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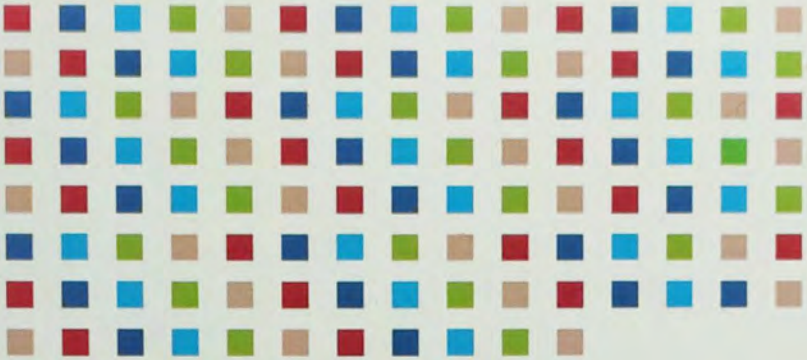


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The Irish Baptist Historical Society

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Editorial

Our meetings in 2010 again stretched across the centuries and addressed aspects of church history diverse in their focus but united in their ultimate goal.

In March Mr Robert FitzPatrick presented the history of Great Victoria Street Baptist Church, Belfast from its origins until 1947. This is a fascinating history, tracing the beginnings of Baptist work in Belfast to the birth and establishment of what became Great Victoria Street Church. The image we are left with is a series of outstanding preachers and buildings overflowing with men and women anxious to hear the gospel. A remarkable era and a remarkable work of God.

In 2009 our focus was on the 1859 Revival and in May 2010 Dr Graham Cheesman drew our attention to one of the great works that emerged from 1859. The Bible College Movement was born out a sense of urgency to send the gospel to the unevangelized corners of the world. The study of theology was replaced by practical preparation to preach the gospel. Dr Cheesman detailed the origin, structure, objectives and subsequent history of the Movement over the next 150 years.

In October a large number gathered to hear Dr Samuel Webb tell the Story of The King James Bible. This had been very well researched and was very well presented with a number of interesting illustrations and a wealth of fascinating detail. The story of men and movements who were prepared to give all to give the English people a Bible in their own language, combined with the efforts of Kings and Queens to use the Bible for personal and political objectives, finally resulted in King James I authorizing the publication of an English translation that was to be a source of immeasurable spiritual benefit to the English speaking world for the next 300 years and beyond.

About Our Contributors

Robert FitzPatrick BA, MA

Having attended Methodist College as a boy, Robert read Honours History at Queen's University, Belfast, and then qualified as a teacher prior to taking a post at Ballyclare High (Grammar) School. As Head of History he was deeply involved in developing the NI History curriculum and was an examiner in 'A' level History. He also undertook further study which led to a Masters Degree in 20th Century, from the University of Ulster, and the Diploma in Curriculum Studies, from QUB, before becoming Vice-Principal. Following a time working with the Department of Education's Inspectorate, he returned to Ballyclare, in 1990, where he spent 10 years as Headmaster. Since 1999 he has been involved with the Regional Training Unit in various programmes for the development and improvement of school leaders and he still works there in a part-time capacity. As a member of the Great Victoria Street church from the 1960s Robert has had a long interest in its history, the second part of which (1947-2007) he is now attempting to complete.

Graham Cheesman BD, MPhil, PhD

Graham was a Baptist pastor in England before taking further study and going as a missionary lecturer to Nigeria for 7 years. He returned to become principal of Belfast Bible College for 17 years and then director of the Centre for Theological Education. He now works with the European Evangelical Accrediting Association and continues to teach, supervise and examine for Queens University and in other situations. He has published three books, including his PhD thesis on the bible college movement in the UK.

Samuel W Webb BSc, MD, FRCP

Samuel W Webb graduated in Medicine from Queen's University, Belfast, and was a Consultant Cardiologist in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast. Married to Ruth, they have 2 children and 5 grandchildren. He is a member of Windsor Baptist Church and enjoys Astronomy, Philately and collecting meteorites! Now retired he has the opportunity to pursue his interests in Church and British History - both of which come together in his account of the history of the King James Bible.

A Shorter History of Great Victoria Street Baptist Church 1811-1949

Robert FitzPatrick

Introduction

In 1947 the congregation of Great Victoria Street Baptist Church had Centenary Celebration Meetings to mark the relocation of the congregation from its original site in King Street to new premises in Academy Street, from where it temporarily moved to Victoria Hall and thence to its present location in Great Victoria Street. It seemed, therefore, a fitting time to trace the history of the Church. This task was undertaken by Dane Skilling and published, in parts, in the 'Irish Baptist' magazine. By the time of the church's 150th anniversary in 1997 this account needed revival and extension and this was eventually undertaken, firstly in an analysis and summary of the extant Church Minute Books by Dr Joss Thompson and recently by the present author. The resultant first part of the Church History covering 1811-1947 was published in 2009 and the second part dealing with developments since 1947 is in progress. It is a narrative rather than thematic history with sections largely based on the periods spent in particular buildings and focusing on the church's pastors. A separate publication compiled by Beth Glendinning deals in detail with the missionary and evangelistic outreach of approximately 100 members in the past 100 years.

Early years and the King Street premises

In 1655, 150 ministers, selected by Cromwell and his officers, were distributed all over Ireland. About 130 were Independents or Baptists. In 1657 there were two ministers in Belfast, Essex Digby an Episcopalian clergyman and William Dix, who was a Baptist. Digby's salary was £120 a year, '*similar in amount with that which was bestowed on the Baptist minister in the town, who was the favoured of the ruling powers' (George Benn's History of Belfast*).[1]

Henry Cromwell in 1657 received *'a Petition from Mr William Dix by which it appears that while divers sober and peaceable people were in the public meeting place in Belfast to hear Mr Dix and to seek the Lord, Mr Henry Livingston, preacher at Drumbo, came with a tumultuous assembly and with reviling pulled Mr Dix out of the pulpit affirming that . . they would do the like again'.*

The change in Henry Cromwell's policy ended the early Baptist presence in Belfast and there is no evidence of a continued Baptist witness in Belfast until after 1811.

Bradshaw's General and Commercial Directory, 1819 refers to *'1811. Baptist Meeting House, King St'.* 1811 not 1847 was therefore the founding date for the church that was to become 'Gt Vic'. The meeting-place in King Street was at No 18 where apparently there lived for a time John Reynolds, boot and shoemaker. The premises were nearly opposite the well known Savings Bank. Benn writing in 1823 referred to *'In King Street the most inconsiderable congregation in the town, called Baptists, have a small place of worship'.*

The origin of the Baptist cause in Belfast in 1811 is related to the work of the Haldane brothers. In 1801 James Haldane of Scotland visited the North of Ireland and around 1807 his brother Robert Haldane, having prepared young men for Gospel work, sent a number of them to do evangelistic work in Ireland. Hugh D Brown writing on the history of Irish Baptists stated *'Their labours resulted in that revival which came sweeping over the North of Ireland, emancipated the illustrious Doctor Alexander Carson*[2] *and led to the foundation of historic Tobermore, Coleraine and other smaller assemblies on Scotch Baptist principles'.* That such principles were the basis on which the Belfast church existed is clear from critical comments quoted in correspondence from Rev C H Hosken, a former agent of the Baptist Irish Society as;

> ' Belfast. *The greatest emporium of manufactures and commerce in the north of Ireland ... , has no regular baptist church. True, there is a church of Scotch baptists, namely : such as admit of no settled ministry. If brother A has a word of exhortation, he says it — if brother B has an exposition of scripture, he delivers it. The natural consequence of this negation of an important element in the Christian church — the stated ministry — is the entire absence of success'. The Baptist Irish Society would gladly send them a minister, but they were not, when I last heard from them, prepared to receive one. I trust, however, that these sincere, though, in this respect, mistaken brethren will soon see their error, and under a suitable leader, make inroads upon the kingdom of darkness, and take part in the onward progress and glorious triumphs of Immanuel'.*

The evidence is strong that the King Street church adopted most, if not all of the 'Scotch' Baptist principles and practice. The consequence is that there it did not have a settled ministry until it was decided to reconstitute the church under the aegis of the Baptist Irish Society in 1847.

Dane Skilling stated that the early Belfast directories and almanacs, while mentioning the place of meeting, made no reference to the name of a pastor or preacher prior to 1847. However Pigot's Directory of 1824, listing the Belfast churches and their ministers, gives clearly the name of the Baptist minister in King Street as John Kilpatrick. When we get into the record of the 1840's we read that the preachers were 'various' (with services at 11am and 7pm). The role of 'pastor' from 1824-40 is unclear. In a brief history of the church, written in 1897 by Pastor McKinney, who was a former member, we are informed that in the early stages of the Church's life *'the pastor was an aged man, who also engaged in the business of linen weaving. It was during his ministry that Mr Wilson, a Presbyterian minister of Belfast, was baptised and joined the Church. On the death of the old pastor, Mr Wilson was chosen to the pastorate and served for several years. It was in his house that Dr Alexander Carson of Tobermore died while on his way home from London. Wilson was a good man and a diligent preacher but he was at the mercy of a morbid conscience, so much so that he divided the Church on small matters till only himself and his wife re-mained in fellowship. I remember hearing him preach on the Quay when I was a boy. About this time Mr Hugh Swain, who had been on the old Belfast Town Mission, became a member. He also acted for a short time as pastor. He was a good man and lived down into 'the sixties'.'*

The 1843 Directory has the entry *'Wilson, Rev Robert, Pastor of the Seaman's Chapel, residence, 32 Dock Street'*. It would therefore seem that this was the house to which Alexander Carson was taken and died after his accident in 1844. Dr. Carson died on 24 August 1844 and that date serves to indicate the time of Mr Wilson's pastorate. The account of Carson's death was published in the Baptist Magazine, 1844. The small size of the Belfast congregation is illustrated by Moore, the biographer of Alexander Carson, describing the celebration of the Lord's Supper in Wilson's house on 18 August during Carson's fatal illness. The 1843-44 Henderson's Directory clearly places the Baptist Church in King Street as *'Baptist Meetinghouse, King Street, Various (preachers), Sunday, 11am & 7pm'* and it is presumably on this work that Wilson is reporting back to the Baptist Irish Society in the above extracts from the Baptist Magazine, 1844.

Rev Robert Wilson, however, also appears as the minister, or chaplain, of a Seamen's Chapel in Pilot Street as *'Seamen's Chapel, Pilot Street, Robert*

Mr. Wilson, of Belfast, June 18th:—

A very interesting field of labour has been opened at Carrickfergus. On my recent visit there I baptized three persons, who bid fair to be useful. The friends there are meeting with much opposition, but they are steadily pursuing their way. They have established prayer meetings, and opened a Sunday-school. A church is formed consisting of five members. I can only go there once a month; and on my next visit, I expect some additions to their number.

The station at Spa Wells flourishes. The attendance last Tuesday was encouraging. As I proposed visiting the families in the neighbourhood on the following day, I gave out preaching for the evening also. I did not expect many, but the number was nearly as large as the *preceding* evening, and a very unusual degree of attention was manifested. In some of the families I had pleasing proofs that previous visits had not been vain; and there is abundant reason to hope, that in a short time fruit will be gathered in this place.

Reports to the Baptist Magazine in England giving some information on Wilson's role in the 1840s

RECENT DEATHS.

DR. CARSON.

Our readers will participate in the regret with which we to have announce that a fatal result has ensued from the accident mentioned in our last as having befallen this eminent writer. He had been travelling for the Baptist Missionary Society a few weeks, visiting Birmingham and a part of South Wales, and had returned in safety as far as Liverpool. On the evening of the 17th of August, he was walking along the Liverpool Dock, waiting for the departure of the steamer for Belfast, when, just as the lamps were lighted, having taken out his watch to ascertain the time, while replacing it he stepped over the side of the dock into deep water. His fall was observed, and a boy passing at the time with a ladder, it was put down instantly by a custom-house officer, who descended and laid hold of him. A small boat immediately pushed from the quay, in which he was placed and taken to the steam-boat. It being found that one of his shoulders was dislocated, this was set; and proceeding on his voyage he arrived at Belfast on Saturday evening. He went immediately to the house of Mr. Wilson, the baptist minister, who received him hospitably, and who with his family treated him with a kindness which Dr. Carson's relatives appreciate very highly. A violent congestion of blood in the lungs came on, and he was soon in a very dangerous condition. The medical assistance rendered by two of the physicians of Belfast, and by his son, Dr. Carson of Coleraine, who reached him on Monday, relieved him in some measure, and he was thought to be improving till the following Friday evening, when an unfavourable change took place, and about eight o'clock on the morning of Saturday, August 24th, he expired.

Wilson, Sunday, 11am, & 7pm, Thur 7pm'.[3] That it is the same Rev Robert Wilson seems clear from his reference *'this interesting station has opened through my preaching on board vessels'*. The Belfast Street Directory for 1852 places the Chapel at the end of Pilot Street (beyond No 31) as *'Seaman's Friend Chapel, and National School; teacher of male school, Mr James Houston; teacher of female school, Miss Dorrans; various preachers'*.[4] This would appear to be the *'suitable place of worship ... occupied during the week as an academy, for which we pay £10 per annum'*.

During the period of the after effects of the Great Irish Famine (c 1845-1847) this work was supported, at least partly, through the 'Baptist Irish Society'. The Society had established a relief fund and used part of it *'to set up reading rooms and a seamen's chapel'*.[5] As seemed common among those who were 'agents' of the Baptist Irish Society, Wilson must have had some freedom as to the various evangelical outreaches in which he could be engaged as he also worked in Carrickfergus and Spa (Ballynahinch).

Hugh Swain, who succeeded Rev Wilson, is included in the Directories as a grocer who lived in Belfast from 1843 to 1870 and that he had a shop at Queen's Square.[6] The Directories also included the entry *'Mr Hugh Swain, Town Missionary. Shop. Queen's Square.'* There seems to be no doubt, therefore, that the person mentioned in the directories is the same man who was pastor at some time between 1844 and 1847. Changes in denominational representation having taken place in the old Town Mission in 1843, it is possible that they had the result of freeing Mr Swain for pastoral work.

As early as 1838 correspondents from Belfast to the Baptist Missionary Society in England argued the case for purchase of proper premises for a church. In October 1838, a Mr Young, who appears to be an agent of the Baptist Irish Society and who on occasions preached in Belfast, wrote, *'We will never be able to get a respectable audience till we have a place of worship as the Belfast people are inclined to despise the accommodation which a hired room affords.'* At this stage he recommended the purchase of Beth Birel Chapel in York Street that the Methodist New Connexion church was selling. This suggestion was not acted upon and the directories indicate that in 1852 these premises were occupied by the Unitarians.

From an article which appeared in the Irish Baptist Magazine for June, 1897, we learn that in 1847 *'there were only twenty Baptists in Belfast. They met in a small hall (ie in King Street). In the latter year Church premises in Academy Street were obtained and to these the congregation moved in 1847'.*

The church in Academy Street and W S Eccles

In 1847, in what generally was a year of death, Belfast Baptists showed signs of life and moved from their rented accommodation in King Street to a church which they purchased in Academy Street. This was obtained through the Baptist Irish Society which, in the year 1847, transferred the Rev William Sloan Eccles from Coleraine to take over the pastorate of the Belfast church.

William Sloan Eccles was born of farm stock in Moneymore in 1816. After a 'long agony of soul' during which his family feared for his sanity he came to the point of conversion. He entered the Belfast Academical Institution as a student for the Presbyterian ministry where he impressed with his classical knowledge. In the religious debating club at the college he was asked to take a defensive (paedobaptist) position in a debate on baptism but found no scriptural basis for it. He was then baptised, possibly in Tobermore. Encouraged by Haldane and Carson he entered Bristol Baptist College but found he was hampered by his strong Ulster accent and left to go to Paris to teach English. He joined the Baptist Irish Society and was sent to Coleraine. Under his ministry the church there grew and a new building was opened in 1842. He was transferred to Belfast much to the regret of the Coleraine church.

The church in Academy Street, which was bought in 1847, had been used as a Chapel of Ease in connection with the Parish of St Anne's and in the 1830s had been a Methodist chapel. To it there was attached a sexton's house which became Rev W S Eccles' residence until he removed to Eglinton Street. The church and sexton's house were about fifty-five feet square. According to Eccles' report to the Baptist Magazine in *1847 'it will accommodate fully six hundred persons'*. When Eccles settled in Belfast in 1847 he was only thirty-one years of age. He was evidently not only an attentive pastor but he also took an active part in both the work of the denomination and in evangelical work in Belfast generally. He was actively interested in the interdenominational Evangelical Alliance. In 1847 he gave a course of eight lectures on baptism in response to Dr Wilson of the Presybterian Assembly College. He was one of the first ministers to hold outdoor meetings and even during the spasmodic riots of the time he was able to do so without protection.

In the 1851 edition of the Baptist Missionary Herald it was recorded that:

> *'The Rev. W.S Eccles has been pastor of the baptist church (in Belfast) from the time of its formation, about four years ago; deriving his support principally from our Society. The church consisted originally of seventeen persons; sixty-one have since been added: but the losses sustained from death and removals, with the exclusion of four, have been considerable. reducing the present number of members to fifty-one. The panic occasioned by the famine led many to emigrate; but on the whole the church is prosperous.'*

THE NEW CHAPEL

Is spacious and comfortable. It will accommodate fully six hundred persons. It is situated in a populous but godless part of the town, where we trust the preaching of the word will be a cause of lasting benefit. It is still subject to a considerable debt, owing to the nature of the past season. When thousands were dying of hunger, money could not be expected for chapel purposes. Applications for assistance were stayed until the appearance of better times.

PROSPECTS.

The door appears to be evidently opened by the hand of God. Many facilities on which I had not calculated have been afforded me since my arrival. Obstacles, too, which I dreaded, have been taken out of the way. "The breaker is come up before them."

