

HAMILTON BAPTIST CHURCH

1886 - CENTENARY - 1986

PRAISING GOD

FOR ONE HUNDRED YEARS

It is inevitable at a time of Centenary in our Church that attention should be turned to the origin and development of the Baptist cause in Hamilton. A study of this fascinating subject reveals the interesting fact that Baptist Churches, so committed to the complete independence of each local Fellowship, are in practice equally committed to a family type interdependence.

The beginnings in Hamilton involved an ex-Church of Scotland minister, the Baptist Union of Scotland with the Baptist Home Mission (now united), and some members of Wishaw Baptist Church who lived in Hamilton. The Wishaw Church has the distinction of being similarly involved in Motherwell, Carluke and Shotts, while we were later to play a part in the beginnings of the Larkhall and High Blantyre Churches, and in more recent times in co-operation with the other Scottish Baptist Churches, the names of East Kilbride, Livingston, Deddridge and Bridge of Don Churches come to mind.

In 1886 on the 14th of March the first Baptist service was held in the old Choral Hall in Hamilton. It was conducted by the Rev. J.R. Chrystal M.A., B.D. who had served for twenty years in the Church of Scotland ministry, but then found that he could no longer accept the practice of infant "baptism". On entering the Baptist ministry his salary dropped from £400 to £70 a year, and he was invited by the Baptist Union of Scotland and the Baptist Home Mission to pioneer a Baptist witness in Hamilton.

God's blessing on Mr Chrystal's ministry soon became apparent, and during the summer of 1886 he baptised eight people, using the Wishaw Church. By the end of that same year the Church removed to the old Granary in Almada Grange at Peacock Cross. It was there, on 31st December 1886 that Hamilton Baptist Church was constituted with a membership of twenty-seven.

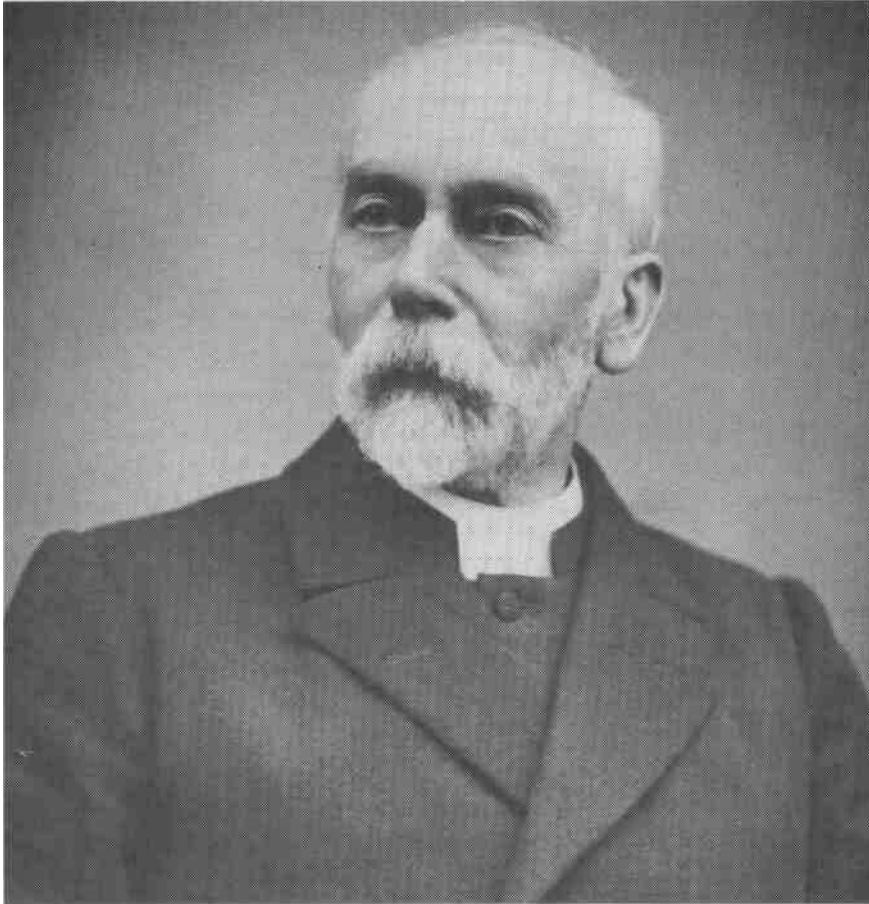
By 1897 the young Church had outgrown the 150 seating capacity of the Granary Hall and a disused Church in Chapel Street was bought for £750. This sum had already been raised by the Church and the premises were opened free of debt. In the new location, Pastor and people continued together in the preaching of the Gospel, by word and by witness, so zealously that the Church maintained steady growth in number and in maturity.

