

PATHWAYS TO FAITH



A History Of
Wigan Baptist Church
1796 - 1996

By Dr. Ian Sellers

FOREWORD

by
Alex Cook, B.A.
Minister
Wigan Baptist Church



1796 — a few years after the French Revolution had removed the monarchy in France and frightened many European Governments into thinking the same might happen to them.

The Napoleonic Wars were causing havoc in Europe. Britain had recently lost her American Colonies. Great changes were taking place in the world.

Change was also taking place in Wigan with cotton spinning, engineering, coal mining and iron production becoming the dominant industries. The old market town was changing into an important industrial town.

It was in such conditions, that a small group of people, who worshipped at St. Paul's Congregation Church disagreed with the doctrine being taught. They left the church and formed a Baptist Church, meeting in a room in Brick Kiln Lane.

Strong in Faith and Hope, the little church eventually grew in number and they built a chapel in Lord Street. Once again, differences over doctrine led to division into two churches. For many years these two churches worked alongside each other in the town, until they united to form the present Wigan Baptist Church.

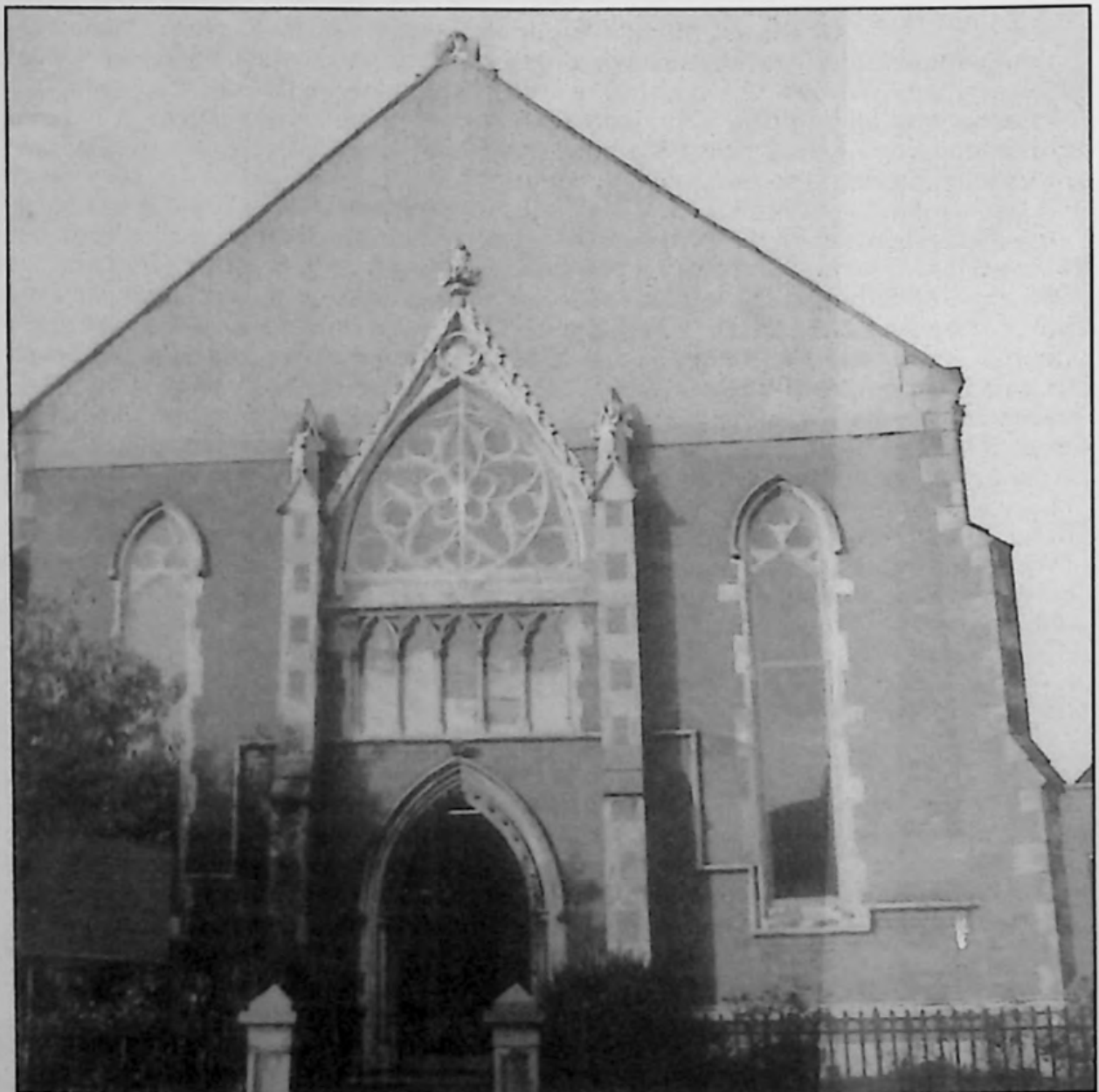
This book tells the story of these Baptist Churches in Wigan. I would like to thank Rev. Dr. Ian Sellers for the work he has done on this project and also Rev David Fraser and other members of the church who have helped in various ways.

I hope that this book will give some idea of the Faith and the work done by our forebears in spreading the gospel of Christ.

What they did in the past should be an inspiration and guide to the present church in these challenging times.



Artists impression of the first Baptist Chapel in Lord Street.



Wigan Baptist Church, Scarisbrick Street.

PREFACE

by
Keith Hobbs, B.A., B.D.
General Superintendent
N.W. Area
the Baptist Union



We owe a real debt of gratitude to Dr Ian Sellers for this readable and informative history of Baptist life and witness in Wigan for the past 200 years. As an association we have been indebted to him in the past for the part he played in writing the history of the Yorkshire and Lancashire and Cheshire Associations from 1647-1987. He brings to his task here the same considerable skills and scholarship in demonstrating the history of Wigan Baptists as it has been handed down to us.

We are no less grateful to him for so readily agreeing to take up the work which the Revd Trevor Hubbard had begun before his untimely death. It is a worthy tribute to one who was the friend of so many.

As I read this history I was struck by two things; first, its honesty, and secondly the timeless quality of the ups and downs, opportunities and challenges for all our churches' life. The spotlight may be upon Wigan but readers of this history will readily identify with it as a reflection of their own church's story both in the past and in the present! It has a contemporary ring about it, and as we read the story we may gain encouragement for the future as we confront today's challenges.

Inevitably, in the writing of any church's history there is a focussing upon ministers' names and their contribution to the developing life of that Christian community. Perhaps less so now in a time of great mobility and crossing of denominational loyalties than in the past we are also introduced to families who played a significant part in the maintenance and support of the two fellowships pictured here. There can be no doubt of the part they played, but the stuff of history really belongs to the unnamed and unsung, seeking to be faithful to their Lord and his church in times of discouragement and struggle as well as in the days of more obvious success.

They sought, as they had vision and resources, to respond to the pressing needs of their day. It is to them that the credit largely belongs not only for perseverance in difficult days but for a continuing stubborn belief that they must maintain their Christian witness for an unseen future. Theirs was the faith in the possibilities of what was yet to come.

As you read this history keep in your mind's eye the context of those people's lives: the Industrial Revolution, social and political upheaval, two World Wars, the ever-uncertain reign of 'King Cotton' and the Depression of the 1930's. To that catalogue we add the more recent developments of secularisation, a multi-faith society and a technological revolution of breathtaking pace.

This is not a unique story. In its telling you will catch echoes of the story of many a Lancashire church. We are grateful to Wigan Baptist Church for sharing it with us. Long may the cause of Christ continue in the unfolding life and witness of God's People in Wigan — and beyond.

TWO CENTURIES OF WORSHIP



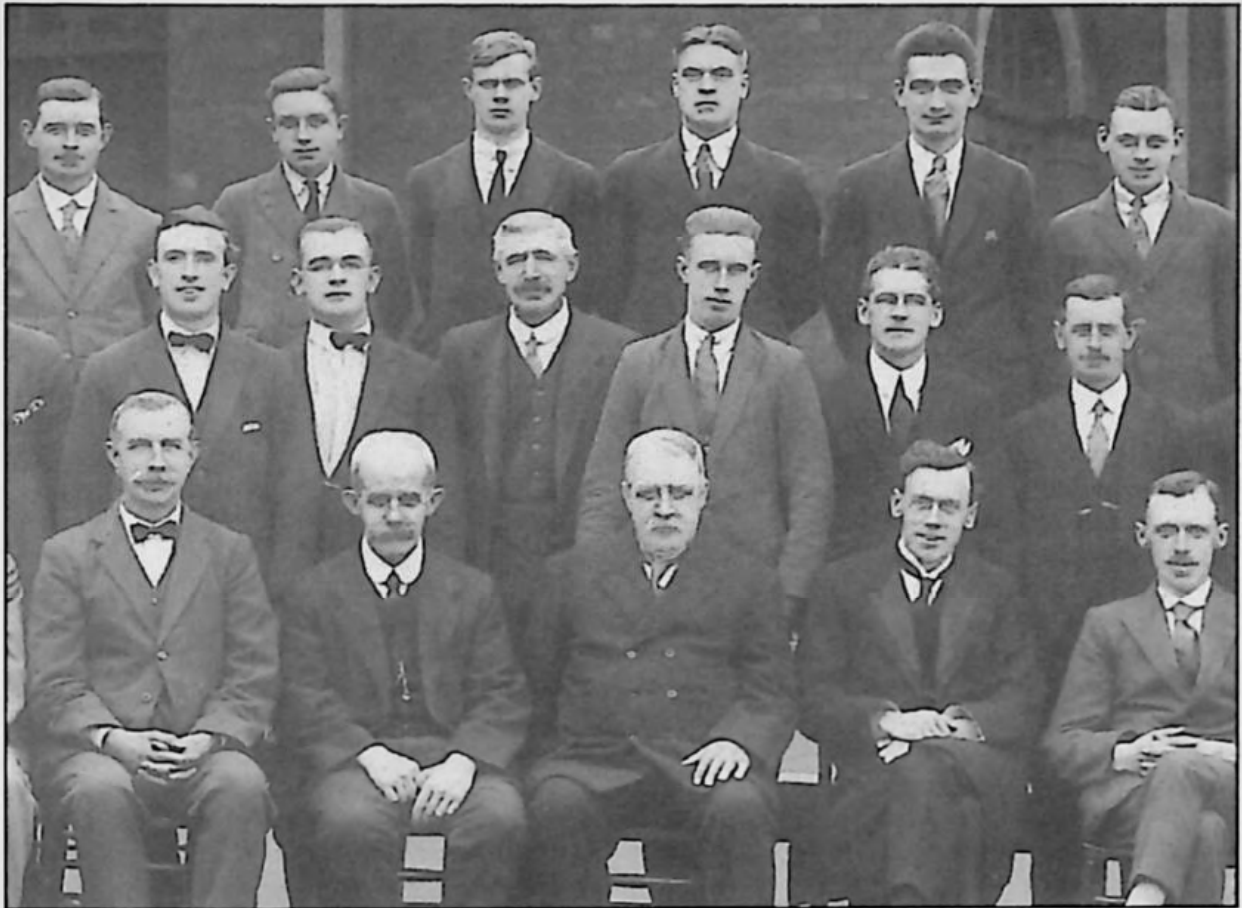
An Introduction

In the Summer of 1994 I received an invitation to write the history of the Wigan Baptists which had been begun by Trevor Hubbard a few months before his death. Out of respect for Trevor, whom I greatly admired, I readily agreed and have gratefully availed myself of his notes, mainly on the earlier years of the two churches. An added bonus for my undertaking this task is that I have got to know the Wigan Baptists who have been very generous in putting the records (and their memories) at my disposal. They have even come to terms with having a Warringtonian (of all people) probing into their past.