Our beginning was small. On the first day of our meeting as a church our number was but fifteen. Since then we have received six; and I expect next week to baptize two candidates for fellowship. The congregation is encouraging, and the attendance increasing every Lord's day. The members are joined together in one heart and mind, and exhibit a warm and lively interest in the cause.

Account in the Baptist Magazine of the New Chapel 1847

In the public meeting of the Baptist Irish Society in 1854 W S Eccles' position as pastor in Academy Street was described as: *'In Belfast, a town containing 100,000 inhabitants, we have an agent who is peculiarly valuable - a man thoroughly instructed in the Word of God, a man whose learning would put many of us to shame, a man of eminent piety and devotion to the cause in which he is engaged. He has managed to obtain a chapel which is now out of debt. A church has gathered round him, and he preaches there Sunday after Sunday with the most encouraging prospects. Our agent is held in very high esteem in that town'.*

The church in Academy Street and R M Henry

In the year 1824 a son, Robert Mitchell Henry, was born into the home of Rev Wm Henry AM (afterwards DD), minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Newtownards. Following in his father's footsteps, Mr Henry was ordained as a minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. He became assistant to, and afterwards succeeded, Rev John Alexander DD of the Dublin Road R P Church. Henry attended the lectures in Natural Science at Queen's College as an external student. He was greatly interested in, and had a wide knowledge of, Zoology, Botany and Geology. In the year 1858 he was Moderator of the Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Synod which included the Belfast and Londonderry Presbyteries.

The year he resigned his church he called the clergy and elders together and told them that he had been reading his Bible in Hebrew and Greek for years but failed to find anything in Scripture to warrant the baptising of infants. This unexpected declaration of Scripture truth was like a bomb dropped in their midst. There was a long silence. The first to jump up was John G McVicker of Cullybackey, a fellow-clergyman. *'What nonsense, Henry,'* he cried, *'doesn't Jesus say 'Suffer little children to come unto Me'?' 'Yes, Mr. McVicker,'* was the reply, *'but if you substitute baptism for the Lord, you can make anything you like out of the Scriptures. A thousand commands to bring children to Christ is not one to baptise them'.* It is interesting to notice that, apparently during the 1859 Revival, Rev John G McVicker had a remarkable experience of conversion while he was actually preaching. He was led into the light of believers' baptism and became the first pastor of the Ballymena church.

Early in the year 1858, Mr Henry was baptised by Rev W S Eccles, who was resolved to resign his pastorate to him against the wishes of the Irish Baptist Society and his Belfast congregation. In the same year Rev Henry succeeded Rev W S Eccles as pastor of the Academy Street Church.

During the 1859 Revival one of the most active workers was Rev R M Henry. He was present and took part in prayer at the first of the united prayer meetings held in connection with the movement. There are also reports of meetings in the Academy Street Church in which revival scenes were witnessed. A united prayer meeting was held in the Botanic Gardens on 29 June 1859—between ten and fifteen thousand persons were present. Rev R M Henry's name is given in the list of ministers occupying the platform. During the day a large number of people were brought under conviction of sin.

We know that R M Henry, *'acting as local correspondent for the English Baptist newspaper 'The Freeman' , forwarded regular reports on the striking effects of the revival in Belfast and in the church in Academy Street . He personally helped 18 prostitutes, who had professed conversion, to find employment and a place to live. In the 21 months to 31 March 1860, the Academy Street church had 124, which included 100 baptisms. Over the same period it lost 35 members through death and emigration'.* (Dr Joshua Thompson on 'Irish Baptists and the 1859 Revival')

In 1861 it was considered that a better church situation should be obtained. The Academy Street Church was sold to the Presbyterians for the sum of £375 and the Belfast Baptists worshipped in Victoria Hall during the next five years. The Academy Street Church was opened for Presbyterian Worship on 26 May 1861 and it was the base from which three Presbyterian churches originated, namely Clifton Street in 1861, Ekenhead in 1865 and Berry Street in 1869.

The question of the longer term influence of the 1859 Revival on the work of the church has yet to be resolved. It has been greeted enthusiastically as the 'Year of Grace' during which up to 100,000 souls were saved in Ulster. There has been, however, a much more pessimistic assessment of its permanent impact. For example in Tobermore Baptist Church the membership of 269 in March 1860 was reduced to 223 by March 1865. By March 1869, when there was not a single addition to the membership, the then pastor, Rev Carson, stated of the revival period *'out of some 80 or 90 individuals received at that time, scarcely one remains to us at this moment. And what is worse than their exclusion or withdrawal, their evil conduct, or their spiritual apathy, did not fail to leave its mark behind'.*

Moving from Academy Street

In a brief history of the church, prepared by David McKelvey c1900, he stated, with reference to the Academy Street premises, *'The extreme lowness and degraded condition of the inhabitants of this locality forced the brethren and sisters to remove to Victoria Hall where the services were conducted for many years, of which some of us have happy recollections'.* It must be remembered that there was only one Baptist church in Belfast at the time and if it was to develop and grow there was a need for its removal to a district which would be generally acceptable to its members and adherents. The ideal solution would have been, as with churches of other denominations, to have had both a church and a mission hall, but owing to the church's straitened financial circumstances, such an extension of its activities was not then possible.

In 1861 the Baptist Magazine reported, *'The church in Belfast is now raising an amount in aid of the ministry, which has enabled the Committee, with the full concurrence of the pastor, to lessen the grant made to that place'.* It was noted that; *'At Belfast a new chapel is about to be erected in a more eligible situation than that now occupied. In order to effect this desirable object the Committee have agreed to the sale of the chapel hitherto used. The church has engaged a suitable public hall for religious services during the time needful for the erection of the new chapel'.*

Although its aim was the 'Self-Support of the Churches in Ireland', the Baptist Irish Society (incorporated since 1865 with the evangelistic outreach on the mainland as the Baptist and Irish Baptist Home Mission), accepted that the Belfast church would still be dependent on British support in order to move from Academy Street .

That the removal to Victoria Hall was only a temporary expedient is clear from an extract from the diary of Rev James Morgan DD, contained in his autobiography. He has written as follows: *'February 23rd, 1861. Another new church is likely to be formed in Belfast. The Baptists have offered their church in Academy Street, for sale, intending to build elsewhere. It contains about five hundred sittings'.*

During the five years when the church met in Victoria Hall, where baptismal facilities were not available, it was customary to arrange for the baptisms to take place at Conlig. Many changes had taken place during the intervening fifty years since the church's origin. The population of Belfast had grown from approximately 28,000 in 1811 to 120,777 in 1861, but the proportionate increase in the membership of the Baptist church was even greater. From being 'the most inconsiderable congregation in the town', with seemingly less than twenty members, the church had increased to 128 members

Victoria Hall

Victoria Hall to which the Baptists moved was situated in Victoria Street near to the location of the Albert Memorial clock, which, however, was not erected until 1869. It was reached after an ascent of three flights of stairs and had accommodation for about five hundred persons. Before the opening of the Ulster Hall in 1862 Victoria Hall and the Music Hall (the Victoria Memorial Hall – since demolished) May Street were the only centres in Belfast for public meetings and entertainments. For example it was in Victoria Hall that, in 1858, the citizens of Belfast saw the celebrated midget, General Tom Thumb. He had already appeared three times before Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace. He drove to and from Victoria Hall in a most ornate

miniature carriage which resembled a huge walnut and opened like one. Charles Dickens made his debut in Belfast on Friday evening, 27 August 1858 in Victoria Hall by opening with his story *'A Christmas Carol'*. In the same place in October of the following year the renowned soprano, Jenny Lind, sang. The Hall was also recognised as being the home of Dr Corry's famous 'Diorama of Ireland.'

The Directory for 1880 shows that Wm Hastings, who was the architect of the church in Great Victoria Street, and other professionals occupied premises at the Victoria Hall, viz

No 20 Victoria Hall, Morrison Moore, caretaker
Hastings, William, architect & civil engineer
Waters, William R., surveyor & valuator
Belfast Conservative Association, Alex. Wilson, secretary
Rooms for Concerts & Public Meetings

The first record we have of a business meeting of the church is one which took place in Victoria Hall on Lord's Day, 26 April, 1863, at which eight resolutions were submitted and passed, two of them being as follows:

(1) That the list of church membership be revised and the cases of persons absenting themselves from public ordinances be brought under the notice of the church.

(7) That the Minutes of the Church meetings be entered in a book provided for the purpose, and that these Minutes be laid before the church at its next meeting for their confirmation.

The minutes make clear that strict attention was paid to the attendances of members not only at the ordinary services but also at the observances of the Lord's Supper. It is evident that it was the normal practice to transact the ordinary business of the church on the Lord's Day. The early minutes reveal that while some of what are contemporary problems had not arisen, others, of which we have little or no experience, were by no means uncommon. Terminations of membership because of intemperance and (fortunately at rare intervals) immorality, occurred. This is a reminder of the social conditions of the times rather than of a low standard of spirituality in the church.

Rev Kirtland, Secretary of the new Baptist and Irish Baptist Home Mission, included a brief account of his visit to the morning service in Victoria Hall during the July holiday period in 1865.

> *Lord's Day*, 16th, was divided between between Belfast and Carrickfergus. In the morning there was a very good congregation at the Victoria Hall, Belfast, where Mr. Henry now preaches, although below the average attendance, in consequence of some being away at the "shore." Amidst considerable discouragements,—arising chiefly from emigration and removals—the cause is still progressing. A superior chapel is being erected on one of the most commanding sites in the city, and there is ground for hoping that, with the Divine blessing, it will help to give the Denomination its proper status in the northern metropolis of Ireland.

Kirtland's Report 1865

Having made a temporary move from Academy Street to Victoria Hall in January 1861 and having in mind the idea of building a church, the members lost no time in getting down to the tasks of obtaining the necessary funds and choosing a site. It was resolved in 1863: *'That the Building Committee be authorised to make whatever agreement they may consider best in reference to the proposed site in Great Victoria Street.'* By June 1863, the church resolved: *'That Mr. Hastings be requested to act as architect on behalf of the church and at the usual remuneration for such professional labours.'*

A year later, on 25 September 1864, the Building Committee submitted its reports regarding the various estimates of the cost of building the church. It was agreed that the contract should be given to Messrs FitzPatrick who had also built the Albert Memorial, the Amiens St Station in Dublin and the McCausland Warehouses in Victoria Street, all to the plans of Hastings.

Pastor R M Henry appears to have had the distinction of being invited to be the first President of the Irish Association of Baptist churches in 1862-63. He was again President in 1865-66 and 1871-72.

Early in 1866 the present church building was ready for occupation and the removal from Victoria Hall took place. A number of members taking notice of the rapid growth of the population of the town (at this time about 150,000) decided to retain the use of the Hall and found a second church. Their foresight and activity led to the formation in the following year of what is now the Antrim Road Baptist Church which met in Victoria Hall until its removal to Regent Street in 1871.

It is somewhat surprising that, in those early days, individuals were received into membership from the Brethren without interview by representatives of the church, but it is evident from the minutes that this was, in fact, the case.



This is the earliest known photograph of the Great Victoria Street premises. It can be dated approximately to 1890, after the building of the Sunday School premises at the rear, and the wall at the side (1884). It pre-dates the building of the caretaker's house to the extreme left of the frontage (1895).

Great Victoria Street 1866-1875

These premises were opened for public worship on Sunday, 8 April, 1866

In accordance with a recommendation of the Baptist Irish Society the church's doctrinal basis was embodied in the Deed which requires the pastor to be a Baptist but allows the church freedom of choice as to whether to restrict communion or membership to baptised believers. In actual practice membership has been confined to those who have been immersed after profession of faith in Christ, except on a very rare occasion when the candidate was, and was likely to remain, in a delicate state of health.

In February 1869 the church minutes record *'about this time it was decided at a business meeting of the church that the Communion of the Lord's Supper should be opened to accredited believers though unbaptised'*. This changed the practice of the church that seems to have been in place since it origins. The decision was not generally acceptable. Several members left

and met for worship in a mission hall on the Old Lodge Road until 21 July 1878, when 25 members of the secession church united with the mother church on condition that the Lord's Supper would be restricted to baptised believers. That position obtained for a long time but gradually there was a return to the practice of open communion, a regularising motion being passed on 3 February 1932.

There is no available information about the cost of the church building. Grants of varying amounts aggregating £340 were obtained from the Baptist Irish Society. The debt on the Building Fund was finally cleared early in 1877, which would appear to be about the time when the church became financially self-supporting.

In March 1869, Rev Dr Price of Aberdare made a tour of the Irish Baptist churches with the object of gaining information for use in joint deputation work in America with Pastor Henry. Dr Price and M Henry remained in America from 20 April to 4 December 1869. During the fortnight ending 23 February 1873, the members were greatly cheered by a spiritual awakening especially amongst the young people of the church and the scholars in the Sunday school. Special meetings were held every night and many, chiefly young persons, were led to accept Christ as Saviour. In the following year revival times were experienced in Belfast in connection with the visit of Moody and Sankey. These facts probably account for the comparatively large increase of 43 persons in the membership during the eighteen months ending June 1875 when there were 182 members on the roll.

On 19 September 1874 Pastor Henry intimated that he thought it right to resign his appointment as an Agent of the Baptist Irish Society on account of a change in his views regarding 'the administration of the Church of God and the support of the ministry'. The church approved of the resignation and indicated that it wished him to continue as pastor. He remained in that role until the 11 July 1875 when he read a statement to the church *'expressing his dissent from several prevailing principles and practices of the Baptist denomination'* and on that account resigned from the pastorate. The issue for consideration was *'whether the church should be guided by the Word of God alone or also by the Baptist Denomination in its principles and practices, and in connexion with this to settle if possible some matters of difference in reference to the name of the church (he wanted to remove the title 'Baptist' from the church's name) – the occupation of the place of worship and the pastorate'*. Up to 70 other members left the church at the same time and Mr Henry began holding meetings in the Ulster Minor Hall.[7] These were continued in the Orange Hall, Sandy Row, from about 1882 until shortly

before Mr Henry's death, in 1891, when removal to Apsley Street took place. Professor Henry, the eldest son of Rev R M Henry stated that his father was never a member of the Apsley Street Assembly and that he had made it clear to him that *'he never joined the Brethren'* but that he and they merely happened to coincide in certain beliefs and practices. R M Henry regarded himself as the pastor of the Sandy Row Assembly and was so regarded by its members. There was no parallel to this among the Brethren. He retained his clerical habit of dress to the last.

Rev S A Swaine (1876 – 1878)

For several reasons Pastor Henry's resignation was a severe blow to the fellowship. He had rendered yeoman service to the Baptist cause in Belfast and for many years he had occupied a position of leadership in interdenominational evangelistic efforts.

In June 1876, an invitation to the pastorate was extended to Rev Stephen Albert Swaine who had preached in the church on two Sundays in May. Mr Swaine began his ministry on 3 September 1876. He had come from Wantage and *'harmony was restored where formerly there had been division; the congregations increased so that the erection of a gallery became necessary; the baptistery which had been closed for a long time was re-opened, additions were made to the membership, cottage meetings were held..and amid the general prosperity the previously leavening influence of hyper-Calvinism ceased to be a cause of embarrassment'.* Mr Swaine is described as having *been 'one of the most successful preachers and devoted pastors that the community had known. On more than one occasion he had very flattering offers of preferment in the Church of England, but could not, of course, accept them' (Baptist Handbook, 1894).*

The stance of R M Henry about the nature of the ministry and his resignation led to much rumour according to an account in the Irish Baptist Magazine by Rev John Douglas of his visit to Ireland in 1878. He wrote *'rumour with her thousand tongues had ventured to insinuate that this church was afflicted with Plymouth heresy. I could not discover the slightest symptom of the dire disease. The order of public worship is precisely that of the Baptist church at Tubbermore. The greatest apparent harmony subsists among the members'*

Mr Swaine's ministry in Belfast was very brief, lasting only from September 1876 to May 1878. Having been used to an 'American' organ in the services at Wantage, it is not surprising that he brought up the question of instrumental music in the Belfast church, with the result that on 31 December 1876, there was an almost unanimous vote in favour of the innovation. Such

unanimity on a subject which was at that time and for years afterwards hotly debated in other denominations was a remarkable achievement.

Mr Swaine was also responsible for another innovation in the church. A 'Basket Society' was set up, in connection with which needlework was done and sold for the benefit of the Building Fund and other objects. The society appears to have been the forerunner of sales of works (which for years afterwards were by no means infrequent) and women's meetings. During his brief stay in Belfast, Mr Swaine's activity on behalf of the denomination included the Secretaryship of the Irish Baptist Association and probably his most notable contribution to Irish Baptist work was his introduction of *'The Irish Baptist'* in the year 1877. He and Dr Eccles were joint editors of the magazine during the first year of its existence but it is on record that Mr Swaine was the means of establishing the magazine. He became sole editor in the year 1878.

During the first year of his ministry between 40 and 50 members were added to the church, but *'extravagant expectations, a desire to build a large Tabernacle, for which the means were not forthcoming, financial and other difficulties in the church'*, led to Mr Swaine's resignation from the pastorate of the church in 1878.

Rev William Usher (1880 – 1892)

The church was without a pastor from May 1878 until Lord's Day, 6 March 1880, when Rev William Usher, formerly of Dacre Park Chapel, Blackheath, London, commenced a ministry of great influence and blessing. He was born in Manchester on 1 April 1848 and in his testimony, which appeared in 'The Baptist Gleaner' for May 1878, he wrote: *'I was taken to a church of the establishment to be sprinkled, my father and mother both belonging to that body. When I was quite a child my father was taken away by death and, at the early age of twelve, I left school to receive a business training, Before this an important change had taken place in the religious views of my mother and she was led to embrace the Roman Catholic faith. I, being too young to give serious and independent thought to the subject, was also initiated into that faith by being 'poured upon' in the vestry of St. Augustine's Chapel, Manchester, which, strange to say, is located exactly opposite the church in which I was sprinkled.'*

The first church year book was issued after Pastor Usher came. It relates to the year ended 31 January 1880 and contains the 'Hints to Members' and the other main features of present-day issues of the year book. A system of issuing communion tickets so that the attendance of members at the Lord's

table might be registered and supervised was introduced but, although such a method had produced satisfactory results in 'Spurgeon's Tabernacle', it failed to do so in Belfast, and in less than three years was discontinued.

