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VOLUME TWENTY-THREE

1990/91

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EDITORIAL

Volume 23 of the Journal offers a fairly concentrated diet of reading. The first topic, 'Liberty of Conscience: A Pertinent Question' attracted the largest audience of the year apart from the annual meeting, and stimulated a constructive discussion of some delicate issues. The practice of encouraging the writing of local church histories is maintained with the paper on the Thomas street Church, Portadown. 1992 sees the centenary of the Irish Baptist College, and the article on 'The Dublin Years' will be followed by another next year on 'The Belfast Years', and together will provide a passable history of the College. Of interest is the list of students who passed through the College between 1892 and 1963. A similar list will accompany Part II next year.

The regular meetings of the Society are enjoyed by members who can attend. Improved attendances indicate that interest in the history of Baptist churches and individuals in Ireland is developing satisfactorily.

We greet all our members in Ireland and elsewhere through the pages of the Journal and welcome the feedback which each volume yields.

Liberty of Conscience: A Pertinent Issue

When asked to present this paper I was unaware of a number of issues. Firstly, how many interpretations of this phrase 'liberty of conscience' there are. Secondly, how little has been written on the subject. Thirdly, how relevant and controversial it would be.

What I offer you this evening is the fruit of a limited mind. I am neither an historian nor theologian, but I am a pastor, and as a pastor one is constantly faced with the issue of liberty of conscience in the local church. For example, when someone in my church hold holds a different theological viewpoint to me do I give vent to my neurotic fears and try to whip that person into line? Do I try to exert my authority over any who seem to pose a potential threat to my spiritual leadership? Or do I debate, do I encourage, content in the knowledge that both my conscience and the conscience of the one who differs with me will be judged by the Lord, the great arbiter and judge? When should I distinguish between what is merely a different theological view which may be harmless and an erroneous view which may threaten the life and witness of the church? What standard of measurement should I use in distinguishing these? No pastor escapes these kinds of questions. Some may not be troubled by them choosing to rule with a theological iron fist. Some may ignore them in the hope that they will go away. But all pastors face them.

If this is true for a pastor it is also true for the members of our churches. These questions can arise when new members bring new influences, when a change of pastor or leadership brings a shift in theological emphasis or in preaching or in local church practices and organization. So, whether there is little or much written on this subject, it is a subject of continuing relevance. Though not always named it is at issue when questions of differences of belief, practice and fellowship are being addressed. It is, therefore, a pertinent subject at any time.

This paper approaches the subject under four main headings:

1. Historical outline of the Baptist position on liberty of conscience.
2. Biblical teaching on liberty of conscience.
3. The limits on liberty.
4. A plea for liberty

1. Historical outline of the Baptist position on liberty of conscience.

Dr Maurice Dowling in his paper, 'The Radical Reformation'[1] concludes, "If one were to summarize the contribution which the Anabaptists made to the history of the Church we would have to pinpoint their emphasis on the principle of a gathered church ... they made an important contribution to the principle of religious liberty, repudiating the idea that the state had the right to punish people for holding particular views ...[2]

The search for the origins of the Anabaptist movement takes us to Zürich in 1524-25. Three names - George Blaurock, Conrad Grebel and Felix Muntz - are particularly associated with the foundation of a group of radical believers who practised believer's baptism and met as a gathered church. The authorities soon outlawed their heresy on behalf of the Reformed

Church in Zürich. They passed laws making it an offence to rebaptize and to meet with Anabaptists. If found guilty the death sentence could be applied. Muntz was sentenced to death by drowning. Blaurock was whipped and exiled. Many others, unknown today, suffered similar fates all across Europe. None of them was prepared to accept that the civil or religious authorities had the right to dictate to a man's conscience. The truths of Scripture were available to be understood and applied with a clear conscience before God. This was a principle for which they were prepared to die.

The seventeenth century brings us to Thomas Helwys. In 1612 he wrote *A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Inquity*. Shortly afterwards he was imprisoned by James I, to whom we are forever indebted for the Authorized Version. Those who wrote the preface to the translation referred to James I as 'the Most High and Mighty Prince James ... defender of the faith.' They continue, "... humbly craving of Your most Sacred Majesty that since things of this quality have ever been subject to the censures of illmeaning and discontented persons, it may receive approbation and patronage from so learned and judicious a Prince as Your Highness is ... So that if, on the one side, we shall be traduced by Popish Persons at home or abroad, who therefore will malign us, because we are poor instruments to make God's holy Truth to be yet more and more known unto the people, whom they desire still to keep in ignorance and darkness; or, if on the other side, we shall be maligned by selfconceited Brethren, who run their own ways, and give liking unto nothing but what is framed by themselves and hammered on their anvil; we may rest secure ... sustained without by the powerful protection of Your Majesty's grace and favour ..." With this the so-called Church grovelled to the State.

There was no room in Protestant England under James 'Defender of the Faith' for a man to follow his conscience before God in private interpretation of Scripture and in public association and worship with those who shared his convictions. Helwys was brave enough, or mad enough, to argue that not only did the king have no right over Helwys' conscience, but he had no right to have 'any thoughts of provoking evil against them of Romish religion ... for ... if they be true and faithful subjects of the king ... our Lord the king has no more power over their consciences than over ours, and that is none at all ... men's religion to God is between God and themselves ... Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews or whatsoever it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least'. [3] As the preface to the AV makes clear Helwys was in a minority, but he maintained the integrity of his position to the point of death.

In 1614 Mark Leonard Busher published *Religious Peace, A Plea for Liberty of Conscience*. Busher had been leader of a group of General Baptists in the Netherlands and had associations with both Helwys and John Smyth. Busher put up seventeen arguments against religious persecution. For example, he argued that Christ had not commanded persecution; that Christ came to save men, not to destroy them; that persecution is tyranny over the souls of men. Busher argued that 'Jews' or 'Papists' should be allowed to 'write, dispute, confer and reason, print and publish any matter touching religion, either for or against whomsoever'.[4] He did impose two limitations: firstly, the only authority writers could quote must be the Scripture; and secondly, the writers would not be allowed to slander or reproach one another.

Turning to the United States of America we can trace the struggle of Roger Williams and others, who, having escaped the persecution of the established church under Charles I, had to wrestle with the implications of permitting the exercise of religious liberty and liberty of conscience. Williams had been brought up in a society which under James I and Charles I actively pursued heretics and disposed of them. Williams himself had been employed by the court before which such heretics were tried and sentenced. Appalled by the inhumanity of this persecution Williams dared to challenge even Archbishop Laud himself and to do so publicly. The consequence of this challenge was the issuing of a warrant for the arrest of Williams. To escape Williams sailed for Boston in 1631.

In Massachusetts similar problems existed. The Puritans, having fled from persecution in England, practised the same themselves in the new land of liberty. Williams made himself unpopular by challenging these practices. He argued that 'according to Divine Law officers of the crown cannot rightfully interfere with the rights of a person to worship as he pleases.'[5] New England, Williams said, 'likes to think of itself as a new Israel, assembled by God to be both a nation and a church, with its own Levitical priesthood and its own promised land. What nonsense! What land is now Israel's parallel? None whatsoever! Nothing is more blasphemous and absurd than the bloody, irreligious, inhumane oppressions under the mask or veil of the name of Christ.'[6]

Williams, Clarke, Scriven, Backus, Leland worked along with many others throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to establish the principle and practice of religious liberty in America.[7]

This is only a brief historical review of the issue. It is important, however, because it highlights a number of key points:

i. Any Baptist who is unaware of the importance of this issue and the cost to earlier generations of Baptists of upholding it is in danger of failing to appreciate one of our great distinctives;

ii The historical debates of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries related not only to the freedom to practise one's religion, but also the freedom to believe. We tend to take for granted the freedom we have to practise our religion and view liberty of conscience as synonymous with religious liberty. This is not the case. Liberty of conscience includes religious liberty but it is more than religious liberty. It also includes the right of private judgment.

iii Today we must ask ourselves if we believe in the right of private judgment as strongly as those we have been considering. We must ask ourselves to what degree we will grant liberty to others to follow that judgment both in our churches and in our Union of Churches.

2. Biblical teaching on liberty of conscience

The key passages I would like to draw your attention to are Romans 14, I Corinthians 8 and I Corinthians 10:23-33. The degree of freedom which Paul, the one time legalistic Pharisee, proclaims is amazing. Truly the old covenant is done away with. One man's faith

allows him to eat everything. He must not look down on the weaker brother, nor must the weaker brother condemn him for his eating. (Rom 14:2) 'One considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike. Each man should be convinced in his own mind.' (Rom 14:5) The practice of looking down on a brother who has little liberty is condemned, as is the practice of condemning a brother who feels great liberty in these things. (Rom 14:10) Paul makes it clear that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God when each one will give an account of himself to God (Rom 14:10-12) In 1 Corinthians 10:25-26 Paul advises his readers to '...eat without raising questions of conscience anything that is sold in the meat market for "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it".' Eat whatever is set before you without raising questions of conscience, unless your host is looking for your agreement in his idol worship. Then take a stand to make it clear that you do not worship idols. Otherwise ... 'why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience', asks Paul, 'If I take part in the meal with thankfulness then why am I being denounced because of something I thank God for?' (1 Cor 10:27-30).

This, by twentieth century standards Irish Baptist and Evangelical standards, is remarkable liberty and freedom!

The other side of the coin is the voluntary restraint of liberty for the sake of the weaker brother. If your brother cannot cope with such freedom be sensitive towards him. 'If your brother is distressed because of what you eat you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.' (Rom 14:15) 'When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience you sin against Christ'. (1 Cor 8:12)

Here we see the issue of freedom and the exercise of restraint like a pair of scales which must be kept evenly balanced, and not weighted on one side or the other. Many have used this as a means of ruling on issues such as total abstention from alcohol, going to the theatre, acceptable limits of leisure on the Lord's Day and a host of other matters. The expression of private judgment (being convinced in your own mind) is to be forever restricted by the weaker brother.

This 'balanced scale' approach needs to be challenged. It is not an adequate reflection of all the biblical material on the subject. If it were the whole picture then there would never be any growth in freedom or liberty. We would be forever caught in what is often referred to as 'the tyranny of the weaker brother's conscience'.

The subject of freedom is not a bipartite but a tripartite issue. The picture of two issues to be kept in balance is not the full story. Better to think of the juggler required to keep three objects simultaneously in motion. When we turn to Galatians we find Peter earning a sharp rebuke from Paul for allowing his liberty to be dictated to by weaker brethren who could not shake off the yoke of Jewish legalism. 'You are a Jew yet you live like a Gentile and not a Jew. How is that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? ... for we know that a man is not justified by observing the law but by faith in Christ'. (Gal 2:14-16) Addressing the believers in Galatia Paul rebukes them concerning their falling back into bondage and abandoning their freedom, and with it the clear demonstration that salvation is by faith alone.

Bearing in mind what we have already heard him saying Romans and Galatians, note the sternness of his rebuke, '...how is it that you are turning back to those weak miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you ... what has happened to your joy? ... I am perplexed about you.' (Gal 4:9-20) Writing to the Colossians in a similar vein he says, '...do not let any one judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things to come: the reality however is found in Christ ... Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules. Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch! These are all destined to perish with use, because they are all based on human commands and teaching.' (Col 2:16ff.)

What has happened to respect for the weaker conscience? Why is he looking down on the weaker brother? He is not! Paul is teaching them and exhorting them about liberty. The biblical model on liberty must also include educating the weak and fearful in the freedom that there is in Christ. The church fails when she allows laws about observance of days, food, drink, etc. to replace teaching on freedom and liberty under the new covenant. The biblical picture is a balance between the three issues of being convinced in one's own mind; respecting the weaker brother; teaching the importance of liberty as a demonstration of the fact that salvation is not by law or works but by grace through faith.

I have pursued this argument for two reasons: (1) To emphasis the extent of liberty that the New Testament grants to the individual believer; and (2) To emphasise that the Baptist practice of standing for liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment is a biblical one and nothing to be ashamed of.

