

A BOLD EXPERIMENT

**The Story of
Bloomsbury Chapel
and
Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church
1848 - 1999**

Faith Bowers

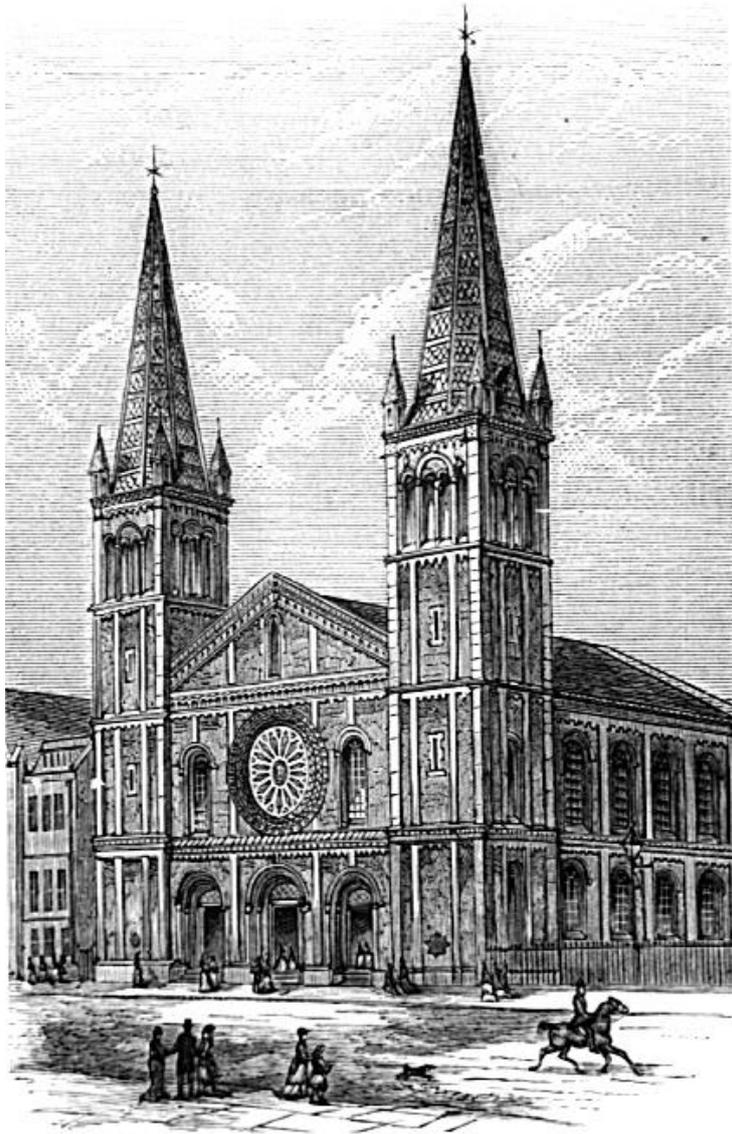
Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church
1999
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For Brian

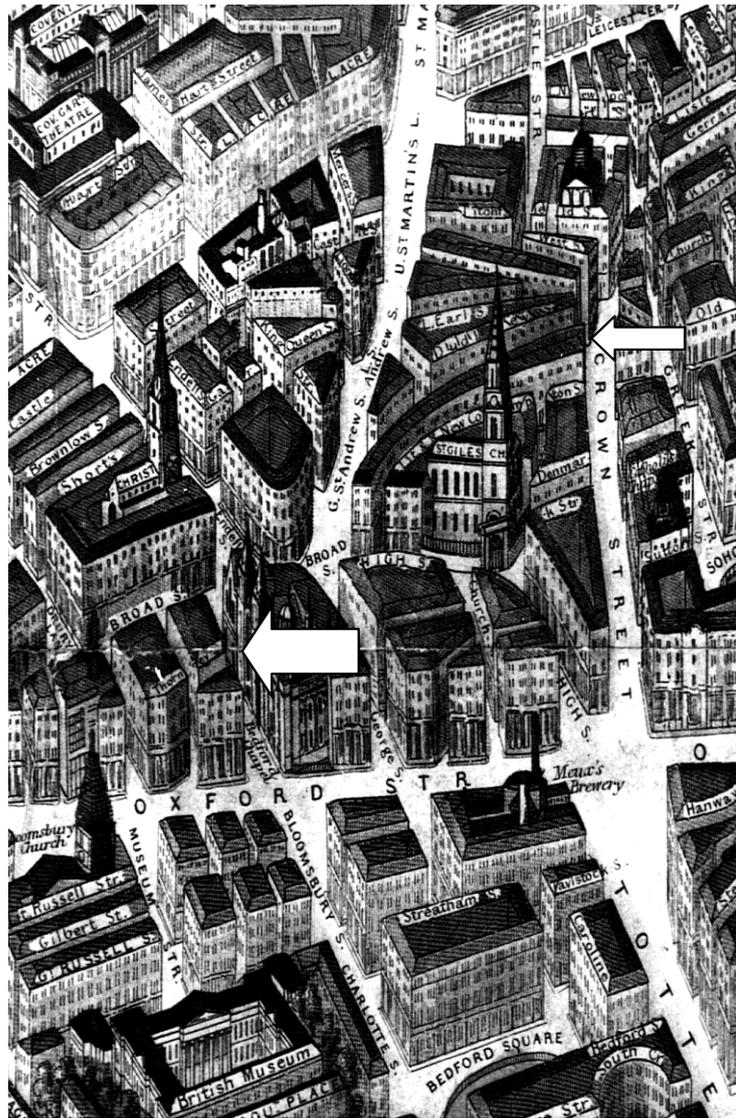
*we first met at Bloomsbury
and this church has been central
to our lives ever since*



Bloomsbury Chapel, 1848

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*Bloomsbury: detail from map of London drawn from a balloon, 1851
(The balloon was over Hampstead Heath, so the map is upside down,
with the north at the bottom)*

The arrows indicate Bloomsbury Chapel and Moor Street Mission Hall

FOREWORD

Faith Bowers has chosen her title well. The quotation from a church paper in 1875 indicates that from its beginnings, Bloomsbury's Baptist Church was regarded as 'a bold experiment'.

The story of Sir Morton Peto's vision and its fulfilment in the building of the Chapel and the subsequent development of a strong and effective Christian community is well told in this carefully written history. Part protest against 'Establishment' domination, and part expression of deep evangelistic and humanitarian concern, Bloomsbury's Baptist Chapel was indeed a bold experiment. Through the years that adventurous spirit has continued to mark the life of this church in the heart of the city.

When I first contemplated coming to serve as minister, I read with interest Faith Bowers' thesis for her Master's degree. I cannot say that reading actually inspired me to come to central London, but it certainly gave me many insights into the history of this unique congregation, and the ethos which has marked it through all the years since Peto's vision first became reality. That thesis provides the basis of this definitive study.

Faith Bowers tells the story of these one hundred and fifty years with a keen eye for detail, but also with a keen mind which provides sound analysis and wise comment. More important than all of this, she knows and loves 'Bloomsbury' from the inside, and the picture she presents is a warm and 'human' one. While this is a solid, academic study, it is not just that. It is the story of a people, generation following generation, who have faithfully maintained a lively and relevant witness to the Gospel in central London.

I first heard of Bloomsbury when, as a teenager in New Zealand, I was present at a service addressed by the then minister of the church, Dr Townley Lord. He impressed me as an urbane gentleman, a preacher with profound conviction, and yet with a broad, liberal view of the Church and of life. I was intrigued. This was something new, refreshing, even liberating to one brought up in the confines of provincial and parochial Baptist life.

Later exposure to the writings, and then the preaching and personality of Townley Lord's successor, Howard Williams, further whetted my appetite for the theology and ethos represented by 'Bloomsbury'.

For the last twelve and a half years it has been my privilege (and at times my burden) to be minister at Bloomsbury. Now in the church's 150th year, I am about to make way for somebody else to take up the task and lead Bloomsbury into the new millennium. I could not wish the new minister any better preparation for that task than to read this account of the first hundred and fifty years.

A firm foundation has been laid; a great tradition established. But as Jacques Maritain reminds us to handle tradition correctly, we must do three things. We must 'receive it gratefully, amend it purposefully and pass it on proudly'. That is now the task of 'the new millennial generation' and those who will follow them. Part of what we hand on is the 'transformed' building - the result of years of planning and sacrificial giving in the closing decades of the *old* millennium. May this renewed facility enhance the church's experience of worship, and strengthen its community, witness and service.

As a young minister in my first pastorate, I was always encouraged on a Sunday morning by what was called the 'preservice prayer meeting'. A few deacons would gather in the Vestry fifteen minutes before the morning service to pray for the day's activities and the life and work of the church. Every Sunday morning, Ian began his prayer with the same sentence. It had been a favourite of his father's before him, and the words were spoken with heartfelt meaning. 'Lord, we would echo the Psalmist, for surely the lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage.'

Yea, indeed, we have a goodly heritage.

We are all grateful to Faith Bowers for the painstaking work that has gone into this history. I for one feel honoured and privileged to have played a small part in this ongoing 'bold experiment'.

Barrie Hibbert
Bloomsbury 1987 - 1999

PREFACE

In the early 1950s a distinguished layman, the Rt Hon. Ernest Brown, preached at the anniversary services of a provincial church and kept referring to the various distinguished people to be found in his church, Bloomsbury Central Baptist. It sounded to me, in my early teens, a nasty snobbish church and I resolved never to go there!

A few years later I went to the University of London and in the first week was taken to the John Clifford Society for Baptist students only to find it met at Bloomsbury. The students were friendly, the new minister preached the Gospel of Christ in a way that gripped our questing young minds, and there was about the whole fellowship an openness and a sense of harmony quite unlike my previous experience of church life. My reservations slipped away. It has been 'my church' ever since.

Over the years I have come to realize that the spirit which pervades Bloomsbury belongs to the corporate nature of this church: individually the present membership includes few who were there in 1958, yet it feels and is the same church. The founders who embarked on this 'bold experiment' would probably be amazed to see the church still here 150 years on, smaller in numbers yet recognizable in spirit. When I read of the first minister that 'to hear him speak of the place, you would have thought it possessed of an organic existence, the sum of all that was breathing in its members, or being wrought out within its walls', I know how he felt. His concern was to serve his own generation, and his legacy - Bloomsbury's tradition - has been a readiness to adapt to different times in the service of the unchanging Christ.

This book has been so long in the making that it is not easy now to name all who helped along the way. I am grateful to my colleagues in the Baptist Historical Society for their encouragement down the years, beginning with the late President, the Revd Dr E.A. Payne, who first urged me to pursue the study seriously. Successive editors of the Society's journal, the *Baptist Quarterly*, have published a number of papers, providing periodic incentives to keep at it. The present editor, Professor John H.Y. Briggs, is a good friend and his history, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, has been a valuable resource. Dr Judith Champ supervised my MPhil studies at King's College London on 'Bloomsbury Chapel 1848-1905', and she and the examiners, the Revd Dr Gordon Huelin and Dr Clyde Binfield, alerted me to the interest of certain aspects. Mrs Susan Mills of the Angus Library has helped me find answers to lots of odd questions.

My fellow church members at Bloomsbury - and the joy of being in such a church - have sustained my enthusiasm. I am particularly grateful to the ministers, the Revd Dr Howard Williams, the Revd Barbara Stanford, and the Revd Barrie Hibbert. In the early years of research I was able to talk to relatives of their predecessors: the Revd Leslie Chown, Miss Margaret Phillips and her sister-in-law Mrs Enid Phillips, who was the daughter of Benjamin Gibbon. Mrs Alice Lord told me much about her husband's ministry. The Revd Dr Edward Brooks, biographer of Morton Peto, showed us around Somerleyton. I had contact with descendants of several of the Victorian members, and talked with people who were at Bloomsbury in the first half of the twentieth century. Their contributions are acknowledged through the book.

The officers and deacons have given me access to the church records, overwhelmingly full and complete for the nineteenth century and frustratingly incomplete for the twentieth. It seems that large leather-bound Victorian manuscript books were carefully stowed away during World War II, whereas typed looseleaf books seemed to merit less care and many disappeared. Selective use would have been essential, but I was sorry to have the selection imposed upon me by default!

We are grateful to Mr Frank Brown, another long-standing member of Bloomsbury, who had enough faith in the publication to help underwrite production costs.

Foremost, however, among the encouragers have been my family, and especially my husband, to whom the book is dedicated. The evening I first went to Bloomsbury I met Brian. Much of our courting was on the church premises, and our lives have been bound up with Bloomsbury ever since. Our sons, introduced to the church as very young babies, grew up and came to faith there. The church shared our anguish at the younger boy's disability but took him to heart, and within that loving fellowship he blossomed. My husband has cared for the church's finances for a quarter century. In many ways our nuclear family is bound up with the wider family of this loving and lovely church.

To all my grateful thanks.
To God be the glory!

Faith Bowers
January 1999

A BOLD EXPERIMENT

In the year 1848 a spacious chapel was erected in Bloomsbury, for the worship of God and the preaching of the Gospel, according to the general usages of the Evangelical Protestant Dissenters . . . in the hope that, in due time, a congregation might be gathered within its walls; and that ultimately a church might be formed in connexion with it, which recognising no other Baptism but the immersion of professed believers, should welcome to its fellowship all followers of Christ; should observe the Lord's Supper every Lord's day, and should co-operate with other churches of Christ in such works of faith and labours of love as are incumbent on all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

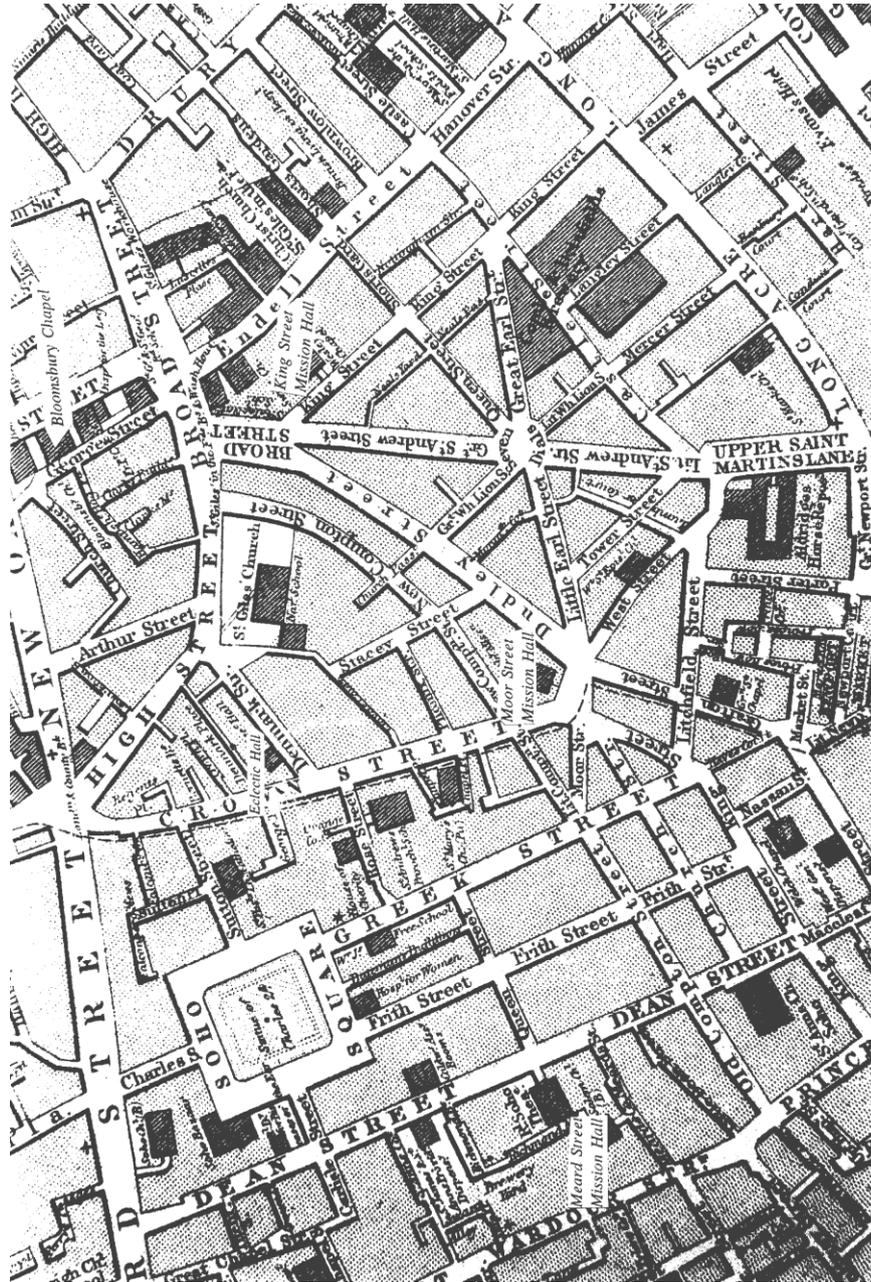
Foundation Statement, Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book 1850

Bloomsbury Chapel opened in December 1848. The above statement was penned by William Brock, the first minister. The hope and vision which led to the new cause began with Samuel Morton Peto, whose wealth derived from one of the century's new industries, railway building. This was to be a new church for a new age, in the Baptist tradition but with an open, pioneering spirit, eager to try new ways of bringing the Gospel to bear on London.

The Baptist journal, *The Freeman*, in its obituary for William Brock on 19 November 1875, described Bloomsbury Chapel as 'a bold experiment'. The same journal carried an obituary for Sir Morton Peto on 22 November 1889. Referring to the church he founded in Bloomsbury, it observed:

The work done by Brock, especially amongst young men, and by his missionary, Mr M'Cree, in St Giles's, has often been alluded to. If fully and graphically told, it would be pronounced the most important and most successful of all 'forward movements' in which Baptists have been leaders.

Here more than a century later is the first attempt to tell the story of that bold experiment fully and graphically, and to record how the successors to Dr Brock and Mr M'Cree continued the work, responding to the changing needs of successive generations as they proclaimed the same Gospel in the heart of London.



Detail from Cassell's map of London, 1862, showing Chapel and Mission Halls

PART I: BLOOMSBURY CHAPEL

2

IN THE YEAR 1848

'The occasion was regarded as an epoch in the history of London Nonconformity.'

C.W. McCree

A time to be born

On 5 December 1848 the *Illustrated London News* recorded in its 'Chronology of Remarkable Events':

Public exhibition of the Electric Light in Trafalgar Square. Opening of Bloomsbury Baptist New Chapel. Serious disturbances at Lucca.

1848 is remembered as a year of revolution in Europe, here reflected in the trouble in Tuscany. Staitte's arc lamp was an early venture into the technology of the future. The new chapel was born into an age of change.

The first half of the century had seen great developments in industry and great changes in people's lives. Cities were growing fast: the 1851 Census found for the first time that half the population was urban, and there were as many Nonconformists as Anglicans, although all church attendance was low in London. Society had become more mobile and people could quite easily move up - or down. The middle classes grew in influence and respectability, but conditions for the urban poor were deteriorating. Major reforms were widening electoral representation. Many dissenters had supported the Chartists' campaign for political change through the previous decade and the 1847 General Election saw the first concerted effort to field dissenting candidates.

Communications improved as railways criss-crossed the country. Between 1829 and 1850, 7,200 miles of track were laid in Britain, and 4,800 more were in progress, with fortunes made and lost in their construction. Railway money paid for the new Chapel. The electric telegraph, introduced for railway signalling in 1837, spread rapidly, while Penny Post was introduced in 1840. London had had a regular police force since 1829 and by mid-century gas lighting brightened the main streets, making it easier for respectable people of modest means to attend evening meetings.

Change was not all for the better. Railways and new roads cutting into central London squeezed more people on to less land. A cholera epidemic led to the Public Health Act of 1848, but clean water and sanitation were not easily introduced to the jumbled mass of over-crowded tenements. London's first Medical Officer of Health was appointed in 1846, but the capital waited another fifteen years for its first main sewer.

Henry Mayhew began to publish *London Labour and the London Poor* in 1851, providing a vivid picture of lifestyles. His articles appeared weekly in the *Morning Chronicle*, and as collected volumes, so there was no excuse for ignorance. Mayhew categorized the poor as 'those who will work' (producers, distributors, carriers, servants, protectors, and street-folk - traders, cleaners and performers), 'those that cannot work' (paupers, those in hospital or asylums, almsmen and prisoners from debt), and 'those that will not work' (beggars, prostitutes, coiners, vagabonds, pickpockets and burglars).

Christians expressed concern at the slums. The Bishop of London built fifty new churches to serve the poor, but they were not well attended. Evangelicals set up the London City Mission in 1835. Methodists, active elsewhere among the working classes, had done less in London. In 1848 Thomas Binney, minister of the King's Weigh House Church near London Bridge, told the Congregational Union: 'Revolutions are convulsing the world; and they are doing so partly through the medium of ideas consecrated by us', and Algernon Wells offered his 'Thoughts on the need for increased efforts to promote the Religious Welfare of the Working Classes in England, by the Independent Churches and their pastors'.¹ Thomas Binney, whose congregation was full of wealthy, self-made men and aspiring younger ones, declared from the Chair that 'Our special mission is neither to the very rich, nor to the very poor. We have a work to do upon the thinking, active, influential classes ... which ... gathered into cities ... are the modern movers and moulders of the world.'²

Edward Miall wrote in *The Nonconformist* that Christians had a morbid horror of poverty. In 1848 he invited working men to send in their views on religious institutions. They denounced the lack of sympathy of ministers of all denominations with 'the privations, wants and wastes of the working classes',³ and saw the churches as for the 'higher' classes. So long as churchgoers expressed their concern by giving money for others to do the work, that image

1 *Congregational Year Book* 1848, pp.83-95. See also J.C. Binfield, *So Down to Prayers*, 1977, p.12.

2 In J.C. Binfield, *George Williams and the YMCA*, 1973, p.28.

3 See K.S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, 1963, p.19.

would remain.

The 1851 Census was unique in including a religious section. Horace Mann's report expressed concern about 'the destitute condition of our great town population', for which 'new and energetic plans' were needed.

Unfortunately it rarely happens that local action is aroused, except to obtain accommodation for an increase in the middle classes ... It really seems that, without some missionary enterprises ... the mighty task of even mitigating spiritual destitution in our towns and cities can hardly be overcome.⁴

Mann noted with approval that some dissenters, who 'attach no peculiar sanctity' to buildings, were reaching the working classes with services in less forbidding, secular halls. Bloomsbury Chapel was among those making this attempt.

The immediate locality

The manors of St Giles and Bloomsbury had been held by the Russell family since 1669. Staunch Whigs, they already owned Covent Garden, where they had encouraged market development.⁵ Their Bedford estates were well-planned and well-maintained, though too far east for fashion. William Gaspey described Bloomsbury in 1852 as 'a kind of miniature or secondary west end',⁶ of genteel character, with well-to-do business families, some better-class lodging houses and professional men working from spacious homes. The British Museum was completed there in 1845.

The parish of St Giles-in-the-Fields belied its name, for its insanitary, overcrowded 'rookeries', especially between St Giles High Street and Great Russell Street, were perhaps the worst of London's slums. Around Seven Dials to the south respectable property of the late seventeenth century had deteriorated rapidly. Decaying properties were filled to bursting, shack dwellings filled yards, and warrens of interconnecting passages across whole blocks afforded a haven for criminals. This was where the Great Plague began. The parish was divided in 1730, and St George's, Bloomsbury, saved residents of the squares from braving the wretched streets to get to church. Parish charities were run jointly. Some of these 'dark and dismal alleys' were

4 Horace Mann, *Religious Worship in England and Wales*, 1854, pp.65, 85.

5 D.J. Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London*, Peregrine edn. 1979, pp.129f.

6 *Tallis's Illustrated London*, II, pp.24-5, 34-5. Quoted in Olsen.

cleared in building New Oxford Street, which from 1847 provided a direct route between City and West End. Endell Street opened in 1845, but Shaftesbury Avenue did not connect Bloomsbury with Piccadilly Circus until



A poor alley, by G. Doré

1886, with Charing Cross Road opening in 1887, its north end following the older Crown Street. Clearing parts only aggravated crowding in adjacent areas. By 1849 only a small slum area remained between New Oxford Street and St Giles High Street but there one and a quarter acres housed 2,850 people in ninety-five houses. A model lodging house, eighty feet long and six storeys high, was erected by the Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes in 1846 in George Street, directly behind the chapel site.⁷

When houses were sold for redevelopment it was hard to dislodge the inmates: 'in some houses, though the roofs have been taken off, they still remain'.⁸ The Duke of Bedford wrote in 1844, 'I cannot conceive what becomes of all the poor people who are compelled to leave their houses and lodgings for the improvements of the town.' The 1848 Annual Report of the Bloomsbury Dispensary, one of the parish charities, had the answer: some ejected families moved elsewhere, but 'by far the greater number continue in the neighbourhood, having crowded into the remaining courts and alleys, and are in no way changed in circumstances and habits.'⁹ The Dispensary pressed for improvements in sanitation, water supply, and refuse removal.

Bloomsbury Chapel rose between St Giles's and St George's, with two episcopal chapels as immediate neighbours, the proprietary Bedford Chapel to the north (1771), and the French Protestant Chapel of the Savoy (since 1845).¹⁰ Not far off was the Swiss Church in Moor Street, soon to move to

⁷ Harold P. Clunn, *The face of London*, n.d. but c.1952, pp.135f, 163ff.

⁸ *Builder*, II, 1848, p.239; Olsen, *op.cit.*, p.302.

⁹ Olsen, *op.cit.*, p.302; Bloomsbury Dispensary Minute Book, consulted at 17a Macklin St, WC2 in the 1970s..

¹⁰ George Clinch, *Bloomsbury and St Giles Past and Present*, 1890.



From left: French Protestant Chapel, French School, Bloomsbury Chapel, Bedford Chapel

Endell Street. Other small chapels around changed hands periodically. The nearest Roman Catholic church, in an area with many Irish, was St Patrick's, Soho Square. John Wesley had used West Street Chapel, Seven Dials, as his West End centre, but in 1798 the Methodists moved to Great Queen Street. Scottish Presbyterians had a chapel in Crown Court, Covent Garden, where Dr Cumming was a popular preacher, and another in Regent Square at the north of the Bedford estates. The Congregationalists had distinguished old churches at Poultry Chapel and King's Weigh House in the City, and a similar congregation gathered at Craven Chapel, off Regent Street, founded as a pious speculation by a layman in 1822. In 1840 this reached a peak at 900 members, with a company of thriving merchants and mechanics under Dr John Leifchild. Their Christian Instruction Society had one hundred visitors making house-to-house calls on Sunday afternoons, with a missionary paid to follow up contacts.¹¹ When he founded Bloomsbury, Morton Peto would have been aware of these churches.

¹¹ *ibid.*

The Baptists

Peto was a Baptist but of wide Christian sympathies, so Bloomsbury was never a ‘typical’ Baptist church, although only practising the baptism of believers. Baptists believe that each local ‘gathered community’ of believers is free to interpret Scripture for its own situation, guided by the Holy Spirit, with decisions taken by the Church Members’ Meeting. Wider groupings are co-ordinating and consultative, enabling rather than enforcing joint action. Churches are self-financing, depending almost entirely on members’ contributions, although they pool resources to aid weaker fellowships, educate ministers and sponsor evangelism. Members are expected to lead godly lives. Much time used to be spent on disciplining those who ‘walked disorderly’: offences included sexual immorality, drunkenness, theft, and debt.

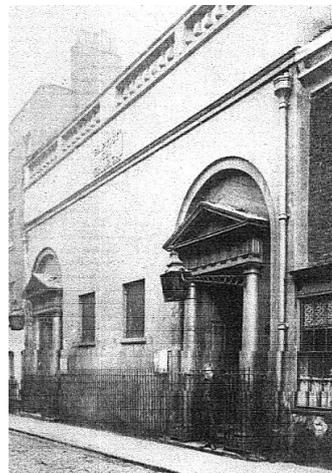
English Baptists emerged in the early seventeenth century. The first were Arminian in theology, believing in general redemption, and were called General Baptists, but soon the dominant group were the Calvinistic or Particular Baptists. Both strands contributed to Bloomsbury’s development. By the nineteenth century these distinctions were less sharp and what really mattered were ‘evangelical sentiments’. The Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), founded in 1792, fostered a sense of denominational identity. The General Union of Particular Baptists, founded in 1812, was reconstituted in 1832, enabling New Connexion General Baptists to join, and the two denominations eventually merged in 1891, while High Calvinists formed separate bodies of Strict and Particular Baptists. Evangelicals across the various churches worked closely together in many spheres. Down the years dissenters had been persecuted and then tolerated by the Established Church, but as the nineteenth century progressed they gradually won full civil rights.

Most early Baptists practised closed communion, admitting only baptized believers, but some had an open table, welcoming all who confessed Jesus as Lord. A few early churches¹² had open communion and open membership, treating ‘saints as saints’. By the mid-nineteenth century, open practice was re-emerging.

12 Notably Jessey’s in London, Broadmead in Bristol, New Road in Oxford, and John Bunyan’s and others in the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire County Union.

Baptists in West Central London

Baptist witness in the area west of the City began when the five General Baptist churches of London decided in 1688 to ‘spread the gospel in the suburbs of the city, which at that time were comparatively destitute of religion’. A new church was formed about 1700, but soon divided, the majority becoming Calvinists at Little Wild Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields. This prominent Particular Baptist church declined with the surrounding area in the early nineteenth century, as ‘the desire for suburban residences, now so general, led to the removal of several London families’.¹³ Another Baptist congregation in Holborn, Kingsgate Chapel, had seceded from Little Wild Street in 1736.



Little Wild Street Chapel

The *Baptist Magazine* listed in 1847 thirty-one churches with a total membership of 5,673 in the moribund ‘London Association’. That October another opened, Trinity Chapel in Leather Lane, about a mile to the east, ‘in the midst of a dark, depraved and dense population’, but this survived only a few months, dying with the founder.¹⁴ Even nearer to the Bloomsbury site were the Strict Baptist chapels in Keppel Street and Soho, and just along the road the Gower Street Memorial Chapel in Dudley Street (now Shaftesbury Avenue). John Street Chapel, Holborn, had a notable ministry from 1850 to 1868, under the prominent evangelical Anglican turned Baptist, the Hon. and Revd Baptist Wriothsley Noel.

Generally, however, London Baptist life was not vigorous. W.T. Whitley wrote of the ‘mid century lethargy of the metropolis’.¹⁵ George M’Cree, who came to London when Bloomsbury was founded, observed that in central London Baptist principles ‘were not always associated with the broader

¹³ C. Woollacott, *Brief History of the Baptist Church in Little Wild Street*, 1859, p.61.

¹⁴ W.T. Whitley, *Baptists of London*, 1928, p.171.

¹⁵ W.T. Whitley, *History of the British Baptists*, 2nd edition, 1932, p.310.

evangelical sympathies or the bolder Christian activities'.¹⁶ Hugh Stowell Brown, minister of Myrtle Street Baptist Church, Liverpool, described how country ministers would visit London expecting to find 'a large, intellectual, fashionable audience', and return from the cold, dead chapels with their small and elderly congregations, thinking the London brethren 'mean and miserable humbugs'.¹⁷ Baptist and Congregational churches, financially dependent on members whose virtues often enabled them to rise socially and move to better areas, tended to migrate with those members to the suburbs.

Morton Peto believed there was room for a new and rather different Nonconformist cause, which would attract the influential classes without neglecting the poor.

¹⁶ George Wilson M'Cree, *William Brock DD*, 1876, p.15. Hereafter cited as M'Cree, which was his preferred spelling. His son used McCree.

¹⁷ W.S. Caine, ed., *Hugh Stowell Brown*, 1887, pp.523f.

3

A SPACIOUS CHAPEL WAS ERECTED*'An edifice ... accessible equally to rich and poor'*

Charles Birrell

The founder, Morton Peto (1809-1889)

Samuel Morton Peto was born in Woking, Surrey, where his father was a tenant farmer.¹ At fourteen he was apprenticed to his builder uncle, Henry Peto, and did his share of bricklaying and carpentry. In 1830 Morton and his cousin, Thomas Grissell (1801-1874), a partner since 1825, inherited the business. They got on well together and in 1831 Peto married Grissell's sister Mary, settling in Albany Terrace, York Road, Lambeth.²

The business grew rapidly. They undertook many public works, like Hungerford Market, Clerkenwell Prison, theatres, clubs, and Nelson's Column. Civil engineering contracts included the Woolwich Graving Dock, and parts of the South Eastern and Great Western Railways, including Paddington and Reading Stations. In 1840 they embarked on a series of contracts for the new Houses of Parliament.

Mary Peto died in 1842, leaving three daughters and a son, Henry, who became a barrister. A second son, Morton, died just before his mother. The widower published a pamphlet, *Divine Support in Death*. The next year he married Sarah Ainsworth, a widow and eldest daughter of Henry Kelsall, Baptist textile manufacturer of Rochdale. She bore Peto a further seven sons³ and four daughters. Morton and Sarah's London home was at 47 Russell



Morton Peto
(Science Museum photo)

1 His mother, Sophia, was the daughter of Ralph Alloway of Dorking. Peto grew up in Cobham, Surrey, and Great Marlow, Bucks.

2 Main sources for this section are Henry Peto, *Sir Morton Peto: A Memorial Sketch*, private publication, 1893, and Edward C. Brooks, *Sir Samuel Morton Peto Bt: Eminent Victorian, Railway Entrepreneur, Country Square, MP*, Bury Clerical Society, 1996.

3 Including Harold (1854-1933) who, after education at Harrow, was apprenticed in the building trade like his father but then became first an architect, the partner of Ernest George who trained Lutyens, and later a landscape and garden planner. See Brooks, *op.cit.*, who supplies a family tree.

Square until 1854, when they moved to 12 Kensington Palace Gardens.⁴ Peto had a succession of country houses: Theobalds in Hertfordshire, Bracondale near Norwich, and from 1844 Somerleyton Hall in Suffolk,⁵ which he rebuilt. Pevsner described it as ‘more Jacobean than any original Jacobean home ... unabashedly sham-Jacobean and therefore as Victorian as it can be.’⁶ Peto was a keen patron of the arts, with the exotic taste of a wealthy Victorian. Somerleyton’s Winter Garden echoed the Crystal Palace. He restored the Somerleyton church, built Union Chapel for dissenters within his grounds, and constructed a quaint model village for his workers, over which the *Illustrated London News* enthused: ‘The houses are particularly neat and well-finished, each containing six rooms fitted with every convenience and comfort. There are thirty-five in number. The whole are occupied by labouring men’. Peto also turned his attention to nearby Lowestoft. The railway arrived in 1847 and he completed the harbour, begun by the Admiralty in 1814 but left



Somerleyton

unfinished. He actively developed a mixed economy, the railway opening the market for fresh herrings in the Midlands and North and bringing new seaside holiday trade to Lowestoft. Pevsner said the area south of the harbour ought to be remembered as ‘Peto-town.’

Railway contracts were too risky for Grissell and the cousins amicably dissolved their partnership in 1846, Grissell taking building contracts and Peto the railway work, with £25,000 worth of plant. A new partnership with Edward Ladd Betts (1815-72), husband of Peto’s sister Ann, lasted until Betts’ death. Peto negotiated contracts, while Betts supervised the work. Unlike some contractors, they refused to resort to bribery, although this lost them some work. With Thomas Brassey, they built railways in Norway, Denmark and Canada. Peto and Betts also worked in Argentina, Russia and Algeria. In Britain their railways included Oxford to Birmingham, and Peterborough to

4 Built by Grissell who lived at no.13. In 1861 the Peto household was the largest in the road with twelve resident family members and sixteen servants.

5 Henry Peto says 1844. *Illustrated London News*, 10 January 1857, pp.24-6, describes Somerleyton and gives the purchase date as 1846.

6 Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Suffolk*, 1961. For full details of Peto’s Somerleyton and Lowestoft, see Brooks, *op.cit.*, pp.46ff.

Doncaster, with an East Anglian network. They weathered a financial crisis in 1847. Good at his work, Peto was less gifted in high finance. In 1851, in a capital beset with cholera, Peto was appointed a Commissioner for Sewers in London and advocated building large brick sewers rather than laying pipes under the roads. The next year, with Sir Henry Cole, he built London's first public lavatories.

Peto enjoyed the trappings of wealth, including the scope for generosity, giving away huge sums in public and private benefactions. Contemporary writers agree in describing his dignity, courtesy and high principles. 'His reputation was made on the basis of fair dealing: he delivered what he promised to the railway companies he dealt with around the world, and he treated those who worked for him with equally scrupulous fairness'.⁷

He was a conspicuously good employer. Terry Coleman, in his study *The Railway Navvies*,⁸ repeatedly stresses how caring and popular were Peto and the other great contractor, Brassey. With the enormous scale of their operations, they had a vested interest in looking after their men. In contrast to others who worked through subcontractors, Peto and Brassey employed their navvies directly, worked them hard, and expected to make proper provision for them in return. Peto detested the 'truck' system of payment in poor kind and always paid 'current coin of the realm'. In that, as in 'his concern for the sobriety and safety of his men, Peto was unusual'. Seconding the Address to the Crown in 1851, Peto told the House of Commons:

I know from personal experience that if you pay him [the labouring man] well, and show you care for him, he is the most faithful and hardworking creature in existence ... Give him legitimate occupation, and remuneration for his services, show him you appreciate those services, and you may be sure you put an end to all agitation.

Beer was not sold on his works, but he did not forbid drinking, because 'A man has a right to bring a gallon with him if he likes in the morning'.⁹

'Sir Morton set an example to employers by the manner in which he provided for the religious instruction and personal improvement of the thousands who worked for him'.¹⁰ He employed lay missionaries (ten or eleven in 1846) to work among his navvies.

⁷ Anthony Burton, *The Railway Empire*, London 1994, pp.24-5.

⁸ Penguin 1968. See esp. pp.58,172-4, 212-20.

⁹ Evidence to Select Committee on Railway Labourers, 1846, quoted by Coleman.

¹⁰ The four-page obituary in the *Baptist Magazine*, December 1889.

It was difficult, he said, to get a man who had received a university education and moved in a higher class of society to come down to the level of the men. Some could, but they were the exception. Generally clergymen could not get through to the men as well as a lay reader who lived among them. It was, Peto thought, not the preaching that did good, but the being among them, sitting down together and talking matters over in a more familiar way.¹¹

Edward Stanley (Bishop of Norwich, 1837-1849, and a reformer who greatly improved the care of parishes in his diocese) noted the success of Peto's exertions for the navvies' moral benefit: gin shops were deserted and the missionaries' schools full. The Dean of Ely was impressed with Peto's navvies, commenting, 'in my district I have never had so little criminal magisterial business during the period I have had a seat on the bench as during the progress of the works on the Eastern Counties Railway under Mr Peto; although for a period of two years three thousand of his men have been in my immediate vicinity'.¹²

Public service

In 1847 Peto stood as Whig candidate for Norwich, the first Baptist to enter Parliament since 1784 and 'perhaps the most distinguished Nonconformist of his day'.¹³ His chief concerns were Free Trade, working class conditions, and religious disabilities. The Trustee Act 1850, 'Peto's Act', simplified the administration of property held in trust for religious or educational purposes and was 'of signal advantage' to Nonconformist churches.¹⁴ The Whig leadership invited him to second the address to the Crown in 1851, and Peto, a loyal but not uncritical party member, used the opportunity to endorse Free Trade. The *Illustrated London News*, 8 February 1851, enthused: governments were now looking for seconders who were not only competent but also

whose personal character and position shall guarantee, as far as possible, the honesty and disinterestedness of their advocacy. These requirements are possessed in an eminent degree by the member for Norwich. Identified with the people, of popular predilections, and, in his own

11 Coleman, p.172, based on Select Committee evidence.

12 Bishop and Dean spoke at the opening of eighty miles of Eastern Counties Railway in 1845. *Illustrated London News*, 8 February 1851.

13 See D.W. Bebbington, 'Baptist Members of Parliament, 1847-1914', *Baptist Quarterly* XXIX, April 1981, p.53.

14 *Baptist Magazine* obituary, December 1889.

person, a natural type and exponent of the material progress of the country, the splendid amplitude of his fortune exempts him from susceptibility to official blandishment ... Hence the moral value attached to the support of such men as Mr Peto - a value that ... was greatly enhanced by the sobriety of view, solidity of judgment, and manly tone which characterised his ... speech.

The article quotes the late Bishop Stanley saying he 'envied the sect to which he [Peto] belonged the possession of such a man, and he would gladly purchase him at his own price; and heartily he prayed that he would ere long become a member of the Church of England'. In 1854 Peto supported the Church Rates Abolition Bill, declaring:

If half the money which was expended on our cathedral establishments were devoted to city missions, to the augmentation of the incomes of the poorer clergy, and to the placing of clergymen where none at present existed, the Church of England would have a much stronger hold on the feelings and affections of the people of England...

That December, concerned at reports from the Crimea, Peto left Parliament to build a supply railway 'without profit or remuneration', from Balaclava harbour to the army encampment at Sebastopol.¹⁵ Peto sent three doctors and three chaplains with his 200 skilled workers and 300 experienced, well-paid and well-equipped navvies, in marked contrast to the mismanaged army. Brassey helped and by mid-April the twenty-nine mile line was ready. The navvies returned home heroes, the contractors to acclaim. Peto, the initiator, was made a baronet.

He returned to Parliament in 1859 as Liberal member for Finsbury, and from 1864 for Bristol. He thrice introduced unsuccessful bills to permit Nonconformist burials in parish churchyards; a Burial Act was eventually passed in 1880, in time for Peto's own interment. In 1863 he published *Taxation: Its Levy and Expenditure, Past and Future*, criticising Palmerston's short-sighted overspending, especially on defence. Peto was a Commissioner for the Great Exhibition of 1851, having been first to guarantee £50,000 to get the project under way. He was Deputy Lieutenant for Suffolk, a Justice of the Peace for Middlesex, on the Court of the Fishmongers Company, and a director of the Rock Life Assurance, North of Europe Steam Navigation and Electric Telegraph Companies.

15 *The Times* obituary, 15 November 1889. See also Burton, *op.cit.*, p.80.

Christian activist

The mainspring of Peto's character, wrote his son, was religion. Brought up among Independents, after his second marriage, he joined Devonshire Square, an open Baptist Church. Peto was Treasurer of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) from 1846 to 1867, maintained a regular correspondence with missionaries overseas, and supported schemes to provide for aged and infirm Baptist ministers.¹⁶ He was Chairman of the Dissenting Deputies in 1853-55 and 1863-67, and a Trustee of Lady Hewley's Charity from 1849 to his death.¹⁷ His Christian sympathies were wide.



Morton Peto MP

He never looked upon his gifts as a substitute for personal labour. Even in his busiest days, when he might have been supposed to be absorbed in public affairs, he took a direct interest in every branch of Christian and philanthropic work, and where sympathy and help were concerned, he never deputed to another what he could do himself.¹⁸

'One of the first to discern the remarkable gifts of Mr Spurgeon',¹⁹ Peto later laid the foundation stone of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, to which he contributed £5,000. Spurgeon observed in 1859, 'Sir Morton is a man who builds one chapel with the hope that it will be the seedling for another'.²⁰ Peto was the leading spirit in forming the Metropolitan Chapel Building Fund in 1851, 'to erect ... commodious Chapels seating not fewer than 600 persons each' within eight miles of the General Post Office.²¹ This Fund merged with

16 W. Cathcart, ed., *Baptist Encyclopaedia*, Philadelphia, 1881, 'Peto'.

34 Lady Hewley was a Trinitarian Evangelical Dissenter; her Trust was established in 1704, but was gradually taken over by Unitarians. In 1826 a Commission was established by Act of Parliament 'to enquire into and correct the abuses of funds and estates settled for charitable uses' and after Chancery proceedings the Unitarian trustees were ousted for breach of trust. Legal disputes continued between the new trustees. Morton Peto was brought in to help settle differences, securing an interest for Baptists. The Trust helps ministers in the north of England. Under the Charity Commissioner's Scheme of 1881 Sir Morton was appointed a Grand Trustee of the Lady Hewley Trust. Information supplied by G. Neil Glover of Leeds.

18 *Baptist Magazine* obituary.

19 Cathcart, *op.cit.*

20 C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, II, p.329.

21 Seymour J. Price, *A Popular History of the Baptist Building Fund 1824-1924*, p.99.

the Baptist Building Fund in 1858. Seymour Price considered it would have achieved more had Peto been able to spare more time to direct and inspire policy. Many churches benefited from Peto's generosity and he was directly responsible for Regent's Park and Notting Hill Chapels, where William Landels and James Spurgeon ministered respectively, as well as Bloomsbury. He was instrumental in obtaining Holford House, Regent's Park, for the college formerly in Stepney.

The American *Baptist Encyclopaedia*, 1881, declared, 'The rapid growth of the Baptists in London and the neighbourhood during the last twenty-five years is largely due to the liberality and energy of Sir Morton Peto'. The eventual bankruptcy of a man so respected for his high principles must have shocked many people, and caused many Baptists to turn their backs on him, but the *Freeman* obituary was still proud to claim that 'Among the high places ... Sir Morton Peto was never ashamed of his religious faith or of the denomination to which he gave his support'.²²

Strategic church planter

When Mr Peto, in 1848, made large offers of pecuniary aid to any united effort to erect a place of worship suited to the times, they fell to the ground. It was not until he failed to obtain co-operation that he proceeded to act independently and to give effect to his own design, which was to obtain a site for an edifice that should actually meet the eyes of the people, and be accessible equally to rich and poor.²³

Thus C.M. Birrell recalls the birth of the Bloomsbury project. The Baptist press does not appear to record such an appeal. Peto may well have trailed the idea informally, but when a good opportunity arose it would have been like him to press ahead, backing his vision with his own money. The erection of Bloomsbury Chapel and arrangements to begin ministry were Peto's venture. Peto the Baptist was anxious to spread the Gospel. Peto the builder and MP wanted prominent chapels to reflect the improving status of Nonconformity.

London dissenters had long worshipped in unobtrusive meeting houses, hidden behind dwellings and shops, in upper rooms, on inner courts and along back streets. Charles McCree, Anglican son of Bloomsbury's Domestic Missionary, regretted this legacy of 'religious intolerance':

²² 22 November 1889.

²³ Charles M. Birrell, *The life of William Brock, DD: First minister of Bloomsbury Chapel, London, 1878*, p.171. Hereafter simply cited as Birrell.

the two neighbouring Baptist chapels, Soho and Keppel Street, ... would have been found up a gateway, and very difficult to find at night, say at an anniversary tea meeting, when strangers had to discover their destination as best they could. Who would ever expect to find such a splendid chapel as Craven Chapel, where it stands, pushed back out of the way, hidden, as though it were ashamed of itself; or, cross the Thames and what do we find in the Borough Road? The chapel ... is carefully guarded by a pawnbroker's.²⁴

Victorian Nonconformists wanted a better public image. Presbyterians were first to build prominent London chapels.²⁵ In 1841 the Congregationalists built Westminster Chapel, a proud building though tucked away. The *Congregational Year Book* in 1847 declared: 'We have no need to *build* barn-like places of worship; when money is to be spent for the service of God, we are bound to use it with taste and judgment, so as to attract rather than repel persons of intelligence and respectability.' John Street Chapel, Holborn (1818) boasted a Greek portico; although this was used by Baptists, its founder, Henry Drummond, 'had not been nurtured in Nonconformist timidity'.²⁶

Peto, with his town house in Russell Square, looked to Bloomsbury. New Oxford Street was being extended east to the City and, crossing it, the continuation of Gower Street was widened as Bloomsbury Street. Here, between the residential squares of Bloomsbury and the grim slums of St Giles, Peto deliberately planted his chapel.

A spacious chapel was erected

The site was Crown property and, under 'Metropolis Improvements, Oxford Street to Holborn', Peto leased it²⁷ for eighty years from 25 March 1847 from the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Woods and Forests, Land Revenues, Works and Buildings.²⁸ In London a lease was only granted when the carcass of a building had been erected, but it must have been negotiated in principle before building began. Leasing the site might seem short-sighted but often

24 C.W. McCree, *George Wilson McCree: A Memoir*, 1893, pp.27-8.

25 Newington Green (1708), Stamford Street, Southwark (1823), and the 'Scotch Church' in Regent Square (1825). I am grateful for information supplied by Mr Christopher Stell of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments

26 Birrell, *op.cit.*, p.170.

27 Lease now held by London Baptist Property Board.

28 Later Ministry of Works, now part of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

there was no choice: 'The system of leases had long worked disastrously for dissenters. They had been so anxious to acquire any sort of site, that again and again they had been content to take leases and then to erect their own meeting-houses on the land, with no guarantee that the lease would be renewed.'²⁹

Tradition³⁰ says the Chief Commissioner, Lord Morpeth,³¹ wanted the building screened by houses. If Peto wanted a prominent position, 'the edifice should have an ecclesiastical character ... *If* it had been a building with a *spire* ...'. Peto promised him two. The towers below the decorative spires were utilized for stairs and ventilation.

The area has changed considerably since the chapel first went up. In 1848 it faced on to Bloomsbury Street East, now the northern end of Shaftesbury Avenue; behind was West George Street, now Dyott Street; to the north lay 'Phoenix Street (lately called Plumtree Street)', now Bucknall Street.

The lease required the premises to be kept in good repair, with exterior redecoration every four years and the interior every eight, with two coats of 'good oil paint', when the high ceilings had to be washed, scraped and rewhitened. An additional clause against misuse gives a flavour of the times: 'the said Samuel Morton Peto ... shall not ... permit or suffer to be used exercised or carried on upon the said premises or any part thereof the Trades of a Publican, Tripe Boiler, Tripe Seller, Slaughterman, Soap Boiler, Tallow Melter, Blacksmith, Farrier, Chimney Sweeper or Brothel Keeper or any other noxious noisy or offensive Trade ...'

Peto's ecclesiastical edifice is described by Pevsner: 'White brick. Broad front with two towers carrying spires. Norman or generally Romanesque forms; big rose-window. The top storey between the towers is a later addition. Originally there was a big gable there.'³² More detailed contemporary descriptions appeared in *The Builder*,³³ *The Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal* and the *Illustrated London News*, the latter particularly enthusiastic:

This Chapel ... is one of the very best, in point of design and character, lately erected in the metropolis. The Chapel stands ... between the neat

29 W.T. Whitley, *A History of British Baptists*, 1923, p.286. Whitley observes that many London churches had been crippled or extinguished by this in the eighteenth century.

30 Birrell, pp.171-2; M'Cree, p.15; Seymour J. Price, *Bloomsbury* (centenary booklet), 1948, p.1.

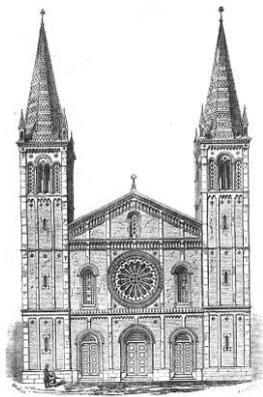
31 George Howard, who succeeded as Earl of Carlisle in 1848 and is so named in M'Cree's account.

32 Nikolaus Pevsner, *London*, I, 1957, p.270. Pevsner says it was built between 1845-48. *The Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal*, May 1848, remarks that 'the building was begun only last autumn', and thought the hitherto unknown architect competent, although the doors might have been recessed deeper with the mouldings in greater relief.

33 *The Builder* VI, 1848, 271, pp.1867f.

Gothic Church belonging to the French Protestants, and the tasteless pile of building known as Bedford Chapel, the latter acting as a good foil to set off the elegant character and design of the new Chapel ... The interior of the Chapel is peculiarly chaste and elegant.³⁴

Thomas Tefft, an American architect, had a copy of this journal and used the design as the basis for his Central Congregational Church in Providence, Rhode Island.³⁵ The Chapel was designed by John Gibson, whom Peto may have met at work on the Houses of Parliament,³⁶ and built by Locke & Nesham. It was almost square, 70 feet



Architect's drawing

(21m) wide at the front, with a roof span of 65 feet (20m) clear of supports and the interior chapel height 39 feet (12m). The height to the top of the spires was 115 feet (35m). The ground floor had pews for 460, two vestries and a vestibule. A gallery round three sides seated 470, with an upper gallery for 250 children. The organ gallery occupied the fourth side, behind the pulpit. The original organ is not described, but in 1850 Henry Willis altered and improved it. The towers housed stairs to galleries and basement schoolroom.

The white brick was faced with Caen stone. 'A degree of ornament' was achieved 'by simply omitting bricks in a regular pattern', noted *The Builder*. The *Illustrated London News* liked the spires, timber-framed and hung with ornamental red tiles: 'an excellent and striking feature is gained without any additional expense. This example is well worthy of study: and our architects would do well to try how colour could be effectively used in exterior decoration, without adding to the cost of the structures they are called on to design.' The pews were of bare wood, scrubbed clean until varnished in 1853. Their arrangement was maze-like, not the semi-circular pattern of today, for in

³⁴ *Illustrated London News*, 9 December 1848, p.356.

