

“75 not out”

A short history of
the Evangelical
Church,
Greatfield Road,
Kidderminster
1930-2005

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- ❖ The Elim Pentecostal Church official historian Desmond Cartwright (information)
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2. Introduction

Mustard seeds and small things

What justifies a small fellowship such as ours taking the trouble to publish a history of its relatively short span of years? Is the narrative you are about to read of any real value in the larger scheme of things? The answer is to be found in the parable of the mustard seed taught by Jesus and recorded in Matthew 13:31-32. The Church may start small but it is destined to become something of great and eternal significance. The Book of Revelation speaks of there being in heaven a multitude that no man can number. Amongst them, no doubt, will be many who have spent their years of Christian service in small fellowships like ours. The Bible is full of examples of where a few are victorious and effective rather than the powerful and the many. Perhaps it is the particular advantage of those attending small Churches that they find it easier to remember that God's strength is made perfect in their weakness. This small volume celebrates (and therefore does not despise) "the day of small things".

A Christian heritage in North-west Worcestershire

The narrative complements a set of display panels being produced for the Church's 75th anniversary celebrations in the autumn of 2005. We begin by focusing on independent Churches and Evangelical witness in the Kidderminster area prior to 1930. It is important to recognise that local Churches exist in the context of God's work in the times before their own. In a town like Kidderminster it is especially important to understand the richness of our spiritual heritage. North-west Worcestershire has seen a number of significant figures in modern Christianity, not least of whom is Frances Ridley Havergal, the hymn-writer, brought up at Astley.



Frances Ridley Havergal

Her most famous hymn (“Take my life”) has inspired generations of Christians and must be very near the top of the “most sung of all time” list.

Three “quarter centuries”

The next three sections each cover periods of 25 years in the Church’s history. The first phase (1930 to 1955) has as its theme “laying the foundations” and describes a good start made and steady progress maintained despite the disruption and challenges of wartime. In these early stages the work was known as a Gospel or Protestant Mission. The second phase (1955 to 1980) has as its theme “keeping going” and describes less encouraging times through which a faithful nucleus had to persevere. During this time the work was generally known as The Bible Hall. For the third phase (1980 to the present) the theme is “moving forwards again” and describes times of renewed vision in the face of rapid changes in society. In recent

years the work has been known as Greatfield Road Evangelical Church with the additional term “Free” used for more formal purposes.

Five different buildings

Threaded through this account is information about the five physical buildings where the church has met. It all started at Kidderminster Town Hall (around 1929). Then there was the rented “upper room” over Nos. 1 and 2 Coventry Street in Kidderminster Town Centre (1930 to 1941). Next was the rented (former) school at Worcester Cross (1941 to 1948). After this was the rented pavilion in Brinton Park (1948 to 1953). Finally there is the purpose-built Church in Greatfield Road, Sutton Farm Estate where the church has met from 1953 to the present.

Two extensions

Also covered are various stages of building work on this site – original construction undertaken by the members themselves (early 1950s), the first extension (early 1990s) and second and larger extension (2005). The current expansion and improvement of the premises speak of our faith in what God is able to do in the future, that from the local community many people will come in to fill the enlarged spaces we have been led (and enabled) to develop.

Living stones

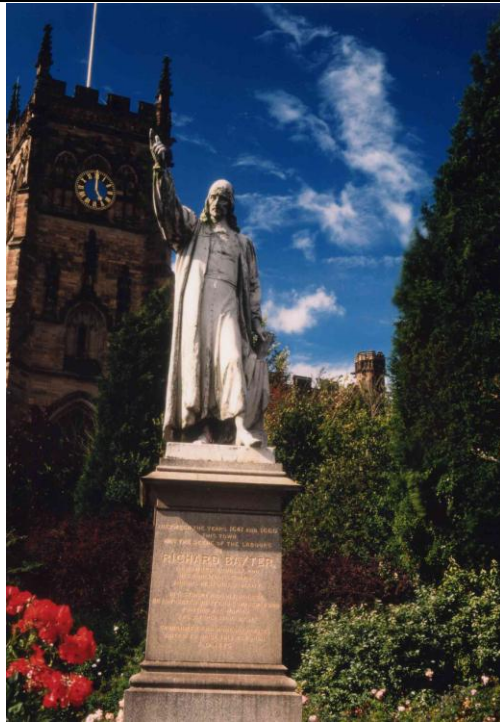
The final section is included as a reminder that the Church is in the end all about people rather than a physical building. It consists of a roll of members who have been part of the life of the church over 75 years and lists those who have had leadership roles either on a supported or lay basis. These Christian believers are the living stones out of which Christ is

building his Church against which the gates of Hell will not prevail.

3. Independent Churches and Evangelical witness in Kidderminster & district (pre 1930)

Richard Baxter

Kidderminster, in the County of Worcestershire, is not just well known for its carpets but also for the religious revival that fundamentally affected the character of the community during the 17th century.



Baxter's statue now outside St Mary's Church
(Photo by David Madeira)

Richard Baxter was the man used by God to bring about a widespread and remarkable turning back to God amongst the population of his time. He described it himself in the following terms:

When I came thither first there was about one family in a street that worshipped God and called on His name, and when I came away there was not...one family in the side of a street that did not so... (quoted in W Stuart Owen Richard Baxter 1615-1691).

The work of God's Holy Spirit will never go unopposed. Following the restoration of the monarchy, Baxter was forced along with many other Anglican clergy across the country to become an independent or non-conformist. It is somewhat ironic that his statue now stands in front of St Mary's, the town's main Parish Church.

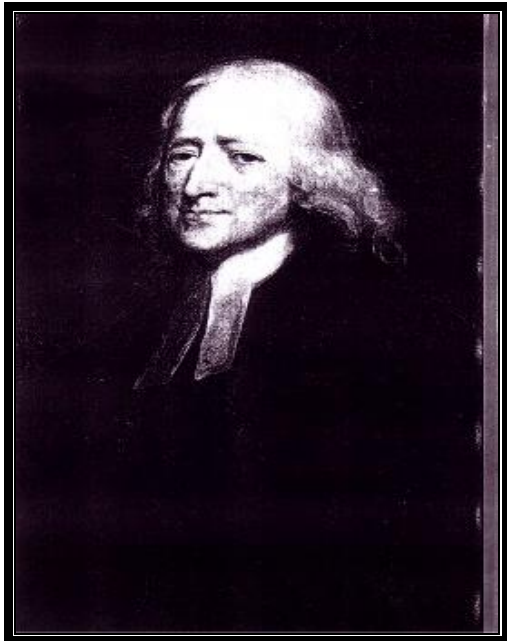
John Wesley

In the following century we find John Wesley involved and influential in the area. In particular he supported the establishment of a Methodist Church in Stourport in association with Aaron York, a prosperous local businessman (after whom York Street is named). Neither the Wesleys nor George Whitefield (the other major figure in the birth of Methodism) had any wish to leave the Church of England but, like Baxter, they found opposition from some elements in the State Church intolerable. In particular this related to attempts to forbid their open-air preaching.

The Countess of Huntingdon

By contrast 18th century Evangelicals of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion did make a clean break equally reluctantly and a congregation of their persuasion was set up in

Kidderminster at that time. In 1898, having for many years met at Ebenezer Chapel in Dudley Street, they opened a new Church building in Park Street and the old building was sold to the Salvation Army.



Painting of John Wesley

Their Pastor at this time, W Clayton Fudge (formerly of St Ives in Cornwall), wrote a most informative and illuminating history of their origins.

This brief history is written...to make mention of those to whom we are indebted, under Divine Providence, for the religious privileges we enjoy; and that in future years, those who come after us, may have a history to refer to and a record of facts and faith which be inspiration and life to them... (quoted from A short history of the rise and progress of the Countess of Huntingdon's Church, Kidderminster)

His reasons for writing a local Church history are interesting. The elements of “prais[ing] him for all that is past” and “trust[ing] him for all that’s to come” are our motivation in this short history. The fact that a copy of Pastor Fudge’s book was found amongst the archives of the Coventry Street Gospel Mission (the original name of our fellowship) suggests that those who were involved in setting up our Church around 1930 may have seen themselves as heirs of the same independent tradition. History has repeated itself in the past few years with the withdrawal of part of the St John’s Kidderminster congregation from the oversight of the Bishop of Worcester to form Christ Church, an Anglican fellowship committed to the Bible’s teaching.

Independents, Pentecostals and Calvinists

Our Church is not, of course, independent in the sense of only recognising itself as a true church or wanting to be separate for the sake of it. Not only do we believe in the worldwide unity of all born-again believers, we recognise the value of fellowship amongst Christians and Churches, locally and further afield - even when we see things differently on certain issues. As we shall discover, the work that is now known as Greatfield Road Evangelical Church grew as much out of Pentecostalism as Calvinism even though its subsequent history has tended more to the latter than the former. The revival of Biblical Evangelicalism starting in 1904 in Wales, spreading to Ireland in the early 1920s and to many parts of England through the late

1920s and 1930s, produced fellowships of many different affiliations. Some were constituted as Elim or Assemblies of God churches whereas others like ours became part of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelicals (FIEC) that had been founded in 1922/1923. The Coventry Street Gospel Mission was amongst the earliest churches to affiliate itself to the FIEC and our Basis of Faith is very similar to the one adopted by the leaders of the national fellowship.