3. Limitations on liberty.

Some limitations on the exercise of liberty of conscience is necessary. That is obvious from the passages we referred to earlier. For example, I may be convinced in my own mind that there is nothing wrong or sinful about drinking alcohol. However, it would be totally irresponsible of me to arrive at a church lunch with a few bottles of wine to wash down the bread and cheese. Some would be put in danger; others would be grievously offended. Some restriction of liberty is proper. On the other hand, if I am so convinced in my own mind about my liberty in this matter I must be prepared to challenge any presentation of the gospel which suggests that response to, or understanding of the gospel is dependent on sharing a total abstinence position. I must not look down on that position, neither should I accept condemnation of my own position.

Further, I cannot exercise liberty of conscience when the exercise of any such liberty leads me to deny the truth of the gospel. There is controversy here - not over the principle I have just enunciated but over the point at which I may be denying the truth of the gospel. We are familiar with the phrase 'matters non-essential'. How do we decide when the principle of separation is being met and when it is being violated? How do we determine when we are compromising and when we are innocently engaged in the exercise of liberty on any matter? The problem is wide-ranging. For example, my interpretation of the passage in 1

Cor 11 on head covering may be different from yours. Can we agree that we hold a different interpretation. or is it simply a matter of me being right and you being wrong, or vice versa? W R Estep wrote, 'There must be some way, unless utter confusion reigns, to determine the relation of the Bible, confessions and conscience in Baptist life ... one of the factors contributing to the fragmentation of the Baptist witness into splinter groups has been the attempt on the part of some to force a degree of conformity on others without safeguarding the individual conscience from the tyranny of the majority. In the absence of any binding authority to hold Baptists together, a certain degree of diversity within biblical parameters is as necessary as it is inevitable ... When held in proper balance...there is possible a rich diversity within a dynamic unity. This is an achievement that requires both thought and conscious effort.'[8] A comment from Penrose St. Amant is helpful at this point, 'Historically, Baptists have lived with a certain creative tension at the point of freedom and authority. Without authority, freedom becomes a kind of theological anarchy. Without freedom, authority becomes oppressive and wooden. Both the problem and the glory of our Baptist heritage are rooted in the authority of the Word of God and in the freedom of man's mind and conscience to understand it.'[9]

When we, as Baptists, say that scripture is our final authority and not a creed or confession or hierarchy, we immediately plunge ourselves into the deep waters of interpretation, like it or not! If we believe in scripture as the final authority, the priesthood of all believers and the right of private interpretation (i.e. the need for each to be fully convinced in his own mind) we must, of necessity, within our local churches and within our Union of churches grant a fair degree of liberty to differ in belief and practice. If we do not, if we cannot cope with a measure of diversity, then we have invested our own or someone else's interpretation of scripture with an authority that we claim belongs only to scripture itself. Of course, we cannot agree to differ on our doctrine of Christ, or to differ on the nature of salvation, otherwise we do not know the same Lord or proclaim the same gospel. Liberty which leads us to deny such things is no longer liberty. There are, however, many issues on which uniformity is not necessary. We have for decades coped with the clear distinction between 'Reformed' and 'Dispensational'. This is right. This is as it should be. Are these the only issues on which diversity is acceptable? If we have coped with diversity over important issues such as predestination and the nature of the offer of the gospel to men, are we to run aground on an inability to see differently issues of separation, forms of worship, head coverings, versions, spiritual gifts, Lord's Day observance, etc.?

Let me conclude this section with a few general observations:

(1) Not every one who has joined Baptist churches in the last decades has understood, or even heard of, the Baptist principle of liberty of conscience. Consequently, there has been a desire for a more rigid and authoritarian or denominational approach to Baptist life.

(2) The political, cultural and religious life in Ireland (both North and South) tends to be dogmatic on many issues. We have allowed the standards of the world around us to dictate our own attitude to liberty.

(3) We have confused the need for order in the church with conformity. This may be because of an undue pride in our theological understanding, an insecurity, or an acquiescence to the demands of those who feel the need for authoritarian leadership.

There must be limits to liberty. Some will be self-imposed. Some will be agreed. But there must be liberty!

4. A Plea for liberty of conscience.

In this final section I want to use the analogy of marriage and a practical illustration to make the case for the exercise of liberty among us. The key elements in a healthy marriage are communication, trust and commitment. Any pastor or marriage guidance counsellor will tell you that when marriages are in trouble someone or all of these things are absent, or have broken down. A husband and wife must communicate, must make the effort that each speaks to and listens to the other - not at a superficial level but at the level of expressing their concerns, their hurts, their hopes, their fears. Each must trust the other. A lack of trust breeds suspicion, accusation, and leads to marital breakdown. As well as communication and trust, there must exist a commitment to one another - a commitment to care and share, to help and encourage, to trust and love. Where these things exist you have the prospect of a happy, fulfilling relationship for both partners which will benefit their children and those they come into contact with.

A Baptist Association, Convention or Union is not dissimilar to a marriage. Indeed the local church is not dissimilar either - note the parallels drawn by Paul in Ephesians. Total strangers have come together and made a commitment to one another in Jesus' name. If it is to be fruitful and to glorify God there must be communication, trust and commitment. It is in this environment that true liberty can flourish, that diversity in unity can be established. The purpose of marriage is to make two one, but it is not to make the two the same. Its purpose is to ensure that they complement one another and draw the best from one another within their shared commitment. Provided Irish Baptists have a shared commitment to the evangelization of their fellow men for Christ, on the basis of a shared commitment to Christ, there is no reason why there cannot continue to exist a fruitful union. There may, of course, be times when a partner will prove adulterous or unfaithful. There may be times when communication and commitment will irretrievably break down. That will have to be faced and as with any marriage situation reconciliation sought or separation accepted. Communication needs to be worked at. A husband and wife who assume too much of each other soon grow apart. Communication which includes a willingness for gracious confrontation is as necessary as it is healthy. It may be that what is needed for the future is a structure or forum for debate and discussion to avoid a 'taking-for-granted' and a growing apart in Union life. It may be that we need to look again at our commitment to evangelizing our fellow men together. Perhaps we have isolated this work to foreign fields too much, and need to rediscover our need of one another in a shared commitment to this Island. In an atmosphere of good communication and commitment, trust will grow and be strengthened. Liberty will neither be threatened nor a threat.

Let me conclude with a practical illustration. Some years ago our late brother Norman Porter presented to this Society a paper on Irish Baptists and the Orange Order. He documented the change in attitudes to the Orange Order from one of total separation to the acceptance of membership of the organization and facilitating it in holding religious services

in Baptist churches. He concluded with the comment that, 'The whole question of Orangeism and Irish Baptists seems to me to be a matter for personal conscience and Christian liberty, rather than something upon which our churches should pontificate'.[10] I believe he was right. I dislike the organization. I detest the marching and the religious services. I am particularly appalled at the idea of Baptists in membership of the Orange Order or any of our churches hosting services for it, or using its premises under any guise. But I have defended the right of Baptists to do such things, however embarrassing I feel them to be. I believe that each person and each local church must decide individually on these matters. Living in a Roman Catholic community I find such things at times awkward, but the price for being a Baptist is to grant liberty to others. The same kind of liberty must be extended across a whole range of issues. It must be displayed in Union life, in local church life. We are not to run churches like clubs, but are entrusted with Christ's church to run it by His rules and not ours. In this the liberty afforded by the New Covenant and the liberty necessary to accommodate our fallible understanding and interpretations must be treasured and safeguarded.

DAVID McMILLAN

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4 Ibid. p.8
5 E S Gaustad, 'Roger Williams Beyond Puritanism' in Baptist History and Heritage, vol XXIV, p.13
6 Ibid., in loc
7 See Dr J Thompson, 'Early American Baptists and Religious Liberty' in IBHSJ vol 9 1976-77.
8 In Review and Expositor vol LXXXIV, 4, p.599
9 Ibid., p.600
10 Norman Porter, 'Irish Baptists and Orangeism' in IBHSJ vol 18 1985-86, p. 16

"Pioneering, Penetration and Progress"

Being an Account of the Baptist Church at Portadown.

Many years ago, when sending a letter to Portadown the address would have read "Portadown near Tandragee"! So it is no surprise to find that in early 1924, Pastor I.P. Bell of Tandragee urged the necessity for a Baptist witness in Portadown. The Irish Baptist Home Mission responded quickly to this request, and an evangelistic tent campaign commenced in June, 1924. Pastor R. J. Clendinning preached the gospel with much acceptance and blessing, and in July he was joined by Mr. George Weir, a student who had just completed his studies at the Irish Baptist College, Dublin. As a result a church was formed shortly afterwards.

The minutes of the formation of the church read: "Sunday 28th September 1924 will be a memorable day in the history of the work of the Irish Baptist Home Mission. Tent work had been carried on in the town during the months of June, July, August and September, and, although the weather was exceptionally rough and wet, yet the services were well attended and were rich in blessing."

The First Church

So the "Pioneering" commenced - or did it? Among the thirteen founder members of the new church was Mrs. A. Wightman who had been associated with a Baptist witness in the town some fifty years previously. She formed an interesting link between the past and the present, and recollected at a church meeting on 25 January 1926, during a discussion about the name for the new church building, that the building in Bridge Street where the old church had worshipped had been called "Portadown Baptist Meeting House". After discussion of alternatives such as "Hall", "Chapel", "Tabernacle", these were rejected and it was decided to name the new building "Portadown Baptist Meeting House".[1]

In our possession is a lease dated 20th February 1864 "between George Bright and Reverend John Douglas, George Drimmie and Samuel Wilson, all of Portadown, aforesaid Trustees for and on behalf of the Portadown congregation of Baptists." It granted "all that room part or portion of a house situated in Bridge Street, Edenderry for a period of ten years at a rent of £10 per annum".

One of the earliest records in the "Denominational Intelligence" section of the Baptist Messenger for 1869 reported:
"Portadown, Ireland. The annual soirée, in connection with the church, was held on the 26th November. The attendance was large. After tea, James Wilson, Esq., was moved to the chair. Addresses were delivered by Rev. J. Douglas, pastor, Rev. Mr. Morrison, Belfast, Mr. Banks, Banbridge, Mr. Buchanan, Dr. Masseroon, S. Dunlop, and Mr. Robb. Several pieces of sacred music were sung by the choir. The proceeds enabled the pastor on the next evening to give a capital tea to 80 of the most deserving pupils attending the Sabbath school."[2]

And again, the same year, this further report appeared:
"May 13, two sermons were preached here by the Rev. W. S. Eccles in aid of the British and Irish Home Mission. The congregations were good, and very deep interest was manifested in the Society's work. The pastoral and evangelistic efforts of the Society's agent at Portadown have been blessed to many souls, eight have been baptized. There are twelve preaching stations."[3]

This all sounded promising but in an article in the Irish Baptist Magazine entitled "Watchman, what of the night?", the writer commented, "If we take the (Baptist) Handbook for 1873, and compare it with that for the current year, we shall find that there are four places (including Cork and Portadown), which together had a membership of over a hundred, all of which it would appear have become defunct."[4] This prompted a reply in the next issue from Rev. J. Douglas, Sen., late of Portadown:
"Mr. Editor, I have read with interest your paper entitled "Watchman, what of the night?" The success of churches in Ireland ought not to be estimated by the numbers of members added annually. I know of many converted through the labours of the pastors, who died in the faith without their having professed Baptist principles, and of course their names were never placed on the church-roll: but their conversion was the result of the existence of the Mission churches in those districts. You have made reference to Portadown as one of the four 'defunct' churches whose united membership exceeded one hundred. But the number of members connected with Portadown did not represent all the good results effected in that district by the existence of that church. It was the centre of twelve preaching stations in which no evangelical services were conducted previous to the efforts of the Baptist church. When the church at Portadown ceased to exist this wide field was abandoned. There is another way of estimating the fruit borne by this church. During the twelve years of my pastorate in Portadown three of its members became Baptist ministers, and are honourably discharging their duties in connection with our denomination: while another member is now a third year student in one of our Baptist colleges preparing for the ministry, and another is devoting a portion of his time as a town missionary in one of our great cities. These results are surely valuable fruit, worthy of the existence of a church apart from that indicated by annual accessions to its membership. Respectfully yours, John Douglas, Newport, Mon. England."[5]

The Second Church

Mrs. Wightman was part of that "valuable fruit" and her contribution to the work from 1924 until her death in 1930 as a hearty and devoted member was greatly appreciated. The founder members in 1924 were Mr. and Mrs. Curran, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Woods, Mr. Thomas Smith, Mrs. A Wightman, Mr.Isaac McKeown, Mr. and Mrs. Walker Graham, Mrs. E. J. Scarlett, Mrs. E. Mathers, Mr. W.J. McAfee, Mrs. M. Girvan, Miss Webb and Mr. G.H. Weir.