³⁵ Information from Professor Kathleen Curran, architectural historian of Brown University, Providence, in a letter to the Revd Barrie Hibbert, 23 August 1987, after a visit to see the chapel that influenced the design of a number in America.

³⁶ John Gibson (1817-1892) was a pupil of Sir Charles Barry, working under him on the Houses of Parliament. His first major work was the National Bank of Scotland in Glasgow in 1844; 'other works ensued of which the earliest and not the least important was the Romanesque Bloomsbury Chapel'. In 1890 he received the Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, of which he was an Associate (1849), Fellow (1853), and Vice-President. *DNB*

the 1905 refurbishments: 'The old box pews, in which a past generation fastened themselves up and suffered many things from the uprightiness of the back and the height of the seats, have disappeared ... Gone, too, is the old arrangement of the seats, as in a puzzle.'³⁷

There are no pictures of the Victorian interior. The panelled ceiling, the line of the gallery (the balustrade is later), and rose window are all that remain. The window, 18'6" (5.6m) in diameter, a prominent external feature, was largely hidden inside by the upper gallery until the 1960s.

The chapel cost £8,700 to erect; Peto spent over £10,000 on building and equipment. The *Baptist Magazine* noted that Peto gave over half and paid the ground rent, leaving a mortgage of £4,000, for the church to repay.

With a building worthy of Somerleyton's owner under way, Peto sought a pioneer minister: his choice fell upon his friend, William Brock, pastor of St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich. As the *Baptist Magazine* for September



Rose window, as originally hidden by the 'bird cage'

1848 recorded:

A conspicuous and elegant place of worship has been erected in Bloomsbury-street by Mr Peto ... It is hoped that the ministry of Mr

³⁷ *Baptist Times*, 5 May 1905, p.320.

Brock there will attract a congregation within which, after a time, a church may be formed.

The founding minister: William Brock (1807-1875)

William Brock was born in Honiton, Devon, on 14 February 1807. His early experience, recorded by his biographer quoting from Brock's reminiscences,³⁸ underlay his care for the poor, his concern for education, and his views on open communion.

His father, a tradesman from a General Baptist family which had drifted into Unitarianism, was converted by evangelical Baptists while visiting London. He became an early Sunday School teacher and distributor of religious literature. In 1806 he married a minister's daughter, but died five years later, leaving three small children. As a dissenter, he was buried 'with the gypsies' beyond the consecrated ground of Honiton churchyard, a factor in his son's dislike of Anglican establishment.



William Brock in 1842

Young William, the eldest child, enjoyed his first 'dame school'. At the age of six, he was sent to the boarding school run by the pastor of Culmstock, his grandmother's second husband. Two years later Mrs Brock claimed a free place at Honiton Grammar School, which was 'aristocratical and high church', teaching Classics to sons of lesser gentry and clergy - not ideal for the son of a dissenting tradesman! In 1818 a small legacy enabled Brock to go to an 'English school' for six months, then for one delightful term to a 'very select' school kept by Charles Sharp, Baptist minister at Bradninch. Sharp, 'an indefatigable educationist', had been Assistant Master at Mill Hill School in London. He ministered for thirty-one years from 1813 to the new Particular Baptist church, with open communion, at Bradninch and established the flourishing school there.³⁹

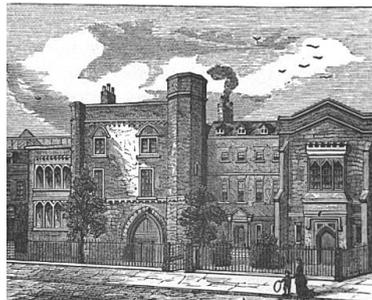
³⁸ Birrell is the main source for Brock's early years and his ministry at Norwich.

³⁹ B.E. Horlick, *The Story of Bradninch Chapel*, Exeter 1913. The school's 1878 building was still in use,

In 1820 Brock's mother remarried and William was apprenticed to a Sidmouth watchmaker. The household proved ill-tempered, illiterate and mean. Brock found devotions drew taunts indoors, so 'on considering the matter I concluded that I might read and pray elsewhere' and found his quiet place on a cliff. He had not yet made a profession of faith and later reflected that 'plausible and captivating ungodliness might have gained me. By vicious and violent ungodliness, I was repelled'. Sundays at the Independent Chapel were the bright spot in his life. He began to teach in Sunday School and read the Scriptures with a poor, blind, bedridden Christian, who helped the youth greatly. Church folk lent books and the *Evangelical Magazine*, and on Saturday evenings he got 'sight of a newspaper'. Any money he had was spent on a bookhawker's monthly visit.

In 1828 Brock moved to Hertford as a journeyman watchmaker, working thirteen hours a day. He went first to an Independent chapel, but made friends with Mr Nicholas, an 'oldish' travelling dealer in lace and fine goods and Baptist lay preacher at Colliers End. The godly pedlar offered Brock lodgings and encouraged him to read theology, including the evangelical works of Andrew Fuller. In April 1829 Brock's uncle, the Revd Edward Lewis, baptized him at Highgate Baptist Church. Mr Nicholas coaxed Brock to help at Colliers End until eventually the young man offered to preach when his friend was ill.

Brock applied to train for ministry at Stepney College, whose President, Dr William Harris Murch, had been a Honiton friend of his father. College legend told how Brock appeared at Dr Murch's door 'in a white hat and yellow waistcoat with bright buttons'. Murch, gravely humorous, observed, "You will find that style ... rather conspicuous when you become a student in this grim college."⁴⁰ Murch had trained at Wymondley Academy, under William Parry, 'the avowed and unshaken advocate for freedom of enquiry',⁴¹ so Stepney students did not learn



Stepney College

(..continued)

rented from the chapel by the Local Education Authority, when the author visited the chapel in 1992. Bradninch, near Cullompton, used to be a market town in its own right.

40 R.E. Cooper, *From Stepney to St Giles: the story of Regent's Park College 1810-1960*, 1960, pp.48f.

41 *ibid.*

defensive attitudes to scripture.

With four others, Brock was sent for six months to William Hawkins, an Edinburgh graduate and pastor at Derby. Teaching English, Latin, Greek and Algebra, as well as theology, Hawkins showed them how to study.⁴² Brock entered Stepney College in September 1830. First-year students were encouraged to hear experienced preachers: Brock favoured Dr Andrew Reed of Wycliffe Congregational Church in Whitechapel, Dr Thomas Binney at the King's Weigh House (1829-69), Dr John Leifchild of Craven Chapel (1831-54), and two Baptists, Dr Thomas Price of Devonshire Square and Charles Stovel (1799-1883) of Prescott Street, Woolwich. Students themselves practised open-air preaching on Whitechapel Road and the notorious Ratcliffe Highway, 'an excellent school for young preachers'! Brock was energetic and successful in this sphere.

Brock's very first sermon had been on 'The Friendship of Christ'. 'Tutors and students were fairly electrified' by his first college sermon, 'The love of Christ constraineth us', according to fellow-student, J.B. Pike, who heard many sermons there: 'some doubtless characterised by greater intellectual power or more of exegetical acumen, but never one which produced so general and deep an impression'. Intense passion already underlay Brock's controlled delivery.

In 1832 the ancient Maze Pond church in Southwark, 'the most aristocratical of the denomination in London', invited Brock to preach repeatedly, and act as student pastor during the vacation. Then he was asked to preach at St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich, where the redoubtable Joseph Kinghorn, leading advocate of closed communion, had ministered for forty-three years. Brock thought Dr Murch wrong to let such churches seek his half-trained services, but both offered trial pastorates. After preaching once more in Norwich, Brock was invited, unusually without further probation, on condition he would not preach against strict communion.

42 Charles B. Jewson, 'William Hawkins, 1790-1853', *Baptist Quarterly*, 26, 1976, pp.279-80.

Norwich pastorate

So in July 1833 the Devon watchmaker, twenty-six years old, his theological training incomplete, succeeded a venerable minister in the great city of East Anglia. Norwich Nonconformity was strong, intelligent and cultured. The big, shaggy countryman was very different from the refined Kinghorn. Brock was amused by an overheard remark, 'We have got a *ploughman* for a minister now!'⁴³ Among the deacons was Mr Hawkins, the father of his former tutor. Brock was paid £124 a year initially, rising to £175.⁴⁴

At first Brock spent two working days on each sermon, writing it twice over: he could only manage one and a midweek address. Stepney students helped until he could cope alone (the travel involved, over a hundred miles each way, suggests a considerable commitment to their friend). Brock had little experience of settled church life and found the conduct of church meetings difficult. Aware of deficiencies in his education, he encouraged senior brethren to offer constructive criticism. Several lay friends knew Greek and Hebrew. Mr Youngman set Brock a weekly paper for discussion 'on some of the deeper points of philosophy and faith'. When Youngman died in 1837, Brock wrote: 'he indoctrinated me with cautiousness against prejudice and prepossession, which has been invaluable to me ever since. He originated the habit of thinking freely and broadly'. He found a good library at the Norwich Literary Institution and appreciated symposia at the Old Meeting Book Club. With the younger Andrew Reed of the Old Meeting, Brock edited the *Church Expositor*, himself writing on church history and the Oxford Movement.

Throat trouble often prevented him from preaching. One doctor diagnosed 'pulmonary disease' and declined to recommend the young man for life assurance. In April 1834 he tendered his resignation, but the church sent him to Devon for prolonged convalescence. He kept in correspondence with his church and a deacon, Jeremiah Colman of the mustard family, travelled to Plymouth to see Brock and his doctor and ensure everything possible was being done. While recovering, a Plymouth friend took him to Gloucestershire and at Shortwood Baptist Church, Nailsworth, he met Mary Bliss. Within a fortnight she agreed to become his wife. Though impulsive by nature, Brock felt such speed was only possible because Mary was the answer to urgent prayer for the support of a good wife. Andrew Reed later gave her a fine

43 Birrell, *op.cit.*, p.84.

44 Norfolk County Record Office, ref.F6/14, Account Book: St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich. Mr Adrian Vaughan kindly sent me this information in 1997.

epitaph: ‘Naturally quiet and retiring, she never did harm or caused distress, but sustained her husband nobly’.

Joseph Kinghorn had argued the case for closed communion in prolonged debate with Robert Hall. Brock, whose youth was spent among Independents, shared Hall’s open convictions. Knowing this, St Mary’s had made him agree to ‘do and say nothing to effect an alteration in the existing order’. After five years Brock decided this was no longer possible and resigned. The church re-appointed him, allowing him to *teach* freely, but not to admit anyone to communion or membership without the church’s sanction. Some people baptized in infancy were drawn to his congregation and did not wish to repeat the rite as believers, so Brock held open communion services in his own house, and later, as numbers grew, at a separate service in the chapel. The church consented but with a number of objectors, including two trustees who threatened legal proceedings. Later they brought a Chancery case against his successor.⁴⁵

Meanwhile membership rose from 150 to 400, with regular congregations of 1,000. The chapel had to be enlarged. He moved the afternoon service to Sunday evening, when:

An audience of a more miscellaneous kind was obtained, and the ministry insensibly assumed a more varied character. Subjects arising out of common life, or relating to public questions and prevalent social discussions, were handled in a manner calculated to interest the most careless persons, and to win their confidence in religious teachers. He endeavoured not to assume too much acquaintance with the Bible on the part of these hearers ...⁴⁶

People found ‘He compels us to listen and think, for he speaks as if he meant it’. The Religious Tract Society published some of these *Fraternal Appeals to Young Men*. Bishop Stanley expressed his pleasure in this ‘excellent little work’, especially the chapter on ‘Scepticism’.⁴⁷

Brock was on good terms with other Norwich church leaders. People responded to him with respect and affection. The Bishop, supportive of many causes dear also to Brock, helped the development of good ecumenical relations. In 1841 he sent Brock Archdeacon Hare’s charge to his clergy. Of Brock’s opinion and the Archdeacon’s response, the Bishop observed: ‘If all Christians differed and discussed their differences in his and your temper, we

⁴⁵ See E.A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A short history*, 1958, pp.88-9.

⁴⁶ Birrell, p.116.

⁴⁷ Birrell, p.117.

might hope for a wider diffusion of Christian spirit than now prevails amongst the controversial leaders of the religious world'. Brock had objected to the distinction, 'a church is a house of prayer, a meeting-house is a house of preaching' and defended dissenters' prayer:

on Lord's days two hours are spent in prayer and supplication, - sometimes considerably more and never less. Such is the practice of my own congregation, and it forms no exception to the general rule. Besides this, there are two services during the week, expressly for prayer, extending to an hour or an hour and a half, and a general service, of which prayer is a prominent part.

Bishop Stanley had scientific interests and 'was one of the first clergyman who ventured to lecture on the then suspected science of geology'.⁴⁸ Brock, who was neither a scientist nor disturbed by the new discoveries in geology and biology which alarmed many Christians, would have heard or read the Bishop in forming his own response to contemporary science.

Brock wrote to Mrs Peto, defending the late Dr Arnold of Rugby against charges that he was unevangelical and unspiritual: 'The truth is, Arnold had a strong aversion to the Evangelicals on account of their narrow-mindedness and sanctimoniousness'. Brock shared Arnold's dislike of 'these two horrid things'.⁴⁹

Although he loved these Anglican brothers, he opposed the Church of England's relationship to the state, and supported the Voluntary Church Society, later Liberation Society, which pressed for disestablishment. He led the dissenting majority in his home parish to withhold the compulsory church rate but make an equal voluntary contribution. Brock nearly went to prison over this.

He campaigned for the BMS, instituting an annual visitation of Norfolk churches, and personally driving deputations around the county. Never a good walker or rider, he drove horses skillfully so owners were happy to lend them.⁵⁰ He wrote regularly to missionaries, and backed William Knibb's mobilization of Baptists for abolition of slavery in the British Empire.⁵¹

Brock was 'the first publicly to attack the inveterate custom of political bribery in Norwich'.⁵² He was joined by other pastors - to the extreme

48 Entry in *DNB*.

49 Birrell, p.133.

50 Birrell, *op.cit.*, p.111.

51 *DNB* highlights this in the account of Brock.

52 Birrell, pp.139f. *DNB*.

annoyance of their flocks, causing a commotion in the city.⁵³ Giving or receiving bribes at an election, usual practice then, was made a matter of church discipline, with two excluded from St Mary's - one had taken bribes from both parties!⁵⁴ On 10 June 1841 Brock gave a public lecture on 'The Duty of Professing Christians in relation to the Elective Franchise',⁵⁵ urging them to use their votes thoughtfully, fearlessly and with integrity: 'You did not cease to be a citizen when you became a Christian, nor do you cease to be a Christian when engaged in acting as a citizen'.

When near Norwich, Morton Peto worshipped at St Mary's and they became friends. Brock recruited and supervised Peto's lay missionaries. In 1847 Brock stayed with the Petos in London while receiving treatment for serious eye trouble, but in the General Election that year Brock found himself morally obliged to support the disestablishment candidate, Serjeant Parry, against Peto, who disclaimed 'all hostility to the Church of England'. Dissenting friends, including Dr Thomas Price, advised him not to adopt so painful a position but Brock persisted, decisive in public and wretchedly torn in private. After the election, Peto wrote, assuring Brock he respected his stand. Their friendship survived undamaged. Andrew Reed wrote of Brock:

The personal affection he inspired was very strong and warm. With all his sharp decision he was so genial; his serious look soon melted into sympathy ... Large and great he was, but he could stoop so winningly; impetuous and impatient, no doubt, by nature, yet love could calm and tame his force. It was so natural to him to call all his friends and adherents by their Christian names, that he seemed the father of a fond family, and he could do almost anything with them, for he knew both how to command and to reward.

All over Norwich his name was a household word of respect ... He used to talk very freely in all sorts of society, and thus, as well as by reading, he learned the ideas of all classes of people, and was helped to comprehend the general feeling ...⁵⁶

53 C.B. Jewson, *The Baptists of Norfolk*, 1957.

54 Jewson, *op.cit.*

55 Later published by Josiah Fletcher, Norwich, 1845.

56 Birrell, p.127.

The call to Bloomsbury

Brock declined invitations to succeed Dr Price at Devonshire Square and to become Secretary of the BMS. Twice Broadmead, the old-established 'open' church in Bristol, failed to coax him from Norwich. Now this able and attractive man, uncomfortable with a closed membership church, was advised by doctors to leave damp East Anglia. Peto invited him to pioneer work at Bloomsbury. Brock expressed grave doubts:

I am in trouble lest my ministry should turn out to be unsuitable for the congregation you desire to see at Bloomsbury. My own impression is that the ability which God has given me is not of the kind which is wanted there ... I am not unmindful of the all-sufficiency of the Holy Spirit ... but it is given to men in their right places, and I do not know that Bloomsbury is my right place.

Then I am apprehensive of much discomfort in consequence of the follies and the fashionableness prevailing so extensively among professing Christians ... I am greatly disquieted at the prospect of a congregation composed principally of persons whose wealth, tastes, and tendencies would lead them complacently to associate with ungodly men.

Then I cannot hide from myself that my course on many public questions is deemed by many persons unjustifiable in the extreme. Not being able to bring myself to the opinion that ministers of the Gospel should let all public matters alone, I am not likely to. My religion compels me to be the citizen throughout ...⁵⁷

Brock feared this might endanger the project, but Peto, who knew Brock was no puppet to be manipulated, persuaded him to accept, and in the polluted yet drier air of Victorian London Brock's health was restored.

Peto made him take a two-month break between jobs, believing there was 'Nothing like beginning well and keeping on quietly', as first impressions were important. Thinking that 'the town missionary in Norwich might possibly prove helpful in the Metropolis',⁵⁸ they also brought George M'Cree to Bloomsbury as 'Domestic Missionary'.

⁵⁷ Birrell, pp.160-162.

⁵⁸ C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, p.26.

4

A CONGREGATION GATHERED

'Nothing like beginning well'

Morton Peto

The opening

Bloomsbury Chapel opened at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, 5 December 1848.

The occasion was regarded as an epoch in the history of London Nonconformity. At that time very few Dissenting Chapels occupied so prominent a position ... There was, therefore, 'no small stir among the people', when Bloomsbury Chapel threw open its doors ...¹

'A great many dissenting ministers of eminence, and a number of clergymen of the Church of England' were present to hear Dr Harris, 'President of Cheshunt College and author of *Mammon*'.² The evening preacher was Dr Benjamin Godwin (1785-1871), Baptist minister at Bradford. '1,800 persons crowded into the Chapel, and numbers were disappointed'. J.H. Hinton, minister of Devonshire Square and Secretary of the Baptist Union 1841-1866, and Dr Edward Steane of Camberwell also took part. The *Baptist Magazine*³ added:

No collection was made, and this fact, together with the noble style in which dinner had been provided for some hundreds⁴ of invited guests in the



¹ C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, pp.27-28.

² *Illustrated London News (ILN)* report 9 December 1848. Dr Harris (1802-56), a Congregationalist, subsequently became Principal of New College.

³ January 1849, p.31.

⁴ *ILN* says 300, which fill the hall.

schoolroom below, called forth strong expressions of admiration of the munificence displayed by Mr Peto.

Dinner speakers were Mr Alexander of Princes Street Independent Church in Norwich, Dr Thomas Price, now editor of the *Eclectic Review*, and Dr Archer of Wardour Street Presbyterian Church.

Aims

Baptists usually gather a church first and then raise money to build a meeting-house. Speculative chapel building is rare, but can make possible strategic missionary enterprise. This was Peto's intention, defined retrospectively in the *Freeman*:

The building of Bloomsbury Chapel was a bold experiment ... The aim was to provide a kind of service which should adapt itself, congenially and yet legitimately, to the peculiarities of the age ... It was the desire of its large-hearted founder that it should become religiously attractive, both to Londoners themselves, and to visitors from the provinces and from foreign lands.⁵

Brock's own, oft-repeated expression was 'The service of the generation was the object: the effective service of the current generation according to the will of God'.⁶ His 1853 Pastoral Letter offered a variant criterion: 'We are not unmindful of the commandment to do good and to communicate'.⁷

The Chapel was launched with bright hopes but it was easier 'to draw congregations out of a vast city than to select from them the materials of a united and harmonious church'.⁸ Only two, interrelated families⁹ had expressed the intention of joining the congregation, but from the first Sunday large numbers came. Even Peto had doubts about moving from a congregation of hearers to a fellowship of committed members. He once wrote: 'I think nearly all the advantages of church membership are lost in London, where parties *cooperate* so little together for their mutual edification and in

5 19 November 1874, obituary for William Brock.

6 Brock's Farewell Sermon. See also *Midsummer Morning Sermons* pp.43,151.

7 *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1853.

8 Birrell, p.177.

9 Birrell, p.174. Presumably the Petos and Kemps; Anne Ainsworth Taylor, from John Street Baptist, Holborn, was probably related to Sarah Ainsworth, now Mrs Peto.

promoting the Kingdom of their Lord'.¹⁰ Brock faced a huge challenge.

An open church

Peto and Brock were agreed that Bloomsbury must be 'open'. Robert Hall (1728-1831) had contended that 'no man, or set of men, are entitled to prescribe as an indispensable condition of communion, what the New Testament has not enjoined as a condition of salvation'.¹¹ Joseph Kinghorn (1766-1832) refuted Hall's arguments. Open or closed was a live issue among Particular Baptists. In 1838 the oldest Liverpool church had split, the open-communionists calling Brock's friend Charles Birrell to lead them at Pembroke Chapel. Others followed.¹² Under George Gould, St Mary's, Norwich, won the right to open communion in a Chancery case in 1860. In London Devonshire Square had become an open church before Dr Price left in 1836. Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle, built in 1861, had open communion, though not membership.

The Bloomsbury church, founded in 1849 with open table and membership, was still breaking new ground in London. The church's life is recorded in Year Books, Deacons' and Church Minutes, the latter recorded by Brock in greater detail than for any later period.

The first Church Minute Book opens on Wednesday, 25 July 1849, with the foundation statement, followed by, 'The hope respecting a congregation was, to a large extent, realized at once ... The Chapel was filled from the first'.

A church formed

Between December 1848 and July 1849 a few candidates were baptized and admitted to the Lord's Supper at Brock's house.¹³ With those dismissed from other churches sixty-two founder members signed this resolution:

10 Henry Peto, *op.cit.*

11 A.C. Underwood, *A history of the English Baptists*, 1947, pp.171, 205f.

12 Union Chapel, Manchester, was founded in 1842. In 1846 the new Suffolk Baptist Union let in two open-communion churches. In 1847 Robert Brewer, from St Mary's, Norwich, became pastor of South Parade, Leeds; the church split and Blenheim was formed, with open membership. Blenheim was not accepted into the Yorkshire Baptist Association until 1887 (see Robert Gawler, *History of Blenheim Baptist Church, Leeds, 1848-1948*, p.11f). In 1851 Charles Williams won the Accrington church over to open membership at Cannon Street in 1874. (John H. Lea, 'Charles Williams of Accrington', *Baptist Quarterly* 23, 1969, pp.177f).

13 *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1850, p.4.

We whose names are hereunto subscribed having been brought by providential circumstances to worship together at Bloomsbury Chapel, and being convinced of the propriety of joining ourselves together in the fellowship of the Gospel, for the better discharge of Christian duties and the fuller enjoyment of Christian privileges, do hereby resolve so to join ourselves together, in humble dependence on the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, in fervent gratitude for the love of God, and in earnest hope of the communion of the Holy Ghost.

And thus constituted by our mutual agreement and prayerful resolution into a Church of Jesus Christ, we will endeavour, henceforward, to bear one another's burdens and so to fulfil the law of Christ, we will hold ourselves in readiness to strive together for the faith of the Gospel, we will gratefully receive to membership with us any fellow disciples whether dismissed to us from sister Churches or commended to us by satisfactory evidence of their conversion to God, we will administer discipline when it may unhappily be required according to the directions and as far as in us lies in the spirit of the New Testament, and we will watch unto prayer that as a Church we may bring forth fruit unto holiness, the end of which shall be everlasting life.

In token of which resolution we hereby attach
our signatures, as in the presence of Him who
is head over all things to the Church". *

Samuel Moton Veto
Sarah Anisworth Veto.
William Brock
Mary Brock
Robert W. Cook
James Benham
Eiza Benham

Under the ‘novel circumstances’, the founders appointed deacons for the first year on Brock’s recommendation, trusting that at ‘the end of that time the Church will have gained sufficient knowledge of its several members to enable it to form an independent judgment as to the brethren best adapted to use the office of Deacon well’. With this reminder of how short a time they had worshipped together¹⁴ they appointed five men: Morton Peto, George Harris, Robert Whall Cooke (from St Mary’s, Norwich), James Benham and George Tawke Kemp (Peto’s brother-in-law). Kemp was replaced in 1851 by James Harvey.

The Census of 1851 included a religious section, with attendances on 31 March. These were carefully analysed by Horace Mann. In London the Church of England normally returned the highest attendances. In eight parishes Baptists came second¹⁵, and in eleven third. St Giles, with three Baptist chapels, had 7.3% of the population Baptist, closely behind St George Southwark (7.6%) and Hackney. Holborn came sixth, with 6.5%. The true picture is more complex, for even then Bloomsbury’s congregation was not all drawn from within the parish.

The detailed return for Bloomsbury Chapel was completed by William Brock. He detailed the ‘space available for public worship’ as: 332 Free Seats calculated at 18 inches (38cm) of pew, 200 children’s sittings at 15 inches (46cm), and 993 rented sittings at 20 inches (51cm), with standing room for ‘about 180’ (Total 1,705). On Census Day morning attendance was 1,233 adults, and 113 Sunday scholars (total 1,346); 138 children attended afternoon school; 1,711 attended the evening service. He considered this typical, so the chapel was indeed well filled. Bedford Episcopal Chapel next door, with 200 free places and 1,100 to rent, had average congregations of 650 morning and evening, and 70 scholars. St George’s, with half its 1,572 places free, drew 1,200 to the morning service, 800 in the afternoon, and over 1,400 in the evening, with 300 morning and 200 afternoon scholars. The French Protestants drew 130 in the morning, and 50 in the afternoon, with 16 scholars. These full churches did not need to be in active competition and welcomed new Christian efforts in the area.

¹⁴ Regent’s Park Chapel, a very similar foundation, took a year to form a church.

¹⁵ Hampstead, St Giles, Holborn, Whitechapel, Bermondsey, St George Southwark, Newington and Greenwich.

Trust deeds

When the church was well established, on 20 July 1852 Peto assigned the premises to twelve trustees, in accordance with the provisions of 'Peto's Act'. The trust¹⁶ was for a congregation of Protestant Dissenters: 'maintaining the sole Authority of the Holy Scriptures in every matter of faith and practice and that interpretation of the Holy Scriptures which is usually reputed Evangelical in contradistinction from the teaching of Unitarianism and the Church of Rome. Ministers would be appointed by majority decision of church members and had to 'maintain the aforesaid Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and administer the Rite of Baptism by immersion only to those who profess their own faith in the Lord Jesus'. Members had to belong for six months before they could vote in church meeting. Believers wishing to transfer from churches of other evangelical denominations would be accepted without requiring further initiation. Decisions were to be taken by a majority of those present at a church meeting. The deeds included detailed provision for the church to rid itself of an unsatisfactory minister, should the need ever arise.¹⁷

The first trustees were members: George Tawke Kemp, silk manufacturer of Tavistock Square; Henry Robarts, draper of Brunswick Square; Robert Whall Cooke, publisher of Vincent Terrace, Islington; James Harvey, woollen draper of Harrington Square; George Attenborough, silversmith of Regent Street; Thomas Burden, chemist of Store Street; John Francis, publisher of Wellington Street; Thomas Gapes, gentleman of Red Lion Square; Joseph Jennings Heriot, ironmonger



George Kemp

of Long Acre; Henry Woodall, fringe manufacturer of Regent Street; George Lance, artist of Hart Street, Bloomsbury; and Edward Hagger, Italian warehouseman of Lambs Conduit Street. There was provision for replacing

¹⁶ Bloomsbury Chapel Trust Deeds, 1852, now with London Baptist Property Board.

¹⁷ To require a minister to resign required a quorum of two-thirds of the voting members and a notice signed by at least thirty.

trustees, up to thirteen in all, if the number dropped to five; new trustees should be members of Bloomsbury or of 'some other Church of Evangelical Protestant Dissenters'. New trustees were appointed in 1882. By 1892 only one original trustee survived: Mr Hagger was active in the church until his death in 1900.

Deacons were to let pews and seats to such persons and at such rents as they deemed proper, and to 'apply the income to paying the ground rent, taxes, rates, expenses of repair and insurance &c and interests on sums borrowed ... and then in or towards the payment of the salary of the Minister ... and for obtaining supplies and for such other purposes for the well-being of the said Church'. In 1854 the deacons purchased a fireproof box for the deeds, which were deposited in the London & Westminster Bank's Bloomsbury branch. The deeds were duly enrolled in June 1862. On 9 February 1875 they were moved, in a 'Japand Box', to the care of the Baptist Building Fund.

Labours of love

As soon as the Chapel opened, work began. The Domestic Mission and Day and Sunday Schools were under way well before the church was formed. The 1850 Year Book, reporting less than six months from the church's formation, already had details of the BMS Auxiliary, Christian Instruction Society, Ladies' Charity for Assisting Poor Married Women, Missionary Working Party, Pastor's Bible Classes, and Singing Class. This is the substance behind the claim *that*:¹⁸

The whole neighbourhood felt the influence of the new church, which poured forth help for all manner of benevolent and educational work. Bloomsbury Chapel became the centre of a Christian evangelization and philanthropy the like of which could not then be easily found in London.

Brock wrote in the 1853 Year Book:

From the first we gave ourselves to the promotion of the good of the neighbourhood where we are accustomed to meet for worship. With the most fraternal appreciation of the Christian labours of other Churches around us, we saw that there was ample room for our labours also, and we began them.

18 W. Cathcart, ed., *Baptist Encyclopaedia*, Philadelphia, 1881.

Attitudes to other Christians

Brock was anxious to work alongside the other local churches but his preaching proved a considerable attraction. By September 1849 the deacons were embarrassed by the number of requests for membership by people from nearby churches and tried to discourage this. Generally good relations were established with the neighbours. Brock recalled:

We deemed it incumbent on us to avoid all interference with neighbouring Sunday Schools. It was our determination to receive no children who were obtaining religious instruction elsewhere. We communicated our determination to the several superintendents, and assured them that our object was not sectarian competition but generous co-operation. The rector heard of this from his superintendent, and on the same Sunday evening I received from him a letter expressive of his warmest sympathy ...

From that time he evinced towards the evangelical operations of this congregation the utmost kindness and respect, on the ground that there was room enough and to spare for more labourers amongst the multitudes around us who are ignorant of God.¹⁹

Brock often met the Hon. and Revd Henry Montagu Villiers, Rector of St George's, Bloomsbury, and later Bishop of Durham, on their way to church on Sunday mornings and they would exchange a blessing as they parted.

¹⁹ Birrell, pp.181f.

WILLIAM BROCK¹
MINISTER OF BLOOMSBURY CHAPEL

'A plain, honest, unadorned Englishman, gifted with commonsense'

A journalist

Brock's theology

Brock was a prominent evangelical, with all the zeal and varied concerns associated with evangelical Christians of the time. Some-times his sermons included pressing appeals: these, as might be expected, are present throughout the *Midsummer Morning Sermons for Young Men and Maidens*,² which aimed both at new conversions and at renewed activity from church members. He often preached on the 'Common Salvation', emphasizing the universal relevance of Christ's Gospel. He embraced the 'moderate Calvinism of Andrew Fuller', and wrote to his student son:



William Brock

How well I understand your difficulties about election. I knew them at your age - I have known them ever since - I know them now. But there they are; and if you give up all belief in election there will be other difficulties of equal intricacy and force.³

It was not for man to set narrow limits to election. When people were thronging to popular services, Brock wrote, 'Now if all London should send callers, who shall declare that any one of them shall be sent away?'⁴ In coming to Bloomsbury, Brock accepted a missionary call, as defined by Fuller, where

1 Some of this material appeared in Faith Bowers, *Called to the city: Three ministers of Bloomsbury*, 1989.

2 A collection of these was published on his retirement. Other sermons by Brock, published because they contain arguments for believer's baptism, are *The Baptism of the Heir Apparent*, 1842, and *The wrong and the right place of Christian baptism*, 1864.

3 Quoted in Birrell, p.219, 321.

4 *ibid.* pp.224-5.

the normal process of a church appointing the minister was reversed, and the missionary, under God, had to create the church.

From youth, he had been an impatient and outspoken champion for what he believed right, although in later years he seemed 'to find more to admire in other men, and less to dislike or to denounce'. His theology never changed in essentials, but he became more ready 'to consider opposite opinions and to admit of the friendly discussion of his own'.⁵ Hugh Stowell Brown described Brock in a Memorial Sermon:

Sufficiently Liberal, not to say Radical, in his politics, our friend was a strong Conservative in his religion. He had, not without examination, not without reflection, not without conviction, embraced the evangelical creed in its entirety; he had experienced and observed its power, and knew full well that 'modern thought', as the cant phrase goes, did not supply anything to be compared with the truth which he had received. I believe that if ever the Gospel, the whole Gospel, and nothing but the Gospel was preached, since the days of the apostles, it was preached by William Brock, for that quarter of a century, in London.

He added that you only had to look at Brock to know he was no 'narrow-minded bigot, no child tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine ... and many a wind of strange doctrine did, in his time, sweep and whistle and howl around him there in the heart of London.'⁶ Brock referred to one such in the 1871 Year Book:

unwholesome doctrine is continually proffered and pressed upon me from all sides ... these times of ours are at least as perilous as any which have gone before. Another gospel which is not another is in circulation, and in fashion too; its dangerousness to the prosperity of the churches all the greater because it uses the good old evangelic phraseology in unnatural senses; seeming to glorify the great salvation, but practically making it of none effect.

This 'larger hope' challenged traditional ideas on eternal punishment and was a concern of the later Down Grade Controversy, when C.H. Spurgeon left the Baptist Union. 'The years of discovery and controversy proved spiritually very exhausting. It is against this background that the achievement of the great Nonconformist preachers has to be studied'.⁷

⁵ William Brock junior, quoted in Birrell, pp.320-1.

⁶ W.S. Caine, ed., *Hugh Stowell Brown*, 1887, pp.523f.

⁷ E.A. Payne, *Free Church Tradition in the Life of England* (1944), p.114.

Fellow Baptists often spoke of Brock's sound conservative theology, yet he was 'modern' enough to appeal to the young. His sense of fair play, warm heart and instinct for reconciliation moderated disagreements. Once he went to preach at a chapel opening and was horrified to discover the service was to be conducted by T.T. Lynch, whose suspect theology prompted the *Rivulet* controversy. Brock admitted afterwards, 'I never heard a prayer which carried me nearer to God than the prayer offered on that occasion by that man'.⁸

Spurgeon mentions two controversial matters on which Brock shared his views.⁹ After J. Baldwin Brown published *Divine Life in Man*, J. Howard Hinton wrote two articles for the *Baptist Magazine* in 1860, criticizing Brown's theology as 'totally deficient in the truth and power of the gospel'. The *Freeman*, the 'organ of the Baptist denomination', reviewed Hinton's response unfavourably. Seven London ministers, including Spurgeon, Brock and Joseph Angus, wrote in protest, supporting Hinton's conservatism and 'the doctrines of grace': 'We trust our ministers will continue to be students of Howe, and Charnock, and Hall, and Fuller, rather than draw their theology from Maurice, Professor Scott, and others'.¹⁰

The second matter was the Baptismal Regeneration Controversy of 1864.¹¹ Spurgeon offended many Evangelical Anglicans by denouncing as superstitious the idea that baptism regenerates the recipients and impugned the honesty of those who subscribed to an oath covering a doctrine they did not believe. Brock supported Spurgeon but was not uncritical. Brock returned from holiday in September to find this a hot issue and wrote *Vindication: A letter to the Rev. C.H. Spurgeon*, declaring that Spurgeon was right and courageous to tackle the dissimulation; the questions were whether he had real evidence and whether he should have tackled the offence rather than the offenders. Indignation against a system was ineffective: it would have been useless to attack slavery without addressing the slave holders.

Of course, had you been less anxious to arouse attention and to secure amendment, you would have been less personal. As it is, the personalities themselves might have been, and - as I take the liberty of saying - should have been less distastefully expressed... Moreover, you gave an opportunity, which I begrudge them, to those officiously

⁸ M'Cree, p.35.

⁹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, II, 1899, p.272; III, p.85.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, II, p.272.

¹¹ See J.H.Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, 1994, pp.48ff.

spiritual people, infesting all our Churches, who ... 'make the man an offender for a word'... But that attention should be fixed exclusively upon those sentences is preposterous.

He asked whether Spurgeon had 'any ground for saying that there are clergymen who do not walk uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel' and gives examples of evidence which would have strengthened Spurgeon's case. This was Brock the zealous campaigner in action, marshalling strong arguments without sinking to personal abuse.

Brock was not greatly troubled by the challenge Spurgeon and others saw in contemporary scholarship, whether scientific discoveries or biblical criticism. He read widely and his close personal friendship with Benjamin Davies, the biblical scholar, and S.R. Pattison, a prominent amateur geologist, suggests he was in touch with modern thought. His extant writings contain no obvious alarm or strictures about the new learning.

The man¹²

Brock was big in body and in heart. He was once amused to overhear two older women speak of him: 'Ah! That is the preacher I like to hear - *six foot high!*' M'Cree quotes a 'public journalist' who knew him well,

William Brock was a plain, honest, unadorned Englishman, gifted with commonsense, serviceable abilities, a bold utterance, and a massive frame.

The Revd William Barker¹³ described Brock as 'a man who felt he had power, and knew his own usefulness'. Alone in his study, the conscientious Brock was often depressed by his sense of inadequacy, but he had too much driving force to stay down long.

In spite of his leonine appearance and forceful personality, he hated personal controversy. He liked people. M'Cree says Brock cultivated 'the art of shaking hands with people', greeting rich and poor, young and old, and 'his heart always seemed to be in his hand'. Following the afternoon communion service each month, he would shake hands with the people as they left, at the south aisle one month, north the other. Brock's splendid memory for names and personal details enhanced the value. M'Cree says it was 'greatly liked by

12 See Birrell, p.184; M'Cree, pp.4, 68, 76f, 89-91, 117.

13 Minister of Wellington Square Baptist Church, Hastings, 1863-91.

the Church, and it did immense good’.

Spurgeon found Brock’s friendship endured in the face of disagreement:

Dr Brock was a man of no resentments ... We once came into collision with him upon a matter in which we had no object but the good of the denomination ... [and] felt compelled to say several things which must have pained him at the time. We counted the cost of our action, and reckoned among the losses the failure of his friendship. We did him no injustice when we so calculated, for in nine cases out of ten it would have been so; but we were in error, for the good soul, though evidently hurt, took occasion to say, ‘Don’t you go home with the idea that I love you any the less. For the most part what you have said was quite right, and where you were too hard upon me I am sure you honestly said what you thought, so give me your hand’... from that hour we were far more intimate than we had ever been before.¹⁴

Not really a scholar or theologian, Brock aimed to be *useful*. He spared no pains. ‘He wrote, revised, corrected, and elaborated until he could do no more, and is not that high praise for a busy man?’ marvelled M’Cree.¹⁵ Brock himself said, in his Farewell Sermon:

I have never done a great thing. I may say that I never tried ... I have just done the things that were to be done as they came to hand from day to day.¹⁶

His useful contribution as preacher, writer and lecturer was acknowledged in 1860, when Harvard made him a Doctor of Divinity. Brock felt ‘he had no pretension to such a title’, but in 1869 the church persuaded him to use it.

14 C.H. Spurgeon, ‘A few personal recollections of Dr Brock’, *The Sword and the Trowel*, January 1876, p.6-7.

15 M’Cree, p.68.

16 Monday Evening Service address, published in *Farewell Services, in connection with the retirement of the Rev. W. Brock, DD, from the pastorate of Bloomsbury Chapel, London*, London, September 1872, p.58.

Home life

Brock's swift courtship led to a happy and supportive marriage. Spurgeon observed, 'He must have been a noble husband and father, he could not have been happy without loving and being loved'.¹⁷ To a servant Brock wrote,

Few homes, I think, are so happy as ours at Gower St, and it is religion that makes it so ... If either your mistress or I can do anything to help you on your way, we will do it most gladly ... Our desire is to make you happy, as far as ever we can. You too desire to make us happy: well, that is the only way for a family to get on.¹⁸

Brock was an affectionate father, close to his four children, William, Hannah, Ellen and George. The eldest often went out with his father and remembered, as a boy in Norwich, meeting Richard Cobden, John Bright and other leading radicals, and also the Baptist missionary who campaigned against slavery, William Knibb.¹⁹ A man of his time, Brock was not teetotal but abhorred smoking, in part at least because tobacco production was associated with slavery.

The Brock home was hospitable. Missionaries on furlough stayed for weeks at a time. They adopted Mrs Brock's young brother, William Barnard Bliss, after his mother died. Later, apprenticed to a Liverpool publisher, he was baptized by Brock's friend, Charles Birrell, and he too entered the Baptist ministry.²⁰ He particularly remembered 'the interest' of Brock's family prayers, short but vital.²¹

Brock's health improved in London. The church asked him to make August a real break from preaching, to be fully renewed for Bloomsbury. He travelled widely in the British Isles and occasionally visited Europe.

17 C.H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel*, January 1876, p.6f.

18 Birrell, p.199.

19 Birrell, p.310.

20 After Stepney College he served at Kington, Pembroke Dock, Hemel Hempstead, Leamington, Leicester and Brierley Hill. He died in 1899 aged 74.

21 Birrell, p.210f.

The Pastor

Bloomsbury drew congregations from a wide area. Brock's diary often had entries like 'about and about from Dalston to Pimlico', but the distances were such he found home visits only worthwhile when age or sickness ensured people would be at home. From 1856 he stated in the Year Book:

In all cases of sickness and trouble the Pastor or Deacons will be happy to pay a visit of Christian sympathy on receiving an intimation that such a visit will be acceptable. A book will be left with the Chapelkeeper to note down such requests.

People remembered Brock's prayers, brief, tender and relevant. He used the post, writing hundreds of pastoral notes, always aware of others' feelings.²² The fit were encouraged to come to him. Brock was 'At Home' on Monday mornings, and often set apart a week of evenings to see enquirers in the vestry and, 'as if determined to demolish the last obstruction to the personal intercourse he wanted, he sometimes appointed, in addition, the hours from six to eight in the morning'.²³

'Singularly gifted in prayer'

William Brock 'delighted in prayer'.²⁴ Dr Landels, in a Memorial Sermon at Regent's Park Chapel, observed:

So distinguished was he in this respect, that the devotional exercises at Bloomsbury were often felt to be the most profitable part of the service ... He took pains ... to impart to it such freshness and variety as made it profitable to all ... His prayers were often singularly felicitous. If we may use a common expression, we should say that he was singularly gifted in prayer. Often his hearers felt how well his petitions gave expression to their feelings and their wants . . . He prayed in public like one who was familiar with prayer in private.²⁵

One 'thoughtful hearer'²⁶ felt 'free prayer' could be a mixed blessing, and

²² *Passim*, esp. Birrell, p.144, M'Cree, pp.56,81.

²³ Birrell, pp.175-6.

²⁴ M'Cree, p.80.

²⁵ M'Cree, p.115.

²⁶ M'Cree, p.35.

all too often a ‘long string of orthodox conventionalisms’, but ‘never did Mr Brock punish his people in that cruel fashion’. The ‘earnest and sympathetic outpourings of Mr Brock’s own large heart’ enabled people to offer God what was on their own hearts. In his ‘counsels’ to members in the Year Books he urges the congregation to make his prayers their own.

There is reason to fear that, to a great extent, the prayer is considered a thing to be offered by the minister, apart from the people themselves. They kneel, probably, when they hear him say ‘Let us pray’; and it may be that, in many cases, they remain kneeling till he has concluded. But this is all.

He urges them to join in ‘the intelligent amen’. Kneeling for prayer cannot have been easy in the crowded pews, especially in the steeply raked gallery!

Many memories of Brock mention his ability to voice the prayers of his hearers, whether in public worship or in private, at the sickbed or meal table. Spurgeon remembered a private dinner when he was worried by the urgent need for money for his Orphanage. A telegram arrived, promising a gift of £1,000. Brock called the party to immediate prayer.



William Brock

The prayer and praise which he then poured out we shall never forget . . . He seemed to feel such perfect oneness with us in our delight that he took the duty of expressing it quite out of our hands, and spoke in our name as well as his own.²⁷

Brock prayed readily, but he disliked some Christians’ habit of ‘having a few words of prayer’ over each separate activity, a practice he sometimes encountered elsewhere.²⁸ At Bloomsbury prayer became so ‘popular’ that he could write: ‘The desire came upon me to have a prayer meeting. So from 8.35 to 8.50 we had one, nine-tenths of a large congregation staying’.²⁹

²⁷ C.H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel*, January 1876, p.6.

²⁸ M’Cree, pp.80-81.

²⁹ Birrell, p.219.

The well-read preacher

As he observed in his Farewell Sermon, Brock tried 'to lay under contribution the discoveries of science; to use for my evangelic purposes whatever I could gather up from the universe, whether of matter or of mind'. He was a 'wonderful reader',³⁰ with a large private library, as well as using the nearby British Museum Library and Mudie's Lending Library,³¹ 'through which nearly every book published of any note found its way to his table. He was "up" in all the literature of the day, whether of poetry, science or fiction', as well as theology and Bible study. This fed into sermons, so he was proactive on topical matters and sometimes cautionary about popular periodicals and 'more pretentious books'.



John Clifford

'Never an eloquent preacher, but always a powerful one', judged William Barker.³² John Clifford, himself a great preacher, remembered Brock's language as 'ponderous, immense, like the man',³³ and wrote of the 'workmanship' that went into his sermons. M'Cree told how they were written out in full, and then retouched, taking two days each week: 'He never shirked labour. Sermons, lectures, addresses, all alike gave indication of hard and persistent work. There was nothing slipshod, awkward, or involved in his utterance; nothing haphazard in his choice of words or themes ... The finished sentences were to a large extent given from memory; yet with none of that painfully introspective glance and sentence-hunting aspect, so often characterising *memoriter* preachers ... as fresh as the most extemporaneous utterance'.³⁴ Brock's extant sermons reveal a heavy, Latin-style construction, with clauses piled one upon another, but he was a

30 M'Cree pp.13, 177. Birrell p.284.

31 *DNB* and *Bloomsbury Magazine*, May 1920. C.E. Mudie (1818-90) founded his library in 1842 and moved it, 'almost a national institution' with 25,000 subscribers, to the corner of New Oxford Street and Museum Street in 1852. By 1861 the Library possessed 800,000 volumes, with 10,000 circulating daily. 'Eminently pious and charitable', Mudie had worked among the poor in the Westminster slums. When not lay preaching, he often worshipped in the Bloomsbury gallery.

32 M'Cree p.117.

33 John Clifford, quoted in M'Cree, p.121.

34 M'Cree, p.121.

master of this so they remain clear and forcible. People found the preaching ‘heart-moving’ and ‘soul-stirring’. M’Cree describes his ‘very sonorous voice - an organ of speech second only to the Revd C.H. Spurgeon’s for great melody and power’.

Passion went in to preparation: friends remembered tears in the study but he was ‘calm and unembarrassed’ in the pulpit, his only gesture an occasional extension of his right hand. Writing to his son in 1859 he lamented, ‘I got too vociferous and pugnacious, but seemed to take hold all round. "Fancy a trumpeter in the crisis of a battle disporting himself with a voluntary on his bugle!" Fool!’³⁵ The appeal of Brock’s preaching must have been akin to that of his prayers: through all the preparation and weighty construction, he addressed people where they were and engaged their attention.

Brock was rarely satisfied with his efforts. Once he told M’Cree, ‘I had no feeling yesterday . . . it is quite true I preached, but the words seemed to come through me like through an iron pipe’.³⁶ Another time he wrote to his son, ‘Really I wondered, especially at night, that the people would sit to listen’,³⁷ but people flocked to listen and many were led to Christ.

C.H. Spurgeon, that prince among preachers, had a high regard for Brock: ‘It was fine to hear him pile up his massive sentences, interspersed with playful allusions, and consecrated by a devout and earnest spirit.’³⁸ When the Metropolitan Tabernacle opened, Brock preached on the Monday evening, 25 March 1861.³⁹ Perhaps the most telling accolade came in 1874 when Brock was Spurgeon’s chosen preacher at the baptism of his twin sons, one of whom, Charles, remembered ‘Dr Brock ... delivered a forcible address, which was emphasized by some of father’s telling utterances’.⁴⁰ Of Brock’s last address to the Baptist Union, Spurgeon wrote:

It was grand, nay, sublime . . . Characteristic, massive, ornate, rich in words too ponderous for our tongue, and in tones which would have



C.H. Spurgeon

35 Quoted in Birrell, p.223.

36 M’Cree p.85.

37 Birrell, p.219.

38 *The Sword and the Trowel*, January 1876, pp.7-8.

39 C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography* III, 1899, p.5.

40 *ibid.*, p.287.

suiting none but himself; but withal homely, hearty, intense, overwhelming - as nearly perfect as can come of mortal man.⁴¹

On such a firm foundation was laid the reputation of the Bloomsbury pulpit.

Views on ministerial training

Brock was sometimes asked to guide young men experiencing the call to ministry. His usual advice suggested that he valued his own hard experience of ordinary working life and the efforts needed to maintain Christian faith and life-style there. His adopted son, William Bliss, was articled to a Liverpool publisher and his son William worked in a City mercantile house. Young William was baptized in March 1854: 'Bloomsbury was not a church in which members were likely to be idle, and soon the pastor's son was hard at work.'⁴² That October he wrote to his parents, who were visiting Somerleyton, saying he felt called to the ministry, but had doubts about his father's reaction. Brock responded:

You may have heard me say that I hoped neither of my Sons would be a minister ... when I have been overwhelmed with a sense of my inadequacy to fulfil my duties ... I should never have deprecated your entrance upon the most honourable of all human occupations ... Your intimation has filled me with delight which I cannot express. God forbid that I should discourage a desire so spontaneous! Whether you have the requisite qualifications will now become the question.⁴³

Over the next three years the church observed the young man. On 27 January 1857 he was formally proposed as a ministerial candidate, and three months later, pressed to judge truly by the Pastor, the church warmly commended him.⁴⁴ He studied at Edinburgh University and Free Church College and was first minister at Heath Street, Hampstead.

41 *The Sword and the Trowel*, January 1876, pp.7-8.

42 *Baptist Magazine*, May 1889.

43 Birrell, p.205.

44 Church Minutes 3 April 1857.

Denominational statesman

At Norwich Brock was already well-known in the Baptist world. He first spoke in London for the Baptist Missionary Society at Finsbury Chapel in 1836.⁴⁵ In 1842 he was a BMS Jubilee speaker at Kettering, and went on a BMS delegation to Scotland. From 1862 he was an Honorary Member of the BMS Committee, and in 1863 preached the Annual Sermon, pleading powerfully for native ministries. When first at Bloomsbury, he wrote: 'To do anything beyond what Bloomsbury brings is becoming impossible',⁴⁶ yet he still travelled midweek to preach and lecture. He liked to go to village chapels, but came to doubt whether the excitement and curiosity his visits evoked was the best way to achieve spiritual effects.

Brock moved with the times but with steady reliability. Spurgeon remembered a deacon leaving the Southwark church early in his ministry, saying, 'I am an old man, and I cannot possibly go at the rate you young people are going; but I don't want to hang on and be a drag to you, so I will quietly withdraw, and go and see how I can get on with Mr Brock.'⁴⁷ Spurgeon approved of this as kind to both himself as a dynamic young leader and to the good old deacon. When his right-hand man, Thomas Olney, died, Spurgeon was ill and told Olney's sons, 'I quite think that, if you can get Mr Brock, it will be just what *he* himself would have desired in my absence.'

Brock represented the denomination on a number of formal occasions, like the unveiling of the Bunyan statue at Bedford. William Barker recalled going 'side by side with him into the presence of Royalty to present memorials'⁴⁸; he watched Brock 'in committee of the House of Commons' and 'never saw him truckle to any man - he was always the same quiet Nonconformist minister'.

His reputation extended widely. When the church in Bathurst Street, Sydney, Australia, was seeking a pastor, advice was sought from three English ministers: Baptist Noel, J.H. Hinton and William Brock.⁴⁹ From across the Atlantic too, Brock was perceived as a leading figure: 'He was one of the founders of the Society for Augmenting Pastors' Incomes, and in the recent movement towards a compacter organisation of the denomination his

45 M'Cree, pp.81-2,9.

46 Birrell, p.184.

47 Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, III, pp.5, 16-17, 287.