A lifetime of change

Having sketched in the religious background against which it is possible to understand the early history of the Church, we must now consider briefly the social and economic context and environment. What was the town and district of Kidderminster like in the 1930s? In view of the fact that the Bible calculates a normal lifespan as between 70 and 80 years, the period during which our church was founded is now a whole lifetime away. There are few alive today who can remember life in the inter-war period from an adult perspective. We know, however, that much has changed since 1930. Most obviously the look of the town is completely different. Even the old pattern of streets has been disrupted by the intrusion of the Ring Road. There are now several shopping precincts (Crossley Retail Park, Rowland Hill Centre, Swan Centre and Weavers Wharf). Many new housing estates have sprung up, moving the residential population out of the close-packed network of streets, interwoven with the carpet factories, into more spacious suburban environments.

Materialism and spirituality

Not least among “then and now” contrasts are the material circumstances of life. Today most houses are double glazed, full of gadgets, computers and sophisticated communications media and with at least one car parked outside. The number of people in the Wyre Forest area has grown to over 100,000. In the 1930s

the area was dominated by one industry – carpet making. Gradually the dominant role that the factories had over family life has declined. It was certainly true in the 1970s that social activities were for many people still focused on the social clubs provided by the carpet firms, creating a degree of insularity. Along with onerous patterns of shift work this may have contributed to a lack of “spirituality” and a hardness to the Gospel in the lives of many. Today there is no longer a single industry. Tourism and retail have expanded as have the number and variety of small businesses.

Commuters and incomers

For many local people today, going to work means daily commuting into Birmingham, the Black Country or Worcester. The workforce now includes as many women as men, and childcare facilities have largely replaced the extended family of years ago. As a result of widespread marital breakdown, many children now grow up outside a stable nuclear family environment. “Incomers” from across the UK have swelled the population growth – something that has been greatly significant for our Church, many of whose members have not been Kidderminster born and bred. In more recent years there have been several from beyond the UK too.

Prosperity and security

In the 1930s the economic climate, following stock market crashes, was harsh with high levels of unemployment. Today sustained economic growth has brought rising living standards to nearly everyone. Levels of health between the wars would have been poor with no National Health Service to support the less well-off. Today, for all the concerns that many people may have about local health provision, life expectancy is much higher as a result of major advances in medical technology. Then the nation was recovering from a terrible European war and sliding towards

a second one. Today despite many conflicts across the world, Europe has enjoyed 60 years of relative peace.

Globalisation and post-modernism

Something else we may take for granted is the information and communications revolution, creating a virtual global village via the Internet and a literal one by means of low cost international travel. For many of those living in Kidderminster in the 1930s the County of Worcestershire (or perhaps Birmingham and the Black Country) might have been the limit of their horizons. Stourport for some was their holiday destination and Weston-super-Mare was a major adventure. Only those who had gone away and returned from fighting in the First World War would have had anything of the wider perspectives we enjoy today. However the biggest shift has been cultural as our society has moved towards a post-modern mindset. This brings the greatest challenges. For people around us now to even consider the Gospel is a much bigger step than it might have been 75 years ago. Entering a place of Christian worship is an alien experience for many.

4. Laying the foundations (1930-1955)



Kidderminster Town Hall in its 150th year (2005)

Town Hall meetings

The starting point for the work of the church was a mission in Kidderminster Town Hall led by a Pentecostal evangelist, Edward Jeffreys (nephew of George Jeffreys, the founder of Elim). It has not been possible to pinpoint the exact date of these meetings despite fresh information about the history of the Town Hall coming to light because of its 150th Anniversary celebrations in 2005. Desmond Cartwright (official historian of the Elim Pentecostal Church in the UK) has, however, provided some useful background.

The beginnings [of your church] can I think be traced to the meetings conducted by Edward Jeffreys (1899-1974) founder and leader of the Bethel Evangelistic Society. This was first established in Bristol in 1928 following a successful evangelistic effort by his father, Stephen Jeffreys (1876-1943). When his father moved to another place to hold meetings he left his son in charge of the Bristol work and Edward discovered his own gifting. In the next few years up until the beginning of 1936 Edward held a number of highly successful evangelistic meetings throughout England. These drew immense crowds amounting to many thousands. There were many widely publicized cases of healing that were reported in these services. As a consequence a large number of churches were established. The greatest concentration was in the area around Stoke-on-Trent and on Merseyside. In total they opened some forty or more churches in the period 1928-36.

Pastor Robbins

Such growth brought a great need for leadership amongst these many new Churches. A Pastor Robbins was left in charge at Kidderminster by the Pentecostals, but this was not a permanent arrangement. Desmond Cartwright continues.

The Bethel work grew so rapidly, and in some places there were such large crowds, that it was not possible to find sufficient qualified leaders to follow up these churches. Coupled with this were the financial restrictions of the economic climate of the time.

Meetings in Coventry Street

We do know that as a result of the Bethel Evangelistic Society campaign a group of Christians began to meet together at some point around 1930. Winnie Youngjohns was one of the younger

people who had been converted through the preaching of Edward Jeffreys. Her future husband Jim and father-in-law Alfred, as we shall see, were to play a pivotal role in the Lord's initial provision of the required leadership and were to be associated with the work for four decades subsequently. The fellowship (unconstituted and unnamed as far as we know at this point) had the use of a first floor room up two flights of stairs in Coventry Street in the Town Centre. The building is no longer standing but we have identified it as having been at the junction of Coventry Street and the former Swan Street. Today the site is occupied by SpecSavers on the outside of the Swan Centre complex.

Bugs and hymnbooks

The "upper room" (as it was known) was down an alleyway between the premises of Harvey Charles Wine and Spirit Merchants (No.1 Coventry Street) and Nightingale's Electrical Store (No.2 Coventry Street). The room was far from ideal. In a recent letter Jim Youngjohns passes on his late wife's recollections of the early days.

The young people and Pastor Robbins laboured to get it decorated – that was in the winter. In the summer following they would be singing...and suddenly a bug would fall into their hymn books. So they had to start redecorating the place...



Lower Coventry Street (much as it would have been in 1930) with Harvey Charles Wine and Spirit Merchants at far left (No.1), behind which the "upper room" was located. Nightingale's by the time of this photo had moved to the far right of the block.
 Photographer unknown (c 1950s).

An entry in the August 1930 Bethel Messenger magazine is worth quoting in full.

Kidderminster.-During the past two months there has been a steady solid growth spiritually and numerically. Over thirty souls have sought salvation and sanctification. God is moving! Our Saturday evening "Power Meeting" has grown from six to thirty odd. We have now commenced a Junior and Senior Sunday School. A Sister's mid-week meeting has now been launched. On July 5th a Fellowship Tea preceded the unveiling ceremony of our Founder's Photograph looking upon the following Inscription:- "Saviour, Healer, Baptizer, Coming King". To see him there ever looking to Jesus as our Saviour is confessed by all to be a great inspiration to fight on.

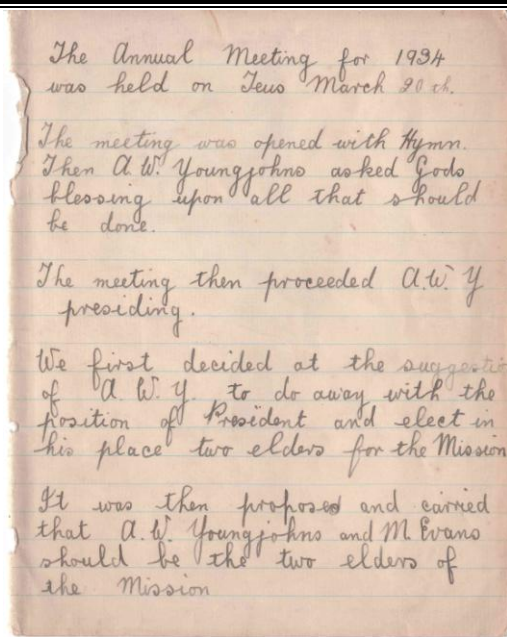


The same scene today – the site is occupied by the Swan Centre and by Specsavers

The first recorded Church Meeting (1934)

Our next snapshot is about four years later. Alfred Youngjohns was a Methodist lay preacher. He was also a clerk at Phipps and Pritchard (Estate Agents) who had the letting of the room in Coventry Street where the church was meeting. This may have been how he came to know about the fellowship. In any case he joined them as did his son Jim. We can deduce a lot from the minutes of the 1934 Annual General Meeting of the Mission, which is the first formal Church record in our possession. It is clear that the fellowship, in a relatively short time, had developed into a functioning Church with leaders appointed, structures in place and a vision and ambition to move forward. The Youngjohns family did not only provide spiritual and practical leadership through many and varied circumstances including times when there was no Pastor. It was also largely due to their

ambition for the Lord's work in Kidderminster that land was acquired in Greatfield Road and eventually a Church built on it.



The Annual Meeting for 1934
was held on Tues March 20th.

