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Armagh Baptist:
A Brief History

Brian Weir

In preparing this paper I would pay tribute at the outset to the many former members, now in heaven, who have worked, under God, to establish the Armagh Baptist Church and to whom the present generation owes a great debt of gratitude. The information has been gathered from newspaper reports, articles in the Irish Baptist, reminiscences of long serving members, former pastors and members of the church.

As some will know I have also been researching the history of my other two interests, the football and cricket clubs in Armagh, and have uncovered a common trend in all three, namely the enormous part played by people from the village of Milford which has exerted an influence far beyond its size. A resident of the village was instrumental in the formation of the church and for many years the membership included Milford people. In 1945 more than one third of the 32 members whose addresses were listed lived in the village.

Finally I acknowledge the co-operation of the elders of Armagh Baptist Church without which the paper would have been very much the poorer.

Setting the Scene

Before I look at the Baptist history I'll give a brief background about the City itself. It is well known that Christianity has been practised in Armagh for many centuries ever since the days of St Patrick. The Church of Ireland Cathedral has been in use since 445 (largely rebuilt in 1268) with a fluctuating level of evangelical commitment from time to time. In 1162 the Annals of Ulster stated that no-one should be per-

mitted to lecture on theology except those who had studied at the Armagh Academy.

The First Presbyterian congregation was established in 1673 followed by another Presbyterian church in 1733, a Seceding Church in 1785 and Third Armagh (now The Mall Presbyterian) in 1837. A Methodist church was built in Abbey Street in 1786 as a result of John Wesley's evangelistic efforts in the city on his visits between 1767 and 1789. The city's Brethren Assembly first met in Barrack Street in the mid-nineteenth century, before moving to College Street and in the 1940s to the present Gospel Hall on The Mall. Armagh Congregational Church ceased to exist and its premises, also in College Street, were used until about 1920 by the Salvation Army. Armagh Elim Church was formed in 1919 and moved a couple of years later to the College Street building when the Salvation Army moved to Little Barrack Street.

The earliest reference I have found to believers' baptism was in James Stuart's "Historical Memoirs of the City of Armagh" which recorded in 1819 that Baptists could hardly be described as a separate community in Armagh but that their pastor was a Mr Hasty and that he baptised people in the River Callan. Stuart also noted that Rev Mr Howden, "a zealous and active minister" of the "Evangelical or Independent congregation" had a roomy and neat tabernacle with a school-room and dwelling-house annexed. Stuart described the group as Calvinistic but nothing more precise is known about the church or the location of its meeting-place.

The population of the city at the 1814 census was 7010 and by comparison, the population of Portadown was 757.

In 1859 the Revival which swept the Province included some large open-air services organised by Methodists, assisted by independent ministers from other towns. Temperance Gospel Missions were also popular.

Baptists were formed into gathered churches in County Armagh in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the first Churches in the county being at Tandragee in 1864, Five Mile Hill (in the Mountnorris area) in 1889 and Poyntzpass in 1894. Just over the county boundary a rural church at Gortmerron in County Tyrone has existed since 1894.

Early in the twentieth century there is evidence of a level of evangelical teaching in some of the larger denominations in the city and one of the city's Presbyterian ministers, Rev Robert James Patterson of The Mall Church, was convinced that one of the main obstacles to the conversion of local people was still the excessive consumption of alcohol, particularly by young men. He had the idea of using other young men to reach them so that each would bring the message, first of temperance and then of church attendance, to their pals. He hit on the name "Catch-my-Pal".

The group met initially on a street corner under a lamp post but Mr Patterson realised that indoor accommodation was necessary. As he wanted the movement to be wider than his own church he decided to attempt to find a neutral venue and the idea of a Catch-my-Pal Hall was born. A site was obtained in Lonsdale Street, about 100 yards from the northern end of The Mall, the central open area of the city of Armagh.

The Formation of a Church

In 1917 the country was at war and, as has happened often in human history, the thoughts of many turned to matters spiritual. Around that time some local Christians who were convicted about believers' baptism held meetings. As time went on they became convinced of the need to separate themselves from their churches and to form themselves into a Baptist Church.

The single event which, under God, seems to have moved the work in this direction was a mission conducted in the Autumn of 1916 by T M

Carleton, a visiting pastor. The believers involved included Mr William Acheson and Mr W G Frizell from Milford who I believe may have been a former president of the Baptist Union of Ireland. Mr Acheson had prayed that the Lord would raise up enough like-minded people to enable a church to be formed, while Mr Frizell later recalled that, while he had been active in St Mark's Parish, Armagh he had never believed, as he put it, in baptising babies since he came to live in Milford in 1876. It can be seen therefore that the formation of Armagh Baptist Church was not a sudden event.

The new church needed a place to meet and as only seven had reached the point of commitment to church membership there was presumably no possibility of buying or building a place of worship so the work began in temporary premises on The Mall, known as the Skating Rink. This building was opposite the cricket pavilion, a few hundred yards from the site of the tabernacle which was to be home of the church in later years.

The new church was constituted on 14th October 1917 when the preacher was a Mr H A Johnston. A letter of encouragement was read from Hugh D Brown of Dublin, a well known figure in Irish Baptist circles at the tine. The church was constituted with seven members, Mr William Acheson of Milford, Miss Hester Coote of Killylea, Miss Violet Gwynne of Milford, Mr James Kyle Paisley, Miss Patterson, Mr Joseph R Ross and Mr Robert Stewart all from Armagh. Most of the members had been baptised as believers in other Baptist churches, though Kyle Paisley had been baptised in the River Strule at Omagh.

Over the next year Isaac Bell, pastor of Tandragee Baptist Church, assisted in visitation and occasional preaching but the church looked at the possibility of calling a pastor and on 1st October 1918 one of the foundation members, Kyle Paisley, was duly called as the first pastor of the church. He moved into a house at Station Terrace in Railway Street which had been left to the church by Miss Hester Coote as a manse to

be occupied whenever the church could have a pastor. Within a year of the formation of the church the Catch-my-Pal Hall, Lonsdale Street had become its long term temporary meeting place.

By this stage of Mr Paisley's life he was married and later he and his Scottish wife had two sons and a daughter. Their older son, Ian Paisley serves as Member of Parliament for North Antrim, the younger son, Harold Paisley, became an evangelist in Christian Brethren circles, mainly in North America, and their daughter Margaret Beggs is married to the minister of a church in Ballymena. As Kyle Paisley's ministry in Armagh ended more than 70 years ago there are no members left who remember him but some of the older members have been able to recall memories handed down to them by earlier members.

Mr Paisley was described by all who knew him as a gentleman and a Godly pastor and from the second hand recollections which have survived he seems to have been universally liked and respected. One memory of a former member, now deceased, was his conscientious visitation and his visits on his bicycle to the homes of rural members.

Records from the earliest days of the church are sketchy but Mr William McClelland from Madden and Mr John McWilliams from Cavanacaw are described by November 1919 as elders, though Mr McWilliams' time in office was to be short. Joseph Ross from Thomas Street and Bartin West from Barrack Hill were deacons with Mr West (known as Bertie) serving as secretary and Mr Ross as treasurer.

By 1922 Mr McClelland was the only elder apart from Mr Paisley and there were seven deacons. Bertie West remained as secretary until 1925 when he resigned from office and from the church; he was instrumental in the formation of the Needed Truth fellowship (Church of God), officially the Newry Road Hall but commonly known for many years as Bertie West's Brethren. The Sunday School held in this hall was the means of salvation for countless young people and those who

passed through it were used to enrich a wide variety of churches, including the Armagh Baptist Church.

As the church did not have a building of its own it had no facilities for baptisms and from time to time it held baptismal services in the premises of other churches. One such service was held on 24th June 1922 in Tandragee Baptist Church when eleven believers were baptised, including Percy Knipe of Ballyreagh and three members of the Gillow family. Two more services were held in Dungannon Church in July and September 1923 when those baptised included Mrs L N Paisley, wife of the pastor of the church.

A New Place of Worship

After almost a decade in Lonsdale Street the young but growing church concluded that the time was right to have its own premises and a site was found on The Mall West, close to the junction with Little Barrack Street. The site had been used by one Johnny Holmes for the grazing of horses when they were not working in his haulage business. It is reasonable to assume that the site was an open space because it was on soft and unstable ground and it was clear that it would not support a stone building in keeping with the rest of the historic Mall. The lease of the site was executed by the church on 26th January 1927.

The members of the church, now almost 50 of them, gave generously to the building fund, administered by a group of their number appointed as building fund trustees, proceeded to obtain and assemble a prefabricated building. The building fund trustees included Mr Percy Knipe and Mr William McClelland who were to give a lifetime of service to the church.

The new building was stated to hold about 200 people. According to "The Armagh Guardian" it was *"about 70 feet long and 24 feet wide; outside the walls are finished in plaster and inside have a wainscotting*

of pitch pine. The pulpit is of pitch pine and the platform seats are arranged in a little alcove with overhead lighting behind a gothic arch. Sunk in the floor is a large bath for baptising which when not in use is covered so as not to be noticeable. There is a good little organ and on one side of the platform a vestry."

For those of us who worship in the same tabernacle three quarters of a century later this outline of the building in 1927 is remarkably similar to a description of the building of 2002. An early photograph of the interior of the building shows the text *"The Coming of the Lord Draweth Nigh"* painted in manuscript over the pulpit. Later decoration schemes have altered the colour scheme but this text (James 5:8 in the King James Version) has remained, most recently in Gothic Script.

The new building, given the name Baptist Tabernacle, was formally opened on Saturday 3rd September 1927 by the Secretary of the Baptist Union of Ireland, Mr J D Gilmore who reminded the members of the church that they were part of the largest body of Free Church Christians in the world, even though, as he put it Baptists "were few and feeble in Ireland".

Mr Paisley then spoke on behalf of the church assuring visitors that the members rejoiced that they had a home of their own in which to worship and that they prayed that it might be a temple of salvation, that souls might be born again and that every member should be an evangelist and a soul-winner. He thanked two of the members of the church who had been principally responsible for the new building. Mr Magill had drawn the plans and Mr McClelland had been responsible for the construction work.

Mr Paisley also referred to the financial position; the cost of the new tabernacle would be £1070 of which £400 had already been received, £136 had been reliably promised and a collection would be taken up that day which would be increased by 50% through the generosity of a

friend of the church.

The next speaker was Mr W G Frizell, who was living in Belfast at that time, explained that 51 years earlier he had come to live in Milford and had taught in the Sunday School there for four years from 1876. He recalled that a mission had been held, organised by him and a Mr Hamilton, at which a number of souls had been saved. He also expressed his pleasure at seeing in the congregation Mr John Gillow whom he had taught in Milford Sunday School 51 years earlier.

The tabernacle was licensed for marriages on 3 September 1928 although the first wedding does not seem to have taken place until 1932.