A detailed account of the formation of the second church appeared in the November/ December 1924 issue of the Irish Baptist Magazine :
"Portadown Baptist Church. On the 28th September a small company of people assembled in the 'Catch-my-pal' Hall in Edward Street, some to witness, some to join in the forming of

a new Baptist Church. There were 46 persons present. Pastor I. P. Bell of Tandragee took the chair ... Mr. R.J. Clendinning, who had been carrying on tent mission work in the town, read the 2nd chapter of Ephesians. Then Pastor Fraser, of Shankill Road, Belfast, set forth in a very clear and forceful way the distinctive doctrines of the Irish Baptists ... While we were all joining in the singing of another hymn of praise, those who did not wish to join in fellowship around the Lord's table went away, leaving 22 to remember the Lord in His own appointed way. After the Breaking of bread an invitation was given to all those who wished to join the Church just being formed, to come forward and sign their names. Fifteen put down their names without any hesitation ...Pastor Bell then said that the Home Mission committee had recommended Mr. G.H. Weir to take the pastoral oversight of the new cause, and that he would suggest that someone should propose, and someone second, that he now be called as Pastor. Mr. J. Curran proposed, and Mr J. Woods seconded, that Mr. Weir should be asked to become their Pastor, and it was unanimously carried by a show of hands ... It was a day of mingled feelings. One could not help trembling at the thoughts of all the forces that the Devil would bring to bear upon the new Church; and yet our hearts rejoiced to see God's hand in all that was done, and to know that He never leaves those who take their stand for Him ... May the Church that is just in its infancy grow to be a glorious Church, whose testimony shall be to the praise and glory of Him who said, 'I will build my church'."[6]

The minutes of the second church meeting record that "owing to a misunderstanding about the rent of the Edward Street Hall, arrangements were made for the Church to meet in the Temperance Hall in West Street, but as the Temperance Hall had a great echo and is very uncomfortable, it was decided to return to Edward Street as soon as possible".

Developing the Work

The members meeting on 14 October 1924 "decided to commence a Sunday School and a Bible class, also to form a building committee and open a Building Fund." This small group certainly had a vision of greater things despite their very limited resources. In view of the part Pastor Bell had in promoting the new Church it was appropriate that the first baptisms should take place at Tandragee, two on 13 November and three on 8 December, 1924.[7]

The Church met on 3 February 1925 and elected Mr. J. Woods as an Elder, and chose the following as deacons - W. Graham, G.Carville, H. Corbett, I. McKeown and W. J. McAfee. From these, Mr. McAfee was appointed secretary and Mr. Corbett as treasurer. During March 1925 Pastor G. Weir held a three-week gospel mission, and reported in the Irish Baptist, "We praise the Lord for the time we enjoyed together, but," he pleaded, " 'brethren, pray for us' - we need your prayers. The Lord has been blessing, but the Devil has not forgotten about us, and sometimes one feels like saying, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' May we be faithful to Him."[8] This emphasis on the continuing necessity for prayer if progress was to be made was preliminary to proposals for erecting a new church building.

Late in 1925 the officers agreed to circularise other Baptist churches asking for their "practical" sympathy. The letter to the churches read: "After much prayerful consideration it has been decided to erect a suitable brick building without any unnecessary ornamentation,

capable of seating 350 people, at an approximate cost of £1500. We are confident that the acquisition of such a building to meet in will give a great impetus to the work in this place, which one of the most flourishing and populous centres in Ulster. We therefore send out this appeal to the Lord's people to help us in what we are sure is the Lord's work. We do not purpose resorting to any questionable means of raising funds, but have faith that through His own people God will supply all our need."[9] Printed with the letter was a sketch of the proposed building, and also (as if to extract more sympathy) a copy of a letter to the editor of the Portadown Times from a T. Macintosh of Ashton-under-Lyne, which ran: "I wonder how many of the subscribers to the Catch-my-Pal Hall are happy in the knowledge that it has now got a dancing license. One would have thought that even in these days there would be some little consistency, but a building which boasts a dancing license and houses a Baptist Church is surely a unique example of inconsistency. Subscribers too understand from the speeches by Mr. Crawford MP, Mrs. McCammon, and others at the laying of the foundation stone that the Hall was to be for the uplift of the people."

Here it is worth noting that the treasurer of the Church, converted through the ministry of the Rev. W.P. Nicholson in 1921, sent a copy of the appeal along with an overcoat at a 'try-on' stage which was being made for the famous preacher. "W.P." replied characteristically: "Yours received. I wonder were you sober when you sent off the measurements!! Did you think you were ordering a coat for Goliath of Gath! I hope it will fit next time. I can understand your making a mistake in the figures when ordering the coat, for I have played golf with you and remember how poorly you played, but how splendidly you could count. It was a mathematical freak the way you could subtract your strokes and add your holes. There is a reason for everything even making a mistake in the measurements of my coat. I enclose a cheque for £5 for the Church Building Fund. May it be a "converting shop". Remember me to Mr. Weir. Keep believing that I may have the coat soon or sooner. Yours , Wm. P. Nicholson. John 3:30 "[10] The reverend gentleman eventually got his coat, a perfect fit and so much admired that he gave his unstinted recommendation of the Portadown firm which tailored it for him.

The Sunday school continued to grow and on 30 July 1925 had its first excursion. "We left the Hall", a report ran, "on a morning which was rather dull, but as the day advanced the clouds scattered and we enjoyed bright sunshine at Warrenpoint. The journey there and back, which was by charabanc, seemed to be a special delight to the children."[11]

The new building project progressed, and in March 1926 it was reported in the Irish Baptist that "a splendid site has been secured in Thomas Street. Plans have been drawn up and approved by the Baptist Building Committee and the Portadown Urban Council. These plans have been out for tender, the contract has been signed, and some of the building material is already on the site. Our building will be a substantial and well-finished brick building, without any unnecessary ornamentation. We expect to have everything completed for about £1700. This is more than we had counted on at first, but we are doing a better and larger job than we had anticipated."[12] The work went ahead on schedule. On Saturday, 25 September 1926 (two years after the founding of the church) the new "Meeting House" was opened.

The Portadown Times devoted a full page to the report of the opening: "The new Baptist Meeting-House in Thomas Street, Portadown, was packed with a congregation of about 400 on Saturday - visitors coming from Belfast and all the neighbouring centres by charabancs, motor cars, and rail - on the occasion of the opening conference, and the building was much admired by everyone ... Pastor J D Gilmore, Secretary of the Baptist Union of Ireland, said he felt he must join with them praising the Lord for the great and wonderful things that He had done ... He was glad to have the pleasure of declaring the building open for the worship of God. In doing so, he congratulated them on what they had been able to accomplish, on having made everything a matter of prayer and on having in so short a time erected that beautiful building ... Pastor I P Bell, Tandragee, President of the Baptist Union of Ireland, who had been present at the formation of the Church in Portadown, assured them it was with great pleasure and joy he stood there that day ... Pastor W E Tocher, Belfast, well known in Portadown, in an address which was followed with keen attention, congratulated the Portadown friends on their excellent building and prayed that it would be the birthplace of many precious souls, and that the work would go on and prosper as the week go by ... They wanted to keep their eye on the Devil, because he was keeping his eye on them. The Devil visited the churches occasionally, and tried to make them a hell upon earth. He would be concentrating on that small church to try and split them and prevent a blessing coming to Portadown. Let them pray to God to preserve them. The Devil, however, got such a shock at Calvary that he had been in a nervous condition ever since and could not resist the shock they could give him in God's Name. Let them keep together in prayer and meet the foe as a mighty prayerful force ... Two hundred visitors were entertained in the 'Catch-my-Pal' Hall." [13]

The members meeting in January 1927 heard that the total cost was £1960, and that at 31 December 1926 £1005. 7. 6 had been subscribed - a magnificent achievement by such a small band of believers. An interest-free loan was received from the Irish Baptist Building Fund, and a further loan of £300 was promised from the English Baptist Building Fund, both loans repayable over ten years when the debt would cease. [14]

The Irish Baptist Home Mission continued to give generous financial support to the Church, and gradually the seed sown took root and began to flourish. Pastor George Weir ministered faithfully to the increasing numbers of believers, and became much respected throughout the district. A booklet marking his twenty-one years as pastor of the Church paid this tribute: "This man of God was a true shepherd to the flock, manifesting the spirit of Christ in meekness, forbearance, humility, patience, sympathy and love to a marked degree. His life and walk, the example he set in character and conduct, his untiring labours in the Gospel in tents, halls, barns, the open-air, as well as in the regular services in the Meeting-House, all bore fruit in many lives." [15]

In September 1929 the annual meetings of the Northern Baptist Association were held in Thomas Street. It was at these meetings that Pastor Emile Guedj of the French Bible Mission was introduced to Ireland, and especially to Irish Baptists. Until the outbreak of war in 1939, Pastor Guedj paid annual visits to the church.

The Pioneer Moves On

At a special meeting of church officers on 15 April 1938, it was reported that Pastor Weir had received a unanimous call to the East End Church in Belfast. Heartfelt regret was expressed by all present at the prospect of Mr and Mrs Weir's departure. Everyone recognized him as a man among men, with a most lovable nature, slow to take offence, ever ready to do the most menial task with cheerfulness, never compromising where truth was concerned, and above all with a real passion for winning souls for Jesus Christ. An emotional farewell was taken of Pastor and Mrs Weir on 4 July 1938. Mr Weir was given an illuminated address and a wallet of notes. The Portadown Times carried a full report of the occasion including Mr Weir's address to the congregation.[16] The 'Pioneer' moved on, leaving behind him a firmly established Church, now self-supporting and no longer obliged to look to the Home Mission for help.

A Worthy Successor

Fifteen months later, Mr William Wilson who had been engaged in evangelistic work in Scotland with the Evangelisation Society of London, accepted an invitation to the pastorate, and commenced his ministry in September 1939. Looking back, Pastor Wilson wrote, "Following the Pioneer , it was my task to penetrate the occupied position and to engage in personal contacts and in evangelism in the districts of Seagoe, Corcrain and Knocknamuckley as well as at the base in Thomas Street, where, despite grim wartime conditions we saw heartening congregations and experienced a measure of encouragement. A feature of those years was a great measure of breakdown in prejudice, and of increased fellowship with evangelicals in other denominations."[17]

A contemporary report on a Service of Song held on 22 December 1942 gives a flavour of the fellowship shared in those dark days: "A large audience was charmed by the sweet and well-balanced singing of the little folks. Solo parts were taken by Margaret Corbett, Madeline Strain, Peggy Hamilton and Helen Day, whilst these girls, along with Bessie Strain, rendered the piece "O the bitter shame and sorrow" with great effect. Duettists were Maureen Howe and Bessie Strain, Edgar Corbett and Raymond Wilson. The choir was trained by Mrs Wilson, the narrative being read by the Pastor. Mr Harry Corbett Jun. manipulated the lantern (projector). [18] 'Manipulated' was the correct term, because one of the lenses in the 'lantern' was cracked resulting in one part of the picture being in focus and the other part out of focus. At times the 'manipulator' had his patience sorely tried!