The meeting was opened with Hymn.
Then A. W. Youngjohns asked Gods
blessing upon all that should
be done.

The meeting then proceeded A. W. Y
presiding.

We first decided at the suggestion
of A. W. Y. to do away with the
position of President and elect in
his place two elders for the Mission

It was then proposed and carried
that A. W. Youngjohns and M. Evans
should be the two elders of
the Mission

First Official Church Minutes (front page only)

Developing activity

At the 1934 meeting in question there was the election of Elders, reference to a new piano and discussion of means for reaching men and women for Christ. This latter topic ranged over open air work, "tracting" (distribution of evangelistic leaflets) and personal invitations to Gospel meetings. Minutes of the office bearers' meetings through the remainder of the year refer to a Crusader class, Sunday School, Mission Band (probably an outreach team rather than a musical group) and proposals to set up a formal membership. They also considered the issue of "appeals" at Gospel meetings, tithing and social events for the membership.

Interesting items from the following year (1935) include reference to annual meetings of the Mission (preaching weekends rather than business meetings), links to work in Palestine, the Pocket Testament League, problems filling the pulpit and Easter events, including an Easter tea and Good Friday communion service. This turned out to be a prelude to significant advance for the work, this year being a key one in the life of the fellowship.

The first long-term Pastorate

In January the leaders interviewed James Cook with a view to his taking on the Pastorate. A decision about this seems to have been arrived at very swiftly indeed. Jim Youngjohns can provide us with a first hand account of this important step.

I remember him [Jimmy Cook] coming to preach for us and I said to my father [Alfred] [that] we should call Jim Cook to the Pastorate to which my father replied – don't be silly we could never afford a Pastor. I was so concerned that I kept on to my Dad about him and finally [he] gave in and asked Mr Cook to be the Pastor. He had just finished Bible College where R B Jones was the Principal...[when] we asked Jimmy Cook to be Pastor...he obviously wanted to know what stipend we could offer him and after paying all the bills we could pay him the princely sum of 7 shillings and six pence a week (a labourer's wage was £1 7/6d in those days). Anyhow after much prayer he accepted by faith and became our Pastor. "God who is faithful" supplied the need.

It appears that he was ordained and inducted the following month. The step of calling and supporting a full-time Minister was undoubtedly a significant challenge in the difficult financial times of the 1930s. This was not the only time in the Church's history when such a step of faith was taken by the members.

James Cook's ministry started at Genesis and went through the whole Bible in 10 years.

A Basis of Faith and Constitution

Returning to the official records, a meeting in March 1936 discussed Easter activities including an outing to Habberley Valley, links to Netherton Baptist Church and new lino for the main meeting room. One of the first fruits of James Cook's leadership was the very significant decision to adopt a doctrinal basis and a parallel move to open a register of members. 28 names of those wishing to signify their agreement to the Basis of Faith and become members of the Mission were entered between June and December. In the Constitution some rather specific rules were included. These were explained in the lengthy exposition written by James Cook. Under the new regime lay leaders were known as Deacons and there was provision for Deaconesses. The need to do all things decently and in order led to a decision to open a bank account and give authority to leaders to sign cheques.

Matters practical and religious

On other meeting agendas at this time were such items as decoration (maybe the bugs were still causing trouble), external signage, Crusaders, punctuality, care-taking and Advent meetings (which may have reflected the contemporary interest in Second Coming teaching). Controversy reared its head the following year (1937). For reasons of not wishing to associate with those of liberal theology, the Mission decided not to join the annual Whitsunday united Sunday Schools procession. Instead they planned an outing – first it was to be Malvern but it ended up at Bridgnorth where the People's Hall (another independent Evangelical Church) assisted with the arrangements.

THE GOSPEL MISSION HALL

COVENTRY ST., KIDDERMINSTER

(UNDENOMINATIONAL)

DECLARATION OF FAITH

1. The full inspiration of the Holy Scriptures; their authority and sufficiency as not only containing, but being in themselves, the Word of God; the reliability of the New Testament in its testimony to the character and authorship of the Old Testament; and the need of the teaching of the Holy Spirit to a true and spiritual understanding of the whole.
2. The unity of the Godhead and the divine co-equality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; the Sovereignty of God in Creation, providence and Redemption.
3. The utter depravity of human nature in consequence of the fall, and the necessity of regeneration.
4. The true and proper Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ; His virgin birth; His real and perfect manhood; the authority of His teaching, and the infallibility of all His utterances; His work of atonement for sinners of mankind by His vicarious sufferings and death; His bodily resurrection and His ascension into Heaven; and His present priestly intercession for His people.
5. The justification of the sinner solely by faith, through the atoning merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
6. The necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, conversion, and sanctification, also in ministry and worship.
7. The resurrection of the body, the judgment of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ with the eternal blessedness of the righteous and the eternal punishment of the wicked.
8. The observance of Baptism as an ordinance of divine institution, but not as conveying any regenerating grace; and the observance of the Lord's Supper as a commemoration of our Lord's death, but not as being a sacrifice for sin, nor involving any change of the substance of the bread and wine.
9. The personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ in Glory.

Sunday School, offerings and baptisms

This same year we discover that they held a Sunday School prize-giving, advertised in the Kidderminster Shuttle (local newspaper), ran a magazine/book stall and purchased tracts. They also decided during this year not to take up an offering during their services but to have a box at the door, a tradition that has continued right down to the present. Another possible link to our own times was the decision to purchase a platform chair, possibly the one still in the ownership of the Church today, which was refurbished in the 1980s. There is mention of Harvest arrangements, a Men's Fellowship, baptisms at the New Baths and winter visitation. On the topic of baptism by immersion, the church had at least once used the Baptist Church in Church Street. It was not until after the new building was opened in Greatfield Road that the fellowship had its own baptistery.

Three weeks in the life...

At this point in the official records we have a most interesting account of the first three weeks in the life of the church that year (1938). A whole range of meetings is described - Watchnight Service, Children's Party, Prayer Meeting, Sunday Services, a Week of Prayer, Men's Fellowship, Deacons' Meeting, Advent Testimony Meeting, Church Meeting and Lantern Service. These accounts provide a fascinating insight into the way the membership was carrying on its activities and indeed how involved the still relatively small membership was. However at the May Members' Meeting there is evidence of counter-activity by Satan. Some members were resigning or causing problems. Money was tight - although this did not prevent the taking up of an offering for Kidderminster Hospital. This was in the days when health services were more dependent on charitable donations than they are today. Some members were lapsed and needing a visit. On a positive note the Basis of Faith booklet had been produced. Also about this time one of the fellowship by the

name of Joy Green was called into missionary service overseas. It seems that she was diagnosed with leukaemia and went to be with the Lord at a relatively young age.

The approach of war

By early 1939 the war was approaching fast but Church life (at first anyway) went on relatively unaffected. There are problems recorded this year with caretaking but also plans for the Annual Meetings (preacher to be Rev Bendor Samuel, a key figure in the creation of the FIEC). The Sunday Bible Class was still functioning despite a downward trend in attendance. Although the country was at war, an evangelistic campaign was held in Kidderminster, supported by the Coventry Street Mission members. One person at least was touched by it. This was a young woman named Kathleen Cole, later to become Kathleen Williams, wife of Eric Williams of the Evangelical Tract Society.

I first came in contact with Mr Youngjohns when a tent mission was held opposite where I lived on the Foley Park Estate. As a result of that I started attending the Church (in Coventry Street) which would have been about 1940. I was actually converted in 1942 when the church was by then meeting at Worcester Cross.

Eric and Kathleen were regular visitors to the church in the late 1970s and early 1980s when Eric came to preach.

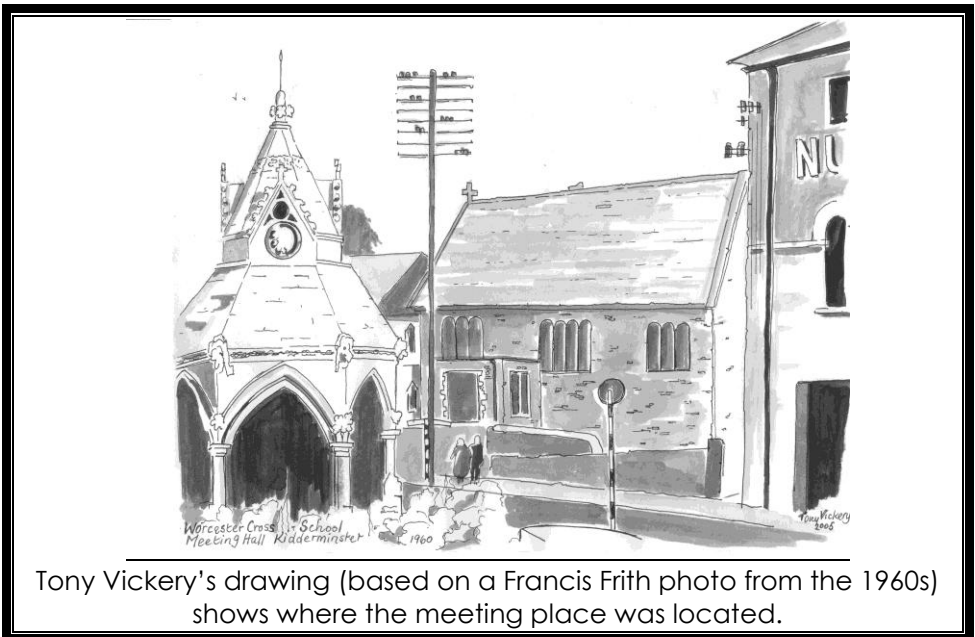
The impact of the Second World War

As the phoney war period passed, the impact of the conflict was increasingly apparent. It seems to have affected the Church financially – a Gift Day to help improve the position was not successful. There were problems over caretaking (presumably because many were being called up or moving away). Some meetings had to cease altogether. The leaders felt that there

was a sense of lethargy and they were concerned over the spiritual state of some. By early 1941 there were worries over the safety of the building. An attempt to have fire-watching duties carried out on behalf of the Church was declared illegal by new regulations – so a rota of members had to be drawn up. As more folk left other meetings were suspended, although an Advent Testimony meeting and the Sunday School Anniversary survived.