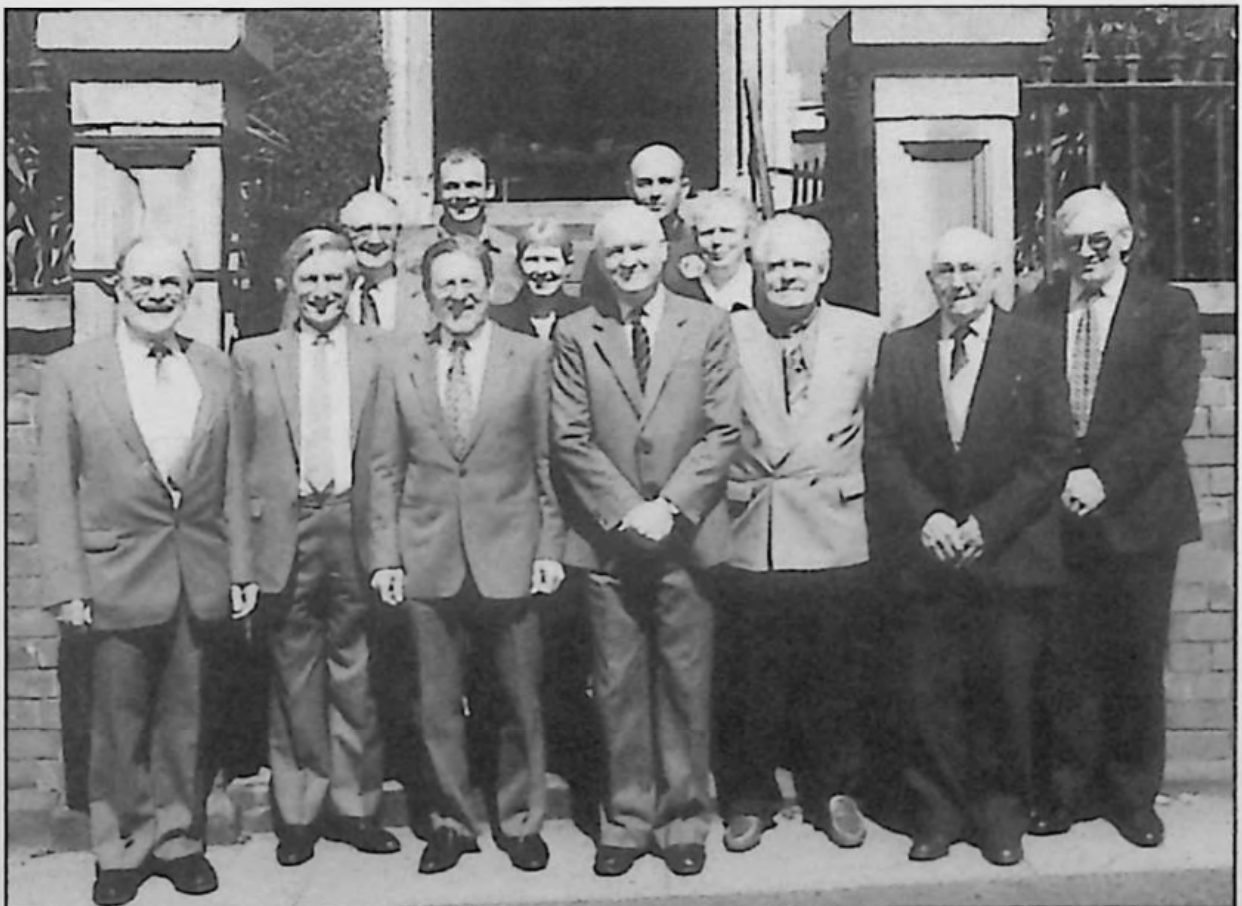
History should be written 'warts and all', and as I have ploughed through minute books and church magazines several distinctive and recurring themes have been much in evidence. One is a certain forthrightness (believed by some, especially Rugby League aficionados, to be a Wigan characteristic). In a church context an independent polity and tension are inevitable bedfellows, and sometimes give rise to factionalism and the expression of strong opinions. Add to this the fact that Wiganers are a very independent people — think of the strength of the Independent Methodists and the Churches of Christ in the town, or the presence near the Baptist Church of two Roman Catholic churches side by side, one of which has been described by its historian as an example of 'Catholic congregationalism' — and the vigorous self-reliance and outspokenness of the Baptists become more explicable. Secondly a note of indecision is also frequently heard. So many minutes end inconclusively with the secretary noting 'a long discussion followed by nothing positive was decided!' To defer to a later date or refer to a sub-committee may be a technique for conflict avoidance; it can also be rather demoralising. Finally, as in any predominantly working-class community like Wigan there is what plush suburban churches might well identify as a certain naivety and lack of business sense. Over and above their very considerable virtues of thrift and self-respect the Wigan Baptists have not historically been worldly-wise; trusts allowed to fall into decay, personal and church finances confused, (for convenience sake and with no intention to defraud), significant documents gone missing. The records sometimes read painfully.

These are generally 19th Century failings. In the later 20th Century we meet another, more human, more natural and ultimately more cruel. Prioritising the struggle for survival at the expense of spirit led renewal, and renewal in unexplored and unexpected places, come so easily to us all. Only when the two Wigan churches merged in 1969 was it really possible to set the former care aside, to pray for and await the Lord's guiding.

From this history there emerges on the other hand an impression which throws all these lesser failings into the shade, for we seem here to be encountering a people whose lack of material resources is compensated for by a Gospel zeal which drives them to work sacrificially for the Kingdom, to dedicate all available time and talents to their Lord and His Church. In the process, worldly comforts and health are alike assigned second place, as they give their utmost for His highest. This is the story of such heroic men and women.



Scarisbrick Street Men's Class 1920's.



Minister and Deacons 1996
Wigan Baptist Church



Scarbrick Street Women's Outing to Blackpool 1930's.



Walking Day 1964.



Pantomime Time 1972.

CHAPTER ONE



The Baptists of Wigan Small Beginnings

In the year 1796 in the Standishgate area of Wigan, St Paul's Church, originally Countess of Huntingdon's, but now Congregational, was in an unhappy state. It was, as the diary of William Roby of the Lancashire Independent College testifies prone to internal strife and a troubled ministry (1803-30) was now drawing to a close. The Pastor was ill and some of his ministerial supplies had Calvinistic angularities. A handful of his flock had arrived at Baptist convictions and now hived off to meet in a room in Brick Kiln Lane. With the encouragement of two well-known ministers, John Hirst of Bacup and James Hargreaves of Bolton, several people were baptised in the River Douglas and ten believers (five male and five female) covenanted together to form a church in the July of that year. They were not wealthy and it was not until they invited William Wrathall of Skipton to be their Pastor in 1803 that a determined effort was made to raise funds to build a church. A site was obtained in Lord Street to be laid out with a graveyard in front and a minister's house and chapel behind. The chapel was a square building with nine straight, hard-backed pews divided by aisles into three parts. By the time Mr Wrathall died in 1809 the Baptists of Wigan had clearly 'arrived', though the membership was small.

During the ensuing pastorless period (1809-10) it actually shrank to eight. In May 1810 a vigorous 57-year old, John Simmonds of Accrington, became pastor and in 1812 baptised, along with others, his son James and William Ellison, both destined to contribute to the preaching ministry of the church (James later went to be pastor at Olney). A Sunday School was now in being (William Park, Superintendent, an office he was to hold for 50 years), and a baptistery installed in front of the pulpit at a cost of £6. There was even an attempt in 1821 by Ellison and William Brown to plant a branch church in Standish. Mr Simmonds resigned aged 70 in April 1823. He had received 37 new members and there were now 31 names on the roll. All seemed set fair for future growth.

The church now turned to Horton Academy for a student pastor, and George Crook was called in September 1823 at a salary of £60 pa. Yet he stayed only a year, before departing to South Shields "matters not being so comfortable as could be wished". Another Horton student, a Mr Fearn, supplied for a time, but declined a call. The cause was now depressed, but in 1826 Rev Benjamin Millard of Bath arrived at Lord Street on supply. He was a determined man and was filled with compassion for the destitute people who lived in the 'central' part of the town (around the old parish church). He felt a call to go and work amongst them and invited the Lord Street people to join him; if they did not, he would go alone. The records tell us that this radical proposal startled and perplexed the people; still an infant church, they were now being called upon to venture into the unknown. Some said yes, others said nothing. The church minute book in fact uses a wonderfully telling phrase about the latter; 'shyness ensued'. Clearly the pastor's enthusiasm had outstripped his flock's. In the end 15 members withdrew with Millard and 22 remained at Lord Street.

CHAPTER TWO

The Two Churches from the Separation to the Mid-1850s



The next 25 years at Lord Street were on the whole satisfactory. The very short six months pastorate of William Davies in 1827 was followed in 1828 by the return of George Crook from South Shields, still a young man, who alas died in 1835, having caught a fever at an overcrowded cottage meeting. His second Wigan pastorate had been a happy one. He had added several new members to the church which was now 32 strong. A church member, William Ellison, now began to preach regularly and was invited to be pastor in August 1839 at a salary of £40 pa. Mr Ellison, a humble selfeffacing man, continued with his secular job; the church's offer in 1848 to pay him £60 pa if he gave it up was declined. One of the lady members became very prominent in the 1840s. Mrs Crook (nee Kay), widow of the former pastor, was a source of great strength to the church as she visited countless houses in the area, while one individual, Mr Edward Lowe, combined the offices of Sunday School Superintendent, Deacon, Treasurer and Church Secretary. By 1850 the total membership exceeded 50 for the first time, and the following year, Lord Street being by now overcrowded, the decision was taken to build a new chapel.

New trustees were appointed and Mr Ellison went round Wigan collecting funds (on one of these journeys he was 'mugged' and robbed of 17/6d). The foundation stone of the new church in Scarisbrick Street was laid on 1st July 1852, addresses being given by the Rev William Roof of St Paul's and Mr Harvey of Bury. On Christmas Day tragedy struck, when a gale reduced the building (almost complete but for the roof) to rubble, but work was resumed and the new church was opened with special services on 13th October 1853, Dr Raffles (Congregational), Dr Newton (Wesleyan) and Stowell Brown (Baptist) being the preachers. The building had cost £2,100, of which sum £1,772 had been raised by this date. Mr Ellison felt that his job was now done and resigned the pastorate a few months later when the debt stood at almost nil.

He was succeeded by Henry Vasey of Wainsgate who came on the odd arrangement that his salary would consist of all the seat rents, currently £88 pa. His ministry was apparently successful; he saw to it that the Lord Street premises were still utilized, as a library on the ground floor (it had a stock of about 800 books) and an infant school, approached by a flight of external steps, above. The first annual collection for the B.M.S. was taken in 1855, and the first subscription to the B.U. was paid the following year. Relations with the other church were very good, joint services and prayer meetings being held (when one church was fundraising, the other honourably desisted). Unhappily the pew rents did not yield Mr Vasey a sufficient income and he resigned in October 1857, Mr Ellison emerging from retirement to take services till a new pastor could be found. Membership now stood at 68.