48 M'Cree, p.117.

49 David Parker, 'Tragedy and Hope: a study of two pioneer colonial pastors', *Baptist Quarterly* 38, April 1999, p.97.

influence was very effective.’⁵⁰ The Augmentation Fund was mooted in 1866 and commenced in 1879. Ministers with stipends over £150 (Brock’s was £700) were asked to give 10% of the excess to help poorer brethren.

Brock was President of the Baptist Union in 1869. On his last appearance on the denominational platform, at the Plymouth Assembly a month before his death, he preached the Valedictory Sermon for four missionaries, including Thomas Comber setting out for Congo.

A prominent evangelical

A century later Brock would have been a keen ecumenist; then he advocated ‘united evangelical action’,⁵¹ but he had little faith in the Evangelical Alliance: ‘he thought it a *fiasco*, and smiled at its weak pretentiousness’, according to M’Cree.⁵² Brock himself spelled out his approach in the introduction to the published version of his sermon on the infant heir apparent, when his strictures on the baptism of the royal baby would not accord with the views of his friends in other branches of the church:

It is the author’s privilege to live in christian fellowship with many sections of the church of Christ ... he can cheerfully minister in their pulpits, and strive together with them for the faith of the gospel ... There are, however, points on which no sameness of judgment exists. He believes one thing, and his brethren believe another, to be the truth of God ... genuine christian unity neither requires the compromise, nor permits the concealment of believed truth ... [Beliefs] being stated by one party, as becometh the gospel, and by the other party received in the same way, co-operation will be unimpeded by jealousy, and fellowship will be uninterrupted by misgivings and distrust.⁵³

A feature of the Nonconformist Conscience was the lack of any rigid boundary between religion and politics: ministers were wary of giving a political lead but ‘Congregational influence helped ensure that when ministers took the lead in social and political affairs, they did act as faithful spokesmen

50 W. Cathcart, ed., *Baptist Encyclopedia*, 1881. E.A. Payne does not mention Brock when writing of the Augmentation Fund; *Baptist Union*, 1959, pp.104-5.

51 M’Cree, p.21f.

52 M’Cree, p.21.

53 William Brock, *The Baptism of the Heir Apparent: A sermon*, Norwich 1842, pp.iii-iv.

of the Chapels.’⁵⁴ Brock was sure political activity was properly part of responsible Christian life, and saw contemporary civilization not as the destroyer but rather as the product of Christianity.

The YMCA organized a lecture series each winter in Exeter Hall. In all 119 speakers were used, eighty once only. Brock spoke six times between 1848 and 1863, on such subjects as ‘The Common Origin of the Human Race’, ‘Daniel: a Model for Young Men’, and ‘Mercantile Morality’.

Brock strongly believed in the right of individuals to determine their religion: such freedom has always been important to Baptists. He had a right to dissent and respected the right of others to choose different ways to God, but this should not impinge on their rights as citizens. By mid-century Nonconformist numbers equalled those of the Church of England, yet Dissent had not yet won full civil rights. Restrictions like closed burial grounds and limited access to university education rankled, and Nonconformists still experienced general underlying prejudice. Prompted in part by the controversial *Essays and Reviews* (1860),⁵⁵ Brock wrote on Nonconformity in the 1864 Year Book. He personally could cite as examples of prejudice scornful attacks in the press, denial of employment and leases of houses and farms, and refusals to deal with Wesleyan or Baptist tradesmen. He protested that there was no reason why Nonconformists should be bad neighbours or bad citizens, and proudly affirmed their generous support of evangelical and philanthropic societies. Although declining to be bound by catechism, creed or liturgy, their doctrine was largely orthodox and their worship as genuine as any. He recognized that ‘the circumstances of Bloomsbury Chapel have been singularly propitious for Nonconformity. No doubt they have; but to say this is only to say that there it has had fair play.’

Brock was prominent among ministers who gave a lead in various campaigns. From 1834 he had thrown himself into the campaign for the abolition of slavery with a zeal that receives detailed mention in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. William Barker recalled his strong line on American ministers from the Southern States visiting London:

Mr Brock would not open his pulpit to these men. ‘No!’ he said, ‘We

54 D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, 1982, p.7.

55 These represented the first concerted attempt in England to bring scholarly criticism to bear on the Bible; although now much of the argument would seem commonplace, at the time it provoked an even worse furore among Christians than Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, published the previous year. K.W. Clements, *Lovers of Discord*, 1988.

can have no complicity in worship with men who sell human flesh.' He brought much odium on himself for such conduct but he held on.⁵⁶

He was among the Baptists who opposed the Corn Laws, 'the core of the denomination's Midland and London leadership'.⁵⁷ These laws protected British agriculture by taxing imported corn, but caused prices to rise so high that the poorer classes were in distress. Dissent championed Free Trade.

Brock had a great respect for the sovereign. On 15 December 1861 he was to preach at Exeter Hall when war with America seemed imminent. Then came news of the Prince Consort's death. Brock, deeply moved, linked the two in a great call to prayer. Brock's 'Memorial Sermon for Prince Albert' was published in the *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book*. In the midst of the political crisis, Brock, ever sensitive to others, felt for the grieving Queen. 'Who', he asked, 'can comfort her as they might another widow?'⁵⁸

In 1868 Brock published *The Christian Citizen's Duty in the Forthcoming Election*. 'Than the British House of Commons,' he maintained, 'there is no greater power for good under the whole heaven, provided that it be what it ought to be, and that it do what it ought to do.' Therefore it behoved Christians to go to the poll as to a prayer meeting. Christians should never indulge in petty tax evasion: 'The Queen is a good deal more practically honoured by my honest payment of the tribute-money than ... by my most vociferous performance of the National Anthem'.⁵⁹

Although he had many Anglican friends, Brock opposed the establishment of the Church of England and, even more, the ritualism encouraged by its Oxford Movement. On 3 February 1847 he lectured for the Anti-State-Church Association at the Liverpool Music Hall, on 'The Ultimate Design of the Evangelical Dissenters in Relation to the Established Church'.⁶⁰ Wanting to attract good congregations on Sunday, 3 November 1850, with special collections for the Chapel schools, he advertised in *The Times*,⁶¹ 'Sacramental Religion Subversive of Vital Christianity - Two Sermons on Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as inculcated in the Oxford Tracts and elsewhere'. In the 1864

56 M'Cree, p.117.

57 K.R.M. Short, 'English Baptists and the Corn Laws', *Baptist Quarterly* XXI, 1966, pp.309-20. The Anti-Corn Law League was formed in 1841.

58 Birrell, p.230; M'Cree, p.88.

59 'Mercantile Morality', YMCA Lecture 1853.

60 *Baptist Magazine*, 1847, p.359.

61 2 November 1850, p.1, column.2.

Year Book his pastoral letter on ‘Nonconformity’, explained the stress on voluntarism:

To ecclesiastical exactions we persistently demur.
With evangelical requisitions we cheerfully comply.

Brock and M’Cree both belonged to the Peace Society. ‘During the Crimean War of the 1850s it was highly unpopular to oppose war altogether, but Brock *had* opposed the Crimean War.’⁶² Given the mismanaged war and Peto’s efforts to improve supplies, he helped by finding suitable ‘religious teachers’ to care for the navvies and kept in touch with them.⁶³

The Indian Mutiny of 1857-8, with its tales of native atrocities, made Nonconformity virtually unanimous in wishing well to British arms’.⁶⁴ Brock allowed himself to admire the British general, Sir Henry Havelock (1795-1857), one of the three British heroes of the Indian Mutiny, whose statue stands in Trafalgar Square. Havelock became a Baptist and married the daughter of Joshua and Hannah Marshman, pioneer missionary colleagues of William Carey in Serampore. When in London, the Havelocks worshipped at Bloomsbury. ‘A soldier of the old Puritan type, his highest aim was to do his duty as service rendered to God rather than to his superiors’,⁶⁵ so he encouraged Christians in his army to meet together for worship, if need be in the cloisters of a pagoda. ‘Havelock’s saints’ became known for their reliability in emergency, since they were always sober. Havelock became a national hero through the relief of those trapped by mutineers in Cawnpore and Lucknow. News of his death on 26 November 1857 reached London on 7 January, and Brock, seeing Havelock as a Christian hero like Stonewall Jackson, preached a memorial sermon to a packed Bloomsbury Chapel ten days later. So many had to be turned away that the sermon was repeated on the Monday, and again at Exeter Hall. Brock was asked to publish it. He was uneasy, for it had drawn some stern pacifist criticism, but Lady Havelock and



Sir Henry Havelock

62 M’Cree, p.69f.

63 Birrell, pp.212-6,243.

64 D.W. Bebbington, *op.cit.*, p.108.

65 *Dictionary of National Biography*.

her brother were delighted. The book, published in March 1858, proved a bestseller, 45,000 copies quickly going in England,⁶⁶ with American and German editions too. It was long popular with English and American soldiers. M'Cree could not reconcile himself to this. When he taxed Brock with celebrating the military, the reply was, 'I did it *honestly*, my friend.' 'Nevertheless,' protested M'Cree, 'Havelock *was a soldier*.'

Taking religion to the people

Brock was heavily involved in attempts to bring religion to the unchurched masses. In December 1850 he realized that the existing churches would not be able to cope with all the tourists coming for the Great Exhibition.⁶⁷ Soon a group of Nonconformists arranged a series of services in Exeter Hall.⁶⁸ Brock preached on two occasions. Their success encouraged more use of secular halls for folk services. Dissenters found no difficulty in using unconsecrated buildings and soon the Church of England thought the approach worth pursuing. In 1859 Evangelical Anglicans planned to use Exeter Hall, but there were last-minute objections to an Anglican preacher from the local incumbent who should have been consulted earlier. Lord Shaftesbury was annoyed and asked Brock to step into the breach, for which he was accused of being 'ungenerous to the Church people'.⁶⁹ Folk services spread.⁷⁰ From week to week Brock could write to his son:

This afternoon I took a service in Cumberland Market, Hampstead Road. Congregation as orderly and quiet as a Quaker's Meeting. Number about 1200.

The folk-sermon in the afternoon brought from ten to thirteen hundred people ... not twenty of the congregation, so far as I know, had I ever seen before. Smock-frocks and fustian jackets were there by dozens.

Soldiers, bearded artisans, artist sort of people, clergymen here and

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Birrell, p.191. With Peto's involvement from the first, Brock would have been thinking early about the implications.

⁶⁸ Exeter Hall in the Strand (the sited now holds the Strand Palace Hotel) sat 3,000 and was much used for Nonconformist gatherings.

⁶⁹ Birrell, pp.209, 222.

⁷⁰ Folk services were held soon after at Westminster Abbey and St Paul's. These, Exeter and St James's Halls could all be filled, without detriment to the chapel congregations.

there; five men to one woman: three thousand immortal souls.⁷¹

And still Bloomsbury 'was as crammed as ever'.

A further effort to take the Gospel to the people, Sunday Theatre Services, began in 1859. The first was planned for Drury Lane but actors objected, since converts would no longer attend the theatre! Instead, they used the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, seating about three thousand. Brock was the preacher, supported on stage by Thomas Binney and Samuel Morley MP. The packed audience was rowdy beforehand, but Brock won and held their attention through a 45-minute sermon.⁷² There is a substantial tribute to the effectiveness of the theatre services in the introduction to Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (complete edition, 1862), written by the Revd William Tuckniss on 'The Agencies at present in operation within the Metropolis for the Suppression of Vice and Crime'. It needed a brave man to make the initial experiment in addressing such an audience in the face of so much criticism from the Church of England and probably from respectable dissenters in the chapel pews.

The impact of the folk-services might be compared with a Billy Graham Crusade, but the arrangements, preaching, and counselling of enquirers were all done by men with full-time jobs in London churches. Follow-up work took a lot of Brock's time. He also took part in the first Midnight Meeting for prostitutes, and spoke at a number of these at the Mission Hall.⁷³

'Sabbatical'

Bloomsbury wanted as long a ministry from Brock as possible, and so spared him for a prolonged break. In March 1865 Brock asked the church members what they thought of a suggestion that he should visit the Holy Land. To be persuaded he would need 'a most unanimous and affectionate wish on the part of the Church that the visit should be paid'. The idea was kindly received but decision repeatedly postponed (leave of absence entailed significant extra expense for the church). James Benham raised the matter again in February 1866. The Holy Land was thought too strenuous and, with the Civil War now over, Brock went to the United States.⁷⁴

71 Birrell, pp.220f.

72 M'Cree, p.7; Birrell, pp.225-7.

73 M'Cree, p.87.

74 Deacons' Minutes 1 November 1865; Church Minutes 2 March 1866; Birrell, pp.239ff.

The deacons privately provided ‘the entire cost of the journey’ for Brock. He sailed on a ship recommended by Peto, with Mr Marten of Lee as travelling companion, thanks to Peto’s generosity. Brock wrote several times to his church, one letter being copied into the Church Minutes. He thought that English devotional services had nothing to learn from America, but said he was trying to counteract the impression that British Christians were more or less unfriendly to the United States. He travelled widely in the States and Canada. In New England he was moved to comment, ‘not a semblance of pauperism anywhere observable’.

Like other leading British Baptists, Brock was received as a distinguished visitor. He opened the Senate with prayer, had a private audience with President Andrew Johnson, and met several Secretaries of State, General Grant and Chief Justice Chase. In due course he put his experiences to practical use, giving lectures on the United States for the Chapel Repair Fund at one shilling a ticket.⁷⁵

Brock’s ministry ends



The Downs Chapel

The beneficial effects of his American holiday were marred on his return, because Peto’s firm had crashed during Brock’s absence. The church was in a low state, conversions were down, and Brock doubted his fitness for the work. In April 1860 he was tempted by an invitation to become minister of the new Downs Chapel at Clapton. In approaching him, the new fellowship referred (one hopes more tactfully than Brock expressed it to his deacons) to his ‘presumed incompetency to discharge much longer the weightier duties of Bloomsbury Chapel’. He asked the church if he should follow the example of Mr Sherman, who had moved from Surrey Chapel to Blackheath at a similar age. His ‘predilections were to remain at Bloomsbury, if not too incompetent’. The church’s first thought was how to lighten his load and elders were appointed to help with pastoral care. The church pointed to signs of renewed spiritual vigour. Brock was persuaded that he was ‘not

⁷⁵ Church Minutes 4 January 1867.

movable from Bloomsbury'. Several suburban members of Bloomsbury subsequently transferred to Clapton Downs, including Brock's daughter, Ellen, who married in 1870.

Three years later, on 1 December 1871, Brock told the deacons it was time for him to retire. They suggested more help: perhaps sharing his son with the Hampstead church. Brock felt strongly that retirement was best for the church's health, so the deacons were 'constrained to acquiesce'. Brock tendered his resignation to the church on 12 January 1872. A printed copy is attached to the Church Minutes. Retirement was not usual in those days, but Brock felt physically unequal to the task. If he continued two or three years more, he feared 'the Church would probably die with me'.⁷⁶ At present he could hand over a church in which there was 'no root of bitterness' but 'many a healthy and vigorous germ ... A good congregation may be looked for at Bloomsbury Chapel still. There is a population within easy reach of it, from which, by a man well adapted to the position, it might be filled as heretofore.' On 26 January James Benham, speaking for the deacons, urged the church it was 'due to the Pastor to accept his decision as a final one', although Mr Pask deemed it 'a bad precedent to set to our Nonconformist Churches for a Pastor to be allowed to retire after giving the best of his days to his people', fearing people would say Brock had been turned away in his old age. 'A kindly conversation ensued', recorded Brock. Eventually he intervened, saying 'ministers were made for churches; not churches for ministers'. Concern for his support in old age could not be 'allowed to endanger the wellbeing of the Church'. The church finally accepted his resignation, carefully recording that: 'To all persons who might enquire into the reasons for the separation, the assurance could be given that, neither actually, nor prospectively, was there any element of alienation, or unkindness'.

The pastorate would end when Brock's house lease expired at Michaelmas. It was a sad time. Mrs Brock had been ill since 1870. A few days after his resignation was accepted, their daughter Ellen died in childbirth. In July James Benham found it necessary to remind the church it was high time they sought a new minister. Plans were made for the Farewell Meetings. A Social Evening was planned for 20 September, and a Church Meeting for the 27th, but these were cancelled when Mrs Brock died on the 20th. Fresh from the graveside, her husband preached his last moving sermons as minister on 29 September.

⁷⁶ *Farewell Services in connection with the retirement of the Rev. W. Brock, DD*, London 1872, p.58.

The church published the Farewell Sermons, in cloth and paperback. The *Freeman* devoted over three of its twelve pages⁷⁷ on 4 October 1872 to Brock's final services, 'the most remarkable and impressive phenomena of the kind which the present generation of London Baptists have ever seen.' The chapel was packed, with many standing. The *Freeman* published the full text of the morning sermon, on the same text as his first at Bloomsbury: Psalm 71.16, 'I will go in the strength of the Lord God'. In the evening he preached for an hour on II Thessalonians 1.10: 'Because our testimony among you was believed'. At the Communion Service they needed 'no less than twelve chalices'. The chapel was again full on Monday evening, when speakers included Peto, Dr Landels and Dr John Stoughton of Kensington Chapel. Stoughton remembered Brock from youth and regarded him 'as the most perfect type he knew of the Nonconformist Christian Englishman'.

Brock chaired a final Church Meeting on 4 October. At the end he shook hands with everyone.⁷⁸ In the event he was to return to that chair two years later to terminate Handford's ministry. He presided over the Recognition Services of both Handford and Chown.

The church wanted to provide for Brock in retirement, for ministers had no pensions. A public appeal enabled the church to purchase an annuity for £230 (about one-third of his stipend) from the Commissioners of the National Debt, 'thus enhancing its value by the assurance of perfect security'.⁷⁹ At the Valedictory Meeting James Benham told the church, 'Our heavenly Father does not now work by miracle, but condescends to work by human agency': Baptists had no Church Fund or endowment, canonry or deanery to offer so 'What was to be done must be done by individual effort and through the working of that voluntary principle which had effected so much in the past and was destined to effect so much more in the future.' Bloomsbury's concern, so publicly expressed, must have been a factor leading to the Baptist Union's Annuity Fund, launched in 1876.

At the Valedictory Meeting several hints were thrown out about Brock's continuing usefulness: another kind of ministry could be valuable. Dr Stoughton, a Congregationalist, observed:

77 Nine and two-thirds columns - with three columns to a page.

78 Deacons Minutes 28 October 1872.

79 *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1873; Church Minutes 1 November 1872.

There were circumstances in their ministry which nobody but a Nonconformist pastor could fully understand... They wanted more ministers at large, to go up and down the country, and to stir up the churches, and to lead them with prudence on the great questions of the day. He believed that Dr Brock had still a great work before him. May he not only be useful to one church, but to many churches - not only to one denomination, but to all!

Peto took up the theme, observing that Mr Binney retained a position of great influence and honour: 'Do we not want in our Congregational Churches advisers of mature judgement and large experience to give their counsel in matters affecting the welfare of the body at large?' Brock did this in his remaining years. Hugh Stowell Brown described how Brock had been called:

to be, by the common consent of his younger brethren, a travelling Bishop, preaching, as to the last he did preach, with so much of the fervour and power of his best days, and giving many ministers and churches the benefit of his sound and sensible counsel. With all our objection to the Prelacy, and all our love of Independency, to some of us Nonconformists, both ministers and laymen, such a modified episcopacy as should secure for young churches the wise and kindly offices of a man like our departed friend would be a great boon.⁸⁰

Such reflections must have contributed to the idea of superintendent ministers, eventually introduced by the Baptist Union in 1916.

Brock was not long spared for this unofficial 'bishopric'. Each winter bronchitis took its toll and on 13 November 1875 he died. Four hundred attended his interment, when Peto and sixteen other past and present Bloomsbury deacons walked with his sons behind the coffin. Bloomsbury Chapel, black-draped for Dr Chown's Memorial Sermon,⁸¹ was 'filled to overflowing, hundreds being unable to gain admittance'.

The *Freeman* remarked on the great love for Brock from all sides:

His manly, direct outcry in favour of the downtrodden and oppressed made him, in the early part of his career, a power in the land. His ministry at Bloomsbury was ever a noble and even grand exhibition of what the pulpit can do in embracing and stimulating the religious wants

80 Caine, *op.cit.*

81 Church Minutes 3 December 1875.

of all classes of the people, the cultured and the common.⁸²

The success of Bloomsbury was summed up by J.C. Carlile:⁸³

Under the inspiring ministry of Dr Brock, it became a home of varied efforts to reach the life of the metropolis. Dr Brock was an unofficial bishop in the denomination, and for many years its leader in good works. His deep interest in progressive movements and in the problems affecting the social life of the people brought him into close touch with social reform. Bloomsbury was a church with institutions long before the institutional church was dreamed of.⁸⁴

Perhaps the most telling comment on William Brock was his son's, not least because many members down the years have understood what he meant:

To hear him speak of the place, you would have thought it possessed of an organic existence, the sum of all that was breathing in its members, or being wrought out within its walls. To love Bloomsbury was at once to be his friend; to be leaving Bloomsbury was a kind of calamity, which drew out his deepest concern. His inner thermometer seemed to rise and fall with the temperature of his church.⁸⁵

82 *Freeman* obituary, 19 November 1875.

83 *The Story of the English Baptists*, 1905, p.254.

84 John C. Carlile, *The Story of the English Baptists*, 1905, pp.254-5.

85 Birrell, p.303.

6

THE CHURCH UNDER BROCK¹

'Members were deemed competent to deal with everything related to doctrine, discipline, worship, meetings, funds ...'

George M'Cree

The worship of God

Some Year Books include 'Counsels Concerning Public Worship', showing how things were done at Bloomsbury. On Sundays Brock led public worship at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. M'Cree conducted Sunday afternoon services at the Chapel and provided 'religious worship and instruction for that large class of persons who are prevented by their health, or age, or condition from assembling together at other times'. The afternoon congregation was largely composed of 'the domestic servants of members of the church and others of the lower middle class'.

Brock, always a stickler for punctuality, urged early arrival for worship, no 'unseemly hurry' during the service, and a pause at the close: 'Few things are more indecorous than the noisy haste with which some congregations disperse almost before the benediction has been implored'.² His concern paid off. Carlile observed that 'The services over which he presided were remarkable for the becoming reverence and sacredness of their character ... our larger churches are not, as a rule, distinguished for devout behaviour in the public worship'.³ Brock cared deeply about this. In 1845 he had written the Circular Letter of the Norfolk and Norwich Association on 'The behaviour becoming the House of God',⁴ saying that he chose this subject because all was not invariably done decently and in order. His concern was with the comparisons

1 See Faith Bowers, 'Sense and Sensitivity of Dissent: the working out of Nonconformist Principles in a Victorian chapel', *BQ*, 32, 1987, pp.121-33, and 'Outreach to the Young in Victorian London: the contribution of Bloomsbury Chapel', *Baptist Faith and Witness: Papers of the Research and Study Division of the BWA, 1990-95*, ed W.H. Brackney and L.A. Cupit, Va, 1995.

2 *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1850.

3 M'Cree, p.31.

4 Norwich 1845; in the Angus Library, Oxford.

‘a person of intelligent piety would be induced to make, when deliberating whether with Churchmen or Dissenters he should cast his lot’.

He urged his fellow Baptists to make worship decorous and attractive, by punctual attendance, quiet behaviour, deliberate action (identifying with the prayers, scripture reading and song), fixed attention, and prayerful spirit. ‘In the absence of specific directions from the Master of assemblies respecting the detail of religious service, it is for each church to devise that detail’. Members should prepare for Sunday in advance, rise early and ‘vie with his minister in punctuality of attendance upon the means of grace’, arriving early enough ‘to give a few minutes to silent meditation and ejaculatory prayer’. They should avoid unnecessary movement, conversations in the pew, and noise, including as far as possible ‘suppressing the noisiness which indisposition would occasion’. Disturbance distracted others, including the minister for ‘He is a man ... of like passions with yourselves’.⁵



William Brock

Worshippers should not listen thoughtlessly, indolently, or superstitiously, but think for themselves. They were capable of discerning whether the exposition was correct, but that required effort on their part throughout the service. They should think, meditate, and consider, giving themselves wholly to worship ‘to transfuse the influences’ through their own characters. It was possible to attend decorously yet leave without benefit, but those who came with a prayerful spirit were unlikely to go ‘unaffected and unblessed’.

The normal Bloomsbury order was a Psalm or Hymn of praise, Prayer (supplications and intercessions with thanksgiving), Scripture reading, Psalm or Hymn, Scripture, Prayer, Psalm or Hymn, Sermon, ‘A Doxology occasionally, always the Benediction.’ The norm in Norfolk was two ‘songs of praise’ and one scripture reading, with an opening prayer for the Spirit’s guidance and the Trinitarian benediction. His Circular Letter described the sermon as a ‘discourse intended to build you up on your most holy faith, and

⁵ *ibid.*

to open the Scriptures to the understanding of the people, that they may become wise unto salvation by faith in Jesus Christ'. Brock wanted the congregation to follow the readings in their own Bibles, 'as now and then a suggestive or explanatory remark will be offered'.⁶ M'Cree observed that Brock rarely 'indulged in commenting or paraphrasing the sacred narrative'.⁷ The constituent parts of worship should be distinct; by allowing quiet space between them worshippers would absorb more. In particular, Brock reproved Norfolk churches for getting ready to sing before the prayer is over, a fault particularly of choirs, 'a great part of whose whole time in the Sanctuary has appeared to be taken up in consulting about the tunes'.

Music was a striking feature of Bloomsbury worship. A well-travelled member, Robert Cowton, offered this assessment:

Mr Brock did much to improve the psalmody of our churches, and he was one of the foremost of our Nonconformist ministers to introduce chanting the Psalms. His selection of the hymns for public worship was always judiciously adapted to the congregation and the occasion.⁸

Brock had to woo his congregation to new practices. In January 1850 the church had a 'lively conversation' on chanting psalms, but after three months' trial this continued. As musical innovations go, this was accepted with remarkable ease but a new church was doubtless open to new practices. There were some paid choristers, adult leaders and boys, and concern was expressed in 1852 that no one should be employed 'who is not a religious person'. William Salkeld Adams, the organist, was sure he only used 'godly persons'.

Members bought their own hymnbooks, 'as the verses are not given out one by one' in the old-fashioned way.⁹ Brock wanted his congregation to join in and often went to the organist's Friday evening classes for those not 'already acquainted with music'.¹⁰ At first they used *Dr Watts'* and the *New Selection* hymnbooks, with *The Psalmist* tunes. In 1853 the church published *Bloomsbury Chapel Chants*, selected by Brock and prepared by Dr Spencer, and *Bloomsbury Chapel Canticles*, selected by Mr Adams. In 1855 the deacons decided it was undesirable to sell these at the Chapel, even with the

⁶ *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1850.

⁷ M'Cree, pp.32,78.

⁸ M'Cree, p.32.

⁹ The Metropolitan Tabernacle, opened in 1861, deliberately had no organ but a precentor led the hymns as Spurgeon preferred the old ways.

¹⁰ *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Books* 1850, 1852.

proviso 'on no account on the Sabbath'; two local booksellers stocked them. They sold to other congregations too and by 1856 a fourth printing was required. Copies of these survive, and of the 1887 *Bloomsbury Chapel Hymns, Chants and Anthems*. Philip Luke, the organist and choirmaster in 1999, has looked at these early collections and observes:

The enterprising nature of the choral development at this time is evidenced by the publication - through a reputable Fleet Street publisher¹¹ no less - of *Bloomsbury Chapel Chants, Psalm Tunes and Chorales* in 1853. Clearly an attempt was being made to mirror some of the best contemporary Anglican practice available. The choral revival in the Anglican Church during the second half of the nineteenth century provided numerous models for the Free Churches, including robed choirs for some and a wide range of accompanied and unaccompanied religious texts in many. The psalm tunes in the Bloomsbury publication were derived from well-known sixteenth and seventeenth century psalters, including composers such as Tallis and Purcell. However, more recent American influences, such as Lowell Mason, were also featured.

No copy has been found of the 1870 *Service of Praise*, first mooted in 1864 when Brock drew the church's attention to the inconvenience of using *five* different hymn and tune books. Samuel Mart, a deacon, was asked to edit a new collection, with anthems, chants and hymns in one volume, and words and tunes on the same page. The church considered the compilation, with singing, on 1 October 1869, and a month later approved its use. Brock rejoiced: 'Thus, after many years of waiting and expectation, the Church had become possessed of one book for its purpose of public psalmody'.¹² Fifty copies were appropriated for visitors, and another fifty, 'in sheets', for the Ragged School boys. Music went smoothly until Mr Adams became ill in 1855. Thereafter arrangements for organ and choir were a continual problem to the deacons. In 1856, with doubts about paid choristers and difficulty in recruiting volunteers, the deacons actually wondered whether some persons from the Mission Hall might augment the chapel choir. In 1869 Charles Searle and George Freeman offered to play 'gratuitously', but in 1872 the church had to revert to paying an organist.

Brock liked congregational music, but not to excess. He was uneasy with American practice, referring to 'that professional singing which really becomes more and more offensive in the USA'. In Chicago he addressed a

¹¹ Cooke and Whitley, 1 Bouverie Street, Fleet Street.

¹² Church Minutes 5 November 1869.

Baptist Sunday School, 1,200 strong, of all ages, black and white:

I spoke such words as seemed to me in season, but the time for speaking them was limited, as nearly two-thirds of the afternoon was occupied in services of song ... I was assured that these abounding musical services were deemed evangelically advantageous. After a good deal of consideration, I still venture to doubt this.¹³

Preaching the Gospel

Brock rarely missed a Sunday from the Bloomsbury pulpit. At the Terseptenary he reckoned that over the twenty-one years, apart from his holiday month, his absences averaged five a year, he had missed about ten through illness and fourteen when in America. He had therefore delivered 1,716 Sunday sermons, with a further 826 on Thursday mornings and over 850 Prayer Meeting addresses.¹⁴

With all his evangelical concern for personal salvation, Brock also cared about the life of society. As at Norwich, he introduced contemporary issues into his Bloomsbury sermons. M'Cree quotes a 'thoughtful hearer':

Mr Brock's early ministry in London was characterised by *a something* which stamped it as a great advance on what was current in the Baptist churches of those days. There were certain preachers equally thoughtful and more profound, whose names were household words . . . but their following was comparatively small, and their influence circumscribed. Mr Brock was, if the expression may be allowed, the first Baptist minister, at any rate in London, to *popularise* evangelical doctrine among men of thought and culture, especially young men.¹⁵

Hugh Stowell Brown disliked the cold London churches, with 'grave deacons, dressed like undertakers'. By contrast, he recalled:

Bloomsbury Chapel was setting a fine example. There was life there, and movement, and power. There was a man there with a good head and a better heart, who, in a plain straightforward way, preached with warmth and earnestness the Gospel of Christ; and to his influence, in a great degree, is to be ascribed the change for the better that is now to be seen in the Baptist denomination in London . . .

13 Birrell p.245f.

14 Year Book 1870.

15 G.W. M'Cree, p.34.

The glory of the Metropolitan Tabernacle cannot cause us to forget the man to whom, and the place to which, a revival amongst the London Baptists was, in the first instance, chiefly owing.¹⁶

John Clifford's biographer, explaining Clifford's appeal to young men, wrote that in 1858 'It was a daring thing for a minister to take for his Sunday evening theme anything referring to current events'.¹⁷ Brock had been doing that for years and he too drew young men with sermons on 'passing events, phases of faith, and developments of doctrine'. John Clifford himself recalled of Brock:

'The Bible and The Times newspaper are the best materials for the preacher', was the way in which he unwittingly represented his quick susceptibility to the life around him, and his strong faith in the living creed that the God of the Bible is the God of every day.¹⁸

Visitors often packed the chapel. Regular worshippers rented their pews and Brock found it necessary to tell them:

Whenever your own seats are not filled, you will cheerfully, and in a moment, invite strangers to occupy them. Let Bloomsbury Chapel get and keep a name for prompt and right courteous attention to strangers. A crowded aisle is a gratifying spectacle, but only as an accompaniment to crowded seats. The comfort of the pulpit is often destroyed by observing the selfishness of the pew.¹⁹

This was not always heeded, and the 1859 Year Book flatly announced: 'All seats that are unoccupied at the conclusion of the first hymn or chant will be filled up if found necessary for the accommodation of visitors'.

The crowded chapel brought other problems. In 1853 the deacons were concerned about the 'disturbance in the Children's Gallery on Sabbath evenings'. In January 1850 the deacons asked Mr Cooke to enquire about having police officers in chapel, because of the frequent robberies (the outcome is not recorded). In 1854 Thomas Hands addressed a BMS meeting, chaired by Peto, at Exeter Hall. He contrasted the moral and spiritual progress in Jamaica with London: 'His shocked voice must have been most impressive as he quoted the minister of Bloomsbury's advice to beware of pickpockets

16 W.S. Caine, ed., *Hugh Stowell Brown*, 1887, pp.523f.

17 James Marchant, *Dr John Clifford*, 1924, p.40.

18 G.W. M'Cree, pp.18,11.

19 *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1850, p.14.

when visiting his chapel. No one would dream of such an idea in Jamaica!²⁰ Nor, of course, would most English congregations, but such problems are ever present in the city centre.

Membership

At the Biseprenary Brock wrote about Bloomsbury's denominational status, reminding the church that 'Baptist' was not used in the title, although it was a 'Christian Church knowing only the Baptism of Believers'.

That children may be commended to the Divine blessing by exercises of special domestic prayer we believe ... we do not baptize them ... thus we differ from Christian brethren of many different names. At the same time, all Christian brethren have always found us ready to join them in labour, to sympathize with them in suffering, to share with them in privilege, to interchange the amenities of Christian love. No term of communion has been insisted on but personal religion ... Membership with Christ has been the only prerequisite for membership with our Church. In harmony with this simplicity, we have cultivated all kinds of friendship with the whole Church of God. Not a Church is there, I believe, of evangelical Christendom, whose members have not joined us in the Fellowship of the Lord's Supper; not very many whose ministers have not administered to us the word of life. Our practical catholicity has been my delight.²¹

'All persons are eligible for Membership who give credible evidence of conversion to God'. The first Year Book proclaimed the open practice. Care was taken over admission. Brock devoted Monday mornings, 9.30-1.00, to private interviews. Then the Church Meeting appointed two 'suitable persons' to confirm that the candidate's 'conversation becometh the Gospel of Christ'. Baptism was administered on profession of personal faith. By autumn 1849 long lists of candidates were brought to each Church Meeting.

Most applications were straightforward, on profession of faith or by transfer, but there were a few special cases. The church agreed in 1849 to accept two sisters who 'on account of domestic circumstances, which were fully stated by the pastor ... would be present at Bloomsbury only every other Lord's Day for a while'. In 1859 four 'Holford House' (Regent's Park

²⁰ J.S. Fisher, *People of the Meeting House: Tales of a Church in Luton*, c.1976, p.65. I am indebted to the Revd D.C. Sparkes for this reference.

²¹ *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1863.

College) students were made 'Associate Members'.

Brief acquaintance did not always provide adequate guide to character. After an exclusion for dishonesty in 1853, the interviewers suggested candidates be asked for 'some reference in testimony to their general character'. The church agreed to seek a trustworthy witness to each candidate's moral behaviour.

The deputation was reduced to one in 1856; in 1862 Brock told the church this was 'sometimes objected to by persons of whose godliness there can be no doubt'; dislike of talking about spiritual matters was often raised as a difficulty when he urged 'converted persons in the congregation' to join.²² The church decided in 1866 to give up deputations.²³ Brock alone would report, but names would be entered in a book and one month allowed for any objections. The candidate might submit a letter too.

There was a steady stream of new members, except in December 1870 when 'the Pastor informed the Church that to his great grief he had not a single candidate to propose; nor any one in prospect'. It is a measure of Brock's achievement that only twenty-eight conversions in the year distressed him.

Members usually left by dismissal to another church. Roll revisions created a category 'Vacated' or 'long absent' (defined in 1857 as more than twelve months without contact).²⁴ Brock could claim in 1865 that nine-tenths of the 872 members were regular communicants, and of 110 who joined that year seventy were new converts.

Occasionally members resigned. In June 1851 the church decided to interview before accepting a resignation: disciplinary inquiries should not be evaded. A member must have the right to resign, but the church had a duty to establish the reason. This policy was reaffirmed in 1863. This large, fashionable church was still careful about preserving the godly character of the gathered community.

In his 1850 Midsummer Morning Sermon Brock urged young believers to join a church, any church, and then support it wholeheartedly. 'Worship with it, work with it, regard it with special sympathy and affection as your own Church'.²⁵ Otherwise 'the appearance may be delightfully unsectarian; the reality will be - if not selfish, censorious sentimentalism - uselessness in

22 Church Minutes 28 November 1862.

23 Church Minutes 2 and 30 November 1866.

24 Church Minutes 27 February 1857.

25 *Midsummer Morning Sermons*, pp.13, 17 (Sermon for 1850).

superlative degree'. Members should attend for worship, communion, and business, should help in the various activities and remain loyal through all vicissitudes, so that membership was 'a thing of reality, and life, and power'.

In 1869 Brock addressed those 'who have confessed Christ, but have not yet laboured for Christ'. It was not enough to be church members, regular in attendance, of good character, and 'ready with pecuniary aid':

You have not joined with your brethren in visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction; you have not striven with them for the faith of the Gospel; you have not stood side by side with them in teaching and preaching Jesus Christ; you have not arranged or purposed to meet them for the purposes of social prayer; you have not ... provoked one another unto love and good works.²⁶

Brock's expectations were clear.

Bloomsbury church meetings were held monthly on Fridays. 'Members were deemed competent to deal with everything relating to doctrine, discipline, worship, meetings, collections, funds, missions, offices and pastorate.'²⁷ Brock 'excelled in wise and devout conduct' of business meetings.

Brock wrote the Minutes and with economy of language conveyed the atmosphere by careful choice of adjectives ('a pleasant conversation', 'a very lively conversation'). By the Terseptenary he had presided over 237 of these:

and most pleasant meetings they have been; the odd seven certainly including all at which anything unpleasant has occurred. We have had different judgments frequently; but we have, to a goodly extent, kept the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.²⁸

When the present author listed meetings that sounded unhappy she found exactly seven.²⁹

In the late 1860s, Peto's bankruptcy, coupled with closure of the school,

²⁶ *Midsummer Morning Sermons*, p.157.

²⁷ G.W. M'Cree, *William Brock DD*, p.92.

²⁸ *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1870.

²⁹ When Mr Cooke was rebuked (5 December 1856); Messrs Francis and Stuart objected to James Benham's 'overbearing' manner (2 July 1858); there were objections to the Finance Committee's ideas (3 May 1867); the young men running a branch mission in King Street broke away (5 April 1867); there was a 'somewhat trying' discussion of the 'seeming deadness' of the church (3 July 1868); Peto was rebuked (8 October 1868); and doubts were voiced over the Terseptenary arrangements (5 November 1869).

carelessness over seat rents and communion tickets, and difficulties over electing deacons, left the church 'considerably depressed'; but September 1870 saw a more cheerful church meeting, helped by Miss Wentmore's encouraging gift of £600.

Notice of church meetings was given from the pulpit for two weeks, a generous reminder of a regular event, but did not always draw the members. In July 1858 the deacons' handling of suggested modifications to the building was attacked at a separate, 'rebel' meeting. A reconciliation was effected in the church meeting, and one critic subsequently paid the outstanding repair costs. Brock had leapt to defend his deacons, sharply reminding church members of their duty to attend meetings.

He could testify that they [the deacons] were not given to make idle experiments, nor to incur unnecessary expenditure: neither were they at all accustomed to act independently of the Church.

It was entirely owing to himself that especial notice had not been given from the pulpit that at the June Church Meeting the proposed alterations would be considered. He had declined to give the notice, upon the ground that the announcement of the holding of the Church Meeting should always be enough to bring the brethren together ... Let the brethren fill up their place regularly and all things would go well ... It would be found that Nonconformity is not insular devotion: that voluntarism is not obstinate self-will: that dissent does not involve the forgetfulness of what is due to us from one another, either as gentlemen or as members of the Church of God.

The Ordinances

The first Year Book announced: 'To such persons as think it right to be baptized on the profession of their own faith, the ordinance is administered at any time which is most convenient to the Pastor and themselves'. By 1852 the norm was the third Friday evening each month.

Little is recorded about baptismal practice. Occasional announcements imply only one sex was baptized on any one occasion. The church supplied baptismal gowns, both male and female. The Church Minutes once mention Brock's 'class of catechumens as initiatory to membership.'³⁰ The youngest baptism identified was Walter Benham's at thirteen. William Brock junior and James Ford, who both grew up within the church, were seventeen.

³⁰ Church Minutes 29 November 1861.

The foundation meeting of the church decided to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly, at 3 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month, and otherwise after the morning service. In 1862 they moved one celebration to the third evening. Brock wrote in the Year Book:

Our weekly observance of the Lord's Supper greatly facilitates such attendance; especially as in the course of the month it is observed at different times . . . For our friends who come from a distance the morning is convenient. By the bulk of the communicants the afternoon is preferred. To our numerous fellow-workers in the several spheres of our evangelic service the evening offers an opportunity of which otherwise they would be deprived.

A minimum of one attendance each month was expected, with communion tickets to record attendance. Until 1856 a list was kept of 'occasional communicants' (visitors wishing to participate), who had to obtain special tickets from Pastor or deacons. The frequency of celebration was unusual: most Baptist churches then celebrated once a month, or twice as Brock had at St Mary's. Spurgeon had a weekly celebration at the Metropolitan Tabernacle a little later: Bloomsbury may have influenced him. Bloomsbury clearly took the Lord's Supper seriously. Morton Peto used to show his respect by wearing lavender kid gloves at the table.

The church had a common cup or cups (two new ones were donated in 1866, and twelve chalices are mentioned at Brock's farewell service). Alcoholic wine was used. Communicants gathered on the ground floor: Brock wrote to his son in 1859, 'Our communicants this afternoon very nearly filled the chapel downstairs'.³¹

In 1868 the deacons considered the appropriate age for communion and church membership:

It was reported that there were in the Congregation a number of Children between the ages of 8 and 12 years who are testified by Parents and Teachers to be converted. It was resolved to bring the subject before the Church.

At the June Church Meeting:

A pleasant conversation arose from mention by the Pastor of a plan adopted by some churches of admitting to the Lord's Supper only such children as give evidence of love to Christ, church membership being

³¹ Birrell, p.224.

delayed until their judgements are more intelligently and maturely formed. The general feeling of the Church was against the plan, nearly all who took part in the conversation affirming their full persuasion that the qualification for the Lord's Supper was a sufficient qualification for church membership as well. It was resolved to resume the conversation at some convenient season.

This proved to be July, when they agreed that 'wherever any person gives credible evidence of discipleship such person, however young, shall be welcome to church fellowship.'

Other services

There was a Thursday morning service,³² to which friends from other churches were invited. Brock usually gave 'Expository Lectures', reaching some who would not join a Bible Class. Ladies played the organ. Monday morning was Brock's main time for receiving people, so presumably a fair number could be available mid week.

The regular Prayer Meeting on Monday evenings³³ lasted one hour, and followed 'Sunday's impressions'. Brock set great store by this 'Psalmody and supplication, interspersed with words of exhortation'. When he was away, deacons took turns to conduct it. The meeting was

Largely attended, and maintained for a long series of years with vital interest. Its management was marked by peculiar order and delicacy. On taking his seat, the pastor glanced over the meeting, and having decided on those whom he desired to take audible part, he intimated their names to the deacons at his side, who quietly proceeded to each one and mentioned the place he was requested to occupy. No names were announced, and no suddenness in the demand or the offer of assistance disturbed the calm of devotion.

When F.B. Meyer was invited to Regent's Park Chapel in 1888 he stipulated: 'I wish to introduce among you, instead of the Wednesday service, a Monday Evening Prayer Meeting like that held now at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, or as that which some of us remember at Bloomsbury.'³⁴

32 *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1850, p.15; M'Cree p.103; Birrell p.175; Church Minutes 30 December 1864. M'Cree and Birrell say this was originally on Fridays: the change must have been very early, before the church records began.

33 *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book*, 1850, p.14; Birrell, pp.192-193.

34 Regent's Park Chapel Minutes, January 1888.

From time to time Brock arranged additional prayer meetings on Sundays or Friday evenings, and encouraged meetings for prayer in homes. To such groups he often traced new initiatives in the church's life.

The Midsummer Morning services merited inclusion in George Clinch's *Bloomsbury and St Giles Past and Present* (1890):

The Midsummer morning service is a peculiar and interesting feature, instituted ... June 24th 1849 ... 7-8 o'clock in the morning. The services ... have been very popular, the inside of the building having often been quite filled by the number of persons who came to the service, and sometimes a service has been held outside of the building, for the benefit of those who were unable to obtain admission.

Brock's collected *Midsummer Morning Sermons for Young Men and Maidens* were published as a retirement tribute. In the Preface he explained how he wanted 'some special service at an unusual time' and hit on early midsummer Sunday. The addresses were 'familiar, earnest, pleasant talk about the good and the right', and 'every service had been attended by conversions'.³⁵ Mr Shipton, Secretary of the YMCA, helped publicize them. Brock was not the only minister to hold such services, although he may have conceived the idea. Charles Vince, for example, did in Birmingham.³⁶

Outside, M'Cree perched on a chair to conduct the overflow service. This attracted passers-by, as well as many young folk who failed to squeeze inside, 'night cabmen, porters, rude-looking women, muddled fast men, thieves, homeless wanderers of both sexes, bakers fresh from toil, shoeblacks and ruffians from St Giles', and 'ladies, gentlemen, clerks, merchants, Sunday School teachers, and Christian workers'.

The 1864 midsummer sermon, 'Merry and Wise', proved controversial. With the text, 'A time to laugh', Brock declared it was right to enjoy life, 'except the sinful things'. This did not go down well in some quarters. A weekly periodical took him severely to task. M'Cree wrote, 'I do not feel bound to defend the sermon, but I cannot too strongly censure the review.' Unrepentant, four years later Brock began: 'Relaxation, diversion, amusement, pastime, by all means ...'³⁷ He explained how Christians might legitimately enjoy pleasure and how it might be abused.

Many of the young people worked in commercial houses, and mercantile

³⁵ M'Cree p.41.

³⁶ M'Cree p.48.

³⁷ *Midsummer Morning Sermons* pp.153-154.

morality often figured in Brock's remarks. He knew the pressures and temptations on young men at work.

Your place of business affords another sphere of action. The office, and the warehouse, and the shop may be, severally, a consecrated place. No psalm-singing need there be; no set, precise, ostentatious, religious formulary should there be. Not of the hymn-book - no, nor of the Bible even - need a single word be said from week's end to week's end. And yet praises unto Jehovah may be rendered by you all the time. Where others will falsify, you may abide hard and fast by the simple truth. Where others will loiter, you may give all diligence to the urgent duties of the day. Where others will pilfer, you may scorn to appropriate a fraction or a fragment of what belongs to another man. Where others will scheme for what will answer best, you may pursue the purpose of doing, at all hazards, what you deem to be right.³⁸

Sometimes he touched on business hours: in 1850 he listed among impediments to fully active churchmanship 'the unwarrantable lateness and length of business hours'. Such views from the pulpit challenged employers in the pews. James Harvey, an early deacon, was a leader in the Early Closing Movement. By 1868 Brock reminded the young people: 'That the leisure obtained by the early closing movement ought not to be all given to amusement.'

These apart, Brock was not keen on special services at the Chapel, preferring to concentrate on the regular pattern, although he willingly took part in special evangelistic services elsewhere.

Deacons and elders

The five deacons first met on 29 July 1849 and began by sacking the chapel-keeper, Enoch Pye, for general unwillingness, lack of courtesy, and not keeping the chapel clean! They assumed financial responsibility for the work on 4 October 1849, with James Benham as treasurer. In December 1851 they agreed to meet monthly in their homes, by rotation, or in the vestry. Brock did not join them until 1863, but thereafter chaired meetings. Peto attended regularly at first, but business often took him from London and his midweek appearances became sporadic. Deacons attended the bookkeeper's pew-letting times and they took turns to man the vestry on Sunday mornings to meet 'occasional communicants'.

38 *Midsummer Morning Sermons* p.63 (1857).

They enlarged the diaconate by two in 1864 and assigned specific duties: Treasurer of General Fund, Treasurer of Lord's Supper and Societies' Funds, Stewardship of the Building, Secretary (minutes, correspondence, stock of stationery and books), Pew Lettings and editing Year Book, Supply of Communion Tickets and emptying of chapel boxes, and arranging sick-visiting and alms-giving. The deacons in rotation attended Thursday morning services, baptisms, and inquirers' meetings. The pastor could pass cases of pecuniary embarrassment to their Committee of Reference. By October 1867 they settled for quarterly 'Financial Meetings of Deacons', with short meetings in the vestry to deal with immediate business in between.



*Sir Morton Peto
(detail from portrait
in Regent's Park College)*

The church considered how best to elect deacons. In September 1851 each member was asked to bring on a card to the next church meeting the name of the brother 'deemed the most suitable for the office'. This system worked quite well, but not all members knew likely candidates. In December 1869 the deacons tried bringing printed voting lists of eligible members, but this proved 'not as suitable as anticipated', with men elected who declined to serve. Individual ballot was reinstated. Deacons were elected for life. Some resigned, on moving away or for personal reasons.

In January 1869 Mr Kinnear, a church member for ten years, was elected deacon. After six months he was so disillusioned that he resigned, saying the Pastor held too much authority compared with the deacons: 'The principles of congregationalism had been disregarded; and as he could be no party to such disregard he had no honorable alternative but to resign.' The Minutes offer no clue as to what upset him and no one else shared his feelings. Brock protested, 'He would yield to no man in affirming and maintaining the independence of the church against any assumptions, whether of diaconate or presbytery, whether of pastor or minister or priest.' Mr Kinnear took himself off to Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Since Deacons' Meetings usually took place in homes, they probably included some time for social intercourse. Just before Brock retired in 1872, James Benham took pastor and deacons out to dinner at 'The Chrystal Palace', where they spent a pleasant afternoon, attending to diaconal business before

dinner. Benham repeated this in 1878 and 1882, when wives were also invited.

In mid-1869, when Brock was seriously considering the Clapton Downs' invitation, Bloomsbury appointed a group of 'Pastor's Helpers', nominated annually by Pastor and Deacons, to assist 'in any way which he might desire'. These twelve Elders visited absentees and the sick, and took over the handling of financial aid: 'If one Member finds another in poverty, and in consequent need of continued pecuniary aid, it will be well to report such case to an Elder, and it is desired that then all contributions to this Member may be sent through that Elder only.'³⁹

The eldership lapsed on Brock's retirement, to be revived in 1873 as four 'Church Visitors'. From 1876 six to eight elders were regularly appointed. These pastoral elders were a lower level of leadership: several subsequently became deacons, but none moved the other way.

The church agencies

James Marchant suggested in 1924 that Praed Street, where John Clifford became minister in 1858, 'was probably the first "institutional church" in London. The Sunday services were not enough, the people wanted somewhere to go during the week, there were no clubs or classes for the young folk and no counter-attractions to the public houses'. Bloomsbury Chapel had already had institutions for a decade then, and can probably claim priority for London, but many larger urban churches were moving this way. By 1860 Birrell's Pembroke Chapel in Liverpool had a similar range. Regent's Park and Shoreditch in London soon had them.⁴⁰ Ministers of such churches doubtless exchanged ideas.

The Schools and Domestic Mission are considered separately. Brock quickly began Bible Classes, finding the people's religious knowledge low. To those interested, Brock taught New Testament Greek. A Female Bible Class was held on alternate Thursday mornings.

A Discussion on alternate Monday evenings from 1855 was open to the Bible Class and other young men approved by pastor or deacons. They tackled subjects of general interest and read essays. In 1857 Brock gave a lecture series on 'Historical Nonconformity'. For youths at work from thirteen, such classes were a measure of secondary education. A minute book survives for 1854-5, when Brock chose the subjects and usually opened, with young men

³⁹ *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1871.

⁴⁰ Payne, pp.76-77.

preparing some short papers. Subjects were advertised in advance ‘to infuse some animation into its proceedings, but especially to avoid the recurrence of those very objectionable lengthy pauses which were the cause of so much insipidity’. Topics included ‘The present authority of the Jewish Scriptures’, ‘The scientific indications of the Book of Job’, and ‘Christian rites or ordinances’. They looked at ‘Planetary and Stellar Words’, with the class secretary outlining the history of astronomical research, and Brock describing modern work which established the truthfulness of astronomical calculations. On 8 January Mr Cryer introduced the current debate around geology, and Brock explained that many Christians found apparent contradiction between geology and Scripture, ‘but all examiners would find that the reasons Christian Geologists adduced were quite sufficient to justify their presentation of the Science... There is the truth as revealed in God’s word, and the truths of Astronomy, of Geology, or of any of the sciences, they all being different in their nature, but none of them contradictory to each other; he endeavoured at length to impress the minds of the members of the class with these arguments.’ This is the clearest statement found of Brock’s attitude to contemporary science. The class wanted to continue the discussion, and on 22 January Brock brought ‘Mr Patisson’ (S.R. Pattison) to talk about the geology of southern England.