On the move again

It was later this year that meetings of the Mission were transferred to a different location, the former Worcester Cross School on the corner of Hoo Road and Station Road. The location can be identified as being in front of an old brick wall at the side of the Kidderminster Ring Road on turning left into Green Street.



Tony Vickery's drawing (based on a Francis Frith photo from the 1960s) shows where the meeting place was located.



A present day photo shows the same scene – the Worcester Cross roundabout on the Ring Road and everything demolished in its path

The reason for this move was mainly because the “upper room” was so difficult to access. Accommodation was rented from carpet makers Woodward Grosvenor, an arrangement that would continue until 1948.

Opportunities amongst servicemen

Despite the disruptions, the war did provide some wonderful opportunities to minister to servicemen based at the nearby Bewdley and Kidderminster military camps. The arrival in the area of large numbers of military personnel from the USA as well as the UK must have had a big impact on the remaining civilian population generally. One of the military camps was on the Greatfield Hall Estate (now a park on Bewdley Hill next door to the Gainsborough House Hotel). Other camps were on the Rifle Range and what is now Burlish Top (a huge military hospital built

to cope with the aftermath of D-Day). The influx, albeit temporary, of Christians serving in the forces would have compensated for the loss of those in the membership away on active service. A letter written in July 1953 on the opening of the new building gives an indication of the help the fellowship gave those caught up in those terrible events.

As one of the servicemen, who enjoyed Christian fellowship and hospitality from the saints at Worcester Cross Mission, I would take this opportunity of wishing you much blessing and joy in the work to be carried on in your new building. It is with profound gratitude and thanks to Almighty God that I remember the times spent during my service life in fellowship at Worcester Cross and the times of spiritual help we all enjoyed. My earnest prayer (and if I may be allowed to speak on behalf of the other service-lads) ...is that you in Kidderminster may continue to be a "light that is set on a hill which cannot be hid", and that other travellers through life may be blessed as they come into contact with God's people.

For many years afterwards those who had been temporarily in the Church at this time came back to renew fellowship with each other. From this point on until 1945 there is very little written evidence of what was going on. We know the Church survived. Despite departures and difficulties, much of its vision and commitment remained intact to take advantage of the cessation of hostilities.

1945 and the post-war impetus

The war years had seen at least as much overcoming as disruption. This must have been largely due to the leadership of James Cook and the lay leaders, providing stability through regular Bible-based ministry. The re-gathering of the fellowship in 1945 saw a large increase in membership, giving impetus to

the search for a building of their own. Sadly James Cook's illness and subsequent home-call meant that he did not share in this next stage.

Seeking a permanent place of worship

In the place of James Cook, the Church called D B Jones. He stayed until 1948. The lay leadership of the church continued to be provided by the Youngjohns family who were instrumental in trying to find permanent accommodation for the Church. There was not however a pre-occupation with such matters. The vision was for reaching out to people as witnessed by the purchase of an amplifier for use on a car going round the streets (not perhaps something that would be welcomed these days). The members were also involved with the Menithwood Mission Hall, near Pensax (at risk of having to close down) and there was the possibility of moving its redundant "tin tabernacle" to Kidderminster. The Lord had other plans and legal problems prevented this happening. The Building Fund was opened and efforts were continued to explore the Menithwood option which involved much correspondence with solicitors and surviving trustees.

A step nearer Sutton Farm Estate

We get a snapshot of the Church's wider connections in the form of a contacts list with dozens of names of those with a prayerful interest in the Kidderminster work and with whom the Church communicated. Not only did the Pastorate of D B Jones end in 1948 but the Church's landlords Woodward Grosvenor gave the Church notice to quit Worcester Cross School just 7 years after granting a lease. The reason for this is not clear from letters written at the time. The forced move was seen as a great blow but actually led to the Church renting the Sons of Rest Pavilion in Brinton Park for the next 5 years. Significantly this brought the fellowship geographically a step nearer the Sutton Farm Estate

where they would in due course find a permanent home in Greatfield Road.



Sons of Rest Pavilion as it is today in Sutton Road

Indeed while the fellowship was still meeting at what was colloquially known as “The Old Pals Shelter”, one young boy was encouraged by Jack Gwilliam to start attending services. Samuel Reading came to Christ at the age of 14 through the Sunday School where his teacher was Dennis Gunstone.

Greatfield Hall and Sutton Farm

At this point, some background information on the area immediately around the present-day Church building may be helpful. Greatfield Road divides this part of Kidderminster in two. The northern part consists of the former Greatfield Hall Estate, the home of the Humphries family (owners of a local carpet firm). The main building was demolished in 1935 and in the years following Birchfield Road and Oakfield Road were developed on land to the south of where the Hall itself had been. This extended the built-up area westwards from Sutton Road. (Some

housing including Washington Street, Claughton Street and Hemming Street dates back as far as the 1850s). Greatfield Road itself was also largely built up during the 1930s. The southern part of the estate consists of the former Sutton Farm, whose farmhouse was located near Tomkinson Drive and which was demolished in 1931. Its fields covered the whole area between Greatfield Road and Sutton Park Road. From the late 1920s onwards it was developed by the local Council who had homes built for sale as well as rent, a policy that caused considerable political controversy.

Local street names

The street names in the area reflect its agricultural past (Birchfield, Greatfield, Oakfield), the local carpet industry (Brinton, Tomkinson, Woodward) and notable local people. Dr Lionel Stretton was a well-known surgeon at Mill Street Infirmary, Edward Parry was the founder of the Kidderminster Shuttle and Rowland Hill (inventor of the Penny Post) is the town's most famous son. It is significant that at the very time when the Coventry Street Mission was being established in the centre of town, a residential area was under construction that would, some two decades later, provide the focus for its ministry to the community. This is a further example of how our sovereign Lord God works together everything for the blessing of his people and the advance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Acquisition of land in Greatfield Road

In 1949 land was acquired on the junction of Spencer Street and Greatfield Road upon which the Church would be built. The plot with two houses was secured with a 10% deposit and a mortgage of £900 arranged with the Kidderminster Mutual Benefit Society. The legal fees were £33 14s 0d. But as Jim Youngjohns explains this debt was not to encumber the Church for long.

My father (who was a faithful man of God), when we bought the ground on which the Church is built, said he would pay for the land and the two houses in Spencer Street...and then he gave them to the Church.

The trustees appointed at this time were G R Williams, W H Sey, A W Youngjohns, J Youngjohns and E Lloyd. The two houses on site (37 and 38 Spencer Street) would have an unexpected role at a later stage when they were sold to finance the improvements of the early 1990s. Arthur Rowett occupied the position of Pastor briefly until 1950.

Planning permission and construction

Plans were now drawn up to build. Planning permission, sought on 2nd January 1950, was granted on 20th of the same month and work started very soon afterwards. The original drawings show the Church as it was built in 1953 and as it remained until the 1991 extension. However it is interesting to note that the overall description was “Proposed Gospel Mission Church, Sunday School and Youth Centre”. The membership as a whole was active not just in financial support for the building work but in the laying of brick on brick. The shortage of building materials meant that they had to be creative in obtaining (for instance) second hand window frames from a factory, two of which have remained in the structure until recent times. Others of these were replaced in 1991. Reflecting on this period of do-it-yourself Church-building, Jim Youngjohns refers particularly to Jack Gwilliam and Dennis Gunstone but many others lent a hand whether that was with the trowel or the kettle.

Jack...was with us in the old Hall [Coventry Street] and he and his wife used to clean the Hall. We gave them a Bible when they gave up and Jack treasured that and used to show it to me when I visited them. Jack also helped on the construction of the building.



Jim Youngjohns (headless), Paul Youngjohns and Arnold Green on site"

He was not a Master Builder then and used to work at a Stourport builders and they used to send him to Oxford to build retorts at the Gasworks there. So he was away and came home weekends when he would run the corners of the Church up and I would fill in during the week. The salvation of Dennis Gunstone was a significant step in the life of the Church. He immediately joined me in the building programme. He would go and get a mix of concrete and sand while I went home and had a bite of tea. He would put the bricks at their respective places on the scaffold and then go off to tea while I laid the bricks. He was the Lord's provision...I could not do without him, the Lord knows. [He] sent him along at the right time.