The story of the second Baptist Church (this numerical terminology, common in the U.S.A., is rare in Britain, but was used in Wigan from the start) is less happy. The meetings in the Commercial Hall which was a Textile Exchange were often disrupted by the Wigan Fair, and though a Sunday School of eight scholars was

begun in September 1826 and a church constituted in March 1827, with addresses from Dr Steadman and William Godwin of Bradford and James Lister of Liverpool, the congregation, mainly poor people, struggled against seemingly hopeless odds. Church discipline was extremely strict with minute enquiries into the moral character of each baptizand. In 1832 a deacon who had celebrated the passing of the Great Reform Bill by getting tipsy was removed from office. Names later prominent in the church, Heyns, Leach, Gibson, Heaton, Johnson, Starr, Smith and Naylor, now begin to appear. These however had not yet acquired the social and economic prestige sufficient to carry the church through a period of stress and turbulence. Meeting in hired premises proved increasingly difficult, but Mr Millard somehow managed to carry on in these depressing conditions till his death in 1849. An attempt to rent rooms at the Bear's Paw Inn having failed, an Appeal Fund, launched jointly by the church and the Wigan Sunday School Union in which Baptists were very prominent, was begun in 1851. The church secured a good site in King Street for £200 16s. 8d.

There followed a most curious episode. The joiner for the King Street project was a Robert Barlow who was a member at Scarisbrick Street. He apparently colluded with a supply minister, Edgar Hewlett from Oxford, who acted as clerk of works, to demand the sum of £710 which they claimed, on flimsy grounds, was owed to them. Arbitration was tried but failed and eventually the case went to law, but was settled out of court for the sum of £300. This unsavoury business could have been disastrous for the church, especially as some members blamed it all on divine displeasure at a Bazaar, including a raffle, which had recently been held to raise funds. At last on 4th May 1854 King Street was opened for worship. It was a plain building with a chapel above and a school below. The entire project had been costed at £800: in the end this figure had risen to £2,342. The debt was a very serious £1,050, but thanks to generous donations and loans, including one from the Baptist Building Fund in 1856, it had been cleared by 1860.

The story of these years is hard to piece together as the Minute Books from 1848 to 1861 were conveniently 'lost' during a subsequent controversy, but it is clear that despite the munificence of individuals and other churches, King Street ended the 1850s in a very parlous condition. In 1861 there was apparently a crisis of such severity that the church contemplated putting up its buildings for sale by auction. Only the tenacity of stalwarts like John Johnson enabled it to stay open.

CHAPTER THREE

Ups and Downs: Scarisbrick and King Streets in the Late Victorian Era



Scarisbrick Street

In November 1858 a committee was appointed to find a new pastor and ascertain particularly his views on the communion table (obviously an issue agitating the church). Caleb Jones was appointed in September 1859 at a salary of £100 pa, an appointment which unhappily coincided with the withdrawal of Mrs Crook to the Brethren, because she favoured weekly communion. Though there was some generous giving during the Cotton Famine years, especially to the Widows and Orphans Fund, finances were by now an appalling problem. Emergency plans were drawn up "to prevent the closing of the chapel" and Mr Jones resigned in March 1863. Henry Phillips succeeded for a short time from 1864 until in 1866 his wife's illness led to his removal to Evesham. But he had persuaded the church to raise money for a satisfactory heating apparatus, the absence of which may have contributed to the recent troubles.

There next followed one of the happiest pastorates Scarisbrick Street had ever known. Matthew Hudson came from Portsmouth in August 1867 at a salary of £70 pa plus an Association grant and the money from pew rents. Cottage meetings were begun in several new streets, the church became open communion in 1868 (thus putting an end to a long standing controversy), congregational tea meetings were begun to enhance the social side of the church's life, and Psalms and Hymns adopted as the church's standard book in 1875. Above all in 1869 a fund for a new schoolroom was launched. A Grand Bazaar was held in November 1871 and the school was opened in January 1876 by the Principal of Airedale College, Bradford. The value of the new school was demonstrated in December 1884 when Mr Hudson on receiving a call to Boxmoor celebrated his departure by baptizing eleven senior scholars. He was presented with a purse containing £120. His departure was greatly regretted; he had been an ideal pastor and of the 57 church members in 1884 he had himself received 50 into membership.

Mr Forster G Kemp of Bevington, Herts, who came in December 1886, began well. A debt of £120 which had plagued the church for years was cleared, the annual Association grant of £50 dispensed with and a gallery, lavatories and new windows were installed at a cost of £700. Meanwhile in 1891 Scarisbrick and King Streets, working together, had helped provide accommodation for many of the representatives attending the Baptist Union Autumn Assembly in Manchester. The same year saw the church opening a mission in a warehouse in Bottling Wood, a self-contained community not a stone's throw from the chapel but isolated and independent. In 1893 Mr Kemp received a call to Norrington Road, Southport. The Wigan church immediately raised his salary to £160 pa to induce him to stay. Mr Kemp had by now received many new members and the church roll of 1896 contained 137 names, the highest total ever. But suddenly things began to go wrong again. A very bold scheme (for those days) launched by the minister to provide a creche to enable young mothers to attend morning service was not

accepted and at the end of 1895 the entire diaconate and the church secretary resigned.

In his Centenary Brochure of 1896 Mr Kemp, who was apparently an outspoken man, adopted an accusatory stance; the church lived for itself and during a period when the population of Wigan had trebled, it had founded not a single daughter church. It had been dogged, unnecessarily, by financial crises. It was for ever lauding the 'good old days', while forgetting how strife-torn they had been. It had exhibited a cold spirit and attendances at church meetings were very small. The officeholders of the church, Messrs Taylor, Abbot, Cartwright, Sykes, Marsden, Davies, Gibson and Hooton must have read this litany of complaints with real concern.

It certainly hung uncomfortably over the church's centenary meetings of September 1896 (in which King Street wholeheartedly joined). Financial problems were now acute again, and the treasurer was actually paying bills out of his own pocket. Severe difficulties between minister and diaconate (in which both the Association and Dr Tymms of Rawdon College were unavailingly drawn in as mediators) were experienced during 1897. Mr Kemp, a vigorous leader but perhaps too brusque for Wigan tastes, left for Aldershot in July of that year. In December 1897 the church meeting, perhaps more in hope than in expectation, passed a resolution that the New Year begin in peace!

But two years of more turbulence ensued; during this time Mr J Bennett of Ormskirk occupied the pulpit regularly. O Rees Gibbons of Wellington, Somerset, came in October 1899 at a salary of £100 pa and organised a new Century Mission led by Manchester College students, but he found conditions very difficult and resigned in September 1901. The church (now with only four deacons) even requested the Association to step in and manage its affairs; the Association secretary told it first to put its house in order; *then* it would receive all the help necessary for its continuance.

King Street

The second church recovered with great difficulty from the crises of the 1850s. Its financial mainstays, James Walker and William Brown ('Mr William' as the popular founder of the Wigan Sunday School Union was known in the town) were both so afflicted by the troubles that they died soon afterwards. But there was now a Sunday School of 300 children, most aged over 14, and Mr Heaton the Sunday School Superintendent, with the help of evergenerous Mr Ellison from Scarisbrick Street, now started house-to-house fund raising and Tea Meetings (300 sat down to tea in January 1858). By 1859 the persisting debt of £450 had been almost wiped out. The Tea Meetings went on however; one in 1859 attracted no less than 520 people.

Mr Hall, a student from Rawdon, having declined the pastorate, C.H. Spurgeon was applied to and sent William Hayward from his own college in December 1861. Tragically Hayward's strongly evangelistic ministry coincided with the Lancashire Cotton Famine when both churches resolved in the current crisis that the bread left over from Holy Communion be distributed among the poor of the flock. Hayward did his best, organising a Sewing Club to relieve distress. But broken in health he had to move south in 1863. Anxiously King Street joined Scarisbrick Street in a monthly prayer meeting to wait on the Lord's guidance. It also rejoined the Lancs and Cheshire Association from which it had resigned a few years previously. In 1867 a Mr William Drew, an evangelist from Norwich, came as pastor. The circumstances of his coming were unusual; he apparently followed in the wake of a number of Norfolk families who had moved into Wigan at this time to find work. Mr Drew was an eager town missionary who during his pastorate baptized no less than 38 persons as well as introducing the church to the new Baptist Hymn Book in 1867.

He was, however, confronted with the first (and last) serious theological

disagreement in the church. One faction (which may have been using theological argument as a cloak for a kind of power struggle, though there is a suggestion, alas, of continuing financial irregularity) drew up a strongly Calvinistic Creed to be applied to Church officers, including Sunday School teachers and baptizands. The more liberal church members hit back: the Confession was not to be applied to baptizands, theological questions were not to be debated in church meeting where prayer only was to be allowed, and, though the church was Particular Baptist, yet 'Christ himself is the test and pattern of sound doctrine'; appeal should be to Him, and 'not to any confession of faith or other work of human hands'. The winning party celebrated its triumph by persuading church meeting in January 1870 to accept by 66 votes to 12 (7 neutral) the principle of the Open Table. Somehow Mr Drew steered the church through these traumas. He organised a series of popular lectures given by H.S Brown of Liverpool and J.P Mursell of Leicester and introduced Visitors to aid the Deacons in their work of pastoral care.

When he left the church in March 1872 for Bradley, Wilts, the parting was most cordial. There followed a succession of very short pastorates. Robert Aikenhead of Wantage served from 1872-78 at a salary of £120 pa, subsequently raised to £130 and later to £150. He worked hard for the church, for the Jubilee Services of 1876 and for the installation of an organ. But the Great Depression which is unreal for some historians was tangible enough in the Lancashire coalfield communities. Harsh times seemed again to be impending, and Mr Heaton, the leader of the defeated calvinistic faction, used the opportunity to get rid of Aitkenhead in 1878.

Henry Hall of Whitchurch, Salop, succeeded. He had twice previously (in 1861 and 1869) been invited to Wigan but had declined. Now he accepted. He did not however stay long, departing for Hebden Bridge in 1882 without informing the church which only found out about it through the local press. Even so, efforts were made to persuade him to stay. He had been very energetic and had in 1881 founded a pioneering mission in Standish which lasted for six or seven years.

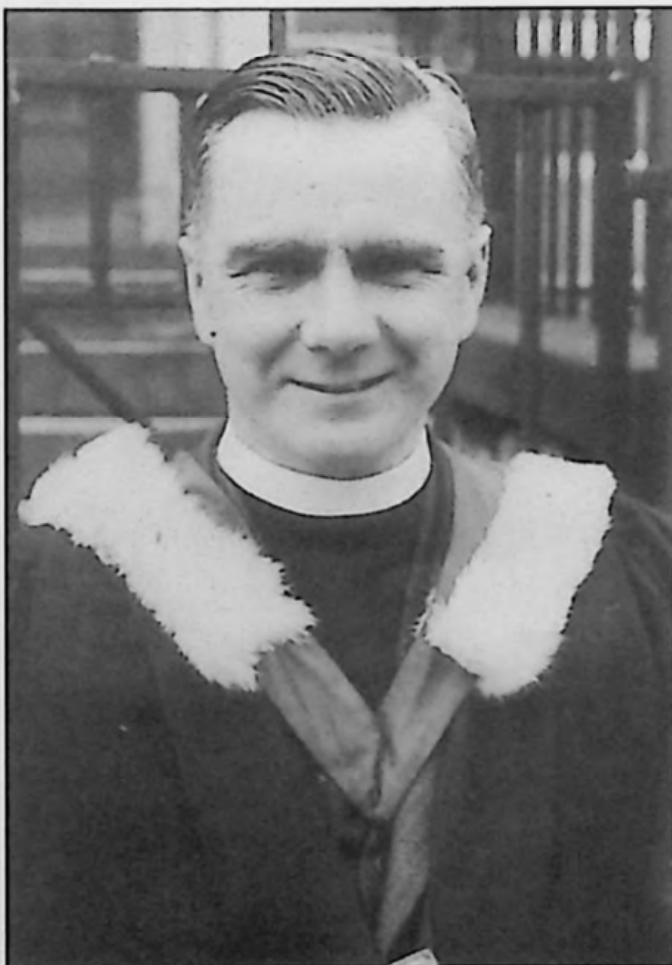
Andrew Miller Mills served from 1883 to 1886 at a salary of £250 pa, a sign that the church, thanks to its strong Sunday School, was impressively building up its strength. He launched in January 1884 a printed monthly record (price 1d: some copies survive in the archives) but he left, for reasons which the Minute Books do not record, in 1886. He went to Carmarthen where he had a notable ministry and was elected Mayor of the Borough three times. John Joseph Berry came in 1887, but his ministry proved 'not acceptable' to some in the congregation and he resigned in July 1890 after he had been invited to stay — on a reduced salary of £160. The parting this time was not amicable.