The End of the Beginning

Having seen the church established and now settled into its own accommodation, Kyle Paisley felt the time was right to accept a call to Ballymena Baptist Church (Hill Street) and the Armagh church set about calling its first pastor from outside its own membership. It has been suggested that Mr Paisley left Armagh in less than cordial circumstances but no evidence whatsoever has been found for this point of view. In fact Mr Paisley continued to visit the church for some years. He later became pastor of an independent fellowship close to Ballymena Railway station and spent the rest of his ministry in that town.

In the course of time the church was led of the Lord to call Mr Herbert Hunter as pastor and he was inducted on 12th October 1928. Addresses were then given by no fewer than five pastors before Mr Hunter himself responded. The preacher was Mr Paisley who wished his successor well and recalled how ten people had met in the Skating Rink eleven years previously to form a Baptist Church in the city where previously there had only been a mission. Mr Paisley then spoke on the text "Not one good thing hath failed from all the Lord promised". William McClelland on behalf of the officers of the church welcomed Mr

Hunter as the new pastor. Mr Hunter's opening words to the church were "I am determined to do nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified".

Mr Hunter was a Civil Engineer by profession and had prepared himself for the Christian ministry by studying at the Irish Baptist College in Dublin. He lived for part of his pastorate in at least three homes, at Drumadd and Rosemount Gardens in the city and at Lislea just outside Milford. The few who remember his ministry do not seem to recall preaching as one of his strong points but he was a committed personal evangelist, and a conscientious visitor.

In his free time Mr Hunter enjoyed walking and was frequently seen in his shorts walking briskly along the roads around Armagh. He had hitch-hiked his way across Europe and often used this mode of travel to get to Belfast. He once hitched a lift in a large black limousine and found himself travelling with the Cardinal Archbishop of Armagh who introduced himself as the local bishop. He was somewhat taken aback when Mr Hunter said that he too was a bishop and spent the rest of the journey to Belfast explaining the principles of church government of a New Testament church.

Mr Hunter continued as pastor for eight years and preached the gospel in a faithful and gracious manner. Souls were saved during the regular ministry and at times of mission, particularly in April 1932 when Mr Tom Rea was the evangelist and 30 souls were saved. One of those saved during these years was Mrs Lee from Milford who began to invite others in the village to the services, an answer to the prayers of the first pastor that members of the church might become soul winners. One of her neighbours, Mrs Agnes Armstrong who ran the village shop, came to a service during Mr Rea's mission and was gloriously saved.

Mrs Armstrong organised her business to run it as she believed her

new-found Saviour would wish her to run it. She was rewarded by the salvation of her sons and daughters, one of whom was her teenage son James who came to faith in 1933 when a member of the Brethren Assembly was instrumental in pointing him the Lord on the pavement in Market Street in Armagh.

James Armstrong recalls how he had been brought to the Tabernacle on The Mall where in place of the cars which were still some way into the future, ponies and traps were stationed outside the Baptist Tabernacle. Another evangelical group in the city was the Salvation Army in whose hall a young man from a church of Ireland family, Bobby Humphries, trusted the Lord and soon afterwards came under conviction about believers' baptism and joined the Armagh Baptist Church.

The first wedding conducted by Mr Hunter in the tabernacle seems to have taken place in 1932 when the church secretary, Mr George Cundell of Lonsdale Street, was married to Miss Ellen Cochrane. Mr Cundell was a most diligent secretary who wrote clear and detailed minutes of all business meetings and office-bearers' meetings, as would have been expected of him, but also wrote notes of each and every service, often including a note of the number present as well as the name of the preacher and Mr Cundell's opinion of his preaching ability. The minutes themselves record discussion on matters ranging from the important, such as the condition of the tabernacle building and the manse, down to such matters as a decision to make a token presentation to the organist only for the committee to discover that she had recently bought a new bicycle, whereupon the idea of a presentation was dropped!

From time to time names are deleted from the register of members, some with comments alongside such as "left to join the Pentecostal" opposite the names of members of a family who had joined Armagh Elim Church, or "left to join the Brethren" against someone who had moved in that direction. One member, a police officer who had joined the church on transfer to the area, was deleted with a note stating "a

dangerous agitator" while another was removed from the register for having "had her children sprinkled by clergy". Sadly Mr Cundell's own name was then deleted with the note "moved to Enniskillen". Unfortunately subsequent secretaries restricted themselves to recording matters which were relevant, omitting such asides as appeared with the record of the church conference in 1931 when pastors from Belfast, Dublin, Cork and England were the speakers. Mr Cundell rated two as Very Good Indeed, one as Very Good and the English visitor as Not Good!

One of the interesting insights gained into the life of the church in Mr Hunter's time was that on Sunday mornings the attendance often dropped below 50 and sometimes did not get far beyond 30 while the evening service was frequently attended by anything from 100 to 150. One Sunday evening service in January 1931 was attended by "only 78 people" because of wet weather but the secretary records the fact that the church was holding a week of meetings on The Tabernacle in the Wilderness by George Weir, pastor of the Portadown church, who illustrated his talks by lantern slides. The tabernacle was described as well filled on the Tuesday and Thursday and full on Monday and Wednesday.

A gospel mission was planned for the following weeks but coincided with a series of meetings in the City Hall taken by Principal Jeffrey under the aegis of Armagh Elim Church. As Mr Jeffrey was a nationally known figure it was probably unwise for the church to attempt to run a mission as a counter-attraction. During the first week the meeting are described as "all very small" while in the second week only the Monday and Tuesday meetings were held at all. The mission was then abandoned, with the minute book recording the words "Elim attraction too great". In 1932 the church cancelled the midweek services to allow members to attend a united mission being held in The Mall Presbyterian Church, so it seems that the early Baptists of Armagh did learn from experience.

The Sunday School has always been an important part of the work in Armagh and in 1931 there were 62 pupils under the leadership of five teachers, Mr William McClelland, Mr Percy Knipe, Mr John Davis, Miss Jennie Cooke and Miss Myrtle Mann, who was also the organist. Miss Mann moved to Bangor in July 1931 and a special farewell evening was held. The ever honest Mr Cundell recorded the fact that a Bible was to have been presented to her, and also to himself as he too was leaving Armagh, but that the Bibles had been sent to be appropriately inscribed and had not been returned!

The support of the church for mission work outside Armagh had already begun with gifts being sent to The Irish Baptist Orphan Society, The Irish Baptist Foreign Mission, the French Bible Society and the Russian Missionary Society. In April 1931 three believers were baptised on a Sunday evening with almost 150 people present, compared with only 27 at the morning service. Further Baptismal Services were held in May and June.

The church conference held in May 1931 had four preachers and incorporated a further Baptismal Service which was held for six believers who wished to associate themselves with the group meeting in the Lurganearly Hall, near Castleblayney. A further conference was held in October when again six believers from Lurganearly were baptised. Cottage meetings, which perhaps nowadays would be known as house groups but which were intended to introduce outsiders to the Christian faith formed part of the programme of the church and were announced at various times for Callan Street and in Ballinahone and Cavanacaw which in 1931 would have been rural areas just outside the city boundaries.

Mr Shields of the Irish Baptist Foreign Mission gave an lecture illustrated by lantern slides on the evangelisation of the Indians in South America. George Weir of Portadown was also present but his part in the proceedings was that he was in charge of the lantern! In March

1932 the evening service was packed when Mr Paisley, former pastor, was the preacher and Mrs Paisley sang.

An unusual feature of church life in the 1930s was that meetings of office-bearers normally took place on a Sunday, usually just after a normal morning service. These were often to discuss such matters as the finances of the church or the status of a tenant in the church-owned house, but equally likely to concern some routine matter.

Another short meeting of the office-bearers was held in July 1933 to consider a request from the pastor that he be granted leave of absence in order to be married. A welcome meeting for Mrs Hunter, who was French incidentally, was held in October but the idea of an informal social occasions does not seem to have reached Armagh as the evening consisted of five sermons preached by five pastors. Mrs Hunter accompanied her husband on visitation on his motorcycle; they once fell off when visiting Milford and arrived on foot at the Armstrongs' home. Mrs Hunter later gave birth to two sets of twin daughters.

The church Christian Endeavour Society continued to meet and eight members travelled to Richhill to the Annual CE Rally, the cottage meetings continued and the church had by now acquired responsibility for the work at Gortmerron, about eight miles from Armagh along the Cathedral Road. The Irish Baptist Home Mission made a payment each year to the church to cover the expenses of the pastor and other members in travelling to Gortmerron to assist the work there.

An extract from the minutes of an office-bearers' meeting held on 12th February 1934 records the concerns felt about the state of the church. It is quoted here because it gives an insight into the thinking of the leaders of the day. *"We feel as a fellowship, and standing as we do for the Truth of God, that we are losing some ground and influence and there is a lot of apathy among our members. As Baptists we feel that we do not fully recognise all that we stand for and our privileged position.*

Members ought to encourage other Christians (of other meeting places) to attend our services." The concerns of the office-bearers were very real but it is certainly couched in terms which would not be used in the twenty first century.

The membership was reduced when a faithful member, Miss Cis Boland, passed away. Mr Paisley and Mr Hunter jointly conducted her funeral service. Mr Paisley was also the speaker a few Sundays later when he preached most helpful sermons and also appealed for funds for what he described as his new hall in Ballymena. Mr Paisley sadly was to return a few weeks later to take part in the funeral service of another member, Mr John Gillow.

The commitment of the church to the wider fellowship of Baptist churches was evidenced by the fact that three delegates were chosen to make what was then a difficult journey to Coleraine for the annual meetings of The Northern Baptist Association. Missions in Armagh YMCA and Portadown Baptist Church were also supported by the church.

However the church was in a situation of mounting debt and a special meeting of members was held in September 1934 when it was decided that a statement of the financial position should be given to all 45 members and that there should be a special week of prayer and a Thanksgiving Day to address the matter. A gospel mission was also arranged for November when Hugh Orr, an evangelist from Coagh, preached to large numbers each evening. The thanksgiving offering was sufficient to reduce the church debt by half but by 31st December it seems to have disappeared entirely. In January 1935 the Christian Endeavour Society held a social evening to mark the forthcoming marriage of one of its leaders, Mr Bobby Humphries to Annie Reaney (on 22nd January) when a short programme was arranged and a tea-set was handed over as a wedding gift.

The Annual meeting in 1935 chose seven deacons and George Magill was elected secretary. Sadly one of the first duties of the deacons was to consider the problems caused by an unhelpful attitude by a former deacon and after discussion is was agreed to take no notice of the man in question if he should make any further accusations, other than to pray for him.

Happier times were ahead as several people trusted Jesus as Saviour at a mission in Gortmerron. Two busloads from Armagh set off to the mission and, for less obvious reasons, a busload from the Strandtown church in East Belfast, also turned up on one evening! The young people of the church got together on one evening to cycle to Gortmerron (this was in February!). Mr Hunter was conducting the mission and in his absence the mid-week services were conducted by Mr Matthew Boland, a young member of the church, and the prayer meetings were led by William McClelland, who remained an elder. Matt Boland was president of the Christian Endeavour Society in the church.