The opening (July 1953)



The church at the time of the opening (July 1953)

The vision for the project was contained in a letter from Arthur Rowett and James Youngjohns to prayer supporters and dated July 1950. They spoke of God “building His Church, adding living stones” but also of “the provision of a spiritual home...a permanent building”. 1953 was a momentous year in the Church’s history. The construction was completed and an official opening arranged for July 4th and 5th. Various Churches sent their greetings including Rev F B Foxall on behalf of the People’s Hall, Bridgnorth and the Far Forest Mission. Jim Youngjohns expressed the mood of the day in some notes contained in the programme.

The building of it has been a long and arduous job, but the Lord has sustained us and graciously enabled us to complete the task. The attacks of the enemy do not diminish but rather increase as we draw near the conclusion of the work. So we look forward to a time of unprecedented blessing and revival in Kidderminster.

The preachers over that weekend were Rev A R Boughen of Birmingham and Rev B S Fidler of the South Wales Bible College. Present day members will be amused to discover that no less than four bus routes were advertised as serving the church (K1, K2, K5 and K6).

1929

1953

ANNOUNCING THE

Opening Services

of

BIBLE HALL

EVANGELICAL

FREE CHURCH

GREATFIELD ROAD

KIDDERMINSTER

JULY 4th and 5th, 1953.

Cover of brochure produced for the official opening (giving the date of 1929 for the start-up of the work)



Members of the Church in the early 1950s away at a Houseparty together including Hadley and Lil Harris, Dennis Gunstone and Jim Parnell (who was to preach at the Church on many occasions in future)

Making the most of the opportunity

In the years following the opening of the Church building (the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s), there was a challenge about becoming a local Church. Was the new building to be merely a facility for large numbers of children living on the estate or was it to be a Church for the whole community? A year on the Annual Meetings were led by Rev P W Fauch and Rev E Marshall. Two years on it was Rev Joseph Ellison (of Birmingham and Gloucester) who preached at the special services. The baptistery was opened in 1955/6 and membership seems to have been up into the 30s by this point.

5. Keeping going (1955-1980)

By 1957 others were taking their share in the leadership (which had not included a Pastor since the departure of Arthur Rowett). Roy Delo, Hadley Harris and Dennis Gunstone are noted as trustees. In 1956 and 1957 two visits were made by some of the men to the Hebrides. They were seeking information about the revival that had happened in that part of Scotland between 1949 and 1953. They longed to see similar things in Baxter's town (as we have already noted from comments made at the opening of the building). These members were able to secure a visit from Duncan Campbell to the Church in Greatfield Road. It is interesting that our present Pastor's wife Marion Hearn comes from the Hebrides and her family also had connections with the 1950s revival in that part of Scotland.



Duncan Campbell

Late 50s and early 60s

As so little written evidence survives from the late 1950s to the 1980s we have to rely on the few snapshots that are available.

For instance the Church Notice Books for the three or four years round the turn of the decade (1959/1960). These indicate the pattern of meetings: Sunday 10.30 Prayer, Sunday 11.00 Breaking of Bread, Sunday 3.00 Sunday School, Sunday 6.30 Gospel Service, Sunday 8.45 Open Air, Monday 6.30 Young Sowers League, Monday 7.45 Prayer, Wednesday 7.45 Women's Prayer, Thursday 6.30 Teenagers Meeting. We also discover that offerings averaged £5 per week. The emphasis on work amongst young people did produce some fruit. Samuel Reading has already been mentioned. He went on to London Bible College (LBC) and into the pastoral ministry and was ordained at Greatfield Road in 1966 at the time when Ken Lowe was Pastor. This is the picture he paints of Church life in his younger days.

I was involved in everything – two Sunday services followed by an after-church open air preaching hour in the Town Hall square opposite the statue of Rowland Hill. Weeknights there was “Young Sowers League”, Monday evening prayer meetings and Tuesday evening open air witness around the nearby streets (in a clapped out old Morris van driven by Walter Farebrother). It was blazoned with garishly painted texts and replete with an old wind-up gramophone from which George Beverley Shea and Frank Boggs crooned out the old time Gospel message in song through attached loud speakers.

Also called into full-time training was Jim Youngjohns' daughter Ruth who went to the Faith Mission Bible College in Edinburgh at about the same time Samuel went to LBC. Colin Duriez (who with his family attended the Church in his sixth form years) went on to University and to exercise a wider Christian ministry including important writing on the lives of C S Lewis and J R R Tolkien.

Thriving work amongst young people

It was in 1958 that the Young Sowers League started with Irene Delo being a key worker for many years. This was a Scripture Gift Mission based activity and was the forerunner of Monday Club (still part of the church's programme almost half a century later). The scale of the Church's work with children in the 1950s and 1960s can be gauged by the fact that in 1962 no less than 84 children were attending and the Church won a national competition in a Christian newspaper for the largest growth in its numbers. The prize was a duplicating machine, the forerunner of other reprographic equipment as technology has developed. For a short period the pattern of largely lay leadership was broken with the Pastorate of Ken Lowe who started in May 1966 but left within a year. With the death of Alfred and the move away of Jim and his wife in 1969, the great contribution of the Youngjohns family came to an end. Another short pastorate helped filled the gap. John Drane became Pastor in January 1969 and stayed until November 1970.

All not well...?

We need to ask at this point why there were so many comings and goings from the mid 1950s onwards. The hard evidence of Church membership statistics is that despite much faithful service by a small nucleus, many other adults moved on while others came and went quickly. Some of the decline in the work was a result of divisions and subsequent departures related to Pentecostal issues. The original Bethel Evangelistic Society campaign of 1929/1930, as we have seen, did not result in an Elim Church plant but rather the creation of an independent Evangelical fellowship affiliated to FIEC. But the April 1955 campaign led by Ken Matthews (which lasted three weeks and took place in the Town Hall) did have this outcome. By 1957 the Prospect Hill Elim Church had been built and remained on that

site until the recent move to enlarged premises at Aggborough. Some of a Pentecostal inclination went over to join them.

Seeking holiness and the Holy Spirit

In parallel with this was another movement that made inroads into the Church. Some of the Bible Hall's leadership at this time adopted the so-called doctrines of Holiness which verged on sinless perfectionism (as propounded by T Austin Sparkes and the Honor Oak movement). Samuel Reading recalls how these things adversely affected many other members in the Church at the time but also how these were days of great blessing and encouragement chiefly through the visits of one man.

Even as a youngster, I realised all was not "well" within the Church...however the magnificent and unforgettable compensations in this fraught period were the visits paid us by Duncan Campbell together with small teams of Faith Mission pilgrims straight from the amazing scenes of revival in the Hebrides. These visits were to have a lasting impression on my own life and ministry.

New hope needed

Unfortunate as these difficulties and resulting divisions were, God's sovereign working out of his purposes is never frustrated by the shortcomings of Christians. For many children in the area growing up at that time, Greatfield Road was their only experience of "Church" and we will not know until we reach glory just how much of an impact the work may have made in eternal and spiritual terms. Certainly much seed was sown. The fact that Pastors came for short periods or on a part-time basis is not a criticism of them or the faithful lay leaders who so often had to fill in the gaps. But it does show that things were in something of a decline. New hope was needed.

A second long-term Pastorate and the link with Dudley

Light at the end of the tunnel came in the form of Jim Harding's involvement with the work. Jim was Evangelism Director at the Midland Bible Training College. He started as Pastor in December 1970 and left in July 1976, exercising a regular preaching and teaching ministry. Jim was employed by Dudley Baptist Church, where he and his wife were members.



Jim Harding's farewell (1976)
(including Delos, Robbins, Brutons, Pages, HARRISES & Benfields)

The Greatfield Road fellowship made what contribution they could to his support. While this arrangement was not ideal, there was encouragement in it, a recognition that regular ministry was important and an acknowledgement that outside help is sometimes essential. As this short history goes to print the news of Jim Harding's home-call on 15th April 2005 has reached us. His standing in the breach was a vital contribution.

Sunday School

Of encouragement at this period was the Sunday School, still numbering 15 to 20 per week. As Stan and Rosemary Robbins explain, the timing of Sunday meetings had to change in the 1970s, the Sunday School moving to late morning (after the Worship Service) rather than afternoon. They also recall the serialisation of John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" which was extremely popular with those attending. Tim and Margaret Bruton led work amongst an older group of young people at this time. Church income in 1976 had risen to £1,500 per year including rent from 37/38 Spencer Street – 1/3rd of this went to support the Pastor. The Church's property situation needed sorting out and a proper basis for supporting a Minister needed to be established. Jim Harding's farewell took the form of a Baptismal Service – there had not been many of these recorded since the days when the new building was opened.

Visiting preachers

The Church now reverted to a pattern of lay leadership and visiting preachers. Men like Jim Parnell, former overseas missionary Theo (Colonel) Cooke, retired Assemblies of God minister Rev Tom Jones and Eric Williams did so regularly. Further attempts were made to rent out the now empty 37 Spencer Street. When Elsie Lloyd (former trustee and long term tenant of 38) died a new approach to both properties was needed. With Church income now £2,000 per year, rent was put up and improvement grants from Wyre Forest District Council sought. A Ladies' Bible Study and Prayer Meeting was commenced at this time and supported the work of the Church in prayer and evangelism.