In 1943 Pastor Wilson accepted an invitation to the pastorate of the Grove Church, Belfast. Mr Alex Russell at the farewell service said that "no finer tribute could be paid to Mr Wilson than that the Grove Church had recalled him to the scene of his former labours." Mr Russell illustrated how goodwill was created among other denominations for Baptists by Mr Wilson's spirit of friendliness. He mentioned the good work done in the various missions he conducted in country districts. Mr Wilson responded and spoke of the joy he had in the numbers attending the evening Gospel services, in his work among the children, his visitation and his fellowship in the Gospel with Christians of other denominations. The soloists for the occasion were Miss N K Montgomery (who passed away in March 1990, after a short illness, aged 103 years) and Mr C Burns.[19]

Years of Prosperity

The spade work of the Pioneer and the harrowing of the Penetrator had prepared the work by 1943 for prosperous years ahead. On 27 July 1943 the members in Special Church Meeting called William Weir then pastor of the Cliftonpark Avenue Church, Belfast, and a brother of our first pastor. He accepted the call and was welcomed to Thomas Street on 2 December 1943. At his first officers' meeting Pastor Weir suggested that the subject of "Revival" should be taken up during the week of prayer at the commencement of 1944 and that he should speak on various aspects of that subject. From the beginning of his ministry Pastor Weir placed great emphasis on prayer, and this remained his chief concern throughout his long term in Thomas Street. As a result of this emphasis on prayer the church grew steadily.

Extension to Killicomaine

Evangelism, outreach and expansion were also high priorities. In discussion with the officers in May 1949 Pastor Weir suggested that a tent mission be held in the rapidly developing district of Killicomaine with the object of establishing a church and erecting a permanent building on a site donated by Mr Thomas Watson.[20] The evangelist was Pastor William Mullan, and his ministry was much blessed.

As a result a special church meeting was summoned early in July "to consider the possibility and advisability of establishing permanent work in the Killicomaine district." [21] Pastor Weir introduced the subject and presided over an animated discussion during which many emphasised their strong feelings that, as the Lord had led us to this district and several souls had been saved, the Church "was being challenged by the Lord to undertake a further piece of lasting service for Him." It was proposed by Robert Page, seconded by William John Hewitt, and passed unanimously that a permanent building be erected at Killicomaine. So another church was conceived.[22]

The Killicomaine building was opened in September 1950 on the 26th anniversary of the formation of the Thomas Street Church. Due to the difficulty of obtaining building supplies and equipment in the post-war years, the cost escalated from £3000 to over £6000! At a members' meeting, after the opening and referring to Killicomaine, Pastor Weir spoke on Revelation 3: 8, "I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it." With the increased responsibility for Killicomaine, he appealed for wholehearted loyalty and above all he said, "May the Lord send an urgency of prayer." Mr Harold Topley took responsibility for the first stages of the work at Killicomaine, and displayed a loyalty and devotion to the new cause which has not been surpassed.

Some matters did not progress as quickly as the new building. In January 1950 the officers agreed to introduce hymn boards in Thomas Street, but it took until 31 March 1990 for this decision to be implemented![23] In April 1951 the Thomas Street Church agreed to purchase a house in Tavanagh Avenue as a manse.

A Great Loss

One man, who had been deeply involved in all aspects of the work almost from its inception, was ill at this time, and on 15 September 1953 passed on to be with his Lord. I refer to my late father, J Harry Corbett. A long, detailed appreciation of him was read to the members on 24 September 1953.[24] Tributes from Pastors L E Deens and G H Weir were published in "The Irish Baptist". Isn't it wonderful to read them and to know they were not exaggerations, but true.

Pastor Deens wrote, "He was a man of untiring energy, wise in counsel and skilful in organization, to whom every department of our work is indebted for service which none but he could have rendered. At great expenditure of time and labour, he reorganized the whole system of Corporation accounting, and succeeded in bringing order and lucidity into what had previously been chaos ... At one time he must have been a member of every important Union committee. Simultaneously, he managed the magazine, served on the Executive of the Foreign Mission, acted as honorary Treasurer of the Home Mission, took a leading part in the work of the Evangelistic Committee and helped on the College Committee ... He was never content to be a "passenger" ... Combined with all this he was truly a spiritually-minded man. It was spiritual consolidation and progress that he was supremely interested in. In debate he never lost his self-control or uttered an unkind or uncharitable word ... we mourn him for his own sake, for he was one of the most lovable of men and one of the staunchest of friends."

Pastor G H Weir said of him, "The two Baptist Meeting Houses in Portadown are permanent monuments to his foresight, his energetic activity, and his unwavering faith. He believed that the house of the Lord should be attractive and comfortable, and he was prepared to spend and be spent that it might be so at Thomas Street and Killicomaine. He had a big heart, and it has been largely due to his influence that the Portadown Church has subscribed so liberally to all our denominational activities. He gave bountifully himself, and somehow those associated with him became rich in liberality too ... He had great patience with those who did not see things as he saw them and could not move as quickly. Strong in his convictions, his loyalty to his Lord and the Scriptures of Truth never wavered, and his efforts for the furtherance of the Gospel were untiring."[25]

During 1954 and 1955 Pastor William Weir was out of action for several months due to illness. In a way, typical of his interest in the work, he sent a message of thanks to the annual general meeting in January 1955 for their kindness and prayers, urging the members to "concentrate on essentials and avoid being occupied with trivialities".[26]

Trying Times

The Killicomaine work remained under the wing of Thomas Street until it was formed as a separate church on 10 June 1958 and joined the Baptist Union of Ireland. The new church grew steadily for a number of years, until sadly, division came and took its toll. Recovery has been painful and slow.

In Thomas Street, too, the church went through a trying time calling for church discipline, but it came out from under this cloud without undue strife or bitterness.

In the late 1950s we had the excitement of a visit by some Southern Baptists from the USA, who thought the speed of our hymn singing was too slow, and speeded it up fourfold! The stimulus was good for us all. We have had nothing like it until our present pastor, Clifford Morrison arrived.

Lengthening the Cords

As numbers grew at Thomas Street we were pressed to provide extra space for Sunday schools and youth work. A small portable hall was erected on ground in Tavanagh Avenue in April 1965 which provided temporary relief. After two years of discussion about starting a uniformed organization for our young people, during which Mr Jim McMullan, one of our deacons who had been a leader in the Campaigner movement elsewhere gave us valuable advice and information, it was finally agreed to form a Campaigner Clan. It was inaugurated on 18 September 1965 under the leadership of Mr and Mrs McMullan. The present strength of the Clan owes much to the indefatigable efforts of Jim and Irene in overcoming problems due to lack of space and equipment, and in training good leaders. Many speak highly of the blessing and benefit the Campaigners have been to them. Through the Clan contact is made with parents and relatives of the young people not otherwise involved in our work.

In 1965 the house and garden at the rear of our church premises came on the market and we were given first option to purchase. The asking price seemed very high at the time and the officers made a faux pas in making an offer which the vendors did not even consider, and the property was put on the open market and sold to another interested church! We live and learn! Shortly after this episode, through the good offices of Mr Kenneth McCluskey, we purchased the Harford Street Mission Hall, known as "Tocher's Hall" or "Burnett's Hall" and this gave the growing youth movement some more room.[27]

Pastor William Weir Retires

The whole church was saddened when on Sunday, 7 April 1968 Pastor Weir announced that he wished to retire in the Autumn. So, on 30 September 1968, after the Pioneering and the Penetration, the era of 25 years of Progress in the life of the Church ended. We did not realise that it would be five years before we would have another pastor, but the spiritual vitality of the Church was such that attendances did not suffer and Progress continued - a great testimony to the lasting ministry of Pastor Weir.

The Church recorded a special tribute to Mr Weir: "Throughout his 25 years as Pastor of this Church, William Weir was characterised by simplicity of life, sincerity of heart, and self-effacing service ... The establishment of the outreach at Killicomaine and Corcrain, the youth work of the Church, and the systematic giving of God's people were all given impetus by the personal interest and faithful preaching of Pastor Weir. Altogether we recognize that 'a holy man of God' has been among us for 25 years. We wholeheartedly pay tribute to him, and also to Mrs. Weir who was so much one with him in his life and labour."[28]

In late 1970 the Executors of W & J Sprott approached the Church about purchasing the house next door to the Church with a garden extending several hundred feet in Tavanagh Avenue. Agreement was reached quickly and amicably. The house is now our manse. The next year alterations were made to the front of the church building to give extra seating and improved facilities for reception and cloakrooms. The Church met in the CWU Hall in Shillington Street during the renovations.

A Notable Pastorate

In August 1972 the Church gave Pastor Paul Tucker of East London Tabernacle a call to the pastorate which he felt unable to accept "at that time". The call was renewed the following February and this time our dear brother accepted and commenced his ministry in August 1973.[29] That year Dick Saunders and his team held a very successful gospel campaign in the old Regal cinema. Our Church was deeply involved, and we were blessed and our horizons were widened. The following year we were granted the use of the Picture House in Bridge Street free of charge for the Sunday nights of March. Our new pastor, Paul Tucker, preached to "full houses" at each of the services. These were attended by many strangers, some of whom later became regular attenders at the services in Thomas Street.

Under Pastor Tucker's fine ministry, progress continued. Seating all the congregation became a problem. It was decided in June 1975 to widen the building, and work began in January 1976, the church services being transferred to Portadown Town Hall. The renovated building was reoccupied in June with seating for 380 persons.

Some years earlier the possibility of changing the time of the morning service from 11.30 am. to 11.00 am had been discussed and shelved. However, with the arrival of Paul Tucker, the teachers at the afternoon Sunday school at Corcrain found the interval between morning service and Sunday school too short, and to facilitate them the time of the morning service was moved to 11.00 am on 23 February 1975. The arrangement seemed to be to everyone's satisfaction, the same people being early, and the same people coming late as before!

By 1978 the youth organizations had outgrown their accommodation and active talks began about a suitable solution. At first a new multi-purpose building was favoured, but opinions changed gradually and Mr Sam Preston drew up the plans for a suite of halls and ancillary rooms to be built on part of the manse grounds. These facilities were opened by the late Mrs. Clara Corbett on 17 April 1982. Mr Preston and Mr Eddie Cairns (secretary) and a host of voluntary workers were congratulated on providing such excellent accommodation for under £100,000. The Halls were sited so that they could be linked to the Church building when finances allowed.

During this period, Pastor Tucker's health deteriorated. His medical specialist felt that the Ulster climate, combined with the strain of the rapid developments in the Church's work, were contributory factors to his illness. The officers heard with great regret and sympathy of his resignation and his acceptance of the pastorate of a small church in Farnham, Surrey.

Typically, Mr Tucker requested that no farewell service beheld. At his last service with us on Sunday morning, 7 August 1983, the Church Treasurer, Mr Harry Corbett, making a presentation to him said, "Our first impressions, since confirmed many times, were of your love and warmth for your congregation. This, together with your exceptional ability to expound the Scriptures and proclaim the Gospel in profound but simply understood language, has led to the conversion of many, and the strengthening and uplifting of believers." The parting from this beloved pastor was hard, and there were many tears of loving emotion from both women and men.

Our Present Pastor

In setting about the task of finding a new pastor, as well as seeking the Lord's guidance, we felt that at this stage in the Church's history that the work needed a young man full of vigour and drive, brimful of ideas, a strong leader, an evangelist, an expositor, and married with a young family. We got him! Pastor Clifford Morrison, his wife Margaret, his children, Judith, Gareth and Simon, joined us from Kilkeel in a welcome service on 30 November 1984.

Pastor Morrison settled in quickly, felt the pulse of the Church, became deeply involved in all its activities. The Lord continued to bless the work, and by June 1986 we faced again the issue of seating growing congregations com;pounded with problems connected with flat roofs, bad acoustics and poor ventilation. Solutions, including demolition and rebuilding, were considered. It was decided to open a Building Fund and when £60,000 had been raised, to have a church meeting to consider the prevailing circumstances.[30]

Extension to Corcrain

Back in 1965 a tent mission was held in the developing Corcrain area (at the corner of Montague and Charles Streets) - the evangelists being Currie Brennan of the Home Mission and Pastor William Weir. It was a good mission and several professed conversion. Stemming from this effort Pastor Weir felt outreach services should be held in the Corcrain Community Centre. Sunday evening services began on 2 January 1966 with an afternoon Sunday school of 22 pupils. The Secretary, Mr Maurice Legge, was in charge of the arrangements for the first year when he removed to Bangor. Mr Ernest Delacour then took charge and gave sacrificial service until the evening meeting was closed at the request of Pastor Tucker and the officers. A number of the "Corcrain" members wanted to return to the evening services in Thomas Street, and the officers thought one well-attended meeting was better than two poorly attended. The Sunday school continues to the present time with just under 100 on the roll.