The church was represented at the annual meetings of the Baptist Union of Ireland in the normal way, even though the meetings that year were held in Cork. The Northern Baptist Association annual meetings however were held for the first time in Armagh. Among the other highlights of that autumn were a successful gospel mission conducted by Mr Hunter in Athlone, a Christian Endeavour Social which was held in the Catch-my-Pal Hall and a visit by the Tandragee Accordion Band.

At the annual meeting in 1936 the treasurer, Mr Percy Knipe, reported that the offerings for the year left a credit balance of more than £20, a considerable encouragement bearing in mind the situation in earlier years. John Davis was superintendent of the Sunday School which had around 50 pupils.

The church was again represented at the Annual meetings of the Baptist

Union of Ireland, held that year in Antrim Road, Belfast. The church heard a report about the Assembly from its delegates. Of no particular relevance at the time was a report on the college meeting which was addressed by Principal Spurgeon and by the senior student, Mr Robert Campbell whose message left a deep impression on the delegates.

After a fruitful pastorate of eight years, Mr Herbert Hunter was led of the Lord to accept a call to a church in Bournemouth in June 1936 and continued in the Christian ministry for many years. In two aspects his departure was unusual. Firstly, Mr Hunter asked the Armagh church to retain his membership even when he was pastor in Bournemouth. Secondly he took a full part in the selection of his successor and the minutes record the discussion of various names as potential pastors, details which nowadays would probably never be committed to paper, but most interesting is that as the deacons looked at serving pastors Mr Hunter actually was the one to suggest the name of Mr Robert Campbell of Dublin, senior student and Mr Campbell preached trial sermons in Armagh on 7th June 1936. The deacons decided that a farewell evening would be held for Mr Hunter on Monday 29th June, the day after his farewell sermons, noting that because Armagh was an aided church the Baptist Union of Ireland and Northern Baptist Association required to be consulted.

Mr Hunter's last act as pastor, apart from his farewell weekend, was to ordain two ruling elders, the first since the appointment of Mr McClelland just after the formation of the church. After the church had made the decision to elect Mr John Doory and Mr John Davis on 10th June Mr Hunter proceeded to explain the importance of the decision and conducted an ordination service.

He first addressed Mr Davis and Mr Doory, explaining that it was his solemn duty "to set forth in a concise manner the warrant and nature of the office". He reminded them that elders were representatives of the people, chosen by them for the purpose of exercising government and

discipline in conjunction with the pastor. He explained that the eldership was an office of government, an office of spiritual oversight and an office of example.

He then asked Mr Doory and Mr Davis the following questions:-

1. *Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?*

2. *Do you sincerely receive and adopt the confession of faith of the church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the New Testament?*

3. *Do you approve of the government and discipline of Baptist churches?*

4. *Do you accept the office of ruling elder in this congregation, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof?*

5. *Do you promise to study the peace, unity and purity of the church?*

Mr Hunter then addressed a question to the members of the church:-

Do you, the members of this Church, acknowledge and receive these brethren as elders, and do you promise to yield them all that honour, encouragement and obedience in the Lord, to which their office, according to the Word of God and the constitution of this Church, entitles them?

The members stood and raised their right hands in assent. Mr McClelland commended the new elders to the Lord in prayer.

Mr Hunter then read the charge to the elders, a matter which he consid-

ered important enough to record in full the words used:

By the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and according to the usages of New Testament Churches you have now been ordained to the office of Ruling Elder; and I hereby declare you duly constituted and set apart as Ruling Elders of the Church. May you faithfully keep the vows of ordination and discharge with loving zeal and fidelity the duties of your sacred office. Amen. I now charge you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to take heed to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the Church of God which he hath purchased with His own blood; and that you keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable until the appearing of our Saviour. I also charge you, dear people of God, to accept these elders, whom you have chosen to rule in this Church, in the spirit of affectionate obedience and trust. Esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And bear them on your hearts in daily prayer to God that they may be abundant in godly counsel, fruitful in heavenly consolations, and tenderly faithful in the exercise of Christian discipline.

All records of the church during the first half of 1936 were in Mr Hunter's own handwriting so there is no record of his farewell service but he left Armagh on 30th June 1936. In the 1950s and 1960s Mr Hunter was a pastor in Woodford in Essex, on the outskirts of London and was also a Royal Air Force Chaplain.

The next chapter

Robert Campbell was an Ulsterman who had left his work in insurance to follow a Bible College course at The South Wales Bible Institute in Porth in 1932. After completing his two year course there he moved to the Irish Baptist College, then situated in Dublin and on completion of that two year course he was called to Armagh after a church meeting held on 10th June 1936. Note the date, as on Sunday 14th June 1936 his letter accepting the call to become pastor of Armagh was read to the

church.

A letter was also sent to Mr Deens asking that Mr Campbell be allowed to remain in Armagh, supported by the Baptist Union Aided Churches Scheme, for as long as possible. Mr Deens was also asked to arrange a motor car allowance to be paid to Mr Campbell to enable him to travel to the Gortmerron church to give pastoral support there.

Mr Campbell and his wife had no children but a daughter, Ruth, was born during their time in Armagh. Mr Campbell is believed to have been the first pastor to introduce community hymn-singing before the Sunday evening services, a tradition which has continued more or less continuously ever since. One of the first requests to him as pastor came in July 1936 (his first month in office) when he was asked to baptise a man. He decided to bring the matter to the church when, it is recorded, some people objected to the man's use of tobacco.

A service of recognition for Mr Campbell was held on 7th September 1936 when letter and telegrams were read from Mr Deens and from some of Mr Campbell's friends in the Irish Baptist College in Dublin. The preacher was Robert Boggs, pastor of the Grange church.

At the annual meeting in 1937 five deacons were elected, Mr Arthur Cooke, Mr Percy Knipe, Mr Cecil Mann, Mr John McWilliams and a new deacon, Mr Bobby Humphries. The 1938 minutes were in the handwriting of Mr Bobby Humphries who records a decision to re-elect the secretary so one assumes that Mr Humphries was elected to the position at some date between the annual meetings of 1937 and 1938.

The deacons at their first meeting made the decision to buy a replacement organ as the present instrument was beyond repair and also began planning for a mission to be conducted by Mr T P O'Connor later in the year. The Gortmerron church wrote to ask if Mr Campbell could be released to preach there on one Sunday each month but the Armagh of-

fice-bearers felt that this would create too many difficulties for the church and suggested that Gortmerron should approach the Home Mission.

During the year Mr Campbell informed the office-bearers of a letter sent to him by the Field Committee of the Home Mission directing him to go to Gortmerron on one additional Sunday morning per month. The office-bearers decided to remind the Committee of the autonomy of Baptist churches and to suggest that they be consulted before any decisions were made about their pastor's workload. The outcome was a meeting with representatives of the Mission and it was decided that Mr Campbell's Sunday morning commitment to Gortmerron should be one Sunday in every two months with the Mission contributing 25p per Sunday to pay the expenses of a replacement preacher for Armagh. One of these preachers was James Armstrong of Milford.

In 1940 a sign of the times was recorded when the secretary thanked the pastor for his work in putting up blackout curtains in the tabernacle. However the main event in 1940 was a meeting of the office bearers called by Mr Campbell after the morning service on 21st July to inform them that he had received a call to be pastor of the Banbridge church and a further meeting on 28th July to say that he had decided to accept it. He concluded his ministry in Armagh at the end of September 1940.

Mr Campbell went on to spend a lifetime in pastoral work in churches of the Baptist Union of Ireland. He served the Banbridge church for ten years and during that period his son Norman, who is still active in Baptist circles, was born. Robert Campbell was pastor in Tandragee from 1950 until 1954 before concluding his ministry in the Londonderry church. He was President of the Baptist Union of Ireland in 1961. Even after his retirement from Londonderry in 1973 he continued to take services, including a series in the Armagh Church in 1976 on The Pilgrim's Progress when at least one person trusted the Lord, more than four decades after he had first stepped into the Armagh pul-

pit.

His daughter Ruth married a future secretary of the Union of churches, Mr Rea Grant and Mr Campbell's grandson Ian Grant is responsible for the work in Cavan.

The wartime years

On 1st December 1940 the church called Mr William E Beatty, the pastor of the Killyleagh church in County Down and he came as a visiting speaker on 29th December when he informed the church that he would accept the call.

Mr Beatty arrived in Armagh with his wife and two daughters to take up pastoral responsibility for Armagh and Gortmerron with Sunday services in both and midweek meetings in Lurganearly as well. During his pastorate the church continued to prosper in spite of the difficulties caused by the war. In 1945 a sad loss to the church was the departure of Mr John Doory, elder, to join the Windsor church.

For 1945 a full list of members has survived which indicates that there were 37 members, of whom four do not have their addresses recorded, eleven lived in Milford, three were from the Collone area, two from the Cathedral Road and two had Killylea addresses, leaving 14 who lived in the city. This ratio of city to country members seems to have been fairly constant throughout the history of the church. There is also a reference to the Armagh and District Baptist Association which met in Armagh in March 1946.

In 1947 two baptismal services were held. In April that year Mr Beatty conducted a mission somewhere in the South of Ireland which was very successful. The church continued to advertise its services in the press and Mr Beatty tended to include the subject of his sermons in the no-

tices. As well as such topics as "Why we believe in Total Abstinence" and "The Subtlety of the Serpent" he announced his intention of covering topics such as "Egypt's dark night", "Weather Forecasting in Bible Times" and once simply "Spectators".

In January 1948 the church elected Mr W Mitchell as an additional deacon. Mr Mitchell stood down as Orphan Society Secretary and in his place the church elected Miss Edna McClelland who has continued to have that responsibility for 53 years. Another change was in the day of the prayer meeting which moved from Friday to Monday.

The Post-war Era

Mr Beatty resigned in February 1948 on accepting a call to another cause which involved two pulpits, Knockconny and the almost forgotten Mullycar Church. He spent eight years there before accepting a call to the Carrickfergus church where he ministered for 13 years until he was 66 years of age. Mr Beatty then accepted a call to the Ballykeel church where he spent a further six years as pastor before retiring to the Co Down coast, first to Newcastle and finally to Bangor where he joined the Rosemary Park church. A feature in "Irish Baptist Life" in December 2001 noted that he still attended all Sunday and mid-week services by the time of his 97th birthday. Mr Beatty and his late wife Sadie had four children, three of whom are still alive and living in Newcastle, Belfast and Bangor.