Obviously the church needed a very strong, not to say ruthless, leader, and such they found in the person of the next minister, Daniel Power Packer of Nottingham. He began by staging a coup against all those who had caused trouble in the past and bidding them adieu. He then strengthened the links with Scarisbrick Street, began a church magazine and introduced collections at the communion services for the church's poor. King Street prospered and raised his salary from £150 to £170. However, to everyone's surprise he left for Gateshead in August 1894.

George James Cliff of Ripley served from 1894 to 1897, when he removed from Wigan for health reasons. The Minutes show that it was he who introduced Infant Dedication services and strengthened the links with Wigan Infirmary where King Street members had been active from the start. He also established a building fund with a view to replacing the now unsatisfactory premises. The church rejoiced that one of its regular attenders, Sam Woods, President of the Lancashire Union of Mineworkers, was elected the town's first LibLab M.P. in 1894. Obviously after all the traumas of the recent past the church was at last soundly established on the social and political map of the town.



King Street Minister and Deacons, Reverend T. Marriott.



Reverend D. MacKenzie, M.A., B.D.



**Tree planting at Whelley Hospital,
September 1973.**

CHAPTER FOUR

Out of the Shadows and into the Light: Scarisbrick Street from 1900 to the Second World War



Scarisbrick Street

The bad spirit in the church had been subdued but not entirely dispelled by the turn of the new century. Robert Black, an Ulsterman from Co. Down, came as pastor in August 1902 at a salary of £100 pa with a 'better feeling', according to the minutes, pervading the church. He began a series of activities to clear off the debt, even refusing a proffered £25 pa increase in his salary because this would frustrate the goal of solvency. Special evangelistic services led by William Lewis of Preston were also held. But Mr Black too became ill. When he resigned in February 1906 he referred sadly to the 'dissentient spirit' he had encountered.

Who would come to Scarisbrick Street now? The name of Mr Bennett of Ormskirk was suggested as a possible lay pastor, but in the end Arthur J Newman of Rock Ferry was invited. Mr Newman was a self-effacing and rather aloof character; only with some difficulty has his christian name been identified and as he was not recognised as a minister by the Baptist Union his name does not appear in successive Handbooks. He came in September 1907 at £104 pa. He at once began a Women's Meeting and a Young People's Guild, soon to grow to about forty strong, and in accordance with the spirit of the times a series of 'Popular Services' on Sunday afternoons. The church came to life again, baptisms were frequent and the membership began to rise. 'A.J.N.' obviously believed that in fundraising boldness was called for and actually wrote to Andrew Carnegie who promised to give £250 if the church raised a like amount. The young people were pressing for individual communion cups (purchased 1909) and a much-needed pipe organ (installed 1910), following a great Bazaar which had raised £220. They also secured the abandonment of the old-fashioned terms 'brother' and 'sister' as used in church meetings and the introduction of an envelope scheme (1909) and a Christian Endeavour (1910).

There now occurred one of those bizarre incidents which seem to crop up regularly in the story of the Wigan Baptists. Because the church owed him £46 8s. 11d., the church treasurer, Mr Robert Telford, kept all the deeds in his own home. Suddenly on 12th July 1909 he collapsed and died and the deacons approached his executors timorously, asking for their documents back. After a long correspondence a sensible solution was adopted; the Baptist Union was asked to step in and become Trustee of the Scarisbrick Street property. A happier event of 1909 was the valedictory service for the church's first overseas missionary, Miss A.V East, on her departure for India (where remarkably she was to meet and marry the Rev G.N Gibson who had gone out to India from King Street). In 1911 special services were held to mark George V's coronation and the ending of the transport strike which had greatly affected the congregation, some of whom were railway employees or their relatives.

The following year another curious episode occurred. The church decided to sell the old Lord Street premises and convert them into three cottages, but all the

trustees had now died without any having been replaced! The church had therefore to apply to the Court of Chancery for a new Scheme. This was not cheap. Mr Newman, who had long been concerned about a whispering campaign against him in the neighbourhood, resigned in May 1912. The ensuing pastorless period enabled the church to install electric lighting at a cost of £50.

In the second half of 1913 two young students, Messrs Scragg and Grainger, shared a joint temporary pastorate at Scarisbrick Street, and in December of that year the former was asked to become minister at a salary of £125 pa. William Scragg's pastorate lasted till February 1918. Remarkably the minutes tell us little about the war, except that prayers were said for 'our young men' at the Front, and the church's affairs were put in the hands of an 'Emergency Committee' when a fuller meeting could not be held. But there is a hidden story here. Scragg was a pacifist, ministering in a town with strong antiwar and pro-war feeling much in evidence. Scarisbrick Street, unlike the local Churches of Christ, never nailed its flag to the pacifist mast but it is noteworthy that, when in 1917 J.H Shakespeare, Secretary of the B.U., appealed to ministers to call for support for the war effort from their pulpits, the church was agitated and refused to follow his lead.

After 1918 Scarisbrick Street decided to adopt a strategy all too common in the difficult years of the inter-war period: calling a minister on a three year contract, then putting away enough money till it was ready to call another on the same terms. Mr R.D Darby of Leigh who came in December 1918 refused to accept this arrangement and the church climbed down. Darby arrived at the time of a grand Welcome Home party for returning soldiers. There was goodwill in the air and before long a big inroad had been made into the church's £500 debt, and that of £250 on the Lord Street property. Darby also reorganised the Sunday School into Primary and Secondary Departments in 1920, and persuaded the church to rely on its own initiative and not apply for a B.U. Sustentation Fund grant. He resigned in November 1922 and went on to play a role of some significance in the history of the BMS as well as to enjoy a successful pastorate in Liverpool.



Walking Day circa 1963.



Women's Concert Parties, Scarisbrick Street 1930's.



Things were now at last running smoothly. Charles Arkinstall of Miles Platting arrived in September 1924 on a three year contract which was again objected to and torn up. The church now felt strong enough to join the Union's Superannuation scheme and raise the minister's salary to £250. Membership by 1926 had risen impressively to 190. By 1930 a huge Sale of Work had virtually eliminated the debt and provided for the installation of a new heating system. Unfortunately, as so often in the past, the minister's physique and the Wigan climate did not agree, and amid expressions of deep regret Mr Arkinstall moved to Malvern later the same year.

Stanley Jones' ministry was brief, from 1930 to 1934. He too was on a three year contract, subsequently extended. This young student from Manchester College had the satisfaction of founding a Young Ladies Meeting (the 'Friends') on Sunday evenings, and seeing the Church's first candidate for the Baptist Deaconess Order, Miss Winnie Linsell, commissioned at Scarisbrick Street in 1932. Once again the congregation was contributing to the life of the wider church, a sure sign that the corner had now at last been turned.

There followed a 12½ year pastorate which was the happiest and most successful since that of Matthew Hudson. Ceiriog Rogers had the kind of background and personality which gelled perfectly with the church's ethos. An ex-miner who had gone down the pits at twelve, Ceiriog had taken his M.A., B.D. at Bangor. He was learned, courteous and refined and Scarisbrick Street came to love and revere him. With the full support of his diaconate (now including women — at least on paper!) and his twelve pastoral visitors Ceiriog launched a whole variety of moneyraising and social activities, while pursuing a bible-based, prophetic ministry which made Scarisbrick Street one of the major Free Church pulpits in the town. The War came all too soon with the inevitable blackout curtains, fire watching, the evening service brought forward to 3pm and 'comforts' for the church's men and women on active service. Above all the Church strengthened its cellars and made them available as accommodation for evacuees; 99 children lived there in the early war years. Unfortunately the minister's house was now deteriorating, and it was in 1944 put on the market for £1,250. (The sale was not effected till 1947 when a new manse in Sandycroft Avenue was bought with generous help from the Hall family for £1,100). However the work went on; the 'returnees' were welcomed back in 1945, in which year Ceiriog showed himself very much in tune with modern times by organising a Youth Club with regular dances and socials. This contributed enormously to the life of the church: its influence is still felt today. Young and old alike were saddened when the minister resigned in 1947. He could not, he declared, have had a more pleasant ministry than this one in Wigan. That he spoke from the heart was shown many years later when the church received a legacy under the terms of his will.



The first King Street



**The enlarged King Street Chapel,
built 1905.**

Chapel, built 1853.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Golden Years and Beyond: King Street, 1897-1946



King Street chapel was in the late 90s poised on the verge of a period of unparalleled growth. Some of its members were as prominent in the life of the town as in the chapel. During the second half of the Victorian age the following had been J.P.s: William Johnson, the church's missionary secretary, Samuel Melling, B.H. Wood, soon to take over as Thanksgiving Fund Organiser, T.L. Lane who led the adult class, John Alfred Johnson, Sunday School Superintendent and Treasurer. In addition there were William Heaton, James Starr, treasurer of the church, John Smith, an enthusiast for children's work and for missions, Thomas Naylor, choirmaster, John Naylor and James Lacock, for some years respectively church secretary and treasurer, William Heaton Starr, Sunday School Superintendent, and David Smith and J.T. Harvey, both church treasurers. The Naylor's were well-known Wigan brass founders, the Smiths knitted garment manufacturers, the Starrs printers and bookbinders, the Harveys bakers. The bulk of the congregation was however working-class, which is why some deemed King Street a 'two-tier' church.

All that was needed was one or more ministers who could galvanise this talent and energy into action. Noah Bosworth who came to the church straight from Rawdon College in 1897 was one such. He began with some trepidation — soon he was baptising almost every month. By 1901 the membership had reached 121, £142 had been collected for the B.U. Twentieth Century Fund, the Wigan Free Church Federal Council launched, with James Starr as its first and Mr. Bosworth as its second secretary and help sent for the holding of the first Baptist World Alliance meeting in London in 1905. The church also sent out its first missionary, Granville Gibson, to India in 1907.

Evangelism was persistent, even in Wigan's two notorious slum areas, Wallgate and Scholes, and after a succession of annual Grand Bazaars the minister persuaded the church to trust instead in an autumn Thank Offering which in its first year raised almost £500.