During the time evening services were being held at Corcrain unsuccessful approaches were made to acquire a site for a permanent building from the Housing Executive, the Craigavon Commission and the private sector. In January 1988 one of our members asked, "Would you like the gift of a building suitable for Sunday school, youth work, and Gospel outreach adjoining the Corcrain area?[31] Was this God's answer to our search for a site since 1965? We were sure it was. Only God could have laid it on the heart of Mr R Jameson to

offer so generously the canteen building of the Metal Box factory, a building of some 4000 square feet. Change of use involved provision of car parking, which in turn meant the purchase of land adjacent to the Canteen, now available for a car park and other development. God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.

Provision for the Future

By the end of 1987 the Building Fund had exceeded the target £60,000. In February 1988 the Church decided to go ahead with the erection of a new building on the existing site in Thomas Street. A design team was set up under the leadership of Mr Sam Preston, the other members being David Baird, Albert Boyle, Paul Major, Paul McGilton, Harry Richmond and Charles Wood. On 31 March 1990 our fine new church building was opened for worship to the glory of God. Seating 500, its design makes it suitable for large or small gatherings, and a covered link-way connects it to our Halls completing a complex which will serve generations to come. What a pleasure it is to join in singing God's praise after the rather poor acoustics of the old building. Added to the work of the design team was the enthusiasm and drive of Pastor Morrison in promoting prayer, praise and evangelistic outreach in the life of the Church.

The Thomas Street Church has always been missionary-minded, giving generous financial and prayer support to a wide range of Missions. The Autumn Missionary Convention has attracted strong support over the years. Church members serving the Gospel at home and overseas are - Kenneth and Mary Martin (Child Evangelism Fellowship), Isobel Metcalfe (Child Evangelism Fellowship), Tom and Linda Eakin (Stauros Foundation), Jacqui Morgan (New Tribes Mission). Others in the past served for short terms. The Church recently has enjoyed fellowship and help from assistant pastors, Mark Robertson 1988/89 (now pastor at Knockconny) and Ian Grant 1989/90. May God continue to use them to His glory.

A Final Tribute

A great deal has been said in this paper about our Pastors. The work, support and worth of their wives should be acknowledged. Maud Weir, Janet Wilson, Sadie Weir, Glynis Tucker and Margaret Morrison all supported their husbands fully by their prayers, presence and invaluable feminine insights. They created and provided a happy family life in the manse, and extended that influence into the wider circle of the Church fellowship.

Pioneering, Penetration and Progress pose the query - What about the Prospect? This year, and every year, our responsible but joyful task is to proclaim liberty throughout our land. Faith in, and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ and His Word is the glorious message for our time and for all time. May there be a spiritual renewal within each of us that will issue in a great concern for the people around us. With God's help the Prospect is good.

J H CORBETT

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Irish Baptist College: The Dublin Years 1892-1963

In 1886 two young men from Great Victoria Street church, Belfast, went to England to train for the ministry. This prompted their pastor, William Usher, to suggest that Irish Baptists might 'celebrate the Queen's Jubilee by establishing in Ireland a College for our own students, and thus secure to our country services, so urgently needed, that would become an increasing source of strength to the denomination.'[1]

At that time one leader with vision and means was Hugh Dunlop Brown, M.A., B.L. who, since 1884, had been pastor of what was then Lower Abbey Street church, Dublin. [2] Under Brown's leadership a house at 16 Harcourt Street, Dublin, was bought and opened on 4 October 1892 as a Training Institute and a select Boys' School. This was the modest beginning of the Irish Baptist College. The plan was 'to afford to young men, members of our Baptist Churches, who have been evidently called of God to the Ministry of the Word, an opportunity for systematic study which they could not otherwise obtain. While most fully recognising the worthlessness for Gospel ministry of education without the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, we are as firmly convinced that God would have His people co-operate with Him in the development and use of all such gifts as He may have bestowed upon them.' [3]

Brown had clear views about the need for the College. Speaking in 1905 he said, while 'divinity schools cannot manufacture ministers', there is 'a need to guard our pulpits from the intrusion of those who, neither from an educational nor spiritual standpoint, possess qualifications which will last the strain and wear of pastoral work'; that 'to teach men, with the Holy Scriptures in their hand, how to think...and to equip them more perfectly in their ministry for God as educated gentlemen, is to accomplish no unimportant work for Christ and for our denomination...'.[4]

In this spirit entry to the College was strictly controlled. 'Each applicant had to

- testify concerning his conversion to God, and his desire for, and call to the gospel ministry;
- be a recognized member of a Baptist Church for a year prior to his admission;
- be formally and heartily recommended by the Church of which he is a member as an earnest christian of consistent character and life and manifestly gifted and called by God to the work of the gospel;
- guarantee the sum of £20 yearly towards the expenses of his maintenance;
- be willing to observe the rules and discipline of the College, and to complete the full course of study [5]

The first Principal was Ambrose Upton Gledstanes Bury, M.A., Brown's associate pastor and friend. Among the first students were James Willoughby, John H. McKnight and T.J.Harvey. The College committee, staff and students had to accept unreservedly the doctrinal basis of the Baptist Union of Ireland. In addition, the Principal and tutors were required to hold 'the doctrine of personal election to salvation and the personal and literal

second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ', but not that sinless perfection is attainable in this present state of the body, nor were they to adopt the unscriptural title "Reverend".'[6]

There was no entrance examination, but each student was subsequently examined in secular subjects to determine his place in that part of the course. The classical languages, Latin and Greek, together with Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, English, History and Geography were taught in the second year to university matriculation standard, and in the third year as preparation for the second examination of Trinity College.

All students were obliged to take the full theological course over nine terms. Biblical studies related chiefly to introduction and content of the Bible. Systematic theology was taught from Hodge's Outlines of Theology. Church History was covered in four terms. Hebrew was studied in the third year. Serving pastors were admitted as 'corresponding students' and followed a course of study under the supervision of a College tutor. Promising students unable to pay the fees of £20 a year, were admitted as 'free students' on the understanding that they would pay as soon as possible after leaving College. In 1908, Brown generously offered to admit two German students at reduced fees. Again, in 1910 after an approach from a Pastor Karl Mascher and consultation with Pastor Fetler of St. Petersburg, a Russian applicant called Klason was similarly admitted.

Graduating students received a 'Testimonium' which entitled them to ministerial recognition.

Evening classes were organized in Dublin in 1909 in response to applications from two young men, L.E. Deens and A. McWilliams, for an opportunity to prepare themselves for Christian work. They were joined by W.E. French, B.Sc., a BMS candidate, and Samuel Ruddock. Mr. Deens was just twenty years of age and a civil servant at the time

From 1910 students were required to give three years to Irish Baptist work on completing their course, to ensure that the output of the College should first benefit the home churches. The following year, the study timetable was revised and provision made for more flexible courses of study. Stress was laid on the need for students to acquire competence in English grammar and spelling! The biblical content of the curriculum was enhanced and pastoral theology and homiletics were introduced. Closer control of extra-mural activities was attempted. Students were required to attend the Sunday and mid-week services in the Harcourt Street church, when they were not preaching elsewhere, and to sit in a special pew! They were expected to visit for two hours each week and to preach in the various mission halls and outstations connected with the Harcourt Street church. A bold suggestion to provide some form of physical recreation for the students seems to have been quietly ignored.

A Major Reorganizaton

Shortage of funds in 1912 led to cuts, eased by the resignation of the Matron, Mrs. Kinch. The students ceased to live in, domestic staff was reduced, the admission of 'free students' was suspended and applications from prospective students in Great Britain were discouraged.

Principal Bury's resignation in September (following his decision to emigrate to Canada where he later became a High Court judge) made other economies possible. James Willoughby, by then pastor of the Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire) church and a College tutor, was asked to undertake Mr. Bury's duties in addition to his own until 31 March 1913, with an increase of £20 a year in his salary. Willoughby accepted and continued to serve at Kingstown until December 1915, when he became full-time Principal at £120 a year plus board and lodging.

Willoughby was highly esteemed throughout the denomination and was greatly missed when, in 1916, he resigned, went to England, joined the Strict Baptists and became the first Principal of their College in London.

Following Willoughby's departure, the ailing Brown himself taught systematic theology. T. Harold Spurgeon, a grandson of C.H. Spurgeon, was appointed tutor in Classics, English and Hebrew from 1 September 1916 at £40 a year. The admissions procedure was brought into line with practice in Britain, the Northern and Southern Associations being asked to interview and recommend on applicants from churches in their areas.

During World War I several students were seconded to work among soldiers in connection with the YMCA. Two of them, Frank Forbes and Charlie Mates, spent a year in this work returning to complete their College course subsequently. 'It was hoped', ran the committee minute of 30 December 1915, 'that the war would be over before 1st Septr. next as the Committee could not at present see their way to allow the use of the students for a longer period than that.'

A Doubtful Future

Hugh D. Brown presided at his last committee meeting on 19 October 1917. Poor health had ended his active ministry in the Harcourt Street church three years earlier. He died in April 1918. These were years of violent change in Ireland when relations between north and south altered radically, and political tensions in society at large put strains on the Baptist community at large, and not least on the College.

Its prospects were not helped by a provision in the trust deed which gave the Harcourt Street church the right to appoint half the elected members of the College committee, the Assembly appointing the other half. This division of control, which gave one church disproportionate power, caused problems and for years frustrated attempts to relocate the College in Belfast. For instance, when in 1919 the committee voted six to five to move it to Belfast, the Harcourt Street church responded by refusing to elect its half of the committee, and for a time paralysed its functions.

In this predicament, with a debt on the premises approaching £500; church and personal subscriptions declining rapidly; applications from prospective students almost non-existent; the tutor (Harold Spurgeon), the visiting lecturers and the caretaker were given three months' notice expiring on 31 May 1919. Plainly, the whole enterprise was in jeopardy. In the crisis

Spurgeon's advice was sought about its future. He responded with far-sighted proposals to provide training for prospective missionaries and evangelists, and to admit women students.

A majority of the committee still saw the best hope of survival in transferring the College to Belfast under the control of the BUI. In February 1920 it was proposed that the premises in Dublin be sold and the Union be asked to assume responsibility for ministerial training. Still opposed to any move from Dublin, the Harcourt Street church delayed exercising its option under the College Trust to purchase the premises at 45 Harcourt Street. The matter dragged on for a whole year. Then the committee pressed for a decision, and in May the church finally decided against taking up the option, but urged that the College should continue in Dublin. At that point a special sub-committee was appointed to advise about the way ahead.

The Way Ahead

The sub-committee wasted no time. Within the month it advised that the College should remain in Dublin, if possible; that Pastor C.S. Donald be appointed President for one year; that Mr.Spurgeon be appointed Principal; that a sub-comittee consisting of the President and the Principal with Pastors J.D. Gilmore, J.W. Pearce, F.W. Gracey and Richard Hodgett be asked to revise the Syllabus of Courses and recommend on the appointment of Lecturers. It further advised that provision be made to admit candidates of both sexes for the misionary training.

Four months later this plan was implemented. No.45 was reopened and a Matron employed. A revised syllabus added courses in Homiletics, Pastoral Theology and Mathematics. Pastors C.S. Donald, Richard Hodgett and J. Pearson Harrison (the new pastor of Harcourt Street church) were appointed visiting lecturers at £10 a year plus travelling expenses. The Principal's salary was fixed at £75 per annum, based on 10 class contact hours weekly. An appeal was sent to the churches, supplemented by another addressed specially to all ex-students.

In May 1920 the committee had admitted George H. Weir, a member of the Grange church in Co.Antrim, but after a short period he sought permission to withdraw, intending to continue his training at the Pastors' College in London. Despite pressure to resume his studies, George Weir refused to return to Dublin in the prevailing uncertainty about the future of the College and the political situation in the Irish Free State. By February 1922, however, matters had clarified sufficiently for George Weir to resume his studies. He was joined by another resident student Reginald R. Cunningham. There were two external students contemporary with George Weir - George McKillen and J. Kyle Paisley. Later James Davison was admitted also as an extern student. Other applications were beginning to come in. Over the next four years the position improved slowly as the student body grew.