At the annual meeting in 1949 the name of Mr David Carson who had been secretary does not appear. He was replaced as deacon by Mr Harry Stevenson who was immediately elected treasurer with Mr Bobby Humphries becoming secretary, a position he would hold for a further forty years. One of his first duties was to call church meeting on 31st July 1949 when it was agreed to seek the approval of the Home Mission Committee to call Mr Charlie Lutton of Phibsborough, Dublin, as the new pastor. Approval was granted on 28th September and Mr

Lutton was invited to take up the pastorate.

Charles Lutton arrived on 16th December as pastor of Armagh and Gortmerron. Speakers at his welcome service were William Weir and Louis Deens, pastors from Dublin and Belfast respectively. Mr McClelland's daughters, Edna and Maureen were the special singers. In 1949 the church held a Children's Day for the first time and in January 1950 Mr Lutton pointed out to the church that apart from himself it had only one elder. It was then proposed, seconded and agreed that Bobby Humphries and Percy Knipe should be elected as elders and the right hand of fellowship was formally extended to them as elders on the following Sunday morning. On the same day Mr and Mrs George Taylor were received into the membership of the church.

Later in 1950 the annual excursion was due to take place to Warrenpoint but heavy rain meant that it was held instead in Warrenpoint Orange Hall which "by a good stroke of business" had been hired for the day where Mr Lutton and Home Mission Evangelist James Armstrong entertained the children.

A Saturday afternoon preaching conference was a feature of Baptist church life at that time and although Armagh had not held one for some years the trend was reversed with a conference in September 1950 when four sermons were preached by visiting pastors, Minnis Mills, William Mullan, William Lyttle and James Irvine. Mr Lutton at the end of 1950 introduced a Christmas morning service and a Watch-night service to the church programme.

A watch was presented in 1951 to Miss Edna McClelland in recognition of her services as organist. A highlight of the early part of that year was a visit by James Armstrong, evangelist, to Gortmerron for a four week mission during which he preached in Armagh each Sunday morning on the subject of The Holy Spirit's ministry. Two baptismal services were held in 1952, for Christians from Gortmerron and Knock-

conny churches as well as Armagh, and the church received several new members. Those coming into membership included James Armstrong transferring to his home church from Shankill, Bobby Humphries junior and Mr Bob Jardine from Belfast who was welcomed as youth leader.

By now a Christmas morning service and a watch-night service had become as much an established part of the winter's activities as Children's Day and the annual outing to Warrenpoint were part of summer and the Saturday conference and Harvest Service part of autumn. At the 1953 annual meeting Mr Jardine was elected as a deacon and seems to have had experience as an office-bearer in Belfast as he spoke at that meeting on the role of an elder as a different role from that of a deacon. The 1953 minutes record that after considerable discussion it was decided to make no change though some of his other suggestions were implemented about forty years later.

Highlights of 1953 were a series of meetings by James Irvine on the Second Coming, a Bible Teaching week by Willie Mullan, a week of Gospel Films presented by James Armstrong and a tent mission at Lisanally Lane in the city, conducted by Mr Lutton with some help from Mr Armstrong. Speakers at the September conference included Hugh Orr, Willie Mullan, T P O'Connor and Joshua Thompson. In 1954 two missions were held.

Mr Lutton remained in Armagh with his wife Margaret (Meg), a native of Poyntzpass in County Armagh, until 27th March 1955 when he resigned, his last service being a baptismal service when Mr Donald Knipe and a Miss Scott were baptised. Mr Lutton went to Canada for two years before he returned to Northern Ireland to become pastor of the East End church for six years. After a further three years in Canada he became pastor in Portstewart in 1967 before moving eight years later to the pastorate of the Ballynahinch church. He continued to occupy the Armagh pulpit occasionally as a visiting preacher for the rest of his

active ministry.

The principal highlight of 1957 followed the preaching on 24th March of a young man from Londonderry, Mr Harry Bennett. Although this was only his second visit to the church it was decided before he had even left the building that he should be approached to allow his name to be put before the church. The approach was unexpected but Mr Bennett agreed to consider the matter. A week later, on 1st April 1957, a unanimous call was issued. Mr Bennett acknowledged it but said that he wanted time to consider it. He wrote again on 20th April to confirm that he would accept the call.

In August 1957 Harry Bennett became the sixth pastor of the church and the third to have responsibility for Gortmerron as well. At the welcome meeting Mr Harold Topley of Portadown read the scriptures, Mr James Smith, Pastor of the Knockconny church, led in prayer and the President of the Baptist Union, Mr Robert Clark, pastor in Monkstown, delivered the charge to the new pastor. Mr William Mullan, pastor of the Lurgan church, brought the charge to the church. Other speakers included Mr Joshua Thompson, Mr Kelly of Gortmerron, William Weir of Portadown, two former Armagh pastors William Beatty and Robert Campbell and finally evangelist James Armstrong who said that he had never been in a meeting where the power of the Holy Spirit was so evident. The singers were Edna and Maureen McClelland.

On Thanksgiving Day that year two of the secretary's children, Jeanie and Kenneth Humphries, trusted the Lord. They, together with Mr Stanley Keown and another elder's son, Leslie Knipe, and five believers who intended to join the Gortmerron church, were baptised by Mr Bennett in December 1957. Mr Bennett began a Bible Class in September as a separate occasion from the Prayer meeting which continued to be held on Mondays.

In 1958 the church elected Mr George Taylor as treasurer. During the

year three baptismal services were held for believers from Armagh, Gortmerron, Lurganearly and Warrenpoint. A new venture that year was a week of prayer in September, to mark the start of the winter's work, held each morning from 7.00 am. The report on the year 1958 includes some figures, indicating that the average attendance on Sundays was 70 and that for the Bible Class on Wednesdays 20. Also that year there was a report on the work of the Women's Missionary Auxiliary, the first report for some years, though no date for its foundation has been traced.

In 1959 a new venture was the decision to hold open-air services these were held in Armagh, Benburb, Caledon, Killylea, Loughgall, Markethill, Milford, Richhill and Tynan. Again the church arranged baptismal services for Warrenpoint Christians as well as Armagh people. A sad note in 1961 came when Mrs Lee of Milford, a stalwart of the work for nearly 30 years, went to be with the Lord, which was far better for her but which left a void in the Armagh church.

When Mr Bennett was pastor the churches advertisements often concluded with the words "Come and bring a Bible". Later this was amended to the "Come and bring a friend" slogan used in earlier seasons. Presumably by then the members and friends of the church had got the message that Mr Bennett expected Bibles to be brought! He left the pastorate of the church in April 1961.

He and his wife Meta had two sons John and Paul but Mrs Bennett died following his departure from the pastorate of the church. In later years Mr Bennett moved into Christian Brethren circles but remained active in preaching and teaching, partly in the Armagh area where he still lives.

The Armstrong Years

For a variety of reasons the church was in a difficult state with fewer

than 20 active members and the office-bearers on hearing that one of its own members, James Armstrong, had recently returned from Canada, asked him to conduct the services for a few weeks. He agreed to come because although he knew many of the people on the fringes of the church he had been away for long enough to bring a fresh approach and believed that with the Lord's help he could help build the church up to its former strength. The church's press notices for services at that time described him as "James Armstrong, Secretary, Christian Police Association". For a special service the church welcomed Robert Campbell, president of the Baptist Union of Ireland and former pastor, the only one to have become President.

At the annual meeting in 1962 the secretary paid tribute to Mr Armstrong's work which had built up the attendances, though no figures were given. Later that year many members began to suggest to the office bearers that the church should call James Armstrong as its new pastor. When the church decided to issue a call in July 1962 Mr Armstrong sought advice from others about accepting the pastorate of his home church on a long-term basis and was advised by many to consider the scriptural adage that a prophet might well be without honour in his own country. In due course the Lord's leading became clear in favour of accepting the call and he resolved to remain in his home district to become, if necessary, a pastor without honour. He was inducted to the pastorate in Armagh in October 1962.

Greetings on behalf of the Baptist Union of Ireland were brought by Norman Porter and Joshua Thompson. The right hand of fellowship was extended to the new pastor by William McClelland and Mr Armstrong in his response told the members that he expected them to be in their places on Sundays, no matter who was preaching elsewhere. He recalled that he had first heard the gospel in Milford Sunday School and looked forward to working with the church to preach the gospel in the old city which had so much religion and so little knowledge of the Lord. Two messages were brought by well known pastors, William

Weir of Portadown to the pastor and Hugh Orr of Great Victoria Street to the church.

As the story of James Armstrong's Christian service has been well and fully documented elsewhere it need not be recounted here. As already noted, he was born in Milford and converted in Armagh. He joined the Irish Guards and later the RUC until the Lord called him to leave his work and devote himself fully to evangelism.

"The Irish Baptist" reported that a meeting had been held on 29th January 1947 in the Shankill tabernacle to bid "God-Speed" to James Armstrong. Mr Armstrong was asked to continue his involvement with the Christian Police Association and more than half a century later he remains a life vice-president of that Association. In 1957 he was married to Jean Spence, a member of the Lisburn Baptist church and they were to spend some years in Canada and then in Milford before he was called to the pastorate.

During his first year as pastor Mr Armstrong saw much encouragement in church life, including the baptism and adding to the church of 13 new members. A new outreach by the church was a regular Thursday evening gospel service held in Ballinahonemore Orange Hall on the Hamiltonsbawn Road on the edge of the city, when Mr Armstrong presented New Testament truth, sometimes by means of gospel films.

At the annual meeting in 1963 Mr Armstrong referred to the state of the premises and suggested that a Building Fund should be started in the hope that some work could be carried out at a future date. Within forty years his advice was fully heeded, though a start was made that evening with the decision to open a building fund.

1963 was the worst winter for many years and the weather disrupted a mission held in February but 25 people were known to have given their lives to the Lord during the mission. A baptismal service was held

later in the year when the seven Christians baptised included Barbara Knipe, Denis Knipe, Noel Humphries and David Nesbitt who were to have a long period of service to the church or to other churches.

Around that time the local press intermittently contained letters on the subject of baptism and the various forms of baptism and christening practised in local churches, including letters written under a pseudonym from a Baptist viewpoint. The writer, though he did not widely identify himself at the time, was William McClelland.

For the second year running a mission was held, many of the meetings were held in Armagh Orange Hall, the reasoning being that many people would attend in such a venue who would not feel comfortable coming into a church. The decision was justified by a good attendance most nights, culminating in more than 600 people arriving on the final Sunday evening. Among five believers baptised at a subsequent baptismal service were Mr Cecil Robinson and his wife Fiona, a granddaughter of John Gillow who had been an office-bearer from 1922.

Two of the elders, Bobby Humphries and Percy Knipe, had the joy of seeing their children join the church when it received nine new members including Dennis Knipe, Barbara Knipe, Noel Humphries, Cecil and Fiona Robinson and Roy Rainey. A highlight for the older members was the preaching of Mr Hunter, former pastor, on his final visit to Armagh.

In 1966 an inscribed Bible was presented by Mr Armstrong to William McClelland who had served the church as an elder for 45 years. He had been a member of the church since 1919 and remained an elder until his death on 27th January 1967.