A careful record of membership was necessary after R M Henry's departure in 1875 as up to 70 members left to join with him in Sandy Row. In 1878 there were 169 members. Before 1878 records of members deal largely with roll revision and do not provide a complete record of those recognised as members. The minutes for 1878 provide names and addresses of members and often the date of baptism. The practice was that those baptised were added to the church almost immediately. It is noteworthy that one of the members – Mrs Armstrong – had joined the church in 1842 (at a time when the membership in King Street would not have exceeded 15).

In the early days of Pastor Usher's ministry the need for Sunday School accommodation arose, the number of scholars having risen to about 150. Plans and specifications prepared by Mr J Livesey, Sunday School superintendent, were accepted by the church. The erection of the building was entrusted to Messrs Dunlop Bros and the work was supervised by Mr William Hastings (jun), architect. Mr Livesey acted as clerk of works. Memorial stones were laid by Mrs Henry McClelland and R G Glendinning Esq on Saturday, 13 December 1884, when an appropriate address was delivered by Pastor Usher to the large assembly of people who gathered for the ceremony.[8] The school was publicly opened on 29 June 1885.

A bazaar was held in the new schoolroom in October 1885 with the twofold object of clearing the debt in the church's current account and providing furniture for the Sunday school.

On 14 February 1886 special services were held in the Ulster Hall to mark the re-opening of the church after extensive repairs and improvements. The special preacher was Rev V J Charlesworth who brought a choir of boys from the Stockwell Orphanage to assist with the singing. There were large attendances at the morning and afternoon services. The hall was completely filled at the evening service. Liberal offerings were received.

To increase his usefulness, especially amongst the poorer classes, Pastor Usher became a medical student in Queen's College, Belfast, and graduated as an MD of the Royal University of Ireland in 1887. The further degrees of BAO and BCh were obtained in 1888 and 1891, respectively. On 18 January 1891 he announced that he would place his medical knowledge gratuitously at the disposal of such church members as might desire to consult him in the interests of themselves or their children, but that he could in no way interfere by advice or opinion where a medical man was already in attendance.

From the 1880s until 1928 a substantial amount of spiritual and financial support for the church was given by Robert Graham Glendinning. Born in Tyrone in 1844 and brought up as a Presbyterian he had emigrated to the USA at the age of 11. He often told how as a young soldier aged 18 in the Union Army during the Civil War he was inspected by Abraham Lincoln while on guard duty at a prisoner of war camp. About this time he was converted and, as described by his great-niece, *'he became a confirmed Strict Baptist and adhered to this sect throughout the rest of his life'.* He became a member of the church on 12 April 1885 on transfer from Washington Avenue Baptist Church, Brooklyn, USA. On 20 June 1929 a tablet bearing the following inscription was unveiled in the church by Mr A H Glendinning (jun), grandson of the subject of the memorial:

> *'In loving and grateful memory of the Rt. Hon. Robert Graham Glendinning, D.I., J.P., who departed this life the 8th June, 1928, aged 84 years. Erected by Great Victoria Street Baptist Church of which he was a generous supporter, devoted member and office-bearer for forty-three years. A man greatly beloved.'*

At the unveiling of the tablet, high tribute was paid to the memory of Mr Glendinning including the following remarks:

> *'the Right Honourable R.G. Glendinning, who for nearly half a century was a devoted member and faithful office--bearer of this church, and whose gracious personality, generous benefactions, and saintly character were a constant benediction to the entire Fellowship. Mr. Glendinning possessed so many excellent qualities that one can safely speak of him in the highest terms, without exceed-ing the range of actual truth. Our brother was one of the finest types of what a Christ -ian should be that I have ever known. So gracious in spirit, wise in counsel, loyal in friendship and generous to a fault; a true gentleman always in every meaning of the word. I do not think there is a single church of our faith and order in Ireland that has not at some time or other benefited by his generous ministry. Only eternity will reveal what our denomination owes to our brother in this connection'.*

Glendinning was a prosperous man, having established the linen manufacturing firm of Glendinning, McLeish and Co with premises in Murray Street and offices in New York and Paris. He also entered politics in 1905 and became *'the only native Irish Baptist representative to be elected to parliament at Westminster'*, as Member of Parliament for North Antrim. His politics were in general 'liberal' or rather anti-landed interests and in his election he was supported by radical elements such as the Belfast Protestant Association and the Independent Orange Order.

Investments were purchased on behalf of the church at the instance, and with the generous help, of Mr Glendinning with the result that the church by 1947 was in possession of substantial assets which provide a valuable source of income for both the church and the Sunday School. Except for a comparatively trifling sum, the cost of the pipe organ, installed in 1937, was met out of the Organ Fund which was composed of investments provided for the purpose by Mr Glendinning.

Mr Glendinning was elected to the Presidential Chair of the Baptist Union of Ireland for the year 1890-1891. He was also the recipient of several honours, including appointments to the Magistrate's Bench (1901), His Majesty's Privy Council (1911) and as one of His Majesty's Deputy Lieutenants.

Outreach and expansion 1880-1892

During Usher's pastorate an Evangelical Association of lay preachers within the membership, introduced in Pastor Swaine's time, rendered excellent service in arranging cottage meetings and supplying outstations. In the first report (1890) presented by an Irish Committee in connection with the work of the Home Mission the following paragraph appears:

> *Belfast District - Conlig, Ballykeel, Lurgan, Newtownards. These four stations have been supplied by members of the Great Victoria Street Lay Preachers' Association under the direction of Dr. Usher and Mr. R. G. Glendinning. The expense of each visit was paid out of the mission. At Ballykeel a wooden Gospel Hall has been erected at a cost of £80.*

The Conlig Church was formed in 1840 when a number of English workers, who were Baptists, found employment in the local quarries.[9] It was the scene of the splendid ministry of men like Rev D Mulhern and of a witness, notable in many respects during its existence, throughout a period of about half a century. Its cessation was due to the return to Great Britain of the quarry workers when the quarries were closed.

During the 1880s the question of the kind of wine which should be used at communion services gave rise to much discussion all over the North of Ireland and led to divisions and trouble in some churches. The subject was discussed on more than one occasion during Dr Usher's pastorate and, on 15 April 1888, the church decided in favour of the use of unfermented wine only.

On 10 April 1889 a special meeting was held to consider a generous offer by an anonymous friend, acting through Mr H H Graham. This friend (now known to have been Mr R G Glendinning) promised the sum of £400 towards the pruchase of a manse conditionally upon the sum of £600 being raised (but not borrowed) by the church within a period of two years. The offer was accepted and Mr W J McCombe was appointed treasurer of the fund concerned. Plans for the raising of the £600 included a visit to America by Dr Usher who returned from there in August 1889. The donor's condition was fulfilled and a great thanksgiving meeting was held on 9 April 1891, when Mr. Graham handed over a cheque for £400. No 40 Botanic Avenue was purchased as a manse and the balance was invested on behalf of the church. The manse was sold in September 1908 and the amount realised was used in the purchase of ground rents, the income being applied for the benefit of the church.

The largest gathering at which Dr Usher ever spoke was the great Unionist Convention held on 17 June 1892 at 'The Plains', adjacent to the Botanic Gardens, in a large wooden building, the planning and construction of which within the short period of a month were regarded as a remarkably good architectural and engineering achievement. The purpose of the Convention was to protest, on the eve of an election, against Gladstone's Home Rule policy. The Duke of Abercorn presided over the huge attendance, which included almost twelve thousand delegates from all over Ulster. The speakers were the Right Hon the Earl of Erne; Sir W Q Ewart; Thomas Sinclair Esq, JP, and other outstanding men in the political life of Ulster, as well as the Revs Dr R R Kane (Church of Ireland); Dr R J Lynd (Presbyterian); Dr McCutcheon (Methodist); Dr Usher (Baptist); and James Cregan (Congregationalist).

Although Dr Usher spoke at the gathering he made it clear that he considered that ordinarily it was inadvisable for ministers of the Gospel to take a prominent part in political affairs. It is interesting to notice that another outstanding Baptist, ie Brigade Surgeon Watters CB, JP of Tobermore, was also present and took part in the demonstration.

During the twelve years of Pastor Usher's ministry he received about 300 members, half of whom had been baptised by him and he baptised about fifty others who did not join the church. He had the interests of the church, the denomination and the Lord's work generally very much at heart. In November 1892 he accepted an invitation to become pastor of Orpington Baptist Church, Kent. Dr Usher was presented with a gold watch and a purse of sovereigns. Members of all denominations contributed towards the presentation. The Duke of Abercorn, Lord Arthur Hill, G W Wolff Esq and Sir William Ewart sent subscriptions.

On his departure from Belfast it was said of Pastor Usher *'When he came to them first the church was a small missionary one and their former pastor was kept up by a contribution from an English society. When Dr Usher came that contribution was stopped, and the total income of the church did not amount to more than £150, whereas the total income in the thirteen years the pastor was with them came as close as £300.'*

Rev Albert Walker (1893 -1897)

Usher's successor was Rev Albert Walker who was trained at Manchester Baptist College and Manchester University. He responded to the church's call on 28 August 1893. He was only twenty-two years of age at the time and Great Victoria Street Church was his first charge.

Mr Walker found his bride in the church in the person of Miss Livesey, a gifted singer, to whom he was married in the early part of 1896.

In the year 1894 extensive repairs to the church were necessary. After discussion in which some suggestion was made for relocation of the church it was decided to refurbish the building and the gallery was then added. The reopening services were spread over three Sundays. In the early months of the year 1895 the church officer's house was built at a cost of £112. Originally numbered 26½ Great Victoria St. the number was changed to 66 (the church building becoming 66a). It was notionally 8 feet wide, but was also extended into the original church building to provide extra living and bedroom areas. It provided a home for its original caretaker, Alexander Barr whose son was born here in May 1899.



The Caretaker's House

On 7 April 1895 it was resolved that the church should assume responsibility for the mission work being carried on at Urney Street (Belfast), Conlig and Milltown. A few months afterwards the control of the Milltown station was handed over to Mr Haggan.

Mr Walker resigned from the pastorate of the church on 27 February 1897 on his acceptance of a call to minister in Trinity Baptist Church, Bradford, where he remained for twenty-one years.

Probably, however, no more outstanding preacher has ever ministered in the church than Dr A T Pierson of Brooklyn, USA, who conducted the morning service on 25 April 1897. In 1892 he had stepped into the breach occasioned by the illness and subsequently by the death of C H Spurgeon. There were many who would have liked to have seen him succeed Spurgeon in the permanent pastorate of the Metropolitan Tabernacle but he was not then a Baptist. When he became convinced regarding the truth of believers' immersion he was baptised after having been a minister of the Gospel for forty years. That was in 1896. Shortly after he had spoken in the church in April 1897 he was interviewed by Messrs D McKelvey, R G Glendinning and John Nelson, who sought to secure him for two, six or twelve months' mission. They were exceedingly gratified to learn that, while he could not entertain the thought of such a mission, he could, and did, consent to think of coming as settled pastor provided he was satisfied that such was the will of God.

Others were considered for the vacancy and then, on the recommendation of Mr W Dugan, Pastor Hugh Gunn was asked to preach in January 1898. A unanimous invitation was extended to him to come as pastor. He accepted the call and began his ministry on 13 March 1898.

Pastor Hugh Gunn (1898-1907)

Mr. Gunn was converted during his apprenticeship and immediately became an active Christian worker. Advised by many friends to prepare for the full time work of the ministry, he entered upon a course of theological training, under Professor John McLellan in Edinburgh. Before coming to Belfast he had been worked in Burray in Shetland on behalf of the Scottish Baptist Home Mission and pastor in Coatbridge for a period of eight years, during which time the membership was greatly increased and the present church building was erected. Throughout his nine years' ministry in Belfast (1898-1907) he was highly esteemed in the church and amongst the Christian public of the city.

Two contemporary reports testify to the value of his faithful work. The first is from the pen of Mr David McKelvey and was written in 1903. It reads as follows: *'His labours are incessant for the welfare of the members and the salvation of the lost, not only within the church buildings but out amongst the people and in the open-air. The result is a considerable increase of members and enlarged congregations.'* It is noteworthy that during the first two years of Mr Gunn's ministry in Belfast almost a hundred new members were added to the roll.

The second testimony appeared in 'The British Weekly' for 30 March 1905, from which the following was extracted and published in the Irish Baptist Magazine for June 1905:

> *'Of Baptist churches in Belfast, the best known, because of its central position, is that in Great Victoria Street, of which the Rev. Hugh Gunn is pastor. It is of comparatively recent erection and has a recognised place as a centre of earnest religious work. Its mission is in the large working-class district in the centre of which it lies, and the success which it has achieved is evident even to the stray visitor. The Rev, Hugh Gunn is a Scottish Highlander, who could still, if there were occasion for it, preach a Gaelic sermon. Youth he has, and energy, and the enthusiasm of the Celt. He has somewhat of the natural oratory of his race, and words come so freely to him that he has no need to make use of manuscript. His English is the English of the Highlander—always correct and often graceful. His voice has in it some of the cadences of the mountain torrent, and is of a carrying power which needs the open air for it to be heard at its best. Mr. Gunn is a preacher of an uncompromising order. His heart is in his work, and he has brought his whole congregation into active sympathy with his devoted missionary spirit. 'God will not bless half measures,' he told his hearers last Sunday morning. Speaking of revival and the spirit of prayer, he said: 'There are many people in Belfast who call themselves Christians who have not been at a prayer meeting for twenty years.' The address was characterised throughout by passionate earnestness—the preacher's whole soul was in what he said. In his manner Mr. Gunn has much of the Celtic winsomeness. By his people he is much beloved. And he is doing a good work—doing it faithfully and courageously, and making the influence of his church felt in the life and in the homes of the district in which it is placed. Everybody who knows Mr. Gunn and his work must wish him God-speed.'*

Pastor Gunn was the Irish Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society. He was also active in Home Mission work and conducted missions in Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Cork.

During his pastorate cottage-meeting work received active attention—there being as many as three such meetings in operation at a time. Members of the church also assisted greatly in supplying the Carrickfergus church with speakers for the regular services. Then, on 28 July 1898, a new mission hall in connection with the church was opened in the Sandy Row district by Pastor Gunn. The hall had formerly been in the hands of a few Christians who worked for some years on non-denominational lines. Having secured premises in another part of the city, they very generously offered the hall and fittings to the church.

After the ordinary Sunday evening services in the summer months it was the practice of many of the members to go to Shaftesbury Square to take part in the open-air meetings which were conducted there under the auspices of the church. These meetings were very well attended *'by all classes—rich and poor. Protestant and Roman Catholic. Again and again people have, of their own accord, come and told us of having received blessing there'* (Irish Baptist, January 1907).

In the early part of Mr Gunn's ministry, in April 1899, a Society of Christian Endeavour was first formed in the church. In December 1901 a deed of release and conveyance was completed by which, after payment of £390, the church became the legal owner of the ground on which the present buildings stand. It was also in 1901 that there was a change over in the church from gas to electricity for lighting purposes.

The purchase of the ground on which the Church and Sunday School had been erected represented the completion of a series of items of capital expenditure which made the fellowship the freehold owner of all its buildings. It is hard to realise that there was a time when the treasurer had regularly to report that the current account balance was an unfavourable one and that finally he was obliged to resign because he could not continue to make advances on behalf of the church from his own money. It is equally difficult to understand that the church once came to a decision to meet its account as and when funds became available; that at one time there was not enough money in hands to enable the pastor's salary to be met on the due date; or that a 20% reduction was made in the same pastor's salary in order that a position of solvency might be maintained. It seems incredible that there was a time when a suggested mission could not be undertaken because of the risk of financial loss. At these times strenuous efforts to bridge the gap between income and expenditure were made by means of written appeals to members, sales of work, special lectures with charges for admission, weekend meetings with visiting speakers and prominent men (not all Baptists) as collectors during those meetings. All these remedies, however,

were only palliatives at a time when wages were low, families were large, and the ability of the general body of members to assist in meeting the ordinary expenses of the church was, therefore, very limited.

In June 1907 Pastor Gunn was called to minister in the John Street Church, Glasgow. Very much to the regret of his Belfast congregation and of the denomination, he accepted the call. At a farewell meeting, which was held on 2 September 1907, he and his wife were presented with a purse of sovereigns as a token of the church's esteem and affection. Mr Gunn remained in the John Street Church until 1915 when he became pastor of the Inverness Church. He was obliged to resign from the last-named charge in 1919 owing to ill-health and passed away in the early part of 1922, at the age of 62 years.

Pastor Robert Herries (1908-1912)

In January 1908, Rev Albert Walker,of Bradford, a former pastor of the church, wrote recommending Pastor Robert Herries as a suitable candidate for the vacant pastorate. On 23 February ,at a church meeting, a unanimous desire was expressed that Mr Herries be invited to undertake the pastoral work. This he consented to do and his ministry began on 3 May 1908.