Eight years later, in 1905, the need for a new building became clear and a Building Fund was started with this in mind. The present site in Kemp Street was bought in 1907 and the memorial stone was laid in 1908 by the Treasurer, Mr J Wishart J.P, who contributed personally with outstanding generosity to the £6000 total cost of the building, its furnishings and its surroundings.

Finally in September 1909 the building was complete and ready for occupancy. Mr Wishart had the honour of serving as President of the Baptist Union of Scotland in 1919-20.

It was very appropriate that the service of dedication was conducted on 25th September 1909 by the founding Pastor, Mr Chrystal, who in May 1909 had deemed it right, because of age, to make way for a younger man to begin this new era in the life of the Church. God had indeed blessed his ministry, as shown by records of 341 people baptised by him - living stones gathered together to be the building not made by hands, the Church of God.

Among those baptised was another ex-Church of Scotland minister, the Rev. John Connor, who was the first minister to be called to the Motherwell Church. Another interesting footnote here is that Mr Chrystal served as President of the Baptist Union of Scotland in 1910-11, and was again active in Church extension from 1911-1914 in the Baptist Mission in Lanark. A faithful servant indeed.



Rev J.R. Chrystal M.A., B.D.

The new minister in the new building was the Rev. Edward Last, inducted to the pastorate here in May 1909, prior to the completion of the present building. Under his leadership the tradition of powerful preaching and personal evangelism was continued with the result that capacity congregations were normal. Following the departure of Mr Last in 1912, the Rev. Forbes Jackson of Aberdeen accepted a call to fill the vacancy, but he was called home to the Lord before he could come to take up the position.

June 1913 saw the induction of the Rev. A. Bell Johnston M.A. to a noteworthy ministry which continued for eleven years. During this time people flocked to the Church to hear the preaching of the word, and work in the various areas of church life flourished to such an extent that the place was described as "a hive of industry" when he left in October 1924 to continue his ministry in Galashiels.

Several men from the Church had by this time obeyed God's call to the pastoral ministry and to mission overseas, and more were to follow.

The Rev. George Douglas, who had held several pastorates in Scotland, was called here in February 1925. Well known as an evangelist and a master of Bible teaching, he continued to hold large congregations and readily shared with others his concern for world wide evangelism. It was unfortunate that the later part of Mr Douglas's ministry was clouded by difficulties which arose within the Church, and Mr Douglas left in November 1932 to take up a pastorate in Wales.

During the long vacancy which followed, the Rev. T.W Lister came from September 1933 to October 1934 to exercise a short ministry of a temporary nature which proved to be reconciling and very gracious in character. This paved the way for the effective ministry of the Rev. R.F. Conway to begin in October 1934 and continue into the difficult years of the Second World War. As well as sustaining a preaching ministry still remembered today, Mr Conway brought comfort to Hamilton families suffering in one way and another from the effects of the war. He left in February 1941 to continue his ministry in St. Andrews.

The Church was then vacant until January 1942, when the Rev. James Taylor began a three years ministry which was marked by preaching described as being of outstanding quality and effectiveness in holding together a membership sadly depleted by the demands of the war situation.

Towards the end of the war, in March 1945, the induction of the Rev. D.B. Thomas took place, and our men and women returned from wartime service to fervent preaching - punctuated at times by a solo! - in the distinctive accent of Wales. He tackled with vigour the task of rebuilding the Church following the depletion caused by the war years.

In this work he was followed by the Rev. John M Dines M.A., inducted in September 1951 to a charge which was to continue for eighteen years. He brought to Hamilton gifts of solid Bible teaching, reconciliation and administration, the fruits of which are still in evidence today. Under his guidance the behind scenes business of the Church was put on competent guidelines. The Church magazine was started, he himself acting as author, editor and printer until successors were trained. Highly esteemed in the town, he served on the local Education Sub-Committee, while the Baptist voice in the Hamilton Ministers' Fraternal was greatly appreciated. On the national scene he served for many years as Convener of the Sunday School Committee and then later as Convener of the Ministerial Recognition Committee of the Baptist Union of Scotland.

Mention must be made of the beginning of a new work at this time - an extension Sunday School in the Hillhouse area of the town, the late Mr Wm. Reid then being the Superintendent. The extent of the support given to this venture by the whole Church in prayer, visitation and staffing was evident in a rate of growth which led to us at one time having responsibility for about 400 children and young people.

When Mr Dines left in 1969 to take up the pastorate in Rothesay, he left behind a soundly taught, closely knit Fellowship - a truly solid foundation on which future ministries were to be built.