Another Town Hall mission

To support the music at services an organ was purchased for £375. The now declining number of members did seek to support outreach in the area, notably the Town Hall Mission led by George Miller, a black Pentecostal evangelist. However this was a distinctive style of healing crusade about which the members had some reservations although it may well have been similar to the sort of meetings held at the time the Church was founded. Contact and discussions took place with the Rifle Range Fellowship (which eventually joined up with the Prospect Hill Elim Pentecostal Church to form Wyre Forest Community Church) to see if their future might involve the buildings and site available at Greatfield Road.

6. Moving forwards again (1980-2005)

Help (from Indonesia!)

Through this struggling period, the Church did enjoy the benefits of being a recognised place of worship – this was the original basis for charitable status enjoyed by Free Churches. The Registrar General's Place of Worship Register was updated at this time and the status of the Church confirmed. A decision was reached at this point to sell 37 Spencer Street for £17,950. The plan was to use the proceeds (wisely invested or on a consumable basis) to support a Pastor for a few years while the work was picking up. It was at this point that Martin Dainton, an OMF missionary temporarily unable for family reasons to return to Indonesia, agreed to become Pastor from September 1980 to the following October 1981. Margaret Dainton, his widow, describes how it came about. Martin served as interim Pastor until the way was opened up for Margaret and him to return to the mission field overseas. A legacy arriving at just the right time helped with the financial challenge.

When we first moved to Worcester in September 1979 we expected to be there for just one year [and then]...return to ministry with the West Indonesia Protestant Church. As we were new to Worcestershire we knew no-one in the area, but made a start by visiting OMF supporters. The list we were given...included the names of Tim and Margaret Bruton. Martin was asked to take the services and tell the congregation about the Lord's work in Indonesia. Greatfield Road Evangelical Church was at that time without a Minister and the congregation was small. The thing that impressed us was that although there were few members, those there had a real sense of call from the Lord to make every effort to spread the Good News in the surrounding neighbourhood.



Daintons' farewell (showing also the Harrises, Delos, Warrens and Thornetts who along with Jack Gwilliam were the entire congregation)

Reaching a crisis point

In all the difficult negotiations over property, financial and legal issues Roy Delo's work was invaluable. Despite the encouragement of this time, however, a crisis point was

approaching. After the departure of the Daintons, the main Sunday congregation had fallen to single figures with only 7 church members (Hadley and Lil Harris, Roy and Irene Delo, Geoff and Carol Warren and Jack Gwilliam). The Church's very existence was in question. Malcolm Laver, Assistant General Secretary of the FIEC paid a visit to help those remaining to think through their situation. Answers however were not immediately forthcoming. The members paid some Sunday evening visits to other Churches – perhaps the future lay with joining up with another fellowship? On the other hand activity such as the Monday Club was important to the local community and needed to be sustained. In the meantime efforts were made to clarify the church's legal position and a new set of rules were discussed. There were, however, further setbacks with the property when the sale of 37 Spencer Street did not go forward.

God's direction - a third long-term pastorate

In early 1982 there seemed little hope of resolving the Church's various problems. In God's purpose he sent Francis York (a Police Officer who had taken early retirement) to serve the Church as Pastor. His ministry lasted for 14 years. The definite way in which this happened could not have been clearer. It hadn't begun too well. When he and Kathie paid their first Sunday visit, the Church had completely frozen up and the handful of members huddled round an electric fire in the vestry. This did not put off the prospective Pastor! By Easter Francis had accepted the Church's call. A service of ordination and induction took place in June. Over 150 people were packed into the Church (and fed). These were his thoughts expressed in his letter of acceptance.

To say that I am thrilled is an understatement...but I am very conscious that God has called me to a position of service and influence where I shall be utterly dependent on Him...



Church fellowship at Francis York's induction (including Delos, Mrs Camber, Thornetts, Madeiras and Warrens)



Francis York's induction showing David Morrow (Spring Hill), Francis York, Kathie York, Jim Higgins (Bridgnorth) & George Roberts (Christian Police Association)

God's provision

His sense of dependency on God was shared by the small group who had taken this step of calling a Pastor. The agreed level of salary was exactly equal to Church's total income, yet within a year the Church's income had doubled. Some of the provision was through renting out 37 and 38 Spencer Street. The Church also started to use tax recovery on covenants (the predecessor scheme to Gift Aid which is of such great value to the work these days). Several new members arrived from various parts of the country, quite independently, and the early days of this new era were marked by getting to know one another at summer picnics, one being at Ragley Hall. Another early outing was to Bristol to see MV Logos, Operation Mobilisation's ship. This forged links with some from other local Churches as a coach was hired for the day and others invited others to join the trip. However it wasn't all about fellowship amongst Christians. The desire to reach out was there too and adverts were taken out in the Kidderminster Shuttle to inform people about the Church, its new Pastor and its services.

Disposal of property

In 1984 the sale of 38 Spencer Street was completed. This was of great significance in that it confirmed the legal basis of the charity. The sale was signed off by the Charity Commissioners and the purpose for which the proceeds could be used linked to the Church's continuing activity and Basis of Faith. It also marked a first step towards being able to improve the premises. The sale had not involved the rear part of the garden (the portion behind the Church building) and the same approach was taken to the sale of 37 Spencer Street later. The thinking was that this area could be developed as an extension in due course. With this in mind a Building Fund was opened with £9,000 in hand. As it happened the first extension did not use any of the space to the rear. This would have to wait over 20 years until the present

second extension. Again in conjunction with this vision for physical growth there was outreach. A leaflet with the testimonies of various members was produced and 4,000 copies delivered. At this time there was no Sunday School but the children of the Church had their own slot within the morning service and activities to do in the week for which prizes were awarded. By 1987 a specification and plans for the first stage of building extension work had been drawn up by Engineering and Building Design of Kidderminster, with much expert advice from Jack Gwilliam.

The Belley connection

In 1998 the Church received a periodic visit from the Knights (serving as missionaries in Belley, France with UFM). Their association with the Church goes back many decades. As we write this, Donald has recently had to face the home-call of Frances but continues to work and witness as faithfully as ever, an example to all who are called to labour for Christ in hard places.



The Knights (Celine, Daniel, Frances and Donald)
with the Owen family

The link with the Church in Belley has been an almost permanent aspect of the landscape, two small fellowships linked by a desire to maintain a witness in unpromising circumstances and with a conviction that in the Lord our labour is not in vain.

Diamond jubilee celebrations

The church (mistakenly) thought that 1988 was the fellowship's 60th Anniversary. As part of the anniversary celebrations. Andrew Anderson, past President of FIEC preached at special services. It was decided to commission from Christian Publicity (CPO) a special brochure for distribution across the western half of Kidderminster. 10,000 copies were ordered and delivered (many by the Ladies' Bible Study Group). The front cover highlighted changes over the six decades of the Church's existence and included the up-to-date testimonies of several of the members. The work of the Church at this point was much improved from a few years earlier. Both Sunday services were reasonably well attended, there was a crèche, Monday Club (for children) was growing and a work for younger teenagers, Teenquest, had been started. Membership had reached over 20 once more. In 1989 work on building the car park (a necessary stage in meeting planning permission for the extension) was commenced and the Building Fund had grown to £22,000.

We're 60 years old..

1928-1988

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

**EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
GREATFIELD ROAD
KIDDERMINSTER**

THEN

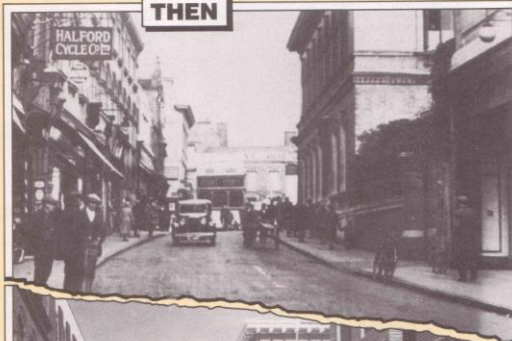
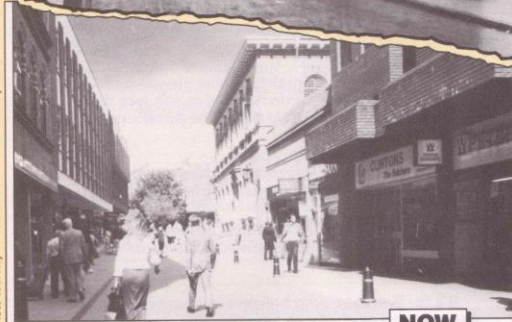


Photo courtesy of Hereford & Worcester County Libraries



NOW

Kidderminster Shopping Centre looks very different over half a century on. Styles of dress and cars have changed and things cost a lot more. You wouldn't have found videos or other consumer durables on offer in the inter-war period. Computers didn't exist.

History has moved on through a second world war and into the nuclear age.

BUT IS EVERYTHING SO DIFFERENT?