But the King Street premises were by now too cramped to be worthy of a vibrant church life such as King Street now enjoyed. The land at the rear of the chapel had been occupied in turn by a coachbuilder and by the Theatre Royal as its dressing room. The church had long tried to purchase it but not till 1904 did it succeed. Now an appeal was launched for £5,900 to build a new church on the same site as the old. With an £800 loan from the Baptist Building Fund and what is recorded in the minutes as a £1,000 'legacy' from William Heaton (in reality Heaton had died in 1899 and this sum seems more likely to have been church money now recovered from his estate) the building was completed with only £2,000 owing. The Sunday School was opened first in April 1904 and the church in February 1905. The preachers were Dr. Clifford, J.E. Greenhough and J.H. Shakespeare, the B.U. General Secretary. Follow-up missionary services were conducted by F.B. Meyer, F.C. Spurr and Sylvester Horne. The new church with its terracotta front in the Norman style, its twelve class rooms, electric lights and three stained glass windows (in memory of J. Johnson, W. Heaton and Mr. & Mrs. J. Starr) was

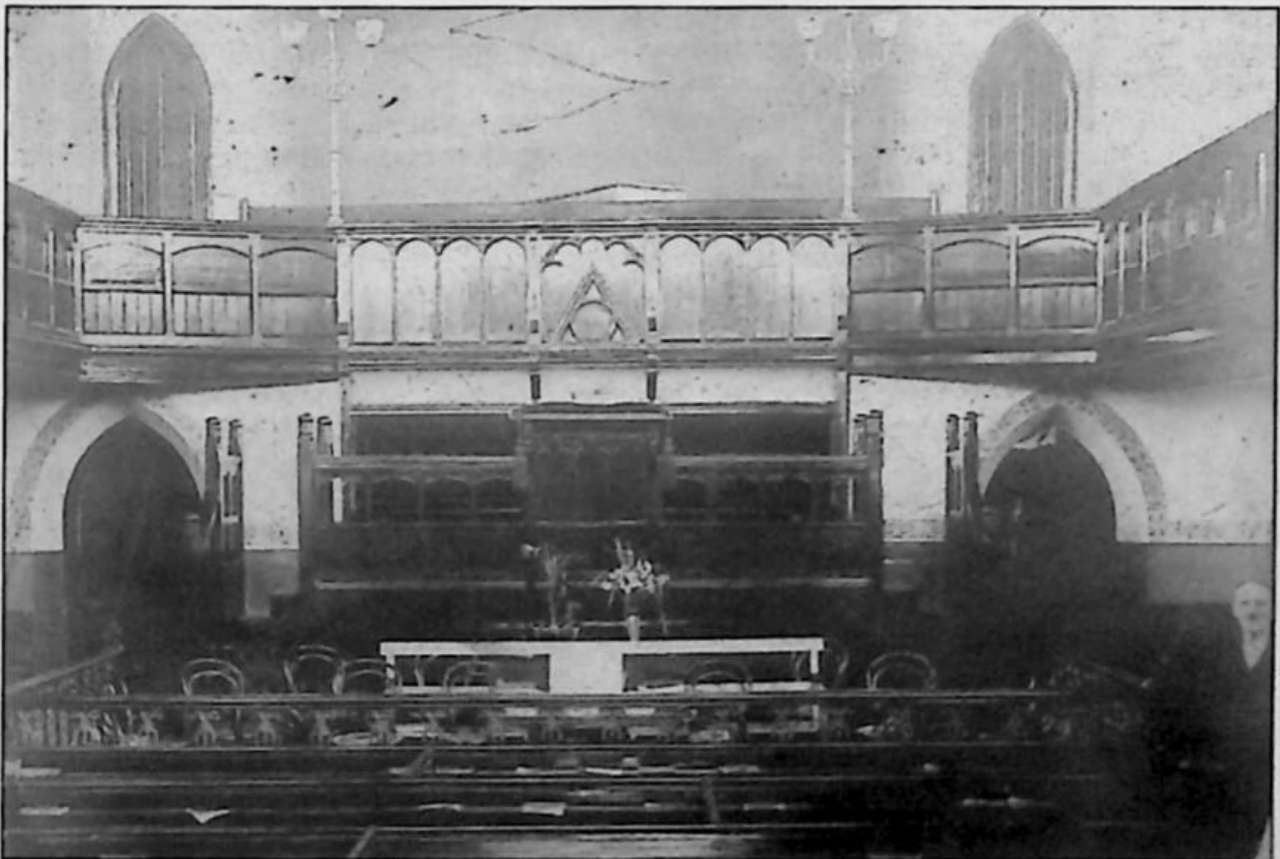
considered a notable contribution to the town's architectural scene, not to mention its Christian witness. Having seen the debt cleared Mr. Bosworth left in October 1907 for Huddersfield.

The church had difficulty finding a successor, so much so that their case became one of those cited by the pressure group in the denomination seeking the appointment of Area Superintendents to streamline the whole process of settlement and removal.

Ambrose Lewis of Maescymmer served from 1908 to 1913 with all the success which had attended his predecessor. In a remarkably 'lively' church (the Band of Hope was too rowdy for the bank next door and had to be closed down in 1912) the membership figures tell the story; they had risen to 240 (100 of them received since 1908) by the time Mr. Lewis left for Tottenham in October 1913.

A twelve year pastorate followed, that of Joseph H. Malins Johnson. He came from Tetley Street, Bradford, in April 1914 with a clarion call to work for a 'Free Church of England' and for personal and social righteousness. Alas, the Edwardian/Georgian age of idealism was soon to be cruelly shattered by war.

There was no marked pacifist tradition at King Street. The church sent its full quota of young men to the front, contributed to the War Relief Fund and to a Non conformist centre and chapel at Aldershot. The church in 1917 allowed its pastor two to three days a week secondment to visit, as a United Board Chaplain, soldiers in three local hospitals. On the ending of the War a special committee was set up to help returning servicemen re-integrate into the life of the church. Membership actually rose from 239 in 1914 to 275 in 1919 and it had been during these same war years that the Sunday School had been reorganised into five grades and Sunday School preparation classes started, that a Young Worshippers League had begun to meet on Sunday mornings and afternoons, that the Women's League had really 'taken off' and indeed that women had at last come into their own in the life of the church. (As late as 1910 the very idea of a lady organist had been found unacceptable; now women were welcomed to most church offices, especially to the ranks of the District Visitors where they now predominated). In 1924 a successful mission was conducted by W.Y. Fullerton.



Interior of Scarisbrick Street Chapel before the organ was installed.

A year later the all too familiar tragedy of the pastor falling seriously ill was reported to the church meeting. Also the General Strike of 1926 severely damaged the church and resulted in a deficit of £73, this despite the fact that Bazaars had now been resumed. Mr. Johnson considered that a smaller church was beckoning him and he removed to nearby Atherton at the end of 1928.

The Great Depression now hit the church. The caretaker's wage was reduced to 15/- a week and it was resolved (happily the church was talked out of this by the Area Superintendent) that the next minister be engaged on a five year contract. R. H. Jackson of Friar Lane, Leicester, was called in 1929 after the church had sold the old manse and purchased a new one for £800. A real financial struggle now began; clearly the church in the 1930's was not paying its way. The adoption of the envelope system in 1936 improved things a little; even so the following year the pastor's salary was reduced by £40 p.a., and he was allowed by the church to take a part-time secular job with the Public Assistance Committee. Mr. Jackson is remembered as a tireless worker, and in 1936 the church's membership reached its highest point ever — no less than 326. The Second World War is only occasionally mentioned in the minute books of 1939-45. One deacon resigned because he was a pacifist. A pacifist group asked for, and was refused, the use of church premises for meetings, the church secretary's son was killed in action and part of the premises was leased to Wigan Technical College. Mr. Jackson was convinced that his ministry at King Street was now completed. He was tired and anxious for a move but was persuaded to stay on till the War was over. That the church's membership nosedived between 1936 and 1946 (in the latter year it stood at 184) is no reflection on its pastoral leadership; rather on the massive Corporation slum clearance programme in the Lawrence, Claremont, Queen and Caroline Street areas which began before the War continued through it and gathered pace afterwards. Members found themselves living on new estates with no transport to get them to church. Only the most dedicated retained their membership and many 'went elsewhere'. At the same time the big families were also moving out — or dying out; neither the Starrs nor the Ormerods had children to take the older generation's place.

At last January 1946, having arranged a Welcome Home Service for June of that year, Mr Jackson was granted his wish and removed back to his beloved Leicestershire, to the church at Coalville.

CHAPTER SIX

King Street The Final Twenty Five Years



As soon as a minister leaves, his years are often seen through rosetinted spectacles, and Mr. Jackson was recalled as a 'model' minister; a pacifist who invited servicemen on leave to address the congregation from the pulpit, a hard-working servant of the Lord who stood his ground against the few remaining chapel grandees, loved the poor and acted as a kind of home help to aged and sick members. His was a hard act to follow, but in the Rev. A. Ellis Mold of Leicester the church discovered a very different kind of leader but a more than adequate substitute. Mr. Mold was a young man and this was only his second church. A fine preacher and possessed of the pastoral gifts which were later to raise him to the office of Area Superintendent, he was soon serving, unbeknown to his people, on two B.U. Committees. Younger people in particular responded to him: two, Granville Gibson and Jack Leigh, as ex POW and great-grandson of a founder member, entered the ministry. Ellis was, nonetheless, unable to stem the numerical decline of the church and Sunday School. Cubs Scouts, Brownies and the Youth Club were recommenced, and 'lost' members were contacted, but the Christian Endeavour folded, and the church displayed a growing introspection and conservatism. It twice refused to host the Lancashire and Cheshire Association meetings and refused to purchase the Revised Baptist Church Hymnal of 1933 till the minister finally persuaded them to buy a set in 1949. A year previously the old manse in Freckleton Street had been sold and replaced at a cost of £1,000 by a better house in St. Malo Road, and two years later the church celebrated its 125th Anniversary in grand style with a Pageant and services conducted by Drs. Townley Lord and Henry Cooke. In February 1953 the minister announced his resignation: he was to succeed Dr. Champion at the Rugby Church.

A very difficult period in the history of King Street ensued. An invitation to the Rev. D.J.M. McIver of Cannon Street, Accrington, was sent at the very time the man himself was laid low by a severe nervous breakdown. Mr. McIver, for sixteen months, sent through his wife bulletins on his health and assurances of his determination to come to Wigan; in the end it was Mrs. McIver who released King Street from its moral obligation to keep open the vacancy till her husband was fully recovered.

At the last minute the services of the Rev. W.F. Scott of Treforest were secured, and he arrived in October 1954, two months after the first broadcast service was held from King Street, conducted by the Rev. H.L. Watson, the Area Superintendent. Scarisbrick Street had supported this event, a sign of the growing cooperation between the two churches. The diaconate (including the first lady deacon, Miss Annie Leigh, elected in October 1954; Scarisbrick Street did not vote a lady to this office till 1968), was relieved to welcome Mr. Scott. This would obviously be the last pastorate for this veteran minister whose opening sermon was based enigmatically on the text: Art thou he who should come, or look we for another?

Mr. Scott's ministry was not untroubled. The Youth Club was getting out of hand again and was eventually re-organised formally as the Baptist Youth

Fellowship, but Mr and Mrs Scott were tireless workers and aided particularly by Mr. Haworth (Treasurer) and Mr. C.N. Smith (Deacon), the minister introduced Sunday School weekends, Festivals of Nine Lessons and Carols at Christmas and a Making A New Start Campaign. The uniformed organisations flourished and covenanted giving was given a real boost. Even so by 1961 with a membership restored to 155 (though 50, it was acknowledged, would have been a more realistic figure), a weekly deficit of £5 or more was being regularly reported. When Mr. Scott announced his retirement in the Autumn of 1961 a crowded church meeting (72 present) was told of the grim reality of the situation. Was closure inevitable, should a formal union with Scarisbrick Street be sought, or should the church call another minister? The first of these ideas was rejected; the other two, somewhat oddly, were to be pursued conjointly. After all in May 1961 the first joint Deacons Meeting of the two churches had been successfully held.