The period of recovery was not all plain sailing. Pastor Harrison had some disagreement with the student Reginald Cunningham, and resigned as visiting tutor. However a more serious issue than a disagreement with a student underlay Harrison's

resignation,. It transpired that he objected vehemently to the use of Hodge's Outlines of Theology as a text book; particularly, Hodge's 'erroneous doctrine' that it was possible for Christ to have sinned, Hodge's defence of infant baptism, and Hodge's doctrine of a general resurrection. Harrison could not truthfully allege that these 'objectionable' doctrines were taught in the College, for they were not, nor did the Committee accede to his demand that the text book be changed. The Harcourt Street church felt obliged to support their pastor by withholding financial support from the College.

Relations between Harrison and the committee deteriorated further in 1923 when Harrison took up residence in the College premises without permission, and treated the house committee with 'airy contempt' and 'unconcealed indignation' when requested to leave. His erratic behaviour also soured his relations with his church and he left Dublin in 1924.

This sad affair had a bright side. After completing his studies at the College Louis Deens went as pastor to the Waterford church in January 1913. His pulpit ministry was of a high order. He rapidly became known as an incisive thinker and a trenchant speaker. His contributions to committee debates revealed outstanding ability allied to sound judgement. Perhaps it was these qualities which enabled him to play high-level chess. On one memorable occasion he held a visiting chess-master to a draw! He remarked with a wide smile when he told the story, "Of course, the master was playing eleven others simultaneously!" In 1920 Mr Deens moved to Belfast as pastor of the Cliftonpark Avenue church, with responsibility for Carrickfergus. While there he accepted an invitation to become visiting lecturer in English Bible at the College in place of Pearson Harrison. Two years later the Harcourt Street church invited him to succeed Harrison as their pastor.

The relationship between Mr. Deens, the church and the College turned out to be a long, happy and fruitful one. Over the next forty years he taught and influenced successive generations of ministerial students (in 1928 he was appointed to the Lectureship in Homiletics and Pastoral Theology in succession to Richard Hodgett), and led Dublin Baptists through difficult years to a new position of esteem and influence in that city. He also won the respect and gratitude of Irish Baptists at large, being elected President of the BUI on three occasions.

Growing Pains

Early in 1925 Spurgeon complained about his increased workload due to the growing number of students, and the progressive difficulty in upholding the academic standards of the College. In his distinctively direct fashion, Spurgeon put four stark options to the committee:

Either appoint a full-time Principal who would teach 30 hours weekly or a 'properly-qualified' tutor to assist the present Principal. Failing this, either reduce the syllabus of courses taught, and abandon the standard of university matriculation or close the College.

With characteristic honesty, he resigned in order to leave the committee free to take whatever steps were felt to be appropriate.

The committee decided to try and raise sufficient additional income to pay Spurgeon full-time, and to employ Deens for 5 hours a week to teach English, Mathematics and History. The two men were good friends and well-matched intellectually, and this arrangement was mutually acceptable. Deens advised the committee that Spurgeon would consider favourably a temporary full-time appointment as Principal. They immediately offered him an appointment for one year from 1 September 1925 at a salary of £400 a year.

Even then, the financial position was so precarious that the committee was nervous about its ability to fulfil its contract with Spurgeon. At an emergency meeting in December, the minute reads:
'This committee regrets that it is not yet in a position to make permanent arrangements concerning the future of the College and it hereby authorizes the continuance of the present arrangement with the Principal for another term.'

It says much for Spurgeon that he accepted philosophically such an uncertain future. In the College's hand-to-mouth existence some novel ways of reducing expenditure were explored. The House Committee in May 1926 introduced a 'dietary' for 'feeding the Students and Staff, who number 13 in all'. It was exceedingly plain fare with a seasonable laxative element that would appal students and dietitians of the late twentieth century!

The long-term financial outlook, however, was not so dismal. Earlier, in March, the committee had floated a scheme to raise an endowment fund of £4000, and also agreed to share in a deputation going to the United States of America to raise funds for Baptist work in Ireland. The ever-generous Robert Graham Glendinning, who had been an active member of committee from the foundation of the College donated £1000 towards the £4000 needed to purchase a ground rent of £200 a year. The committee accepted Glendinning's offer gratefully and raised the balance by way of a bank overdraft of £3000, to be discharged out of rental income over 15 years. This plan worked satisfactorily and laid a foundation for the College's finances.

Financially, 1926 turned out to be the best year to date. The Treasurer, Frank W. Carson, reported increases in income: two Belfast churches (Great Victoria Street and Antrim Road) giving record contributions of £74 and £63 respectively; an anonymous supporter in Belfast obtained five 'special' subscriptions of £20 each; the American deputation raised £650 for investment and £240 for current expenses. A debit balance of £19 had been converted into a credit balance of £43. Carson's only complaint was that a 'considerable' number of Irish Baptist churches had not contributed.

Educational Standards

In 1926 the College 'Testimonium' was revised and renamed 'Diploma'. As an award it was graded into 'pass' and 'honours', the Honours Diploma being granted to students who achieved an average mark of 70%.

The forward-looking Richard Hodgett in 1927 proposed that the College should seek affiliation with the University of Dublin. However, the committee, with an eye on the churches, considered such a move impolitic. It was to be almost fifty years before an academic link was considered again. In the intervening period students with the ability and desire to take a degree at a recognized university were obliged to do so on an independent and personal basis.

Hodgett, at the same time, advocated an entrance examination designed to test the ability of applicants, but again the committee declined to act. Instead it agreed to place new students on probation for their first two terms, their acceptance as 'students in full standing' to depend on their performance.

In the middle 'Twenties there was unrest among the student body following a decision to allow a third-year student, James A. Stewart, to do his fourth year at a Baptist seminary in the U.S.A., and to grant him a College Diploma on the certified satisfactory completion of the fourth year. Other students wished to follow Stewart's example, (Herbert Hunter had been offered scholarships at three American Baptist seminaries), but were denied permission on the ground that the College existed to train men for Irish work, for which the current curriculum was adequate. One student, Alex. Best, resigned in order to complete his studies in the U.S.A. The committee flatly refused to give Best a certificate of achievement or a letter of commendation because he had broken his promise to complete his course in Dublin. Clearly, in favouring Stewart and denying others the committee had acted unfairly, and the students could scarcely be faulted for their reaction.

A revised curriculum was adopted in June 1927. A comparison with the 1901 curriculum shows much less emphasis on purely secular subjects, except for English language and literature now geared to the London University matriculaton examination. Conversely, more stress fell on biblical and pastoral subjects, the biblical languages receiving closer attention than formerly. The extension of the course to four years in 1921 was confirmed as the basis for full ministerial training. Systematic theology was to be taught from A.H. Strong's Outlines , a text book widely used in the American Baptist seminaries.
This curriculum remained in force for ten years and was revised again in June 1937. English language and literature still had a place, but was no longer related to university examinations. The course of study had a much stronger Baptistic emphasis.

In April 1928 yet another sub-committee pondered how to put the College on a sound financial footing and to improve ministerial training. Once again the possibility of moving the College to Belfast was considered but no decision was reached.

Widening Horizons

A dearth of Irish candidates in 1930 was traced to young men going to American seminaries where they were able to work to pay their way through college. The College urgently needed more students if it was to survive, and especially students from outside Ireland. Some justification for widening its catchment area was found in 'the need (that)

exists for a "Fundamentalist" College in the British Isles, supplementary to Spurgeon's College in London'.

Given the theological climate of the period this was not as arrogant as it sounds. Spurgeon and Deens discussed the position with the committee of Spurgeon's College who generously volunteered to suggest to applicants who did not gain a place at Spurgeon's that they might try the Irish College. There is no indication that any practical results followed this friendly offer. However, the issue became less urgent as applications from both Ireland and Great Britain began to pick up once more.

A proposal that students from Great Britain should pay £75 a year, and those from 'the Colonies' £100, was rejected as unfair discrimination. Spurgeon argued that it would be fairer to distinguish between the students' future spheres of service rather than their place of origin. He won his point. It was agreed to treat all candidates alike, except for a modest differential of £10 to distinguish between candidates accepted specifically for Irish Baptist work and those accepted unconditionally.

Precarious Finances

Three years later (when the national economy was depressed) the College was again short of money obliging the long-suffering committee to arrange an overdraft of £500 with themselves as guarantors. The situation was so serious that the finance sub-committee thought that student admissions ought to be suspended until it clarified. This sub-committee, as well as recommending a fund-raising drive among the Irish churches, and a personal visit by the Principal to the British churches, regretfully concluded that the Principal's salary of £400 a year should be cut, although it was 'not excessive for a man of Mr. Spurgeon's qualifications'. A reduction of £50 was mooted. The report had a frosty reception. Spurgeon agreed to raise funds 'across the water' only if the proposal to cut his salary was dropped! However, student admissions were suspended temporarily.

The next year a more vigorous spirit animated the committee. Student admissions were resumed, four of seven candidates were admitted, the successful applicants being cautioned that 'while the course is a four years' one we wish to make it clear that we may be forced, on account of the financial situation, to close the College, but all work done will be fully recognised'.

"Heresy!"

Finance instability was not the only problem to be faced. In 1935, Alfred Olley, a member of the Grove church, Belfast, (which itself had been critical of the theological teaching in the College in 1933), abruptly left the College in his final year, giving as his reason 'the unsoundness of the Principal's teaching on the inspiration of scripture'. Spurgeon had, in fact, been teaching this topic from the set book, Strong's Theology, and Strong's 'dynamic' view of Inspiration conflicted with the 'inerrancy' view held by Irish Baptists generally.

The committee itself was divided on the definition of 'verbal inspiration'. One member, F.W. Gracey, pastor of the Cork church, confessed that
'while he believed Spurgeon stood by the basis of doctrine as he understood it, there was the fear in his (Gracey's) mind that it was interpreted differently from what it was in his college days &, he thought, in the minds of the majority of committee. To him the admission of even the possibility of error in the original documents was immediately contrary to verbal inspiration.'

The committee, by a majority of 15 to 4, recorded its conviction that Spurgeon was loyal to the doctrinal basis without mental reservation and cleared him 'from any taint of heresy'. The four dissentients met the Principal and three others (Deens, Freeman and Ruddock) and reached agreement on the basis of the following resolution:
'That in view of the unfortunate misunderstanding caused by the use of Dr.Strong's Theology the Principal be asked, when teaching the subject of Inspiration, to revert to Dr. Hodge's Outlines of Theology.' [8]

Olley published his version of the matter and the committee set up a small group to monitor developments. They reported that it was impossible 'to deal fully in print with every one of Mr. Olley's mis-representations' and recommended that no attempt be made to do so, but that 'unofficial steps should be taken to put the facts before such enquirers as are honestly disturbed by his statements in the pamphlets'.[9]

The affair was damaging. It deepened existing suspicions and antipathies to the College in certain churches, and some vacant churches showed a reluctance to call College graduates. Spurgeon, with a practical turn of mind, suggested that the Union and the College should assist final year students in their search for settlements. The Union appointed its President with Pastors D. Burrows, F.H. Forbes and J.W.D. Freeman to act with the Principal and Tutors as a Settlement Committee. It did not enjoy much success.

Outside the committee, some non-collegiate pastors had declined to lend their support to the campaign to denigrate the College, largely because Olley in his literature had attacked the reputation and integrity of esteemed brethren. In doing so, Olley himself seems to have forfeited the confidence of the churches for his usefulness subsequently was desultory and negligible. To Spurgeon's credit he never again referred to what must have been a painful episode for a man with his sensitivities.

Post-War Boom.

During World War II the College, helped by its location in neutral Eire, was able to continue without interruption, and from 1939-1945 received 13 students.

In the post-war period, in common with other theological colleges in the British Isles, the College enjoyed an influx of students. In 1945 there were 10 students. Another 6 were admitted in 1946; 3 in 1947, one of whom (JackWilde) was a 'Bevan Boy' who had done his national service in a Durham coalmine. The largest intake of students came in 1948 when

8 freshers were admitted - 3 English, 2 Scots and 3 Irish. There were then 18 resident students. The ex-Servicemen were funded by the Ministry of Education which paid their fees and upkeep. This infusion of new blood and the larger numbers helped to widen the horizons of the College generally. Outgoing students filled pastorates in all parts of the British Isles and overseas.