Robert Herries was born at Kelton Hill, Kirkcudbright on 10 August 1851. As a young man, he was led to Christ during special evangelistic services which were held in the Reformed Presbyterian Church. After his conversion he became an earnest Christian worker but failed miserably at the end of three minutes' speaking at his first attempt at public ministry. He got over his failure, however, and was advised to prepare for the work of the ministry. He entered Spurgeon's College in January 1875 and it was there that he made what is now a well-known extemporaneous speech on 'Zaccheus.' Mr Spurgeon wished to test the senior students in impromptu speaking in the presence of the whole College, including the professors. He held in his hand a number of slips of paper on each of which a subject was written. Robert Herries drew one of the slips and, after the two minutes allowed for hurried thought, rose and said: *'The subject that has fallen to my lot is Zaccheus, and no subject could be more fitting to me. Firstly, Zaccheus was a little man: so am I. Secondly, Zaccheus was up a tree: so am I. Thirdly, Zaccheus made haste and came down: so shall I.*' This quaint style of treating his subject was hailed with boisterous merriment, in which Mr Spurgeon took part with all the glee of a junior student. Afterwards he said: 'Herries, you'll do!' (Irish Baptist, May, 1908).

Mr Herries, having completed the normal course of studies at Spurgeon's College, began his ministry at Consett, Co Durham in 1877. Three years later he was called to the pastorate of Howard Street Baptist Church, North Shields, where he remained until 1892. In that year he began a pastorate which continued for sixteen years in Leeds Road Church, Bradford. In each of his ministerial spheres he was greatly used of God.

After 1908 the church progressed during the pastorate of Mr Herries as is illustrated by the following extract from a report of the Anniversary Services held in February 1910. *'At no previous juncture in its history was the number of members and adherents larger, its finances in a sounder condition and its manifold agencies more beneficently active than to-day'* (Irish Baptist, May, 1910).

Mr & Mrs Herries were both specially gifted for work amongst young people. A notable feature of Mr Herries' ministry was his sermons to children. Mrs Herries took an active interest in the Christian Endeavour Society. She had much to do with the first 'Children's Rally' of the Baptist Union of Ireland which was held in 1910 at the Antrim Road Church. *'About twenty children, specially trained by Mrs. Herries and Miss Owens, appeared in native costume and gave two `Missionary Demonstrations' in a most accomplished manner, setting forth the triumphs of the Gospel in heathen lands'* (Irish Baptist, August, 1910).

Pastor Herries became President of the Baptist Union of Ireland in May 1911 when the title of his presidential address was *'The Position and Purpose of Christian Discipleship'*. In his capacity as President, he had the honour of presenting an address of welcome to King George V on the occasion of his visit, with the Queen, to Dublin in the Summer of 1911.

On the 11 November 1912, Pastor Herries tendered his resignation from the pastorate in view of the call he had received from Allerton Central Church in Bradford. He retired from pastoral work in 1919 and died as the result of a seizure in April 1924.

Pastor Henry Turner (1913-1918)

After Pastor Herries' resignation it was almost a year before his successor's ministry began. During the intervening period, the oversight of the church devolved largely on Mr John Haggan, whose preaching on Lord's Days, leadership at mid-week prayer meetings and chairmanship of business meetings were greatly appreciated.

A letter of recommendation from Pastor Hugh D Brown of Dublin brought the name of Pastor Henry Turner, an Irishman, before the deacons at their meeting on 4 May 1913. Mr Turner's ministerial life had begun in Alva Baptist Church, Stirlingshire, where he assisted Rev D W Laing during the years 1903 to 1905.

Mr Turner was pastor of the Baptist Church in Faversham, Kent, from 1910 to 1913. He was invited to preach in Belfast on 8 & 15 June 1913 and, on 22 June, all, with one exception, of the eighty-nine members present at a special church meeting signified their desire that he should be asked to accept the vacant pastorate.

It was in the Great Victoria Street Church that on the 29 October 1913, Rev R S MacArthur, of New York, President of the Baptist World Alliance, delivered his famous address entitled *'The Coronation of the King of Kings.'* All who heard it agreed with the utterance of one who was there: 'He crowned Him well.'

Anniversary services in connection with Mr Turner's settlement as pastor were held on Lord's Day, 8 November 1914. The special preacher was Pastor R Herries of Bradford, who also spoke at the social evening on the Monday. Pastor C S Donald of the Antrim Road Church based a thoughtful address on a church report which he had once read ...

Prayer going up;
Blessing coming down;
Workers going out;
Converts coming in.

The church seems to have had a fair measure of that experience during Mr Turner's pastorate in the difficult days of the First World War. That he had the active support of his wife in his efforts to further the Gospel is evident from the following paragraph which appeared in the Irish Baptist for May 1915:

> *'From the very beginning of her husband's ministry, Mrs. Turner identified herself with the varied activities of the church. She has shared his labours, blended her efforts with his in every enterprise for the advance-ment of the cause, and supplemented and enriched his services by her sweet gift of song. And whatever her hands found to do was done well and unobtrusively, and her co-operation was all the more acceptable, because it was associated with a natural reserve that shrinks from publicity'.*

Mr Turner served the church faithfully, both in his capacity as a pastor and as an evangelist, and evidently he was in great demand for special services in other Baptist churches. He conducted very successful missions in Coleraine and Killyleagh. The Antrim Road, Bloomfield, Milltown, Ballymena, Banbridge, Dungannon and Tobermore churches experienced the benefit of his ministry. He was also the visiting preacher at the installation, in December 1915, of Rev J S Andrews as pastor of the Londonderry church. He was very keen on Sunday School work and temperance propaganda and for a time was secretary of the denomination's 'Total Abstinence Society.' He was also greatly interested in foreign mission work which he publicly advocated. When the Baptist Missionary Society launched the 'League of Ropeholders', the church was one of the earliest to form a branch, the first member and secretary of which was Mr R Ernest Thompson.[10] In the autumn of 1915 he entered the Faith Mission Training Home in Edinburgh and, after finishing the normal Bible training course there, he was engaged for a time in evangelistic work in Ireland before going to China in 1920 under the auspices of the China Inland Mission. Increased experience in the field brought increasing and onerous responsibilities with the result that in 1941 he was appointed a Regional Director of the China Inland Mission.

Other new activities which were commenced in connection with the church's work during Mr Turner's pastorate were the Mothers' Meeting, the Lodging House Meeting and a Troop of Boy Scouts.[11] Evidently the first of these branches of the work was introduced on the advice of Pastor Turner and conversions were soon observed to take place amongst the women who came. The Lodging House Meeting was held in Matilda Street and was successfully continued for many years.

The outbreak of the Great War in August 1914 seems to have been peripheral to church matters. The Church records make little reference to the events that were convulsing Europe in the Great War. In domestic affairs, in 1914, a protest was made unanimously to the Town Clerk against *'the action of the Corporation ... to allow advertisements of intoxicating liquors to appear on Belfast trams'*.

The focus of the records in the period of the War is on issues of membership, appointment of various delegates to the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland or the Northern Association or the 'May Meeting' and the on-going question of how to remove the Church debt. Social teas were organised as fund raising events and an envelope system introduced. The treasurer reported that if the weekly offerings could be brought up to about £7-10s it

would leave the church *'without any financial encumbrance'*. This debt-free state was achieved by 1915. *'To the knowledge of the oldest member of the church such a financial state of affairs had never occurred before'*.

The impact of the War is noted in 8 August 1915 when the secretary was directed to *'write a letter of condolence to Mr Wm G Frizzell who was to take the service in our church on this date but was notified from the War Office that his son had been killed at the Dardanelles fighting his country's battles.'*

In January 1916 the Baptist Council wrote stating *'the question of sending a representative from the Baptist Churches in the work of the gospel among the soldiers in France for a period of 3 months'* and *'requesting ... if we would be prepared to grant leave of absence to our pastor provided he were willing to act'*. The permission was granted unanimously.

On 2 April 1916 a letter was received concerning a meeting to form a unit of the 'War Time Council' for St George's Ward and requesting that about 12 members should attend at the Albion Hall. The response to the appeal is not recorded.

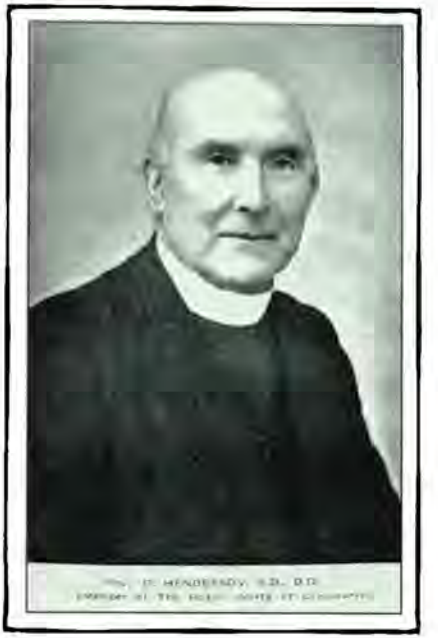
From the membership of the church and the immediate families of members at least twelve persons served in His Majesty Forces in the 1914-18 war. Of this number, there was one, Corporal John Ramsay, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, who made the supreme sacrifice. He served in Gallipoli and also took part in the advance in France on 1 July 1916, on which date he was killed. He was a member of the church and in business and in the Army adorned *'the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things'*.

Early in 1916 Pastor Turner went to France with Pastor Robert Clark, Secretary of the Belfast and District Baptist Council, in order to minister, under the auspices of the YMCA, to the soldiers who were serving there. Very good work was done during the four months of their labours in France.

On 1 May 1918 Pastor Turner intimated by letter to the deacons that he had received a pressing and unanimous call to the pastorate at Inverkeithing, where he had formerly ministered. The call was endorsed by the Baptist Union of Scotland, and, to the church's regret, Mr Turner was led to accept it. On 24 July, at a farewell meeting, he and Mrs Turner were presented with a wallet of Treasury notes as a token of the church's esteem and affection. His pastorate of the church terminated on 28 July 1918 when he preached to large congregations. He continued as pastor at Inverkeithing from August 1918 to January 1924 when he accepted a call to the pastorate of John Knox Street Church, Glasgow. He and Rev T M Bamber, of London, were the

special speakers at the church's centenary celebration meetings in September 1947.

Pastor David Henderson (1919-1949)



With the pastorate of David Henderson we come to the period of the church's history which still exists in the memory of some existing members and of others who have since joined other fellowships. Guided by the observations of wiser and more experienced writers, we record only some of the more interesting features and events of these 30 years of the church's history.

Mr Henderson was a native of Glasgow where he sat under the evangelistic ministry of a Presbyterian pastor. Converted at seventeen years of age, he became an active worker in the cause of Christ. Shortly afterwards he was baptised and his gifts as a preacher were discovered, causing him to abandon the study of mining engineering at the Technical College in Glasgow and to become a student in the Bible Training Institute there.

In 1901, shortly after Pastor William Pringle had commenced his ministry at Lisnagleer, he invited Mr Henderson over for a holiday and so the Lisnagleer church was the first Irish one in which he preached. On 9 November 1901 he was welcomed to his first Irish pastorate, namely that of the Limerick church, where he succeeded Pastor A Grant Gibb. On 15 July 1906 he resigned from the Limerick charge to enter the Dublin Baptist College for a course of study made necessary by a change in the denominational rules regarding pastoral recognition. Simultaneously he attended a course of lectures in Trinity College. On completion of the Baptist College curriculum he was called to the pastorate of the Bangor church where he remained from 30 January 1910 until the commencement, on 4 January 1914, of his pastoral work in Tobermore. While in Bangor he met and, in 1912, married Miss Elizabeth Gaston, a member of the church.

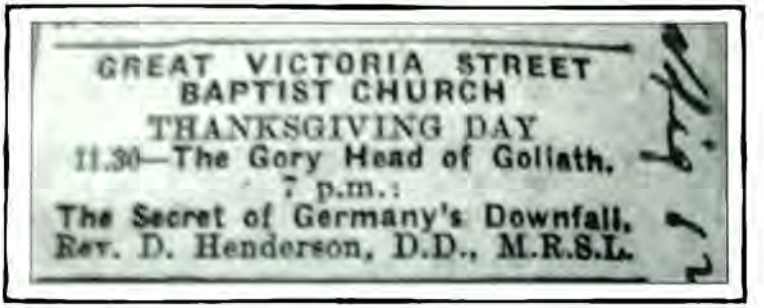
In December 1918, at the close of the evening service, a special church meeting was held to deal with the matter of the vacant pastorate in Great

Victoria Street. By this time the fellowship had discovered the wisdom of considering only one candidate at a time for a pastoral vacancy. This procedure had a unifying effect, avoiding, as it did, the divided and abortive voting that was experienced under a plurality of candidates system that made it difficult for any one man to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority. The one name which was submitted to the church on 1 December 1918 was that of Mr Henderson, in whose favour the special meeting, at which there was 'a very large attendance of members,' unanimously voted. His ministry in the church began on 2 February 1919. Ten years later, he was called to the Presidential chair of the Baptist Union of Ireland, the theme of his address being *'The Bible and Science.'*

David Henderson's book, *'A Well-Furnished Life'*, was greatly valued by many church members of the time as offering much practical guidance for their spiritual growth. A simpler version, *'How to Succeed in Life'* (subtitled *'Stepping Stones to Success'),* was written 'especially to assist young people who anxiously desire help that will enable them to pursue such a steady and stimulating course of study as will ultimately cause them to be most useful in the sphere of service chosen by them'.

Under the ministry of Mr Henderson, the church continued its evangelistic witness and many souls were saved during or after the regular services. The membership increased from 229 at the end of 1919 to 321 at the end of 1929. He ministered to the church through an era that included a very difficult period of civil strife in the city in the early years, followed by some years of tension and division when he had been pastor about 10 years. At this time his relations with some of the then office bearers, both elders and deacons, deteriorated and there were unfounded allegations of his impropriety. These issues were investigated by committees of the Association of Baptist Churches and led to secessions of members resulting in the formation of the Windsor church. Although his personal character was fully vindicated, it took some years for the church to recover from this trough of depression. The membership of the church had fallen to 199 at the end of 1932 since when it gradually increased to 478 in January 1949. It was during this period that men of outstanding character and ability such as R A L Mann, William Brennan, Hugh Burrows and Dane Skilling were elected to office in the church and ably supported Rev Henderson in the church's ministry.

In 1938 David Henderson gained a Doctorate of Divinity degree from Webster University in the USA. His insistence on the use of this (and a Membership of the Royal Society of Literature) in the advertising of the church services led to some disagreement with the office bearers who approached him about this on at least two occasions. The newspaper cutting advertising the services marking the Victory in Europe in May 1945 at the end of the Second World War illustrates his unwillingness to abandon his practice.


GREAT VICTORIA STREET
BAPTIST CHURCH
THANKSGIVING DAY
11.30—The Gory Head of Goliath.
7 p.m.:
The Secret of Germany's Downfall.
Rev. D. Henderson, D.D., M.R.S.L.

The seating capacity of the church was 500 but this was inadequate for the members and adherents who attend the ordinary services. As a first step towards the provision of larger premises, the church bought the adjoining property at No 1 Hope Street, which was auctioned on 13 September 1944. The area of ground of the purchased property was rather larger than that of the existing church and Sunday School premises. In 1945 a booklet entitled *'Preparing for the Future'* was circulated presenting the problem of accommodation.

> *'For our morning services the building has just been comfortable, but for our evening gatherings it has not accommodated the people crowding to hear the old, old story of redeeming love. We have been deeply grieved on many occasions to have to say to those wishing to hear the Gospel "there is no room "and see them turn away disappointed ... We realise that unless something is done in the near future our opportunity of becoming an increasingly useful channel in God's hands may be limited, or even reduced, because when people realise there is no hope of obtaining a seat after – say 6.50 pm they will go somewhere else, find other interests, and forget us'.*
>
> The major accommodation need was summarised as *'we need a new Church building accommodating at least 1,200 people (say 800 on the ground floor and the remainder on a gallery) with a baptistery where the act of confession will not be hidden as at present'.*

It should be noted that it was a further 18 years before a renovated Church building was opened.

Besides ordinary Sunday services, Sunday School and Bible Classes, by 1947 the church had at least five prayer meetings, three Christian Endeavour meetings, a Women's Missionary Auxiliary, a Women's Bright Hour Meeting and a Saturday night Open-Air Meeting.

At this stage there were ten missionary members on the roll and two members were on the staff of the Home Mission.[12] Three former members had become pastors of Irish churches ie Pastors R Boggs (Tobermore), G A Cawfield (Dungannon) and J Thompson (Lisburn). Mr & Mrs W McComb (formerly of the Acre Gospel Mission, Brazil) had charge of evangelistic work in Everton Mission Hall. Mr Currie Brennan had a similar responsibility in connection with Felt Street Mission. Dr J Edwin Orr MA, BD, the author and revivalist, had been a Sunday School scholar. Four members were in training for full time service. A Missionary Training Fund, inaugurated early in 1947, was available to assist students in training.