In November 1961 Tom Marriott, formerly of Hill Cliffe, Warrington, came to King Street. Tom was an Australian through and through, tough, forceful, brash and determined, and brimful with new ideas. He worked hard, was in his vestry every morning and visited every afternoon. He introduced Family Church in October 1962, arranged the celebrations for the B.U. TerJubilee of 1962 with his customary zeal, got his members involved in intensive visitation of local high-rise flats, and introduced monthly house fellowships. He also in May 1963 secured that the Baptist Union be made Trustee of the King Street premises under the Model Deed and encouraged the election of younger deacons. But he had his setbacks; the church held out against the new Baptist Hymnal till Tom really insisted — with the result that two senior deacons resigned. He ran the church, it was said, somewhat like an impulsive business entrepreneur, but both attendances and finances showed a marked upswing — to about pre 1959 levels, in fact. It was a bombshell when in November 1963 he announced he was joining the growing band of ministers who were transferring to the teaching profession.

Ralph Drake arrived at King Street from Coventry in June 1964. Since at least the January of that year the Area Superintendent, now the Rev. Norman Jones, had been canvassing a scheme for the coming together of the two Wigan churches and Mr. Drake came on the understanding that on the not-long-to-be-delayed departure of the Scarisbrick Street minister he would become minister of both churches, with the probability that they would formally merge at a later stage. However, the Area Superintendent was perhaps moving too quickly for the churches and Drake was chagrined to learn that Scarisbrick Street was intent on calling a new minister of its own. For a time Mr. Drake, an energetic man of small stature but a large heart, struggled on — as did his church. A request for a car was met with an offer of a loan of £240 and a suggestion that the minister to pay off this sum take up some part-time employment! Like many ministers of his generation Drake realised that he was confronting the swinging sixties in all their degrading absurdity. He tried film services, sermons based on the latest 'pop' hit and a series on the Ten Commandments brought up to date. It was all to no avail. Disappointed and frustrated his wife found her A level studies preferable to helping her husband lead so obviously a dying church. But there were gains as well as losses during this brief ministry. One of his (and Clifford Jackson's) innovations made before his departure to Moortown, Leeds, in June 1967, proved so popular that it lasted for more than two decades — the church coach outings in the winter, spring and autumn, while a strong personal friendship with the Rev. W. Welch of Scarisbrick Street led to the production of a joint magazine for the two churches. The covenant scheme was also strengthened, particularly since it was feared that the death of the church's financial mainstay was imminent and that that would mean certain closure. (For a time in 1965 finances had been boosted by letting the premises out as a Magistrates' Court during alterations at the Town Hall, but a burst boiler in December 1965, replaced at a cost of £800, wiped out the benefits of this windfall). Finally in 1967 the Area Superintendent with Drake's and Welch's backing had inaugurated a Wigan and District Baptist Fellowship,



Preparing for the Flower Festival, 1995.



Church decorated for Harvest, Scarisbrick Street, 1950's.

embracing both Wigan churches, Golborne and Ashton. This was to be another step on the road to interchurch co-operation and the re-organisation of pastoral oversight.

With Mr. Welch showing signs of seeking a new pastorate the Area Superintendent decided on the bold move of recommending King Street to call a new minister who could, with a better chance than Mr. Drake in 1964, look forward to being the minister of a joint Wigan church. The Rev. Michael A. Smith M.A. had an unusual background. Trained in an Anglican Theological College and ordained Deacon he had become convinced of the truth of believer's baptism and applied for a Baptist pastorate. A keen, guitar-playing evangelical, Michael who had just become engaged was also a considerable scholar with a deep interest in the early history of the Eastern Church. An acquaintance with the Byzantine complexities of ecclesiastical politics would certainly stand him in good stead during his two years' probationary ministry in Wigan. He inherited from his predecessors a loyal, if small, company, the pastoral care of Ashton, the house fellowships, the coach tours, the uniformed organisations and the Family Church services on Sunday mornings. He was also confronted within a few months of his arrival with an offer too tempting to be turned down.

The T.S.B. were prepared to pay £15,000 for the King Street premises. The church asked for £35,000; £20,000 was eventually agreed to. Scarisbrick Street was kept informed of developments and 'most cordial' discussions were held. Mr. Smith was told that he would be invited to become minister of the uniting churches, with or without a colleague. (This however, was not to be). All kinds of ideas were floated at the King Street Church and Deacons Meetings; perhaps a church room could somehow be incorporated into the new T.S.B. premises. Perhaps the church could relocate at Goose Green. Perhaps the proceeds of the sale should be invested, pending future developments. The last course was eventually adopted. At a church meeting on April 1st 1969, presided over by the Rev. Victor Crane of Lathchford, King Street, agreed to sell and unite with Scarisbrick Street. The voting was 39-4. The turning point had probably come when it was realised that most of the surviving King Street members actually lived nearer to the other church. Two forthright businessmen, who did not always see eye to eye, were delegated to supervise the sale of the premises and the removal of all objects worth preserving (in effect the stained glass memorial windows and the mahogany pulpit and panelling) to Scarisbrick Street.

The only question remaining concerned the harmonisation of finances, the matching of Family Worship practices at both churches — and the position of Mr. Smith. Eventually the deacons of the uniting churches reluctantly decided that he was perhaps too young and inexperienced for the task ahead, but that he should be allowed to reside in his manse and be regarded as minister of the joint church till he received a call elsewhere. In December 1969 farewell services were held in Scarisbrick Street on the Smiths' departure to Zion, Rochdale.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Scarisbrick Street, 1948-69 Struggling Through



The ministry of B. Inglis Evans at Scarisbrick Street began in January 1948. His was a ministry not unlike that of his contemporary, Ellis Mold — sound, consolidating, reconciling after the tumult of the war years. Despite some problems — sparring, though rarely confrontations, between church and youth club, renovations in 1951 costing over £2,000 and leaving behind a serious debt, the new manse turning out not as sound and solid a building as it was thought to be — the church flourished. The new minister had a small car and was a persistent visitor. His efforts inspired the congregation and the town was again divided into a number of Visitors Districts, with good results; congregations grew and several candidates came forward for baptism. Even the worry of indebtedness was partially relieved when the School Meals Service began to rent the premises in 1952. Mr. Evans, however, concerned by the rapidly deteriorating state of his home, resigned on his call to Skipton in March 1953. On his departure the manse was actually put up for sale — no offers were received. A new minister was found in the person of the Rev. Donald M. MacKenzie, a young Scot, straight out of the Scots Baptist College, whose first pastorate is still remembered with very real affection. He was full of enthusiasm for the work in Wigan. District visitation was stepped up, covenanted giving introduced (September 1954), new baptismal gowns and a waterheater were purchased, and a church magazine launched in 1955. Meanwhile the Billy Graham rallies had obviously enhanced the church's spiritual life. Following the Persian Oil Crisis a period of rapid inflation set in. The church had now almost yearly to raise the pastor's stipend from the £300 p.a. when he came to £775 p.a. in 1962. This imposed severe stains, as did the need for the renovation of the school premises, costing £673, in 1956. Morning attendances caused great concern; Deacons and church meetings discussed the problem but (all too frequent entry in the Minute Books) 'Nothing definite was decided on'. More determinedly the church began in 1959 to hold occasional joint services with the neighbouring Anglican church of St. Michael's, while, with commendable concern for the wider church, Scarisbrick Street in 1962 pledged to give £225 to the B.U. Ter Jubilee Appeal, postponing very urgent redecoration and rewiring plans till the sum was raised.

Indebtedness nevertheless grew ominously throughout this period and in 1960 the church had decided that rather than continue to receive a small rental from the three cottages in Lord Street it would be better to sell the whole site, while at the same time leasing out part of their premises to the Health Authority which was anxious to find extra accommodation. Now at last the purchase of a replacement manse was a real possibility, and towards the end of 1962 a house was purchased in Mesnes Road for £4,500, far more than the church had intended to pay. A deficit of £4,100 was reported, not much reduced when the old manse was finally disposed of at a knockdown price of £1,200 a little later. Mr MacKenzie's final contribution to the life of this church was the introduction of Family Worship in 1963 and his urging in January 1964 his people to consider carefully the Area Superintendent's scheme for drawing the two churches into one. By this date he had become much used by the B.U. on fraternal visits to churches in other lands. It

was while on a delegation to the Americas in June 1964 that he apparently disclosed that he was leaving the church. Oddly enough the Minute Books make no mention of his announcement. Had he stayed, the two churches, it is generally agreed, would have united four years before they actually did so.

Events were however now moving rapidly towards this event. The Area superintendent was therefore somewhat perplexed when Scarisbrick Street instead of using the ensuing vacancy to resume negotiations with King Street, staged what he saw as a pre-emptive strike and called the Rev. William V. Welch of Theydon Bois to the pastorate in January 1965. Mr Welch who began his ministry in April 1965 was determined to extend the cooperation with St. Michael's to other churches in the Swinley area, including St. John's R.C. as well as to bring down the deficit while maintaining the church's self-sacrificial giving to the Union, the BMS and selected charities. However, his plans were frustrated when in January 1966 the Health Authority quit the church premises and a desperate appeal was made for interest-free loans. Meanwhile Mr. Welch, a southerner, perhaps a little out of his natural milieu in Wigan, though playing a full role in the District Fellowship and enjoying a strong personal friendship with Ralph Drake, was perhaps because of the circumstances of his appointment, rarely seen on the King Street premises. Were the churches, drifting apart again? Mr. Welch took a part-time teaching post and in March 1968 announced his call to Totterdown, Bristol. He left behind a slightly increased membership of 163 (25 of these inactive and 20 nonresident).

Anxious Deacons' Meetings now followed. The manse, after a series of disastrous water-pipe bursts, was put on the market for £6,500 but no haste was shown in looking for a new one, and the question was raised — could the church realistically afford the salary of a new pastor? Scarisbrick Street was now as eager for talks with King Street as the latter was to negotiate with its sister church. No barriers, theological or social, now stood in the way. 'The climate is right' the Minute Book states. Though the sale of the manse, now imperative, (it was actually disposed of for £6,000 in March 1969) was a distraction, events moved very quickly. The name 'Wigan Baptist Church' appears for the first time and a joint Deacons Meeting on 11th April finalised matters. A new era had begun, and symbolically new Minute Books were purchased.

CHAPTER EIGHT



A United Church

Stanley R. Bushill came to Wigan in October 1969 from the Long Buckby Church. Clyde Bifield in his history of Queen's Road, Coventry, has depicted vividly what it meant to sit at the feet of Ingli James. Now came one of Ingli's converts, his youthful radicalism tempered but never submerged by the experience of a number of successful pastorates, mainly in the Midlands. Stanley was a reconciler, a friend, an inspirer and a father figure. He had to bring together two congregations which now differed in no way theologically or in social composition. This would be a big enough task in itself, but Stanley went further, a new church (which is how he regarded it) need new initiatives and organisations, as well as extra premises. Three additional rooms were built between the church hall and the church in 1971, filling in the yard, at a cost of £4,000.

As for the former requirement, the Baptist Women's League was strengthened and in turn gave rise to the Over 60's Club, one of Stanley's most permanent memorials, which celebrated its 21st Anniversary in 1993. The new Men's Meeting (Mr. Danson Secretary) was less successful and more spasmodic. A Christian endeavour run informally by Betty Clements and Mildred Grimshaw was also launched. The free transport from the Wallgate area for ex-King Street members wishing to worship at Scarisbrick Street was another useful means of strengthening the church's togetherness.