S.R. Pattison

The group developed into the Bloomsbury Chapel Young Men’s Association in 1862. Birrell explains:

The number of young men attracted by his ministry was always great; and fully sympathising in their desire for a fair measure of amusement, and, in the case of those especially who were severed from their homes in the country, for the cheerfulness of social life, he very soon added to his Bible Class an Association ...⁴¹

The idea was not new. Surrey Chapel, for example, had a Young Men’s Association in 1844. The need for wholesome social life, with a little education thrown in, was real, as the novelist, Anthony Trollope, observed: ‘So little is done for the amusement of lads who are turned loose into London

⁴¹ Birrell pp.188-189.

at nineteen or twenty. Can it be that any mother really expects her son to sit alone evening after evening in a dingy room drinking bad tea and reading good books?'⁴²

By 1865 the Bloomsbury Association had 250 members and the hall was usually crowded to excess. M'Cree, the Hon. Secretary and later Vice-President, described the Association as:

A secular society which met in the Lecture Room under the chapel on Monday evenings, immediately after the prayer meeting, to hear lectures, public discussions on 'burning topics', accounts of travels, first class singing, take part in Bible Studies, and enjoy social evenings...⁴³

The 1862-3 lecturers were Brock and his elder son, M'Cree, Mr Pattison and Dr Landels. In 1871-2 Brock spoke on five occasions on biblical or historical themes, his son once, M'Cree twice, and J.P. Chown once. Several evenings were led by laymen. Brock led a monthly Bible study. M'Cree described the audience: 'Young men and women, students, employers, shopkeepers, heads of Departments in city houses, two or three deacons, a brewer's drayman' (presumably Brock's popular lectures were 'open evenings').

Meanwhile other Bible Classes were formed, with various leaders and locations. Charles Searle's class overflowed the vestry and moved in June 1865 to Red Lion Square, while Mrs Searle held a class for young women in their home. Brock wrote in the 1865 Year Book:

It is a pleasant spectacle on a Sunday afternoon to see a large drawing-room well filled with young ladies from our houses of business engaged in close examination of Holy Scripture; and it is another pleasant spectacle to see scores of young men similarly engaged in a hall.

As one group moved out to larger premises, another would seize the chapel room.

Social life

Brock believed social intercourse was important to church life and demanded special effort with scattered members.

As the Church increased in numbers, new methods became necessary to bring its members into more intimate communication ... Many of these

⁴² In *The Small House at Allington*, 1864.

⁴³ M'Cree pp.133, 64f.

succeeded for a time, and, on losing their freshness, were succeeded by others, each accomplishing something, and all leaving the ideal unity unreached ...⁴⁴

A series of annual Church Tea Meetings from 1850, incorporated the 'Annual General Meeting', with reports on the year's work, presentation of accounts, etc. By 1859 a Congregational Social Meeting followed a month later.

In the winter of 1854-55, the pastor and deacons arranged a series of smaller socials, inviting fifty or sixty members each time to get to know them better. These were repeated in other years. From 1856 half an hour of general intercourse 'to cultivate more extensive acquaintance with one another' followed the monthly business meeting.⁴⁵ For special occasions the schoolroom was too small. The Biseptenary meeting was held at the Freemasons Hall and the Terseptenary Meeting at the Hanover Rooms.

In December 1859 Brock met that year's new members on a Friday evening 'for conference and prayer'. This idea, 'at once so definite and so general', was repeated. On 5 January 1866 M'Cree gave the church 'pleasant information about social meeting with Police': alas, no more is revealed!

The church later held four social meetings each winter. A sample programme survives in the 1872 Year Book:

6.30	Tea Conversation with microscopes, stereoscopes, and illustrated books lent by some of the friends, and vocal and instrumental music at intervals.
9 p.m.	Hymn of Praise, Scriptures, Prayer.

Such 'pleasant and profitable' meetings drew about three hundred.

The social initiative did not always lie with pastor and deacons and it is hard to draw the line between social and religious activities. House groups were encouraged for Bible study, prayer and social intercourse. Brock defined three categories of prayer: public, domestic and social, and urged all on his flock. Sometimes Brock addressed meetings in members' homes, to which they invited neighbours. Some groups developed into regular Bible classes, others led to new ventures in local mission.

In 1865 the Church and Congregation held a social meeting at the Store Street Music Hall. In 1867 the young men arranged a concert there to support

⁴⁴ Birrell p.192.

⁴⁵ Deacons Minutes 24 July 1856, 3 October 1856.

the Repairs Fund. After the Day Schools closed in 1870, the basement schoolroom was refurbished, with 400 chairs, carpet and blinds. The deacons 'offered accommodation to any friends who might desire to have a Bible reading; placing the Lecture Room and its conveniences at their service for social intercourse with their friends'.⁴⁶

The chapel building

The fine new chapel had teething problems. To meet heavy demands, extra classrooms and a third vestry were added and the gallery doors widened in 1853-4. The central chandelier was designed to carry off 'vitiating air' through the towers, but lighting, heating and ventilation gave continual trouble. In 1854 the Fabric Steward, Mr Cooke, thought the roof might be 'out of the perpendicular', with possible symptoms of dry rot. The surveyor thought it all right, but major roofing repairs were needed in 1866. In 1871 tiles fell off the spires, while the Caen stone facing only just lasted Brock out. The organ presented sundry problems and was rebuilt in 1879. Such matters consumed much diaconal time and church money.

In 1870-72 James Benham had protracted dealings with the solicitors for Sir John Hanmer, who owned the property behind the chapel, about iron railings and gates at the sides of the chapel. Bedford Chapel and Holborn Board of Works were also involved.⁴⁷ In 1878 Sir John demanded the removal of the railings because of his redevelopment. The other parties were no longer interested and Benham concluded the church could not usefully resist, but persuaded the parish to pay the removal costs, while himself paying for necessary alterations to the side gate.

Removing the protective railings led to fresh problems. In September 1882 Benham reported to the deacons:

That great annoyance was given to Sunday School teachers and others using the Lecture Hall by the improper conduct of Boys outside, and to prevent a recurrence of it [he] was employing Roberts the doorkeeper as Watchman for the present. Also the pits below the gratings at the side of the Chapel were used during the week as a receptacle for filth and rubbish, and to prevent a continuance of it he proposed to have glass fitted to them and at his own expense would also have the top sash of windows in Lecture Room altered so that they may screen more

⁴⁶ Church Minutes 3 November 1871.

⁴⁷ Deacons' Minutes 16 July 1872.

effectually when opened for ventilation.

The church and the wider world

Bloomsbury was not wholly absorbed in its own concerns. London Baptists had lagged behind many areas in co-operative action, but Brock loved to see Christians working together. Backed by the church, especially by James Benham, he joined C.H. Spurgeon and William Landels of Regent's Park Chapel in founding the London Baptist Association (LBA) in 1865, with Brock as first President. In the first twelve years 140 churches, with 34,000 members, joined the Association and a new chapel was erected each year.

Many applications for help were declined; but occasionally the church made a fraternal gesture. Two collections were taken to reduce Regent's Park Chapel debt in 1860, for this was a sister church, begun on Peto's initiative. £38 went towards the Chancery case when Brock's Norwich successor won the right to open communion.⁴⁸ In 1863 £64 was collected for Brock's son's Heath Street Church.

Some Bloomsbury members were individually active at denominational level. Peto was treasurer of the BMS, and S.R. Pattison, solicitor to the Baptist Union (BU). James Benham was active in the LBA, BU, and other Baptist bodies. Bloomsbury Chapel was bound to be in touch with the denomination at large.

The church took a keen interest in the BMS. A fund-raising auxiliary was quickly formed. The first Monday Prayer Meeting each month was devoted to missionary matters. As in many churches, women undertook much regular subscription collecting. The church agreed to correspond with missionaries: letters, prepared by individual members and addressed to individual missionaries, would be formally adopted at Church Meeting.

In April 1852, when the BMS was considering Native Agency, Bloomsbury passed a church resolution:

In the judgment of the Church, it is incumbent on the Committees of our several Missionary Institutions to direct their attention forthwith to the



William Landels

⁴⁸ Church Minutes 1 June 1860.

subject of native agency, with a view to the employment of such competent persons as God from time to time may raise up, not only in the preaching of the Gospel, but also in the pastorate of the Mission churches, independently of the jurisdiction and control of European Missionaries.

This was akin to Peto's preference for lay missionaries for the navvies. Year Books in 1857 and 1860 note with approval the increasing use of native staff overseas.

The Missionary Working Party made '*useful* clothing for sale or gratuitous distribution at missionary stations abroad',⁴⁹ seeing mission work in nearby slums and overseas in similar light. At first their goods went to a mission school in Ceylon. The contents of the 1854 box are listed in the Year Book: '12 children's dresses, 39 children's jackets, 3 shirts, 6 cotton dresses, 16 petticoats, 10 infants' shirts, 8 pinafores, 38 yards striped cotton, 81 yards calico'. The needlewomen must have envisaged the pupils in Western dress. In 1865 Brock explained that their handiwork was sold 'among the English residents', the proceeds being used for the Mission schools.

From 1855 Bloomsbury and John Street Chapels jointly supported a teacher at the new Native Female Boarding School near Calcutta. From 1867 the ladies collected separately for Zenana work⁵⁰. Lady Peto was first treasurer of the Zenana Mission, a position she accepted hesitantly as Sir Morton had just resigned as BMS treasurer because of his financial embarrassment! Bloomsbury took particular interest when George Kemp's daughter joined the Zenana work at Benares in 1877.

In March 1855 Peto told the church of a group of open communion evangelicals in Paris. Bloomsbury promised to make three annual collections for them. Henry Benham was later involved with the Paris church, ensuring Bloomsbury's continued interest. This appears to have been the church now in the Rue de Lille, whose records contain some Bloomsbury names.⁵¹ James Benham laid the foundation stone of the Paris chapel. In 1861 the deacons decided to support an appeal for the German Baptist Mission from J.G.



Baptist Noel

49 *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1850.

50 Missionaries to the 'female inmates' of 'Hindoo gentlemen's' houses.

51 Michel Thobois of the Rue de Lille church, a leading French Baptist historian, showed the author some of the early records in February 1995. James Benham reported to Bloomsbury on the Paris church after visits in February, April and October 1873 (Church Minutes).

Oncken, the key Baptist missionary in continental Europe.

The pressing needs of central London promoted good relations between the churches. In some schemes they co-operated, in others they worked separately but avoided competition or conflict. Co-operative efforts included support of Ragged Schools and the Sunday School Canvass in 1856, in which 118 Bloomsbury folk took part. In 1850 Mr Hamilton of Regent's Square Presbyterian, Mr Noel of John Street Baptist and William Brock planned a monthly United Prayer Meeting, but Bloomsbury's sympathy was guarded, fearing to detract from their own Monday Meeting.

Occasionally some political matter demanded a clear response. On 2 May 1851 the church passed a resolution:

That this Church cannot admit to the fellowship of the Lord's table any person whatever, who either sympathises with or supports the Fugitive Slave Law of the United States; or who withholds his influence from the efforts which are being made for restoring to the coloured population of the United States the rights of which they have been so wickedly deprived.

They determined to advertise this in *The Times* and 'other Newspapers according to the discretion of the Pastor'. Brock expected numerous applications for communion tickets from American visitors in that Great Exhibition summer and was unhappy with the 'implication of the American churches in the continuance of the abominations of slavery'.

In June 1860 the church petitioned Parliament against the proposed religious clause in the Census. In 1872 Bloomsbury petitioned in favour of the Burials Bill. The church also expressed its concern about national education.

Special meetings and collections show the church responding to disasters near and far. During the cholera epidemic in August 1849 they held two mid-week meetings for 'humiliation and prayer', and in that November there was a service of thanksgiving for its removal. In September 1854 they had special collections in thankfulness for the abundant harvest and gradual subsidence of cholera, giving the proceeds to University College Hospital (£50) and the Orphan Working School (£27). In January 1861 £20 from the Lord's Supper Fund was sent to a 'distressed church' in Coventry, while in 1862 £110 was sent to the Mayor of Newcastle for sufferers from the Hartley Colliery Accident. In 1865 they collected for the distressed in Jamaica. A big effort in 1862 raised £609, sent with clothing to distressed Lancashire operatives, whose work suffered because they would not support the Southern States,

where slavery persisted, in the Civil War. The deacons printed special handbills about this.⁵²

This was a vigorous young church serving its generation.

52 Deacons Minutes 23 October 1862; Church Minutes 31 October 1862. Birrell, p.229.

7

THE CHURCH MEMBERS

'Every person who constitutes the church is a fellow-helper to the truth'

Bloomsbury Chapel Directory 1850

Church Registers

Three registers span July 1849 to December 1904 (numbers 1-4856), with brief details of accession and removal. Sixty-two founder members enrolled in July 1849. Twelve came from John Street Baptist Church, Holborn, seven from Norwich (including the Brocks and M'Crees), seven from Devonshire Square (including Morton, Sarah and Anne Peto, his second daughter by Mary Grissell), six Benhams from Paddington Chapel, three each from Wardour Chapel and Camberwell. The Bloomsbury schoolmaster Joseph Meen and his wife Sarah transferred from Shoreditch. The others came mainly from London chapels, though Rochdale, Margate and Devonport also appear. Three were newly baptized at Bloomsbury.

Thereafter members were added by transfer ('dismission') or 'by profession on conversion' (implying baptism as a believer). Later a few joined 'by recommendation of a deputation' or 'by present decision of the Church'. These imply Christians whose membership elsewhere had lapsed or whose churches would not transfer them. A few, returned after a lapse or moves away, came 'by renewal of membership'; and a few, suspended for misconduct, 'by restoration'. All accessions were approved at the Church Meeting. Following member no.2074, Brock wrote on 4 October 1872: 'May those names be found written in the Book of Life! So prays, with many tears that he shall add no more to their number, the first Pastor of the Church. William Brock.'

Removal was usually by 'death' or 'dismission' to a named church or town, occasionally a 'general dismissal' when the departing member had not yet found a new church. 'Long absence' implied roll revision, no contact for at least twelve months being the criterion. A few left 'by resignation', and twenty-four 'by exclusion'. One man was accepted in February 1869 and removed 'by non-appearance' in July: 'he never came after his application'. There are a few unfavourable comments. Flora Holgate was given a general dismissal in June 1855, after 'she became alienated from the Chapel, as a

place'. Elizabeth Letheren was 'a victim to London dressmaking'. Some became 'indifferent to religion', and one 'incurably deranged'. Exclusions are explained: 'become thoroughly immoral', 'immoral in the extreme', 'grievously dishonest', 'gross intemperance', 'through financial delinquencies', 'he robbed his employer', 'he gave way to Gambling &c &c', 'a case of complicated wickedness'. Adultery was noted as 'violation of the Seventh Commandment'.

Brock added some approving remarks: Jane Hughes, who died in 1853, was 'one of the most self-denying Christians', while Elizabeth Cable was 'much esteemed as long as she was with us'. After a general dismissal, Thomas Frost was later discovered at Blackheath, 'doing well'. Various members' 'end was peace'. Edward Woolacott came in 1864 'By commendation. Grandfather'. Christopher Woollacott had just retired as pastor at nearby Little Wild Street, a closed communion Baptist church which would not formally transfer to 'open' Bloomsbury. Brock spoke at his Farewell Meeting, but the commendation is interesting; his daughter, as Lady Lush, became an influential member of Regent's Park Chapel.¹ Similarly in 1870 the two Matthews brothers came recommended by co-workers in the Bloomsbury Sunday School and a deacon of Soho Strict Baptist Church who regretted that formal dismissal was impossible to an 'open' church.

Transfers to and from Bloomsbury suggest surprising mobility around London, Britain, and the world, from Bedford Chapel next door to Honolulu.² It is difficult to see any pattern: probably many were young adults, but married couples also moved around. Most movement was between towns, but scattered all over Britain.

Most transfers were between Baptist and Congregationalist churches, with some Wesleyan and Presbyterian. Anglicans, Plymouth Brethren, 'Hypercalvinists', Irvingites and Salvationists all appear, but not by dismissal. The largest group accession was eleven from Keppel Street Strict Baptist in June 1852, doubtless following some disagreement there. From as early as 1856 Year Books lament removals to the suburbs.

Chart I shows the recorded membership, which was usually 500 - 800. There was no significant falling off until late in the century. Roll revisions account for occasional sharp drops.

A few members came from overseas, including Jonathan Carey from

1 See Dorothy Pearce Gould, *Diamonds in Drummond Street: The story of Regent's Park Mission*, kindly lent to the author in 1981 by the late Miss Annie Fisher.

2 Walter Weedon, baptized June 1865; in September 'he removed to Honolulu'.

Calcutta in 1850. The youngest son of William Carey, the pioneer of the Baptist Missionary Society, Jonathan became a Supreme Court Attorney.³ At Bloomsbury he was active in support of the BMS auxiliary, but he had returned to India by 1857.

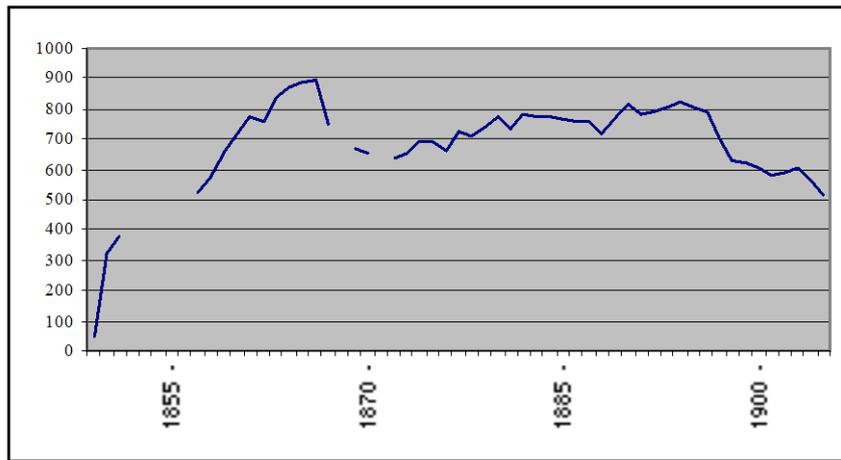


Chart 1: Membership

In those empire-building days, 109 members went abroad: to Australia (46), USA (24), Canada (12), New Zealand (9), India (6), South Africa (5), China (4), and one each to South America, Demerara and Paris.

Distribution

Church registers give no addresses, but about ten per cent can be identified from Year Books. These are weighted towards leading members: deacons, elders and some society officers. The ninety-eight Mission Church members were listed in the Minutes with addresses when they rejoined Bloomsbury in 1874: mainly from lower social classes, they lived in St Giles and Soho.

As might be expected, the wealthier members lived mainly to the immediate north and west. The Peto household came in force from Russell Square and later Palace Gate, Kensington: 'When in London he used to drive to Bloomsbury Chapel in his omnibus which carried his family in one part, the

³ Mrs Kathleen Carey, secretary to Carey's descendants, was able to make the identification with certainty from the available data.

female servants in another, and the men servants on the back'.⁴ Peto sat in the corner seat by the north door. Two of his sons were baptized at Bloomsbury, Henry in May 1860 and Morton Kelsall in February 1861.

A number travelled a fair distance, apparently preferring Bloomsbury to Peto's other foundations at Regent's Park and Notting Hill, or to Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle. Samuel Mart remained a deacon after moving to Hackney Downs - but his fruiterer's business was in Oxford Street. His journey must have been comparable with the 1998 church officers, travelling from Bexley and Kingston. Later in the century, some journeyed from the north-west and south, but the majority still dwelt fairly near the chapel. In 1905 all but one deacon lived in walking distance.⁵

Ministers moved progressively further away. Brock lived in Gower Street, and Handford in Mecklenburg Square, Gray's Inn Road. Chown lived in St John's Wood, Baillie and Gibbon in Oakley Square, and Phillips in Harrington Square, all at the north-east corner of Regent's Park. In 1930 the church bought a manse at Golders Green, nine miles away, where Townley Lord and Howard Williams lived. In 1987, however, Barrie Hibbert made his home in Mornington Crescent, returning to the area preferred a century earlier.

Occupations

About two per cent of the members' jobs over the Victorian period can be traced from Deeds, magazine advertisements, stray references, and Post Office Directories. The result is listed below, with initials indicating **E**lder, **D**eacon or **T**rustee.

The middle class membership, predominantly in commerce and trade but with various professions represented, is no surprise. It is harder to identify the humbler folk who were present in substantial numbers at both chapel and mission hall. A significant category were the many young men, and increasingly women, often from country backgrounds, who came to work in local business houses. The hotel proprietor, Thomas Pole Price (not to be confused with Dr Thomas Price), kept Price's Private Hotel in Dover Street.

A few society officers appear to live at business premises; presumably they were employees, the younger being apprentices who 'lived in'. The Revd Arthur Mursell was among those who went to Bloomsbury when 'a lad in

⁴ A.C. Underwood, *A history of the English Baptists*, p.240.

⁵ Tom Phillips, *Baptist Times*, 20 March 1925.

business far from home and friends'.⁶ F. Wood, whose addresses seem always to be city office blocks, was probably a caretaker. Others were household servants.

1 antique dealer D	4 merchants TD D TD
1 architect	2 museum curators
2 artists	1 ornamental writer
1 builder	1 outfitter TD
3 cheesemongers E	1 patentee
2 coppersmiths D	1 pawnbroker ED
2 drapers E T	1 perfumer EDT
1 dress shop proprietor	2 pharmacists ED
2 dentists EDT	3 printers/publishers T TD E
4 doctors D	1 railway contractor D
1 draughtsman	2 retail ironmongers ED
1 fringe manufacturer TD	1 silversmith D
1 fruiterer D	3 stationers
Several gentlemen D D D E	2 surveyors
2 grocers	2 tailors D E
1 hotel proprietor D	2 teachers
1 house decorator/carpenter ED	2 theologians
1 jeweller D	1 umbrella maker
1 journalist	1 undertaker
7 lawyers (one a barrister) D	4 warehousemen D E T
4 manufacturing ironmongers DDTD	1 wood engraver E

More is known about some early members and this is given in some detail below. These were mainly prominent members, but they and others like them would have brought not only families, but often servants and employees to church with them.

6 M'Cree, p.122.

The Benham family⁷

The Benhams of Wigmore Street were the dominant lay family. Seven were founder members, fourteen more joined subsequently and three subscribed to the agencies. The number from one family is exceptional, but the nature of their involvement illustrates well the demands of Bloomsbury membership.

The firm of John Lee Benham & Sons, 'Ironmongers, bath makers, stove, grate and kitchen range manufacturers, and hot water engineers', was founded in 1817. It prospered under the founder and his eldest son, James, with major naval contracts for efficient and safe cooking ranges.⁸ They 'made a considerable display at the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park in 1851', and at Paris Exhibitions in 1855 and 1867, receiving prizes at all three. Thorn Electrical Industries took over the business in 1961, but retained the Benham name until 1979, when the firm left Wigmore Street.⁹ Benham & Sons' first major contract, in 1841, was to equip kitchens for the Reform Club, built by Grissell & Peto, and they too worked at the Houses of Parliament. The Benhams already knew of Brock's ministry, for another brother, Edward, a printer in Colchester, had worshipped at St Mary's, Norwich.

James, then aged twenty-nine, three younger brothers, Frederic, Augustus and John, and two sisters, Emily and Jane, were founder members of Bloomsbury, transferring from Paddington Chapel, and James's wife, Eliza Horsey Benham, transferred from Charles Stovel's church in Prescott Street, Woolwich. In December 1849 a third sister, Harriot, joined after baptism. Subsequently the three brothers' wives joined Bloomsbury, as did more Benhams, probably cousins, Caroline¹⁰ and Charlotte, the wife of Daniel,¹¹ who was not a member but subscribed to the Sunday School and Sick Poor Relief Fund. The energetic young family threw itself into the various activities, giving generously of their time and money. Their father was not too

7 In addition to the church records, I am grateful for information supplied in 1977-8 by Colin Benham, John's grandson, who also kindly lent a history of the firm; by Wilfrid Benham, James' great-grandson; and by Clyde Binfield, URC historian, who has an interest in the family's Congregational ramifications. For a fuller account see Faith Bowers, 'The Benhams of Bloomsbury', *BQ*, 29, 1981, pp.64-76.

8 Stanley J. Benham, *Under Five Generations: the story of Benham & Sons Ltd*, 1937. Stanley was John's son.

9 Electrical trades' directories; letter from Colin Benham, 21 December 1978.

10 Caroline came from Brighton in 1864 and went with Harriot to Hastings in November 1872, when Brock retired.

11 Daniel was Secretary of the City of London Gas Company (*Post Office Directory* 1852). Charlotte transferred from City Road in February 1850, and died in 1874. Henry's wife was a member 1873-4, and their son Charles while studying at UCH from 1892; he dies at Salonica in 1916.

dismayed at their defection, for he subscribed to the Domestic Mission, and the firm to the Ragged Schools through Bloomsbury. Miss Anne Benham is also listed as a subscriber. By 1853 the next generation was contributing, when James's elder son, Henry, contributed to the Children's Treat. His brother, Walter, subscribed to the BMS when only six. Both joined the church on baptism in February 1863. James and Eliza's two other sons, Frank and Charles, died too young to appear in the records.

Emily collected for the BMS and was secretary of the Ladies Bible Class. In 1852 she became the second wife of Edward Bean Underhill, BMS Secretary from 1849. She died in the Cameroons in December 1869, when accompanying her husband on a visit.

Jane married James Harvey, a Bloomsbury deacon, in 1853. He had confided to his diary the previous year, when aged thirty-five:

I desire a wife, if it will help me to serve God better, to discharge my private and official duties more efficiently, and by these means to honour my Lord and Saviour; and not else. Do I believe that a Christian woman likeminded with myself would thus help me, and I help her? I do.

Jane was of suitable character and piety, but asked for time,

I feel fearful and anxious lest your strong attachment to me should overbalance my judgment and lead me to a hasty and therefore wrong decision, in which case my whole hereafter as well as your own would be embittered ... I always regret any action that is not sanctioned by my judgment as well as by my heart; and I feel I must be specially careful in the matter so all-important to us both.

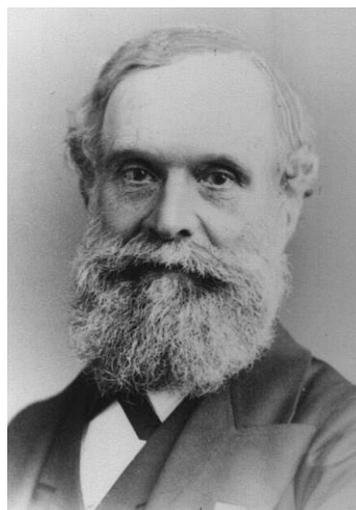
They married in November 1853, enjoying two happy years together before Jane died in August 1855, ten days after their son's birth.

Frederic Benham was the first superintendent of the Sunday School, in which all the brothers taught. He also served on the Domestic Mission committee. In 1869 he was made an Elder, but declined to join the diaconate the following year. In November 1872, after Brock left, Frederic and Emily, with their daughter Ellen, transferred to Regent's Park Chapel.

Augustus became a partner in Benham & Froud, coppersmiths. He served on the committees of the Day Schools and Sick Poor Relief Society, and was first secretary of the Discussion Class for young men. In October 1862 he was elected deacon, accepting by letter from Dublin, but resigned in January 1864 because often out of London. He was Secretary to the National Sunday School Union. In November 1865 he and his wife Mary transferred to Redhill.

John, the youngest brother, served the Sunday School for fifty years, as a teacher (1849-62), superintendent (1862-70), and treasurer (1879-99), handing over just before his sudden death. He was a deacon from 1870-83, and often represented the church at wider meetings, such as the London Baptist Association 1872-99. As church treasurer from 1874 he 'yielded no jot to his successor in exactness, though he was not gifted with the art of breezy fascinating Budget speeches'.¹² He was a 'musical enthusiast' and 'referee of the church in all musical matters', often dealing with the organist on the deacons' behalf. They moved to Clapham, but continued to travel to Bloomsbury and three children joined the church on baptism, Mary in 1880, Leonard in 1881, and Ethel in 1882. In 1884 they transferred with their mother to Grafton Chapel, Clapham, returning, like Augustus, to the Congregational fold, although John remained in membership at Bloomsbury.

James was one of the five original deacons. In October 1849 'it was agreed that all matters of Finance connected with the Chapel should be under the control and management of the Deacons ... James Benham to be the Treasurer'. Mr Hadrill, a bookkeeper, was employed to handle monthly pew rents. James was also secretary of the Sabbath and Day Schools Committee. In 1853 he asked to be relieved of some responsibilities, relinquishing the schools' work and the Lord's Supper Fund. Up to his death in June 1885 he remained in office and active, esteemed for his 'watchful devotedness to all matters of the Church and Sanctuary, material and spiritual'.¹³



James Benham

In 1861 James Benham became secretary, and in 1864 fabric steward, supervising the chapelkeeper and caring for the building, his special concern thereafter. Problems with chapelkeepers, and their assistant pew openers and door keepers, who were all paid by the church, constantly exercised the

¹² Magazine obituary 1899.

¹³ *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* obituary, 1886.

deacons. In 1882, for example, there were complaints about Dolby the chapelkeeper 'not being sufficiently cleanly in person or in keeping the pews free from dust'.¹⁴ James Benham promised to speak to him.

Some maintenance problems fell within the field of Benham & Sons.¹⁵ James knew other local tradesmen personally. Maintenance problems ranged from draughts at doors to exterior stonework requiring complete replacement.¹⁶ From the crack in the roof¹⁷ to the schoolroom water closets,¹⁸ James Benham gave his personal attention over many years.

Care for the building often conflicted with his concern for church finances; grieving to see renovations long delayed, he often paid for improvements himself. In June 1884 he was told redecoration would have to wait: his £200 legacy to the church was used for this. Deacons' Minutes record the gift of a communion cup in 1866, a new carpet for the minister's vestry to greet Mr Handford, and vestry redecoration and new cushions for the pastor's pew to welcome Mr Chown. He commissioned a portrait of Dr Brock for the vestry in 1877, and in 1884 he put new lighting in the deacons' vestry and presented a roll of red cloth for weddings, the deacons to charge for its use. He fitted a steam pipe to heat the baptistry in 1877. In 1883 he altered the front seats in the gallery because 'they were previously most uncomfortable'.

He conducted the Sunday School infant class, and was Day Schools treasurer and chairman. He took an interest in music too, offering to superintend the choir when the deacons wanted more control in 1856, and suggesting in 1883 that the Moody and Sankey hymnbook might be liked for the Monday meetings, after using it at a Gospel Temperance Meeting at Bloomsbury. He sat on the Domestic Mission committee and pressed its claims in March 1878, when the serious deficit was 'not creditable to us as a church'. His wife worked with poor mothers at the Mission.

Eliza and James were keen BMS supporters. James was a founder in August 1848 of the Young Men's Missionary Association, the first youth section.¹⁹ On 1 May 1885 he addressed the Young People's Missionary Meeting at Exeter Hall, and was due at a BMS committee the day he died. The *Missionary Herald*, 1 July 1885, printed a long front-page obituary

14 Deacons' Minutes 15 March 1882.

15 e.g. Deacons' Minutes 17 January 1852. Mr Benham senior reported on and was authorised to attend to the warming apparatus.

16 Deacons' Minutes 20 June 1877.

17 Deacons' Minutes 21 June 1876.

18 Deacons' Minutes 12 February 1862.

19 *Baptist Quarterly* 13, 1949, pp.62f.

appreciating his prayerful character, detailed committee work, and persuasiveness which made him a man of influence, willing and warmhearted, and 'exceedingly courteous to the Press'.

The Benham interests were always wider than their own church. Several served as delegates to the Association and Union and as Dissenting Deputies. James was actively involved with Brock in founding the London Baptist Association, and attended BU meetings, first as a Bloomsbury delegate, and later as a personal member. From 1864-85 he was on the Council of Regent's Park College, on which his father, John Lee Benham, had also served (1848-64). He was Joint Secretary of the Baptist Building Fund from 1851 with Alfred Bowser, and then treasurer, 1864-85. Bowser and Benham 'initiated a policy of advance' and travelled widely for the Fund.²⁰



Eliza Benham

In the dark days when Brock's successor left in disgrace, James Benham was the church's natural leader. At the last church meeting of the interregnum, he thanked the church 'for the kind manner in which they had sustained him throughout this long interval of solicitude and trial'.²¹ The church subsequently presented him with a French clock and bronze vases for 'constant devotion to the interests of the Church since its formation in 1848, and more especially for services rendered during the vacancy in the pastorate'. Mrs Benham received an elegant Davenport writing table for her assiduous attention to the church institutions.

Benham thought it *should* be possible to avoid annual deficiencies on the General Account,²² but resisted economizing on social evenings: a genial man, he often undertook their arrangement.²³ Increasingly unhappy with pew rents by 1881, he was keener than other deacons to change to voluntary offerings. He thought 'strangers' [visitors not renting seats] must be encouraged to give, so had new offering boxes put up more prominently around the premises.²⁴

20 Seymour Price, *Popular History of the Baptist Building Fund*, 1927.

21 Church Minutes 7 May 1875.

22 e.g. Deacons' Minutes 18 June 1884.

23 e.g. Deacons' Minutes 1 November 1884.

24 Deacons' Minutes 16 March 1881, 19 March 1884, 12 December 1884, 27 March 1885.

On Monday, 15 June 1885, James Benham passed quietly away in his chair: 'Life had ceased on earth some time before it was known to those nearest him and his departure was a 'translation' rather than what we think of as death'.²⁵ He had been as 'bright and active as ever' the previous day. Accounts of the funeral and memorial service, describe them as 'bright in character'. The Chapel Year Book and the *Freeman* also carried long obituaries. The Church Minutes, volume 5, have a unique memorial on three black-edged pages. The *Freeman* obituary listed his many interests and continued:

All [were] objects of his keen intelligence and business faculty. He saw everything, knew all the bearings of events, came to real, practical decisions, drew up large, simple, wise, financial plans, administered with fidelity, left no weak places or unsettled accounts, did well whatever was trusted to him, such a business man was invaluable to ... the whole church. But Mr Benham was not a mere financial deacon; he was regularly present at the Monday evening prayer meeting and ready to take his part in its most essential proceedings. His interest in the BMS was profound ... His attachment to Bloomsbury Chapel was very great. Every stone of it was precious in his sight and its holy services were as life to his soul. Such men are the light, salt, flower and pillar of our Churches.

The mantle of deacon and chapel steward passed to his son Walter. James's widow lived until 1892, a lady of 'generous and principled liberality'.

Walter, a bachelor, became chairman of the firm after John's death. He was 'a very unusual character ... totally unsuited to a business career. He should have been a Baptist minister! He had an intense love of meetings. I have known him go to five meetings in one day without any consideration as to business requirements. He was a very good man, kind and very generous, but ...'²⁶ His special Bloomsbury interest was the Domestic Mission. He was a lay student at Regent's Park College.²⁷ The Sunday School magazine for January 1897 described Walter speaking at the Meard Street Mission Hall:

The address ... was excellent, pointed and brief. We wish he would sometimes speak a little less rapidly ... His voice is powerful and far-reaching: it would excite the envy of a Trafalgar Square orator, but is

²⁵ *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1886.

²⁶ His cousin and partner Stanley Benham, *Under Five Generations*, p.21.

²⁷ Information from E.A. Payne. He does not figure on the student lists, so was probably not registered full-time.

now and then apt to become a little too loud for an indoor meeting.

As chapel steward he insisted that the chapelkeeper should have proper summer holidays. He was a trustee of the Chapel from 1886. From 1898 heart trouble limited his activities, but he still did paperwork for the Mission, and became Church Treasurer.

The Benham family, like many others, offered the church their business abilities, caring for administration, money and premises, and freeing their ministers for the spiritual work, although taking their share of that too.

Other prominent members

George Tawke Kemp, silk manufacturer, and his wife Emily, Sarah Peto's sister, were founder members. In 1846, soon after they became friends, Kemp had taken Brock for a continental holiday.²⁸ At Bloomsbury he was a trustee, one of the first deacons and first treasurer of the schools, and his wife served on the Day School Ladies Committee. They had houses in Tavistock Square and Roehampton, where they invited the schoolchildren for a treat. He was treasurer of Stepney College (1845-55), and a founder member, with Brock, Peto, William Garrett Lewis, Baptist Noel, and W. Brodie Gurney, of the Metropolitan Baptist Chapel Building Fund in 1851.²⁹ Soon he joined his father-in-law in the firm of Kelsall & Kemp, flannel manufacturers, and became a deacon of West Street Baptist Church, Rochdale. He died on a Nile boat in Nubia, 20 March 1877.³⁰ His son, Sir George Kemp, MP (1866-1945; Shrewsbury, Balliol and Trinity College Cambridge), was created Baron Rochdale in 1913, but was not a Baptist. Lady Rochdale opened the Bloomsbury Sale of Work in March 1925.

George Kemp's daughter, Emily, one of the early students at Somerville College, Oxford, maintained the connection with Bloomsbury. Miss Kemp was an intrepid traveller, especially in Latin America and remote parts of Asia. She died on Christmas Day 1939.

Dr Thomas Price DD LLD (1802-68)³¹ and his wife were members of Bloomsbury from 1850 to 1864. Baptized by Dr Ryland at Broadmead, Bristol, Price trained at Bristol Baptist College, Glasgow and Edinburgh, and was minister of Devonshire Square in the City, 1824-36, until throat disease

28 Birrell, p.150.

29 Seymour Price, *Popular History of the Baptist Building Fund*.

30 Birrell, p.342.

31 Birrell, p.156; *Baptist Handbook* 1868.

ended his public speaking. His preaching had formative influences on the student Brock, and Devonshire Square moved to open membership during his pastorate. His American doctorates³² were conferred for his *History of Protestant Nonconformity*. He was proprietor and editor of the influential *Eclectic Review* for nineteen years, and a founder and secretary of the Protestant Dissenters' (later General) Life and Fire Insurance Company.

He had worked with Brock against slavery and establishment. In 1847 he tried to dissuade Brock from opposing Peto in the Norwich election, observing when Brock persisted, 'I feel deeply for your position in the matter and honour beyond what words can express the integrity with which you have acted.' This 'happy, well-balanced man of useful qualities',³³ greatly respected, although a semi-invalid from 1848, must have been a welcome member.

John Francis (1811-82)³⁴ was the son of a Bermondsey leatherdresser and Trade Unionist. The family was deeply religious in the Independent tradition. John went to a Nonconformist free school in Unicorn Yard, Tooley Street, and apprenticed himself to E. Marlborough, newspaper agent at 4 Ave Maria Lane. Aged fourteen he became a Sunday School teacher in John Rippon's church in Carter Lane, and joined the church in 1828. After the move to New Park Street in 1833, he was Sunday School Superintendent for seven years and then secretary to the District Visiting Association. He was a secretary of the South London branch of the Sunday School Union, and campaigned on behalf of poor children. In 1831 he became a junior clerk in the office of the *Athenaeum*.³⁵ Within a month he was promoted to publisher and business manager, a post he held for over fifty years. For most of those years he lived 'over the shop' in Catherine Street and later Wellington Street, both north of the Strand near Waterloo Bridge. The *Athenaeum's* independence and integrity appealed to the young Baptist, and he helped build the reputation of the journal, which was notable for its unbiased and often critical book reviews in an age when most reviewers were in publishers' pockets.

He came to Bloomsbury when the Chapel opened because it was nearer home, and became a member in December 1849. On arrival he was asked to

32 DD from Boudoin College, LLD from Madison University.

33 Obituary, *Baptist Directory* 1868.

34 Sources are *The Times*, 11 April 1882, p.5, and 19 April 1882, p.12; obituary in the *Athenaeum*, No.2842, 15 April 1882, p.476; John C. Francis, *John Francis: Publisher of the Athenaeum*, London 1888; Henry J. Nicoll, *Great Movements and those who achieved them*, 1881, p.265ff.

35 An independent weekly founded in 1828, four years after the Athenaeum Club, to cover literature, the arts, science, and social reform.

‘superintend and arrange the foundation of the Sunday School’, canvassing the neighbourhood, recruiting teachers and scholars. He took the Bible class for the older boys. Then he became Superintendent of the District Visiting Association for eleven years, with a team of forty visitors. He himself concentrated on the common lodging-house kitchens, ‘filled with men of the lowest and most degraded character’, rescuing a good number, including forty ‘fallen females’. He gave this up in 1861 because of his daughter’s serious illness and removal with her mother to Hastings for many months. The following year they moved to Canonbury and took sittings at Dr Allon’s Union Chapel, but a move to Highgate Road in 1868 put them on a convenient bus route for Bloomsbury until Highgate Road Chapel opened in 1877. He served Bloomsbury as both trustee and elder.

John Francis was prominent in the campaign against ‘taxes on knowledge’, the heavy taxes imposed on newspapers and pamphlets in 1712 by a government afraid of the influence of the press.³⁶ These taxes discouraged the production of wholesome literature for working men and restricted advertising to wealthy firms. Francis threw himself into this cause, forming in 1849 the London Committee for Obtaining the Repeal of the Advertisement Duty and addressing meetings all over the British Isles. *The Times* obituary recorded that ‘While Mr Milner Gibson fought the battle in Parliament, Mr Francis did more than any one man out of doors towards bringing about the repeal of these taxes, in 1853, 1855 and 1861. On 11 February 1859 Francis, Henry Vizetelly from the Newspaper Press Association, John Cassell, Milner Gibson and William Chambers led a large deputation to the Prime Minister, Lord Derby. Mr Francis told the Prime Minister that one of the ‘most formidable’ arguments against repeal was

the impression that if the duty were repealed the country would be flooded with a profane and scurrilous literature ... He had taken the trouble to collect a number of journals, published and circulated in the lower districts of the metropolis, into which such matter, if it had existence, would be likely to find its way; but he found that there was not in any of them a line which a lady need fear to read.

Of the many involved in the campaign Milner Gibson and John Francis were singled out for public recognition.

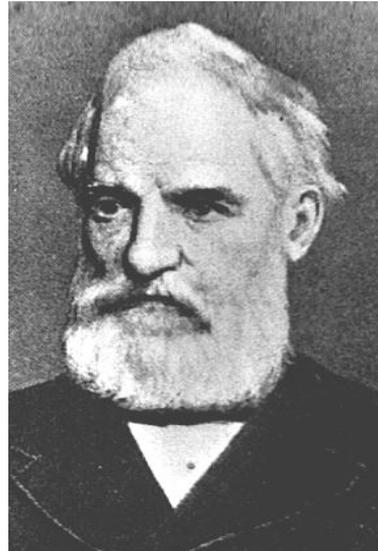
³⁶ A daily newspaper typically incurred tax of £2,650 a month; in 1849 government revenue from these taxes amounted to £150,000 from advertising (1s 6d per advert), £396,000 from the stamp tax (1d on each newspaper), and £745,000 from paper duty (1½d per pound weight), which also applied to books and even grocers’ wrapping paper and dressmakers’ patterns.

Francis was in touch with both the educated and the lower classes, for whom the press was a means of self-improvement. Repeal of taxation resulted in a great increase in newspapers and magazines. John Francis brought all his Nonconformist zeal to bear on one particular freedom: he stands in a distinguished line of Baptist campaigners.

'Firm yet gentle, sincere and generous, he was the unfailing friend and best adviser of all who knew him'. He was buried in Highgate Cemetery, 'close to the grave of Michael Faraday'. Two John Francis pensions were founded in his memory, in connection with the Newsvendors' Benevolent Institution. Both his sons were baptized at Bloomsbury and went into publishing; the elder, John Collins Francis, at the *Athenaeum*, while Edward James Francis was manager of the *Weekly Despatch*.

James Betts was baptized at Bloomsbury in May 1850. With his wife Mary, Betts moved away in 1854, but resumed membership three years later, presumably having lost his wife in between. His second wife, Laura, came from Blackheath in 1858. He may have been related to Peto's partner, Edward Ladd Betts. He served as a deacon 1864-70, and was a Protestant Dissenting Deputy. In December 1860 they moved to 'a very substantial house' called Aboyne Lodge in St Albans, where he later served as a deacon at the Dagnall Street Church.³⁷

Jane Benham's husband, James Harvey (1816-1883)³⁸, was the youngest son of a Norfolk farmer. James, an energetic youth, went to London in November 1832 as junior assistant at £12 p.a., for Mr Bardwell, who had a wholesale and retail business in wool and Manchester goods (cottons) at the foot of old Holborn Hill. After two years James sent his parents the money to pay his last year's school fees, outstanding



James Harvey

³⁷ Letter from Dr D.A. Gardner, 2 April 1990.

³⁸ Alfred J. Harvey, *From Suffolk Lad to London Merchant*, 1900. His son Alfred became an Anglican and was Vicar of Shirehampton. Also memorial sketch in *The Freeman*, 16 February 1883.

because of poor harvests, and always treasured that settled account. Within five years he became a partner and he and Joseph Bartrum inherited the business when Bardwell died in 1845. By then Harvey, who believed the qualities desirable in a man of business were self-respect, honesty, persevering industry and clearness of purpose, had saved £2,500, as well as sending money to his parents regularly. Bardwell left him a further £1,000. Bartrum, Harvey & Co flourished. Displaced by Holborn Viaduct (1865) they moved to better premises in Gresham Street. Harvey's biggest worry was the temptation of increasing wealth! The wholesale trade became so extensive in Europe, America and 'the Colonies' that they gave up retail business.

The new partners had experienced the stern conditions for young resident staff in a city warehouses; they imported James's sister Rachel as housekeeper to create a more homely atmosphere, and began monthly discussion classes for their young men. Bartrum and Harvey supported the Early Closing Movement which began in London in 1842. Until then no firm in Holborn closed before 8.30 p.m. in winter and 9 p.m. in summer, with many staying open until 11 p.m. By 1855, Bartrum and Harvey shut all year at 7 p.m. and at 5 p.m. on Saturdays. Harvey spoke at Exeter Hall on 10 September 1856, advocating the change, which his firm made without consulting neighbouring firms. They had not lost trade, their young men were ill less, and most used their extra leisure well. He supported the YMCA, which began in 1844 at the neighbouring firm of Hitchcock, Williams & Co.

Mr Bardwell had expected his household to accompany him to the Surrey Tabernacle, where the minister, James Wells, was a strongly Calvinistic Baptist. Harvey became deeply religious and, visiting Norwich in the first flush of high-Calvinism, was disappointed with Brock's preaching but later, unsure of his own 'election', tried again, determining to attend Bloomsbury for six months when it opened, to 'give the minister, and the doctrines ... a fair trial ... The first month had not passed away before I found what I had long been seeking in vain. I was able to rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ'. Baptized in 1850, he became a deacon the following year.

Harvey dreaded the love of wealth and, becoming rich, had to be generous. On the eve of his marriage, worth £11,000, he wrote out a resolution never to spend more than one third of his income on self and family, never to save more than one third, not to give less than one third to religious and charitable purposes, and never to be worth more than £20,000. He failed in the latter, but left the surplus 'to promote the cause of Christ and the good of our fellow men'. He believed much giving should be anonymous, but some public, to show Christian duty and as a stimulus to others, since a rich man venturing

money in faith could get projects off the ground. As first LBA treasurer, 1866-81, in 1870 he suggested that if churches in debt paid off one-third and pledged themselves to raise the rest by December 1871, he would give 10% towards it, contributing £500 in total that year. He paid for two houses at Spurgeon's Stockwell Orphanage and gave Spurgeon money to provide holidays for poor ministers. In April 1882, as BMS Chairman, he urged businessmen to consecrate every seventh year's profits to the Lord's work.

After his wife's death he took his infant son and Rachel, his aunt and 'almost mother', to the cleaner air of Hampstead, where James was prime mover in building Heath Street chapel. At Heath Street Bloomsbury influence was strong; the foundation statement has strong echoes of Bloomsbury's and four Bloomsbury members (Augustus Benham, Henry Woodall, Samuel Mart and S.R. Pattison) were among the nine trustees. Harvey was delighted when William Brock junior became the first minister, the minute inviting him again reminiscent of Bloomsbury: 'In the hope that a congregation might be formed in connection with it ...'

Made a liveryman of the Company of Loriners³⁹ in 1853, Harvey was a Freeman of the City and Common Councilman for Faringdon Without. As Chairman of the Board of Guardians, he attacked abuses in the local poor law administration. He was first treasurer of the Annuity Fund for retired Baptist ministers; his colleague in that, Dr Richard Glover of Bristol, wrote the introduction to Harvey's biography.

Harvey was a serious man. He loved reading 'books of gristle', and enjoyed jury service. He took a vigorous part in the campaign to permit witnesses to affirm truth rather than swear an oath, previously only allowed for Quakers. Foreign travel appealed, though he would never be long absent from the firm. With his wife's support, he became involved in the public defence of Christianity, so he read *The Reasoner*, journal of the Secularists, and sometimes wrote to it, signing himself 'Inquirer'. He went to their John Street Institution in Fitzroy Square and persuaded them to let him respond to various issues.⁴⁰ In September 1862 he umpired a six-day public discussion between the Revd William Barker for Christianity and 'Iconoclast' (Charles Bradlaugh), the editor of *National Reformer* for 'secularists and infidels'.

Harvey was an evangelical Christian by conviction; 'Baptist though I am, yet I have ever objected to work specially as a Baptist; I prefer to do so on the

³⁹ Originally makers of bits, spurs and metal mountings for bridles and saddles.

⁴⁰ e.g. on 30 March 1856 in reply to Mr R. Cooper's lecture on miracles, and on 11 January 1857 when, in reply to Mr Holyoake, he argued that 'The Morality of Christianity is Definite, Adequate and Operative'.

much broader basis of a disciple and servant of Christ'. When in 1871 he appreciated a new book by the Revd Thomas Griffith, Prebendary of St Paul's, he wrote to the author offering to pay for free copies for a number of clergymen to be named by Griffith.

The *Freeman* obituary, 15 February 1883, declared that Harvey

had a rare confidence in his own powers; success had given him a right to believe that study and effort could enable him to do almost anything. Singing was wanted at Bloomsbury, he learnt it; preaching to the poor, he studied and did it; and so of numerous other attainments. He thought a matter well out, and then nothing would prevent his attempting to work out his conclusions... He was good at athletics, a keen sportsman, a jocund traveller ... I cannot conceive of Mr Harvey doing anything by halves. If he discussed a subject, it would be done from first principles; if he shot a pheasant, it was sure to be killed at once ... There was an antique Roman cast of character about our friend. Such natures have a kind of moral police force in the world; they prevent meanness and indolence around them.

George Lance (1802-64)⁴¹ was the son of an adjutant in the Essex Yeomanry, who came to London as Inspector of the Bow Street horse patrol; his mother was the daughter of Colonel Constable of Beverley, Yorkshire. Lance transferred in 1850 from the John Street Church. He lived near the chapel, in Hart Street. He studied in Haydon's studio, where Landseer was a fellow student. Lance specialized in still lifes, especially fruit, flowers and game. He exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy in 1828, and in every year from 1835 to 1862, thirty-eight paintings, of which at least twenty-two are still life. Peto commissioned a large 'Fruit Piece' for Somerleyton, paying Lance a



George Lance

Photo: Victoria & Albert Museum

⁴¹ *DNB*. Birrell, p.342.

thousand guineas, and also bought 'The Seneschal', exhibited in 1852.⁴² A Bloomsbury trustee, Lance took particular interest in the Day School drawing class. He was conspicuous for his velvet coat and long black hair. When he died in 1864 Brock wrote to Kemp, 'Dear Lance's end was beautiful'.⁴³

Samuel Rowles Pattison FGS (1809-1901)⁴⁴ was born in Stroud, Gloucestershire, to an Anglican family. Pattison studied at University College London and became a Baptist under the influence of the Hon. and Revd Baptist Noel, the evangelical Anglican turned Baptist minister. He returned to London in 1853, after practising as a solicitor in Launceston, Cornwall, where he had been a lay preacher and Sunday School Superintendent. He and his wife Marina joined Bloomsbury in 1853. They lived in Torrington Square, just beyond the British Museum. He served on the Day School Committee (1854-61), and as deacon (1855-57), and was one of seven church members who accompanied one hundred Mission folk to 'Whembley Hill', their first excursion in 1855.⁴⁵ The Pattison and Brock families were good friends.⁴⁶ The register says Mr and Mrs Pattison transferred to Greenwich but that may be a slip: accounts generally say they helped found Heath Street, where he was a trustee and deacon (1869-92).