On 3rd September 1967, exactly forty years after the opening of the tabernacle the special speaker was Pastor Joshua Thompson.

At this time in the history of the church the Baptist Youth Fellowship (BYF), led by Jim McAnlis, was a thriving part of the work with up to 30 young people meeting together. In 1967 it held some Gospel Rallies where the attendance was over 100. There was an increase in the number of children's meetings which made for a smaller attendance at each and thus a more manageable organisation. A new event at the end of the year was a social evening for teenagers, which was to grow into a major event on the social calendar for young Christians in Armagh and beyond.

In 1968 three missions took place led by the former pastor, Charles Lutton, Home Mission evangelist Sam Draffin and Hamilton Moore, then pastor of the Magherafelt Baptist Church, who presented the gospel for "teens and twenties". At least eleven young people were known to have trusted Jesus as Saviour.

In June of that year the church had a visit from a team of young people who had come to present the claims of Jesus at a series of open-air and church-based meetings. This type of evangelism was to develop in later years under the title BYE team but was a new venture in the 1960s. The annual conference again concentrated on missions but a comment that numbers were reduced was the first indication that the days of Saturday afternoon meetings were coming to an end. A further gospel mission was held for four weeks in September and October, conducted by James McManus, a long serving evangelist who by now was pastor of the Newry church.

In January 1970 a presentation of a watch was made to Miss Edna McClelland in recognition of her faithful service as church organist and Sunday School teacher. Presentations were also made to George Taylor, treasurer, and Bobby Humphries, secretary.

The serious civil unrest in the community was taking its toll and at the 1972 Annual Meeting it was reported that the average attendance at the

children's meeting in the tabernacle had dropped to 12 and that the Youth Fellowship was on the verge of closure. Later in the year it did in fact cease to meet.

An inscribed Bible was presented to Percy Knipe who had completed fifty years as an office-bearer of the church. He was described by Mr Armstrong as a beloved brother, a dependable comrade and a partner in the work.

A children's church during the sermon on Sunday mornings was established on 15th October 1972. This was a small beginning, taking place in the small vestry room behind the pulpit, but was to become an integral part of the morning service for the next three decades. A baptismal service was held in March 1973 when seven believers were baptised and ten new members were received bringing the total membership of the church to 75. The weekly meetings in the Lisanally Old People's Home started that year and has been a blessing to the residents ever since.

In 1974 a great encouragement was the conversion of Mr Tommy Flannigan. He was the son-in-law of Mrs Lee of Milford and successive generations of members of the church had prayed for his conversion for forty years. He died later in the year.

A new venture was the distribution of gospel booklets by post. These were initially sent in envelopes addressed by Noel and Dora Humphries using names and addresses from the electoral register, though in later years the convenient but impersonal Royal Mail household delivery service was to be used. It proved to be means of ensuring that the gospel would reach all in selected areas of the county, particularly those who because of their place of residence in our divided society or their remote locations would be unlikely ever to be reached by door to door evangelists from any church. Booklets used over the years were "Journey into Life" by John Blanchard and two written by the pastor.

James Armstrong entitled "Born Twice" and "The Missing Note". More than 22,000 were to be delivered over the coming years.

In June 1975 the church held a series of meetings for believers conducted by James Irvine, pastor of the Newcastle church and also a baptismal service for four believers. As so often happens, both in church life and life in general, a time of great encouragement was followed by a time of sadness when Mr Percy Knipe died after serving the church as deacon, treasurer, Sunday School Superintendent and elder for more than fifty years.

At the annual meeting in 1976 the church unanimously appointed Mr George Taylor as an elder to replace Mr Knipe. The office-bearers now consisted of Mr Armstrong as pastor, Bobby Humphries and George Taylor as elders and seven deacons

In 1976 a series of meetings by Robert Campbell, pastor of the church more than forty years previously, was intended for Christians but was used of the Lord in the salvation of at least one soul. The subject of the meetings, held on the five Monday nights in March, was John Bunyan's famous book, "The Pilgrim's Progress".

A further baptismal service took place in the autumn when Freda Vallelly was among those baptised; Ken and Freda Vallelly joined the church a few weeks later in December 1976. Also in that month a carol service was held and for the first time, jointly with Armagh Elim Pentecostal Church, a Watch Night service was held on 31st December.

The church was still considering extending the premises but in the expectation that a decision would take some time the tabernacle was redecorated, the inside by a painting contractor and the exterior by members of the church. The deacons decided not to replace the carpet in view of the possible future extension!

One of the most memorable missions during Mr Armstrong's pastorate was conducted by members of the CPA, a different speaker each night and testimonies, solos etc all from serving and former members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The mission ran for three weeks from 20th March 1977 under the title "Peace with God and Men". The speakers on some evenings were local officers while others travelled from places as far apart as Limavady and Bangor. Not only was God's kingdom extended as people were converted but others were revived in their commitment and all of us were blessed by the Lord's presence each evening.

A sad note during the mission occurred when the pastor's mother, Mrs Agnes Armstrong, died. She had been faithful in her attendance at the church for well over 40 years. Later in the year the church heard of the death of the second pastor of the church, Mr H J L Hunter.

In view of the reduced attendance in previous years the annual conference consisted of a single meeting, held on a Saturday evening, an indication that the days of Saturday afternoon conferences, so popular in earlier years, were now at an end.

Of less spiritual significance, though no less important, was the decision of the office-bearers to buy a new carpet as the extension of the building might take some time. However early in 1978 the deacons considered plans to extend the tabernacle and a special meeting of the church was held in February. In the debate Mr Harold Carson put forward the revolutionary suggestion that the church should leave The Mall and move to a new site. Only six members voted in favour. Another item in the church report referred to the start of a regular meeting for children known as the 6.60 club (one minute after 6.59pm!), the beginnings of the Friday night youth work which has lasted for a quarter of a century.

Two more of the older members of the church went to be with The

Lord in 1979, Mrs Annie Humphries and her sister Mrs Lily Hill who died within three days of each other after many years of involvement in the work of the church.

At a baptismal service in July four believers were baptised, Henry Irvine, Jean Irvine, Phyllis McFarland and David Graham. A series of meetings conducted by James Irvine of Newcastle formed another highlight of the year, while another, of lasting benefit, was the establishment of a Bible class for the older children under the leadership of Fenton Nesbitt. During the year the church gained nine members including a couple who would play a part for some years to come, Brian and Phyllis McFarland.

While the normal work of the church went on, most of the activity seemed to take up less discussion time than the question of property. One report however concerned a former member of the church, Mr Kenneth Humphries, who was inducted as pastor of Killyleagh Baptist Church, the first former member to move into pastoral work in another church.

In 1981 the annual meeting was overshadowed by Mr Armstrong's announcement that he intended to relinquish the pastorate of the church before the next annual meeting. A baptismal service was held a few weeks later.

A mission for children was held at the end of November. The first night was cancelled due to a threat of serious unrest in the community but the meetings were well attended for the rest of the week. Another development of the work was the extension of occasional open air evangelism to become a regular outreach on The Mall each Sunday evening. The year 1981 also marked the entry of a member of the church into Bible College. Bertie Johnston was the first member of the church in more than fifty years of its existence to enrol at The Irish Baptist College, or indeed any other college. The membership of the

church was recorded as 80 members.

At the annual meeting in February the secretary read a letter from Mr Armstrong giving three months' notice of his retirement. While he had indicated that this would be done there was nevertheless a great sense of sadness on the part of many at the end of an era. The church also referred to the presentation by the Armstrong family (the pastor and his brothers and sisters) of a reading desk for the use of the church. It was agreed to affix a small plaque recording the source of the gift.

In April 1982 Mr Armstrong became the first pastor of the church to retire. James and Jean Armstrong had two sons, David, who was educated and subsequently employed in England, and Andrew who lives in County Fermanagh, and one daughter, Mrs Helen Hargy, who later moved with her husband to the Ballymena area where she is a member of Ballymena, Hill Street Baptist Church. At that stage the church permitted him to remain in the manse but when he moved back to his parents' house in his native Milford the church decided to sell the house in Folly Lane and to consider at a later date the arrangements to be made for the new pastor.

The retirement function was attended by one of the largest gatherings in the history of the church with almost every member present together with many adherents and visitors. Mrs Jean Irvine, wife of one of the deacons, baked a cake for the occasion and iced it with the words *God is not unrighteous to forget your labour of love (Hebrews 6:10).* So ended the longest pastorate in the history of the Armagh church.

Following his retirement Mr Armstrong moved back to 5 Monaghan Street, Milford but for some months he served the Killicomaine church in a part-time capacity in the hope that the church, which had been formed as a result of one of his missions in earlier years, could come through a difficult vacancy. He derived great satisfaction from the fact that the Lord chose to bless the church both during and after his months

there to the point where it was again able to call its own pastor. Mr Armstrong also conducted a series of meetings in Kilrea Baptist Church and competed the week in spite of an illness which was to affect the remainder of his life. He had continued in membership of the Armagh church and after his time in Killicomaine he resumed regular attendance at the services where in spite of pain, tinnitus and hearing loss he has been a considerable source of support to his successors.

The modern era

One of Mr Armstrong's dearest wishes at that stage was that the work of the church should go on and indeed prosper under its new pastor. However a vacancy came first and the church was blessed through the preaching of many visiting speakers. The open-air witness continued in the summer and Brian McFarland started a meeting for young people. Unfortunately only three young people attended but Mr McFarland's perseverance would be rewarded in future years. The missionary conference on a Saturday had come to an end but a missionary Sunday was to take its place and the speaker in 1982 was Mr Wesley Crawford of the Slavic Gospel Association. Neither Mr Crawford nor the SGA was known to the church before that date but his visit was to change its future profoundly, both in its support for the Lord's work in Eastern Europe, and its choice of pastor.

The end of another era occurred in 1982 when Mr Jack Gillow died. He had been a member of the church for more than fifty years and was the son of John Gillow whose association with the church went back even further.

Extensive preparations were made for a children's mission in September but no-one expected the vast turn-out as 367 children packed the building on the first night. As the seating capacity is 168 even those

who did not enthuse over the use of an Orange Hall as a venue for church activities realised that conditions for such numbers in the tabernacle were unsafe. The mission thus moved across The Mall for the rest of the week where between 445 and 500 children heard the gospel each night.

The annual missionary conference again took the form of the normal Sunday services and in view of the interest the previous year Mr Wesley Crawford was again the speaker. He was then called as the new pastor of the church. Wesley H Crawford was a member of the Newtownards church and until that time the Northern Ireland representative of the Slavic Gospel Association. He accepted the call and arrived in Armagh at the end of August 1984. As Mr Crawford had owned his own home in Newtownards he decided to buy a house in Armagh.