There were disappointments, however. It was most frustrating that the King Street uniformed organisations had to be disbanded as their national executive judged that their continuance would undermine the provision on offer at St. Michael's (not that ecumenical relations with this church and St. John's R.C. suffered — Stanley was particularly keen on enhancing the work of the 'Swinley Group of Churches') It was also felt in some quarters that the King Street premises had been sold too quickly and should have been placed on the open market rather than sold by private treaty. The residue of the sale money, amounting to £20,000 was placed in a special fund to build a new church ('in about ten years' time, according to the minutes); any surplus church funds were to be periodically added to it, as indeed they still are.

Meanwhile the B.M.S now occupied a far more urgent place in the church's thinking, largely because Stanley's sister was a missionary and a frequent visitor when on furlough to her brother's church. Finally, after long and intense debate, the church voted in April 1975 for open membership. This could have proved very divisive, but ministerial tactfulness ensured that only one family was lost.

Some stalwarts died during this pastorate, Frank Hall, Albert Lawrenson, Tom Haworth and the Misses Hilda and Mary Starr. The church also in 1972 mourned the passing of its most distinguished 'old boy', Gareth John, son of the former Deputy Head of Up Holland Grammar School and a top civil servant. But the church was blessed with a good number of hard workers, some of whom Stanley had received by baptism. The Rev G. Pullin, a social worker and later Councillor, arrived on the scene, looked after the Ashton church in the District Fellowship and supplied on occasion at Wigan also Dilys Hall J.P. Alec Aldridge and Philip

Eastwood rendered yeoman service. Names happily still with us, Eric Jones, Lorraine Baggs, Ron Martin, Arthur Clements, appear frequently in the Minutes, while from the wider Baptist community two particular friends, John Nicholson and Trevor Hubbard, strove hard both for the internal good of Wigan Baptist and to link it to the wider fellowship of churches.

When in February 1976 Stanley Bushill announced that he had been called to Harborne, Birmingham, Possibly his last pastorate, real sadness was felt throughout the while church.

During the interregnum a pageant was staged to mark the jubilee of the Lord Street church, Dr. David Russell preaching, and a Gospel Rock Concert was held on the Saturday evening, a sure sign that the church was alive both to changing times and to changing musical tastes, particularly among the younger people.

The Rev. Philip Clements-Jewery arrived in Wigan from Botley Baptist Church, Oxford, in October 1976. Philip had been educated at Cambridge and trained at Spurgeon's — which sound an unusual combination until we recall that this is the background of Paul BeasleyMurray also. The two men are in fact contemporaries, friends and alike in many ways. Philip's approach to his new church was direct and purposive. Aware that many of his predecessors had sought to widen horizons and extend commitments in all kind of directions, he was, even so, unconvinced that the church was sufficiently responsive to the needs and demands of the outside world; it ought to be pushed firmly into more wholehearted endeavours.

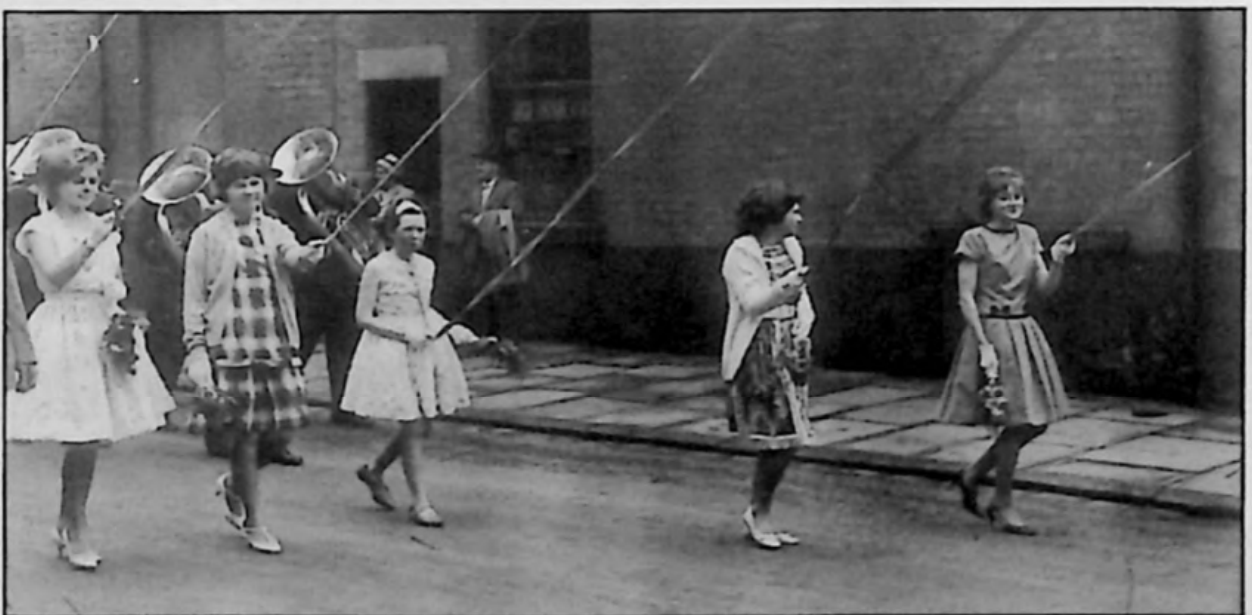
So the new pastorate began with an almost breathtaking flurry of activity. Each year, in the summer, a group of Cambridge students arrived to run a holiday club — out of this the Friday night youth group emerged. The adult members were invited to evening class as part of a Christian education programme and the deacons were taken off to the Northern Baptist College to discuss what should be included in a new church covenant to make it relevant to the needs of the late 20th Century. The young people meanwhile found themselves taking part in street theatre to present the gospel with challenge and urgency. With the help of his wife, Susan, 'C.J.' as he was affectionately known (from the Managing Director in the popular T.V. series *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin*) was especially keen on involving younger women in the life of the church; a Link-Up Group for the 20's to 40's age group was introduced. He was also anxious to secure a deeper involvement with the work of the B.M.S. and in the Operation Agri initiative. A missionary, Miss Barbara Bond of Bangladesh, was 'adopted' and later Ann Matthias of Nepal, while Alan and Janice Brown were valedicted in 1982 for service in Zaire. The W.C.C. was also brought to the church's attention in 1980. Philip actually went to Australia as a British Baptist representative to an important W.C.C. Conference. Christian Aid was another enthusiasm as was the B.U.'s Home Mission Fund. Finally Philip through the church magazine invited representatives from the trades and professions of the town talk about their work and the church to respond accordingly.

Some of these initiatives had only partial success, but others really took off. Mention should certainly be made of the role of Mavis Mather in the work of the Wigan CAB, of Susan, C.J and Dilys Hall in the Wigan Marriage Guidance service, above all of the work of Dilys in the successful launch of the Wigan Hospice.

The usual property problems were experienced in this ministry as in all previous ones; a suspended ceiling was installed in the school room in 1981 and a major organ renovation scheme, costing £7,200, was begun the same year. Some more old friends of the Wigan Baptist cause passed away during this pastorate, Clifford Jackson, Mr & Mrs Gent, Tom Leather, Margaret Hill, Hugh Blundell and James Dean. But others who contributed actively to the life of the church at this time included Arthur Clements, Sam Wigan whose Prayer Diary in the monthly magazine was most appreciated, Mrs and Miss Eastwood, Messrs. Greenough, Vaughan, Winstanley, Cunliffe and Grimshaw, Gordon Hutchinson, David Openshaw, Mel Woodcock, John Logan and Jack Humpreys.

In the summer of 1982 Philip announced that his work in Wigan was done and

Walking Day, circa 1963.



that he had received a call to Cemetery Road, Sheffield. His had certainly been an intense and challenging pastorate, and the church wished him, his wife and young family well in their new sphere of labour in South Yorkshire. It would certainly be an experience to transfer from a church which considered itself to be (and still to some extent was) working-class to one where professional people, especially University Lecturers, were a significant element.

On all sides a call was now heard for a ministry which would be equally as challenging and decisive as Philip's, but one which would be perhaps less strenuous, at once homely and pastorally oriented. In Alex Cook, a quiet, but determined Scotsman, with successful pastorates in Worcester and Ilkley to his credit, the church seems to have found the ideal man for the job.

The three once-dominant families in the church, Hall, Leather and Lynn, were still happily well-represented when Alex arrived in 1983, but the work-load was now shared with many others; old hands, newcomers to the town, some who had found the church through the testimony of others, some who had come up through the youth club, which Alex and his wife led on Saturday evenings, to Believers Baptism and church membership. Among the new faces seen in the church were doctors and nurses from the nearby Infirmary, though, alas, many of these were 'passing through' Wigan on their way to other appointments. The occasional American visitor to Milliken Carpets makes his way to Scarisbrick Street also.

Church organisations are many; Mothers and Toddlers on Tuesday the Over 60's Friendship Centre on Wednesday mornings, the Girl's Club on Mondays, and the B.B. on Fridays, the B.W.L. alternating on Tuesdays with Prayer and Bible Study, the renowned D.I.Y. Working Party on Wednesdays, nine teams of cleaning volunteers, and, of course, Junior Church. These, together with the six church meetings and ten deacons' meetings a year are all demanding on the minister's time, and, as he is a pastoral visitor and hospital chaplain par excellence, it was in 1992 felt that the church should help ease his punishing work-load as far as it was able. The Rev. Ernie Whalley came over from the Northern Baptist College and out of his visits came the Forum Group, a kind of think-tank for forward-looking church members. Out of this in turn arose a number of new initiatives; the Good News Club (Wednesday Evening for the under-11's), practical concern for the homeless, a Pastoral Group (a renewal of a practice with deep roots in the church's past, each pastoral leader having 6 to 10 people as his/her particular concern) an annual Children's Mission and the first tentative steps towards a churchplanting scheme. (When the time comes it is earnestly hoped that contrary to past experience, 'shyness' will not 'ensue', and that the steps to be taken will be firm, unanimous and decisive). In addition out of the new thinking came the suggestion of a pastoral assistant for the minister — John Logan, the busy Area Secretary for Christian Aid, assumed this role in 1993.

Wigan Baptist Church has currently 98 members. As well as supporting Christian aid, Operation Agri, Spurgeon's Child Care and the local Hospice, it give 4 % of its annual income to the B.M.S., 4 % for Home Mission and 2 % to the Northern Baptist College. Any surplus goes to the trust funds accumulating since 1969. The church has had its problems during the last thirteen years: the counter-attraction of a thriving Pentecostal church in the town, the closure of Ashton Baptist Church following a serious division in the church in 1992 (a sadness which was particularly felt in Wigan) and the perennial parking problems in Scarisbrick Street, particularly when Wigan RLFC are at home. The church trusts however, that in all these and other matters the Lord will lead them and show them the way ahead into the new millenium.



Church interior from the pulpit.