**READ
ON...**

Anniversary brochure 1998
(thought to be the Diamond Jubilee year)

Financing the first building extension

As the new decade began, the Church faced a dilemma relating to the proposed extension. The main contract could not start; 37 Spencer Street had not been sold, and although the new car park was usable it had not been surfaced. Should funds be reduced further to complete the car park ahead of building extension? It was decided to spend £3,500 and remarkably exactly this sum of money came back from three independent sources, two of which were Christian trusts to whom application had been made. So the Building Fund was not depleted. Shortly afterwards No.37 was sold, a contract with the Bewdley Building Company was agreed and the main extension work carried out. This year also saw the decision by member Cathy Allenby (later to be Cathy Tibberts and then a nurse at Kidderminster Hospital) to enter training for missionary service with New Tribes Mission. The building extension work was completed by the early part of the year including some internal refurbishment. The total spend of £60,000 had come from the sales of 37 and 38 Spencer Street as well as much sacrificial giving.

Opening of extension and Baxter's 300th anniversary

Thanksgiving for the completion of the work took place to coincide with the 300th Anniversary of Richard Baxter's death. A weekend of celebrations included a special service at Kidderminster Town Hall on the Saturday and special Sunday services. This was an opportunity to renew links with Dudley Baptist Church, many of whose members were present.



Extended buildings (1991)

At all the meetings Maurice Roberts from Ayr, Editor of the Banner of Truth Magazine, brought God's word. Stuart Owen wrote and published a short history of Baxter's life which aimed to counter the false emphasis in some of the more official ecclesiastical celebrations.

Youth work and Teenquest

By 1993 Teenquest had become a well attended and thriving group with attendance from young people inside and outside the Church congregation. Biblical teaching was a key element of the activity. Not all the other Christian youth activities in the area adopted this approach and attempts were made to influence the direction of Wyre Forest Christian Youth Association. The philosophy behind Teenquest was that recreational and spiritual activities could and should be included together. Making the Bible meaningful to those from non-Christian backgrounds is

always challenging but doing this in the context of a programme of activities was found to be helpful. Events like Survival Challenge and Environmental Challenge also proved valuable in building relationships, along with periodic fishing, boating, skating and bowling trips.



Members of Teenquest raising funds for Tearfund's work in Central America

Planning for further growth

Plans were developed in the early 1990s for a further building extension, the need highlighted by a very successful and well attended Holiday Bible Club. The possibility of (lay) Eldership was incorporated into the Church rules at this time. In the following year 1994 planning permission was obtained for stage two (subsequently it had to be renewed for a second 5 years). After steady growth and consolidation, this year was not to be an easy one, however. A second and very well attended Holiday Bible Club possibly overstretched resources and experience too

much. Capacity to keep going Teenquest and Monday Club (boosted by those drawn in by the Holiday Bible Club) was stretched and it was only possible to maintain the work for younger children. Sadly Teenquest had to close. More setbacks were to come in the autumn with Francis York's deteriorating health forcing him to give the Church notice of his resignation as of Easter 1996.

Many achievements

Under Francis' leadership the Church confirmed its position as Biblical and Evangelical. A fresh nucleus of families was drawn together, providing a viable basis for Church activity including children's/youth work and ministry to elderly people (eg monthly services at the nearby Carter Avenue complex). There was renewed commitment to regular distribution of literature and other forms of outreach especially amongst children and young people. There were improvements to the appearance and usefulness of the buildings. These were a strong foundation for the future. The task of leading the Church and seeking God's will concerning a new Pastor occupied the Deacons for the rest of the year.

Overseas interests

At no time in the Church's history has overseas missionary work been neglected. In working with children and young people the global dimensions of Christianity have always been included in teaching. In the summer of 1996 Aaron Madeira and Angi Warren headed off for Mozambique and Uganda respectively to gain an insight into the international Church and the needs of the Third World. In the latter case this involved meeting Charity, an Aids orphan sponsored by the Church and Teenquest via Tearfund. Aaron has recently joined the Cornhill Training Course in London.



Photo from the Kidderminster Shuttle accompanying a feature article about Angi and Aaron's African experiences

During the inter-regnum, there were key areas of activity that needed to be sustained, not least Monday Club.



Leaders and attenders of Monday Club

A fourth long-term pastorate

By December 1996 God had led the members to invite Philip Hearn, an Elder at Cheam Baptist Church (CBC) in Surrey and then completing the Cornhill Training Course in London. The invitation to the Pastorate was accepted and plans made for him, Marion and their three sons to move to Worcestershire. They would not feel altogether like strangers in their new surroundings as no less than six of the current membership had been members of CBC at various times in the past.

Induction

Philip had previously been in the Royal Navy followed by a career in Health Service management. In Summer 1997 he was ordained at his home Church in Cheam and a coach load travelled down from Kidderminster to share in the occasion. The induction day in September will not just be remembered for it being the day of Princess Diana's funeral. Those taking part were Morris Bird in the chair (formerly Pastor at Worcester FIEC Church), Declan Flanagan (Pastor of Cheam Baptist Church) and Paul Mallard (Morris' successor in the Pastorate at Woodgreen Evangelical Church, Worcester and later to serve as FIEC President). These were Philip's thoughts as he commenced his Pastorate in Kidderminster.

I believe that in God's purposes I was called to this fellowship to preach and teach the Word of God. This is God's way to call people to saving faith in Jesus Christ and it is the way to strengthen the faith of his people, equipping them to serve him with love in the world for his glory. This is what I seek to do in his strength.

The building was full again as it had been at Francis York's induction with a marquee attached to the entrance to provide extra seats.



Church fellowship (including Holts, Vickerys, HARRISES, WARRENS, Hollifields, Butchers)



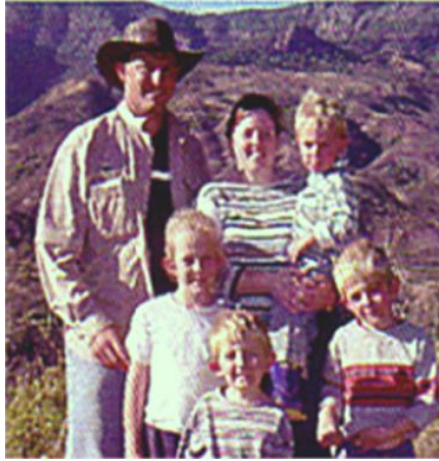
Those taking part in Philip Hearn's induction (1997)
Declan Flanagan (Cheam), Philip, Morris Bird and Paul Mallard (Worcester)

New beginnings

Despite the disappointments of the mid-1990s, the Church was still in a very much stronger position than it had been in 1982 and, although the challenge of fully supporting a Pastor with a young family was considerable, the unity and commitment of the membership had been renewed. There were a number of signs of new beginnings in 1998 and 1999 – the purchase of a moveable pulpit, a visiting programme to 1,000 nearby homes, a seminar on outreach, the start of regularly recording the Sunday ministry for those unable to be present and opportunities for Philip with the players and staff at Kidderminster Harriers Football Club in the role of Chaplain.

Y2K and into the 21st century

The Millennium year provided further opportunities for outreach – Mark's Gospels were offered to nearby homes. On a visit of classes from Sutton First School to the Church, copies of a special children's edition were distributed. The annual Tearfund frugal meal celebrated its 20th year (it has now been a regular part of the Church's life for over 25 years). The steady growth in congregations was most evident at the Carol Service that year when the building was full. In 2002 Cathy Tibberts (nee Allenby), her husband Stephen and their 4 children spent an extended period with the church after a stressful time in Bogota. This was to be a prelude to a new assignment with New Tribes Mission in Mexico, moving during 2005 to a tribal location.



The Tibberts family at Taxicaringa, Mexico (2005)

Connections with the wider Christian scene

Another FIEC President, Andy Paterson, paid us a visit during the year. Meanwhile the decision of Rev Charles Raven, and of many of his St John's Congregation, to part company with local Church of England structures had various knock-on effects on the Church at Greatfield Road. The Little Chicks Toddler Group moved its location to the Greatfield Road building and stayed until 2004. There was a joint meeting at which Philip Hacking, a key leader in Anglican Evangelicalism, challenged those present from several Churches about the true nature of unity. The membership were pressing on in the area of outreach too with a "Face Values" questionnaire used door to door. The closure of the Highley Congregational Church resulted in some new people worshipping at Greatfield Road. Tim Howells (formerly their Pastor) took on some leadership of the outreach work. In 2003, Tim Howells and his family left for South Wales where Tim took up the Pastorate of The People's Mission, Skewen. The Church also inherited a link with Allan in Uganda, another child supported under the Tearfund programme.

A Sabbatical and an Associate Pastorate

After 6 years Philip Hearn took two periods of sabbatical in 2003. During the first of these Howard Stidwill led most of the services. This turned out to be preparing the ground for a decision by the Church to appoint him to the position of Associate Pastor in September 2003. Howard has served a number of Churches including some in the West Midlands and with Wendy represents Wycliffe Bible Translators. These were his thoughts as he started a new period of ministry.

It was a privilege to be asked to preach during Philip's sabbatical and a pleasant surprise to be asked to serve (part time) as an Associate Pastor. My prayer is that God might use me for his glory.