Dane Skilling in his original version of the history of the church states;

> *' It is only right to say that whatever success the church may have achieved in recent years: is not due to any single factor or person. In the providence of God circumstances have operated with cumulative effect, and while the church is not without its serious prob-lems, deficiencies and weaknesses, it has had some experience of the fact that on the spiritual plane 'Nothing succeeds like success.' It is only right also to pay tribute to the energetic and efficient efforts of the Secretary, Mr. R.A.L. Mann, whose organising and executive ability has contri-buted in no small measure to the furtherance of the church's witness. His and Mrs. Mann's work for the comfort and hospi-tality of the sailors, soldiers and airmen who visited the church during the war years deserves more than a passing reference, but space considerations have an overruling effect'.*

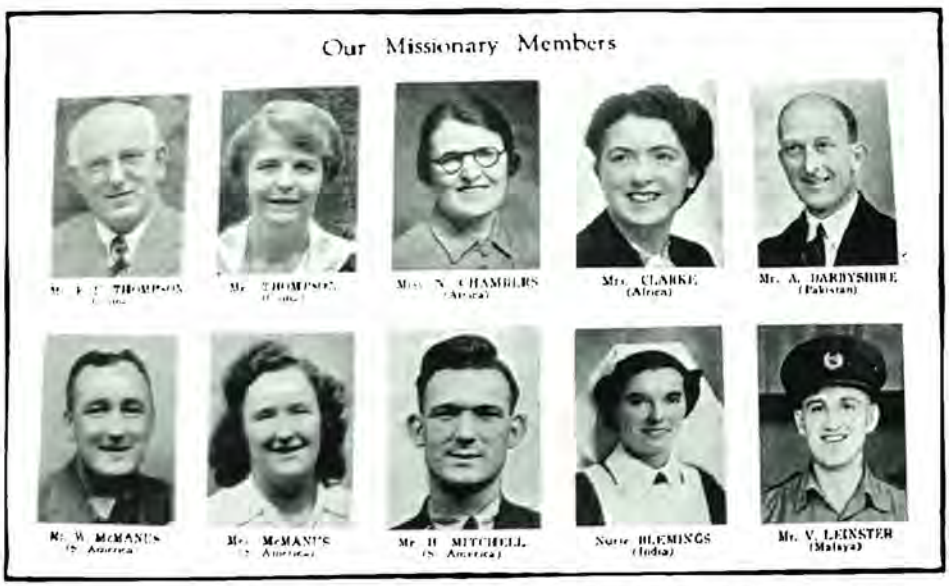
Pastor Henderson invariably received prayerful and active support in his ministerial work from Mrs Henderson. She rendered excellent service in the women's meetings and, before there was a junior Christian Endeavour Society in the church, she conducted a children's meeting where many of the young people were led to Christ. She was also a frequent visitor with Mr Henderson in the homes of the congregation.[13]

Post-war growth 1947 - 1950

In 1947 the office bearers reported in a pessimistic tone that the end of the war had not led to peace or plenty. *'The atomic bomb, the instrument of final victory was ... instilling and intensifying fear.' 'There was a shortage of essential goods, industrial disputes and general moral laxity'.* The belief was that *'clearly this is an unspiritual age'* in which prophecy was rapidly being fulfilled and it was important that *'the coming of the Son of Man will not find us indifferent, unprepared or ashamed'.* Such an emphasis was derived from

the strong pre-millennial views prevalent among Irish Baptists at the time and often reflected in the preaching of Rev David Henderson, especially in the Sunday evening gospel services. At these services 'the building was usually full, often times to overflowing'. There was a high proportion of young people in the congregations and it was noted that in the regular services souls were being saved, not just through special missions such as that conducted by Pastor Hugh Orr in March 1946 at which more than 90 'enquirers' were dealt with personally.

The earlier 19th century pattern of those who were baptised being added to membership within a short time was partly reflected in that, in 1946, of the 57 persons baptised 33 were added to the membership after interview. In total there were 461 members, representing about 300 families. The age profile of the membership was such that *'despite the large membership, the year 1946 was the first for a long time in which the hand of death was not responsible for any removals.'* As attendance at the Lord's Supper continued to grow it was noted in 1949 that *'to provide for the increase two extra plates and two extra trays were obtained ... with this additional equipment we can now provide for 240 communicants'.*



Missionary members as shown in the 1950 Year Book

The end of the war made possible once more the movement of members to missionary fields and details of the careers of Norah Chambers (North Africa Mission), Ernest & Mrs Thompson (China Inland Mission), Mr & Mrs McComb (Acre Gospel Mission) and others working in Great Britain and Ireland can be found in Beth Glendinning's publication on the history of missionary enterprise of the church. It was significant of increased missionary interest that in 1947 Billy McManus became the first member of the church to serve with the Irish Baptist Foreign Mission and that a 'Missionary Training Fund' had been created in September 1946 to assist candidates training for missionary work. By 1949 there were at least ten missionary members with others in training.

Work among young people and children augured well for the future growth of the church. There were three Christian Endeavour Societies - Senior, Young People's and Junior (children *'from toddlers to teen age'*). The Seniors engaged in summer open-air meetings accompanied by tract distribution from door to door. Their indoor meetings attracted about 40 members and there was an annual outing and Boxing Day party. The Young People's Society was led by Billy McManus, followed by Norman Shields, both of whom went into training for missionary work and Willie Brennan, assisted by Paul Thompson, the son of Ernest Thompson, continued the work.

The Young People's Society, like the Seniors, held open-air meetings, in their case in the Stranmillis district, each Thursday from May until the end of August. In addition, the Sunday School consisted of 205 'scholars' and 28 staff with Hugh Burrows as Superintendent ... and also 'Commanding Officer' at the annual Boys Camp. This venture seems to have been started around 1942 during the height of the war. A League of Church Loyalty had been formed with over 80 children in membership and cards were marked at a table on the bend of the stairs leading to the gallery, at first by William Matier and then by Norman McNaught.

Open-air witness took place on a Saturday evening led by David McCullough and it was recorded that *' the new loud-speaking equipment has been a great help and encouragement, and through this medium we believe that the Gospel is reaching many who would not otherwise hear'*. Singing was to be assisted for many years to come by a portable pedal organ. In September 1947 there was a 'Campaign' held on the open space in High Street that had been created by the Belfast Blitz. Each night closing messages were brought by Sam Clark, Harry Geddis or Pastor McNabb of Cliftonpark. An open-air campaign in September became an annual event. With the rebuilding taking place after the War it was relocated by 1949 in Fountain Lane.

The damage caused to London churches by the German bombing raids had led to the setting up of a 'Distressed Churches' Fund' in 1942. By 1947 this was wound up with final grants to the Nunhead, Devonshire Square, Peckham Park Road and Downham Churches. In the 5 year period the fund had provided *'grants totalling £665 to distressed sister churches in the severely 'blitzed' London area'.*

Work among women had been established through the Women's Bright Hour, a meeting that continues to the present. It had a gospel thrust and in 1947 it was noted that *'several conversions resulted and Christians received blessing'.* The Women's Missionary Auxiliary operated on a smaller scale with about 15 attending and, as with its sister meeting, it has continued but renamed as the Baptist Women's Fellowship.

1947 was described as *'the most disastrous in living memory, war years excepted ... before a month had gone, severe weather quickly led to a break down in coal supplies, which seriously retarded national recovery with unpleasant repercussions for us all.'* Attendance at services declined slightly. This was attributed to the inadequacy of the accommodation which *'necessitates early attendance at services to obtain a suitable seat or, alternatively, results in the separation of visitors from friends who bring them, also oftentimes obliging them to sit in discomfort in some congested part of the building'.* This problem of accommodation had been identified in a booklet entitled 'Preparing for the Future' issued in 1945, proposing extensions that would have added 700 seats to the existing 500 seats. By 1952 the membership stood at 476 but no extension was to be built until 1963. In the five years following the war the general trend was for the membership and attendances at the morning services, then held at 11.30 am, to increase slightly but for the numbers at the evening services to fall.

The Centenary of the move from King Street to Academy Street was marked by services conducted by the Rev Henry Turner, who had been pastor of the church from 1913–1918, and Rev Theo Bamber of Rye Lane Church, London. There was a certain apathy in marking this point in the history of the church, evidenced by disappointing attendances at the services and a poor response to the Centenary Thankoffering that was to reduce the liability remaining on the Hope Street Property that had been bought in September 1944.

Visiting preachers were a common feature during the period. The ministry of

Rev Alan Redpath, Rev Geoffrey King and Pastor Hugh Orr was highly valued. Many still remember annual visits from Ernest Lloyd on behalf of the British Jews Society and Pastor Emile Guedj of the French Bible Mission, the former being noteworthy for giving many insights into the Old Testament Scriptures and the latter for his powerful singing. Evangelistic Campaigns were planned and conducted on an almost annual basis. In 1946 by Hugh Orr and in 1947 in the larger premises of Richview Presbyterian Church by Major Ian Thomas who had recently been decorated militarily for his significant part in the capture of Monte Cassino. He was supported by Rev Geoffrey Lester as soloist and song leader. In 1949 a precedent was established in the use of the Wellington Hall for the Sunday evening services during the Mission conducted by Rev Donald R Robertson of California. A second evangelistic campaign was held in December of that year, conducted by Rev John G Ridley and Mr J S Carroll. They had come to Britain to assist in the 'Ringing of London Campaign'. Their ministry was powerful and memorable and the record is that *'Souls were saved, backsliders restored and the Church experienced a breath of revival'.*

By 1949 the pastor, Rev David Henderson, had given 30 years service to the church. At the end of 1919, the date of the first calculation of membership after his settlement in the church, there were 229 on the roll. In the 30 years that followed more than 1000 members were received. Although the figures were partially offset by transfers, resignations and removals and, in particular, by the loss of 64 members to the newly formed Windsor Baptist Church in the period 1931-33, the net effect was that membership more than doubled between 1919 and 1939 with eight people who had been members continuously since David Henderson's installation. His breakdown in health at the end of June 1949 led to his much regretted resignation taking effect from 30 September 1949.

His thirty years ministry was not only the longest of his various pastorates but also of any of the known pastors who had served the Church since its foundation in 1811. His ministry was marked by evangelical fervour and expository preaching. As well as his ministry from the pulpit he was a systematic and sympathetic visitor to the homes of members of the congregation. As the office bearers reported *'God richly blessed the labours of His servant. Souls were saved, believers were instructed and inspired and many were led into full-time service at home and abroad'.*

Notes

1 Recorded in the history of Rosemary St Presbyterian church.

2 Carson was then the Presbyterian minister in Tobermore leaving in 1804 to found the Baptist church there.

> *'Alexander Carson was born in 1776 at Stewartstown, County Tyrone, and was educated in Glasgow. He became a Presbyterian minister at Tobermore, County Londonderry, but had leanings towards Baptist theology and resigned in 1804. He wrote prolifically on theological subjects, and his work is published in six volumes. He received an honorary degree from two American universities'.* [Biography by Moore and Douglas]

3 The 1844 Directory states of the 'Seamen's Friend Society'

> *'Has for its object the religious instruction of Seamen, Pilots, etc. A convenient place of worship has been erected in Pilot Street for their accommodation, the religious services are conducted by a Chaplain, who also visits the vessels in the port, and the families of those connected with the sea. There are also Sunday, Daily and Infant Schools, under the superintendence of the Committee.'*

The Society was interdenominational in character and thus there would be no bar to Rev Wilson acting as its chaplain, while also having a responsibility for a Baptist Church in Belfast. The building dates from c. 1838 and by 1856 the Chapel had been converted to a National School.

4 There is no record of Wilson in the 1852 Directory.

5 Quoted in *'The Largest Amount of Good – Quaker Relief in Ireland 1654 – 1921'*, Helen E Hatton. 1993.

6 An entry in The Belfast Street Directory for 1843 gives 'Swain, H., Grocer, 30 Henry Street.

7 The 'Baptist Magazine' 1889 states ' in 1876 the church had recently passed through a crisis caused by the secession of the pastor with seventy members to the Plymouth Brethren'

8 The memorial plaques still exist.

9 It is most likely that this refers to lead mines opened c.1780 on the side of Conlig Hill owned by Lord Londonderry. David Kingdon, in *'Baptist Evangelism in 19th Century Ireland', (1965)* states *'outside the village was a lead mine worked by miners from Wales, many of whom were Baptists. These formed themselves into a church in 1840.'* A detailed account of the formation and impact of the Conlig church is contained in a history of the Conlig Presbyterian church.

10 A more detailed account of RE Thompson's missionary career is given in Beth Glendinning's Great Victoria Street Baptist Church – A history of missionary enterprise'

11 It is likely that the troop was part of the 'British Boy Scouts' movement and not Baden-Powell's scouts. A British Boy Scouts troop 'was attached to a Church and that indeed the Church formed a good part of its programme, almost as if it were, a uniformed Christian Fellowship. The BBS had developed as a Church based organisation but never restricted to any single denomination yet in each location it was a full and active part of Church life'. Such troops emerged from 'the debate about the influence of militarism in the Boys' Brigade with its military drill and dummy rifles'.

12 For details see Beth Glendinning's 'Great Victoria Street Baptist Church – A history of missionary enterprise'

13 It was his practice during the Sunday services to announce his schedule of visitation for the incoming week, and the members knew they were expected to be at home on the announced days, when their pastor was likely to appear on his bicycle.

The Bible College Movement with special reference to Northern Ireland

Graham Cheesman

The Bible College Movement was one of the most seminal movements for the construction of attitudes in theological education throughout the world in the last 150 years. Many of the attitudes in colleges in the UK, the Americas, Africa and Asia owe their inspiration to this movement. It was new, in the sense that the Church of England controlled the two great universities of Oxford and Cambridge until the appeal of the Test Acts in the 1870s and the dissenter academies, or non-Anglican denominational colleges, including the Baptists, in the UK provided most of the rest of the market.

The Genesis of the Bible College Movement

The Bible College Movement came firstly out of the revival/revivalism movements in the second half of the 19th century. Around the year 1859 a significant revival of evangelical religion occurred in America and the United Kingdom. Its characteristics were large prayer meetings, often in urban settings leading to a great number of people being concerned about their spiritual state and then finding faith in Christ. J Edwin Orr called it The Second Evangelical Awakening. It began in America and Orr estimates that a million people were added to the churches there within two years.[1] In 1859 a significant awakening also occurred in Ulster where the evangelists Spurgeon and Grattan Guinness were very active. It moved to Scotland in 1860, particularly around Glasgow, and England also had some evidences of the revival. This spontaneous outpouring of the work of the Spirit moved on to more organised forms which could be called revivalism (Parsons suggests that the difference between the two could be seen in that one prays for revival to be given while the other prays that our revival meetings will be a

success[2]) and D L Moody was at the centre of this. Moody came to Edinburgh in 1874, then to Glasgow, Belfast, and England. Moody and Sankey arrived in London in 1875 and made a tremendous impact in their crusades.[3] The effect of revival and revivalism was to stir up a very large number of ordinary people to commit their lives to Christ and his service.

The Faith Missions were founded around this time and drew significantly upon this great pool of committed people which came out of revival and revivalism. Their beginnings were with Hudson Taylor's founding of the China Inland Mission in 1865. It used ordinary people in an interdenominational way, males and females, and its primary task was evangelism and church planting throughout China.[4] The Faith Mission concept was developed and applied in Africa and further afield – not least by Grattan Guinness. One of the big characteristics of the Faith Missions was that instead of sending ordained people from the upper middle classes on mission, ordinary people were used in large numbers arising out of the revival.[5]

The Bible Colleges were founded around this time as the link between those awakened by the revival who longed to serve God and those societies, of a Faith Mission variety, which were willing to send them on evangelism at home or mission abroad. The colleges trained these people for the work. The first Bible College was founded by Grattan Guinness, the revivalist preacher of Ireland who spent some time in a standard theological college (New College - a Congregational College in St John's Wood, London) but throughout this time was deeply worried that theological study would ruin him by toning down his zeal. He only lasted a year at the college, having spent far more time in evangelism and open-air preaching than in his studies. He returned to Dublin to start a little class of teaching for young men who wished to serve God and it was there that he met Hudson Taylor who was travelling through. The two became close friends. Their children married each other and they shared many attitudes.[6] When Hudson Taylor met Guinness in Dublin he issued a challenge to go on missionary service. Grattan Guinness and his wife, Fanny Guinness, offered themselves but Hudson Taylor refused, considering them to be too old at 30 to learn another language and advised them to stay in the UK to *"train me the men and women".*[7] They did not immediately do so but went on a missionary trip to Europe. Then, finally, in 1872, they arrived in London and began the East London Institute for Home and Foreign Mission, which came to be known, in early 1873, as Harley House. It grew at a tremendous pace and in 1875 they added a second college Hulme Cliff College in Derbyshire which became the centre for their training of African missionaries (now Cliff College, the Methodist establishment). In 1885 they added Doric Lodge to the work in London which

became the dormitory for female students who studied together with the male students. They were part of a strong evangelical community in East London that included Guinness's great friend Barnado, the Pennefathers at the Mildmay Centre, William Booth, the Earl of Shaftesbury, C H Spurgeon and often D L Moody in his travels.[8]

The influence of Harley House was seminal and immense. The first US Bible School in 1883 was founded by A B Simpson and deliberately patterned on the East London Institute. The Prairie Bible Institute in Canada likewise. In 1889 when A J Gordon opened the Boston Missionary Training Institute that was under the inspiration of Grattan Guinness who was visiting America at the time. The Moody Bible Institute was founded under Moody assisted by Emma Dryer who asked Grattan Guinness to come to Chicago and advise her in setting it up. Eventually as missionaries went out across the world they founded schools similar to those they had been trained at in the UK and America and so transferred the Bible College ideal across all continents. The ideas behind the movement, soon began to infect the more staid theological colleges, such as the Baptist ones, to their great advantage.[9]

Harley House only lasted for 35 years. A number of other colleges lasted much longer in the UK and in fact, BTI Glasgow and Redcliffe, which were founded in the 1890s are still alive and working today. The inter-war years was a period which could be regarded as a golden age for Bible Colleges, when the majority of the colleges we know today were founded ... and they became central and fundamental to the missionary work of the churches in the UK and, to an extent, the United States. Post-second world war, the basic paradigm was changed by the founding of London Bible College which had a new attitude towards academics in theological education and the training of men and women for Christian service and aligned itself firstly with the University of London, then CNAA in order to award degrees. Gradually over the last 30 years, all other colleges have moved towards that new paradigm without entirely forsaking the basic attitudes of the early Bible Colleges. After the demise of the CNAA in 1993, the colleges were required to seek accreditation with universities, usually the post-93 type which had greater freedom to include vocational elements in their degrees.