Witness to this is seen in two areas. Firstly, the flow of young men and women accepting the call of God to full time service started up in the later years of Mr Dines's ministry, and secondly the large numbers of conversions and baptisms that took place during the following vacancy speak eloquently of the depth of his teaching and the commitment of the membership who continued the work of spreading the Gospel. Mr and Mrs Dines now live in retirement in Larkhall.

Willing and eager to build on such a sure foundation, the Rev. Gordon Heath was inducted in 1970 and soon proved himself to be in the tradition of the Bible teachers who have occupied the pulpit here. Preaching with zeal and enthusiasm, he also found time to set an example in door to door work that is difficult to equal. Who else would set themselves the aim of gaining entry to at least one new household each day to share the Gospel? It was inevitable that his services were and still are in great demand as guest preacher throughout the land. He had the honour of serving as President of Scottish Christian Endeavour. With Mr Heath's active assistance and encouragement the Church tried to build on the success of the Extension Sunday School in Hillhouse by holding Sunday evening services there, but it did not succeed.

But the Church continued to grow and it soon became necessary to bring the balcony of the Church into use again, an answer to years of prayer. During Mr Heath's time with us there were periods when there were as many as ten young people preparing for full time service, and many engaged in weekly Coffee Bar Evangelism in Chapel Street.

It was with profound regret that the Church had to accept Mr Heath's resignation in May 1976 due to ill health, which happily proved to be temporary. On his recovery he accepted a call to Canada, then to Leven and now to a part time pastorate in Dalbeattie.

Steady numerical growth continued during this vacancy also, pending the arrival in October 1977 of the Rev. Alistair Begg B.A. the youngest minister so far in our history. Although young in years, Mr Begg in his preaching displayed deep spiritual maturity and an easily discerned gift in the proclamation of Biblical truths.

He too was in great demand as an evangelist and conference speaker. From the lean war years of 1939-45, the Church was now restored to its former near capacity congregations.

Greater numbers, however, brought greater pastoral responsibilities and in an attempt to cope with this increased load, the Church experimented with the appointment of an Assistant to the Pastor. The Rev. David Hart, B.A. was appointed to this post in September 1982 and he assisted Mr Begg until June 1983, when Mr Begg left, having accepted a call to a Church in U.S.A. Mr Hart's appointment was terminated on 31st December 1985.

Still in vacancy at this time since Mr Begg's departure, the work of the Church continues as we await the unfolding of God's purpose for us, praising Him for a succession of Godly men in the pastorate here and thanking Him for the next one to be called in due time according to His sovereign will and purpose.

Witness to their faithfulness in discharging their responsibility to lead and to teach God's people is the record of service to be seen in our Church history. As we look back we thank God for that tiny band who caught the vision of a Baptist witness in Hamilton and their commitment to be used of God to bring it into being, to nurture it and pass it on to our care today. We are presented with the challenge of their record of faithful service - attending Sunday and midweek services, teaching the young in Sunday School, Bible Classes, Christian Endeavour Societies, Girls' Brigade, Boys' Brigade and in other ways appropriate to the needs of the times.

Outreach from the Church is to be seen in Choir and smaller groups in deputation, Gospel Coffee Bars and campaigns, door to door visitation, work in Women's Auxiliary, Men's Fellowship, Youth Fellowship, Ladies' Bible Studies, Supper Clubs, Children's Clubs, Open Air work, Eventide Homes and last but not least, personal witness in word and in life, which God has been pleased to use to great effect in our situation.



Hamilton Baptist Church and Extension

Mentioned earlier is the fact that our premises were built at a cost of £6,000. Today they are insured for a sum rapidly approaching £1,000,000. In recent years they have been extended, modernized and modified to cope with the needs of the disabled; the roof has been reslated, the stonework cleaned and restored, all in anticipation of the next hundred years, if that be in the will of God.

It would appear that God in His goodness has chosen to make this a place from which He calls many to full time service on the Mission field and to the pastoral ministry. In the missionary area we call to remembrance Jim Smith (Miss Smith's brother) who founded the first Christian secondary school in Kenya, William Wallace who went with B.M.S. to the Congo in 1921, and Dr Ruth Russell L.R.C.P.S. (Edin.) D.T.M. (Liverpool) also served in the Congo. Dr Russell was Rev. R.F. Conway's daughter. In recent days Miss Elizabeth Leggat and the late Miss Colleen Ross served as teachers in Mission schools in Pakistan and Senegal respectively. Still totally involved in Mission we have Moffat and Joy Lindsay with I.C.E, Robbie and Margaret Toop with W.E.C. and Miss Anne Wilson very recently accepted by the Mission to Mobile Homes.