Samuel Pattison had a 'great legal practice' and was legal adviser to the Baptist Union for many years and BU Treasurer (1879-92). He served on the BMS Committee. He prepared the BU Corporation scheme in 1890.⁴⁷ He found time for literary and scientific hobbies. Ethnology interested him but 'geology was his favourite study'; and he was twice elected to the Geological Society Council. Geology was proving the earth was far older than the 4004 BC creation date accepted by the Church until then, so many saw it as a threat to Christian belief, preceding the evolution debate. Pattison embraced new revelations of God's truth and sought to reassure those alarmed.

Undoubtedly the minds of many good men are uneasy at the suspicion of a conflict ... just as on the eve of an important trial the young advocate is distressed by the prospect of contrary evidence equally credible. But in both cases the open examination removes, one by one, all the apparent discrepancies, and truth comes out all the more illustrious for the clouds

42 The Victoria and Albert Museum has a self-portrait by Lance.

43 Quoted in Birrell.

44 *Baptist Magazine* March 1890, pp.97-100, and 1902, pp.31-2 (the latter an obituary).

45 C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, p.69.

46 W. Brock jun., 'Recollections' appended to Birrell's biography.

47 See also Payne, pp.147-8, 262. *Baptist Times* 6 December 1901, p.830.

which beset its course.⁴⁸

His numerous publications, religious and scientific, were described by the *Baptist Magazine*: ‘The full and accurate knowledge, the orderly arrangement, the apt illustrations, the lucid style, and the spiritual power of these works gives Mr Pattison a high place among living Baptist authors’.⁴⁹ Some were scholarly papers but much was written in more ‘popular’ style, to make the fruits of scholarship widely accessible.

S.R. Pattison’s two sons, Rowles and Thomas, were baptized in 1857 and active in the church. Rowles became a solicitor. His brother, Thomas Harwood Pattison DD (1838-1904),⁵⁰ was known at Bloomsbury as Thomas, but later preferred Harwood. Educated ‘by private tuition and at the London University School’, he studied architecture for four years but in 1859 sought the church’s commendation to Regent’s Park College. He was pastor of Middleton Teesdale in 1863, Ryehill Baptist, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Rochdale. Among English friends with whom he maintained contact were John Bright, the Liberal statesman, C.H. Spurgeon, and the Congregational minister, R.W. Dale.

In 1874, on a tour of the United States, he was invited to First Baptist Church, New Haven, Connecticut, and settled there in March 1875. He attracted ‘the attention of intelligent Baptists everywhere’, and was called in 1879 to Emmanuel, Albany, New York. His reputation grew ‘as a fine scholar, an eloquent preacher, a judicious pastor, and a gospel laborer upon whose efforts the favour of heaven specially rests’. Madison University bestowed a DD in 1880, and he was invited to ‘one of the most important chairs’ in Rochester Theological Seminary, becoming Professor of Homiletics⁵¹ and Pastoral Theology from



T. Harwood Pattison

48 S.R. Pattison, *The Earth and the Word, or Geology for Bible Students*, 1858, preface.

49 The British Library Catalogue lists thirteen publications by Samuel Rowles Pattison, half of them geological, most wholly or partly religious, e.g. *Arbitration: A paper read ... at the Autumnal Session of the Baptist Union, ... Sept. 27, 28 [1871]*, 1871; ; *On the History of Evangelical Christianity*, 1875; *“The Antiquity of Man”: An examination of Sir C. Lyell’s recent work...*, 1863; *The Earth and the Word: or Geology for Bible Students*, 1858.

50 Entry in William Cathcart, ed., *Baptist Encyclopædia*, Philadelphia, 1881. The author is grateful to Dr Eljee Bentley for identifying him in American records and directing her to Rochester, and to Dana Martin and Ashley Phelps of the American Baptist-Samuel Colgate Historical Library, Rochester, New York, for information.

51 The art of preaching: sources, doctrinal and ethical content, structure, illustration,

1881 until his death twenty-three years later, preaching almost every Sunday. 'In the history of our denomination in this country [USA] no man has ever acquired such distinguished success in a shorter time than Dr Pattison, and no one more richly deserves it.'

While in England he published *Present Day Lectures to a Baptist Congregation*, and contributed to *Congregationalism and Aesthetics*; later he was American correspondent for the *Freeman*. He showed his father's 'habits of clear, crisp thought and expression'. His books, scholarly yet readable, including *Public Prayer*, *The Making of the Sermon*, *The Sunday School*, *The History of the English Bible*, and *The History of Preaching*, were adopted as text books in many theological colleges.⁵² A kind man, he was 'full of fun in private', hard-working and thorough, 'of endless versatility' and, like his early mentor Brock, noted for his public prayers, 'marvelous for their simplicity, pathos and comprehensiveness'.⁵³

Robert Offord of 233 Oxford St (apparently a Coach Factory, though there was also a jeweller, probably a sub-letting) joined Bloomsbury on baptism in 1855. His daughter Marian was baptized the next year. Their home was at 53 Wigmore Street, until 1863 when they moved to Bayswater after Mrs Offord died. In 1857 he was Superintendent of the Domestic Mission Committee and his wife helped run the Mothers' Meeting. With Brock and M'Cree he recommended Marian Bowers to Mrs Ranyard as a Bible woman (see chapter 9).⁵⁴ In 1861-2 Offord had Palace Gardens Chapel built in Kensington Park, with Charles Searle as architect.

Charles Gray Searle, architect and surveyor, trained under Thomas Cubitt of Pimlico and set up his own business in about 1846.⁵⁵ Charles and Kate Searle transferred from the King's Weigh House in 1857, when living at 4 Bloomsbury Place, and were active members until they moved away in 1870. Three of their sons were baptized at Bloomsbury; the eldest, Charles Henry, joined his father in business and brought his wife Annie from the Camden Place church.

language, preparation and delivery. From definition in John Stacey, *New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, SCM 1983.

52 Obituary in *The Examiner*, vol.82, no.11, 17 March 1904, by Augustus Hopkins Strong, President of Rochester Seminary. The accompanying photograph of the college staff includes Walter Rauschenbusch.

53 Obituary in *New York Baptist Annual* 1905, p.77.

54 C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, pp.77, 79, 91.

55 A major source for this section were Searle's own Letter Books, lent by his great-great grandson, Adrian Dence, in 1985. Volume I covers 22 June 1859-25 September 1860; Volume II 26 September 1860-18 January 1862. In them one catches a glimpse of the Nonconformist business network. See Faith Bowers, 'Letters of a Baptist architect', *Baptist Quarterly* 37, 1998, pp.249-57.

Mr and Mrs Searle were Bible Class leaders. By 1863 the *Year Book* reported that Mr Searle's Young Men's Bible Class comprised 'as large a number as the Vestry can possibly accommodate', they squeezed forty-five into the North Vestry, a room 5.4 x 3.2 metres! In 1864 sixteen of these young men had joined the church, eight left to teach in the Sunday schools, two to become district visitors; those remaining took turns to distribute tracts on Sundays. The class also met on Friday evenings for prayer and mutual instruction, and had a library with 100 books. In June 1865 they moved to 5 Red Lion Square, to allow for growth, rising to 128 in 1866, of whom sixty were already church members, while thirty had recently left to undertake other Christian work. Meanwhile Mrs Searle ran a class for young women at home. Charles Searle represented Bloomsbury on the Baptist Building Fund and was voluntary organist from April 1869 to June 1870.

Two extant manuscript letter books reveal much about his work and business contacts, many of them Bloomsbury colleagues, James Harvey, Robert Offord, George Hatton, John Francis, S.R. Pattison, and other Baptists, some of whom he first met when they visited Bloomsbury. He had plenty of local work in the Covent Garden and Drury Lane area, and built a number of Baptist chapels, including Heath Street in Hampstead, Palace Gardens, and Haywards Heath, and worked on others, including extensive alterations to Coleford Baptist, Forest of Dean.⁵⁶



Coleford Baptist Church

Benjamin Davies PhD LLD (1814-75)⁵⁷ and his American wife, Eliza,⁵⁸ transferred in 1858 from Montreal, where he was professor at McGill for ten years. Born in Carmarthenshire and trained at Bristol Baptist College, he also studied in Dublin, Glasgow and Leipzig. In Germany he formed 'life-long friendships with Tholuck, Ewald and Rodiger'.⁵⁹ He went to Montreal in 1838 to teach candidates for the Canada Missionary Society. He was Principal of

⁵⁶ The Coleford frontage reminded the author of Bloomsbury long before she knew of this connection.

⁵⁷ *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* obituary 1876; *Baptist Handbook* 1876; *DNB*.

⁵⁸ He had married Eliza Try of Portland, Me.

⁵⁹ W. Cathcart, *Baptist Encyclopaedia*, 1881.

Stepney 1843-7, but better as scholar than administrator. He returned to the college in Regent's Park as Professor of Oriental and Classical Literature.

He had a wide knowledge of languages, and translated *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*⁶⁰ from the German and prepared a Hebrew reading book to accompany it.⁶¹ 'When the work of revising the Authorized Version of the Holy Scriptures was undertaken by a committee of the Convocation of the Established Church', Davies, as a leading Hebrew scholar, was one of the first brought in to represent 'biblical scholarship amongst the Nonconformists'.⁶² The second Baptist Old Testament scholar was Dr Gotch. The *Revised Version* was published in 1877.⁶³ 'In examining a Hebrew word, he was as painstaking and as scientific as a physician scrutinising a cell in which some foreign element appeared that might contain the germ of life and death. To him every word of Scripture had a meaning definite and single, to be ascertained according to the fixed laws and rules of human speech. Dr Davies was one of the men to whose memory Nonconformity has not yet done justice. We have so many saints that we do not even try to hold their names in remembrance.'⁶⁴

Dr Davies was a willing and active member of the church. William Brock junior remembers 'good Dr Benjamin Davies and his delightful wife' as family friends who would drop in at the manse at Christmas when 'old and young became playfellows; and a notable sight it was to watch the Hebrew professor, with his eyes carefully bandaged, grasping the air or the window-curtains at blind-man's-buff ... Pastor and professor ... took their reward afterward in the hour of intimate fireside talk which the elders of the party reserved for themselves'. Davies' contact with German theologians would not have been a commendation to all Baptists, but his biblical scholarship clearly did not frighten Brock.

60 Heinrich F. W. Gesenius (1786-1842) was a German orientalist and biblical scholar. His *Hebräisches und Chaldäisches Handwörterbuch* was published 1810-12.

61 First published in London in 1846, this was reissued in New York 1847, London 1852, London and Leipzig 1876, and Leipzig and Boston 1880. His publications also included *Student's Hebrew Lexicon: a compendious and complete Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testaments: chiefly founded on the works of Gesenius and Fürst, with improvements from Dietrich and other sources* (London and Leipzig, 1872). The *Paragraph Bible*, published by the Religious Tract Society, was largely his work.

62 Cathcart, *op.cit.*

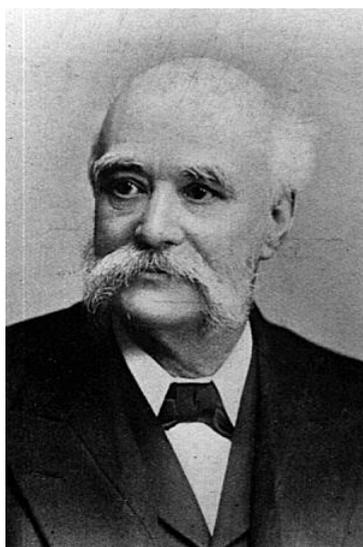
63 Leslie Chown gave the author the copy which James Benham presented to Joseph Chown.

64 J.C. Carlile, *The Story of the English Baptists*, p.222.

Charles Willis Denny,⁶⁵ the son of a village bricklayer, came to London to seek his fortune and established the firm of C.W. Denny & Co., House Decorators, Carpenters and Blind Makers of 69 Red Lion Street and 4 Red Lion Passage. In 1858 he and his bride came to Bloomsbury with a visiting cousin who wanted to hear Brock. Baptized the next year, they remained members for life. From 1860 to 1894 he regularly visited the poor, and was on the Domestic Mission Committee. He was made an Elder and then Deacon (1883), being Senior Deacon from 1894 to 1903. 'His cordial handshake and cheery welcome at the door were always appreciated by visitors to this church'. He served on the LBA Council and was a personal member of the Baptist Union. At the spring Assemblies in London, 'he was practically the host on behalf of the Church and was thus very well known throughout the denomination'.⁶⁶

Henry Elliot (1839-1907)⁶⁷ was a Congregationalist from Windsor who came to faith in 1854. Elliot moved to central London as a commercial traveller in 1860, eventually owning a leather merchant's business at 278 Walworth Road. He worked with boys in Moor Street Sunday School for a time, but joined Whitfield Chapel, off Drury Lane, and developed a young men's Bible Class in Long Acre and later Endell Street. His sister married Bloomsbury's William Webb.

In June 1871 Brock invited Elliot to take responsibility for a Young Men's Bible Class at the Chapel, bringing his own boys with him. He transferred his membership in 1872 and led the Bloomsbury class for thirty-six years. 'Theologically he was distinctly broad', although he never held with believer's baptism. Brock knew he had the right man for the job and told Elliot to teach as he liked and Brock would put the young men right from the pulpit! The church made him an elder, 1883-1905.



Henry Elliot

⁶⁵ B.J. Gibbon, *Memorial Sermon*, 11 January 1903. *Baptist Times* 16 January 1903.

⁶⁶ Obituary, *Baptist Times*.

⁶⁷ F.L. Blackaby, *Henry Elliot: A Memoir*, 1907.

The Bible Class secretary observed in 1891 that ‘the class had been very catholic in its character, besides Church of England the denominations represented being Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Brethren and Wesleyan Methodists’.

Elliot’s merry humour was as notable as his piety: he never lost touch with youth, in spite of worsening deafness. His home was open to the boys, and he took them on country rambles and boating trips, ensuring the poorer shared in wholesome leisure activities. He paid for some to have music lessons. This genial old gentleman, armed with his speaking-tube, was an outstanding and much-loved youth leader to the end.

Other members of church and congregation

Henry Stuart was head of Stuart & Sons of Old Change, a warehouse business, which George M’Cree served as chaplain. Edward Hagger ran an Italian warehouse. Henry Woodall (treasurer 1870-75) was a fringe manufacturer in Regent Street. Edward Nodes, a later treasurer, belonged to Nodes Brothers, ‘funeral furnishers, cremations, embalming’, at 12 Tottenham Street, Tottenham Court Road; the family were undertakers on a large scale, with some ten branches around north and west London. James Smith and his family had joined Bloomsbury before their umbrella business (founded 1830) moved almost opposite the chapel, where it continues. Members of this family were in the church for many years. A Bloomsbury artist, John Robert Dicksee, uncle of the better-known painter, Frank Dicksee RA, sat near the south door, just opposite Peto. He made a portrait of Brock in about 1856, a lithograph of which was sold for the church charities, prints at five shillings, proofs ten, and a limited edition of ‘artist’s proofs’ for twenty shillings (£1).

Somewhat later came Burton Matthews and his brother Ebenezer, local ironmongers, John Carter, perfumier of Fleet Street, and Gilbert Jennings BA, merchant of Gracechurch Street.

It is always harder to place members who did not hold office, but one family traced recently was that of Harold Cooper, who owned a smithy at the junction of Drury Lane and Sun Street, while his wife’s family were local bootmakers. The smithy was a large concern, with forty to fifty employees. At least eight of his thirteen children went to the Chapel, and one, Gustavus Adolphus (born 1877) often played the organ. He went to the Guildhall School of Music, as well as designing for his father’s firm.⁶⁸

68 Information from Brenda Holyer, Gustavus’ daughter, whom the author met at Bloomsbury, 10 July

The congregation ranged wider than the membership, including many whose work often brought them to London although home and church membership were elsewhere. M'Cree remembered Richard Harris, fancy hosier and MP for Leicester from 1848; John Candlish, glass bottle manufacturer and MP for Sunderland 1866-73; and Henry Winterbotham, barrister and MP for Stroud 1867-73, who was Under Secretary in the Home Department.⁶⁹ Harris and Winterbotham were both 'averse to extremes', though Candlish was 'somewhat narrow' in theology. David Livingstone sometimes worshipped at Bloomsbury when in London. Brock and M'Cree showed him missionary work in darkest St Giles.⁷⁰ A long letter to Brock from Dr Livingstone in Africa was prompted by appreciation of the Havelock biography. The chatty letter shows that Livingstone regarded Brock as a friend, sending greetings to Mrs Brock, the Petos, Thomas Binney and C.H. Spurgeon.⁷¹ Birrell mentions as worshippers Dr Murch, formerly Stepney principal; Henry Foster Burder DD (1783-1864), former Chairman of the Congregational Union 1844; and the opera singer, Edwin Ransford.

The 'celebrated actor and play-writer', Sheridan Knowles,⁷² was baptized by Brock late in life and then tutored Stepney students in elocution. G. H. Davies remembered Knowles entering the classroom 'full of excitement about "the Cambridgeshire lad" who had just come to the Park Street pulpit'. He urged the students to hear and learn from the young Spurgeon.⁷³

Charles Mudie (1818-1890) moved his Lending Library to New Oxford Street in 1852, and was often in the Bloomsbury gallery.⁷⁴ Mudie was 'eminently pious and charitable', a lay preacher, and worker among the poor. He wrote the hymn 'I lift my heart to thee, Saviour Divine'.

Sir Thomas Barlow (1845-1945) and Sir Oliver Lodge (1851-1940) both worshipped at Bloomsbury in their student days.⁷⁵ Barlow, brought up a Wesleyan, was a distinguished physician at University College Hospital and

1994.

69 C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, p.56. D.W. Bebbington, 'Baptist Members of Parliament, 1847-1914', *Baptist Quarterly* 29, 1981, pp.52-4.

70 M'Cree, and Todd in *Bloomsbury Sunday School Magazine*, February 1893.

71 Letter written from Kongone Harbour, 12 November 1859. I am grateful to Mr Alastair King, great-great-grandson of William Brock, for a copy. The original is in the Library of the University of East Anglia. The full text was published in the *Baptist Quarterly*, 35, 1994, pp.411-2, 'A letter to William Brock from David Livingstone'.

72 Birrell, pp.235-6.

73 C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography* I, p.353.

74 *Bloomsbury Magazine*, May 1920; *DNB*.

75 Church magazine, May 1920.

Great Ormond Street, and made a special study of scurvy and rickets, vitamin-deficiency conditions prevalent among poor children. He was Walter Benham's doctor in 1907-8. Lodge, physicist and radio pioneer, was at London University as student and lecturer 1870-81.

Ministers and missionaries sent from Bloomsbury

Over twenty-five men left Bloomsbury in the nineteenth century to become pastors, fourteen in Brock's time. The first, a founder member, commended to Stepney College in 1850, was William Bentley, who became pastor at Sudbury, a noted Hebrew scholar and father of William Holman Bentley, the Congo pioneer missionary. Charles Stovell was baptized by Brock and went to Bristol Baptist College in 1850.⁷⁶

James Ford and Henry Murray⁷⁷ were local boys, baptized by Brock. Some were only in London a few years and it is not easy to distinguish those who came as ministerial students from those whose call came under Brock's ministry. Butlin Dickins⁷⁸ and Henry Bayley⁷⁹ were students at Regent's Park College, and John Mayo⁸⁰ at Spurgeon's College. William Carey Walters from Birmingham (member 1874-5) was probably a student, as he became pastor at Whitchurch. W.W.B. Emery⁸¹ and Edgar Blackaby⁸² were in Henry Elliot's Bible Class.⁸³ In 1867 the church noted with regret that others had left to minister elsewhere without seeking Bloomsbury's blessing.

76 Stovell (1838-1925), not to be confused with Charles Stovel of Woolwich, yhad pastorates at Over Darwen, Fakenham, Lincoln and Chudleigh.

77 (1855-1943). Minister at West Kilburn 1889-99, and then for 21 years at Gunnersbury. Additional information on ministers' subsequent careers is drawn from obituaries in *Baptist Handbooks*.

78 (1834-1910) was a member of Bloomsbury 1856-9. On leaving Regent's, he served at Edenbridge, Naunton, Swadlincote and Husband's Bosworth.

79 (1837-1913) held pastorates at Kingston upon Thames, 1861-83, New Barnet and Addlestone.

80 1873-1953. From 1903 pastor at Lake Street, Leighton Buzzard.

81 Emery (1862-1937) went to Rawdon College, and had pastorates at Queen's Road, Coventry from 1891, North Finchley from 1913, and Cotham Grove, Bristol, from 1920.

82 After Bristol College, Blackaby (1883-1977) was assistant at Queen's Road, Coventry, and then pastor at Hillhead, Glasgow. He went to Bombay in 1916, returning to Milton-under-Wychwood in 1921, and his final pastorate was at Willingham, 1926-49.

83 John Stannissi (member number 478, Stannion/Stanniou - the writing is indecipherable) settled at Luton in 1856, Butlin Dickins at Edenbridge in 1859, Thomas Roberts at Oldborough in 1861, Philip Rowe at Thrapstone in 1862, and Thomas Pattison at Middleton Teesdale in 1863. Brock's son William was at Heath Street, 1861-1905. In 1864 Charles Marshall, baptized 1858, 'became pastor of a Church. Grafton St', and the following year Charles Starling, baptized 1857, in Cardiff. Mr Giles and John Williams, both baptized 1859, went in 1862 to Dublin and Norbreth respectively. George Hatton, baptized 1859, was first pastor of the group dismissed in 1867 to form the St Giles' Christian Mission.

Frederick Brotherton Meyer (1847-1929) came to Bloomsbury as a child, until the family moved to Brighton in 1856.⁸⁴ The Meyers, who were related to an early deacon, Henry Sturt,⁸⁵ never formally joined Bloomsbury, but rented the left corner seat at the back. Mr Meyer was a London merchant of German extraction, giving his son ‘a social background possessed by few Nonconformist divines’.⁸⁶ When his son, aged sixteen, felt called to ministry, Mr Meyer consulted William Brock, who heard the youth preach and advised Frederick to go into business for two or three years and then train for ministry. ‘Time and again in subsequent days Dr Meyer expressed the wish that every theological student could have a similar education in business, for in this way he would learn the real needs and temptations of young men and be able to exercise a much more effective interest.’ In 1866 Brock arranged for him to preach at the Mission Hall, after which Meyer was recommended to Regent’s Park College. Three years later he began his distinguished career as assistant to Brock’s friend, Charles Birrell.



F.B. Meyer

Reuben Handford, brother of Brock’s unhappy successor, was commended to Rawdon College in 1873 and served long and faithfully.⁸⁷ When Mr Hart sought to enter Rawdon College to train as a missionary in 1885, Mr Elliot and Mr Webb helped him financially.

James G. Ford (1858-1928) was seventeen in March 1875 when he was baptized. Educated in the Bloomsbury Chapel Day School, he trained first as

84 A. Chester Mann, *F.B. Meyer*, 1929, pp.20-39. I am grateful to Pastor J.B. Jones, then of St Giles’ Christian Mission, for drawing my attention to the Bloomsbury references.

85 Mrs Meyer was one of ten children of Henry and Anne Sturt of Clapham Congregational Church. Henry and Alice Sturt belonged to Bloomsbury 1850-70.

86 D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, 1982, p.80.

87 (1852-1937), minister at Bishop Auckland; Gorton, Manchester; Baxter Gate, Loughborough for 27 years.

an architect, but entered Rawdon College in 1879. In 1882 he became pastor at Wakefield, moving to Bromsgrove (1893-1917) where he built up a strong church and was Secretary of the West Midland Association, 1896-1911. A keen historian, he was a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. He took a keen interest in education. In retirement at Silverdale he continued to preach among the Free Churches of North West Lancashire.⁸⁸

In December 1878 the deacons noted that Mr Davison was also seeking to train for ministry, and by the next September realized that something would have to be done, 'he having expressed a determination to enter the ministry'. Spurgeon had volunteered favourable reports on both Ford and Davison. They arranged for Davison to preach at some afternoon services, and commended him, although he had to wait until 1881 for a place at the Pastors' College.

Some went overseas. John Parsons, baptized 1858, was commended to Regent's Park College and left Bloomsbury in 1863 to become a pastor in New Zealand. Edgar Blackaby was in Bombay for five years. Alfred Lapham, who came from Salisbury in 1875, became assistant to Hugh Stowell Brown in Liverpool. Later he went to Ceylon with the BMS.

Bloomsbury's missionaries included Martha Spearing, baptized 1863, the first single woman missionary to go to Congo, where she died in 1887. The Congo claimed other lives prematurely: William H. Doke, who transferred from Chudleigh in Devon, to train at Regent's Park College after Brock's missionary sermon at the Plymouth Assembly, and Annie B. Baker, who transferred from Shepherd's Bush in 1882 and married the Revd A.E. Scrivener (BMS Congo 1885-1916). The Revd Sidney Bowskill survived much longer in Angola and Congo from 1900. Sutcliffe Robinson went to Jamaica in 1878. Miss Jennings became a Zenana missionary in 1883 and she and Miss Jay worked in Tangiers from the 1890s.

This was a proud record for the church's first fifty years.

88 Obituary, signed F.H.B., in *Baptist Handbook*. See also in chapter 10, 'The Schools'.

8

FINANCE

'proportionate pecuniary co-operation'

Bloomsbury Chapel Directory 1850

Peto's contribution

Baptist churches depend on members' giving. When Bloomsbury Chapel opened there were no church members so Peto assumed the initial financial responsibility for his experiment. He spent a little over £10,000 in setting the chapel up and suggested the church should repay £4,000. Baptist records imply that the sum was duly repaid.¹ Peto must have intended this to be understood, but the Church Minutes (5 March 1852) explain that 'The Church and Congregation having contributed £2000 ... Mr Peto thought it better that the remaining £2000 should not be asked for ...' This is stated in the 1852 assignment of the lease to the new trustees. In waiving the rest, Peto's only condition was prompt clearance of the £500 debt for alterations, to which he promptly contributed £200. Someone suggested presenting a framed vote of thanks, but the majority sensibly decided that liquidating the £300 would be a more appropriate show of gratitude.

The deacons, Peto among them, undertook responsibility from October 1849. Total expenditure between December 1848 and September 1849 amounted to £1,267; pew rents had brought in £677. Peto made up the difference. These expenses included M'Cree's salary, thereafter raised separately as an expense of the Domestic Mission. Peto continued to pay Brock's rent. To the charitable agencies Mr and Mrs Peto contributed £125 in 1852 (14.4% of the total £868), and £202 in 1863 (15.8% of £1,275). Theirs were usually the highest individual donations.

Income

The *Bloomsbury Chapel Directory* for 1850 declared:

It is expected of all the members severally that they will, at once and
statedly, contribute according to their ability, not only to the maintenance

¹ e.g. Birrell, p.174 footnote; *Freeman* obituary of Peto, 22 November 1889.

of public worship at Bloomsbury, but also to the various religious institutions of which mention is hereafter made. It is sometimes forgotten, especially where several members of a family belong to the church, that every person who constitutes the church is a fellow-helper to the truth, by proportionate pecuniary co-operation, as well as by such personal service as he may be able to perform.

The main income came from pew rents. Each member was expected to hold a sitting, paying quarterly in advance. Rents varied with location, but few details survive. A surviving Gallery Pew Rent Book for 1875-83 shows rents from 2s 6d to 10s 6d per quarter. The various deficit discussions seem not to have considered increasing rents, so these may have been in force from 1849. In 1885 rents averaged 5s 0d. The ground floor 'area' was generally dearer than the gallery. Given earnings like £2 a week for the schoolmaster and £1 for the mistress, a quarter's sittings for a family would be significant.² The only surviving Victorian Receipts book, 1878-84, hints at the social distribution, for the Area is marked for Gold, Silver and Copper, but the Gallery only for Silver and Copper.

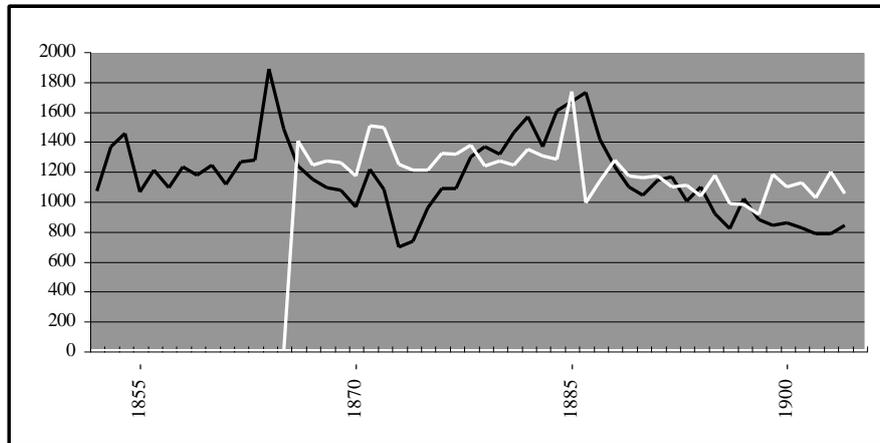


Chart II: Giving to charitable agencies and to main Church Fund (recorded from 1867)

Pew Rents were fine provided most sittings were taken, but too often 'on account of unlet seats the present income was not equal to the expenditure'.³

² In the early 1870s Peto paid £5 a quarter for Pew 8 at South Street, Exeter; this would have accommodated several members of his family. Letter to author from Mr John Cumming of Exeter.
³ Church Minutes 5 February 1869.

In 1852 992 sittings should have realized £1,153-10-0, but there was a five per cent loss. In the early days visitors usually filled vacant seats, but did not provide regular income.

In 1853 the deacons arranged two special collections a year, soon increased to four, 'to give strangers an opportunity of contributing to the funds', and collected these 'from pew to pew instead of holding boxes in different parts of the Chapel'. This was no light decision and was much discussed. At the back of the first Church Minute Book (1849-60) is a note in Brock's hand, summarizing the arguments. His own views are clear:

Remark on the Subject of Collection from Pew to Pew

1. 'You should not concern yourself with such matters'. 'Set all secular matters alone'! No. I am bound to declare the whole Counsel of God.
 2. 'You ought not to expect us without exception to contribute'. Creditors unpaid! Means small. Parents give!
 3. 'You are not to ask us at all. We are to do it spontaneously'. Paul asked. Titus was sent on purpose. 'Show ye to them the proof of your love'.
 4. 'You must not apply to us in this way'.
 - α) 'The clinking of money'! We have that at Lord's Supper. You would have it at the doors. What is it after all?
 - β) 'You would commingle the godly with the ungodly. So you do in psalmody. So indeed at the doors: the application is made to every one passing its boxes ...
 - γ) 'You destroy all voluntaryism forthwith'. How so? Literally nothing more is done than giving the opportunity. It may be declined. No more in this than at the door at all.
1. The practice has been generally adopted. I have seen it in operation in every place but one all this year!
 2. It is exceedingly convenient. Myself standing.
 3. It harmonizes with the religiousness of the act exactly.

After a year's trial they continued, though with some reservations.

Bloomsbury raised large sums for good causes (Charts II and III) but struggled with the running costs. Income and expenditure were usually close, with sometimes a modest surplus or small deficit, usually quickly cleared. In 1864, 1867 and 1871 special Finance Committees sought improvements. In 1885, when twice as much was given to the various good causes as to church funds, the deacons asked: 'whether a percentage might not be taken off the

amounts collected for purposes outside the Church in order to assist in meeting the current expenses.’ The only evidence of such practice relates, late in the century, to the main Sunday offerings for visiting evangelists during Missions or for the BU Twentieth Century Fund. Then the normal average was retained for church funds.⁴

Frederick Benham, as auditor in 1870, suggested the church should be ‘better acquainted with its financial position as the year went on’, so the deacons put up round the chapel eight more offering boxes and fifteen frames, announcing the sums collected each week.

The 1871 Finance Committee considered weekly offerings the most effective way of increasing income: at least £3 per week was needed, £7 would render the incidental charge unnecessary. Some wanted to ask for one penny per week per head, claiming this would produce enough and induce good habits. ‘Some brethren were not so sanguine’, but all encouraged offerings in boxes at the doors. In 1871 these averaged £4 6s 0d a week over the year, which covered the ground rent. In 1870 pew rents realized £900, quarterly collections £189, and weekly offerings £181; by 1886 the corresponding figures were £613, £196 and £206.

Other income was limited. The Day Schools paid £50 rent and the chapel was sometimes let. There was the occasional legacy. A timely donation from Miss Wentmore in 1870 lifted a depressed church, with £250 for evangelical work, £250 for running costs, £100 for poor relief.⁵ She gave a further £375 in 1872, ‘from her personal regard for the Pastor’.

Special funds were raised for repairs, and sometimes the church resorted to Deficiency Funds, raised by direct giving and special efforts: thus, in 1867 Brock lectured on his American tour, the young men gave a concert, and the congregation collected £100.⁶

Charitable giving

Each charitable agency provided a report for the Year Book, with subscription lists. Treasurers appear to have borne any deficit themselves.

4 Deacons Minutes 4 May 1871.

5 Church Minutes 30 September 1870.

6 *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1868.

The Lord's Supper Fund, after meeting table expenses, relieved poor members and helped local charities, and the LBA Fund for distressed widows and orphans of ministers. The church gave for disasters like Bengal Famine Relief (1874, £13), and the Jamaica Cyclone Fund (1880, £21). From March 1863 they collected pew to pew at the evening communion service. This fund raised £186 in 1867, slowly dropping to £102 in 1894 and plunging to £48 in 1904.

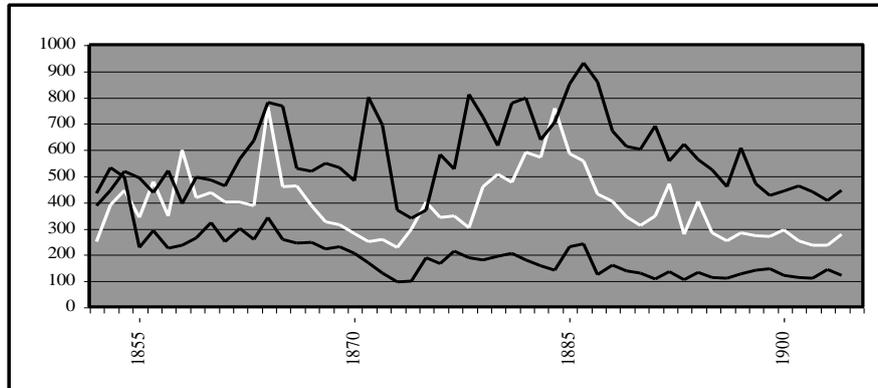


Chart III: Main Charitable giving (upper line shows the Domestic Mission, middle line foreign mission, and lower line the schools)

Chart III shows the totals subscribed to Foreign Missions, Domestic Mission and Schools. At first education caught the church's imagination, but this dwindled. At times peaks alternate between foreign and domestic mission: one can almost hear treasurers competing for 'floating donors'! A typical year's list shows the range of donations. The Petos' contributions are listed separately to give a truer impression of the congregation's giving.

The main overseas interest was the Baptist Missionary Society. Giving to work overseas was normally lower than to the Domestic Mission. Bloomsbury's figures compare happily with Pembroke Chapel's average of £183 to foreign missions in the 1850s when Bloomsbury was averaging around £390, but were lower (£290) than Regent's Park's (£411) in 1879.⁷ At first the commitment was an annual subscription; from 1881 a system of monthly envelopes with twelve collectors increased support.

⁷ Payne, p.76. Regent's Park Minutes consulted in Baptist Union Library, now in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

Subscriptions to the charitable agencies, 1863

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Petos'</u>	<u>Highest</u>	<u>Lowest</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Foreign Mission	188	£100-0-0	£15-0-0	2s 6d	£349-12-9
Domestic Mission	170	£50-0-0	£15-15-0	2s 6d	£373-16-9
Mothers Meeting	31	£1-0-0	£1-0-0	9d	£17-6-1
Missionary Working Party	26	-	18-0	2s 6d	£10-2-6
Sick Poor Relief Society	113	£21-0-0	£7-0-0	2s 0d	£123-15-11
Cheap Clothing Society	63	£2-0-0	£2-2-0	5s 0d	£41-13-3
Maternal Society	36	£1-1-0	£5-0-0	5s 0d	£24-1-11
Day Schools	51	£20-0-0	£3-0-0	2s 6d	£115-11-7
Sunday Schools 110	£2-2-0	£3-0-0	2s 6d	£64-19-9	
Ragged Schools	60	£5-5-0	£6-0-0	2s 6d	£76-7-0
Calcutta School- Young Men's Society for the Relief of the Poor	-	-	-	£25-17-0	
	58	£1-0-0	£1-1-0	2s 6d	<u>£51-16-3</u>
					<u>£1275-0-7</u>

The Sunday Schools received about £50 p.a., rising to £115 in 1871, when they benefited from closure of the Day Schools. Their support did not decline in later years: in 1904 £106 was received. Subscriptions to the Ragged Schools (around £70) were doubled by Congregational Collections in alternate years. Soon most months saw a special collection. Thus in 1865 there were two for the Domestic Mission, and one each for Foreign Mission, Baptist Building Fund, Day Schools, local hospitals, and Regent's Park College, plus quarterly collections for the ground rent. Figures ranged from £3 to £70 per collection. A small annual sum went to the Particular Baptist Fund, rather more to the LBA and the British and Irish Home Mission. From 1870 regular contributions went to the Pastors' Income Society. The church usually sent £20-£30 a year to Baptist colleges (the nearby Regent's Park and, if different, the one where the current minister trained). All these fell off by the end of the century.

Expenditure

The first claim was the minister's stipend. Brock was paid £500 p.a., rising to £600 in 1853, and £700 in 1861. From 1855 the church also defrayed his Income Tax (£12-£19 p.a.). In 1869 he suggested a salary cut to help the church, but this was ruled out, although he was allowed to take over payment of one of his Life Insurance premiums from 1871. James Benham told members, 'He wished to pay both of them but to this we should not consent'. M'Cree was paid £104 at first, rising to £200.

Although perpetually hard up, the church treated Brock well and never begrudged money spent on ministry. He had August (allowing five Sundays) as annual holiday, and also four months' 'sabbatical' in 1866. At the Terseptenary he was given £1,000 and his wife a couch, and provision was made for his retirement. His stipend was good, but not enormous:

Olympian ministers, chiefly Congregational, might expect between £700 and £1000 in the second half of the nineteenth century, but the generality were not nearly so grand. In 1867 a Manchester congregation ... advocated a minimum stipend of £150 for a village pastor, with £250 for his small town and £300 for his larger town counterparts.⁸

The 'affluence of clerical income' in Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* (1855) was £800. Among Baptists Hugh Stowell Brown received £900;⁹ Dr Landels' stipend at Regent's Park Chapel reached £800 in 1863, though his successors received £600-£700, and their Domestic Missionary £100 in 1857. Bloomsbury's Day School master received £100, which would afford 'lower middle class comfort'.¹⁰

The church was anxious to pay visiting preachers properly. In 1861 deacons enquired the practice of other London churches and settled on 21s 0d per service for students and some ministers, and 31s 6d for 'ministers of established standing', plus coach hire. Brock and M'Cree considered 10s 0d a ludicrous offering from another wealthy London church.¹¹ When M'Cree became pastor of the separate Mission Church, Bloomsbury paid him £21 a year for Sunday afternoon services.

8 Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity 1780-1920*, London 1977, p.18.

9 Regent's Park Chapel Minutes; Gordon Savage, 'Hugh Stowell Brown', Baptist Historical Society Lecture 1975, unpublished.

10 Gillian Avery, *Victorian People*, 1970, notes that her schoolmaster grandfather could save on £70 p.a. in 1895. In 1851 Mayhew found poor working men in London typically earned sixteen to eighteen shillings a week (£41-£47 per year, provided they kept fit and found work every week).

11 M'Cree, p.114.

Other expenses included care of the chapel. Batchelor Russell and his wife, as full-time chapelkeepers from 1850, jointly earned 30s 0d a week.¹² Doorkeepers and pew-openers were paid until 1882 (10s 0d a month is noted). Music cost £50 to £70 a year, of which organists were paid £30-£40; in the early days a conductor was paid £7, and the choir £20. These were gradually pruned back. Peto employed a bookkeeper to collect pew rents, and the deacons took him over in 1853, paying £20 (£30 from 1868).



The 1871 Finance Committee concluded that pulpit expenses and chapel keeping should not be reduced. With good volunteers, they might dispense with the paid soprano. Mr Francis offered cost price printing, and suggested two or three young men might take over pew rents: for 'a paid bookkeeper was not general amongst our churches'. Brock minuted: 'A good deal was said but nothing definite was done.' The success of weekly offerings enabled the church to retain Mr Meen's paid services, and the deacons only took over the bookkeeping in 1881.

For all their efforts, financial problems recurred. The late Victorian church seems to have accepted periodic Deficit Funds as a way of life.

12 In the 1890s Charles Booth judged that sufficient for 'solid working class comfort'.

Fabric maintenance

These Victorian Baptists, liking impressive buildings but attaching no particular sanctity to them, found fabric upkeep a perpetual burden. Ardent voluntaryists, they were irked by the enforced requirements of ground rent (£200) and the lease's stipulations on redecorations, so approached them in a different spirit. They tried to purchase the freehold in 1864, when Peto would have paid half. The building constantly required improvements: £868 worth in 1858, £1,120 in 1866, £4,428 in 1877, but all these debts were cleared within two years.

Insurance was another condition of the lease, three-quarters of the value with a view to re-instatement, approved by the Crown Commissioners. In 1854 a new policy with the General Fire Office covered chapel, pews and pulpit for £6,400 and the organ for a further £600. In 1860 George Brock arranged a new policy with the Royal, for £16,200 (building £15,400, organ £600, £200 ground rent) at a premium of £16 7s 0d. Tax and insurance cost about £20 p.a., and fuel and water a further £35-£60, rising markedly from 1899, reflecting the change to electric light. Stationery, postage and hymnbooks varied, £6-£125: higher figures reflect bulk purchase of hymnals.

Attitudes to money

While grateful to a few wealthy supporters, Bloomsbury has always depended on many modest contributions. The detailed publishing of these by name through the Victorian period contrasts curiously with modern taste. A comparison with Regent's Park Chapel suggests that, although Bloomsbury had about a hundred more members, the social mix was more varied so less was raised, but of that a higher proportion went to charities.

Bloomsbury deacons worried a lot about money. The large Victorian church was less viable financially than the smaller church since World War II, although maintaining the same building (with an extra floor replacing the separate Mission Hall), and employing a similar number of staff. Today's treasurer wonders why they did not increase pew rents; they seemed reluctant to ask members to increase their giving to the main church fund. The Victorian church was more generous to good causes at Bloomsbury and further afield. Members, leaving the deacons to fret over fabric and ground rent, probably felt they had their priorities right.

9

CONSECRATED COMMONSENSE Bloomsbury Chapel Domestic Mission¹

*'It was the glory of Bloomsbury to possess and effectually work
a slum mission before slumming became a fashionable craze'*

J.C. Carlile

George M'Cree (1822-92)

With Brock from Norwich came the young temperance missionary, George Wilson M'Cree. A northerner, with minimal training, limited experience, and poor health, and a General Baptist, whereas Brock was a Calvinist, M'Cree might not appear an obvious choice, but Brock knew his man.

To the district where vice was most rampant, Bloomsbury sent its representative, Mr G.W. M'Cree, a man of consecrated commonsense and great boldness in the service of Christ. He was identified with every good work, and was as popular in the thieves' kitchen of the penny lodging-house as upon the platform of a temperance meeting.²

His father was a Presbyterian grocer on Tyneside; his sister Euphemia became a Primitive Methodist preacher in the pit-villages, and soon George too began to preach outdoors around the Lake District. When eighteen, he became a Baptist and signed the pledge two years later. The denominational change was a personal but not exclusive conviction. He

never regarded baptism as ESSENTIAL to Church fellowship ... he *preferred* that all his members should be *immersed* believers, but if believers, that was sufficient ... The terms 'open' and 'close' were very distasteful to one who was himself wide open.³

After short pastorates, interrupted by illness, at Boroughbridge and Monkwearmouth, during 1847 M'Cree was a temperance missionary in Nottingham and Norwich. His first publication was on the principles of the

1 See Faith Bowers, 'Religion amongst the proprietaries of life: George M'Cree and the Bloomsbury Domestic Mission', *Baptist Quarterly* 33, 1989, pp.29-36.

2 J.C. Carlile, *The Story of the English Baptists*, 1905, p.255.

3 Charles Wilson McCree, *George Wilson McCree: his life and work with extracts from his journals*, 1893, p.19. His father preferred the spelling M'Cree. This chapter is based on this and Domestic Mission reports in Year Books.

Peace Society. He married and had two sons. Charles was baptized in 1862, but in 1870 joined the Church of England, after long doctrinal arguments with his father. Edwin, the younger son, emigrated to Canada.

George M'Cree's voice was powerful yet melodious and expressive, his delivery slow and his style, in marked contrast to Brock's, was 'homely, at times colloquial, and never encumbered by long sentences long drawn out, or obscured by words above the understanding of the common people... His addresses were studded with facts, quickened by pathos and humour, and pervaded by a moral tone which none could overlook or despise'.⁴ He used plenty of illustrative anecdotes.



George M'Cree

He was a powerful preacher, but his son considered him even better as a lecturer: both 'had the same simplicity, terseness and pointedness, while the sermon had less of that play of humour which the platform permitted and invited'. His lecture 'Day and Night in St Giles' was given over 300 times around the country;⁵ others included 'Baptists and the Abolition of Slavery', 'Lights and Shades of Life in London', and 'Why are Ragged Schools necessary?' 'He did it all so easily', remembered his son, describing how his father, when at Borough Road,

would take a light tea say at four, travel forty or fifty miles, lecture to two or three hundred people, back home without bite or sup, take a simple supper, and then sit up by the fire reading alone till one or two in the morning, and down again by eight. Then next day off again ... He often went away on Monday afternoons, lectured in a provincial town, slept there, went further on Tuesday, further still on Wednesday, ran back on Thursday morning to dinner, had a good sleep in the afternoon, and over to the Borough to conduct the week evening service, as cool as

4 Dawson Burns in C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, pp.141f.

5 In one year's diary his son found engagements in Berkhamstead (2 visits), Diss, Southend, Bradford, Long Eaton, Cottenham, Havenhill, Falmouth, Truro, Ford, Brighton (3), Huddersfield (2), Green Hammerton, York, Nantwich, Market Drayton, Mow Cop, Stevenage, Newport, Aylesbury, Herne Bay (2), Reading, Maidenhead (2), Great Marlow, Peterborough (2), Spalding, Chatham, Addlestone, Thrapstone, Tring, Northampton, Newbury, Norfolk, Lincoln, Sidcup, Esher and Watford, and all over London. C.W. McCree, p.166.

though he had not been further than Charing Cross since the Sunday.⁶

He did, however, believe in good holidays, a practice Bloomsbury encouraged. His son remembered ‘a parson’s fortnight’ (three Sundays) in early summer, and another in September. They visited various parts of Britain, but not Europe, though his father would have liked to visit the Holy Land. Occasionally he took his family out for a day. One trip to Willesden, when Charles was a young child, was memorable: a kind friend arranged the outing and they dressed eagerly in holiday attire. ‘It was a take down and no mistake’ when the friend, an undertaker, arrived at the door to take them to Kensal Green in ‘an old fashioned mourning coach, with two black horses’!⁷

A leading figure in the temperance movement, M’Cree was Band of Hope editor from 1857 and then Secretary 1865-75, and on the committees of the United Kingdom Alliance and National Temperance League. He helped found the London Temperance Hospital. He was active in the Liberation and Peace Societies, and served on the Mansion House Committee on the Dwellings of the Poor, regularly sitting next to Cardinal Manning.

According to John Clifford, the London General Baptist Ministers’ Fraternal, formed in 1877, was conceived in ‘the fertile mind’ of George M’Cree.⁸ Theological differences did not prevent him working well with Brock. M’Cree’s rapidly produced biographical tribute to Brock ran to five editions.⁹ General and Particular Baptists were drawing closer through this period, eventually merging the year M’Cree died.

Beginning the Mission

As Domestic Missionary of Bloomsbury Chapel M’Cree was to visit, preach and lead worship among the poor. Brock and M’Cree approached first the undisturbed rookery behind the chapel, but were driven out violently by the ‘fierce fanaticism of the Irish’ there. Instead they directed their attention to the immediate south. Conditions there were appalling but the people proved more accessible.¹⁰ M’Cree describes how:

As soon as possible, I took my first walk into St Giles. I walked into it

6 C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, p.167.

7 C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, pp.42, 48, 181, 182.

8 C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, p.152, and preface to John Clifford, *The English Baptists: who they are and what they have done*, 1881.

9 C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, p.173.

10 Birrell, pp.178-9.

alone; and yet I was not alone, because the Father was with me. I remember passing to and fro, a stranger, unknown to any, exploring my way, as best I could ... I was induced to enter a barber's shop ... and there I began ... to testify ...

I went into every attic and cellar and lodging-house, and every place in which I could find a human being. I visited these for six months, and although it was thought one of the worst parts of St Giles ... except on one occasion, I never received an insult.¹¹



Dudley Street, by Doré. The main thoroughfare between Chapel and Mission Hall

As soon as the church was formed, the Domestic Mission Committee was set up to support M'Cree, and hired a large room in King Street, Long Acre, as a Mission Hall (for map of area, see page 12). Within four years M'Cree was visiting four hundred families each month, 'as meticulous as a rent collector', and preached to 150-200 on Sunday evenings. Volunteer Sabbath Visitors

¹¹ G.W. M'Cree, *Twenty Years in St Giles, (a sermon)*, 1868.

covered an adjacent district on Sunday afternoons. They encountered ‘drunken and depraved classes’ yet were well received and felt useful.¹² In 1854, with fifteen visitors, they were able to enlarge their district and found opposition was waning, even from Roman Catholics. Districts were clearly defined, because co-operation with other Christians serving in the area was good. M’Cree often refers to his ‘district’ and to those of London City missionaries nearby.

At its peak with forty visitors in the late 1850s, Bloomsbury’s District Visiting Association covered Broad Street, Dudley Street, King Street, Queen Street, Neal’s Yard, Neal’s Passage, the Back Entry, and George Street, including all the kitchens (where the most wretched gathered). With multiple occupancy, these streets were home to several thousand people. Later nineteen visitors covered 150 families in Dudley Street and 100 men in the George Street kitchens, where they held brief services. District Visitors, often helped by Regent’s Park and New College students, offered tracts and invitations, encouraged cleanliness and education, channelled relief, and ran branch Sunday Schools. They even penetrated that ‘most deplorable neighbourhood’ behind the chapel, from which Brock and M’Cree had been driven when they first came. The visitors were pleasantly surprised at their resistance to the pervading infections - ‘God usually protects the visitors’; doubtless better diet and general health also helped. In 1861 they asked for some lady visitors, ‘circumstances frequently occurring which required the womanly attention of Christian friends’; the men must by then have felt confident of welcome. In 1869 members of the Mission Church undertook the local visiting, and the Chapel volunteers concentrated on leading services and meetings at the Rose Street hall.

Mission activities

A wide range of evangelical and welfare work was quickly established. M’Cree was ‘one of the earliest to face the imperative urgency of the Social Gospel’, according to John Clifford.¹³ Each week there were Sunday and Tuesday evening services, Sunday Schools, prayer meetings, open-air preaching in summer, and a meeting for destitute children. Visitors did not go armed with material aid, but referred cases of acute need to various aid societies, chiefly Bloomsbury’s Sick Poor Relief Society, Cheap Clothing

12 See their annual reports in *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Books*.

13 John Clifford, ‘The Bishop of St Giles’, *Bloomsbury Chapel Sunday School Magazine*, January 1893.

Society for the Industrious Poor, and Ladies Charity for Assisting Poor Married Women. The latter, renamed the Maternal Society in 1854, helped with confinement supplies. In 1852 forty-one mothers were lent equipment and baby clothes and only one failed to return them; in very bad areas the Society found gifts better than loans. Church members subscribed to and staffed these aid societies, and reported regularly in the Year Books.

The Visitors distributed 20,000 tracts a year, many of them written by M'Cree.¹⁴ He found many poor men could read and welcomed free literature: 'Conversed with a number of men - most of them thieves - in Neal's Yard. They took my tracts and sat down on the ground and round the gin shop door to read them.' In 1853 M'Cree, aided by a generous Quaker, opened a lending library at the Mission, with 450 books and 130 readers. He believed this the best way to counter pornography:

I devoted a portion of my afternoon to examining the books read at a coffee shop, which is frequented by many from my district ... an immense number of immoral books, the worst in our language, and from their appearance very much read. Numbers of young boys and men read them, and I am fully persuaded such a collection of dangerous and impure volumes must do more harm than can be undone by a *dozen missionaries*. My visit convinced me of the vast importance of a *good* lending library ... for ... the working classes.¹⁵

Books were exchanged before the Tuesday evening service. A Bible and Book Society helped people save for their own Bibles and good books, such as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Brock's *Life of Havelock*, Martin Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy* and *Hedley Vicars*.