Belfast Bible College

Belfast Bible College was founded in 1943 by a couple, Mr & Mrs McKnight, and stands clearly in the inter-war BC tradition. Mr McKnight, a school Principal, was converted to Christ in middle age and, when he offered for missionary service with his wife, was judged to be too old. Before her

marriage, Mrs McKnight had been a Faith Mission Pilgrim and so had attended their Edinburgh College ... she had also spent some time on the staff of Emmanuel College, Birkenhead. Convinced that God wanted them to commence missionary training in Belfast, they started evening classes and then eventually, as joint Principals, founded the Belfast Bible School and Missionary Training Home early in 1943, in their own home.[10] Most of the early students only had primary level education and the academic standard was not high.[11] Yet, from the beginning, an attempt at serious biblical study was made, and Greek and Hebrew were optional for the students. This may well have been made possible because of the high standard of training of the local ministers, mostly Presbyterian, who provided much of the lecturing at the time.[12] The emphasis however was on *"prayerful Bible Study and the spiritual equipment of all students"*.[13] There was a 'Holiness' slant to the teaching in those early days,[14] a sort of uniform was worn and the sexes were strictly segregated.[15] Drysdale came over regularly from Birkenhead to speak at the college.[16] BBC was, therefore, at first an interesting blend of the pre-war college model on the one hand, probably because of the influence of Mrs McKnight, and serious study on the other hand, provided by the well-trained clergy of the province. A series of six Principals followed the McKnights from 1950 to 1970, until Victor Reid (who was already the resident tutor) took over in that year, first as Acting Principal and then, in 1972, as Principal. In the period prior to 1970 the college was always small, with numbers of students no more than about twenty and sometimes no more than three or four, and, in that period, the college moved twice.[17] BBC clearly struggled to be a credible alternative to the better known Bible Colleges across the Irish Sea and the better established denominational colleges in Ulster. Victor Reid came out of the Bible College system in England having first studied at Moorlands and then at LBC. He inherited a college that was now targeted at training men and women for Christian work at home and abroad but with few students and little teaching taking place.[18] Earlier ideals of attaining *"the highest levels of academic scholarship"*[19] and stimulating missionary work in the province[20] had foundered on a lack of students. Victor Reid was academically competent and lectured at a good level but he also saw the need for parallel provision in the college courses for those without qualifications. He restructured the courses, including preparation for external exams such as 'A' level Religious Studies and the Diploma in Theology of London University (later changed to the Cambridge Diploma in Religious Studies).

The turning point came in 1976. Students were very few and the question of closing the college was discussed. The new Chairman, John Spence, and Victor Reid got together and presented a development plan to increase the student numbers, upgrade the accommodation and add a tutor. All this was

quickly achieved and the college began to grow with new confidence.[21] Numbers continued to rise ... to 39 in 1980 and 44 in 1981. A new extended practical missionary placement began in 1981 and the college moved to its present site in 1983. Graham Cheesman, who had also been trained at LBC, took over the Principalship in 1988 and, in 1990, the college began to teach for the London BD. Three years later it obtained membership of the Faculty of Theology of The Queen's University, Belfast, and has taught for its degrees ever since, although throughout that time between a half and two-thirds of the student body have chosen college courses. In 2005, a new principal was appointed, Dr David Shepherd, who is the present incumbent. There are about 150 full time students today.

Fundamental attitudes

In this section I will talk mostly about the attitudes that were characteristic of the early Bible College Movement and, although there has been some development, are often alive today.

Home and Overseas Mission There is no doubt that the early colleges had a strong preference for overseas mission. They were feeding the faith missions abroad and Fanny Guinness wrote early on, *"our friends are aware that ... the extension of missions to the heathen is our great ultimate object".*[22] There were, however, a number of faith missions operating at home such as the city missions and, by and large, the Bible Colleges marketed themselves as training for mission at home and abroad. They did not partake of the grand dichotomy which saw mission only taking place cross-culturally but saw the task as similar throughout the world. Indeed, preparation for evangelism abroad was evangelism at home. One famous graduate of Harley House was the founder of the Qua Iboe Mission, Samuel Alexander Bill. He was a Presbyterian, was converted under D L Moody in Belfast, re-baptised as a believer and went across to London to train for missionary work in Harley House. One lunch time Grattan Guinness read out a letter from some tribal chiefs in Ibeno, Southern Nigeria, requesting a missionary and Bill offered himself. He was equipped and sent by the Guinnesses but kept his support base in Northern Ireland, which became the Qua Iboe Mission, then the Qua Iboe Fellowship and then Mission Africa.[23]

The priority was the preparing of evangelists People were perishing without Christ and needed to hear the gospel and be saved and the great task of the colleges was to prepare people to spread the gospel. However, this had to be modified in two ways. Firstly, when

people were converted then churches were often planted and the founding and maintaining and growth of a church was also part of the curriculum in a number of the colleges, not least the Missionary Training Colony in London. Secondly, most missionaries in Africa and, to an extent in Asia, involved themselves in medical work and educational work. Fiedler says, *"There was no missionary without a medicine box and hardly ever a missionary stationed in Africa without a school. Only in ignorance or prejudice can it be said that the evangelical missions did nothing but evangelistic work".*[24] The ultimate aim of the colleges, however, was simple and the success of home and foreign mission was measured mostly in one way - that people come to Christ and have their lives sorted and turned around both practically and spiritually.

The admissions procedure of the early colleges is important to note They looked for a number of characteristics in their potential students and they did not generally admit on the basis of intellectual ability, although where somebody was particularly poor in this area they sometimes advised a period of private study before entry into the college. The key issue was whether God had called that person to be a missionary, whether they had the spirit of Christ and sometimes the early colleges were called Testing and Training Homes and they were places where potential missionaries were tested. The dropout rate was a sign that things were going well. They were adamant in not making academic work an ultimate test, *"lest in excluding ignorant and unlearned men we shut out some who, like the Galilean fisherman of old, may have been called by the Master to be witnesses unto Him in the uttermost parts of the earth".*[25]

The Bible Colleges trained women equally with men There were a number of women's only Bible Colleges, particularly in the inter-war years, but there were also colleges where men and women were trained together, not at first in the East London Institute, but after the founding of Doric House and also in 1893 when BTI Glasgow was founded. It is interesting to note that women were also very active in the teaching and administration of the colleges often in a very powerful and useful way. Before the turn of the century women made up to a third of the Bible College student population and eventually this moved closer to half, by the time of the second world war. This was part of the Faith Missions emphasis that God equally calls men and women to do his work. Fanny Guinness was the major influence on Harley House and Mrs McKnight on BBC.

The early Bible Colleges were inter-denominational One would expect that of the phenomenon that owes so much to the revivals, to Moody's revivalism and to the Faith Missions, all of which were strongly inter-denominational in character. E. J Poole-Connor writing about the 1859 revival in Ireland comments: *"they show that on many matters on which we are accustomed to lay stress, His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts. ... God wrought so impartially through the traditional churches as he did through the Brethren assemblies, and the human distinctions between Anglicanism and Dissenter, Presbyterianism and Independent, Baptist and Paedo-Baptist seemed on that great day of visitation, to be of little more than the pre-occupation of children".*[26] This was the view of the Bible Colleges, that the evangelization of the world was of far more importance than doctrinal emphases and denominational affiliations.

The colleges had a particular attitude about the supply of financial resources These colleges were individual and often founded by a strong individual, free from ecclesiastical authority and not tied to a denomination. They could appeal to the Christian public and the Christian aristocracy for support and did so. To a great extent, however, they adopted the Faith Missions pattern of asking God for the money rather than people, although most of them in some way or another made the needs known to people who were sympathetic and interested to help. At first they did not charge fees, although later on students were expected to come with some money to the colleges. Generally those who were suitable but could not pay were accepted as warmly as those who were suitable and could.

It is a fact that the early Bible Colleges were a reaction against the theological colleges which often were either connected with the universities or doing higher level studies on behalf of a denomination, and were for those who had had plenty of prior education. The Bible Colleges were an educational solution to a church and mission problem. They had classrooms and teaching and lectures. They often taught Greek and Hebrew and they had examinations. Yet it was always for a purpose. It was the use of the Scriptures for personal spiritual profit and missionary competence. They also taught general subjects. *"A missionary should know something about everything".*[27] This included geography, anatomy, history, grammar, philosophy, English, etc ... but the key subject was the Bible, "the one text book".[28]

Practical training The Bible Colleges were deeply interested in this. The classroom was held in balance with other objectives. Students were not becoming professionals but they needed to know the basic techniques of evangelism. They were taken out on door to door work, street evangelism, children's and Sunday School work, etc. Harley House even had a boat going up and down the Thames for a while, a precursor to the Operation Mobilisation ships. As Grattan Guinness said in 1888, *"next, perhaps, in value to spirituality may be ranked evangelistic gift and ability"* [29] and it was all intended to strengthen this.

Spiritual formation In the end this was the ultimate aim of the colleges. *"The development of spiritual life is the great thing to be aimed at in missionary training. Woe to the church if she neglects this or gives it a secondary place".*[30] Above all else, the missionary needs spiritual vigour and spiritual power. This is to be aimed for throughout everything that is done in the college.

Character formation Alongside the emphasis on spiritual development the colleges were concerned to grow *"strong Christian character".*[31] The Bible Colleges themselves were products of strong individual entrepreneurial characters in evangelicalism such as Moody, Guinness and Spurgeon. The students (doubtless male and female) had to be 'manly', full of physical, spiritual and mental vigour. This was generally promoted by a strongly disciplined life inside the college, sometimes of an excessive nature. Those colleges which were particularly training pioneer missionaries would give students the roughest ride of all, getting them up at 6 o'clock in the morning for a run, cold shower, one hour of devotions, a small breakfast, and then a day full of hard work. Rules and regulations were followed and, although the methodology was often deeply suspect, the aim was a strength of character to be imparted to students that would stand them in good stead in a difficult missionary situation.

In conclusion, the Bible Colleges were a new and dynamic force in theological education which turned attitudes upside down and, through the tripartite model of academic, practical and spiritual intent, is still influencing theological education today.

Whither the Bible College Movement in the Future?

We have to say that the denominational colleges have embraced many of the special issues of the Bible Colleges and there is now much less distinction

between them than before. The Bible Colleges have also become as much a part of the secular academy as the other institutions and have grafted onto the root of their special nature, the growth of the secular higher education model through the accreditations they have adopted and the universities they have had to satisfy. Along with this has come the concept of 'disinterested theology', that those without personal faith have, technically at least, to be able to be successful in their degrees, that faith is not seeking understanding but the student is seeking understanding of the faith of Christians. Some describe the new situation very negatively, such as Lesslie Newbigin who calls it the Babylonian captivity of theological education by the academy and others see it as a necessary contextualisation into the current educational system of our culture.

What is clear is that Bible Colleges have lost their distinctiveness in the church today. They prospered because they were the new dangerous thing. Not any more and, if they want to regain their prosperity, they will have to find their new dangerous edge again. But maybe that is not possible. They have been domesticated, like the colleges they challenged to be something else. And now we wait for the next new thing in TE in the UK to emerge, possibly the in-service course. They will continue to be very useful for many years, but the days of glory of the Bible Colleges are probably at an end.

Notes

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2 Gerald Parsons, "Emotion and Piety: Revivalism in Victorian Christianity" in Ed. Gerald Parsons, *Religion in Victorian Britain; Volume 1 Traditions*, pp 214-218.

3 John Pollock, *Moody Without Sankey: A New Biographical Portrait*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1963, p137.

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7 Fiedler, op. cit. p86.

8 For these early years, see Fanny Guinness, *The Wide World and our Work in it*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1886 and various accounts in *Regions Beyond*, such as January/ February, 1911.

9 See Fiedler, op cit. pp43, 146, 166.

10 Maurice Harris, *Four Decades: The Belfast Bible College 1943 - 1983*, BBC, 1983, pp3-4. Kenneth Scott, *Sited for Service*, BBC, 1998, pp4-5.

11 Robert Mackey (first year student) writing in *BBC Newsletter*, special edition 1969, p6.

12 Lecturers came from the Presbyterian, Methodist and Nazarene churches. Private conversation with David Ross, the first student of BBC, on May 20th, 2002.

13 Mackey, op.cit. Early *Prospectus* of the Belfast Bible School and Missionary Training Home (probably 1950s), p5.

14 Former student, quoted in Scott, op.cit. p6.

15 Ibid. pp6-7.

16 David Ross, op.cit.

17 Scott, op.cit. pp8-16, Harris, op. cit pp6-10.

18 Victor A.S. Reid, *"Aw [sic] Change" - 22 years at Belfast Bible College*, 1988.

19 Michael Fleming, "The College that Would not Die", *BBC Newsletter* 1968, pp2-3.

20 Harris, op.cit. p10.

21 Harris, op.cit. pp17-19.

22 Fanny Guinness, *Other Seventy Also – The Story of our Fifth Year the East London Institute for Home and Foreign Missions*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1878, p11.

23 For some information about the origins of the Qua Iboe mission, see Robert L. McKeown *In the Land of the Oil Rivers, the Story of the Qua Iboe Mission*, London, Marshall Brothers, 1902, pp61ff.

24 Fiedler op.cit. pp226f.

25 Fanny Guinness, *Regions Beyond*, 1884, p7.

26 Quoted in Robert Amess, *One in the Truth*, Eastbourne, Kingsway Publications, 1988, p149.

27 Fanny Guinness, *The Wide World*, p27.

28 Grattan Guinness, "The Training of Missionaries" an address in the Exeter hall in August 1888 at the London General Missionary Conference. Printed in *Regions Beyond* in two instalments, August 1888, p264.

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The History of the King James Bible

Samuel Webb

Four hundred years ago, the '*noblest monument of English prose*' (Louth 1710-1787), the King James (KJ) Bible was published. It was destined to become the most well-known book in the world and the centrepiece of British family life for three hundred years.

The history of the KJ Bible begins with the birth of the English language which traces its origin to people who lived around the Black Sea 6,000 years ago. Their language, known as Indo-European would eventually develop into English. About the time of Abraham these people migrated west and split into two branches. One group settled in Northern Europe and their language evolved into Germanic. At that time the population of the British Isles spoke various Celtic languages. With the departure of the Romans in AD410 the defenceless Britons were invaded by the Germanic-speaking Anglo Saxons from Northern Europe. The Celtic-speaking natives were driven westward leaving the invaders free to develop their own language into what became known as Old English.

During the Roman occupation the Bible had been translated from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, the language of the Empire. Soon there were different versions in circulation causing confusion. Jerome (342-420) brought order out of chaos by producing the accepted version known as the Latin Vulgate. This remained the Bible of the Medieval Church for the next 1,000 years. Ireland became the place in Europe where Jerome's Bible was best preserved and most magnificently copied. In 1546 the Council of Trent extended this elevated status of the Vulgate in respect of the Roman Church for a further five hundred years.

In the eighth and ninth centuries portions of the Vulgate were translated into Old English by the monks of Lindesfarne, the Venerable Bede and King Alfred (849-899). Little translation took place during the next 400 years.

When William defeated Harold in 1066, English society changed dramatically. Norman culture came to dominate every aspect of life. Crucially, French became the language of government, commerce and the ruling classes. For the next 300 years the Kings of England spoke only French. Latin remained the language of religion, scholarship and science. English was relegated to the language of the peasants and regarded as capable of expressing only the most basic ideas. For a number of reasons during the fifteenth century English began to displace French in the affairs of the nation. Incessant war with France (The Hundred Years War) led to French being seen as the language of the enemy. After the Battle of Agincourt (1415), Henry V began using English in his correspondence and Parliament followed his example. Geoffrey Chaucer (1345-1400) was the first author to popularise the use of English in literature. The middle classes were emerging for whom speaking in English was a matter of honour and pride. These factors, and others, led to growing pressure for the Bible to be available in English.

THE ENGLISH BIBLE

John Wycliffe (1330-1384), Master of Balliol College, Oxford was the first man to translate the Bible into English. He lived at a time when the Medieval Church had reached its lowest ebb. The Babylonian captivity of the Church (1309-1377) was followed by the disaster of The Great Schism (1378-1417). Wycliffe was highly critical of the wealth and power of the Church and believed that the only solution was that *'all Christians ought to know Holy Writ'.*

He faced two major obstacles. The first was the opposition of the religious authorities who had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. They realised that if ordinary people could read the Bible for themselves their privileged position would be threatened and law and order undermined. The Peasants Revolt of 1381 showed how easily the fabric of society could fall apart. The second was the perceived problem of the English language itself. It was sufficient for the lower classes but was still considered by some as lacking the sophistication necessary to convey the elevated concepts of religion and philosophy.

Nevertheless, in 1382, Wycliffe and his colleagues completed the monumental task of translating the Vulgate into English. The fundamental weakness of his work was that it was a translation of a translation. Wycliffe had no desire to challenge Jerome as after 1000 years the Vulgate had acquired a halo of sanctity. Out of respect, the translators translated the Latin word for word making the result sound wooden and in places incomprehensible. Nevertheless it was a landmark in the history of the English Bible. Each copy had to be hand-written and took about one year to complete. It was Wycliffe who gave us such phrases as *'a coat of many colours', 'the patience of Job', 'vanity of vanities', 'salt of the earth', 'millstone about his neck',* and *'in the twinkling of an eye'.*

The Medieval Church was shaken by the appearance of the Bible in English. Henry Knighton was appalled and wrote, *'what was previously known only by learned clerics ... has become common and available to the laity - in fact, even to women who can read'.* Wycliffe's work was condemned by the authorities and his translation banned under the Constitutions of Oxford (1408). Possession of a Bible in English became a capital offence. Wycliffe's influence continued for more than a century through the work of his followers - The Lollards. Wycliffe died in 1384 and was buried in the grounds of Lutterworth Church. He was later declared a heretic and his resting place became the scene of a ghoulish ritual. His remains were exhumed and burnt to powder. His ashes were cast into the nearby River Swift, conveyed to the Avon and thence to the four corners of the world. It would be 100 years before any further attempt would be made to translate the Bible into English.

Printing

The seventeenth century polymath, Sir Francis Bacon, said that the world had been radically changed by three recent discoveries: the magnet had revolutionised navigation, gunpowder had transformed the face of warfare and printing had changed communication forever. The Italian Renaissance had led to an increased desire on the part of the population to read and write and the demand for books soared. A fortune awaited the man who could devise a method of producing books quickly and cheaply.