Howard and Wendy Stidwill at Howard's induction (2003)

OMF

The Church's prayer links with the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) go back, as we have seen, to the Daintons and now include Howard and Wendy's son Jonathan and his wife Hope and their children (until recently in Vietnam), Sally Stubbs (supporting the work in China based in Singapore) and Stephen Howard (with his wife and family in Mongolia). Recent years have seen a continuing and growing interest in the work of the Slavic Gospel Association.

Other developments

Over the last few years work amongst women has developed (now called Women Together), the church has published an enlarged edition of its own supplementary worship book "More songs of Worship" and developed a Resources Bank to replace the library and bookstall. Membership, activity and attendance levels have returned to and even exceeded those of ten years ago.

The second extension

Planning permission for a second and larger stage of building extension was due to expire in July 2004 and the leadership called the Church to a prayerful consideration of the need to move forward on the lines agreed 10 years previously. A Gift Day took place in January 2003 and much of the required funding was pledged over 5 years. In the summer of 2004 the foundations of the extension were put in before the end of the planning permission period. A second Gift Day late in 2004 resulted in the remaining funds being pledged or lent interest free (with repayments linked to pledges). Work started in January 2005, carried out by Wrighton Projects with completion of the contract in August. In total the improvements have cost £140,000 (equivalent to 3 years of the Church's regular income).

This has been a great challenge to our trust in the Lord to provide. Most of the money has come from the giving of the membership and congregation but we were grateful for one significant gift from a Christian trust. Taking this step is an expression of our faith in the future of God's work and our witness to the people of the local community. This brings us right up to the present time and our celebration of 75 years and the opening of the extension on 24th September 2005. As the church sets off on another stage in its journey, Paul's words to the Corinthian church remain as great a challenge today as they have ever been.

For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation...his work will be shown for what it is... (quoted from 1 Corinthians 3:11-13)

For our encouragement, the large text that has for many years been on display above the pulpit reminds us week by week that Jesus Christ is the only way, the only truth and the only life.



Extension in progress (early 2005)



New roof

7. The church is people

It is all too easy to confuse the Church with a building or a social activity. The true Church, however, is constructed out of the spiritual lives of people. It is the body of Christ. The flesh and blood of any local Church history is saved people. Through 75 years of its existence our fellowship has touched many lives, young and old. The first 50 years of the Church's formal records only include the names of full members. Even some of the Pastors were not added to the Church roll. This makes it hard to produce consistent lists of names including all who made a contribution. We can however identify some important categories or groups.

Provision for the children of Church members has always been a priority (whether this has taken the form of a Sunday School or

Bible Class or as part of Church services). In part this has been seen as a fulfilment of commitments made when babies have been dedicated – 10 were brought in the period since 1980. At least 8 people associated with the Church or congregation have been called into full-time Christian ministries of various kinds (Joy Green, Samuel Reading, Ruth Youngjohns, Colin Duriez, Stephen Howard, Catherine Allenby, Arnie Van Eerden and Aaron Madeira).

For children and young people from the local community, without a connection to the Church through their families, it has often been midweek activity that has brought them into contact with the Church. Over the years quite a number of those brought up under the influence of the Church's life and witness did profess faith in Christ and others have come to faith during adult life through other Churches.

Since the mid-1970s there have been 20 people baptised by immersion. The number is much higher for the whole 75 year period – perhaps between 50 and 100. Others have been part of the regular congregation without making a commitment to membership. We know of some at least who went on later to make a profession of faith in Christ elsewhere - not big numbers, perhaps, but each one a miracle of grace nevertheless.

Of the full members (148 in total), some have been active with the work for many decades like Hadley and Lil Harris, involved for over half a century now and indelibly associated with the work as the Youngjohns, Gwilliam and Delo families also were. Many others have had briefer associations but each one played his or her part.



The Harris and Gwilliam families between them have been associated with the Church for all but the first few years of its existence (photo shows Evelyn, Lil, Hadley and Jack in the 1980s). A plaque in memory of Jack is located by the Church entrance.

(Mr) E Ansell	(Miss) J Ansell
(Mrs) J Ansell	Evelyn Banfield
Herbert Banfield	Mary Banfield
(Mr) C Barnett	(Mrs) E Barnett
Kathleen Barnett	Ann Benfield
Dave Benfield	Ellen Berry
Maryenne Berry	Tony Berry
(Mrs) M Bickley	(Miss) H Bill
Bernard Blendell	Rita Blendell
(Miss) E Blount	J Bowen
Nigel Bradley	Venesta Bradley
Andrew Butcher	Judith Butcher
Nigel Butcher	Winifred Camber

Pat Carter	(Mr) E Cartwright
Ellen Cartwright	(Mrs) R Cartwright
Robert Cartwright	Amy Collis
James Cook	Nina Cook
(Mr) G Cox	(Mrs) L Cox
Edna Davies	(Mr) K Davis
Vera Davis	Irene Delo
Roy Delo	Shielia Dungate
Colin Duriez	Colin P Duriez
Madge Duriez	(Mrs) N Elcock
Joan Farebrother	Walter Farebrother
Stanley Ferris	Winifred Ferris
Anne Furber	(Mrs) Gould
Joy Green	(Mr) D Gunnell
(Mrs) S Gunnell	A Gunstone
Dennis Gunstone	Evelyn Gwilliam
Jack Gwilliam	Angi Hale
(Mr) D Harding	Hadley Harris
Lil Harris	Marion Hearn
Philip Hearn	Glenda Holifield
Paul Holifield	Connie Holt
Frank Holt	Lilian James
(Mrs) J Jones	(Mr) Jones
(Mrs) Jones	Elsie Lloyd
(Mrs) L Lloyd	Chris MacLean
Carole Madeira	David Madeira
(Mrs) E Manley	Alan Mansell
Jill Mansell	Kate McArthur
Tess Mitchell	V J Nichols
(Mr) A Overfield	(Mrs) M Overfield
Beryl Owen	Stuart Owen
Ray Page	Tuula Page

Jack Palfrey	Muriel Palfrey
(Miss) L Parkes	Jan Peckham
Jeremy Peckham	(Mrs) E Porteous
James Porteous	Samuel Reading
Rosemary Robbins	Stan Robbins
Mike Rose	Sue Rose
(Mrs) E Rowley	Jonathan Salem
Nicola Salem	(Mrs) L Sey
William Sey	Chris Smith
Dave Smith	Ethel Smith
Gladys Smith	(Mrs) Stagg
Howard Stidwill	Wendy Stidwill
Dennis Sullivan	Florence Sullivan
(Mr) J Thomas	(Mrs) J Thomas
Cathy Tibberts	Steve Tibberts
(Mr) L Tressider	(Mrs) V Tressider
Jean Vickery	Tony Vickery
(Mr) E Wagstaff	Basil Warren
Carol Warren	Geoff Warren
Joyce Warren	Louise Weber
Phil Weber	(Mrs) E Williams
(Mr) G R Williams	Kathleen Williams
(Mrs) A Wright	Albert Wright
(Mrs) G Wright	John Wright
Jing Ping Xiong	Shicai Yang
Francis York	Kathie York
(Mrs) Young	Alfred Youngjohns
(Mrs) E Youngjohns	Jim Youngjohns
R Youngjohns	Winnie Youngjohns

Finally we come to those men who have served as leaders. In the Church of Jesus Christ they do not enjoy a different status but their role is God-given whether in a lay or “set-apart and supported” capacity. The following 11 men have been employed as Minister or Pastor for a period of at least a year, covering between them about 45 out of the 75 years of the Church’s existence.

Pastors

Mr Robbins (c1930)
James Cook (1935-1945)
D B Jones (1946-1948)
Arthur Rowett (1949-1950)
Ken Lowe (1966-1967)
John Drane (1969-1970)
Jim Harding (1970-1976)
Martin Dainton (1980-1981)
Francis York (1982-1996)
Philip Hearn (1997-present)
Howard Stidwill (2003-present)

The Church records include the names of 9 men who were formally appointed as Secretary or Treasurer but this is far from a complete list of those who have served as Deacons or Elders.

Secretaries/Treasurers

Nigel Bradley (1991-1998)

Andrew Butcher (1998-present)

Roy Delo (1960-1987)

Dennis Gunstone (1958-1960)

Hadley Harris (1969-1980)

Stuart Owen (1987-1996)

Geoff Warren (1980-1991/1996-present)

Alfred Youngjohns (1934-1958)

Jim Youngjohns (1936-1969)

The map below reminds us that we are a local Church set in a community.



God only knows the precise shape of the new opportunities that an extended and improved building will bring to the immediate area and beyond. Already the Church serves younger and older members of the local community in a variety of ways. Our prayer for the “next 75 years” is that many more people will be reached and that many more will come to know Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord through God’s wonderful grace.



The children and young people who are associated with the fellowship today either attend Monday Club or one of the Sunday School groups or both. Many more are linked to us through the local school.



Women Together is one of 4 smaller groups where week by week people study the Bible and pray

But what of the people who are the core of the Church fellowship today? 48 people belonging to the current membership and congregation are pictured here, making up a wall of “Living Stones” ...