He was inducted as pastor on 31 August 1984 in the presence of almost 500 people in Armagh Orange Hall when the speakers included three pastors from other churches, Mr Jackie Hughes from Coagh who led the meeting, Mr Samuel Carson who gave the charge to the new pastor and Mr Gordon Cardwell who gave the charge to the church. Mr Mervyn Morgan who had been associated with Mr Crawford in his earlier ministry also took part. Bobby Humphries welcomed Mr and Mrs Crawford to Armagh and extended the right hand of fellowship to them. Mr Crawford suitably replied and Mr Armstrong closed the meeting in prayer, commending his successor to the Lord.

Mr Armstrong had left the church in a healthy spiritual state and the foundations were ready to be built upon. Mr Crawford changed the emphasis of the Wednesday night meetings from prayer to Bible teaching, which had the effect of substantially increasing the attendances in mid-week. As often happens following a time of vacancy a number of adherents joined the church and the membership slowly increased from just over 80 to almost 100.

In 1984 the children's work expanded further with a meeting for younger children (the Bright Hour) being added to the 6.60 club and the youth meeting, now known as Youth Challenge. Also in that month a house two doors away from the tabernacle, No 2 Mall View Terrace, came on the market and the church decided to buy it. Four baptismal services were held in 1985.

The developing youth work now had four Friday night meetings with the Youth Challenge being divided into Junior and Senior groups (JYC and SYC) and expanded further with the establishment of a fourteen plus group on Sunday nights, held in Mr Crawford's home at Linsey's Hill. For many years children had entered the written Sunday School examination of the Baptist Union and while its primary purpose had been, and remained, the learning of scriptural truth by children the Gribbon Shield was presented to the Sunday School with the best average mark per child. Armagh won the shield for the first time at the 1985 examination.

During the year seventeen new members joined the church and three left. The church also agreed to receive an evangelism team from other churches in the Northern Baptist Association, which engaged in visitation of households in the city and in Newtownhamilton in June. Mr Crawford conducted a further gospel mission in October 1986, this time in Newtownhamilton, where a number of church members lived. Between 65 and 140 people attended the meetings each night. Three baptismal services were held during the year.

At the annual meeting in 1987 the church noted that over 90 children and young people were now attending the various meetings on Friday nights. Mr Crawford had noted that Mr Bobby Humphries had served the church for 50 years and presented him with a watch to mark the occasion.

A historic occasion in 1987 was the 70th anniversary of the formation

of the church. On the first Sunday in November, which as usual was the harvest thanksgiving weekend, Mr Crawford invited all his predecessors to take part in the services. By that stage Mr Paisley and Mr Hunter had died but Mr Campbell, Mr Beatty, Mr Lutton, Mr Bennett and Mr Armstrong all took part.

In 1988 the church was also informed on that occasion that No 1 Mall View Terrace (the next door property) was for sale and that the late owner had wanted the church to have the opportunity to buy it before it was placed on the open market. At a special meeting held in April the church decided to buy it and thus became the owner of three adjoining properties.

At the same meeting the pastor made a presentation to Miss Edna McClelland who had served the church for more than 40 years as Organist, Sunday School teacher and Orphan Society Secretary. Edna had wished to be relieved of the duties of being full-time organist but would continue to play the organ in a rota with others (Dennis Knipe, David Graham and the pastor's wife, Helen Crawford).

Mr Crawford spent two weeks in Poland with SGA in the summer but the church was saddened later in the year when he announced his resignation after he had decided to accept a call to the Portstewart church in County Londonderry. During his final few months in Armagh Mr Crawford received nine new members into fellowship, bringing the total membership to 109.

In 1988 the 14+ group started by the pastor in his home continued to meet when Rodney and Joan Shanks who had recently arrived in Armagh opened their home for meetings on Sunday nights. Mr Crawford informed the church in January 1989 that Stauros, a ministry to people with addiction problems, had been granted the use of church property (No 2 Mall View Terrace) twice a month, the start of a long link between Stauros and the church.

Mr Crawford's final act at a church business meeting was to present a gold watch to Mr George Taylor who had resigned after serving the church as treasurer for thirty years. He had resigned due to ill health but continued as an elder for the incoming year. Fenton Nesbitt was the new treasurer. A further announcement at the annual meeting in 1989 was made by Brian McFarland who with his wife Phyllis had been called by the Lord into His service with Slavic Gospel Association and had just been accepted onto its full-time staff. He would thus become the first person since James Armstrong to be a member of the church while serving the Lord "full-time" in another capacity.

In February 1989 the church met to say farewell to Mr and Mrs Crawford. Margaret Nesbitt and Edna McClelland paid tribute to Mrs Crawford on behalf of the ladies of the church and presented her with a brooch while further presentations were made on behalf of the youth groups by Brian McFarland and the Sunday School by Noel Humphries. George Taylor on behalf of the church made presentations to Mr Crawford, his wife and their three children.

Mr Crawford and his wife Helen had arrived in Armagh with four children. Sadly their daughter Deborah died in August 1988 and was buried in Armagh, while their other two daughters Julie and Leslie left the area with their husbands. Their only son Richard went with his parents when they moved to Portstewart, he now lives in the Carryduff area.

Seventy members of the Armagh church travelled to Portstewart for Mr Crawford's induction. After a number of years there he accepted a further call to the Comber church in County Down and after his time there he moved into a ministry of Bible Teaching and evangelism. In October 1989 Mr Crawford returned to Armagh to preach at a commissioning service for Brian and Phyllis McFarland at which Samuel Carson, under whose ministry Brian had sat in the Shankill Church as a student, and James Armstrong also took part.

A baptismal service was held for two believers in July 1989 and the baptistry was opened on another occasion when pupils from St Catherine's College came to look as part of their Religious Education course. This had not happened before but was to become a regular feature of church life in later years. Alan Baird, then pastor of the Dungannon church, was present to answer questions from the young people.

At the 1991 Annual Meeting the church appointed David Graham as treasurer to replace Fenton Nesbitt. The Sunday School won the Gribbon Shield for the best Sunday School results in the Baptist Union. A few months later Mr Armstrong and Mr Crawford returned to share the funeral service for Mrs Peg Acheson who, although a resident of an Old People's Home for many years, had been a member of the church for more than thirty years. Mr Lutton and Mr Crawford shared in the funeral service of Mrs Mary Knipe who had joined the church as long ago as 1928 and had later married Percy Knipe to whom she had given her support in his lifelong service to the church.

A happier event occurred when Helen Armstrong was married to Andrew Hargy. The bride's father James Armstrong conducted the service and performed the improbable feat of giving the bride away before handing over to Mr Lutton to perform the ceremony.

After a further business meeting the church issued a call to Mr John W Taylor, a Cookstown man who was pastor of the Kilrea church. After due consideration Mr Taylor accepted the call and at his induction Mr Crawford welcomed his successor to Armagh and formally inducted him. Mr Bobby Humphries, secretary and elder, spoke on behalf of the church and greetings were brought from neighbouring Baptist churches and from the Baptist Union of Ireland as well as the Kilrea church. Mr Taylor spoke of his faith in Jesus, his thankfulness to The Lord for saving him and his desire as pastor to minister to the members, to lead others to a personal faith in Jesus and to offer help in Jesus' name to needy people.

Later that summer several young people in the church took part in Five Day Clubs for children, a form of outreach which was to become a permanent feature of the church's life. Mr Taylor baptised five believers including Phillip Vallelly who was later to enter full-time service, first in Ballycrochan church, then in Canada and currently in Northern Ireland with SIM. A new development that year was a Christmas dinner for Senior Citizens.

Around this time Mr George Taylor resigned as an elder when he moved to Carrickfergus, although he was to retain his membership and his interest for the rest of his life. His fellow elder Bobby Humphries who had been secretary of the church for 55 years remained as an elder but decided in 1992 that it was time to hand over the post of secretary. The church appointed Mr Kenneth Vallelly to replace him. Another significant announcement that evening was the decision of one of the members, Mr Adrian McBride, to leave his employment to study at the Irish Baptist College with a view to entering pastoral work. He was later called to the Kilrea church.

In September 1992 a further business meeting was held but on this occasion some progress was made when the church decided by 61 votes to 2 to attempt to buy a site at Markethill Road. The office-bearers were able to report in January 1993 that a deposit had been paid on part of the site. A further business meeting later in 1993 authorised the office bearers to make enquiries about the purchase of the remainder of the Markethill Road site though it was recognised that the purchase might not be straightforward.

One of the significant developments during Mr Taylor's ministry was the appointment of three elders, the first new elders for almost 25 years. Noel Humphries, Brian McFarland and Ken Vallelly served with Mr Bobby Humphries as elders from 3 November 1993. During 1993 a further ten members were received into membership of the church. Its outreach that year included the organisation of four Five Day Clubs in estates around the city.

An expansion in the work of Baptist Youth in the form of camps and BYE teams as well as short term missionary appointments by a number of Societies led to a number of young people in the church spending part of their summer vacation in the Lord's service.

Overshadowing all else in church life in 1995 was the serious illness and subsequent death of Margaret Nesbitt. Margaret had been secretary of the Women's Meeting and leader of Children's church as well a constant source of support to her husband Fenton Nesbitt in his work as deacon, treasurer and leader of the Bible Class and door to door outreach. In 1998 Bobby Humphries retired from the office of elder after 49 years, during which time he had served with five pastors.

In 2000 after almost nine years in office Mr Taylor announced his resignation in order to serve the Lord with the Slavic Gospel Association. He and his wife Christine remained in membership of the church and moved only five miles away to live in Hamiltonsbawn with their daughter Judith and son Aaron. Subsequently due to ill health Mr Taylor was no longer able to travel to eastern Europe and there upon resigned from SGA in 2002. In July 2002 he became part-time pastor of the Mourneview Assembly, an independent Baptist church in Lurgan.

A few months into the next vacancy the elders brought to the church a recommendation that an interim pastor should be appointed and Mr Eddie Rea, formerly of the Clough, Rathfriland and Shankill churches, duly arrived. He lived over fifty miles away in Carrickfergus and during his time in Armagh moved to Ballymoney which increased his travelling distance on a Sunday to 120 miles but he attended every meeting without fail. Whatever the merits or otherwise of a temporary pastorate in relation to the urgency of filling the vacancy, Mr Rea was a diligent pastor and visited faithfully each and every member who was ill, bereaved or in any way in need, regardless of the distance to be travelled or the level of personal inconvenience. He made it clear that he did not wish to be considered as a permanent pastor and left Armagh in July 2001.

Looking to the Future

The next chapter of the church's history continued early in 2002 when a special business meeting decided to extend a call to Mr Andrew Roycroft. The other highlight of 2002, the 75th year in the present building, occurred on 9th March when a group of members and friends of the church gathered in a field on the Markethill Road for a short service of dedication of the site for the new building following which Bobby Humphries, who had been in membership since the 1930s and was now one of the longest serving members, and James Armstrong jointly cut the first sod for the place of worship which will serve the church and the community in the years ahead.
In May 2002 William McGilton, a retired pastor who had been in membership of the Armagh church for some years since his retirement, accepted an invitation to serve the Gortmerron church as temporary pastor, thus restoring a historic link between the Armagh and Gortmerron churches.