Johannes Gutenberg was born around 1400 in Germany. He invented a method of printing using moveable metal type, producing the world's first printed books in 1452 - a Latin Grammar and an Astronomical Calendar. In 1456 he succeeded in the much greater task of printing the entire Latin Vulgate. His invention represented the greatest technological advance since the wheel. The Information Age had arrived. He soon identified a particularly

lucrative use of his new invention, the printing of indulgences. Initially these were hand-written but with his printing press Gutenberg was able to run them off in thousands. By 1500 the Vulgate was being printed all over Europe but few people including the clergy could understand Latin.

Erasmus (c1466-1536)

The next step called for the printing of a Bible in English which was both readable and accurate and that step was taken by the greatest scholar in Europe, Erasmus of Rotterdam, with a publication not in English but in Greek. Erasmus, a Catholic priest, began life as a non-person, the son of a priest. He exemplified the Renaissance theme of *ad fontes* ('to the sources') and no one could rival him in his knowledge of the classical languages. He was the Professor of Divinity at Cambridge from 1511 to 1513 where he studied all the available manuscripts of the Greek New Testament (NT) publishing his innovative rendering in 1516. The result was sensational! He revealed that the centuries-old Latin Vulgate was littered with errors. The Latin read *'Do penance for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand' (Matt.3:1-2)* that is, confess your sins to a priest and perform the required acts of penance. Erasmus was withering in his condemnation of this translation. The original Greek clearly stated *'Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand'*. In Luke 1:28 the Vulgate stated *'Hail Mary, the one who is full of grace'*. For centuries this had been understood as meaning that Mary was replete with grace - like an overflowing reservoir and was therefore able to bestow grace on others. Erasmus castigated this translation. The Greek said *'Hail Mary the one who has found Grace'*. This was alarming because to attack the Vulgate was to attack the Church. The use of the Latin *'justificare'* (to make righteous) was an etymological disaster which was not corrected until the Reformation.

The early part of the sixteenth century was already a powder-keg waiting to explode. Erasmus lit the fuse, making The Reformation inevitable. His Greek NT was the key which unlocked the door through which the Reformers would pass. He longed that his NT would benefit the peoples of Europe and beyond:

> *'I wish that the Scriptures might be translated into all languages so that not only the Scots and Irish but also the Turk and Saracen might read and understand them. I long that the farm-labourer might sing them as he follows his plough, the weaver hum them to the tune of his shuttle, the traveller beguile the weariness of his journey with their stories'.*

His Greek NT acted like a lightening conductor with Germany receiving the

first strike. Luther was stung into action and by 1521 he had translated Erasmus' NT into German. Erasmus may have laid the egg but Luther was determined to hatch it! Erasmus knew that he had laid the egg but had expected a different kind of bird!

William Tyndale (1494-1536)

The powerful shock waves spread quickly across the Channel reaching Cambridge in 1521. A group of scholars, known as the Little Germany Group met in an English pub (The White Horse Inn) to discuss the works of Erasmus and Luther. The group included Thomas Bilney who was converted through reading Erasmus' Greek NT and Robert Barnes who preached the first Reformation sermon in England in Cambridge on Christmas Eve 1525. Other members included Latimer, Ridley, Bradford and Rodgers. The group probably had contact with the brilliant young linguist, William Tyndale who wished to follow Luther's example and translate the NT into his native language on the basis of Erasmus' Greek NT. He was denied permission to pursue his work in England and was forced to travel to the Continent. He never returned. He single-handedly translated the NT into English, publishing his work in 1525. It was the most important event in the history of the English Reformation.

His work was a masterpiece of clarity, brevity and power. His words were readable, understandable and above all memorable. It is Tyndale we have to thank for many of the phrases we so readily associate with the KJ Bible: *'scapegoat', 'fleshpots', 'filthy lucre', 'my brother's keeper', 'a law unto themselves', ' fight the good fight', 'the powers that be'* and many others. His translation reflected the new thinking of The Reformation: 'Church' became 'congregation'; 'priests' became 'elders'; 'penance' became 'repentance' and 'charity' became 'love'. The change from church to congregation was far-reaching as it dealt a serious blow to the medieval notion of the church as an institution consisting of Bishops, Priests and Religious with the laity somewhere on the periphery.

The influence of his work was immense and his translation became the foundation of every English Bible which followed. His New Testament was the first book of substance to be published in Modern English and represented a turning point in the history of the English language. He showed that English was able to bear the weight of the Bible and set English on a course to become the language of the world.

Sir Thomas Moore (1478-1535) was severely critical of Tyndale's work. He regarded it as scandalous to translate the Bible into English. Latin was the

language of God and the angels. Tyndale's publication was banned and any copies which had been smuggled into England were publically burned. It even became an offence to hear the Bible read in English. Tyndale was hounded across the Continent, eventually finding refuge in Antwerp where he was treacherously betrayed and imprisoned. He taught himself Hebrew and translated The Pentateuch into English. While incarcerated he wrote a pitiful message to the Governor of the prison . . .

> *'If I am to remain here during Winter. be kind enough to send me a warmer cap. a warmer coat also for that which I have is very thin. My overcoat is worn out as are also my shirts. I also wish to have a lamp in the evening. above all kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible, Grammar and Dictionary that I might spend my time with that study'.*

He was never released but was found guilty of heresy and executed in 1536. His last words were said to be *'Lord, Open the King of England's eyes'.* That king was Henry VIII, the most powerful king in English history.

The Great Bible

Henry had severed relations with the Pope in 1534 and declared himself and his successors Head of the Church in England. After separating from Rome, Henry became receptive to the idea of the Bible in English. If he could have his own Church, why not his own Bible? Miles Coverdale, Tyndale's assistant, published the first complete Bible in English in 1535. It was based mainly on Tyndale's work and carried a Royal dedication.

> *'I dedicate this translation unto your Highness...having continual thankfulness unto God...for being our Moses and for bringing us out of this old Egypt from the cruel hands of ... Pharaoh'.*

Coverdale saw Henry as Moses leading his people out of Rome and into the Promised Land of The Reformation. Unfortunately, Coverdale's Bible failed to gain the King's approval because of its association with the ill-fated Anne Boleyn.

Two years later Matthew's Bible was published. It was the work of John Rodgers, one of The Little Germany group and contained his own outspoken marginal comments. Surprisingly, Henry gave Matthew's Bible his approval, the title page bearing the words *'set forth with the King's most gracious licence'.* It was the first Authorised Version of the English Bible. The King's eyes had been opened.

In 1538 Thomas Cromwell advised Henry that a Bible should be placed in

every church in England.

> *'Ye shall provide one book of the whole Bible of the largest volume...and set up in some convenient place within the...church.. where... parishioners may most commodiously ... read it'.*

Neither Matthew's nor Coverdale's Bibles were considered suitable. Cromwell commissioned a revision of Matthew's Bible with all the controversial annotations deleted. The result was The Great Bible of 1539. It measured sixteen and a half inches by eleven inches.

One of the most important innovations in printing in the sixteenth century was the development of The Title Page. The Great Bible's Title Page (Fig 1 on page 66) was an elaborate piece of iconography by Hans Holbein and designed to convey only one message - that Henry was now Head of the Church and not the Pope.

Henry is shown sitting on his throne distributing the Bible to the clergy on his right (represented by Thomas Cranmer) and to the laity on his left (represented by Thomas Cromwell). Cranmer is seen standing bare-headed receiving the Verbum Dei from Henry. He then distributes copies to his clergy who kneel to receive them. The priest is then shown preaching to an attentive congregation who far from thanking God for the Bible shout *Vivat Rex*. Thomas Cromwell receives his copies and distributes them to the Privy Councillors and thence to the people. God is represented by a tiny figure above the King's head. The message is that Henry has been directly appointed by God and is the spiritual guide to his people. It is a powerful portrayal of the Divine Right of Kings and Royal Absolutism. To oppose the King is to oppose God. The Bible has become an instrument of the state. It is important to understand that although Henry is shown distributing the Bible it is not because he has become a Lutheran or a Protestant. Nothing could be further from the truth. He loathed Luther and had nothing but contempt for his theology. Henry saw the Bible as presenting an elevated view of Kingship with himself in the role of the OT Kings of Israel, especially David. The function of the Bible was to teach the people their obligation to obey the King at all times. Throughout his life Henry remained a Catholic, albeit an idiosyncratic English one. His religion was neither Roman Catholicism, nor Lutheranism, nor Anglicanism but Henricanism, a religion peculiar to Henry himself and which ceased with his passing in 1547. His will provided for two priests to pray for his soul every day until the end of the world.

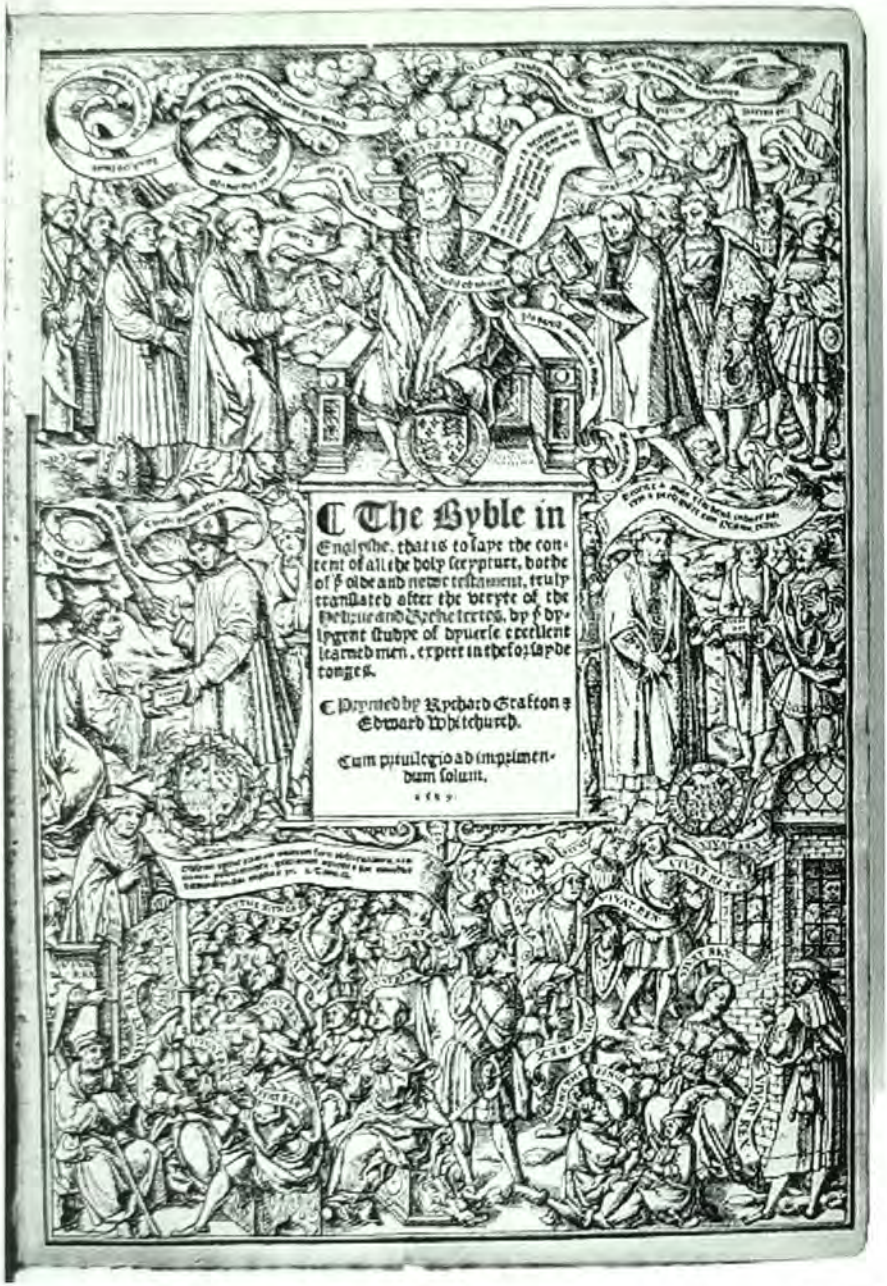

¶ The Byble in
Englyshe, that is to saye the
content of all the holy scrypture, both
of ye olde and newe testament, truly
translated after the veryte of the
Hebrue and Greke textes, by ye dy-
ligent studye of dyuerse excellent
learned men, expert in the fore sayde
tonges.
¶ Prynted by Rychard Grafton &
Edward Whitchurch.
Cum priuilegio ad imprimendum solum.
M.D.XL.

Figure 1

Edward VI / Mary

Henry was succeeded by his nine-year-old son Edward who embraced The Reformation under the tutelage of Thomas Cranmer and others. He was seen as England's King Josiah who would initiate widespread religious reform. His reign started well with the publication of The First English Prayer Book (1549) and it appeared that England was set to become a Protestant nation.

However, it was not to be. Tragedy struck in 1553 when Edward died, aged 16. He was succeeded by his half-sister Mary. Her life was a vale of tears. The progress of the Reformation came to a bone-crunching halt. Mary re-established Roman Catholicism and papal authority throughout the land. Anyone who espoused the Reformation was removed from office, or worse. John Rodgers, the translator of Matthew's Bible was the first of several hundred to perish in the fire. Many scholars were forced to flee to Europe not knowing if they would ever return. A number settled in Geneva which had become a centre of Biblical scholarship under John Calvin and Theodore Beza. John Knox famously described the independent city as *'the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on the Earth since the days of the Apostles'.*

The Geneva Bible

In the safety of Geneva the exiles produced a new translation known as the Geneva Bible, published in 1560. Impeccable scholarship meant it was the best translation in its day. The Geneva Bible rendering *'cast thy bread upon the waters'* was vastly superior to the Great Bible's *'lay thy bread upon wet faces'* . Phrases such as *'skin of my teeth', 'money is the root of all evil'* and *'the race is not to the swift'* are the heritage of the Geneva Bible. It was the version used by Shakespeare and later by John Milton and John Bunyan. The Soldier's Pocket Bible (1643) issued by Cromwell to his troops contained extracts from the Genevan Scriptures.

The Englishmen dedicated the new translation to Elizabeth, their 27 year old Queen across the seas:

> *'To the most virtuous and noble Queen Elizabeth...whom God hath made as our Zerubbabel the Lord of Lords and King of Kings strengthen your Majesty that you may be able to build up the ruins of God's house'.*

Henry had been seen as Moses leading his people to the Promised Land.

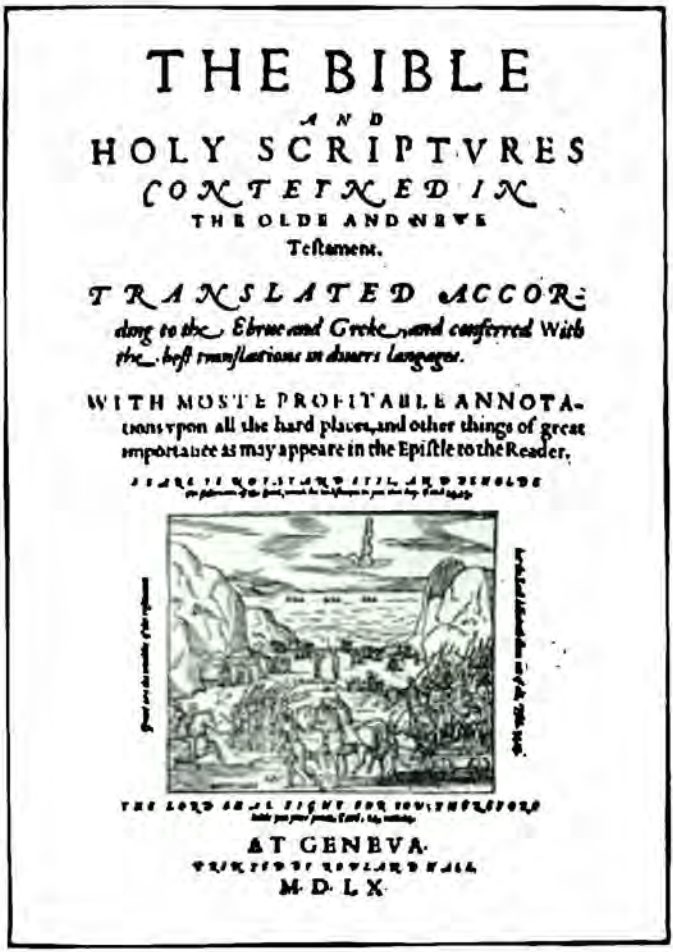

THE BIBLE
AND
HOLY SCRIPTVRES
CONTEINED IN
THE OLDE AND NEWE
Teſtament.
TRANSLATED ACCOR-
ding to the Ebrue and Greke, and conferred With
the beſt tranſlations in diuers langages.
WITH MOSTE PROFITABLE ANNOTA-
tions vpon all the hard places, and other things of great
importance as may appeare in the Epiſtle to the Reader.
AT GENEVA.
M. D. L X.

Figure 2

Now Elizabeth was regarded as Zerubbabel who would rebuild the ruined church in England just as Zerubbabel had rebuilt the ruined temple in Jerusalem.

The Title Page (Fig 2 above) was radically different from the grandiose iconography of The Great Bible. It was plain, serious and biblical, stating that the new translation was accompanied by *'most profitable annotations upon all the HARD places'*. The woodcut showed the children of Israel about to

cross the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army in hot pursuit. The monarch did not appear on The Title Page but the fleeing Israelites were strengthened by quotations from Exodus 14 and Psalm 34:

> *'Fear ye not, stand still, and behold the salvation of the Lord. The Lord shall fight for you; therefore hold your peace'.*

The Geneva Bible introduced versification and was easier to read than The Great Bible. The margins bristled with annotations amounting to over 300,000 words, some of which were outspokenly anti-Roman, *'the beast that cometh up out of the bottomless pit'* (Rom.11:7) was accompanied by the annotation *'that is the Pope, which hath his power out of Hell'.*

The Elizabethan Settlement

When Elizabeth came to the throne the country was in turmoil. The religious pendulum had been swinging wildly as a result of the mayhem created by Mary, Edward and her father. The Marian exiles soon returned and the Geneva Bible quickly became the most popular Bible in the country. Three groups vied for the Queen's favour. The returning exiles (Puritans) sought a radical overhaul of the Church and the use of the Geneva Bible. The Anglicans wanted a return to the conditions under Edward and the Catholics wanted to maintain the status quo which existed under Mary. Elizabeth needed religious peace and needed it quickly. The Elizabethan Settlement of Religion was a *'via media'*, a compromise arrangement which gave something to everyone but nobody received all they wanted. In essence, the Church was to be Catholic in structure and Reformed in doctrine as outlined in The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (1563).