In 1858 M'Cree induced three shop-keepers to close on Sundays. Another time he tackled a 'porn' merchant who had opened a 'cheap and nasty exhibition, with an indecent announcement outside as a bait'. M'Cree simply stood outside, saying nothing. His familiar presence deterred people from entering, so eventually the showman took down the 'bait'.

In 1852 the Cheap Clothing Society sold 928 items.¹⁶ These were sewn by Bloomsbury ladies, meeting monthly in the vestry from 3-8 p.m.:

To induce economical habits, with a view to such savings of money as

¹⁴ George M'Cree wrote some sixty-eight pamphlets and tracts.

¹⁵ C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, p.30; see also p.49.

¹⁶ '270 chemises, 31 night-jackets, 60 petticoats, 56 shirts, 35 sheets, 161 pinafores, 67 aprons, 12 caps, 52 children's stays, 43 prs hose and socks, 29 handkerchiefs, 112 blankets.'

may be advantageously expended in procuring at half price blankets, material for garments, and garments ready-made. Great care is taken to render this assistance only to such persons as are known to be deserving, morally and otherwise.¹⁷

Members who subscribed 5s 0d¹⁸ a year secured three tickets worth 1s 6d each to give to the 'industrious poor' (but not servants), who then paid a further 1s 6d for 3s 0d worth of clothing. Men might subscribe. Improving conditions were reflected in the reports of this Society. By 1862 there was more demand for ready-made articles than for material, and in 1865 better quality blankets were appreciated. When Lancashire workers were in difficulties, the Society was careful to buy their products. Needs and support waned in the 1880s, yet the renamed Dorcas Society still provided seventy-four garments in 1894.

Sick Poor Relief provided money, fuel, food, and clothing, and also free medical advice and medicines, thanks to Dr Carlill and Messrs Burden and Linder, pharmacists, who were church members. 'No relief is given without personal visitation; and the visitors take care at all times to combine Christian counsel with the temporal relief afforded'.¹⁹ In 1864 Sick Poor Relief provided gifts of 832 quartern (4 lb/1.8 kg) loaves, 1,271 lbs (580 kg) of meat and 11 tons 5 cwt (11.4 tonnes) of coal.

With limited resources and great need, there was unashamed discrimination in favour of the 'deserving' poor (workhouses catered for the destitute), but assistance was not confined to mission adherents. M'Cree would refer anyone in dire need, Roman Catholics included. In giving relief, the constant aim was to 'avoid pauperizing the recipients, but to enable the poor, as far as possible, to help themselves'. If a man was ill, his tools might be pawned to feed his family, so relief often included redeeming tools so that he could earn a living again. Similarly, paying for an injured cabman's licence could enable him to return to work.

Charles McCree thought his father shrewd at distinguishing practised cadgers from people who had 'gone off the rails' and needed help to recover. Often M'Cree took starving youths into his home,²⁰ 'where I can best supply them with food, warmth, clothing, and kind words about the Gospel, and not a

17 *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1865, pastoral letter.

18 There were 12d (pence) to one shilling, 20s (shillings) to £1, but inflation makes simple comparison (5s = 25p) meaningless; £1 per week was an acceptable working-class wage.

19 *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1854.

20 He never lived in his district but was first at 53 Burton Street and 4 George Street, both near Euston, then in South Crescent, Store Street, and from 1860 in Ampton Street, Regent's Square, whence he later commuted to Borough Road.

few ... prove themselves clean, honest, worthy fellows'. His son met some of them in good positions in later years.

Other activities at the Mission Hall included the Mothers' Meeting, Singing Class, Writing Class, Watchnight Services, and temperance meetings, while the Coal Club and Penny Bank encouraged thrift. M'Cree's reports rarely mention temperance work, although often telling of alcohol's worst effects. The omission can only be because it was so integral that he did not single it out. In 1875 his successor listed the Band of Hope and three Temperance Societies, hardly all new. Before and after the Tuesday evening service, M'Cree held a Counsel Chamber, and people brought all manner of concerns. His son remembered keeping the queue in order on the stairs. On 16 February 1857 M'Cree noted a typical day's list of clients:

A husband who wished me to visit his intemperate wife; a mother who desired to consult me with regard to her son, whom she fears has been lost at sea; a father whose son had come out of prison, I got the lad into employment; a female without a home - she was assisted and has since gone to a place; a young man who has just come out of prison; two young women who desire to become members of Bloomsbury; a young man who cherishes the same desire; a mother who brought her son to me that I might beseech him to be a better boy; a man with a Crimean medal, who wished to know whether I could do anything to get him a pension; a ticket-of-leave woman,²¹ who implored me to get her into an Institution, which I did; a tradesman, who desired to be taught the way of salvation; a wretched woman, whose drunken husband had declared he would kill her.

In 1856 M'Cree asked to hold prayer meetings in people's homes. Poor as they were: 'More rooms were placed at my service than I could occupy; this, too, with the perfect knowledge that there would be no pecuniary reward for coals, candles, cleaning, &c.'

There was a strong educational element in the activities, because education encouraged self-help. Thus the Mothers' Meeting offered fellowship and instruction in needlework, with a cheap supply of materials, along with Christian teaching. Mary Brock, Eliza Benham and their friends went beyond the 'Lady Bountiful' role:

The presence of two or three Christian ladies in a company of sixty or seventy mothers, in order to superintend their needlework, to advise

²¹ i.e. a convict on parole.

them under their various circumstances, to take kindly notice of their infant children, to read to them at intervals from some interesting volume, and to induce the feeling of general friendliness among different classes, can hardly be over-estimated.²²

The Mothers' Meeting arranged a winter tea and summer excursion each year as treats for women with dismal, monotonous lives. A similar meeting for younger women began in 1864. These retained their popularity into the next century, drawing increasing numbers. From 1873 a Mothers' Monthly Prayer Meeting encouraged prayer for their children.

M'Cree tried to persuade parents to give their children toys, which were rare in St Giles.²³ He loved to brighten children's lives and took special delight in his dinners for those who rarely got more than a crust flavoured with fish.

Knowing how much sickness was induced by starvation, I resolved to supply one dinner per week for from 25 to 50 children. This would not be much, but it would have, I knew, a great effect upon their physical health ... [*he arranged for a cookshop to supply*] Clean white tablecloths, plates for two covers [*courses*], knives and forks, plenty of bread, good water, pepper and salt, and mustard, beef or mutton, vegetables, hot gravy and smoking plum pudding.

He invited children over ten, 'wan, hungry and neglected', and was touched to see how many tried to tidy themselves up before coming. In time 120 children were served each week. Most had to be taught how to use cutlery, let alone say grace.

Cheap teas were provided for other groups, like poor needlewomen, sandwich-men, drunkards, and even for 'the most wretched, neglected, ragged adults who could be found.' Two hundred or more would be served, with Mrs M'Cree ever ready to cater. One poor man drank fourteen cups of tea at one meal and announced 'he thought he'd had his sixpen'orth!'

Such activities brought people within earshot of the Gospel, for there was always a short evangelistic message. The mandate to call sinners to repentance motivated the work, but so too did compassion and



*A sandwich man
by Doré*

²² *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1865, pastoral letter.

²³ G.W. M'Cree, p.84.

Jesus' directive to care for the poor and distressed. Evangelism and social action were twin imperatives. Welfare work opened the way for preaching but the Gospel made huge demands on church members and offered the poor the prospect of a better life in this world as well as hope for the next.

For the poor, conversion involved material as well as spiritual transformation. With faith came self-respect and the will to change. They were helped to use their limited means more wisely and soon had more nourishing meals, better clothing and even furniture. The improvement in their appearance was so marked that the Mission had to be vigilant lest shabby newcomers were put off by the respectable appearance of the congregation. In March 1859 Mr Harvey reported to the church the commencement of another service in St Giles for 'a lower class than those who are gathered into our Mission Hall'. As people were helped to get their lives together they were able to move away to better areas, but since others took their place, the process began again. It was years before demands on the Mission began to ease.

People of the Mission

The 1867 Year Book describes a typical Mission congregation:

Sober, well-dressed mechanics, tradesmen, street-hawkers, thieves, temperance lecturers, costermongers, fallen women, men fresh from prison, begging letter writers, readers for the press, porters, happy mothers with their children, young men of good position, shoe-blacks, milliners' assistants, and not a few ... who keep themselves wrapped in mystery ... It is probably as thoughtful and still a congregation as there is in London.

Some, especially the young men, would be supportive Bloomsbury members. The porters were from Covent Garden Market.

M'Cree often mentioned people's occupations, showing a range of street trades and skilled and unskilled labour, with the occasional professional man. Shoemakers, soldiers on leave, cabmen, knife-grinders, dustmen, ballad singers, publicans, cookshop keepers, pawnbrokers, all appear, with the occasional lawyer, doctor or even clergyman reduced



Orange seller by Doré

‘through indulgence in bad habits’. He mentions a printer, an harpist, a chemist, a factory foreman, a gingerbeer manufacturer, a farrier, an ex-sailor, a navvy, a pavior, an actor, a conjuror (formerly a painter and paperhanger but there was too much competition), a dirty showman, an accountant reduced to doing market porters’ accounts, and a solicitor’s clerk. Often men are simply defined as ‘drunkards’. Women are found as costermongers, servants, washerwomen, makers of braces or army clothing, slop-workers, match or orange sellers, prostitutes and beggars. Children are mentioned as ballad-singers, beggars and pickpockets. Mrs Ranyard reckoned that street sellers could earn three to four shillings a day - and spend it all on drink.²⁴

In 1852 the Mission Committee considered, but could not afford, a second missionary. A Female Missionary, Mrs Symons, widow of a Primitive Methodist minister, worked mainly with sick-poor women between 1861 and 1867. She proved better than M’Cree at rescuing fallen women, but he often persuaded couples living together to marry. Lay ‘prayer leaders’ or a Mission Nurse later assisted the missionary.

M’Cree led the Mission for twenty-five years, declining an invitation to Chipstead in 1865,²⁵ but left soon after Brock’s retirement to become minister of Borough Road General Baptist Church, Southwark. Bloomsbury friends showed their appreciation of his work with gifts equal to three years’ salary.

Mission and mother church

An army of volunteers was mobilized from the Chapel: this was an important aspect of the church’s work. The Mission Committee involved *all* the deacons, plus other church members. Bloomsbury’s minister preached quarterly at the Mission Hall. Bloomsbury paid the staff and provided mission halls. That in King Street was outgrown by 1855 and they moved to better premises, the former Swiss Chapel in Moor Street, Five Dials (now north-east edge of Cambridge Circus).

It was a far superior place to King St. It had a gallery with good staircases leading to it, and good rooms at the top, one used as the library, and the other as the vestry ... It had to be approached by a long dark passage, but when it was reached you found yourself in a very commodious place of worship. It held about 500.²⁶

²⁴ LNR [Ellen Ranyard], *The Missing Link*, 1857, p.44.

²⁵ Deacons Minutes, 25 May 1865.

²⁶ C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, p.72

The congregation was then normally three to four hundred.

Mission converts joined the mother church, enjoying ‘full church privileges’, though most felt more comfortable at the Mission. By 1865 there were sixty such members, ‘an amount of spiritual fruit certainly not anticipated a few years ago’. Brock became concerned about so many members rarely seen at the Chapel and thought it worth forming a Mission Church. This was agreed in principle in January 1866, and came into effect a year later. The work at Moor Street was then conducted separately, though still financially dependent. The Mission Church could raise at least £50 a year (in 1858 the Committee had estimated the Mission needed £300), and looked ‘to Bloomsbury to make up any lack, with its renowned generosity’. M’Cree and his two deacons attended Bloomsbury Church Meetings.

When Brock retired, M’Cree sought greater independence. On 14 November 1872 the Bloomsbury deacons recommended approval of M’Cree’s plan for a more spacious building, but wanted the Mission Church to assume greater financial responsibility and pay part of the rent, with a view to eventual independence. The Mission would have its own morning service and take over the Moor Street Sunday School. M’Cree’s hopes were not realized and, probably unhappy with Handford as a colleague, he left in 1873. The Mission, with 111 members, was formally re-absorbed into Bloomsbury, but kept its own deacons and church meetings, with decisions ratified by Bloomsbury. New members were received into the church at Bloomsbury, and Bloomsbury deacons continued to arrange annual Public Meetings to raise funds for the Mission. C.H. Spurgeon was the guest preacher in 1876, and Lord Shaftesbury presided in 1878.

Mrs Ranyard’s Bible and Domestic Female Mission

Two other missions had their origins in that of Bloomsbury: Mrs Ranyard’s Bible and Domestic Female Mission and the St Giles Christian Mission.

Ellen Ranyard (1810-79) had long worked as a Bible Society agent in London before moving to Bloomsbury. Escorted around St Giles, she realized that no *lady*, however brave, could hope to sell Bibles there, and conceived the idea of *Biblewomen*, ‘native agents’ who would ‘intimately know the habits of the people’. Consulting the Rector of St Giles and William Brock, she was directed to M’Cree for a ‘good, poor woman who would venture with a bag of Bibles into every room, as a paid agent of the Bible Society’.

M'Cree thought of Marian Bowers,²⁷ who had been the first to use his library, when she came for a Bible. A poor woman, who had grown up in a St Giles' lodging-house and married a poor but sober man, she could read and write but earned a meagre living making wax flowers, firepapers and silversmiths' bags. In 1857 she had written to M'Cree, offering to give two or three hours a day to help 'the lost and degraded of my own sex, whom, from their vicious lives, no tenderly reared female would be likely to approach'. She envisaged washing the person, repairing clothes, cleaning the room, and trying 'to win such erring sister back to virtue and peace'.

Working for Mrs Ranyard and allowed to choose her streets, Marian began in Soho, close to St Giles Church. Even she was often shocked yet found people receptive because they had a vague idea that the Bible did them good, and they were impressed by the cheapness: these Bibles were clearly not being sold for profit. In twenty weeks she sold on subscription 130 Bibles and 120 New Testaments, the small, gilt-edged edition proving most popular. Her work was supervised 'by a Lady', probably Mrs Brock. In the evenings Marian would return in her own time to give practical help, which 'may be the means of my obtaining permission to read and, as well as I can, explain the glorious truths of the Book, for which in the morning, perhaps, I had vainly endeavoured to obtain an entrance'.

Few women could read (although their children often could), so she held tea parties in her one-room home and read the Scriptures to them. She encouraged sobriety, cleanliness and better housekeeping, reporting that the women were ready to learn but 'do not think much'. She sold them (for ½d so they would value it) Mrs Ranyard's soup recipe (1½ gallons for 6d), designed to reduce the craving for gin. Marian commented that she herself made it even more cheaply with bones or cowheel, but the prescribed ½lb of solid meat 'takes with the people much more'.

Before long her health broke down, but she had proved and extended Mrs Ranyard's original idea. By 1860 London had 134 Biblewomen and the work was spreading elsewhere. Some trained as Biblewomen-Nurses, one of the precursors of the District Nurse. The Mission congregation provided a second Bible-woman in 1859 and others later.

27 No relation to author. For Mrs Ranyard's work, see LNR [Ellen Ranyard], *The Missing Link: or Biblewomen in the homes of the London poor*, 1859, esp. pp.5-6, 14f, 44, and *London and Ten Years Work in it*, 1868.

St Giles Christian Mission

St Giles Christian Mission began with a group of Bloomsbury young men, led by George Hatton. With James Harvey's aid, they opened a branch mission in Queen Street in 1860. The Young Men's Society for the Relief of the Poor helped the deserving, but not necessarily sick, poor within one mile of Bloomsbury Chapel. Help went mainly to the childless aged, widows struggling to support families, and sick or unemployed working men. They lent or gave clothes, tools, furniture and money, visiting on Sunday afternoons. They held services at their hall on Sunday and Wednesday evenings, with lectures and classes other nights. In summer they arranged open-air services on Seven Dials, and in lodging-house kitchens in winter. Converts joined Bloomsbury and Brock held occasional communion services at their hall. In 1863 they moved to the former mission hall in King Street. That year twenty-four young men were active, with thirty-eight Chapel friends subscribing; they assisted eighty-one cases, with a further 350 tickets given for bread, meat and coals, and supplied twenty-six families with Christmas dinners.

The deacons envisaged this work coming under the Mission Church in 1866, but the young men hived off separately. Bloomsbury was peeved at the manner of this, but had no quarrel with the work. On 5 April 1867 the church dismissed thirty-seven King Street members with its blessing. Nine young men, including the Society's treasurer and secretary, were unhappy with the separation and remained at Bloomsbury.

By 1874 George Hatton and his colleagues had taken over the Little Wild Street chapel as their base and the work developed as the St Giles Christian Mission. By 1892 Charles Booth found this the best local mission work, by then a huge organization, with five stations in the area.²⁸ Prison-gate work had become a special interest. The Mission broke its Baptist connections in 1903 but is still active in Islington.²⁹

Consecrated commonsense

George M'Cree, that 'man of consecrated commonsense', was an early exponent of slum mission, at work in St Giles before Henry Mayhew began to

28 Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 2nd series, *Religious Influences*, vol.2, 1892, pp.169-205, esp.188-9.

29 I am indebted to the former pastor, J.B. Jones, for drawing my attention to - and lending me his copy of - C.W. McCree's biography of his father.

publish *London Labour and the London Poor* or James Greenwood wrote his investigative pieces, beginning with *A Night in the Workhouse* (1866). M'Cree penetrated the grim rookeries well before the better known work of the Salvation Army (founded 1865), Dr Barnardo's (1867), or the Church Army (1882), and before *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883) alerted Christians at large to the urban plight.³⁰

M'Cree preached and practised the whole Gospel for the whole man, woman and child. His diary contained many accounts of wretched 'homes', pathetic children, violent men and drunken women. He would: 'leave my house at 9 in the morning and return at 11 at night, having been all that time going from door to door, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and binding broken hearts.'³¹ Often he intervened in fights. He knew and loved his people and earned the right to preach to them, as did his lay colleagues.

Open-air preaching was still a rarity in London, although it became popular later. When Horace Mann suggested in 1854 'that "street-preaching" under proper sanction and control would not be too energetic a measure for the terrible emergency', M'Cree had been preaching regularly on Seven Dials for at least two years. Preaching outdoors elsewhere, he had experienced verbal and physical abuse: he knew about being stoned and floured. He was constantly amazed at the reception in St Giles:

How is it two other open-air preachers are laughed at and disturbed? Thomas Pavitt [*a Bloomsbury layman*] is not. I am not. There must be some simple reason for this ... Can you enchain the people on Seven Dials with a simple sermon on Christ? Yes, and with nothing else.



*M'Cree's portable pulpit
for open-air work*

Of services in the kitchens, he wrote: 'Is there any novelty in the service? Is there any excitement? Is there any noise? No, all is solemn, quiet, orderly and devout.' The occasional trouble-maker was quickly quelled by those wanting to listen.

Often people came to the Mission Hall after hearing M'Cree on the street;

³⁰ *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: an inquiry into the condition of the abject poor* was taken up as a focus of concern for the poor by W.T. Stead in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

³¹ G.W. M'Cree, *Twenty Years in St Giles*.

sick men would send for him because 'I have often heard you preach on the Dials and I thought I should like you to pray with me'. They knew that M'Cree and his friends made Christ's presence felt in those sordid alleys and filthy hovels.

M'Cree could record: 'Mrs C and her son I found in deep distress. Through want of clothing the lad has not been out of the house for four months ...' He clothed the boy and found him work and noted, 'His mother is much pleased with the change'.

M'Cree would spend three hours on Saturday evenings on Seven Dials, not to preach but:

to make personal appeals to the people who throng that spot, to invite them to the Mission Hall, to give them tracts, to urge them to take their wages home, and to speak to them of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He found this worthwhile, although he faced 'some very rough, wicked, and drunken men'. He rarely had trouble when visiting, although not always immune: 'In the afternoon, when conversing with two working men in Neal's Yard, a man threw a lot of hot water upon me. I am not aware what induced him to do so'. Often men argued with him, especially Roman Catholics or lapsed churchgoers, but he observed, 'I never find women to join their husbands in arguing against the Bible.'

Fights were not uncommon:

I saw a large crowd witnessing a fight between two lads ... Loud was their applause, under which the two lads fought like devils. A gentleman tried to stop the fray but failed. A working man then tried and failed also. I then thought it right to leave the house where I was, and interfere as best I could. I did so; as soon as I got to the mob I went quickly and quietly through it, and laying hold of a combatant, I bore him out of the ring, and saw him safe home; no one touched me.

M'Cree nearly died of cholera when first in London and could identify with the wretched sufferers, as in these two accounts:

I found him in a kind of closet at the far end of a room in which were five beds. The stench of the den in which he lay was sickening and enough to make one less prepared for such a scene turn away in disgust ... The poor man seemed very thankful for my visit ...

I found him on a bed far from clean. The smell of such visits is often very repulsive, and when two or three such examples of poverty come in a morning I am not very fit for dinner. I sat a long time with him.

M'Cree loved to give his people a 'lift'. He understood the attraction of warm, bright public houses and music halls, and offered an alternative social venue, with tea and a Gospel message rather than alcohol and vice. Concerts and lectures, often by Chapel people, were popular. M'Cree himself sang solos and gave many general interest lectures. That on 'The Stomach' was particularly relished! The appeal of such efforts is a reminder of the paucity of diversion available in this dreary part of Victoria's vigorous capital. Lectures drew men who would not have come for a service.

M'Cree described his people with affection, thieves and all, and would never have summarized them, like the 1902 Year Book, as 'the thrifty, the shiftless, and the lonely woman'. It is the little extra touches to give pleasure that distinguish M'Cree's approach from what came later. Those clean white tablecloths for the street children's dinner, and plum pudding because he knew it was their 'climax of human happiness'. After his time the children just received Irish stew, nutritionally adequate but not thrilling. Again, on Christmas Eve needy families received 'a piece of beef, two loaves, flour, raisins, etc., and a bran new shilling from the Mint for coals and vegetables'.³² That newly minted coin is pure M'Cree - not necessary, but special. How different in spirit is the smug philanthropy of the 1900 *Bloomsbury Magazine*: 'Our own Christmas gatherings will be all the brighter if we have done something to provide for our poorer friends and neighbours. The distributions will be at 5 o'clock on Christmas Eve, and tickets to witness the interesting sight can be obtained in the vestry!'

As M'Cree's work became known, often through his own zealous lecturing, he received many gifts for his people. He lists typical ways of using such money, illustrating the local needs:

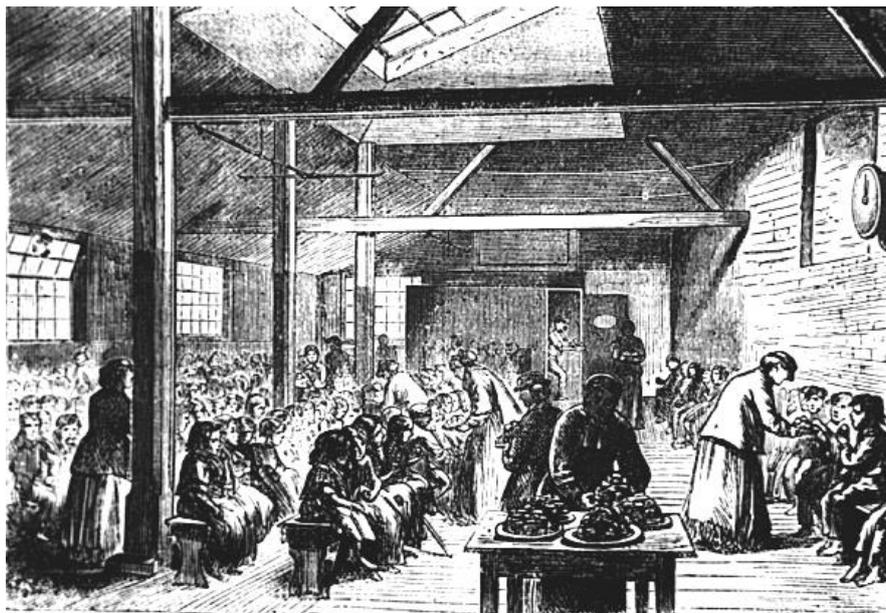
Convalescents sent to seaside, surgical instruments purchased and presented under medical direction, back school fees paid up when through illness and depression they had fallen into arrears, young couples helped to furnish, votes purchased³³ ... weekly doles to tide over a trying time, doctors' bills paid for poor pastors, a shilling put onto the card of every regular attendant at the mothers' meeting, and a few things 'got out' for a poor widow who had been obliged to pay a visit to 'Uncle'.³⁴

³² The spelling is M'Cree's.

³³ i.e. for treatment at a charity hospital.

³⁴ C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, pp.130-31.

Summer excursions became a highlight of Mission life from 1855, when 169 people saved up 2s 6d to travel in nine vans to ‘Whembley Hill’. In M’Cree’s last year in St Giles they filled a special train to Herne Bay. For most this day was the annual holiday.



Children's tea party in St. Giles
(from *The Christian Family*, 1879)

In M’Cree’s day there was a noticeable improvement in the area. In 1860 four public drinking fountains (a clean water supply) were installed in the parish, one opposite the Mission Hall. That July M’Cree wrote:

Do the people of St Giles grow better or worse? A Parliamentary Return of aggravated assaults on women furnishes some information ... during the last five years ... whilst there were 301 convictions in Clerkenwell, 289 in Southwark, 264 at Worship St, and 153 at Thames Court, there were only 75 at Bow St. This proves that St Giles is now more sober, quiet and religious than is commonly supposed.³⁵

Another time, at a prayer meeting of a hundred working folk in a local school,

³⁵ C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, p.83.

an old man told M'Cree: 'I have known St Giles for fifty years, and such meetings as these were not known when I was young. People would have smashed the windows then.'³⁶

By 1873 the Mission report observed there was less 'absolute destitution', though they still found some without clothing or any furniture. In 1875 they reckoned 3,000 families still lived in single rooms and a further 2,800 in common lodging-houses.

The glory of Bloomsbury?

'It was the glory of Bloomsbury to possess and effectually work a slum mission before slumming became a fashionable craze', declared Carlile.³⁷ By 1850 plenty of Christians were working among the poor, though Baptists were not widely prominent among them. The Domestic Mission only served a few crowded streets, but the population was dense, mobile and potentially threatening. Mrs Ranyard, experienced visitor of the poor, was afraid to penetrate far into the Dials' hinterland, even with a male companion, but there M'Cree and Bloomsbury volunteers made life a little better for a few hundred people each year.

M'Cree strove to tell the nation what poverty meant. His work was known in evangelical circles nationwide and must have influenced others, yet cannot claim very wide significance. Nevertheless, it was heroic work, as the church tried to tackle the problems on its doorstep, not turning away with a donation to Christian relief and the excuse that bad conditions needed political solutions. M'Cree and his helpers went willingly to work in an appalling district because they believed in the power of the Gospel to change lives.

A good number of Bloomsbury's members were directly involved. Wealthy businessmen spent many hours visiting homes in the dreadful tenements. Charitable work may have been 'part of the nineteenth-century way of life',³⁸ almost 'a branch of fashion', with 'social work an adventure' for those with time on their hands,³⁹ but the work undertaken by respectable Bloomsbury members in their leisure hours throughout the 1850s and 1860s was often difficult, sometimes unpleasant and hazardous.

Taking a year at random, in 1857 the Domestic Mission Committee

36 C.W. McCree, p.96.

37 Carlile, *op.cit.*, p.255, quoted in A.C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, 1947, p.240.

38 D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, 1982, p.37.

39 F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*, 1980, pp.11, 40.

comprised William Brock, the deacons and nine other men, with twenty-one visitors and 121 subscribers who between them contributed £91-11-0 (almost a year's wages for the schoolmaster or M'Cree). The Cheap Clothing Society was directed by eighteen ladies who sewed, with seventy-three subscribers raising £44-10-6. Eight women ran the Maternal Society, with thirty-six subscribers (£21-16-0). Forty-eight church members subscribed to the Ragged Schools Auxiliary (£65-12-6). Others taught in the Mission Sunday Schools. Supporters of the various bodies overlapped, but a good proportion of the five hundred members took an interest in the Domestic Mission, trying to understand and ease the immediate problems. It was a considerable achievement to keep so many so motivated for so long.

Sometimes the criticism is levelled at such evangelical philanthropic activity that it scratches surface problems locally without tackling underlying causes. This would not be entirely fair here. Brock, M'Cree and many of their helpers were aware of the causes of poverty and disease. They were active in bodies seeking reform, but did not see social and political pressure as an alternative to direct action to improve the life of individuals on their doorstep. They earned the right to speak on behalf of those they cared for in Christ's name.

George M'Cree, who gave himself freely to the poor of St Giles and knew the need for better housing, pure water, honest work and wholesome entertainment, as well as food for their souls, did his utmost to make Britain aware of their state. Lord Shaftesbury once introduced M'Cree at a public meeting as 'the Bishop of St Giles', and

The audience accentuated the new title by continuous cheering. It was like throwing a stone into a pond, the ripples widened and widened, until, up and down England, wherever he went, the sobriquet stuck to him. The chances are that five minutes before his lordship uttered the words he had never thought of them, and simply intended them as a passing compliment.⁴⁰

The foresight of Brock and Peto when they sent the young missionary into the most depraved haunts of the imperial capital, and their success in enlisting the church's ongoing support were perhaps an even more glorious achievement than filling the new Chapel with eager worshippers. If religion came to be amongst the 'proprieties of life' for many of the poor of St Giles, it was not for the material benefits alone. People were drawn to Christ by one

40 C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, p.155.

whose love for them reflected his Lord's.

M'Cree, ministering to the poor of a few London streets, commanded wide respect. In 1892, when dying of cancer, he wrote to the *Daily News*, contending that London had improved considerably. This drew an acknowledgement from an unlikely source:

Yes, brave M'Cree, *Punch* reads your record o'er with acquiescence and with admiration, and again, forty years toil in London give a claim, my good M'Cree, to reverent attention.⁴¹

The dying man relished the compliment. When he died a few weeks later, 'Brave McCree' was set in violets on a wreath from his Bloomsbury friend, John Collins Francis. The Revds Newman Hall, F.B. Meyer and Dr Dawson Burns led the memorial service at Borough Road, and Dr John Clifford took the graveside service. No tribute can have been more briefly to the point than the *Church Times*⁴² rare epitaph:

Few men ever laboured with more zeal and less fuss.

41 Quoted in C.W. McCree, *op.cit.*, p.203.

42 23 December 1892.

10

THE SCHOOLS¹

'The State has no business with the education of the child'

William Brock

Education for the poorer classes was in a state of transition. The industrial revolution and resultant urbanization had cut across the old ways where children learned their parents' jobs by working alongside. Young children, inexpensive and usefully small, had been forced to spend long hours in unpleasant work in factories, mines, and streets.

Evangelical Christians, led by Lord Shaftesbury, were battling against this. The Factory Act of 1833 had stopped children under nine being employed in factories, and limited 9-13 year olds to eight hours a day. In 1843 a ten-hour limit was added for those aged 13-18 years. Legislation for education began under these Factory Acts, but it was 1875 before sweeps were forbidden to send small boys up chimneys.

Education had always mattered to Dissenters who wanted people to read the Scriptures themselves. The Establishment had been wary of education for the working classes, fearing that reading would give access to opinion-forming papers and engender discontent. John Foster, the Baptist essayist, observed that to win funds for education, even in dissenting circles, it was necessary 'to avow and plead how little it was that they pretended or presumed to teach'² Many Nonconformist ministers augmented their income by running schools, some offered advanced subjects, and a few provided early theological and pastoral training. Brock's own education had depended heavily on teaching ministers.

In the late eighteenth century Sunday Schools emerged to teach reading and give basic Christian instruction, and the interdenominational Sunday School Union (SSU) was formed in 1803. As primary education spread, Sunday Schools concentrated on religious instruction and their nature

1 Main sources: annual reports in the *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Books*; manuscript Minute Book of the Day Schools Committee, which covered the Sunday School until June 1851; from 1892 the *Bloomsbury Sunday School Magazine*. For Baptists and education generally, see J.H.Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, 1994, chapter 10, pp.340ff. An earlier account appeared as Faith Bowers, 'Opting out in Victorian London: A school for the respectable poor, 1849-1870', *Baptist Quarterly*, 34, 1992, pp.240-8.

2 John Foster, *Essay on the Evils of Popular Ignorance*, 1820.

gradually changed, moving from basic teaching to the neighbouring poor to provision for children of the congregation and a means of outreach. Sunday Schools long served poorer children, although many teachers were middle-class; this was good for 'social cohesion'.³ Teaching covered scripture reading, exposition, and psalmody; learning was by rote. Scholars' ages might range from eight to twenty, and the atmosphere was usually friendly, although control was strict.

Provision of primary education gradually increased. The Church of England founded the National Society in 1811, and thereafter many parishes had their own schools. Dissent supported the non-sectarian British and Foreign School Society, founded 1814. 'British Schools' gave Bible-based education without the particular teachings of any one branch of the church. Both Societies used the monitorial system, where older pupils, of ten or eleven, drilled younger ones in basic reading, writing and arithmetic. By mid-century teacher training was coming in: Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth established the first training college, Battersea Normal School, in 1839-40.

The 1833 Act provided government grants for both Societies, but Dissent objected to government interference, however generous, and some churches set up their own independent schools. Much of the ensuing education struggle, which delayed educational provision for all, centred on this principle. If government legislated for education and put money into it, the State had some control over those schools. If there was religious teaching, that control might extend to it and could infringe religious liberty. Dissent did not object to Anglican teaching in parish schools but to State money, including their taxes, being spent on it. It is not easy from the perspective of the secular society to grasp how keenly these distinctions mattered between 1833 and 1906.

In 1843 William Brock gave a lecture on 'The Position and Duty of the English Nonconformists in respect of National Education',⁴ in which he declared:

National legislation should confine itself to the guardianship of our persons, and to the protection of our property, leaving every man to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. . . The State has no business with the education of the child

Although both National and British schools served those who could not afford private education, there were modest fees and families were large. The

³ Cecil Northcott, *The story of the Sunday Schools and of the National Sunday School Union*, 1953.

⁴ Quoted in C.B. Jewson, *Baptists of Norfolk*, 1957.

poorest children missed out altogether, apart from a few who went to charity schools, which often had a distinctive uniform, like the green coats of the Shelton School adjoining St Giles' Church. The first Ragged School was set up in Field Lane, Holborn, and soon free education for destitute children was seen as a preventative against juvenile delinquency. The Ragged School Union was formed in 1844, with Lord Shaftesbury as President.

Dissenters in mid-century tried to support educational provision on a voluntary basis, but their efforts were out of proportion to the needs. In 1870 they accepted the Education Act that brought in School Boards to set up non-sectarian schools and in 1876 primary education was made compulsory. Secondary education was still a privilege, and many bright young people, apprenticed at fourteen, were eager to improve themselves, especially when the Early Closing Movement gave them more leisure. This underlies the popularity of lectures, and Mechanics' Institutes, Philosophical Societies, and Mutual Instruction Societies at this time.

The Bloomsbury Parochial Schools were in Museum Street and catered for eighty boys and twenty-five girls, children of 'poor but respectable parishioners'. The National Schools in Broad Street took nearly 400 children, boys contributing 2d a week, girls 1d. New schools in Parker Street took another 600. Next door to the Chapel the French school boarded fifteen girls of Huguenot lineage, who formed the church choir.⁵

Bloomsbury's efforts must be considered against this background.

Sunday Schools

Morton Peto intended the Chapel's basement as a schoolroom for weekday and Sunday use. The Bloomsbury Chapel Sunday School opened on 25 March 1849. It was to be entirely financed by the church. The intent would have been akin to that at Norwich, of which Brock wrote: 'To the utmost capacity of our accommodation we gather around us the uneducated and the rude ... these children are instructed from the Holy Scriptures in their obligations to God and man'. John Francis, already experienced in Southwark, was charged with initial arrangements and vigorously recruited teachers and scholars. Frederick Benham then took over as Superintendent.

5 Details about local schools from George Clinch, *Bloomsbury and St Giles, Past and Present*, 1890; and Sampson Low, Junior, *The Charities of London*, 1850, p.445. Low drew on Reports of the House of Commons Commissioners 'appointed to enquire concerning charities in England for the education of the poor', 1819 and 1826.

The first Sunday twelve boys and seven girls attended. By October there were 115 boys and 73 girls on the books, with average attendance of 118. There were seventeen teachers, but more 'could be usefully employed'. Classes were small, with six to eleven children per teacher, contrasting with 45-65 in the Day School. In May 1850 visitors were recruited to visit absentees' homes and canvass for more scholars. There were senior Bible classes too; John Francis started the first for older boys in 1849. Soon Mr Meen, the Day School master, whose own children, Joseph, Josiah and Sarah joined Bloomsbury as they grew up, led a Bible Class for 'older youths and young men', probably taking over as Mr Francis devoted more time to the Domestic Mission. This class flourished under successive leaders, including Charles Searle.



John Francis

At first a single committee managed Day and Sunday Schools, with common funds, but they were separated in June 1851. Thereafter half the Sunday School Committee was chosen by the church, half by the teachers (Minutes 129, 146). There was a problem with disorderly behaviour in November 1858: three deacons were deputed to deal with the offenders.

Voluntary finance was always forthcoming for the Sunday School. Bibles and hymnbooks were sold to scholars, and Sunday School Union magazines given as rewards. The teachers held monthly prayer meetings, and by 1868 had a training class on Sunday afternoons. Senior classes often formed their own prayer circles. From 1861 there were regular reports of older scholars joining the church, and in 1868 60-70 children attended a Tuesday evening prayer meeting.

The Bloomsbury School met at 9.15 a.m. and 2.30 p.m. and teachers took turns to conduct a service for younger children in the schoolroom during morning worship (suggesting some had parents in the congregation). At first the older children attended the main service: a former scholar, Frederic Todd, remembered trooping from the schoolroom, class by class, to the upper

gallery.⁶ They found Brock's preaching too difficult, so from 1854 separate children's services were held at the Mission Hall, a change Todd remembered as 'very welcome to us scholars'.

Every Sunday morning the long procession of scholars left Bloomsbury Chapel doors at about half-past ten . . . The scholars walking two by two, and the teachers with their classes passed up the old Moor Street, with its shops for the sale of birds, second-hand clothes, and general stores all open. The good order and the generally attractive appearance of the scholars . . . helped to fill the school.⁷

Children's services continued at least until 1865, probably lapsing after Brock's retirement. In 1878 services for younger children were again arranged in Denmark Street, returning to the Bloomsbury basement in 1884. Although well attended, these disturbed adult worship above so were discontinued in 1888. In 1897 children's services were again arranged at the Mission Hall, when school numbers were falling and the special service proved more attractive.

Bloomsbury joined the West London SSU Auxiliary. Augustus Benham, remembered by Todd as a painstaking teacher who used SSU lessons and maps and other visual aids, offered his class occasional prizes for essays: Todd won one for 104 foolscap pages on the 'Life of Christ'.⁸ Another Bloomsbury teacher, Mr Pask, ran SSU teachers' training courses. When the SSU arranged a mass canvass of London in 1856, 118 from Bloomsbury took part.

In the early years quarterly internal examinations were arranged; from 1884 scholars from both Chapel and Mission schools took the Scripture Examinations. In 1902 there was a SSU Mission at the chapel. Most of the children's charitable offerings, £50-£100 p.a., went to missionaries.

Branch schools were established, first at the Moor Street Mission Hall in 1856. Soon both schools drew around 400 scholars. A third in Queen Street opened in 1861 with 60 children and moved to King Street in 1864, where attendance quickly rose to 150. A fourth school in Rose Street moved in 1869 to Denmark Street, and then to Upper St Martin's Lane.

Numbers remained high. In 1879 Bloomsbury drew 155 scholars in the morning and 400 in the afternoon, Moor Street 119 and 443, and Denmark Street 241 in the evening (King Street had by then separated as the St Giles

⁶ Sunday School magazine, February 1893.

⁷ Sunday School magazine, December 1901.

⁸ Frederic Todd, 'Recollections of an old SS Scholar', *Bloomsbury Magazine*, February 1893.

Christian Mission). That year there were 110 teachers, and ninety former scholars were now church members. In the mid-1880s numbers began to decline with the 'depopulation' of St Giles, but in 1891 there were still 880 scholars, of whom 220 were over fifteen. The school in Upper St Martin's Lane had 199 on the books in 1888 but was closed the next year because of 'lessened need'. Staffing so many classes must have been demanding.

The Bloomsbury Sunday School had an interest in basic education but also in recreational activities. In 1858 160 Moor Street scholars attended for Thursday evening classes teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, followed by singing. At the Chapel singing lessons afforded 'innocent recreation' from 1857, and in 1873 a Wednesday evening meeting was begun for former scholars, with lectures, readings and recitations.

Lending libraries ensured a supply of wholesome literature, religious and of general interest. The Bloomsbury Sunday School established one quickly in 1849 and soon fifty-three attentive children were allowed to borrow books as a reward. In 1862 nearly half of the 600 books were out at any one time. Branch schools had their own libraries, and there was another for teachers. In 1857 the School Committee decided to circulate Tract Society magazines among parents, and in 1858 older boys were recruited for the 'Circulation of Pure Literature' in the neighbourhood. Much later, in 1891, the Sunday School introduced a monthly magazine 'as a further inducement to wholesome reading'. Bloomsbury news and local advertisements were bound first into the *Silver Link*, and from 1893 into the *Home Messenger*, which had wider appeal. Readers liked this substantial monthly, full of factual articles and moral stories, and it was adopted as the first church magazine in 1898, with local news pages added.

To encourage thrift and self-help, the Sunday Schools had their own Sick Fund and Clothing Fund, and a Saving Bank was established, where weekly deposits earned five per cent interest. Infants too young for summer excursions had Christmas parties: 150 attended the first in 1857, and by 1886 400 gathered around a Christmas tree. From 1851 the schools arranged an annual Parents' Tea in winter, alternating between the Chapel and Mission from 1868. From 1879 teachers enjoyed their own excursion.

The distinction between the main and mission schools gradually lessened; from 1875 they met together quarterly, and from 1894 shared an Annual Flower Service. The first joint outing was in 1879, when 720 went to Dartford Heath. The 1893 Mission outing included a 'considerable number' of Russian and Polish Jewish immigrant children living in Soho.

A Sunday School Festival was held from October 1877, switched in 1894

to March, 'the proper anniversary time', close to the Ash Wednesday gathering of former scholars, inaugurated in 1867 when 300 attended; these were a prominent feature in the church's calendar for many years.

Day Schools

The Bloomsbury Chapel Day Schools opened on 9 April 1849 with sixty pupils, thirty-three boys and twenty-seven girls. Six months later 286 were on the roll, with an average attendance of 210. From the Year Book reports and manuscript Minute Book of the School Committee, it is possible to form a picture of the education offered before the 1870 Education Act.

Peto and Brock recruited a schoolmaster, Mr Joseph Meen, paying him £100 p.a. plus £20 rent, and a mistress, Miss Cottle, at £50 (which she subsequently judged too low but the Committee deemed adequate under 'ordinary circumstances'). The schools would be subsidized by the church to offer basic education to 'children of the respectable poor or of small tradespeople ... in harmony with the benevolent character of an institution connected with a Christian church', with infant, intermediate and, later, senior sections.

Management

The church elected a committee of fifteen men, chaired by Brock. They were mostly local businessmen interested in appropriate education for potential employees and servants. They met quarterly and took turns to visit the school regularly. A sub-committee of eight ladies managed the girls' section, visiting weekly. All subscribers had a right to visit.

The church charged the school £70 p.a. rent, plus £15 for services; this was a vexed issue between School Committee and diaconate, although some men were on both, and in 1854 the rent was reduced to £35. Pupils paid 3d a week plus 1d each for optional extra courses. By November 1853 339 children were contributing a total of £4-9s-0d a week, and the subsidy needed from the church members varied between £80-£100. Fees amounted to five-eighths⁹ of the total cost averaged over the school's life, subscriptions and donations providing the balance. In the early years gifts were higher relative to fees. Some church members took real interest, but most needed repeated coaxing and constant assurance that their money was properly applied. Private application for subscriptions by the Secretary proved more effective than

⁹ Secretary's report, April 1868. Total expenditure over 18½ years amounted to £6,100.

Congregational Collections following a special sermon.

Who were these 'respectable poor'? In 1855 subscribers were anxious lest 'some of the Parents were in a position to pay for the education of their Children'. Similar suspicions in 1858 made the Committee record the parents' status. They found 'Journeymen or Police 74, Shopmen 8, Tradesmen 26, Schoolmasters, Clerks etc. 13, Foreman 6, Widows 7', and concluded the school was 'well adapted to the wants of the neighbourhood'. Ten years later they noted what had become of boys who had left during the year. Four had gone into solicitors' offices, three into the Stamp Office at Somerset House, one to the office of the Geographical Society, several had become errand boys or apprentices, and one had died in the Regent's Park ice tragedy. Many girls went into domestic service. Church members were encouraged to employ the school leavers. Periodically the school recruited actively. In 1854 a circular was distributed, mainly about the classes for older boys. In 1863 a prospectus was printed, and in 1865 500 handbills for exhibition in shop windows.

In November 1853 Mr Meen suggested charging seniors one shilling a week inclusive to afford more staff, although Miss Cottle disagreed. He rightly thought most parents could bear this and the wider curriculum proved popular. In 1855 Meen was concerned at falling numbers but 'the decrease had taken place in the lower portions of the Schools whilst the number of those paying the higher fees was greater than at any previous time'.

Although the church subsidised the school and provided the governing body, these conscientious voluntaryists would not inculcate specifically Baptist principles. Brock observed with pride in the 1865 *Year Book*:

There are no schools like them anywhere about. They are entirely undenominational, no use being made of any catechism, or creed, or Church formulary whatever. No attendance at a particular place of worship on Sundays is insisted on. No reproach is cast, either directly or indirectly, upon the religious opinions or practices to which the children are accustomed when at home. At the same time, the Holy Scriptures are in constant and careful use, whilst prayer is daily offered up for the Divine blessing on all who are concerned.

When fine new National Schools opened in Endell Street in 1862, the Committee urged this as 'an additional inducement to support the schools here so that they may not suffer from the proximity of a large school under Government patronage'.

George M'Cree once attempted to give weekly addresses, presumably of evangelistic nature, but the Committee quickly put a stop to this, preferring to

trust religious education to the schoolmaster. The Committee would doubtless have liked to see all the children become Baptists but would not abuse the role of education. Although the school used British and Foreign Society lesson books, the Committee declined to attach the schools to the Society, and was annoyed to hear the Society's inspector, Henry Althans, had turned up unannounced, even though he expressed much satisfaction with what he saw.

Annual examinations were held orally in public, in front of the Committee, parents and friends. The schoolmasters liked neighbouring colleagues to help examine the children, introducing a measure of independent assessment, but the Committee preferred to keep it internal. In 1861 there was a written examination, drawn up by Brock.

Absentee figures reflect the prevalence of prolonged illness in those days. Epidemics, like measles in 1860, reduced numbers dramatically, as did times of high unemployment when parents could not meet the modest fees. The severe winter of 1854-5 created problems, but the schoolmaster was 'careful for the very poorest of the children'. The population was mobile, so relatively few children were there long, the average stay being two years. Over twenty-one years, nearly 3,000 pupils were taught by twenty-seven teachers at an average total cost of £329 per annum.

Boys and girls had separate classes in the one room. The school experimented with co-education in 1854, after Miss Cottle left abruptly. There had been discipline problems and Mr Meen told the Committee 'some girls should be expelled as no mistress could control them'. One father complained at the resultant expulsions and the Committee decreed that in future 'except in flagrant cases, no child shall be expelled from these Schools without the cause of complaint being previously stated to the child's parents, or nearest friends, or without the sanction of the Secretary of the Schools'. Meen advised that 'the harmony and efficiency of the Schools would be better secured by placing them [the girls] wholly under his immediate superintendence'. Experience elsewhere had shown that 'classes could be advantageously mixed', but he would need the help of a sewing mistress. The Ladies Committee were happy with this and Meen's salary was raised to £130, but after his death in 1861 the sexes were again segregated because 'when the boys and girls were taught in a class together, it was found that the girls were backward in answering questions; and objections were constantly made by the parents to the mixed classes'. After resegregation, the number of girls increased.

School hours were 9 a.m. to 12 noon and 2 to 4.30 p.m., Monday to Friday. There was evidently a three-week Midsummer holiday, for in 1861, when the Mistress had run both sections for some weeks after Mr Meen's sudden death,

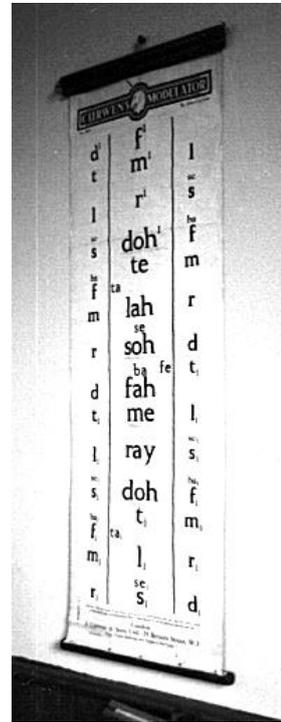
'It was arranged that the Boys' School should reassemble after three weeks holiday, and the Girls' after four weeks in order that Miss Pearce might have a longer rest'. She was also given a £5 bonus.

Curriculum

The whole school joined in an opening session of 'Singing, Scripture Reading and Prayer', and in two or three singing intervals through the day (the only recreation possible without a playground) and at the close. Boys studied reading, writing, history, geography, grammar, arithmetic, natural history, natural philosophy [physical science], and mental arithmetic. Girls had needlework instead of the sciences, and only older girls were expected to cope with mental arithmetic! Optional extras were drawing, mathematics, bookkeeping (for boys from 1855), and 'singing by note' (Hullah's system at first, but by 1858 this gave way to Tonic Solfa)¹⁰.

Mr Meen offered a fortnightly chemistry class to older boys. This was early for science teaching in such a school, though from 1862 schools receiving government grants were encouraged to teach some science. Some of the Committee were distinctly suspicious of Meen's enthusiasm.

The school's subject range compares well with the 1890 requirements for Standard IV (top level of elementary education).¹¹ Subscribers thought it rather ambitious: they did not intend their charity to educate children beyond



Tonic Solfa Chart

10 John Hullah, 1812-84, composer and music teacher, introduced Wilhem's method of teaching music to large numbers at the Battersea Normal School in 1840, and held Classes for schoolmasters and the general public at Exeter Hall. By July 1842 50,000 Attended his classes in London and Manchester. 'He avoided the common mistake of imagining that music, in order to be popular, must also be bad' (*DNB*). Tonic Solfa was introduced by John Curwen (1816-80), an Independent minister, in 1842 and overtook other systems.

11 Standard IV, 1890: reading, writing, arithmetic, drawing (boys) or needlework (girls), singing, recitation, plus two other subjects (grammar, geography, history, or elementary science). Pestalozzi stressed the value of recreational subjects, like music and art, even for poorer children, and Kay-Shuttleworth gave these a prominent place at the pioneer Battersea Normal School.

their station in life. It took Mr Meen from February 1851 to May 1856 to persuade the Committee to let him reward proficiency and good conduct each quarter with a shilling book prize for each section of the school.

Needlework, important for girls, evoked much concern. In 1851 the Committee asked Lady Visitors 'to prohibit forthwith such worsted and fancy work as they deem unsuitable', and firmly told Miss Cottle to co-operate. By November 1852 girls could 'undertake work for friends in the congregation', but with close scrutiny to ensure this was good plain sewing. In 1855 the Ladies Committee 'determined to render every assistance in instructing the Monitors in Needlework, the inequality of which is still to be deplored'. The following March things had come to such a pass that 'the work done by the children was so bad that some of the garments sold by the Cheap Clothing Society had been returned to them' - ultimate condemnation! Happily needlework improved under Miss Pearce.

These children too enjoyed occasional outings, at first joining the Sunday Schools at Regent's Park, Sudbury or Richmond Park. In 1852 Mr Kemp, the School's Treasurer, invited all the day scholars to his grounds at Roehampton, ten miles away, 'where they spent a most merry and joyous afternoon. They had taken their dinner with them but were supplied with milk and water and buns for tea'. Nine vans carried 281 children and their teachers. The children paid 3d each towards this, about a quarter of the cost.