During the vacancy 25 believers were baptised but to bring the story right up to date Mr Andrew Roycroft was instituted as the tenth pastor of the church on the last Wednesday in August 2002. At the induction service, which was led by James Byers from Newtownards all the living pastors of the church were present from Mr Beatty in 1941 to Mr Roycroft who was accompanied at the service by his fiancee, Miss Carolyn Cooke.

He preached his first sermon on Sunday 1st September which was the nearest Sunday to the 75th anniversary of the opening of the tabernacle and the church looks forward to the future and its new building to be opened in 2003.

Jim Henry Evangelist and Pastor

An Appreciation

J A Smyth

James Cowan Henry was born on May 28th 1937. His parents, Samuel and Sarah Henry, lived at Boyne Square in the Sandy Row district of the city of Belfast. Nine children were born to Samuel and Sarah of which, Jim, as he was affectionately known, was the youngest. Sarah fell ill after Jim's birth and sadly passed away after four years of continuing ill health. Her youngest child was reared by his grandmother and subsequently by his sister Jean. The pressure of war meant evacuation to the Harryville district of Ballymena. There he attended a Brethren Sunday School where gospel seeds were sown in his young life.

On his return to Belfast, he attended Linfield school. School days being ended, he became an apprentice baker in a well-known bakery. He was a typical young man of that era and enjoyed the pleasures of the world. One night returning home he met an old pal, Tom Neill. Tommy had recently come to a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as saviour and Lord. As the two pals engaged in conversation concerning spiritual matters, Jim knew the experience of the Holy Spirit working in his heart. Arriving home later, he bowed at his own bedside and passed from death unto life spiritually. Friendship evangelism is no new concept and Jim Henry is evidence of its fruitfulness as he was converted on July 31st 1955. He was subsequently baptised in a Brethren hall and then attended Lisburn Road Methodist church.

Baptist principles and practices took hold of his spiritual thinking and as a result he joined Great Victoria Street Baptist church. Gradually his concern and conviction about his life work concentrated his thinking on Bible College. Belfast Bible College was his place of full time study from January 1st 1957 until the end of 1958. During this period of full

time study he had two summer appointments with the Irish Baptist Home Mission. His experience during these temporary appointments proved influential in his life ministry. Mr Currie Brennan was his mentor for a month at Rathfriland. Mr James McManus acted in the same capacity for a month at Enniskillen. What happy memories Jim retained of these two months. He felt that it had been his privilege to work intimately with two excellent evangelists. He learned, at the rock face, the skill of preaching the gospel and door-to-door visitation. He felt himself to be the novice working with the veterans.

Jim now felt a strong call to the work of evangelism. Application was made to the Irish Baptist Home Mission. The Mission meeting of December 1958 agreed that he should join the staff. The Great Victoria Street church commissioned him on January 1st 1959. At that service, Pastor H.H. Orr preached and Jim was sent out to his life's ministry with the blessing of his local church. In its wisdom, the Mission seconded him again to James McManus. Missions were held in Kilrea, Shankill and Carndaisy churches. Again Jim gained practical experience during these missions. Such experience would stand him in good stead during his subsequent ministry.

Larne was a young church with a growing need for pastoral care and evangelistic enterprise. The decision was made that Jim Henry had the ability to fulfil both these roles. On April 8th 1959 he went to Larne a single man. In those days our mission operated in a twin capacity, providing pastoral care and evangelistic ministry to small emerging churches. Larne proved a spiritual success and before long the church issued a call to the pastorate, which Jim accepted wholeheartedly. On December 10th 1959, he married Maureen Forsythe. She was from a family closely identified with Great Victoria Street Baptist church. Her father was an elder in the church. This proved to be a most happy marriage. Two girls, Gail & Karen were born to Jim & Maureen. Family life gave him great joy and brought out of him the very best traits of humanity. To Maureen he showed affection, loyalty, care, tenderness and

generosity in every way. The girls were the apple of his eye and nothing was too good for them. The arrival of grandchildren added greatly to the joys of family life. Maureen was a true helpmeet with her gracious smile and gentle handshake enhancing the ministry of her husband. The year 1965 dawned with Jim increasingly feeling that his work in Larne was drawing to an end. By the middle of that year, his feelings were totally confirmed and he retired from the Larne pastorate. This was a brave decision as no other openings for full time ministry had emerged.

He made a decision to return to his former occupation as a baker on June 29th 1965. The tenure of his bakery employment was short but a number of important events took place during it. He was invited to preach at an evangelical church in England. They showed a decided interest in him becoming their full time Pastor after they had heard him preach over a weekend. He felt that this was a non-starter and so declined the invitation.

Around this time he had a remarkable experience with the Lord, which was very personal and intimate. He never spoke publicly about this experience and as the years went on, talked less and less about it. He maintained it was a very personal experience and not for public testimony. In my opinion, it made a lasting impression on Jim spiritually. Though he kept it very much to him self, the impact and influence of the experience was good.

On August 15th 1965 he preached in the Omagh church and an insertion in my diary indicates that he stayed with us over that weekend. Favourable relationships were initiated that Sunday with the Omagh church. He rejoined the Home Mission staff and was seconded to Omagh, beginning there on November 7th 1965. Spiritual prosperity and progress marked the seven years, which he spent in Omagh. The church there recognised his pastoral and preaching gift and called him to be their Pastor. When he arrived in the county of Tyrone, the church had gone

through a spiritual decline as well as a decline in numbers. Jim went primarily as an evangelist with pastoral responsibility. He initiated and totally participated in a varied and wide- spread ministry of evangelism. He secured the use of a book trailer from the late John Eton, founder of the Missionary Trailer Fellowship. This trailer was located in a prominent place on Omagh's High Street. A very good work emerged from this exciting enterprise. He managed to get others involved in this work and many contacts were made in gospel interests. He used local halls and a portable hall in which to hold evangelistic missions. I attended most of these missions accompanied by Knockconny folk. Names of different locations for missions come flooding into one's memory. Names like Strawletterdillon, Fintona, Mountjoy, Pigeon Top, Mountfield and Averlee are but a few. The Lord was blessing the local church in Omagh. The struggling church survived and was revitalised. The upward turn had begun and was being increased month after month.

Open-air meetings, door-to-door visitation and personal evangelism were being used greatly for the spread of the gospel. The church at Omagh issued a call to the pastorate and Jim accepted the invitation. He took up his pastorate on January 1st 1969.

During his pastorate, he received a call from David Aiken asking him about the possibility of a Baptist witness in Strabane, a matter about which he contacted myself. To make a long story short, bible studies were held in the Aiken home in Strabane. Soon Sunday afternoon services were being held in a hall in Stabane. Circumstances indicated that Sion Mills could be a better location than Strabane. I well remember visiting Sion Mills with Jim. Searching for a venue for a gospel mission, we were led to visit the late Tommy Craig, Sheila Johnston's father. Sheila had recently got saved and a site was immediately available. Jim cared for the fledgling work, souls were saved and baptised in the Omagh church. Some sought and found a temporary spiritual home in Omagh. Castlederg and Dunamanagh churches owe their exis-

tence, in a large measure, to the interest, influence and input of the Sion Mills church.

Jim's ministry was being truly blessed. I could relate some amusing incidents that happened during his days in Omagh. Sam Draffin assisted in some of the missions and during one of these missions, in Mountfield, Jim and Sam went out to visit. They were late home for their tea and Maureen enquired as to the reason for their delay. She discovered that a discussion on the Lord's return had developed and that they had got no further than the manse gate. Sam was an ardent pre-millenialist and instead of their usual afternoon's visitation they had spent it in discussion. The city man had fitted in well to a provincial town. The erection of portable halls was necessary in those days for the holding of gospel missions. This involved hard work and Jim often had to opt out of this work, as he felt unable to cope. He was treated for fibrositis and, although none of us knew, this was the beginning of an illness that would eventually issue in the death of a comparatively young man.

Bloomfield church had become vacant, their previous pastor having moved to new pastures of service. Jim was called to the pastorate of the Bloomfield church and he was inducted on Thursday September 28th 1972. After seven years in a provincial town and conducting missions in rural settings, the Bloomfield ministry was quite a dramatic change. He settled well into the work and things were progressing. Little did he know that soon a dark cloud would descend on his life, in the form a of a serious heart complaint.

Driving to visit Sam Dunn in Killyleagh, he felt a strange pain asserting itself. Not wanting to annoy Maureen and the girls in the car, he continued on their journey. He collapsed as soon as he entered Sam's house. He was rushed to Downpatrick hospital and major heart problems were discovered. This was on Thursday April 24th 1973. Archie Hanna and I visited him in hospital on Saturday April 26th and I can

vividly recall asking him how he felt. He replied in the following terms, "Men, the texts which I have long used in sermons are becoming more real to me than ever". Humanly speaking, this was a severe blow in the early days of his Bloomfield ministry. On Monday November 10th 1980 he had his first triple bypass surgery. This particular operation was less common and more complicated in those days. His family and friends hoped and prayed that this would be the answer and end to his physical problem, but this was not to be. I think that during his recuperation he thought deeply concerning his life and ministry. It may have been that he was an evangelist at heart and certainly for some time he contemplated a move into full time evangelism.

Nearing the end of his Bloomfield ministry, he received a call from Carluke church in Scotland. He eventually intimated to the Carluke church that he was prepared to accept their call. However, a very strange thing happened, as he was unable to get his resignation from Bloomfield out of his pocket. A providential resistance came into play and Jim was perplexed. I was in Magherafelt at this time and he spoke to me by telephone. We arranged to meet in a car park in Ballymena to talk and pray. Years before this, I had received a call from the Dromore church. By telephone, I had indicated to Bobby Baxter, secretary of Dromore, that I intended accepting. The night after contacting Bobby, I couldn't sleep and neither could my wife. I phoned Bobby the next morning to request him to withhold the previous nights phone call. I was confused and in a serious dilemma. I contacted Jim and he came across from Omagh to Knockconny to talk and pray. I did not move to Dromore and now Jim was in the same dilemma as I had been. In the end, he decided not to move to Carluke.

This experience unsettled him at Bloomfield still further. On August 9th 1982 I preached at his farewell in the Bloomfield church. He was engaged with Baptist Missions as an evangelist from October 1st 1982. His career was to take another unexpected turn after joining the Baptist Missions team. He started a mission at Grange on Sunday November

7th 1982. The following Tuesday saw him in the City Hospital, hours after another heart attack. The providence of God was again strange according to our human reckoning. I deputised for Jim at the Grange mission and John Birnie completed the last two weeks. Recovery from this period of illness meant he was unable to resume full duties until January 1983. His diary identified churches where he conducted missions up until the end of April 1983. Such locations as Downpatrick, Tobermore, Carndaisy, Sion Mills, Castlederg and Whitehead are mentioned during this period. He had his second triple bypass operation on May 18th 1983. This necessitated a two-week stay in hospital. Retuning home on June 1st 1983 he started to make a reasonable recovery. It was for him a difficult experience again as he was unable to engage in evangelism for a few months.