In 1950 the tide began to ebb. By 1952 the number of students in residence had fallen to 13. An intake of 5 freshers the following year raised the student body to 15 residents with one extern student. In 1955, however, the decline resumed. The Principal explained: 'A number of applications were sent in during the year, but none of the applicants could be accepted. This was due largely to the action of the various local Baptist Associations in deferring recommendations for a time'. In fact the other Baptist Colleges were suffering similar falls in student numbers, hence the unhelpful attitude of some of the English Associations.

The decline continued through 1956 by which time the number of resident students in the College had fallen to 3. By 1962 there were only two students, with no prospect of improvement. It looked like the end of the road.

Two comments seem appropriate here.
First, that in the post-war boom period the College only survived because demand for ministerial training out-stripped the capacity of the British Baptist theological colleges.
Second, that in a period of sustained growth in Irish Baptist work which began around 1944 the Dublin College played only a small part in supplying a trained ministry for the churches.

The Final Phase

This second point did not pass unnoticed because the 1949 Assembly instructed the Council to investigate the position. Subsequently, on 17 January 1950 the Union Council and the College committee met to discuss: the constitution of the College committee; the location of the College; and the place of the College in the life of the denomination, including the question of life and conduct in the College.

At a Council meeting nine days later, some alleged that the lack of confidence evident in the majority of the churches was due to the fact that the College was not under the control of the denomination. Others blamed, in part, the attitude of the Principal to such matters as smoking and cinema-going. There was also disquiet over internal discipline and examinations. As a result three questions were addressed to the College committee:

1 Why are the young men of the denomination going to other Colleges across the water?
2 Why are so many of the churches not supporting the College?
3 Why are so many of the trainees not coming to our churches?

At the College committee these questions and views exposed 'very great divergence of opinion among the members'.[11] It quickly became apparent that agreement was out of the question. Instead, in February 1952 it was suggested that:
'no attempt be made to interfere with the existing position during the present Principalship if the Grosvenor Road Church will now undertake that at the expiration of that Principalship it will co-operate with the Union in seeking legal authority for a revision of the present College Trust Deed which will transfer future control to a Committee appointed solely by the Union.'

The Union Council and the College committee agreed to this course but the Grosvenor Road church refused to give any undertaking.

Despite strenuous efforts to keep it afloat the College by 1962 was in dire financial straits, with student entry suspended and Spurgeon approaching retirement age. The issues of the location and control of the College again became acute. The Union made provision for Spurgeon in his retirement, and the Grosvenor Road church finally bowed to the inevitable. The committee met for the last time on 14 March 1963 and awarded the College Diploma to the last two students to graduate from Dublin. The concluding entry in the College Minute Book reads, 'The Committee learned with great gratification that the Baptist Union of Ireland hopes in the near future to organize a new College in Belfast, and prays that from its inception this new venture may enjoy unmistakable tokens of Divine approval and blessing'.

The College was wound up formally in Dublin on 30 June 1963 and reconstituted in Belfast under the control of the Baptist Union of Ireland by an overwhelming Assembly vote in favour of a motion that the churches should 'maintain a College for the training of candidates for pastoral and missionary work'. This vote was more impressive because it represented the express views of the churches and not the personal preferences of the delegates.[10]

In the Final Analysis

In the seventy years since its foundation the College admitted 136 students of whom 28 did not graduate for a variety of reasons. How did Hugh D. Brown's concept of training Irishmen for Irish churches work out? Well, so far as I have been able to discover, of the 108 graduates only 16 served exclusively in the Irish Baptist churches. Another 32 served part of their ministry in Ireland. The 'sixteen' became household names among Irish Baptists and made outstanding contributions to the life and witness of the churches. The list reads like a roll of honour - John W.D. Freeman, Charles Willoughby, Fred W. Gracey, David Henderson, Louis Deens, Richard Hodgett, Samuel Ruddock, Frank Forbes, George Weir, George McKillen, Robert Clarke, Robert Boggs, Robert Campbell, W. J. Rowell, T.J. McNabb, and William Lyttle.

One name shines out above others in that list. Pastor Deens retired from the active ministry in 1963 after 50 years of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ, 38 of which

he spent in Dublin. He came north that same year to be my associate in Union administration and, when the College was reconstituted in 1964 with David Kingdon as Principal, he resumed his famous lectures in Homiletics and Pastoral Theology. The College elected him as its President, an office he held and adorned until his death on 2 April 1984. No graduate of the College whether of Dublin or Belfast would dispute the claim that Louis Deens was its most illustrious student and beloved President. We thank God upon every remembrance of him.

JOSHUA THOMPSON

References:

1 Irish Baptist Magazine, February 1887, p.28.
2 L.E.Deens, Man of Stature: Hugh D. Brown, (Belfast, 1968)
3 BUI Handbook 1899-1900, p.5.
4 Baptist World Alliance Congress Report (1905), p.233
5 Minute Book 1901-1947, f.3 recto
6 ibid., f.4 recto. These provisions were also embodied in the Harcourt Street chapel deed.
8 College Minute Book, 26 June 1935. Strong in his Systematic Theology (New York, 1907), vol.I, ch.3 'Inspiration of the Scriptures' held the 'dynamic' theory i.e. 'Inspiration is characteristically neither natural, partial, nor mechanical, but supernatural, plenary, and dynamical.' (p.211) He taught that 'Every imperfection not inconsistent with truth in a human composition may exist in inspired Scripture' (p.213); or again, 'Inspiration did not guarantee inerrancy in things not essential to the main purpose of Scripture' (p.215). Hodge, on the other hand, in his Outlines of Theology (London,1870) defined Inspiration as 'that divine influence which, accompanying the sacred writers equally in all they wrote, secured the infallible truth of their writings in every part, both in idea and expression, and determined the selection and distribution of their material according to the divine purpose.' (p.70)
9 Committee Minute Book, 20 February 1936.
10 BUI Reports and Statistics 1962, p.5.
11 Committee Minute Book, 23 February 1950.

Irish Baptist College
List of Students from 1892-1963

Notes:

1. This list includes all applicants who were admitted to the College, even those who did not complete the course and graduate. Many applicants were refused admission for various reasons: two of these reasons are of interest and applied until World War II, namely, no one was admitted who was either over 30 years of age or was married.
2. Irish-born students are indicated by an asterisk (*) and their home church, where known, is given in brackets after their name, [Lurgan].
3. Where possible, information is given about the early career of each graduate, but this is not intended to be complete or exhaustive. In some cases information is given about the subject's subsequent career if this is deemed to be of relevance.

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1. S.A. McCracken (1892) Cork 1893-4; London 1894-
2. John W.D. Freeman (1892) Athlone 1897-1903; Coleraine 1903-
3. *C.D. McCarthy (1893-5) BMS d. 1898 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
4. Selby Arthur Gray (1894-96) Phibsborough 1896-7; Congregational ministry M.A., LL.B.
5. James Spottiswoode (1896-9) Fivemilehill 1900-1; Waterford 1902-5. Emigrated to New Zealand.
6. Hugh Watson (1899-1902) Evangelistic work with Black in Co.Armagh.
7. Robert Black (1899-1902) Scarisbrick, Wigan 1902-
8. John H. McKnight (1899-1902) assisted James Hodge (Ballykeel) at Bleary; Poyntzpass 1903.
9. A. McCluggage (1900-2) Resigned to settle in England. Reapplied in November 1903 to complete his course. Application declined by committee.
10. *James Willoughby (1898-1902) Lower Gardiner Street,Dublin 1902; Assistant tutor at IBC/ further study at TCD. M.A.
11. *Thomas John Harvey [ ] (1900-4) Banbridge 1904-8; Bellshill 1909-12; Ballymena 1912-15; Cowdenbeath 1915-20; etc.
12. *Thomas Warwick [Lurgan] (1900-4) Knockconny with Dungannon and Mullycar 1904-12. Congregational ministry subsequently.

(Note: Students 1-12 had been admitted and studied at the College under Brown's regime at 16 Harcourt Street. Students 6-12 continued their studies under the new arrangements at 45 Harcourt Street.)

13. Samuel J. Reid (in-service training 1901-) while pastor of Shankill Road church, Belfast 1897-1903; Londonderry 1903-12; Emigrated to USA 1912.
14. T. Gelbart (1901-3) while missionary for British Jews Society in Dublin. Resigned 1903 to get married.
15. *Charles Willoughby (1902-6) [brother of James and a Methodist 'paid evangelist'] Waterford 1907-13; Mountpottinger, Belfast 1913- M.A.
16. *W. Reid McCullagh B.A. [Antrim Road, Belfast] (1903-5) Clough 1906-9

17. *Fred W. Gracey [Antrim Road, Belfast] (1903-6) intended BMS missionary Cork 1910-49
18. *John Laird [Londonderry] (1903-6)
19. *Thomas Porter [Antrim Road, Belfast] (1904-6) Left for 'social reasons'.
20. *William Campbell [Mountpottinger, Belfast] (1904-8) Lurgan 1911-14; Bangor 1914-17. Presbyterian ministry subsequently.
21. David Henderson (1906-9) after 5 years as pastor of Limerick church. Bangor 1910-13; Tobermore 1913-19; Great Victoria Street, Belfast 1919-49.
22. *Louis Edward Deens [Phibsborough] (1909-13) Waterford 1914-19; Bloomfield, Belfast 1919-20; Cliftonpark Avenue, Belfast 1920-25; Harcourt Street, Dublin 1925-63.
23. *Charles J. Mates [Cork] (1907) after 2 years in Africa with Qua Iboe Mission. Left after one term to become general secretary of Ealing YMCA. Re-admitted (1914-17)
24. * -. Cobb (1907) a Methodist evangelist baptized by Pearce in Cork. Left after one term to accept 'an appointment offered him abroad'.
25. *W.A. Wilson [Queenstown] student Methodist ministry adopted Baptist views (1908) Left after one term on financial grounds.
26. J. Klason (1910-12) Russian student recommended by Pastor Fetler of St. Petersburg. Returned to serve in Russia.
27. *Richard Hodgett [Dungannon] (1910-12) Phibsborough 1912-14; Shankill, Belfast 1914-21; Hill Street, Ballymena 1921-27. d.26.9.27
28. Albert Quigley (1911-14) Dungannon with Lisnagleer and Mullycar 1914-16; Lisnagleer 1916-1919.
29. Harry Ernest Spelman (1911-13) Athlone 1913-15; Limerick 1915-19; Foulsham 1919-
30. *Samuel Ruddock [Harcourt Street, Dublin] (1912-15) Asst. Harcourt Street, Dublin 1915-1918; Bangor 1918; Ballykeel 1920-22; East End, Belfast 1922-29; Strandtown, Belfast 1929; etc.
31. *Frank H. Forbes [Banbridge] (1913-17) Lurgan 1917-24; Ballykeel 1924-32; Hill Street, Ballymena 1932-37; Secretary, Baptist Union of Ireland 1937-52.
32. Thomas Watson (1913-14) for foreign missionary work. After a year's work with YMCA among the troops, went to Salonika to continue this ministry.
33. Stephen Madden (1916-18) asst. Harcourt Street,Dublin 1918-19; East End, Belfast 1919-1921; East Dereham, 1921-
34. *George McKillen (1917-24) a non-Baptist at application elected under Rule 15. An extern student. Name removed from College February 1924 because of failure to complete the course.
35. *J. Kyle Paisley (1921-26) extern student. Armagh 1918-28; Hill Street, Ballymena 1928-33. Resigned to form an independent work in Ballymena.
36. *George Henderson Weir [Grange] (1921-24) Portadown 1924-38; East End, Belfast 1938-45; etc.
37. Allan Kimmance (1922) withdrew on health grounds.
38. Reginald R. Cunningham (1922-23) resigned.
39. *James R. Davison (1922-26)
40. *Samuel C. Thompson [Mountpottinger, Belfast] (1922-26) Waterford 1926-35; Ballykeel 1935-54; emigrated to USA.