Other outings were educational: to the British Museum and the Polytechnic Institution in Regent Street, 'followed by useful lessons on parts of that instructive exhibition'. In 1862 Charles Gilpin¹² paid for children to attend the International Exhibition. From 1858 about a hundred regularly took part in Tonic Solfa concerts at the Crystal Palace, Exeter Hall and Agricultural Hall. Occasional evening lectures were arranged for scholars, and a Mutual Improvement Society for the seniors was started in 1858. Two years earlier Meen began meetings for former pupils nearby, as 'he thought it well to look after them as much as possible after they have left school'. He also suggested the annual Parents' Singing Meetings, presumably as a means of keeping in touch, and arranged occasional classes for teachers and educational lectures in the schoolroom.

12 A Quaker and MP for Northampton 1857-74.

Staff

The staffing of the Bloomsbury school reflected teacher training in its infancy. Mr Meen came as an experienced schoolmaster and Miss Cottle had taught elsewhere. Bloomsbury paid boy monitors 4d to 1s 0d a week, and girl monitors 1d to 4d, and thought 6s 0d a week enough to spend on them. In October 1849, with numbers rising rapidly, Mr Meen asked for 'an Assistant to enable him to conduct classes in the School Room and Class Room simultaneously, as he is compelled at present to trust more to the Senior Monitor than he thinks expedient'. The Committee would not pay for a trained Assistant, but decided to try the new Pupil Teacher system, first introduced in 1846, whereby apprentice teachers began to replace monitors. Articled at thirteen for five years, they were expected to complete their training at college. Bloomsbury articted Alexander Anderson for four years (presumably he already had monitorial experience), and took a second boy on probation. After six months they would have accepted him too, but his parents declined the terms, so instead Charles Collins was articted for five years. Bloomsbury paid pupil teachers £8, £10, £12, £15 and £20 p.a. progressively. Some monitors were still used, but by 1855 they only cost £2 a quarter.

When Meen was seriously ill in 1852, the Committee obtained a supply teacher from the Voluntary Schools Association, but over four days he proved 'ineffective' and 'subsequently the School was conducted by Anderson and Collins very successfully'. At the end of his apprenticeship Anderson would have liked to become Assistant Teacher but wanted £50 p.a., which the Committee deemed exorbitant, so he went elsewhere. Several boys were tried before Ebenezer Cole was articted, but he died in 1855. Early in 1854 a temporary assistant master was appointed; he left after two years and Charles Collins, apprenticeship completed, was appointed Assistant at £25 p.a. The following year, with the Committee's approval, he entered Homerton Training College. Other young men and women came and went as teachers.

Relations between the Committee and Miss Cottle were often strained. She resented the Ladies Committee and Lady Visitors, sought a rise in vain in 1850, was dilatory in handing over scholars' fees, and complained about the lighting in the subterranean hall. Sarah Meen was appointed her Assistant in 1851, at £10 p.a., with a £2 rise annually 'so long as your good conduct and efforts to improve yourself shall seem to the Committee to deserve it'. In 1854 her father sent her for training at a Normal School and the Committee, although suggesting that Miss Cottle should work the school with monitors, eventually appointed an Assistant, Anne Baker, aged fifteen. Miss Cottle

resigned soon after, to be succeeded by Sarah Meen at £30 p.a.

Mr Meen had given general satisfaction but now began to have disagreements with the Committee, perhaps reflecting personnel changes, not least of Secretary, after James Benham relinquished this office in 1853. There were problems over expulsions, and subscribers were unhappy with the 1855 examinations, complaining that:

The higher branches of Education were pushed too far, whilst too little attention was given to needlework, and domestic matters in general. But, it was thought, so long as the Evangelical Principles were so well taught as they had been, and Mr Meen continued Master, no change could well be made.

Mr Meen was considering a post in Jamaica and 'it was thought, should he do so, our difficulties in a great measure would be removed'. The Committee was disappointed when he stayed.

Miss Baker was grudgingly granted a £2 increment in 1855, in the hope that 'the increase of salary will act as a stimulus to greater diligence than had hitherto characterized her services', but she soon left on grounds of ill health, as did her successor. Miss Meen was judged not to 'possess the necessary amount of tact and energy to fill her post efficiently' and was sacked in March 1856 because, although amiable and co-operative, she was poor at needlework and for 'want of energy and authority'. The Ladies Committee recommended Elizabeth Pearce, who had trained at the British and Foreign Society's Borough Road training college. Pious and of proven efficiency, 'her services would not be obtained for less than £40 p.a.'. This the Committee felt able to pay and increased it to £50 the next year to mark their satisfaction. Early in 1868 Miss Pearce was offered 'a very good situation in another school' but was willing to stay for less than she could command elsewhere. The Committee hastily increased salaries all round.

Mr Meen died suddenly in April 1861; the Committee gave his widow two months' salary, plus £80 raised specially. A new schoolmaster, Mr Lawrence, was recommended by the neighbouring minister, Baptist Noel. Lawrence was his Sunday School Superintendent. He had taught eight years in Kent and sixteen in central London. 'A very intimate friend of Mr Meen's', he had already helped with Bloomsbury examinations. Committee members visited his school at Dr Archer's Chapel in Ship Yard and were impressed, inviting him from 24 June at £120 p.a. He brought his assistant, Mr Gams, with him and asked for a Junior Assistant to take the youngest boys. The Committee agreed and left the choice to Mr Lawrence, in marked contrast to their attitude

to Meen's request when numbers were higher. They increased Lawrence's salary to £130 in 1865, and paid Gams £40, and junior assistants £14 to £16. The Girls' School had a succession of young assistants, some like Anna Coe being former pupils. When Miss Pearce left to marry in 1866, Mary Wood was promoted after being sent for three months' extra study. Anna Coe moved up and Lottie Coe was given the infants.

Premises and equipment

The basement schoolroom was a hall 19.7m x 17m x 3.5m high, less the stairwells (about 300 square metres). Early nineteenth-century National Schools allowed six square feet per child, on which basis Bloomsbury might accommodate 500, less space for teachers, gangways, cupboards etc. The number on the books reached 366 in November 1852 but average attendance was 283. Even so, they would have been quite tightly packed, and had no exercise yard. The basement schoolroom was entered 'by a circuitous passage under the pavements ... about two feet wide, like a passage in a coal mine and almost as dark'. Within the main hall were raised galleries for infants. In January 1850 Meen suggested that a 'Washing Place' for the occasional use of children was 'much needed', and also wanted a partition 'to promote the quiet and order of both Schools'. A curtain was soon abandoned as it made lighting and ventilation even worse. Silvered reflectors at the windows helped, but the Committee could only afford four of the recommended eight.

Morton Peto initially provided desks, forms and 'fittings', and George Kemp books and maps. Thereafter essential equipment was bought by the Committee. Two movable platforms were made for the teachers. Green baize was bought to cover desks for needlework. Such basic equipment as cupboards demanded weighty Committee consideration. There was no budget for books and slates: teachers had to beg for more as school numbers rose.

Mr Meen formed a Loan Library for pupil teachers, as no local circulating library could provide appropriate books.

In 1854 a deacon suggested the 'necessity for Iron Guards to protect the children from accident at the schoolroom stoves' but these were deemed unnecessary. A fireguard was supplied for the girls' stove in 1863, their skirts being the greatest risk. Water-closets, under the pavement in front of the chapel,¹³ provoked complaints in 1862: on enquiry the Secretary found that

¹³ Their location puzzled us until my son Keith recognized the remaining marks on the wall when exploring the vaults in the 1970s!

‘the closets were only flushed once a week, though Mr Russell, the caretaker, had received instructions to flush them every day’!

Individual Committee members proved generous friends. Mr Ball gave the much needed cupboard in 1853, Mr Robarts and Mr Kemp money for more books, and Mr Benham a globe. George Lance, the artist, provided books and drawing materials, and some ‘Mahogany Plank ... which might be exchanged with the carpenter for suitable Drawing Boards’. Mr Thornthwaite helped the boys make maps for the school. In July 1853 Mr Meen attended meetings at the Mansion House, when the Government offered to provide drawing materials and masters at very reduced prices; the Committee spent £4 on materials because offices were interested in young draughtsmen. Most of the equipment used for science was Meen’s own, but the Committee bought it from his widow at Mr Lawrence’s request.

Closure

The church was losing interest in the schools. In May 1869 the Committee considered transferring them to Mr Lawrence and Miss Wood, who would have liked to continue, paying a fair rent. That November, anticipating the coming Education Act, the Committee resolved:

That in consideration of all the circumstances of the case, - and under the altered aspect of the question of *National* education: the Committee recommend to the Church the relinquishment of the Day Schools altogether after Midsummer next.

On 1 April 1870 the church regretfully agreed to close the schools at Christmas. Lawrence wrote sadly to the Secretary, ‘From remarks made to me by various Members of the Church, I do not think the closing of the School will add very much to the prestige of Bloomsbury’. Once the decision was made, numbers quickly dropped off and in July they decided on immediate closure. Mr Lawrence and Miss Wood had posts awaiting them in continuing schools¹⁴ at nearby chapels and were given some desks and forms. Lottie Coe became Infant Schoolmistress at Leytonstone Workhouse Schools, ‘an excellent situation for her’. The fate of other teachers is not recorded. The church soon had other uses for the basement hall, for which it was better suited.

The church had never found it easy to fund the school adequately and now

¹⁴ Lawrence at Wardour Chapel, Soho: Deacons Minutes 23 June 1870. There is no indication of Miss Wood’s new post.

accepted State provision, although with continuing reservations about religious education. On 3 February 1872 James Benham reported to the Church Meeting on the Education Conference in Manchester. He, Brock and Francis, along with other Nonconformists, were dissatisfied with the 1870 Act in practice. The church agreed to 'take advantage of such opportunities as may arise for petitioning Parliament ... to secure the liberation of all State education from sectarian influence or denominational control'. In a chapel school parents knew what to expect, but in state schools:

The use of the Bible must be omitted: not from disrespect, nor from indifference to the Bible, but from the difficulties arising out of a state established and a state supported system of Education, the attendance on whose schools is to be everywhere compulsory and the payment to whose funds is to be compulsory also. With secular instruction ... the State might interfere, but with religious instruction it had no concern.¹⁵

William Brock, now on the verge of retirement, had only slightly modified his views of 1843.

Achievements

Bloomsbury's schoolmasters were interested in educational developments and wanted to give the children a good, general, Christian education, but were under constraint from the Committee, whose members wanted dutiful employees, who could perform competently but knew their place and would not compete with those from wealthier families and more expensive schools. They were unenthusiastic about the masters' moves towards secondary education. Nevertheless, an able boy could do well from such beginnings.

Surviving records leave significant gaps, not least in the area of the school's achievements. In 1860 Meen reported that a number of older scholars were 'manifesting much interest in religious matters', some showing 'real earnest piety'. In 1868 the teachers were cheered by visits from former scholars, now in 'useful and responsible situations. . . The religious instruction given in the Schools has borne and is still bearing good fruit'. Most of the pupils would have led unremarkable lives subsequently, but three who did well can be identified.

Henry Jones became a pillar of the Bloomsbury church, which he joined in 1875 and subsequently served as deacon, magazine editor, and long-serving and well-loved Sunday School Superintendent. Clearly he attained a position

¹⁵ Church Meeting, 3 May 1872.

in life comparable with the men who had served on the School Committee, although church records do not mention his secular occupation.

James Ford FRHS,¹⁶ when Baptist minister at Bromsgrove, served on the School Board and Urban District Council, as Chairman of Governors of the secondary school, and Chairman of the Higher Education Committee.

Robert Mitchell, born 1855, was the son of a police detective. The family attended a Congregational church but sent Robert to the Bloomsbury School. Robert was apprenticed to a shop lamp maker, but also became Honorary Secretary to Quintin Hogg's Boys Institute in 1871. The introduction of technical classes among the various educational and recreational subjects offered there seems to have been Mitchell's inspiration. Mitchell was to be Hogg's close associate at the Regent Street Polytechnic, becoming the Director of Education in 1891. He developed trade classes and also holiday tours. In World War I Mitchell was made an Honorary Major for training men for the Royal Flying Corps and Assistant Secretary at the Ministry of Pensions for rehabilitation work with wounded soldiers. For these services he was awarded a CBE.



Robert Mitchell

These 'old boys' were identified almost by chance because they returned to the school as speakers. Probably some others did well in life too. Their interest in education suggests that they valued the grounding received in the Bloomsbury Chapel Day School.

Ragged Schools

The Ragged School Society was formed in 1844 and within four years covered schools in forty-four buildings, sixteen open daily with a paid teacher, thirty-three open Sundays only with voluntary teachers, and thirty-one open on week evenings with a paid supervisor and voluntary assistants. In all 450 teachers helped 4,776 destitute children. Admission was by the application of sponsors, who might be subscribers, or magistrates, policemen, clergymen, city missionaries, ragged school teachers, etc. A first experimental Juvenile Refuge

¹⁶ See Chapter 7: Church Members.

and School of Industry in Westminster, housing and training fifty boys, aged 12-15, of the 'most degraded' class soon led to others, including those in St Giles.¹⁷ This work, in which Lord Shaftesbury took a keen interest, developed later as the Shaftesbury Society.

Bloomsbury Chapel subscribed to the St Giles's and St George's Ragged Schools, the first of which opened the year before the Ragged School Society was formed, and which taught 440 children by 1854. M'Cree was glad to have these schools available and often directed wretched children to them.

Returning to my district I met a most wretched boy. His clothing was a ragged jacket and a pair of trousers. He had no cap, shirt, shoes or stockings. 'Have you a home, my boy?' 'No, sir.' 'Where do you sleep?' 'About the streets.' 'How do you get a living?' 'By selling ballads in public-houses.' 'Would you like a home?' 'Yes, sir.' I took him to the Ragged School, and he was admitted to the dormitory.¹⁸

William Williams, a solicitor's clerk who was himself disabled, founded the Boys' Refuge in Great Queen Street. He had close links with Bloomsbury, according to M'Cree, although a member of Baptist Noel's church.¹⁹ By 1960 the local Refuges held 100 boys and 50 girls. Refuge boys worshipped at Bloomsbury Chapel, sitting in the upper gallery, while the girls went to St Giles.



'Found in the street' by Gustav Doré

with the ragged schoolchildren. The church, almost at its inception, tried in vain to prevent the erection of a Ragged School 'immediately contiguous to

¹⁷ Report of Annual Meeting, *Baptist Magazine*, 1847, p.371.

¹⁸ Extract from M'Cree's journal, quoted in the biography by his son.

¹⁹ Memorial sermon by James Baillie.

the front of Bloomsbury Chapel'.²⁰ The following January the French Protestants next door wrote, 'complaining of some annoyance from the School children'. James Benham, as Secretary, replied that the committee had:

instituted a strict enquiry and while they seriously deplore the annoyance ... they are led to hope that the blame does not attach entirely or even chiefly to the Children of our own Schools. It appears that the rough uncultivated children from George Street and Church Lane are in the habit of assembling near our School gate to meet our Children as they leave School or enter it, and often cause them much alarm and vexation. Some of our children have been plundered by them, others beaten, others pursued and pelted, and it is by them, we are assured, that the injury has been done to your premises. - For the blame which justly attaches to our Scholars, such as loud noises, ringing your Door Bell &c, we have reprimanded and punished them, and we have endeavoured to prevent a recurrence of the evil by ordering a Monitor to superintend their departure after School ... probably we must claim the protection of the Police. (It may serve us both by the bye as an additional argument against the proposed infliction of a 'Ragged School' at our very doors). James Benham (who copied his official letters in the back of the Minute Book) regularly contributed as much to the local Ragged Schools as to the Bloomsbury Day Schools, but this is a blatant case of 'not in my back yard'!

When the road in front of the Chapel was rebuilt in the mid-1880s through to Piccadilly, it was named 'Shaftesbury Avenue', after the late President of the Ragged School Union. A new home for working boys, Fordham House, opened in 1888 close to the Chapel. John Hampden Fordham, a barrister and long treasurer of the Ragged Schools, was a Bloomsbury member.

In 1902 the church presented a silver watch to a youth from the local Refuge for saving a child from drowning. A Bible Class member, he learned to swim in the Chapel's Swimming Club. Here was a poor boy of whom to be proud!

²⁰ Church Minutes, 2 November 1849. The School was the other side of the French Church, on the corner site occupied by an optician's shop in 1999.

DISCIPLINE WHEN IT MAY UNHAPPILY BE REQUIRED

'Even the appearance of evil must be avoided'

William Brock

In Bloomsbury's early days church discipline was solemnly and carefully practised in accordance with the foundation resolution to 'administer discipline when it may unhappily be required according to the direction and as far as in us lies in the spirit of the New Testament'. Discipline cases were few but sufficient to remind members of the standards expected.

All 'gathered community' churches, composed of members who have made a positive commitment to Christ, demand of them godly lives. Nonconformist piety fostered industry and integrity and, barred from the leading professions, many turned to commerce and manufacturing: 'The nineteenth century was a time when success in business was the chief avenue to eminence for Baptists',¹ and honest hard work often made for commercial success. Those who prospered were respected and, as rich men, had the means to do much good in days when social welfare relied on philanthropy. Respect for financial success demanded that it be achieved honestly, so business misdemeanours were not taken lightly, whether petty pilfering by the humble employee or malpractice at the top.

Like many other chapels, Bloomsbury had a solid core of businessmen, from whom the early diaconate was largely drawn and business ethics concerned the congregation. Brock's lecture on 'Mercantile Morality' to the YMCA at Exeter Hall in 1856 earned mention in his entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. In it he applied Christian standards to buying and selling, contracting, letting and hiring, giving references, and imposing and paying taxes. He showed how easy it was to pass the boundary of honesty: 'we may keep within the line of our conventional proprieties, but we are transgressing the line of His recorded law ... Even the appearance of evil must be avoided.'

Between 1849 and 1866 twenty-four disciplinary cases came before the church. Usually bare details are given in the Minutes. Eight involved bankruptcy, others were for adultery, stealing, having a baby too soon after

1 D.W. Bebbington, *Baptist Quarterly*, 31, 1, January 1981, p.4.

marriage, intemperance, and renouncing Christianity. There was a case of 'dishonesty and general inconsistency of conduct', and one man was found guilty of repeated fraud against his employer, a fellow church member. Members might fall prey to various temptations, but business morality assumed considerable importance. Bankruptcy did not always imply shameful conduct but the suspicion was present so each case had to be properly investigated.

The church tried to make inquiries sensitively and with compassion. When in 1857 one bankrupt was cleared of malpractice the Church Meeting sent him 'an encouraging and sympathetic' letter. Where sin was proven but the sinner penitent, the church would not sever the link, although temporary suspension was occasionally used as a punishment. By 1866 there had been ten exclusions and four suspensions. Some were restored after amending their lives. Sometimes the church was stern: in that case of repeated fraud, members resolved that 'In vindication of the honor of the Church and in obedience to the commands of Christ, Jacob Wyatt be put away from us as an evil person', but they still exhorted him to repent.

The early financial cases all fell in the years 1854-7, around the time of the Crimean War. In March 1854 two brethren became 'embarrassed in their relations with their creditors'. Mr Cooper was cleared. He 'had in no wise involved his reputation as a Christian professor'. Indeed, his creditors testified to his 'integrity and moral worth' and his church membership was declared 'to have been most consistently maintained'. No further action was needed in the second case. In September a third bankrupt was cleared morally, but when a fourth came under investigation he resigned.

One of the first deacons, Robert Whall Cooke, a publisher, tendered his resignation in November 1856 because of 'temporary commercial embarrassment'. Before accepting, the church investigated the charge of procuring money 'under false pretences'. They found this not 'positively substantiated', but his conduct was 'not characterised by that uprightness and candour which is so necessary in the Christian professor ... Mr Cooke, in his effort to put back the coming evil day, often resorted to means that certainly do not savour of whatsoever things are honest and of good report'. Cooke was contrite: 'No greater injustice could be done to me than to think I do not most strongly blame myself.' Two courses were open to the church: to reject Cooke's resignation and exclude him as 'an evil person', or to accept the resignation with rebuke. Brock judged the latter more in harmony with the

love of Christ, and the church eventually agreed, voting by silence, 'more seemly' than a show of hands. The church decreed that resignation could not be used to avoid disciplinary inquiry. When the Revd W. Figgis made enquiries about Cooke in 1864, presumably with a view to membership in his Brighton church, the deacons instructed Brock to reply privately.

In January and December 1857 the integrity of two other bankrupts was vouched for on inquiry. When Mr Kempton's business failure was also reported that December, members were so certain of his integrity they waived investigation.

Morton Peto's Bankruptcy

Everything Peto did was on a grand scale, including his failure. Railway contracting was a risky business and Peto and the other great contractor, Thomas Brassey, had both weathered serious financial crises in the past. Any contractor needed substantial credit at his disposal. Most let out sections of the work to subcontractors who were responsible for engaging navvies. Peto was unusual in preferring to employ men directly which gave him closer control of the work and working conditions, but he needed more capital to work that way.

In 1862 Peto and Betts joined with T.R. Crampton to contract for work on the London, Chatham and Dover Railway. The main line had opened in 1860 and the new contract was for an extension from London Bridge through Blackfriars to what is now Holborn Viaduct. On 11 May 1866 Peto, Betts & Crampton suspended payment. The immediate cause was the failure the previous day of their bankers, Overend, Gurney & Co, on whom they depended for funds while the contract was in progress.

The London, Chatham & Dover was a 'contractor's line': the capital needed by the railway company to pay for the new line was acquired by arrangement with the contractor who was to build it.² Shares to the value of £2,400,000 were issued, half being offered to the public, half being taken by the contractors who undertook not to offer them to the public for a year. This second half was sold on to two finance houses, one being Overend Gurney, who agreed to hold them for a year, not anticipating widespread financial collapse. As evidence of the contractors' confidence in the value of the shares,

2 Michael Robbins, *The Railway Age*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962: the financing of new railways and extension is discussed in chapter 10.

the financiers had required that they should purchase and hold whatever shares the public offered for sale at less than the initial price. In the event Peto, Betts & Crampton bought 'rather more than half' of the first public shares, and they still held these at the time they suspended.³

Peto, Betts & Crampton had liabilities of £4,000,000, of which all but £200,000 was 'amply secured'. Their assets were £5,000,000 and in their formal announcement of suspension they referred to a statement prepared the previous month showing a net balance of £1,000,000.⁴ Among these assets was the sum of £380,000 which they maintained was owed to them by the London, Chatham & Dover Railway. When, however, proceedings began in the bankruptcy court, the railway company claimed it was owed £6,661,941 by Peto.⁵ This massive claim was not upheld on legal investigation. Peto, Betts and Crampton were all adjudicated bankrupt on 4 July 1867, and their affairs were scrutinized in sixteen days of acrimonious hearings. Various allegations insinuated against Peto were not substantiated. All three bankrupts were discharged twelve months later.

Peto's bankruptcy was raised at a church meeting on 5 July 1867. Dr Brock was asked to write to Peto, who was not present, expressing 'in the kindest way the sympathy of the Church with him and with Lady Peto under their heavy trial'.⁶ The church would consider the matter further when Peto's affairs were finally arranged. From Peto's reply to Brock's letter, it is clear that the actual bankruptcy (rather than the temporary suspension of payments) was forced by the Railway Company's claim.

The last and truly the most painful step which the conduct of the L C D new directors have occasioned has been indeed a great trial to us, but we are assured that in the interests of my creditors it was necessary to protect them. So it became a duty, and viewing it in this light much of the bitterness of the trial is removed. And I trust that in the end it may be the means of my seeing what I so earnestly desire, those my creditors paid in full and myself and partners at work again.⁷

A year later, when the bankruptcy proceedings were completed, the matter

3 *Memorandum as to Sale of Shares and Securities*, appendix to Benham and Kinnear's report to the church, bound into the Church Minute Book at October 1868.

4 *The Times*, 12 May 1866, p.9e.

5 *The Times*, 5 July 1867, p.9d.

6 Church Minutes, 5 July 1867.

7 Letter: Peto to Brock, 10 July 1867, copied into Church Minute Book.

was raised again in the church meeting on 24 July 1868. James Benham and George Kinnear were deputed to make the appropriate investigations and report back. The records contain little about George Kinnear, who was baptized at Bloomsbury in February 1859 and served as a deacon 1868-9 but transferred in 1870 to the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Their report, dated 25 September, was presented to the church on 2 October.⁸ About 5,000 words long, it begins with an acknowledgement of Peto's ready assistance in the investigation. He answered all their questions, supplied the information required, and showed all the relevant documents, making it clear that he considered the church inquiry right and proper.

Benham and Kinnear made a creditable attempt to explain how new railways were financed to church members whose trading activities were on a different scale. They observed that some people objected to the system, indeed *The Times* had been arguing against it,⁹ but they explained:

We wish only to draw attention to the fact that, right or wrong, such was the common practice in the City of London. One thing however we will insist on here, that it must be held either to be right or to be wrong ... If that mode of commencement be held to be right in cases where the result is profitable to all parties, it must be held to be equally so when it results in a loss.

They examined the matter thoroughly and sorted out the issues which concerned the church:

We have read carefully the verbatim reports of all the Examinations in Bankruptcy ... They are long and confusing but still we have endeavoured to understand the whole case. This we have found difficult to do, on account of the immense magnitude of the sums involved and the multiplicity of the Undertakings. But we do not feel it necessary to enter into any of the particulars, except in so far as they involve the moral and religious character of Sir Morton Peto.

Various 'legal fictions' to which Peto contributed in the course of business were analysed in the Report. One was the signing of subscription lists for shares in the new railway to a greater amount than Peto could pay, on the understanding that the full amount would not be called. 'Long and laboured attempts have been made to prove or to insinuate that the parties who signed

⁸ Church Minutes, 24 July and 2 October 1868.

⁹ See, for example, *The Times* 12 May 1866, p.9a; 5 July 1867, p.9d.

these Lists intended some falsehood or deception', but this was common practice. There was no intention of deceiving anyone and no one was deceived. 'Business indeed in England is full of such fictions ...'

They looked into several specific insinuations of dishonest conduct, and found that there was 'not offered the least evidence' for any of these. Throughout these unfortunate transactions Sir Morton Peto 'had conducted himself with perfect candour, openness, and integrity. We do not think that on any of the occasions stated he ever intended to be doing one thing while he professed to be doing another.'¹⁰

Some of our brethren are of opinion that we ought to stop, and pass no censure whatever on Sir Morton Peto; and looking at it as a question of conventional morality alone they are probably right ... but ... something more than conventional morality is demanded from the followers of Christ, who says to each of us 'what do ye more than others?' ...

Those who have put on Christ are called on to live not only righteously but also soberly; to walk circumspectly, not to assume positions in which the duties are inconsistent one with the other; to maintain that moderation which should be apparent to all men; and to avoid the appearance of evils. In these respects we cannot declare our Brother to have been free from blame.

They criticized Peto on three grounds. First, he had allowed himself to hold too much power in his own hands. When he arranged finance for the railway, he effectively had control over the railway itself, as well as his own business: 'That he did not abuse his power we have acknowledged, but, in our opinion, as a Christian man he ought not to have held it at all'. Secondly, he had taken on too much liability. Benham and Kinnear compared Peto's business to a heavily laden ship which foundered in bad weather when it could have survived with a little less cargo. Thirdly, although Peto was acquitted of any dishonesty or deception, he had not always avoided the appearance of evil, but had mixed himself up with questionable matters. In these ways Peto had 'exposed himself to the censure of the Church'. He had acted unwisely, but he was not corrupt. They stressed that those 'unfortunate years' did not embrace the whole life of Sir Morton, and commended their brother to the respect and love of the church.

After some discussion the church meeting, held on a Friday evening, adjourned until the next Thursday. The deacons undertook to meet any

¹⁰ See also *Baptist Quarterly*, 29, 2, p.71.

member in the vestry on the Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday to discuss any aspect of the report and show the supporting documents. Several members availed themselves of this opportunity and one then withdrew some charges he had made against Peto. On the Thursday, after further discussion, the church resolved:

That, having deliberately considered the report of the Deputation respecting the bankruptcy of Sir Morton Peto Bart and matters pertaining thereto, we conclude that in some of the transactions brought under our notice Sir Morton did not evince the moderation and prudence becoming a Christian man, and that he suffered his good name to be associated with questionable acts and misleading representations, without due investigation into their real character and probable results. He did not, indeed, avoid the appearance of evil, with the carefulness which should have distinguished a man professing godliness; and, on this account, we deem him to be deserving of our faithful, brotherly reproof.

We conclude, however, that the charges which have been so generally made to Sir Morton Peto's personal dishonor are without foundation: that he has neither attempted nor desired to aggrandize or enrich himself at the expense of other persons: and that, throughout a course of most complicated and embarrassing transactions, instead of premeditating and intending wrong, he meant to do unto others as he would that others should do unto him. In the judgement of this Church, therefore, Sir Morton Peto is still to be held in honorable reputation as a fellow Citizen with the saints and of the household of God.

When a paper¹¹ on this investigation appeared in 1982 some people dismissed the church's investigation as a 'whitewash' while others wanted to defend Peto against so severe a church. 'Imagine ... the business tycoon being investigated today in the light of one who has "put on Christ". The very criterion adopted takes one's breath away!' wrote a retired history teacher.¹² A Baptist barrister itched to defend poor Peto against that horrid church. Perhaps the opposing retrospective reactions show how just the church was when faced with such a shattering situation.

It did not feel like a 'whitewash' to Brock, who spoke movingly at the end of the Church Meeting of how he shared Peto's grief over the affair.

11 Brian and Faith Bowers, 'Bloomsbury Chapel and Mercantile Morality: The case of Sir Morton Peto', lecture given at the Christianity and Business' seminar of the University of London Business History Unit in March 1982, subsequently published in the *Baptist Quarterly* 30, 1984, pp.210-220.

12 Letter: Mrs Christina Holder, great-granddaughter of Joseph Chown, to author, 19 August 1984.

Nothing had been so bad, amidst it all, as the imputations on Christian character which had sometimes been conveyed in anonymous letters, as well as in leading articles and satirical lampoons. These had been sent to the Pastor with all sorts of intimations that he was party to the delinquencies with which Sir Morton was charged and that they were both bad alike... However, he had never let go his confidence in Sir Morton Peto's unimpeachable integrity, assuring himself as best he could that the vindication of that integrity would come in due time. Tonight it had come in ... the deliberate and devout decision of the Church, the decision being based upon a report which has been patiently and intelligently and competently performed.

Reading Benham and Kinnear's report many years later, two aspects stand out. First, the thoroughness of the investigation and the care with which complex issues were analysed and explained to church members. Second, Peto's acceptance, indeed his desire, that the church should investigate his affairs and pass judgment.

The only contemporary mention of his troubles in the Baptist press was the *Missionary Herald* report of his resignation, reluctantly accepted, as BMS treasurer. Spurgeon wrote to Peto:

A little time ago, I thought of writing to condole with you in the late tempests; but I feel there is far more reason to congratulate you than to sympathise. I have been all over England, in all sorts of society, and I have never heard a word spoken concerning you, in connection with the late affairs, but such as showed profound esteem and unshaken confidence. I do not believe that this ever could have been said of any other man placed in similar circumstances. The respect and hearty sympathy which all sorts of persons bear towards you could never have been so well known to you as they are now by means of the past difficulties.¹³



Morton Peto

13 C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, II, p.324.

That may have been true of those who knew him personally or whose churches were indebted to him. The church at Regent's Park avoided reference to his troubles in their Minutes and subsequently invited him back to chair the annual meeting as though nothing had happened.

Later Baptists viewed Peto as suspect and, although some historians seemed to clear him of guilt, he was sidelined in the denominational memory. Carlile wrote: 'After this catastrophe Sir Morton practically retired from public life, though the failure of his firm was caused by circumstances which were admittedly beyond any possibility of his control'.¹⁴ Underwood observed: 'He started life afresh and built other railways. Though he had devoted a great deal of his energy and his once ample fortune to the work of Baptist extension, he never again occupied quite the same place among Baptists, owing to their attitude to one who has once been bankrupt, even through circumstances beyond his control.'¹⁵

The Bloomsbury church was less ready to exonerate Peto of blame and more ready to forgive his lapse. The minutes relating to the case and the inquiry reports do not read like an attempt to evade or cover up. Bloomsbury was sadly but *honestly* treating the honoured founder as a church member. The scale of his business was almost beyond their comprehension. They realized that no-one questioned his conduct until he was caught up in a wider commercial crisis, but that did not mean that all was well. If Peto were excused as a special case, the whole practice of church discipline would lose integrity. The church had to decide whether his business activities were acceptable or not. Moreover, murmurings and suspicions were buzzing within the church and would be better dealt with by tackling the matter openly and trying to help members understand the complexities of such business.

The censure of his church was probably what Peto needed. Ashamed of allowing himself to get into such a position and devastated at the disastrous effects on many of lesser means, he doubtless blamed himself far more harshly than did Benham and Kinnear. He knew the insinuations reflected badly on the Christian bodies with which he was associated, and he must have been glad to have these dismissed as groundless. The church's reproof probably helped him come to terms with himself. It must have been easier for him to reappear at Bloomsbury, after accepting censure, than if he had been declared blameless, with inevitable mumblings among the membership.

14 J.C. Carlile, *The Story of the English Baptists*, p.263.

15 A.C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, 1947, p.240.

Bloomsbury was always delighted to welcome Sir Morton back, and he was prominent on various public occasions, though he never again lived in London and in 1873 he and Lady Peto transferred their membership to Exeter. The deacons made it clear that his resignation was only accepted on grounds of distance. Three days after his death in 1889, his widow wrote to James Baillie, then the minister of Bloomsbury, thanking him for visiting Sir Morton: 'his heart rejoiced in your good work at Bloomsbury, and it was a constant source of comfort to him to know that the good news of salvation was so faithfully proclaimed in the place he loved so well'. Many years later Leslie Chown was a great enthusiast for Peto;¹⁶ his admiration must have reflected his family's esteem for Sir Morton, even after his fall.

Peto rose from quite modest beginnings to become 'perhaps the most distinguished Nonconformist of his day'.¹⁷ He was a man of big ideas. He had high principles, but also a taste for adventure. He rose to a position of great wealth and considerable influence largely by his own industry and vision. He risked large sums on enterprises he believed in. A cautious man would not have been a railway contractor; a cautious man could not have been so generous a philanthropist. A cautious man would never have erected a large chapel to house a non-existent church!

For many years Baptists at large and the Bloomsbury church in particular rejoiced in his success; then, when he failed, they questioned the entrepreneur's instinct. If M'Cree was a man of consecrated commonsense, Peto might be characterized as a holy gambler. He clearly enjoyed embracing huge risks for ends he considered worthy. He ventured fortunes for the good of society at large and to promote the kingdom of God. He enjoyed a wealthy lifestyle, but also gave huge sums away, much of it to improve life for the poor. He understood the building business and was an excellent employer, but was less astute when it came to high finance. His character would not have allowed deliberately dishonourable practices, but he made serious misjudgements, partly because he was too ready to trust others. Such a man was bound to evoke mixed reactions, especially after failure moderated appreciation of his generosity among those who did not know him personally. As the *Freeman* obituary observed, 'He was widely known, and wherever

16 Joseph Chown's son John, Leslie's father, married within Bloomsbury. Author's memory of conversations, backed by letters and Chown's campaign, ultimately successful, to get a plaque to commemorate Peto in the Houses of Parliament.

17 D.W. Bebbington, 'Baptist Members of Parliament, 1847-1914', *Baptist Quarterly*, 29, 1981, p.53.

known he was respected and loved.’

How prudent must a Christian be? Benham and Kinnear said that Peto had overstepped the line. They did not define where the line was. They said Peto held too much power, even though he did not abuse it. At what point should he have pulled back, to avoid any ‘appearance of evil’? Have later generations of Baptists abandoned church discipline because they are kind-hearted - or faint-hearted? The case of Sir Morton Peto raises uncomfortable questions that remain pertinent.

Brock referred to the matter at the church’s twenty-first anniversary in December 1869:¹⁸

The change that came upon Sir Morton Peto’s circumstances at the time of our great panic, and the consequences which that change involved, afflicted about the heaviest blow to which at any time I have been exposed. How heavy it was, on many more sides than one, I cannot faintly intimate, much less adequately tell. Truer friends than Sir Morton and Lady Peto I never had; truer friends than they no Church of Christ has ever had. From knowledge of which I am personally in possession, I avow my belief that the esteem in which my friends were once so generally held was most richly merited and most righteously deserved. Let all come out to light; and whilst, in regard to the founder of our Bloomsbury Chapel there will be occasions for profound regret, there never will be seen reason for being ashamed. Errors in judgment there may have been many; dishonourableness of intention or obliquity of design there has been none.

In Peto’s case the church exercised discipline in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. A few years later a very different matter had to be tackled.

Bailiffs at the manse

The 1852 Trust Deeds made detailed provision for relieving the church of an unsatisfactory minister; in 1874 the church had to do just that. It is easy to feel such episodes are best forgotten, yet the way in which this was handled provides insights into the attitudes and strengths of the church.

With Brock’s retirement imminent, in July 1872 the church set up a Pastorate Commission of six to confer with the deacons. Soon they recommended a promising minister, Thomas Handford. Trained at Rawdon

18 Published in the *Freeman*, 10 December 1869, and *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book*, 1870.

College, he had been ten years at Bolton and had given a brilliant address at the recent Baptist Assembly. He was 'very strongly recommended to them as a suitable person, well qualified to fill the vacant pastorate'. After hearing him on the two Sundays following Brock's departure, only one of the 222 members at the church meeting dissented. Handford became minister on 5 December 1872. The roll stood at 635 in January 1873, including only eight of the sixty-two founding members from 1849.

At Handford's Recognition Service, Brock spoke of the method by which his successor was selected:

It had been remarked, 'How soon they had become settled at Bloomsbury'. But he regarded the shortness of the period as an illustration of the good working of Nonconformist methods of Church government and Church action. The way in which that Pastorate had been filled brought out into great prominence the excellence of their principles. They had not to await the good pleasure of a patron respecting the choice of a successor, trembling lest they should be saddled with Ritualism or Rationalism, lest they should have to complain in vain of unsound doctrine or immoral life. The 'living of Bloomsbury Chapel' ... was in no man's gift. Nor was the appointment of the Minister dependent on the approval of any coordinate authority or any ecclesiastical body. In choosing a Pastor, the congregation had acted with the same freedom as if they were selecting a Physician ...

Alas, this splendid method, praised by Brock, himself the inspired choice of a patron, in this instance proved unreliable.

The Handfords moved into 8 Mecklenburgh Street, near Grays Inn Road. The church paid him £500 p.a. On his appointment the elders resigned because they had been appointed expressly to assist Dr Brock, but there was a case for lay pastoral assistants and four Church Visitors were appointed in December 1873. The new minister made a few changes: he dropped the Thursday morning service and in April 1873 persuaded the church to change the mode of receiving new members and to end each business meeting with a communion service. This the church firmly gave up after six months, declaring that every Sunday was enough. Membership rose by fifty-five in his first year.

At the church meeting on 9 May, Mr Woodall abruptly resigned after thirteen years as treasurer. Through June, July and August the Minutes continue with no other hint of trouble. Then on 2 October James Benham presided, saying that the pastor had gone away for a few days, suffering from 'slight congestion of the brain'. Handford was still 'too ill' to attend on 9

October. The deacons called a Special Church Meeting to inquire into the state of the church.

On 23 October Dr Brock returned to the chair. James Benham, as senior deacon, had received Handford's resignation. and read a statement to the solemn church. Thomas Handford was excluded from the church for adultery and the church endeavoured to relegate him to oblivion. Further information is found only in the Deacons Minutes.

On 22 May 1874 the deacons had asked the pastor to meet them and James Benham had read a prepared statement:

In order to avoid giving utterance to a single word which may give unnecessary pain to their Pastor and Friend and also to secure perfect accord among themselves the Deacons have felt it desirable to commit to writing their common views and sentiments in reference to the present very serious crisis in the history of Bloomsbury.

It is with the most painful feelings that they have sought this interview with the Pastor, but a solemn sense of the gravity of the position and of their duty to him, to the Church, and to themselves renders it inevitable and incumbent.

It is little more than a fortnight since it came to the knowledge of all the Deacons on the authority of a 'Trade Protection Circular' that the Pastor had given a Bill of Sale to a Discount Company presumably for a personal loan, and that this report had already become the subject of painful remark in London and the Provinces. In consequence of this they requested one of their number to ascertain from the Pastor himself the actual facts of the case and the extent of his indebtedness. At three successive interviews held accordingly the assurance was solemnly reiterated that the security in question was not 'a bill of sale' - that it contained no reference to household goods or furniture but was simply a mortgage of two Life Policies, deposited for a loan of £100. It appeared further that for this £130 would have to be repaid and that there were other cash loans, tradesmen's bills, etc. amounting to £360 or thereabouts. Besides this it was found that the late Treasurer of the Chapel had made an advance to the Pastor of three months salary instead of one [hence Mr Woodall's resignation] - thus constituting another debt of £100 - and swelling the amount of liabilities to £590.

The total cash receipts during 18 months seem to have amounted to at least £1,320.

These statements were reported to the other Deacons and caused profound surprise and regret. But their feelings underwent a very painful change on the following day when it was ascertained by application to

the Queen's Bench Office that the document in question was really a Bill of Sale - that it contained an inventory of all the Pastor's furniture signed by himself, with an additional clause that he signed it fully understanding the meaning and intent of the deed - also containing most onerous and stringent conditions such as will not only prevent his disposal of the lease, or removal of the furniture, but will effectually postpone the claims of all other Creditors in favour of the Loan Company. It contained, however, no reference to Life Policies.

With these fresh facts before them the Deacons could not but feel most acutely the want of candour that had been exhibited as well as the previous absence of confidence in them in spite of the kindness and liberality which had been displayed from the first by the Church and by the Deacons collectively and individually. *They felt grieved that the Pastor when he found himself embarrassed did not seek the advice of his friends*¹⁹ instead of having recourse to an expedient which has made his position public - has brought his good name into disrepute and brought scandal upon the Church. But they felt no less grieved at the want of perfect rectitude and high principle which has led to these embarrassments - has allowed debt to accumulate in spite of a liberal income, and has adopted such means for their temporary removal.

The Deacons have been painfully impressed for several months with the conviction that from some cause the Pastor was not throwing his whole heart into his work at Bloomsbury; and there have been not a few indications in his sermons of hasty and imperfect preparation. The facts now revealed account only too readily for what has been so much regretted.

They have, however, no wish to dwell further on the past. Thus much they have felt bound to convey of their sorrow and remonstrance but having done so they wish to approach the Pastor in a loving and brotherly spirit. They hope better things for the future and trust that the lessons of the past may, by Divine grace, lead to such changes as shall prevent the recurrence of these sorrows. So far as their aid and co-operation in all the work of the Church may help him back to a position of happiness and usefulness it shall be cheerfully rendered.

But of course it must largely depend on the Pastor himself whether this end be attained; and no sympathy of theirs will avail unless he is prepared to enter on an earnest course of rigid self denial and strictest economy.

They must add, however, that it will be necessary to find some other

19 Author's italics.

mode for the payment of the present debts than the one suggested last week. With their present knowledge none of the Deacons can consent or would feel it right to make a further loan for the purpose, and the terms of the Bill of Sale not only shuts out all other Creditors but also prevents any removal to a cheaper house. Moreover Mr Woodall quite declines the suggested Trusteeship. All that they feel bound to do is to provide for the repayment to the Church, before the Annual Audit, of the sums rather unwisely advanced by this late Treasurer. For this purpose they have instructed his successor [John Benham] to retain £15 per month till November and £10 in December from the monthly payments. Beyond this they do not feel at liberty to interfere and they must leave it to the Pastor himself to find a solution of difficulties for which he alone is responsible.

Handford maintained that he had not *wilfully* misrepresented the facts; he had been deceived as to the nature of the deed he signed, and had not realized it gave the moneylenders power over his furniture and effects. The deacons accepted his declaration, though expressing 'profound surprise that he could have been so deluded'. 'After this the Deacons waited a considerable time to hear what the Pastor had to say; but he did not add another word.'

Eventually Handford offered to repay £150 a year. The deacons did not want the pastor in debt for four or five years and suggested he should make more strenuous efforts to economize. Handford suggested moving to a cheaper house. The deacons reminded him he was not free to move his furniture. He could, however, let his first floor, furnished, for £100 p.a. or more. 'To this suggestion he made no reply'. Handford clearly hoped the deacons would discharge his debts. To this veiled hint, they told him flatly: 'no person would be willing to lend money to anyone who had given a bill of sale'.

To this he made no reply, but sat perfectly mute for some time; and as there appeared no disposition on his part to ask the advice of the Deacons or to make them his confidantes in any way, it was proposed ... to leave the subject for Mr Handford's consideration.

Six days later they met again. Handford thanked the deacons for their 'faithful kindness'. He could limit his expenses to £360 p.a., leaving £240 to liquidate the debts. He could pay off the small debts, amounting to £150, at once - by borrowing money. He could cover half the sum by a life insurance, 'on procuring two sureties. The obtaining of the sureties was the difficulty'. 'The Deacons told him positively that none of them could consent to take that responsibility'. Mr Benham directed him for advice to Mr Trepidior of the

Perpetual Investment Company. The deacons told him to let part of his house. 'He said, after some time ... he was willing to do so'.

The deacons had gathered, without Handford, on 23 September. By then there was among church members 'a deep and widespread feeling of dissatisfaction with the conduct and ministry of the Pastor'. Some were leaving. The deacons were coming to the conclusion that 'the interests of the Church required that Mr Handford should leave forthwith'. They should not anticipate the church's judgement: the demand must emanate from the church, not just the deacons, so they summoned a Special Church Meeting.

Handford preached on 20 September 1874, then went sick, and resigned on 13 October. By then he had told friends 'he had been living in adultery for more than a year'. James Benham and Henry Sturt were deputed 'to wait upon him to hear from his own lips whether this was true, to whom he made an explicit confession of his sins'. The reason for the puzzling over-expenditure was apparent. The Minutes suggest the deacons took this disclosure calmly, past being shocked by this disastrous man. In their eyes mismanagement of money was even more reprehensible than sexual misdemeanour.²⁰

The deacons tried to help Handford out of his difficulties. Had he shown more contrition and co-operation in May, some deacons might have cleared the debts privately, but they were not men to encourage irresponsibility by throwing good money after bad. The scandalous affair was handled with calm wisdom to minimize the harm to the church. The saddest aspect was perhaps the loss of good but over-trusting Mr Woodall.

There was a postscript to the affair: in September 1876 the deacons received a letter from Dr Castle, minister in Toronto, where Handford was seeking membership. Was his 'confession of Evil' a true one? 'After consideration Mr Benham and Mr Brough consented to reply'. A request for further information was 'answered respectfully, declining any further correspondence on the subject'.²¹ Eliza Handford evidently stayed with her husband; her membership had been transferred to Toronto the previous June.

The Sunday after Handford's exclusion, the church announced in *The Times* that Dr Brock would occupy the pulpit. Doubtless rumours were rife about the trouble at Bloomsbury Chapel so the deacons wasted no time in

20 Leslie Chown, whose maternal grandparents were in the church, understood that the stability of the Handford home had been shaken by losing a baby and the adulterous relationship was part of the sad aftermath. Letter to the author, 28 September 1970.

21 Deacons' Minutes 20 September and 20 December 1876.

trying to restore the former image. After a revision which removed eighty-nine names, the church stood at 696 members, a net gain of forty-three in 1874, thirty-one being new converts.

LATER VICTORIAN MINISTRIES

'I find increasing pleasure in the methods of your Christian work'

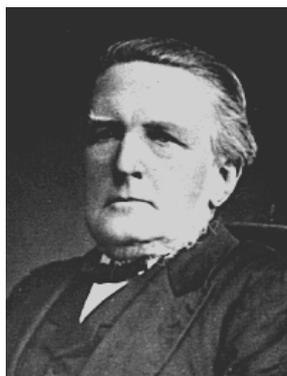
James Baillie

Joseph Parbery Chown (1821-1886)

The 1874 Pastorate Committee¹ took its time. James Benham, as senior deacon, led the church and held regular prayer meetings for guidance. On 5 March 1875 the committee recommended Joseph Parbery Chown to the church, which voted two weeks later to invite him, 201 for, 6 against, and 14 abstentions, some probably hesitating to afford so eminent a minister.

Joseph Chown was born at Kingsthorpe, near Northampton, in 1821. Baptized in 1841, he began to preach and was pastor at Ravensthorpe before proceeding to Horton Academy, Bradford, in 1846. After two sessions at college, he was called to Sion Chapel, Bradford, where he ministered for twenty-seven years: 'endowed with a fine presence and a magnificent voice, his platform speeches, as well as pulpit services, attract large audiences'.² Active in benevolent, educational and temperance work, he was known far beyond Yorkshire, and had visited the United States.

The church decided to offer him £700 p.a., in quarterly instalments, and James Benham undertook to make up any shortfall over £600 for two years.³ Asked to approach Chown at once, Benham replied 'that he and the Secretary were prepared to start for Bradford by the 11.55 train tonight'. Arriving early next morning, they pressed the invitation. Chown 'obeyed what seemed to him



Joseph Chown

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- 1 It comprised the deacons, church visitors (increased to six because of the extra work while pastorless) and twelve other church members.
 - 2 W. Cathcart (ed.), *Baptist Encyclopedia*, 1881. See also *Baptist Handbook*, 1887, p.103, and D.B. Milner, 'J.P. Chown, 1821-1886', *Baptist Quarterly* 25, 1973, pp.15f.
 - 3 Deacons Minutes, March 1875.

an imperative providential call',⁴ on two conditions: the same annual holiday as Brock and an annual collection for his old college.

Before he arrived, the church made a huge effort to clear its debts and embarked on house-to-house visitation of 40,000 families. Mr Brough suggested this exercise should be repeated in the Squares, because 'While our poorer neighbours were not neglected, our wealthier neighbours, who needed the Gospel being taken to them as much as the poor, should not be overlooked'.⁵ Dr Brock, Sir Morton Peto, C.H. Spurgeon, Alexander McLaren of Manchester, and Newman Hall of Surrey Chapel all took part in the Public Recognition Service. Brock must have been relieved to see Bloomsbury in the hands of a well-trying man, who should restore confidence.

The patterns of ministry continued much as before. Although known as a good organizer, Chown left a lot to the senior deacon, who often chivvied the deacons into decisions, with Chown happy to acquiesce. Benham was not above prompting the pastor too. In 1876 he persuaded Chown to reinstate Brock's practice of being 'At Home' to church and congregation on Mondays; few called, perhaps because Chown lived further from the chapel. Mr Chown made some 160-180 home visits each year. He lectured to the Young Men's Association on such subjects as 'Photography: Chemical, Mental and Social', and 'The Mouth: Physiological and Otherwise'.⁶ His Year Book letters were briskly to the point, not sermonizing. The church was well pleased.

Late in 1884 Chown confessed to James Benham that he was considering retirement. Benham suggested he might continue longer if they found some help with preaching. Alexander McLaren was considering an invitation to a chair at Regent's Park College: perhaps they could persuade him to become Assistant Preacher, taking one service every Sunday at Bloomsbury, with no responsibility for church business or pastoral care. McLaren, an outstanding Bible expositor, was interested and in May 1885 Chown and Benham put their idea to the deacons, who liked it and offered McLaren £500 p.a., of which Chown would contribute £200. Raising the rest ought not to be a problem, since 'most probably vacant sittings would be let'. It was an exciting prospect, but then McLaren's wife died and he decided to stay in Manchester. Chown's disappointment was great, and he was shaken by the sudden death of James

4 Cathcart, *op.cit.*

5 Church Minutes 3 December 1875.

6 Letter: J.L. Chown to author, 28 September 1970. Perhaps such interests were encouraged by his doctor son, who won the Macadam Bronze Medal for Chemistry.

Benham. In August Chown himself became ill and told the church in September that he would like to pay £300-£400 for help with the evening service but, before anything could be arranged, he collapsed again and resigned on 25 November: 'The organisations and responsibilities of our Church are such as nothing less than the most thorough ministerial equipment can ever discharge ... The interests of Bloomsbury are too sacred to be kept in suspense.'

'Financially the Pastor was quite in a position to comfortably retire', but the deacons firmly declined his offer to pay for supplies during his illness, in spite of a deficit of £435 on church funds. The church then had 758 members, of whom 200 were at the Mission. During Chown's pastorate, 995 new members had been received.⁷ Farewell gifts from the church included an elegant desk for his wife and a painting of the Chapel by Herbert Marshall, whose London scenes still appear on Christmas cards. The original painting is now in the Museum of London, but the church has a copy; Mrs Chown's desk is in the Wolverhampton Art Gallery.