Thankfully he resumed full duties and again conducted missions in different areas like Letterkenny and Omagh. Only once did I hear Jim refer to his heart condition in public. He never used himself as an illustration of God's mercy in this respect. During his Letterkenny mission, he was asked to speak at a coffee morning on the subject 'Facing Death'. I was present and to me it was most memorable as he recalled the grace of God as he went through his operations. During a service in Drogheda, he suffered another heart attack and spent a few days in the Louth Hospital.

The mid 1980s may have begun the enterprise for which he may be particularly remembered, at least so some of us think. At this time some local authorities produced area plans for development in their districts. The Holy Spirit gave guidance to Pastor D Baxter, Secretary of Baptist Missions. As he viewed these plans, it was brought to his attention that some of the areas had no Baptist presence in terms of established churches. Gradually there unfolded to him a desire to remedy this situation. Derek brought his inspired ideas to the committee and it was agreed to venture into some of the areas due for economic development. Jim was asked to lead a team into some of these areas, a task for which

he was well equipped. April 1986 saw Jim lead a team into Moira. Cecil Johnston, his right hand man, had been giving himself to door-to-door evangelism for some time. Two college students, Stanley Black and David Whitmarsh, who were on a summer appointments with Baptist Missions, joined Jim and Cecil. They prayed and planned, then vigorously pursued and carried through this plan. A visit to every home in Moira to present every person with the gospel was indeed a very worthy plan. A tent mission was held in Moira Demesne and today Moira is a thriving, increasing and forward-looking church. The Housing Association complex in Moira is named 'Henry Court', surely a permanent memorial to Jim.

Next port of call was Saintfield, again it was on Derek's hit list spiritually. The summer of 1987 saw a team enter Saintfield with the avowed purpose of visiting every home. A tent mission was held with souls being saved and a backslider restored. The Saintfield team was strong numerically, Jim & Cecil Johnston being joined by Sam Best, Stanley Black, Desmond Creelman and Alan Wilson. Good work was done and home bible studies, led by Jim, eventually led to Saintfield Baptist Fellowship becoming an established church.

During 1988 and 1989 Donaghadee was targeted for evangelism and church planting. This was to prove a slower success than the others mentioned. David MacFarland joined the team operating in Donaghadee. A tent mission was held and two of the converts of that mission became foundation members of the church formed on June 30th 1991. It is interesting to note that the Northern Baptist Association held summer services in Donaghadee for a few years. I myself had a summer appointment there in the early 1950s.

Crumlin appeared next on Derek's list. Harry Thomson joined the team and extensive visitation was done in the Crumlin and Glenavy districts. Jim led this team and a lot of hard work went into evangelism as Crumlin proved to be a difficult area with regard to the gospel. Bible studies

were held and at least one soul saved. A house was purchased and used for the church services but the work was still slow. It is encouraging to note that Moira, Saintfield and Crumlin all now have their own church buildings. Jim would be thrilled if he was able to able to see the results of his work and others, indeed I can hear him say Praise the Lord.

In January 1985 Baptist Missions issued a document with the enterprising title "Strategy for the future in Ireland". It read as follows, "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". Jim Henry was pre-ordained of God and appointed by the Mission to be that evangelist. The abiding fruit has proved the wisdom of that strategy and divine guidance in the appointment of Jim to that position

Jim was versatile and this gift was employed in diverse forms of evangelism. His commendable motto was to have a meaningful conversation about Christ with everyone he met. His divers ministry is evidenced in the work he did together with his church planting endeavours. He led a team in Athlone during Cecil Johnston's time there. Jehovah's Witnesses were active in Magherafelt and he spent a short time there to combat their influence. June 1987 saw him lead a team in Letterkenny, preaching in the evenings and doing door-to-door work during the day, as well as a few coffee mornings. Such places as Downpatrick, Macosquin, Orangefield, Lisnagleer and Limavady experienced blessing from his ministry. He went to Gran Canaria for evangelistic meetings and was well received. He often expressed a wish to visit our missionaries in Peru but he knew that his state of health meant this was a non-starter. He often expressed the desire to have church planting teams in the South. If the Lord had permitted him to remain until retirement, I think he would have fulfilled this desire.

On Thursday September 12th 1991, I had been visiting the R.V.H. in Belfast and after returning home to Limavady, I went out to do some

pastoral work. I had just arrived home at 10:00 P.M. when the telephone rang. It was Jim Henry at the other end of the line. He mentioned two missions, which he had just conducted during the course of conversation. One seeming fruitless according to human reckoning, the other proved fruitful. He was talking about the strange providence of God, which gave fruit in one place and seemed to withhold it in the other. We usually phoned each other twice a week and there was nothing unusual about the conversation, apart from Jim's concern regarding an apparently fruitless mission recently held. At around 2:30 A.M. on the next morning, September 13th 1991, our telephone rang. At the other end of the phone was Maureen Henry saying that Jim had just died. He had departed this life at 2:00 A.M. just four hours after he had spoken to me. Jim had said to me that he had an envelope sealed and left in his study indicating what his funeral wishes were. We searched in vain for this envelope but I was aware of what the envelope contained. On Monday September 16th, the funeral and thanksgiving service for J.C. Henry was held in Gt.Victoria Street Baptist church. Pastor T.C. Brock conducted the service and Pastor J.R. Grant, secretary of the Baptist Union of Ireland, led in prayer. A tribute, on behalf of Baptist Missions, was given by Pastor D. Baxter, Missions secretary. A thanksgiving prayer, was led by Pastor R. McMullan and the address given by, Pastor J.A. Smyth. It was Jim's wish that the service would be one of joy and thanksgiving. The sympathising congregation gave united thanks as they sang three hymns; "I once was stranger to grace and to God" and "In loving kindness Jesus came". As the service drew to a close and before Pastor Brock prayed, the hymn "Face to face with Christ my Saviour" was feelingly sung. At 1:00P.M. the mortal remains of James Cowan Henry were laid to rest in Roselawn Cemetry. His soul had already been brought into the presence of the Saviour he trusted, loved and served. Sadly, most of us felt that life could never be the same again for us, as a brother loved had been taken from us. The trumpet had sounded on the other side and another saint had been welcomed to their eternal home. Reflecting on Jim's life, I want to pass some comments in conclusion.

His illness was severe and restrictive. I discussed with him the possibility of divine healing according to James chapter 5 but he never asked for anointing with oil or the prayer of faith taught in that chapter. He looked so well with his well-groomed hair that he often said few had sympathy with him. His family life was excellent and his generosity well known. There was no one like his Maureen, he loved her dearly and provided for her worthily. His daughters, Gail and Karen, were the apple of his eye. Sons-in-law and grandchildren were constantly brought before the Lord in prayer. He also had an exceptional love for his wider family circle.

Theologically, he was difficult to categorise. He refused to be pigeon holed into a theological straight jacket. He had a bent towards the reformed position but felt it had reduced gospel fervour. It should not of course do so but Jim thought it had done so unnecessarily. He was no slouch either when it came to extensive reading in the theological field and was a leader of men. He was firm but fair with men who had done part time assistantships with him in his pastoral ministries. He was known to have private conversations with such men, giving advice with strength and heart felt sympathy. He was an inspiration and example to team members in his Baptist Missions days. In his personal work and door-to-door work, he was persistent and at times almost aggressive. He was never a committee man as they seemed tedious and repetitive to Jim. Being a man of action, he felt committees spent hours deliberating and bore little fruit, but at the same time, he recognised their necessity. In some ways he was an individualist but was able to submit to the wisdom of others when occasion arose. I remember him being asked to address a meeting, which had a charismatic ethos. He spoke to me about it and declined the offer, as he desired not to allow others to identify Baptist Missions with the meeting. Baptistically, he was strong and he appreciated the union of churches and what they had done for him.

In all his work, he was conscientious and meticulous. His preaching

was biblical and Christ centred with the ingredients of warmth and enthusiasm. Personally I feel that Jim was at his best when preaching on themes connected with the cross work of the Lord Jesus Christ. His preaching was direct and challenging and the applicatory ingredient of his preaching was always evident. I have in my possession his copy of C.H. Spurgeon's New Park Street Pulpit for 1855. In the preface Jim has underlined some of Spurgeon's remarks as follows. "The preaching of the Word by the chosen servants of the living God is the ordained means for the gathering in of the elect". "Sermons are valuable in proportion as they speak of Him and point to Him". Writing of himself, Spurgeon has these words "He is not quite sure about a smile being a sin and at any rate he thinks it less a crime to cause a momentary laughter than a half hours profound slumber". I believe that James Cowan Henry had a great affinity with Spurgeon's remarks as they fitted in nicely with Jim's ethos. In his pastoral ministry, he invariably preached evangelistically once every Sunday. He strongly believed that no one should enter our churches and go out not knowing their need of salvation and how to be saved. In his ministry generally he was a textual preacher. His directness, both publicly in his preaching and in his personal contacts, sometimes caused offence. I know that Jim had a very soft heart, sometimes obscured by his directness but it was ever present. He was a faithful colleague in the gospel. Though he had hurts and offences during his ministry and suffered severely from physical illnesses, he was never soured, resentful or filled with self-pity. Like Paul, he finished the course, fought a good fight and kept the faith. If it were possible, what message would Jim send us today? Continue to preach the gospel and remain united in the essentials. We salute the memory of one of the characters of our union of churches. May we all follow him in so far as he followed his Lord.

Irish Baptist Historical Society

Annual Report 2003

Dr. Joshua Thompson stepped down from his role as Secretary of the Historical Society in September, and the new working arrangements agreed, that it should operate as part of the College work, came into effect then. The IBHS Committee is now a sub-committee of the College Board, made up of both College Board members and members if the Historical Society.

Tow meeting were held in September and November. Mr Brian Weir presented a short 'History of the Armagh Baptist Church' at the first and Pastor J A Smyth delivered a paper on 'The Life and Work of Pastor J C Henry' at the second. Both were appreciated and well received by the very good number of members and friends who attended.

Plans for the coming year include Dr Maurice Dowling reflecting on the Sandown Road years of the College, and Pastor Liam Goligher, our Assembly speaker, who will reflect in his ministry experiences since leaving Irish Baptist circles.

Finally thank you for your support through your prayers, your financial contributions, and the many others ways in which you encourage us in the ministry given to us at the College.

Irish Baptist Historical Society
(Formed 1968)

The Secretary
Irish Baptist Historical Society
The Baptist Centre
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