41. *William Park Rankin [Mountpottinger, Belfast] (1923-27) Cliftonpark Avenue, Belfast 1927-33; Leith 19333-36; Union Church, Hyderabad and with British and Foreign Bible Society in India and Ethiopia.
42. *John A. Simpson [Coleraine] (1923-27) Carrickfergus 1924-31; subsequently in Scotland.
43. *Herbert J.L. Hunter [Grove] (1924-28) Armagh 1928-36; subsequently in England.
44. *Robert Clarke [Grange] (1924-28) Bloomfield, Belfast 1928-31 etc.
45. James A. Stewart (1924-28) for foreign mission work. Permitted to do 4th.year in Baptist seminary in USA. Remained in USA.
46. *G. Dudley Arnold [Antrim Road,Belfast] (1924) withdrew.
47. *Dwight L.Moody [Bangor] (1924) resigned to study at QUB. Reapplication in 1938 declined.
48. *Robert Wallace Kerr [Grove] (1925-29) went with committee's approval to Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. B.Th. Elliston, Kentucky 1930-31; Bloomfield, Belfast 1931-34; Limerick 1935-39; chaplain H.M. Forces 1940-46; Exeter etc.
49. *Leslie H. Fraser [Shankill, Belfast] (1925-29) Slaithwaite, Yorks. 1929-
50. *Alexander Best [Londonderry] (1926-27) resigned in order to complete his studies in the USA. Remained in USA.
51. Thomas J.Hughes (1926-30) Athlone 1930-33.
52. *Samuel Jardine [Grove] (1926) withdrew because of ill-health.
53. *Robert Wilkinson [Great Victoria Street, Belfast] (1927) left after one term because of ill-health. Re-admitted 1929 but again withdrew after one term.

(Note: The committee on 14 September 1927 altered Rule 4 to require each applicant to submit a certificate of health from a doctor appointed by the committee. Despite depleted numbers the committee also in 1927 rejected a number of applications which did not satisfy entry requirements.)

54. *Robert A. Boggs [Great Victoria Street,Belfast] (1928-32) Grange 1932-38; Tobermore and Carndaisy 1938-78.
55. Albert Leslie Smith (1929-33) Cliftonpark Avenue, Belfast 1932- Entered the Anglican ministry.
56. Denis Bareham (1929-33)
57. Clifford Harold Culyer Robbins (1929-33) East End, Belfast 1933-37; Dereham Road, Norwich etc.
58. Garwood Silvester Tydeman (1930, 1932-35) Lost a year following a serious road accident. Martham 1935-39; Godmanchester Group 1939-43; etc.
59. *William Harkins [Shankill,Belfast] (1931-35) with IBFM in Peru and Argentina 1936-57; Canadian ministry.
60. *Alfred Olley (1931-35) resigned on doctrinal grounds in final year.
61. *Dermot H. McDonald [Harcourt Street,Dublin] (1931-35) asst. Harcourt Street,Dublin 1935-36; Stockton-on-Tees 1936-42; etc. Vice-Principal, London Bible College 1954-75 B.A., B.D., Ph.D., D.D.
62. *David Hynes Hodgett [Bangor] (1933-37) took courses at TCD in parallel. Killed on active service in World War II.
63. *Robert Campbell [Monkstown] (1934-36) left before completing course, settled in Armagh, completed studies as extern student. Armagh 1936-40; Banbridge 1940-50; etc.

64. Leonard Watkin England (1934-38) Sutton-in-Ashfield 1939-43; etc.
65. *William J. Rowell [Phibsborough] (1934-38) Athlone, 1938-39; Lisnagleer 1939-45; etc.
66. J. Wilson (1934-38) Athlone. Later entered the Anglican ministry.
67. *Robert G.Clarke [Coleraine] (1935-39) read for degree at TCD. Athlone 1939- ; went into Congregational ministry.
68. Benjamin W. Peake (1936-40) Stockton-on-Tees 1943-47; etc.
69. *Archibald Hugh Duff Stevenson [Antrim Road, Belfast] (1936-40) diploma granted June 1941 Coleraine 1940-45; Knightswood, Glasgow 1945-54; etc.
70. J.C. Dye (1937-38) withdrew
71. *F.W. Greer Hutchinson [Tobermore] (1938-42) Lurgan 1944-46; Renfrew 1946-
72. *Thomas J. McNabb [Lurgan] (1938-40), completed studies as an extern student. Killyleagh 1941-44; Cliftonpark,Belfast 1944-50; etc.
73. C.A. Noad (1938-40) resigned nervous illness.
74. Ronald F. Mitchell (1939-42) passed London matriculation 1941 and intermediate B.D.; completed College course as an extern student preparatory to sitting final B.D. (London); Woodmansterne 1944-62; etc.
75. Albert E. Allen (1939-43) Cote 1943-46; Rickmansworth 1946-61; etc.
76. Arthur James Sleeman (1940-44) Bovey Tracey 1944-48; Hope, Plymouth 1948-51; etc.
77. Arthur J. Chandler (1940-44) Wednesbury 1944-48; Queen's Road, Coventry (asst.) 1949-57; Nottingham 1957-65; etc.
78. Richard Bolster (1941-44) Edinburgh 1944-
79. Graham Jack (1942) unable to begin course due to military call-up.
80. *Desmond Jackson [Harcourt Street,Dublin] (1942-46) Pollard's Hill, Surrey 1946-
81. *John Gardiner [Athlone] (1942-46) asst. Glengormley 1946.
82. *James Alexander Ritchie [Shankill] (1943-47) Brannockstown 1947-53; Limerick 1953-57; Gateshead !957-65; to Reformed Presbyterian ministry.
83. *Matthew Patterson [Shankill,Belfast] (1943-46) final year as extern student Blantyre 1947-
84. *James G.Kernoghan [Windsor] (1944-47) Limerick 1947-49; in Australian ministry then in Scotland.
85. *Hugh Charles Lutton [Carrickfergus] (1944-47) final year as extern student. Phibsborough 1948-49; Armagh 1949-55; Canadian ministry 1955-57; Larne 1957-58; etc.
86. *William Lyttle [Bloomfield] (1944-48) Glengormley 1948-73; secretary IBFM 1973-
87. *Samuel P. Shields [Windsor,Belfast] (1944-48) Bovey Tracey 1948-
88. *John B.Craig [Cork] (1945-49) Windsor,Belfast 1950-56; in Canadian ministry. B.A., B.D., M.Th.
89. Ivor Howard Tomlin (1945-49) Plumstead 1949-54; etc.
90. David Harding (1946-50) Kington, Herefordshire 1950-
91. *David Lockhart [Great Victoria Street, Belfast] (1946-50) Canadian ministry
92. Ronald K. Hall (1946-50) Lydney,Glos. 1950-57; etc.
93. William Carey Harvey (1946-50) Cambridge Street, Glasgow 1950-
94. Joseph Thomas Jones (1946-49) final year as extern student due to family and financial circumstances. Sale, Cheshire 1950-53; Blackpool 1953-
95. Arthur John Tugwell (1946-50) Stroud 1950-57; etc.

96. *William J. Arlow [Great Victoria Street,Belfast] (1947) withdrew during first term on medical grounds.
97. Jack Owen Wilde (1947-51) with BMS; B.A., L.R.A.M., A.R.C.M.
98. John Chalmers (1947-51) Clydebank 1952-62; Fraserburgh 1962-
99. Raymond David Hall (1948-52) Lydbrook 1952-55; Haslingden 1955-58; etc.
100. Oliver Johnston (1948-50) resigned.
101. *Matthew Maxwell Nesbitt [Shankill,Belfast] (1948-52) Manchester 1953-
102. *W.Kenneth Connolly [Bangor] (1948-49) resigned to enter evangelism.
103. Leslie Coates (1948-52) St.Helen's 1952-57; etc.
104. James Thomson (1948-52) Kelso 1952-
105. Cyril F. Nunn (1948-52) Swaffham,Norfolk 1952-
106. James McM. Campbell (1948-52) Workington 1952-
107. *Stanley O'Connor [Ballymena] (1949-53) emigrated Australia 1953.
108. *Joseph Derek Maguire [Portadown] (1949-53) Exeter 1953-
109. William G. Purdy (1949-50) resigned, went to London Bible College.
110. *William R. Cairns [Shankill, Belfast] (1950-54) emigrated to Canada 1954.
111. William W.H. Baird (1950-54) Scarfskerry 1954-
112. Raymond A. Waterson (1950-54) Kilmington, Devon 1954-
113. Harbit Windham (1950-54) Bridlington 1954-
114. *James Donaldson [Shankill, Belfast] (1951-55) Esh Winning 1955-60; Luton 1960-70; educational appointment 1970-
115. Peter Graham Whiting (1951-55) King's Heath, Northants. 1956-62; Chaplain 1962-
116. Eric J. Carlton (1951-55) Walsall 1955-
117. *Hylands Glendinning [Limavady] (1951) did not take up his place because of unexpected change in his financial circumstances.
118. William Watson (1952-56) Maryport, Cumberland 1956-
119. John Jackson Campbell (1952-56) Saltcoats 1956-60; Grantham 1960-69;
120. John Forrest Neilson (1952-56) Saltly, Birmingham 1956-61; Leighton Buzzard 1961-65; etc.
121. *Ivan Stewart [Tobermore] (1952-54) resigned. Transcript of his work sent to an American seminary at his request.
122. *W.Robert Truman [Knockconny] (1953-57) Maghull, Liverpool 1957-61; Mirfield 1962-65; etc.
123. *Thomas H. Evans [Tobermore] (1953-57) Matson 1957-61; Warwick 1961-68; etc.
124. *E.G. Towson [Grosvenor Road, Dublin] (1953-57) Scarfskerry 1957-
125. William Ronald Scott (1953-57) Denny 1957-63; South Shields 1963-68; etc.
126. G.H. Fox (1953-55) resigned: lack of funds and to get married. At BTI, Glasgow.
127. David E. Atkinson (1954-55) resigned.
128. Guy R. Finnie (1954-58) Workington 1959-68; Norwich 1968-75; etc.
129. Peter Wortley (1956-60) Willesden Green 1960-65; Enfield 1965-75; etc. B.A., B.D.
130. David Patterson (1957-60) Burra Isle, Shetland 1960-64; Newburgh 1964- B.D.
131. Adrian F. Ravenhill, B.A. (1958-60) resigned.
132. *Cecil J. Bradley [Ballykeel] (1958-61) Glenburn, Paisley 1962-66; Coatbridge 1967-73; etc.
133. *Joshua Graham [Glengormley] (1959-62) IBHM evangelist 1962-68.

134. Peter E. Wright (1960) resigned after one term for financial reasons.
135. Ian George Dixon (1960-63) Athlone 1963-70.
136. Ian Alexander Dixon (1960-63) Hamsterly Group 1963-69; Bradford 1969-73; etc.

[Prepared by J. Thompson]

Annual Report to Assembly 1991

Historical research into the life of our Churches makes available to present-day Irish Baptists, stories of men and women "of good reputation who were both practical and spiritually minded." Certainly, they had their share of human weaknesses, but generally, as the Lord enabled them, they tackled the perpetual tasks of evangelism and consolidation facing the churches with spiritual common-sense.

An aim of the Historical Society is to discover, to understand and to analyse how and why opportunities were seized or neglected, problems were solved or ignored, decisions were taken or shelved. The truth, as it emerges, is often encouraging, sometimes disturbing, and occasionally depressing.

The value of historical truth is the use we make of it. Irish Baptist history has much to teach us - if we learn the lessons it holds!

Three meetings were held during 1990. Another two were arranged but had to be cancelled for practical reasons. In addition the Society continued to process enquiries from churches and individuals seeking information on a variety of subjects of historical interest. Papers to be read to the Society in 1991 include "Liberty of Conscience", "Writing a Local Church History", "Frank H. Forbes" and "Towards a Theology of the Child".

The Society offers facilities for the safekeeping of church minute books and other archival material. The importance of this service cannot be over-emphasised. In the past, important church records have sadly been lost or destroyed, which would have been saved if deposited in such a facility. It is a condition that such material is available to the depositing churches for consultation on demand. Other valuable additions to the Society's records have been received from individuals. Churches publishing local histories are invited to donate a copy to the Society's collection. The task of collating and cataloging the holdings continues

Our only source of income is from Members' subscriptions and sales of the Society's Journal. Membership costs £5 a year which includes advance notices of the meetings, opportunities to share in the Society's activities, and a copy of the Journal. Volume 23 of the Journal includes papers read during the session, and is on sale to delegates and churches at £4 a copy.