APPENDIX

Wigan Baptist Church Office Bearers and Leaders 1995/6



Church Secretary: Mr Arthur Clements
Church Treasurers: Mr K Vaughan & Mr A. Halliwell
Minute Secretaries: Mr Tom Southwell & Mr E.C. Jones
Covenant Scheme: Mrs Pru Preston
Building Fund: Mr Malcolm Preston
Salary & Tax Items: Mr Mark Sheen.
Music Fund: Mr Malcolm Preston
Junior Church Superintendant: Miss Gill Evans
Junior Church Secretary: Mrs Hazel Greenhalgh
B.W.L. President: Mrs Maureen J. Cook.
B.W.L. Secretary: Mrs Elizabeth Gardner
B.W.L. Treasurer: Mrs Pru Preston
B.W.L. Minute Secretary: Mrs Lorraine Baggs
Organ Rota: Rev. Alex Cook
B.M.S. Representatives: Mr & Mrs Richard Turner
B.M.S. Mag. Secretary: Mrs Mavis Jones
Home Mission Secretary: Mr Tom Southwell
Christian Aid Representative: Mrs Brenda Evans
Girls Club Leader: Mrs Ruth Fraser
Boys Brigade Captain (Acting): Mrs Sonia Griffith
Over 60's Club Secretary: Mrs Mavis Jones
Over 60's Club Assistant Sec.: Mrs Joan Hankin
Over 60's Club Treasurer: Mrs Gwen Best
Youth Co-ordinator: Mr John Logan
Pastoral Assistant: Mr John Logan
Sunday Night Group: Rev. Alex Cook
Prayer & Bible Study: Rev. Alex Cook
Friendship Centre: Mrs D. Kinnear Mrs J. Marsh Mrs J Hankin
Mother & Toddlers: Mrs Maureen Cook
Good News Club: Miss Gill Evans
D.I.Y. Group: Mr Ken Grimshaw
Garden Helper: Mr R. Taberner
Chief Steward: Mr Jim Winstanley
Baptist Times Distributor: Mrs L Baggs & Mrs M. Cook
Music Group: Mrs Mavis Jones
Birthday Scheme: Mrs Pru Preston
200th Church Anniversary Committee Chairman: Mrs Loraine Baggs
Secretary: Mr Eric Jones
Flower Rota: Mrs Gwen Best Mrs E.Gardner
Flower Distribution: Mrs Ruth Halliwell
Church Weekend Secretary: Mrs Lorraine Baggs
Communion Preparation: Mrs J. Taylor Mrs B. Evans Mrs M Cook
Refreshments Convener: Mrs Mildred Grimshaw

Entertainments Chairman: Mr Malcolm Baggs
Together Magazine Editors: Mrs R. Martin Mr R. Turner Rev. Cook
Cradle Roll/Birthday Visitors: Mrs E. Gardner Mrs Pru Preston
Caretaking/Cleaning: Teams
Auditors: Miss G. Evans Mr Ken Grimshaw
Bible Society Representatives: Mrs B. Evans Mrs M. Cook
WMS World Day of Prayer Rep: Mrs Maureen Cook.

Church Weekend Committee: Mrs Loraine Baggs, Rev. Alex Cook, Mrs Maureen Cook, Mrs Ruth Fraser, Mr John Logan.

Cleaning Rota: Mrs Mary Barker, Mrs Joan Booth, Mr Bob Booth, Mrs Betty Clements, Mrs Maureen Cook, Mrs Margaret Dierden, Mrs Brenda Evans, Mrs Elizabeth Gardner, Mrs Hazel Greenhalgh, Mrs Mildred Grimshaw, Mrs Dilys Hall, Mrs Ruth Halliwell, Mr Albert Halliwell, Mrs Irene Humphreys, Mrs Mavis Jones, Mr Eric Jones, Mrs Margaret Mackay, Mrs Pru Preston, Mrs Valerie Taberner, Mrs Kath Thomas, Mrs Irene Turner, Mrs Audrey Vaughan.

Music Group: Miss Elizabeth Baggs, Mr Arthur Clements, Mrs Betty Clements, Mrs Brenda Evans, Miss Gillian Evans, Mrs Ruth Fraser, Miss Lynn Fraser, Mrs Albert Halliwell, Mrs Joan Hankin, Mrs Irene Humphreys, Mr Jack Humphreys, Mrs Mavis Jones, Mr Eric Jones, Mrs Audrey Vaughan.

B.W.L. Committee: Mrs Loraine Baggs, Mrs Betty Clements, Mrs Maureen Cook, Mrs Brenda Evans, Mrs Ruth Fraser, Mrs Elizabeth Gardner, Mrs Hazel Greenhalgh, Mrs Mildred Grimshaw, Mrs Dilys Hall, Mrs Pru Preston, Mrs Audrey Vaughan.

Church Cleaning/Balcony: Mr Malcolm Cawley, Mr Arthur Clements, Mr David Gardner, Mr Albert Halliwell, Mr Frank Howard, Mr Ron Martin, Mrs Betty Roberts, Mr Geoff Roberts, Mr Malcolm Preston.

Church Cleaning Sanctuary: Mrs Gladys Harrison, Mrs Susan Holmes, Miss Joyce Kenyon, Mr Geoff Roberts, Mrs Betty Roberts, Mrs Jean Lowe, Mrs Angela Bond, Mrs Diane Kinnear

Fabric Sub Committee: Mr Ken Gramshaw, Mr Ken Vaughan, Mr Jack Humphreys.

Organists/Pianists: Mr Trevor Beswick, Mr Alan Bolton, Miss Sheila Brown, Mrs Mavis Jones, Mr Harry Manifold, Mr R. Pakingham, Mrs Kath Williams.

Preachers: Rev. George Bonson, Mr Eric Jones, Mr John Logan, Mr Ron Martin, Mr Graham Phillips, Mr Tom Southwell, Mr Nigel Taberner, Dr. Alex Turnbull.

Junior Church Teachers & Helpers: Creche: Mrs Elizabeth Gardner, Mrs Pru Preston, Superintendent: Miss Gillian Evans, Secretary: Mrs Hazel Greenhalgh, Mrs Loraine Baggs, Mr Malcolm Cawley, Mrs Hilary Logan, Mr Ron Martin.

Discussion Group: Mr John Logan, Mr Nigel Taberner.

Deacons: Mrs Loraine Baggs, Mr Arthur Clements, Mr Ken Grimshaw, Mr Albert Halliwell, Mr Eric Jones, Mr Mark Sheen, Mr Tom Southwell, Mr Nigel Taberner, Mrs Kath Thomas, Mr Ken Vaughan, Mr Jim Winstanley (Life Deacon) and Mr A. Hall. Proposed and due for re-election.

Finance Sub Committee: Mr Arthur Clements, Rev. Alex Cook, Mr Albert Halliwell, Mrs Kath Thomas, Mr Ken Vaughan.

B.M.S Committee: Mrs Mavis Jones, Mrs Rita Sherrington, Mrs Marion Turner, Mr Richard Turner, Mrs Margaret Mackay, Mr Ron Mackay Globe Boxes.

Refreshments Committee: Mrs Betty Clements, Mrs Maureen Cook, Mrs Ruth Fraser, Mrs Dilys Hall, Mrs Mildred Grimshall, Mrs Ruth Halliwell, Mrs Irene Humphreys, Mrs Mavis Jones, Mrs Valerie Taberner, Mrs Audrey Vaughan.

200th Church Anniversary Committee: Mrs Loraine Baggs, Rev. Alex Cook, Mrs Hazel Greenhalgh, Mr Eric Jones, Mr Ron Martin, Mr Graham Philips.

Promotion and Finance Committee: Rev. Alex Cook, Mrs Mavid Jones, Mrs Kath Thomas, Dr. Alex Turnbull.

D.I.Y. Group: Mr Arthur Clements, Mr Ken Grimshaw, Mr. Albert Halliwell, Mr Jack Humphreys, Mr Ron Mackay, Mr K Vaughan.

Girls Club: Mrs Ruth Fraser, Mr Clive Fraser, Mrs Valerie Taberner, Mr Nigel Taberner.

Entertainments Committee: Mr Malcolm Cawley Chairman, Mrs Loraine Baggs Secretary, Mrs Betty Clements, Mr Arthur Clements, Rev. Alex Cook, Mrs Mildred Grimshaw, Mrs Kath Thomas, Mr Ken Vaughan.

Boys Brigade: Mrs Sonia Griffiths, Mrs Chris Brown, Rev. Alex Cook, Mrs Aureen Cook, Mr Mark Sheen, Mr Nigel Taberner, Mr Lee Watkinson.

Over 60's: Mrs Mavis Jones Secretary, Mrs Joan Hankin Assistant Sec., Mrs Gwen Best, Rev. Alex Cook, Mrs Maureen Cook, Mrs Irene Humphreys, Mrs Joyce Marsh.

Together Magazine: Rev. Alex Cook, Mr Ron Martin, Mr Richard Turner.

Spring Fair Committee: Mrs Elizabeth Gardner, Mr Eric Jones, Mrs Pru Preston, Mr Nigel Taberner.

Mother & Toddlers: Mrs Betty Clements, Mrs Maureen Cook, Mrs Mildred Grimshaw, Mrs Mavis Jones, Mrs Margaret Mackay, Mr Ron Mackay, Mr Roy Taberner, Mrs Dorothy Taylor, Mrs Jean Tyrer, Mrs Audrey Vaughan.

Good News Club: Miss Gillian Evans, Miss Lynn Fraser, Miss Bethan Thomas, Mr Nigel Taberner.

Friendship Centre: Mrs Diane Kinnear, Mrs Joyce Marsh, Mrs Joan Hankin (Treasurer).

A NOTE ON SOURCES

The two separate churches' and the united churches' record are most extensive; there are fairly continuous runs of Church and Deacons's Minutes, Treasurer's Books, Deeds, Magazines, etc. All of these were carefully sorted by Sue Clements-Jewery whose catalogue has been of great value during the research for the present history.

PROGRAMME 1995

- Sept. 1-3 Flower Festival "The Creation" * Exhibition by Standish Art Club.
Oct. 7 Church Anniversary Social.
Oct. 8 Church Anniversary - Guest preacher Rev. Keith Jones.
Oct. 15 Junior Church Gift Sunday.
Oct. 16-20 Children's Mission.
Nov. 5 Thank Offering Sunday with Thanksgiving lunch.
Nov. 19 Home Mission Sunday - Guest preacher Rev. M. Goodspeed.
Dec. 2 Christmas Celebration - Social Evening Will Power Theatre Group.
Dec. 10 Bible Sunday - Guest preacher Geoff Harrison. Exhibition in the Church Hall.
Dec. 17 Nativity and Carols by Candlelight Services.
Dec. 24 & 25 Christmas Services.

PROGRAMME 1996

- Jan. 7 Covenant Service.
Jan. 10 Retired Friends' Party.
Jan. 14 Guest preacher - Rev. Dr. Richard Kidd - Principal of the Northern Baptist College.
Jan. 21 Ecumenical Songs of Praise. Epilogue - Rev. Keith Hobbs, General Superintendent N.W. Area Baptist Union.
Feb. 10 Missionary Weekend. B.M.S. & Christian Aid Displays.
Feb. 11 B.M.S. Sunday - History of B.M.S. - Kath Mawson.
Mar. 3 Guest preacher - Dr. Ian Sellers - author of "The Church History".
Mar. 9 "Fayre Do" Social Evening.
Mar. 22-24 Youth Weekend - Iain Hoskins.
Apr. 7 Easter Sunday - Easter Breakfast.
Apr. 19 B.W.L. Special Event - Flower Arranging Demonstrations.
Apr. 26-28 Church Weekend - Bodlondeb Castle, Llandudno.
May 11 Historical Pageant produced by Rev. R. Ayres.
June 8 Celebration Concert Parkside Choir with guest Joanne Moore.
June 29 "Celebration 2000" Songs of Praise.
June 30 "Celebration 2000" Service - Rev. Michael Quick.
Oct. 13 Church Anniversary - Guest preacher Rev. Ernest Whalley.
Nov. 29 Church Fellowship Meal - Speaker Canon Noel Proctor.

THE AUTHOR



**Rev. Ian Sellers, M.A.,
M.Litt., Ph.D.**

Dr. Sellers is a Lecturer
in Church History
at the University of Manchester.
He is also Minister of the
Norris Street Methodist Church,
Warrington.

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