Association structures by which the Historical Society will cease to be a department, the members at their meeting on 8 November agreed to a proposal that the Society should pass under the aegis of the Irish Baptist College and become a committee of the College Board.

This committee would be appointed by the IBHS members and would retain, as far as possible, the same format as at present, and make arrangements to continue publication of the highly-respected IBHS Journal.

This change awaits the approval, in due course, of the Churches' Council at its meeting in May 2002. Following this approval, the IBHS members will proceed to appoint the committee and appropriate officers. The College Principal and Secretary will be ex-officio members of the committee.

As an Historical Society we give thanks to the Lord for the vigour of the Society since its formation. Long may it continue to make its unique contribution to the life and witness of Irish Baptists.

Irish Baptist Historical Society

(Formed 1968)

The Secretary
Irish Baptist Historical Society
Ballinderry Road
Lisburn BT28 2SA,
Northern Ireland

Telephone: 028 9266 9366
Fax No: 028 9266 9377
email ABCinI@aol.com

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Please enrol me as a Member of the Historical Society.
I enclose my subscription of
£10.00, €16.00 US $20 (sterling check)

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Address: _____

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