Called from the Church to the pastoral ministry in the earlier years of the Church's life we record the following.

Rev. Wm McInnes to Antrim Road Baptist Church, Belfast.

Rev. George Spiers to Victoria Place Baptist Church, Glasgow.

Rev. Wm Reid to the Baptist Ministry in Canada.

Rev. Wm. McVey to the Baptist Ministry in Canada.

Mr George Bell to Assistant Superintendent, Tent Hall, Glasgow.

Rev. John McKendrick, who also served as President of Baptist Union of Scotland, 1958-59.

Still engaged in pastorates are the following:

Rev. David Montgomery, now with Church of Scotland in Argyll.

Rev. Bill and Vivian Slack in the International Baptist Church, Aberdeen.

Rev. Peter and Maureen Bowes in Morningside Baptist Church, Edinburgh.

Rev. Ian and Morag Thomson in Mosspark Baptist Church, Glasgow.

Rev. Liam and Christine Goligher in Airdrie Baptist Church.

Rev. George and Margaret Campbell in Carlisle Baptist Church.

Rev. Charles Crosland in Ross-on-Wye.

Rev. Stewart and Jean Pendrich in Day's Lane Baptist Church, Sidcup, Kent.

God honours us still by continuing to use us in this way, as we see Him call others to full time study preparatory to full time service. May we never forget the accompanying responsibility placed upon us as we share in this great partnership of the Gospel - in Hamilton, in Scotland and to the ends of the earth.

In this necessarily short account some have been mentioned by name, but we dare not omit the thousands of unnamed as we thank God for all of them. Many are now in the glory of God's near presence and many are still engaged in the heat of battle. Today, we on earth join by faith with those around the throne in a great hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God for our shared experience of His goodness. His loving care and His saving and keeping power.

Praising Him for one hundred years.



*Hamilton Baptist Church
with recently acquired area of ground*

CENTENARY DIARY

Saturday 17th May at 7.30 pm
**An Evening of Music and Drama
with the ICHTHUS CHOIR**

from Lanarkshire

Monday 19th May at 7.15 pm

A Musical - "FORWARD"

and other items

from our Christian Endeavour Societies
and Youth Fellowship

Tuesday 20th May at 7.15 pm

A Century in Costume and Song

presented by our Ladies' Fellowship,
Ladies' Bible Study and Men's Fellowship

Wednesday 21st May at 7.30 pm

The Church at Home

An informal evening of fellowship

Thursday 22nd May at 7.00 pm

A Sunday School Soiree

Conducted by Sunday School and Bible Class

Friday 23rd May at 7.00 pm

in EARNOCK HIGH SCHOOL

"ACCENT ON BRIGADE"

by our Girls' and Boys' Brigades

Saturday 24th May at 7.30 pm

CHURCH SOCIAL

Speaker: Rev Peter Barber M.A., B.D.

General Secretary, Baptist Union of Scotland

Subject - "A DOXOLOGY"

Singers: Mr and Mrs McIlwraith from Wishaw

Sunday 25th May, Church Services

11.15 am - "A Prayer"

6.30 pm - "A Plea"

Speaker: Rev Peter Barber

CENTENARY FUND

In recognition of our indebtedness to those involved in our beginnings one hundred years ago, and in gratitude to God for His goodness to us as individuals and as a Fellowship, a Centenary Fund is now being inaugurated, with Mr Tom Kerr as Treasurer.

The purpose, as expressed and unanimously agreed at a Church Meeting, is that the entire amount contributed be donated to further the Lord's work in places other than Hamilton. Of course this is something we already do as an ongoing commitment, but it was thought to be appropriate that a special effort should be made to mark our Centenary, trusting that God will use these extra resources to help some other Fellowship towards their Centenary celebrations in the years to come.

In this way we hope to express our thanks to God and to God's people from outwith Hamilton who have helped us from 1886 onwards to begin and to maintain our work and witness in this place.

And to God be the glory.

CHURCH OFFICIALS AND MEMBERS OF THE DEACON'S COURT

May 1986

Secretary

David R. Quinn B.Sc.

James Weir A.C.M.A.

Treasurer

Deacons

Douglas Bryson

James Farmer

Tom Kerr

George Knox

Alex Sinclair

Tom Wilson

James Burrows

Eric Halkett

David Kinnon

James Naismith

John Thomson

Trustees

Tom Barrie (Hon. Life Deacon) James Naismith (Chairman)

Alex Sinclair (Secretary) John Thomson (Treasurer)

David Quinn James Weir