The Bishops' Bible

An important part of the Settlement was the updating of the Bible in every church. The Geneva Bible was superior to the Great Bible but was unacceptable to the church authorities because of its outspoken comments. The Queen agreed that her Bishops should produce a new translation which was to be based on the Great Bible. The result was the Bishops' Bible of 1568. The sumptuous Title Page showed the Queen surrounded by female personifications of Justice, Mercy, Prudence and Fortitude, all of which was in marked contrast to the Geneva Bible. The Bishop's Bible never displaced

the Geneva Bible which remained the most popular translation for the next one hundred years. The Elizabethan Settlement settled little and religious tensions continued throughout her reign.

The Douai-Rheims Bible

The Douai-Rheims Bible (1582, 1609) was the work of Catholic exiles who had fled to France during Elizabeth's reign. They relied heavily on the Vulgate because the Council of Trent (1546) declared that the Latin translation was the only authoritative text for Roman Catholics. It contained many Latin expressions and underpinned Catholic doctrine employing such words as '*chalice*', '*penance*' and '*host*'.

THE KING JAMES BIBLE

With the death of Elizabeth in 1603, the Tudor dynasty ended and was followed by the Stuarts, the first of whom was James I (James VI of Scotland). The country had just emerged from one of the most sensational centuries in British History which had seen seven new translations of the English Bible. Society had moved away from the medieval world of images, relics and pilgrimages towards a more word -based society. Three versions of the Bible were in circulation, the Geneva Bible of the Puritans, the Bishop's Bible of the religious establishment and the Catholic Douai-Rheims Bible. There was no demand for a new translation.

The Puritans were enthusiastic at the prospect of James as King as he had been brought up by Presbyterians in a country which had embraced that form of church government and the Geneva Bible. They lost no time in presenting the King with The Millenary Petition highlighting their serious concerns regarding Episcopacy, The Prayer Book and certain liturgical matters. They sought to purify the Church and rid her of all vestiges of Catholicism.

> *'Such abuses...in the Church of England we are able to show not to be agreeable to the Scriptures. If it shall please your Highness further to hear us or by Conference to be resolved'.*

The petition caused consternation within the church establishment which repeatedly reminded the King that the survival of the Monarchy depended upon Episcopacy. They need not have worried because James had an intense dislike of Presbyterianism, having suffered a bruising experience in Scotland. Presbyterianism was far too democratic for a monarch who believed passionately in the Divine Right of Kings. He said, '*a Scottish*

Presbytery goes with a King as well as God goes with the Devil'. 'No Bishop, No King' was his succinct policy statement. Furthermore, he detested the Geneva Bible calling it *'the worst of all translations'* not because it was inaccurate but because he found certain marginal comments offensive. For example, commenting on Daniel 6:7 the translators stated that the King was not above the law and that Daniel was right to disobey the King, a view which caused James to fly into a rage. *'Touch not mine anointed'* (Ps.105:15) was applied not to the king but to the people.

Nevertheless James was anxious to achieve religious peace and followed the example of Constantine by convening a conference. James ensured that the delegates to the Hampton Court Conference were heavily weighted in favour of the Bishops with nineteen Establishment figures and only four Puritans. The proceedings opened on 14 January 1604 with a speech by James which lasted over one hour.

> *'It is no novel device for kings to take the first course for the establishing of the Church both in doctrine and in policy. To this the very heathen related in their proverb "A Jove Principium." Henry VIII ... altered much; King Edward more; Queen Mary reversed all and ... Queen Elizabeth settled religion as it now stand-eth. I am happier than they because they were fain to alter all things ... whereas I seek no such cause to change ... what I find settled already'.*

James had no intention of conceding anything to the Puritans. They became the unfortunate victims for all the indignities James had suffered at the hands of the Presbyterians in Scotland. Yet, James still needed to achieve religious stability and desperately needed to offer the Puritans something or his conference would be seen to be a flop. His opportunity arose when the leading Puritan, John Reynolds, proposed a new translation of the Bible. We will probably never know what motivated this proposal but what we do know is that James seized on the suggestion seeing it as an opportunity to give the Puritans something they had asked for. Furthermore, the outcome would be forever associated with him and known as The King James Bible. The task would take years to complete during which time religious controversy would be reduced. The Bishops opposed the suggestion but eventually gave their support when they were given control of the translation process.

The translation was to be the work of forty-seven of the most able scholars divided into six companies. Each was allocated one sixth of the Bible which was to include the Apocrypha. The members received no payment as the royal coffers were empty following The Nine Years' War in Ulster! Archbishop Bancroft drew up a set of 15 rules to ensure that the result would not favour the Puritans. The excommunication of Elizabeth in 1570 and the attempted

invasion by Spain in 1588 meant that the rules should not favour the Catholics either. The guidelines stated that the Bishops' Bible of 1568 should be the foundation text. The old ecclesiastical words such as bishops and church were to be retained and the work was to be regularly reviewed to ensure that the result was suitable for public reading. No marginal comments were to be included.
The work took six years to complete. It was a masterpiece of English literature with its pleasing rhythms and cadences beloved of so many. Yet the primary aim of the KJ translators was not literary merit but accuracy in translation.

The Title Page

The Title Page (Fig 3 opposite) had the appearance of a heavy sculpture and was dominated by the figures of Moses and Aaron standing in niches, representing the Law and the Priesthood. The inclusion of Aaron is unusual but not surprising as the Anglican translators wanted to emphasise the dominant role of the priest in the Church of England as opposed to the Puritan's insistence on the priesthood of all believers. Aaron is shown holding the instrument of slaughter and a vessel containing blood. Above these two OT figures is a cornice showing the heraldic emblems of the 12 tribes of Israel. The Trinity is represented by the Tetragrammaton, a dove and a lamb holding a flag. Gathered around the Trinity are the twelve Apostles. Peter and Paul are seated with Peter holding the keys and Paul holding a sword. Others include Andrew with a transverse cross, Bartholomew holds a tanner's knife and Simon a saw. At the base there is an oval panel showing a pelican feeding her young with her own blood, an established symbolic device representing the work of Christ.

The woodcut presents an interesting mixture of Protestant and Catholic iconography. The portrayal of Peter as the sole-holder of the keys is distinctly Catholic. The Apostles with their instruments of martyrdom and the 'vulning' pelican are well recognised Catholic emphases. *'Appointed to be read in churches'* meant 'suitable to be read in churches' rather than Authorised or Approved as we understand the term today. The term 'Authorised Version' did not appear on the Title Page.

Dedication to King James

The famous Dedicatory Epistle was drippingly sycophantic.

> *'To the most High and Mighty Prince James, by the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith ...*

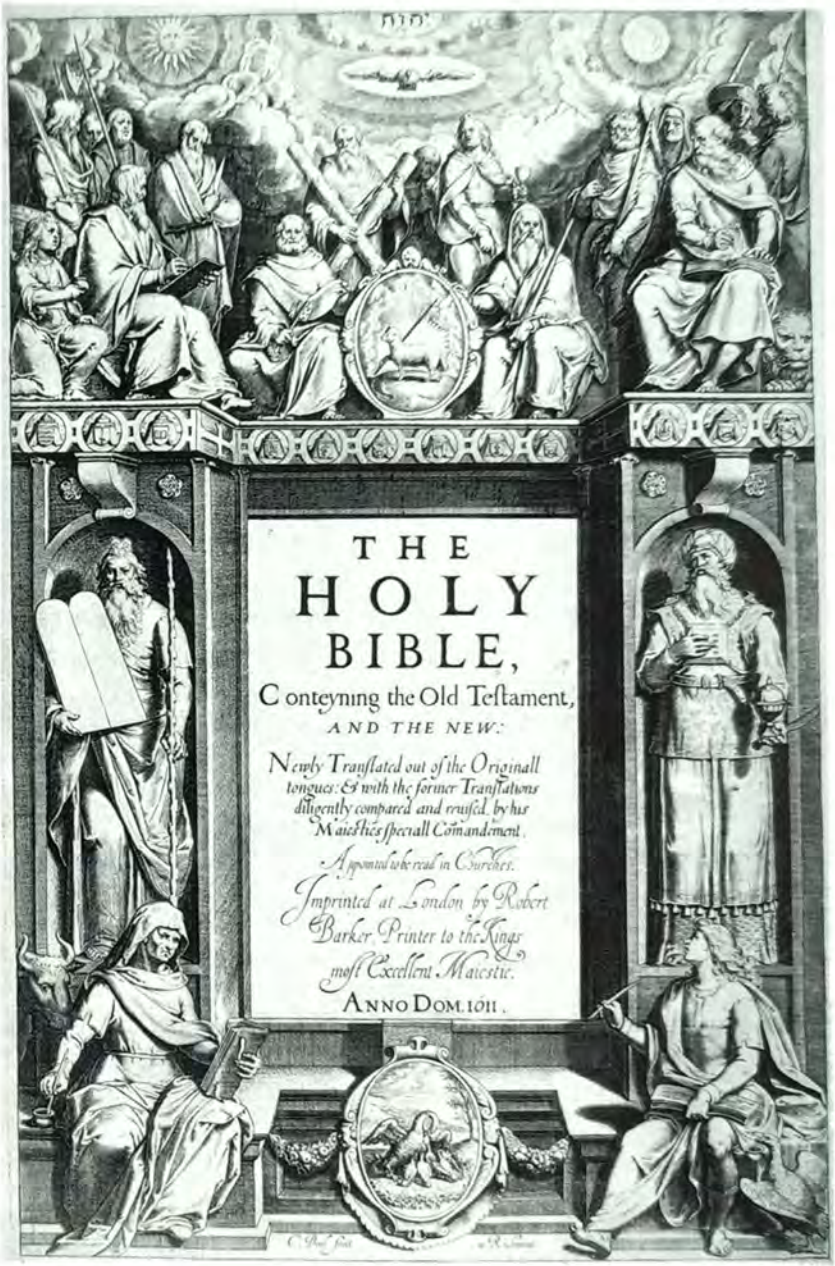

THE
HOLY
BIBLE,
Conteyning the Old Testament,
AND THE NEW:
Newly Translated out of the Originall tongues: & with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by his Maiesties speciall Comandement.
Appointed to be read in Churches.
Imprinted at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the Kings most Excellent Maiestie.
ANNO DOM. 1611.

Figure 3

Great ... were the blessings, most dread Sovereign which God bestowed upon us ... when He first sent your Majesty's Royal Person to rule ... over us ... It was the expectation ... that, upon the setting of that blight occidental star Queen Elizabeth ... some thick and palpable clouds of darkness would so have overshadowed this land ... the appearance of your Majesty instantly dispelled those ... mists. We hold it our duty to offer this work ... that it may receive approbation from so learned and judicious a Prince'.

The author is unknown but the suggestion that he was a career ecclesiastic is probably close to the truth. The inclusion of France in the King's Title is curious because Calais had been lost during the reign of Mary Tudor, fifty years previously.

Translators' Address to the Readers

The new translation also supplied a 10,000 word 'Address to the Readers' which is no longer printed in today's KJ Bibles. This is unfortunate because the translators gave interesting insights into various aspects of their work. The Address was quite different from the extravagant eulogising of the Dedication.

Miles Smith and his colleagues held a high view of Scripture.

'[The Bible] is not only an armour but also a whole armoury. It is not a herb, but a tree or rather a whole paradise of trees...which bring forth fruit every month. It is not a pot of manna ... but ... a shower of heavenly bread sufficient for a whole host. A treasury of most costly jewels, a fountain of most pure water. Happy is the man that delighteth in the Scripture, and thrice happy that meditateth in it day and night'.

They had the highest regard for the work of previous translators and were aware that they were building on other men's foundations.

'We acknowledge ... (those that travailed before us) *to have been raised up of God ... and that they deserve to be had of us and of posterity in everlasting remembrance'.*

'We never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one, ... but to make a good one better'.

The *'good one'* was mainly the work of William Tyndale which eventually accounted for eighty percent of the KJ New Testament and seventy-five percent of the Old Testament books which he had translated. It is one of the great injustices of literary history that the name William Tyndale does not appear on the opening pages of the KJ Bible.

The task of translation was approached with the utmost care seeing their work as,

> *'that openeth the window to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water even as Jacob rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which means the flocks of Laban were watered'.*

The translators acknowledged that biblical translation was not a precise science and that it was difficult or impossible to understand certain Hebrew words. In such cases they indicated that dogmatism was inappropriate,

> *'for as it is a fault of incredulity to doubt of those things are evident; so to determine of such things as the Spirit of God hath left questionable, can be no less than presumption'.*

They felt free to use a variety of English terms to translate the same Hebrew or Greek word as a means of enlivening the text.

> *'We have not tied ourselves to a uniformity of phrasing or an identity of words. For example if we translate the Hebrew or Greek word once by PURPOSE, never to call it INTENT ... If one were JOY never GLADNESS'.*

The six companies had to contend with Hebrew idioms, some of which they recognised (Gen.7:13, Ezk.2:3) while others they misunderstood (Jer.7:13; 29:19). After much discussion it was decided to present all literary genres in the same way. This was unfortunate as it obscured the poetic nature of large sections of the text. The translators were constrained to follow the language of The Bishop's Bible which in turn was based on Tyndale's work and were not free to reflect changes in English which had occurred over the previous three generations. This meant that when the KJ Bible was published in 1611 it already had an air of old-fashioned majesty because the use of words such as '*Thou*', '*Thee*' and '*Ye*' were already in decline. Their translation of the NT was based solely on the Textus Receptus.

In addition, there was the issue of the Apocrypha. Although The Thirty-nine Articles had not included the Apocrypha within the Canon of Scripture, these writings were included in the KJ Bible of 1611.

Only after studying the Title Page, reading the Dedication and digesting the lengthy Address did the reader finally reach Genesis chapter 1.

The triumph of the KJ Bible

When the new translation was released it had minimal impact as the ordinary people continued to use the Geneva Bible. They regarded the new translation as the Bible of the Anglican and political establishments. This caused James little concern as he was satisfied that he had been seen to give something to the Puritans. The matter however gave rise to serious conflict during the reign of his son, Charles, to whom James had bequeathed the baneful doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. Archbishop Laud detested the Geneva Bible and banned it arguing that support for it was unpatriotic in the face of the new Royal translation.

The Civil War split the country into two camps each with its own Bible. The Royalists supported the KJ version while the Parliamentarians adhered to the Geneva Bible. Victory went to the Parliamentarians and Britain became a godly Commonwealth. With the Restoration in 1660 there was a reaction against the strictness of the Puritan regime accompanied by a sharp decline in the use of the Geneva Bible. The country turned its back on Puritanism and the Geneva Bible became *'the forgotten translation'*. Religious conformity based on The Prayer Book and the KJ Bible was imposed on the people. The KJ Bible became the Bible of the nation and remained so for the next three hundred years. It had a unifying effect on all English-speaking people throughout the ever expanding British Empire.

The English language

The KJ Bible had a significant impact on the English language. During the early seventeenth century the native language was in a state of flux and the KJ Bible was published at just the right time to influence what were to become the norms of written and spoken Modern English. For 300 years the KJ Bible was the most widely-read book and for many it was the only book they read or heard. It is not surprising that many phrases from the KJ Bible have become part of everyday speech, *'How are the mighty fallen'; 'beat their swords into ploughshares'; 'to everything there is a season' 'suffer little children* 'and *'a thorn in the flesh'.*

But British culture is changing. With increasing secularisation and diminishing exposure to the Bible, biblical phrases are likely to pass out of common usage within a few generations. Furthermore, because the KJ Bible permeates much of English literature an increasing number of students are finding large portions of our written heritage difficult or impossible to understand.

Today some Christians regard the KJ Bible as the best translation and resist attempts at revision. This is understandable because people long for fixity, finality and certainty but the translators of the KJ Bible would not have seen it that way. They freely acknowledged that they built on the foundation of others and that future generations would build on theirs. All translations require revision because living languages change (Js 2:3, 5:11). Dead languages don't change. The Bible contains 'the lively oracles of God' and all translators must strive to render them understandable to their generation. The scholars of 1611 produced a literary classic in Elizabethan English but the task of translating the Bible into modern English continues today and will continue to the end of the world or until English becomes a dead language.

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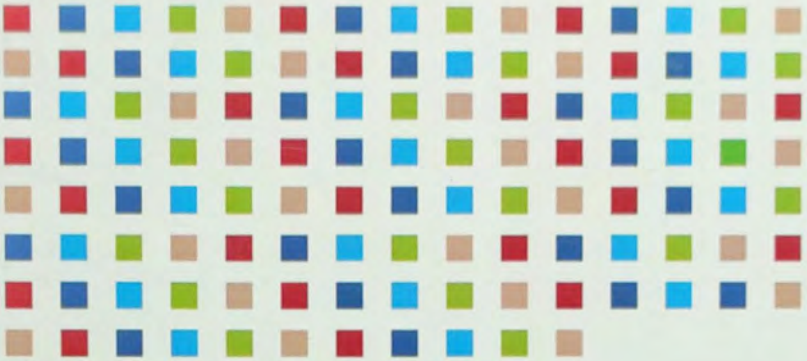
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