Mrs Chown's desk

Chown died on 8 July 1886. Memorial sermons were preached at the Chapel by William Brock of Hampstead, BU President Charles Williams of Accrington, and John Clifford. Before his death, Chown wrote to James Baillie, who had just accepted the call to Bloomsbury:

You are coming to a Church which for all by which a Church of Christ should be distinguished has never been surpassed by any Church I have known; to Church officers who, whether they are taken personally or collectively, are among the most estimable and devoted men I have ever had to deal with; and to a centre of organisations which, while they may involve considerable responsibility, are at the same time a great encouragement and blessing.⁸

⁷ Deacons Minutes 8 January 1886.

⁸ Among papers given to author by Miss Irene Willmay of Bath, a niece of Mrs Baillie.

James Baillie (1850-1927)

James Baillie was born near Edinburgh in 1850. His father was an elder of the Free Church of Scotland and James grew up in the Martyr's Free Church, Dundee, but when seventeen he was baptized as a believer and joined the Baptist church in Lochee. A meeting with C.H. Spurgeon led him to try preaching in the open-air: he always remembered his first sermon delivered on a kerbside. From the early days he made a particular impact on young men. Going to work in Manchester, he attended Alexander McLaren's church, and then, aged twenty-five, entered Bristol Baptist College. Before completing his studies he was called to Manvers Street Baptist Church, Bath, where he served for ten years, with membership doubling to 440. There he married E.M. Willmay, who was a strong support and herself active in social work, although she did not enjoy good health.



James Baillie

Baillie's sermons were marked by 'intense spirituality, originality of thought, and condensation of expression'. His rather nasal Scottish voice was 'peculiarly fascinating, especially as it rises and falls', expressing variously sympathy, indignation, or vigorous denunciation, but some found it rather piercing. One described his accent, like his intense personality, as 'un-English' but 'not unpleasant to those who are accustomed to listen to Americans'. He read dramatically, but one journalist found his prayers 'marred by a heavy, monotonous and depressing drawl'. A good organizer and ardent temperance worker, he was a highly-strung man, who undertook his work with impassioned and exhausting zeal. At the Recognition Service he told the church: 'He had heard that Bloomsbury was the hardest place in the world to work, and he thought at once that that was the place for him.'⁹

⁹ The quotations are from reports of the Recognition Service in the *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* and in *Christian Globe*, 2 April 1887; and from *Christian World*, 9 July 1896.



BLOOMSBURY CHAPEL,
SHAFTESBURY AVENUE.

.....

SUNDAY EVENINGS IN MAY.

The following will be the Subjects of Discourse, by

REV. JAMES BAILLIE.

May 7—Gardens and Orchards.
(TO YOUNG MEN AND MAIDENS.)

„ 14—A Hillside Sanctuary.

„ 21—The Brook at Midnight.

„ 28—“The Wings of the Morning.”

.....

SERVICE AT 7 O'CLOCK. ORGAN RECITAL 6.45.

A survey of Baillie's first year at Bloomsbury in the *Christian Commonwealth* of 5 January 1888 pronounced it:

Quite a revolution ... He introduced a new hymn-book, he preaches a popular sermon once a month to young men and maidens, he is an enthusiastic advocate of muscular Christianity, cordially encouraging his young men in their gymnastic exercises, and now he has gone in for the most surprising innovation of all, viz. the abolition of pew rents. He announced on Sunday evening ... God's house had been too long in the possession of the rich and the middle classes. Now the poorest man would be made heartily welcome.

Baillie inherited a good morning congregation but only two to three hundred in the evening. Free seats filled the chapel again in the evenings, especially at the monthly young people's service.

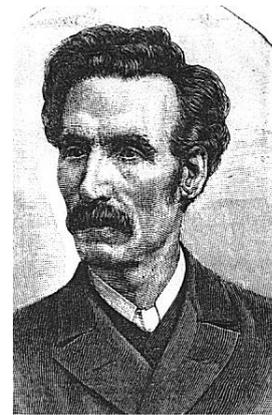
There are few more exhilarating sights than that of a great London chapel crowded from floor to ceiling at an ordinary service. Bloomsbury Chapel was so crowded on Sunday evening. Even the farthest rows of the gallery - are there anywhere else in London such steep, uncomfortable galleries? - were filled. The audience consisted largely of

young men and women.¹⁰

‘In Central London one must not be afraid to try new methods’, declared Baillie. ‘The Gospel never changes, but in applying it we must adapt ourselves to the needs of the time’.¹¹ Writing in the *Bloomsbury Chapel Sunday School Magazine* he observed that ‘the recent discussions of the higher criticisms on the Old Testament have sent me to turn over its pages with a deepened anxiety for the light of God’s Holy Spirit, but my experience of preaching Christ in this Chapel for seven years has made the saving truths of the Gospel unalterable convictions in my own mind, they are not things to be turned over and questioned, they are settled, firm and sure, I have tested them, and am satisfied that they are true as to Scripture and true as to their effect upon the human heart’.

In 1893 he was taken to task for preaching on mirth ‘in a chapel which has so often rung with the solemn utterances of the Rev. William Brock’.¹² A curious comment as Brock offended in the same way! The *Echo* expostulated:

The Rev. Mr Bailey [*sic*], of Bloomsbury Chapel, though prone to call people not of his own way of thinking ‘worldlings’, is pretty much of a ‘worldling’ himself. For several days past posters as big as a barn-door have been posted outside his chapel, stating that he would ... preach on ‘Mirth and Medicine for Young Men and Maidens’... We have heard pretty much from time to time of the ‘Church and Stage Society’, but if Puritans and others of the same mind as Mr B. deliver [such] discourses ... before long we shall have the ‘Church and World Society’. Then we may expect to find chapels utilised - on weekdays at least - for concerts and private theatricals of an instructive kind. In that direction things are tending. Everywhere Churches are using secular agencies to maintain their ground.



James Baillie

¹⁰ *British Weekly*, 1 December 1892.

¹¹ *British Weekly* 19 July 1894.

¹² *The Echo* 2 and 5 October 1893.

R.J. Cope of Great Coram Street, ‘a very old disciple of Christ’, heard the sermon and defended Baillie: ‘the drift ... was to show that Mirth and Hilarity might be directed into a right groove ... and to prove from Scripture that they are both lawful and expedient. There is “mirth and mirth”.’¹³

Generally Baillie was more wary of secular involvement than Brock, and vigorously evangelistic. Asked by the YMCA whether he approved of direct questions about personal salvation, Baillie replied carefully: ‘I approve of “button-holing” with all my heart when it is done by men who are gifted with a fair amount of sympathy and tact’. He added, ‘I have never been able to deal with men in classes. I must always know something of the mental calibre, the previous habits and taste, of the enquirer before I feel any confidence in dealing with him.’¹⁴ The YMCA had asked specifically whether members of their Reception Committee should broach the subject of personal salvation when strangers called for a prospectus or just to look round. Baillie advocated caution:

Direct questions about whether a man be saved or not may be very objectionable at reception meetings, but enquiries wisely directed might lead up to a very helpful conversation ... if he feels doubtful he had better err on the safe side, and express kindly the hope that his new acquaintance is trying to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in his daily life. Only the fear that you will drive away a young man ... should impose silence on the question of personal religion in the meetings of a *Christian Association*.

Baillie’s unrelenting zeal taxed his health and concerned deacons gave him occasional Sundays off to rest. He was ill in summer 1894 and seriously considered a call to Reading that November but was dissuaded. Among his papers were seven persuasive letters from members: Henry Jones for the Sunday School, a seat steward speaking for those in the pews, the organist and others associated with the Singing Class, and leaders of the Mutual Instruction Society, including Alfred Vinter who was determined to omit no possible argument:

I repeat we cannot spare you. London cannot spare you. The School Board Teachers cannot spare you. The Purity League cannot spare you. The Anti-Gambling League cannot spare you. Temperance cannot spare you, and although you might use many of these influences in Reading

¹³ *Echo*, 5 October 1893.

¹⁴ Unidentified press cutting among Baillie papers, probably 1888.

they are most wanted in London. Hoping to hear your decision is a big NO...

P.S. Isn't Reading *rather* damp for dear Mrs Baillie? My boys' great grandma writes to say that boats are plying on the streets!

Baillie was given leave of absence from May to August 1895 for a period of rest to restore his health, payment for May-July supplies to be deducted from his stipend. In June 1896, with an invitation to Tredegarville, Cardiff, he resigned, 'feeling the weight and responsibility of such a Church too heavy and too great a strain upon his health'.¹⁵

Tredegarville more than doubled to 1,100 members during his eleven-year pastorate, which must have felt rewarding after Bloomsbury, where he received a thousand new members in ten years yet numbers on the roll fell. Bloomsbury had raised over £27,000 overall in his time, despite its situation 'in central London, where Nonconformity is generally supposed to be suffering from depression'.¹⁶ In 1896, after careful revision and the loss of thirty-nine Mission members who followed Mr Harrison to Orange Street, membership stood at 699; there had been forty-two baptisms that year.

Baillie remembered how

I had not been here more than a few weeks, when I walked into the vestry one evening and found the deacons standing round, each one looking more gloomy and sad than the other... I very soon found out that one of the most genial of deacons [Charles Cox] had decided to exchange the noise and turmoil of Wardour Street for the quiet and refinement of Kensington - and they have streamed out ever since.¹⁷

During his pastorate, nine deacons, seven elders, and about a hundred members each year had moved to the suburbs, and numbers were dropping, although the church remained 'so devoted and united a people'. During the more conservative ministries of Baillie and Gibbon, several members transferred to Joseph Parker's City Temple. Generally Baillie sustained a steady flow of baptisms every month, but was better at winning than at retaining new converts. Of thirteen baptized on 3 February 1888, only one remained in 1896: one had died, one resigned, and ten were long absent. During his ministry, 851 were baptized and 416 came by transfer. By 1904 of

15 Deacons Minutes 4 June 1886. After later pastorates at Cotham Grove, Bristol, and Frogmore Street, Abergavenny, he retired to Bath in 1914.

16 *Christian World*, 9 July 1896.

17 *Bloomsbury Chapel Sunday School Magazine*, October 1892.

the newly baptized, 239 remained, and of those who arrived as Christians 131.¹⁸ Taking the resigned, excluded and long absent categories as ‘failures’, 46 per cent of new converts failed and 34 per cent of those already Christians. Such figures can hardly have encouraged the minister.

Nevertheless, a young American Baptist minister, C. A. Eaton,¹⁹ who took the July services in 1895, wrote on his return home that Baillie had focused all his energies into the Bloomsbury church and ‘By their faith, enthusiasm, and abundant consecration of time and money, they are giving to all the world a most noteworthy example of how to solve the problem of the ‘down-town church’.²⁰

Finding a successor to Baillie proved difficult. McLaren’s assistant at Union Chapel, Manchester, the Revd J.E. Roberts (1866-1929), declined an invitation in December 1896; he succeeded McLaren in 1903. Thomas Phillips of Kettering declined Bloomsbury the following June. The church, first attracted to Phillips’ preaching in 1895, sent two deacons to beg him to reconsider, but to no avail. In autumn 1887 Benjamin Gibbon was appointed.

Benjamin Gibbon (1871-1947)

Born in Plymouth, Gibbon grew up on the Isle of Wight. He worked in an auctioneer’s office, before training at the Pastors’ College (later called Spurgeon’s) and then served East Street Baptist Church, Southampton, for five and a half years, doubling the membership. He married the daughter of the Revd J. Prue Williams of Southsea in 1895, and was only twenty-six when called to Bloomsbury two years later. His father-in-law was a speaker at the Recognition Service. Gibbon appears to have been good but rather young for the weight of Bloomsbury work. He valued piety, opposed the theatre, was keen on Christian Endeavour (introduced to Britain from America in 1888), and made frequent evangelistic appeals.

Baillie and Gibbon were paid £500, less than Brock and Chown, but the

18 Of the newly baptized, 81 had died, 32 had transferred away, 2 were long absent, 202 had resigned and 25 had been excluded, leaving 239 still in membership. Of those who transferred membership to Bloomsbury, 46 had died, 18 had transferred away, 209 had resigned and 12 been excluded, leaving 131 members.

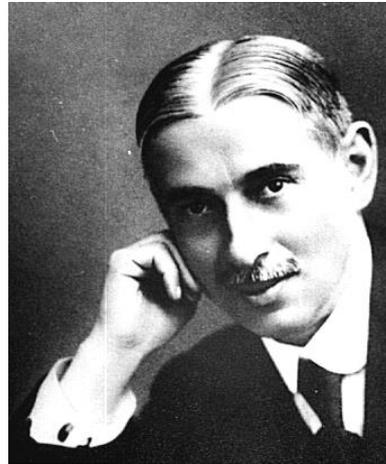
19 Dr Charles Aubrey Eaton (1868-1953), ‘a brave, good man’, was Congressman for New Jersey for 28 years. He graduated from Massachusetts Theological Institute in 1893 and had several pastorates, including Madison Avenue, New York, before turning to politics in 1924. *Watchman-Examiner* 41, no.6, 5 February 1953.

20 *The Watchman* 15 September 1895.

Gibbon household, with two small children, could run to a Cook-General and Nurse-Housemaid in 1900.²¹ Their daughter Enid remembered²² their mother pushing the children in the pram from Oakley Square to Bloomsbury each Sunday. Her sister Gwyneth was born in Bloomsbury's Jubilee year and all her life her pet name was 'Jube'.

Gibbon shared Spurgeon's liking for the 'faith principle' for raising money: to announce a Thankoffering Day should be enough. This led him somewhat rashly to restore Bloomsbury's premises, without first securing adequate funds. Faith might well prompt the wealthy philanthropist and draw sacrificial giving from the poor, but the small businessman, however devout, could not with integrity give away profits without considering responsibilities not only to family but to the firm and his employees. Bloomsbury businessmen knew responsible handling of secular finance was also a Christian duty, but their level of giving was a sad disappointment to Gibbon.

He liked to begin the winter's work with a week of united prayer, morning and evening, and a Thanksgiving Day. Although he appears to have prompted the Jubilee renovations, he was relieved after 'a year of comparative disintegration' to return to more spiritual labours. He encouraged members to take an active part: in March 1900 he told the deacons he would like to write to all members, with a reply postcard, 'urging one and all to take up some special work'. One possibility would be neighbourhood visitation. In March 1903 he invited magazine readers to tell him, anonymously, which passages of Scripture had converted them, and also any 'difficulties, doctrinal or practical, that trouble them in their Christian life'. He must have been disappointed by the tiny response. Finding blanket pastoral visitation impossible, he arranged a series of 'At Homes' at the manse for all members, invited alphabetically.



Benjamin Gibbon

²¹ 'Sit.vac.' advertisement in church magazine.

²² Letter to author, 22 August 1985.

Although Gibbon was not perhaps best suited to Bloomsbury, there is only one hint of irritation between him and the deacons. In February 1901 the Treasurer inserted a note in the magazine:

The pastor has broken out in a fresh place. He has published a book, and that without the advice or consent of the Deacons. It is not such a very difficult matter to write, or even to publish a book, the greater difficulty lies in selling it.

Gibbon was responsible for selling 250 copies of this book of sermons, which was well reviewed and cost half a crown. In spite of the treasurer's misgivings, or aided by his appeal, *Visionaries* sold out in eighteen months.

The impression is of a young man trying hard but on a 'different wavelength' from the church. His 1903 holiday was overshadowed by his father-in-law's death. In October the deacons, 'fearing a physical breakdown', gave him a further three weeks' rest from the 'great strain and anxiety of the work'. On 5 November he resigned, having been invited to King Street, Bristol. The deacons did not press him to stay. Their letter in the Year Book speaks of his nervous breakdown due to pressure of work.²³ Leaving presents from the church included a rocking-horse for the three little Gibbons, Gwyneth, Enid and David (the first child, a boy, had died in babyhood).²⁴ Restored to health, Benjamin Gibbon did good work in Bristol and from 1917 had a fine pastorate in Leicester, in the huge church at Melbourne Hall. The Gibbons retained friendships at Bloomsbury and Enid returned there as a student, eventually marrying Edward Phillips, son of her father's successor. Together they served as missionaries in China.

When Gibbon left, the church sought the advice of F.B. Meyer on securing

23 Gibbon's daughter, Enid Phillips, read with interest the MPhil dissertation (University of London, 1984) in which this account first appeared; the copy she borrowed was returned carefully covered in brown paper, which still protects it. She told the author that the record of her father's breakdown came as a relief to her. She remembered before they left London surreptitious activity, with visits from worried deacons, puzzling and suspicious to a child, and was glad to have confirmation there nothing worse was being concealed. Her niece, Ruth Baker (telephone conversation with author, 17 August 1998), could not imagine anyone doubting her grandfather was a model of uprightness. Ruth, whose father David Gibbon was a missionary teacher in India, remembers returning to her grandparents' home in 1947 and being amazed when after breakfast the servants (two or three indoors, and a gardiner) trooped in for family prayers.

24 As an old lady, Enid (born 1899) remembered that superb horse: 'not just painted wood but covered with "fur", brown, just like a real horse, and to us he *was* real with his harness and nosebag. He was named "Major" and how we loved him! He went on to the next generation. We never had anything that we loved more!' Letter to author from Enid Phillips, 17 July 1986.

the 'best possible' pulpit supplies. Meyer himself took the Midsummer Morning Service. Dr A.T. Pierson,²⁵ an American first suggested by Gibbon, served the church from February to April, and his compatriot, Dr Woelfkin,²⁶ for a further two months, 'with such acceptance' that he was invited to become pastor but preferred to return to America. A tolerant, sane, courageous and calm man, Cornelius Woelfkin loved people and was loved in return. He believed strongly that 'man must keep faith with himself' and keep in touch with reality.²⁷ Hardly a lover of controversy, he began as a conservative literalist but gradually changed his theological position, his honesty drawing attacks and rejection from former friends.²⁸ Meanwhile many in the Northern Baptist Convention continued to see him as a great Bible expositor and evangelical preacher.²⁹ When Bloomsbury was attracted to him in 1904 he would still have appeared a respectable conservative evangelical of particularly attractive personality.

Eventually the church looked again at Thomas Phillips who preached on 9 and 16 August 1904.

25 Dr Pierson subsequently contributed *Many Infallible Proofs* to the series *The Fundamentals*. This series, published from 1909 on, spread the idea of religious fundamentalism which had been developing in America over the previous decade.

26 Cornelius Woelfkin DD LLD LittD (1859-1928) rose to academic distinction without benefit of a college training. He had pastorates in New York, worked as an evangelist, and became Professor of Homiletics at Rochester Theological Seminary 1906-12, then returned to pastorate at Park Avenue, New York.

27 This description is drawn from Conrad H. Moehlman, *The Baptist*, 28 January 1928.

28 Fundamentalist obituaries declared sadly that Woelfkin had been a highly esteemed, conservative Baptist for many years, but in his last twenty years had gradually changed his theological position until 'he became as liberal as he had formerly been conservative', and imply that was the end of his useful ministry: 'For the last dozen years Dr Woelfkin has had no power as an evangelist, and no influence of an evangelical sort, and for this decline the Northern Baptist Convention was solely responsible'. *Watchman-Examiner*, 12 January 1928, and *Christian Fundamentalist*, March 1928.

29 See William Lippard's obituary in *Missions*, March 1928. I am indebted to Professor Richard Pierard of Indiana State University for obtaining obituaries of Woelfkin and Eaton. Woelfkin came to the fore at the Indianapolis convention in 1922 when the fundamentalists wanted the NBC to adopt the extremely conservative New Hampshire Confession. Woelfkin offered a substitute motion that 'the Northern Baptist Convention affirms that the New Testament is the all-sufficient ground of our faith and practice and we need no other statement'. This was passed, since most found it hard to vote against the New Testament. H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 1987, p.577.

Church Life 1874-1904

During the difficult 1874 interregnum the church had proved itself capable of dealing with more than the bare necessities. The Deeds and other documents were lodged with the Baptist Building Fund. The church considered replacing the minister's second prayer on Sunday mornings with a liturgy which the deacons would prepare, but decided it was not the appropriate time for change. Moody and Sankey declined an offer of the chapel for their forthcoming visit to London. The pulpit was well supplied, for Bloomsbury received sympathetic help from 'all denominations'.³⁰

Worship continued along established patterns under the later ministers. Arrangements for music continued to worry the deacons. Each new organist found a need for organ repairs or a new hymnbook - or both. The deacons appointed George Carr organist in March 1878; in June he told them major work was needed and when the deacons said it would have to wait, Carr 'expressed the hope that he should not be blamed if the organ should suddenly fail during the proposed interval'. The next year an anonymous 'old friend' paid for this (£315).³¹ Later the deacons had to restrain the choir's enthusiasm, suggesting in 1898 and 1901, and insisting in 1902, that anthems should be shorter, not outlasting the offering. The deacons now preferred hymns to chants and anthems, suggesting in 1903 that the morning pattern should be three hymns, one chant or anthem, plus an anthem or voluntary during the offering; in the evening there might be five hymns and the offering anthem. By 1904 the church was using the *Baptist Church Hymnal* (1900) and Bristol Tune Book.

Visitors came from all over the world. They could expect to hear able preaching. George Clinch observed that 'many of the leading Nonconformist divines of England and Scotland have preached in the pulpit at various times'.³² In 1886 these included three leading Baptists - Dr Joseph Angus, Dr John Clifford and George P. Gould, the Methodist Hugh Price Hughes, the Secretary of the London Congregational Union, Andrew Mearns, and his fellow Congregationalist, Andrew Reed. August often brought American preachers, though in 1899 and 1903 the deacons asked for good *English*

³⁰ *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1876.

³¹ According to Edward Robbins, organ historian of Haywards Heath, this was a 'new organ', built by Thomas Christopher Lewis in a case designed by George Carr. Organ history is often complex as older parts can be extensively re-used in rebuilding.

³² *Bloomsbury and St Giles Past and Present*, 1890.

supplies. The only reference to a lay preacher at the main Chapel services appears in 1899 when the deacons agreed to invite Mr S. Wood MP or Mr W.S. Caine MP on Sunday, 3 December. Bloomsbury housed the spring meetings of the Baptist Union in 1875 and continued as the main London assembly place for over fifty years, apart from 1886, 1888 and 1901 when meetings were jointly held with the Congregational Union.³³ The warm welcome evidently offset the uncomfortable pews, for an assembly reporter observed, 'Inside, Mr Baillie's church is chiefly remarkable for homeliness and comfort. "I don't know how it is", a Baptist remarked to me one day, "but at Bloomsbury one always feels at home."' ³⁴

Special services came into favour, but the Sunday afternoon services at the Chapel were discontinued in December 1883 for lack of support. Harvest Thanksgiving, introduced in 1875, did not include a display of fruit and vegetables until 1888, and deacons watched such displays warily, demanding 'greater simplicity' in 1896, and in 1898 only permitting 'slight decorations in the Table Pew'. That December, however, they invited the Christian Band to obtain an épergne for the communion table and fill it with flowers every Sunday, 'a beautiful innovation'.³⁵ A Christmas Carol Service is first mentioned in 1891. A Flower Service was already a regular summer event. In 1903 Gibbon first invited 'parents who have infants under, say, a year old, to bring them, that God's blessing in the presence of his people may be invoked upon them'.³⁶

Members formed a Gospel Temperance Mission in 1883, with monthly meetings and week-long summer campaigns. The thousandth church member enrolled in December 1884. A mission week was a normal winter feature, with well-known missionaries, like W.Y. Fullerton and Gipsy Smith in 1896, and J.R. Coutts and Jack Cooke in 1901. After the 1883 mission James Benham and others asked to use Moody and Sankey's hymnbook at the Monday Prayer Meeting, but Chown found it 'more adapted to evangelistic services'.

33 E.A. Payne, *The Baptist Union*, p.101.

34 *British Weekly*, 19 July 1894, in the report of the Baptist Union Assembly.

35 *Bloomsbury Chapel Magazine* February 1899.

36 *Bloomsbury Chapel Magazine* March 1903.

Finance

Persuading people to rent sittings was a continual worry. In March 1876 deacons noted 189 sittings vacant, although membership had risen by sixty-eight that year to 726. Two years later 242 were vacant and pew rents were falling, although weekly offerings were up. In 1880, they considered making all seats free on Sunday evenings, a practice attracting outsiders to other chapels. Instead they distributed 1,000 leaflets and placed weekly advertisements in the *The Times*, *Daily News* and *Echo*.³⁷ The next year James Benham persuaded the deacons to reduce some rents and in 1884 he sought to vary price according to members' circumstances. Chown lamented the constantly changing congregation, although membership kept up, with more admissions by conversion than transfer.

The Treasurer, Edward Nodes, suggested replacing rents with a Guarantee Fund. He thought 300 donors could raise £25 a week, instead of the current £21, thus:

3 at 20s 0d	£3-0-0	40 at 2s 0d	£4-0-0
6 at 10s 0d	£3-0-0	100 at 1s 0d	£5-0-0
20 at 5s 0d	£5-0-0	100 at 6d	<u>£2-10s-0d</u>
20 at 2s 6d	£2 10s 0d	Total:	£25-0-0

Promises would be confidential to the treasurer and rent-free sittings might still be appropriated. The deacons rejected this idea.

In 1885 255 gallery and 211 area sittings were unlet. The average rental was then five shillings a quarter. Church income continued to fall (£1,022 in 1873 but only £744 by 1886). In January 1887 Mr Nodes listed the objections raised to renting pews:

- The wealthy bachelor discharging what was counted his duty in taking one seat.
- The class spirit engendered by the inequality of position.
- The system of buying and selling seemed contrary to Scripture.
- A system not in harmony with the times and it had completely broken down.

The deacons adjourned to enquire about other churches' experience of voluntary giving. The Downs Chapel and Clapton Park were pleased with

³⁷ Deacons' Minutes, 5 December 1880.

voluntary offerings (VOs), Tolmers Square had too complicated a system, and Camden Road was unhappy with pew rents and would watch Bloomsbury with interest! Seven of the eight deacons present favoured Free Will or Voluntary Offerings in principle, though only five thought them advisable at Bloomsbury.

In November the church made the change: 'in future the poorest man would be able to have his own seat and would only be expected to give whatever he felt able'.³⁸ Regular worshippers would still hold sittings and receive thirteen Free Will Offering envelopes a quarter to place in boxes held by deacons at the doors (not all deacons were convinced this was the best use of their time). 'Spare worshippers' could donate loose cash.³⁹ Pew-to-pew offerings were increasingly used at special services, but they were not ready for this at all services. Pew-to-pew collection became the norm in 1898, when it was seen as 'a two-fold improvement, in that it enables everyone to see the plate, and spares our good Deacons the trying ordeal of standing frequently in very cold and draughty positions'! Promises were confidential to the deacons: the senior deacons had objected to them being known to the treasurer alone, as there had never been 'secrecy in the vestry'. The pursuit of tardy promises was, however, left to the treasurer and he found it arduous. In December 1899 Mr Nodes tendered his resignation as treasurer because VOs made so much extra work. He was persuaded to stay with clerical help.

VOs proved better than pew rents as membership declined, initially realizing £1,148, compared with £978 from pew rents the previous year, but many reminders were needed. The visit of Professor Harwood Pattison from New York was advertised in the *Baptist, Freeman and Christian World*. The next year they were eager to get 'another leading American minister' for August. In 1900 they engaged Dr A.I. Pierson for four Sundays, promising him £25 but actually paying £30 after offerings almost tripled. In 1901 they secured Dr Stewart of Toronto for two weeks, Dr Broughton of Atlanta, and A.S. Wilson of Perth, Australia.

The trustees refused to raise a mortgage in 1898 to pay for the renovations, preferring 'advances on personal security', which did not please the deacons who were expected to make such advances. They borrowed privately at a modest 3% interest. With Bloomsbury's usual care for paid staff, they increased the chapelkeeper's weekly wage by 2s 6d in 1900.

38 *Christian Commonwealth*, 5 January 1888.

39 *Bloomsbury Chapel Magazine* 1888.

To help in placing visitors pew tablets identified reserved places. From 1898 all seats and hymn sheets were free for the monthly youth service. In 1901 the deacons were not yet ready to open the galleries free at other services.

Pulpit supplies cost very little during Chown's pastorate; presumably he was rarely absent. By 1890 supply preachers were paid four guineas, which Baillie thought excessive unless railway expenses were heavy, but the deacons judged right. During the 1886 interregnum, the usual supply rate was paid but the deacons decided 'It would be a graceful act to give an additional fee, say, of half a guinea' [10s 6d] to those presiding at the Lord's Supper. In 1901 the supply rate was raised to £5 per Sunday.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Chown was not happy with the arrangements for baptisms, which took place within the prayer meetings. The baptistry was against the end wall, behind the pulpit and under the organ gallery, so the congregation could not see much, but in 1875 curtains were fitted to ensure wet candidates could reach the vestry unobserved. Two ladies attended female baptisms, and it would be 'courteous and pleasant' if elders attended the men.

The afternoon Lord's Supper was dropped in 1875, attendance being very low, and weekly celebration went in 1882, again because of 'scanty attendance', celebrating thereafter on the first morning and third evening each month, a pattern common in Baptist churches well into the twentieth century and still the Bloomsbury norm in 1999.

In 1884 the deacons, especially James Benham, became concerned about distribution of the Lord's Supper Fund, which was handled by Chapel elders and Mission Church deacons. They had been applying to the treasurer for lump sums, usually £5, to dispense to needy church members. There was concern that a few might have received help from more than one dispenser, and also that 'those persons who had been receiving permanent relief should not be regarded as Pensioners as that was not within the meaning or intention of the Lord's Supper Fund'. The deacons regretted the accumulation of funds and the elders were known to feel underemployed.⁴⁰ When there was still a surplus a year later £10 was sent to the Pastors' Income Augmentation Fund and £5 to the Widows and Orphans Fund, although some deacons questioned

40 Deacons' Minutes 22 February and 12 December 1884; 27 March 1885.

whether this was a proper use of this Fund, although giving from their surplus to poor churches had been earlier Bloomsbury practice.

The use of alcoholic wine at the Chapel seems not to have been questioned until 1884. Two years later the temperance-minded Mission asked for non-alcoholic wine to be used at the Church Meeting communion to welcome Baillie, so they could all join in. The mother church refused, arranging instead for Baillie to attend the next at Meard Street, but having been made to think about this, Bloomsbury adopted unfermented wine in April 1888 (the Deacons' Minute recording this is the first to use the term 'communion').

Visitors' tickets for the Lord's Supper were abandoned in 1887, when a general invitation was given: 'Members of other churches and all who love our Lord Jesus Christ will be heartily welcomed to this service'. In 1896 the deacons and elders recommended limiting this to 'members of other churches', presumably reflecting concern at the possibility, peculiar to Baptists with an open table, of admitting the unbaptized to communion. No decision is recorded.

Membership and Church Meetings

Church meetings were held monthly. Unavoidably absent members were allowed a vote in elections by 'signed proxy' (a 'postal vote' rather than true proxy) from October 1873. Voting numbers when ministers were called suggest about a third of the members attended. In December 1875 the church decided to make special provision for the instruction and training of younger members, and the elders arranged some Young Members' Meetings, for those under twenty-five, male and female alternately.

Membership rose under Chown to a peak of 816 in 1880. An annual Church Conference from 1889 discussed the work, planned new strategies and enlisted new recruits. In 1900 members asked for more spiritual topics, preferring 'Prayer and Personal Effort' to 'Our Charities'. From 1891 new members were received at the Sunday evening communion, rather than the weeknight service. Movement to the suburbs stepped up in the 1890s and, coupled with the tendency to attend only once on Sundays, depressed the minister. Even so, Gibbon's anxiety seems sad, for in 1903 the church lost 86 but gained 104 new members, 31 of them new converts; total membership was then 604. VOs totalled £860, and the Thankoffering £250. Numbers had

declined, but that was general among city churches at the end of the century.⁴¹

The *Daily News* made a census of London church attendance in 1902-3, with independent enumerators covering one borough per Sunday. On 7 June 1903 Bloomsbury Chapel had the highest Protestant congregation in Holborn, followed by high Anglicans at St Alban's. Next highest Nonconformist attendance was at John Street Baptist, with attractive premises and services but only half Bloomsbury's numbers, and those exclusively middle-class. The third Baptist church, Kingsgate, was small yet worthy. Bloomsbury was unusually high in men, and low in children, for it was 'not a family neighbourhood'. Bloomsbury's figures were in the morning 174 men, 190 women, 105 children, and evening 202 men, 280 women, and 94 children. It is hard to recognize this as a church in severe decline. Richard Mudie-Smith wrote of its ongoing success due to 'the good organizations and well-filled pulpit', and also because well-known in the denomination as a regular place of assembly. The congregation included many workers from shops and other local businesses.⁴²

Holborn, the smallest borough, had a dense population (165 per acre) and only nine acres of open space. The census report described it as in process of redevelopment, residential areas being replaced with business premises or high-class flats. Bedford and Russell Squares and Southampton Row still housed 'wealthy, independent' people, and Gt Russell Street, John Street, and Bedford Row had independent or professional households. Elsewhere north of Oxford Street were the homes of 'tradesmen, shop assistants, dressmakers, hotel waiters etc.', and to the south 'market porters, Jewish tailors, carters, waiters, labourers, theatrical employees, charwomen, washers, etc'. The worst remaining area was around Drury Lane.

Of the West End generally Mudie-Smith observed: 'The employees of the large business houses ... provide unique opportunities for Nonconformist initiative and enterprise, for the overwhelming majority of these young men and women are by birth and religious education Nonconformists, who have gravitated to London from the provinces'. They could be attracted by a strong and vital message united with real social sympathy 'and an appreciation of the

41 Clyde Binfield notes in *So Down to Prayers* the decline at the Congregational church at East Parade, Leeds; Gordon Savage, Baptist Historical Society Annual Lecture 1975, noted that Hugh Stowell Brown's congregation fell off by 1880, with losses to the suburbs, and he told the church 'Whoever comes after me will have to keep and gather his own people'.

42 Richard Mudie-Smith, *The Religious Life of London*, 1904, reporting on the *Daily News* census of church attendance in 1902-3.

solitariness which is the permanent condition of so many thousands of young men and women in these districts'. Churches failed when dull, with inadequate gospel exposition, and lack of energy and enthusiasm. A strong church needed a devout and well-equipped minister, good leaders and workers, and good music, instruction, organization, and missionary enterprise. He concluded that 'the power of preaching is undiminished ... wherever there is the right man in the pulpit there are few, if any, empty pews'. He was impressed by the 'institutional churches' which provided 'a centre of active, aggressive, social work' all week:

The institutional church is ... the solution of the problem presented by closely-congested, densely populated neighbourhoods. In the returns ... these buildings shine, as regards the numbers attending them, like stars in an inky firmament of failure.⁴³

Bloomsbury with its 'good organizations' was among the churches that led to this conclusion. His third-party assessment was an interesting corrective to the publicity of 1904-5 implying Bloomsbury was at a low ebb and the way out was to make it 'institutional'! The difficult year came after Gibbon left, when the pastorless church only saw six baptisms, and membership dropped to 517.

A late tribute to Gibbon's ministry reached the church in 1997, when Miss Kathleen Crook read about Bloomsbury's latest development fund in the *Baptist Times* and sent a donation in memory of her mother. Born in 1887, Lily Gillson grew up in the Bloomsbury fellowship. Her father died when she was three, her mother when she was fourteen, and her husband also died young, leaving her with four young children and little money but sustained by her faith. She often spoke of going with her mother and sisters, to Bloomsbury as a child, and of the day she accepted Jesus as Lord. Her daughter sent copies of four letters her mother had always kept.

The first was from William Bolton, Elder, on 22 May 1902, instructing her to be in the vestry the next Sunday evening by 6.30 for baptism, equipped with 'a change of under clothing, shoes etc. and a towel'. Then came a printed letter in a 'script' font, signed Benjamin Gibbon, dated 9 June 1902, informing her that she would be received into membership the next Sunday. The duties and privileges were spelled out: regular attendance at Sunday and Thursday services, and at Communion and church meeting each month, weekly

43 *ibid.*

offerings according to her means, subscriptions to some of the church's benevolent institutions and religious societies, and personal service: *'I hope that receiving the Year Book you will decide to enter that particular department of Christian work, among the many there described, for which your abilities and opportunities seem to qualify you. If you will then apply to me, I shall be happy to introduce you to the Superintendent or Leader'*. Gibbon concluded: *'I congratulate you heartily upon your admission to the Church universal ... I welcome you most cordially into our section at Bloomsbury of that great society'*.

With these were the letter on her mother's death that December from her 'Morning Teacher', C.B. Bray, and a letter from Lily Crook herself to a doubting widow, for out of her own hard experience she became a great encourager of others. She had the joy of seeing all her children embrace the faith she had found under Gibbon's ministry at Bloomsbury.

Elders and Deacons

The eldership had become firmly established under Chown. Their work was primarily visiting sick members and following up absentees from the Lord's table. In 1877 they were invited, as 'officers of the church', to take their place with the deacons at church meetings. A 'young elder' was appointed to represent and involve the young men from 1880. In 1883 Frederick Brough (a deacon whose tailoring partner and probably brother, John, had been an elder) suggested a joint meeting 'to talk over the work of the church', and this was repeated annually. Baillie allocated a section of the chapel to each elder for pastoral care. A surviving Elders' Book has entries like 'Mrs Cookman: deserves our sympathy. Comes when she can'; 'Mr Evans: is a regular attendant. Will be more careful to use his Communion Tickets'; 'Mr & Mrs Richardson: very aged and too feeble to attend'; 'Harry Nesbit: prefers to wander about'; and even 'Mr Dosseter: has been dead 18 months'.



John Carter

In June 1875 Mr Carter suggested appointing some permanent Lady Visitors, but this failed to win support. H.E. Jones, a forward-looking man who had made the case for electric lighting at the previous meeting, proposed in June 1897 that the church 'consider the need of ladies being appointed to fill any vacancies that may occur in the Eldership'. The deacons and elders were not yet ready for this, but agreed to ladies interviewing those female candidates who would prefer it, and reporting to

Church Meeting. An advertising committee in 1899 deliberately included ladies.

Late in life James Benham was concerned about the vague arrangements for deacons, who had been elected for life and each carried specific duties. After they died or resigned, more were chosen. They no longer all lived close by: meetings rotating around their homes involved travelling to St John's Wood, Tufnell Park and Clapham. Benham himself was ageing and could not do so much, while his brother John, having moved 'out of town', found it hard to attend more than once on Sundays, and other deacons 'found it necessary to live out of town for a while during the summer months'. James thought it was time to enlarge the diaconate.⁴⁴ Two more were appointed and another in 1880 making eight in all.

In 1881 Benham made a more radical suggestion: 'He had felt for a long time the life election for the Diaconate was wrong', and suggested it would be better for two a year to submit to re-election.⁴⁵ Decision was deferred, but when two years later he again proposed limited tenure, with eight deacons serving four years each,⁴⁶ this was adopted. An amendment to prevent members under eighteen from voting was heavily defeated. John Benham and two others took the opportunity to retire. James Benham, anxious lest less prosperous brethren might feel unable to serve, said:

it would be well if the Pastor will inform any friend elected to the office of Deacon that the quarterly meeting at each other's houses, although very pleasant, was not necessary. The meeting could be held in the Vestry. [He] hoped that not having suitable accommodation for this will not prevent suitable men from accepting office.⁴⁷

The deacons suggested three names to the church, including Walter Benham, but none of these were chosen. James himself was duly re-elected; the next three meetings took place in his home.

The new deacons were greeted with a 'Tabular Statement of the Duties of the Deacons' Office both specific and general', drawn up by James Benham in January 1884. This does not survive, but the specific tasks were those of Church Treasurer, Lord's Supper Fund Treasurer, Church Secretary/Vestry Steward, Deacons' Secretary, two Seat Stewards, Registrar, and Fabric

⁴⁴ Deacons' Minutes 20 March 1878.

⁴⁵ Deacons' Minutes 21 December 1881.

⁴⁶ Deacons' Minutes 24 January 1883.

⁴⁷ Deacons' Minutes 19 December 1883.

Steward. All deacons had keys.

By 1886 only five original trustees survived,⁴⁸ so eight more were duly appointed: John Carter, perfumer of Fleet Street; William Stuck, surgeon dentist of Gower Street; Edward Nodes, undertaker of Tottenham Court Road; Walter Benham BA, engineer of Wigmore Street; Gilbert Jennings BA, merchant of Gracechurch Street; George Pavitt, warehouseman of Southampton Row; Ebenezer Matthews, ironmonger of High Street, Bloomsbury; and Robert Hogg, outfitter of New Oxford Street.

Institutions

Most of the earlier church agencies and activities continued. In 1887 Baillie wrote in the *Year Book*: 'I find increasing pleasure in the methods of your Christian work. You have fairly grasped the double aspect of our Lord's mission; you not only rescue perishing souls, but you bestow loving service on the bodies of men as well.'

Sunday School work increasingly expanded into midweek evenings, with meetings of devotional, singing, sewing, social and gymnastic character. Children were encouraged to give to missionaries and charities. In the early 1890s the Sunday School began regular visits to local hospitals and workhouses, taking fruit, magazines, toys and flowers. The Meard Street School arranged concerts at the Poland Street Workhouse. The Tonic Solfa Class was 'probably the most successful of its kind in London',⁴⁹ but closed in 1896 because it had outgrown available accommodation.

From 1880 a Choral Association worked at 'sacred and secular part music', as well as psalmody. Oratorios were performed in the Chapel. It was disbanded in 1897, ostensibly for lack of funds, but it was probably not greatly to Gibbon's taste. By 1900 the choir was ninety strong, with an average attendance of fifty-five. They mustered ninety-three to sing the new century in with the 'Hallelujah Chorus'.

The midweek emphasis gradually moved from educational to physical pursuits. A Gymnastics Society, formed in 1886, used the Exeter Hall gymnasium in Long Acre on Saturdays, with separate hours for ladies and gentlemen, and a monthly gospel address. This was serious exercise: a photograph taken a few years later shows the young women looking quaint in

48 Morton Peto, Robert Cooke, Henry Robarts, Henry Woodall and Edward Hagger.

49 1893 Year Book .

their long clothes but wielding heavy dumbbells. The Society hired its own gymnasium in Soho Square in 1888, but four years later retreated to the Bloomsbury basement. They gave displays and provided instructors for other clubs. Cricket, Football and Tennis Clubs enjoyed Regent's Park facilities, and the Swimming Club met at 7 a.m. in the Regent Street Polytechnic pool. An Excursion Club and a Cycling Club were popular in the 1890s; part of the chapel basement was appropriated as a bicycle park during services.

Baillie was not happy with the secular activities of the young men. The Young Men's Association did not report after 1883, but there was by then a Young Men's Club. This 'had no official connection with the Church, although a great many of the members of that Institution belonged to Bloomsbury';⁵⁰ nevertheless, Baillie insisted on vetting its programmes. By 1888 the Club had premises in Great Russell Street, whither Henry Elliot took



The Young Women's Gymnasium, 1907

his Bible Class. The residential provision increased, and in 1901 the club opened the new 'Bloomsbury House', at 10-12 Queen Square, with extensive facilities and accommodation for eighty to ninety residents. Debating, musical,

⁵⁰ Deacons' Minutes 15 September 1886, 15 June 1887, 21 September 1887.

elocution, rambling and photographic societies were organized there.⁵¹ Baillie enlisted the young men's support for his monthly evangelistic services.

The deacons were happy to advertise these youth services, but less pleased when asked to vacate their vestry after services for enquirers' use.⁵² Then in 1899 Baillie asked to alter the church programme to allow more time for the 'intellectual development of the Young Men and Lads', although he was 'ready to sacrifice himself, rather than interfere in the slightest degree with what the Deacons felt to be in the best interest of the cause.'⁵³ Under this moral blackmail the Monthly Prayer Meeting was moved to Thursdays, absorbing the Pastor's Bible Class, a measure of prayer and Bible study evidently being sacrificed to evangelism. There was some tension between Baillie and the church's enthusiastic youth leaders, who were not used to a narrowly religious programme. Brock and Chown had not drawn such sharp distinctions between sacred and secular.

Mr Elliot's young men were encouraged to combine religion, study and recreation. They themselves conducted evangelistic services at the Mission Hall and on behalf of the BMS at Walworth Road Chapel and the Metropolitan Tabernacle. These young men were determined to take an interest in the wider world. The Bloomsbury Mutual Improvement Society, founded in 1890, debated social and other topics, and had lectures, very like the former Young Men's Association. A Parliament was added in 1893, with 31 Liberals and 21 Conservatives. Ladies were admitted in 1897 and meetings became more social, which 'provides for the recreative portion of the Church's activities', according to the 1901 Year Book, but the next year the Society reverted to young men only and chiefly educational content. Gibbon suggested ending the Midsummer Morning Service in 1903. That resulted in improved attendance, over 350, but that modest figure shows clearly enough that the service had lost its former appeal.

The Christian Band was formed in 1885 as a link between Sunday School and church, to encourage those 'seeking the Saviour but not yet wholly yielded'. It soon drew 172, of whom 98 were already church members. Gibbon, on arrival, wanted to link this to the similar Christian Endeavour movement, but the Band voted against this - a late display of the Chapel's independence. Eventually Gibbon prevailed and the Band became a Christian

51 Church magazine, October 1900.

52 Deacons' Minutes March and September 1887.

53 Deacons' Minutes June 1889.

Endeavour Society in September 1901.

Temperance work, always important at the Mission (where 300 adults signed the pledge in 1891 and the Band of Hope drew 600 children), became more prominent at the Chapel. In 1893 Baillie led a Bloomsbury party in the Direct Veto Demonstration in Hyde Park, and Bloomsbury women switched from the British Women's Temperance Association to the new Women's Total Abstinence Union. The Temperance Society canvassed for local temperance candidates in the 1895 County Council election. Enthusiasm for temperance meetings dwindled among the adults, but Band of Hope remained popular with children. At the turn of the century, the church magazine predicted that the battles of the twentieth century would be against 'intemperance, gambling, overcrowding, religious immorality, war.'

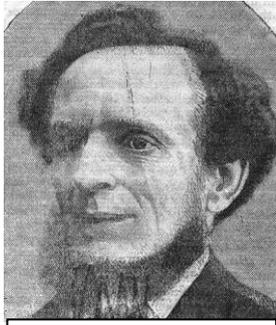
After Baillie's departure, the deacons determined to improve the 'true social character' of the January Church Social Meeting, arranging for a hymn, tea, two short musical contributions, and conversation over objects of interest. An extra Tea and Public Meeting for the pastor's anniversary was introduced in 1898. This was more formal, with several addresses. 'Social concerts', with talks and entertainments, proved popular in 1903.

By the late 1890s the Domestic Mission held annual Sales of Work, but at the Chapel in 1900, with the church heavily in debt, such efforts were judged 'undesirable'. In 1902 Gibbon reluctantly agreed to let the young people organize a bazaar over two days in December, with stalls, exhibitions and competitions. This raised £340. Gibbon did not care for such methods, but admitted that those involved also contributed generously on the June Thanksgiving Day, and Bazaar's 'social intercourse and fellowship in Christian work' had enriched the church.

An attempt to attract young people down to the Lecture Room after evening worship failed in 1892, but ten years later, knowing Social Hours went well at some chapels, Bloomsbury tried again and found support for a monthly hour 'with introductions, conversation, light refreshments and music, concluding with family worship conducted by the Pastor.'

The Domestic Mission

William Harrison, formerly assistant to Newman Hall at Surrey Chapel, was Bloomsbury's domestic missionary from 1874 to 1895, when he became minister of the nearby Orange Street Congregational Chapel. He was assisted by Miss Hill, the Mission Nurse, who watched by sickbeds, provided light



William Harrison

nourishment and hospital letters, read Scripture and prayed with the sick.⁵⁴ In 1876 she made 2,598 visits, achieving many conversions. In 1880, with scarlet fever rife, she did more actual nursing. After her marriage in 1888, church ladies, led by two elders' wives, visited the women. The Sick Poor Relief Society still made 3,000 visits a year in the 1880s. In the final decade of the Mission's life, from 1896, Mission Sisters (deaconesses) led the work. The London Baptist Association had set up a small community of Sisters in Doughty Street in 1890.

Among the Mission volunteers was William Luff. Born in 1850 in Theobalds Road, he grew up in the Metropolitan Tabernacle and later became an itinerant evangelist. As a youth, he attended a Bible Class connected with Bloomsbury Chapel, probably Charles Searle's in Red Lion Square, and the young men used to help Mr Harrison,⁵⁵ regularly taking the Monday evening meeting, and helping with 'Children's Dinners and Dinners to lodging house men and others'. Luff married Agnes Britton, instrumentalist and soloist at the Mission. He left a description of a Christmas dinner for the poor in 1881:

Moor Street is in the very heart of the Seven Dials, and the Mission Hall is on the north side of the broader thoroughfare out of which seven narrow streets diverge. On the evening of an ordinary week day it is comparatively quiet, but on Sunday morning it is, from a 'Dials' point of view, in its glory of noise and traffic. Hard by, there is a dense colony of foreigners, the French alone numbering 7,000, and the Mission Hall may be said to be the centre of a vast hive in which the poor toil through their burdened lives, snatching such honey as they may from their scant opportunities. The dinner party of last night consisted of the pick of such a population, all being respectable looking folk, selected by Mr Harrison from a miscellaneous flock over which the Mission exercises such supervision as it can secure. Sometimes in the same hall a number of the hungriest of the 'sandwich men' who live in the neighbourhood are regaled with a plain, wholesome meal; once a week during the five winter months 300 destitute children are fed.

⁵⁴ *Bloomsbury Chapel Year Book* 1877.

⁵⁵ *William Luff: An Autobiography*, 1930, pp.44-8, 100. I am grateful to Frank Brown, a fellow member of Bloomsbury, who found the book in a family collection.

"EVENING PARTY FOR THE AGED."

"No person under sixty years of age can use this ticket."

*A few friends interested in aged people ask the
favour of your company at an*

*EVENING PARTY, on Wednesday, January 4th,
1882, at the MISSION HALL, Moor Street,
The Dials, St. Giles.*

*A Roast Beef and Plum Pudding Dinner at half-past
six o'clock. Mr. Harrison and other friends will be
present to welcome you.*

During the evening Selections of Music, etc., will be given.

(N.B.--Each person must bring knife and fork.)"

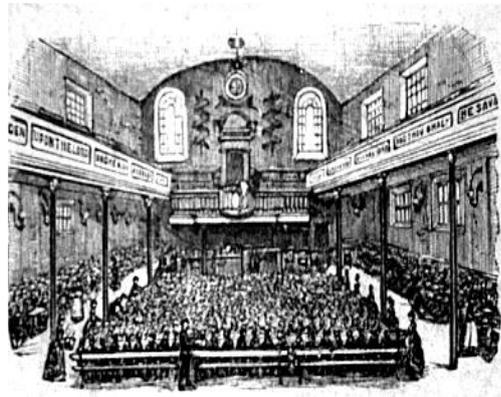
Twice a week evening entertainments, more or less of a secular character, are given ...

The dinner, with which we are specially concerned, was provided at the cost of a few ladies living at Tottenham, and it will be enough to say that it was a success; that the fare was abundant and good, and that, if delicate garnishments were lacking, the guests did not miss them, being evidently of Sam Weller's opinion, that so long as the beef is forthcoming there is no need to break one's heart over the absent horseradish. The preponderating proportion of women was striking, and it seems that the men present represented the 20 married couples who here and there sat together. Most of the others were widows, for Mr Harrison's experience is that in this district the men (probably because of the close confinement of their daily avocations), die earlier than the women. Of the 230 guests there were four over 85 years of age, 10 over 80, 21 over 75, 61 over 70, and 92 over 65... With bright music, genial and not too long speeches, and occasional oranges and tea, the dinner party to the end was pleasant to all concerned. The absence of strong drinks would save outlay in aerated liquors next morning. There were no waiters to fee, or coaches to call; and the guests will not be harassed by the necessity of giving a return feast. It is needless to explain that under these circumstances the party broke up satisfactorily. There were no flirtations on the way home, and if some of the guests did not walk away quite straight it was because feeble knees and auxiliary crutches and sticks are not, as a rule, favourable to

chalk-line demonstrations. On the whole, however, these aged diners-out were wonderfully preserved specimens of people living in an atmosphere, and amid surroundings generally supposed to be highly inimical to longevity.

A detailed account of the Mission's work appeared in *The Baptist*.⁵⁶ The reporter had spent a day with Mr Harrison and been shocked to see the degree of poverty so close the riches of the West End. The occupations of people living close to the Hall were listed as tailors, shoe-makers, theatre scene shifters, and restaurant servants.

The children receiving Thursday dinners were carefully selected as particularly needy because their fathers were unemployed or dead. They were asked to pay a half penny and bring their own spoon, but if that was difficult the charge was waived. The reporter saw 400 children fed on 'Savoury Irish Stew', served by a number of ladies and two or three gentlemen. The meal was substantial: 1 cwt of meat (51kg, allowing the equivalent of a 'quarterpounder' each), with a 'large quantity of rice and vegetables' and 25 quartern loaves (4lb, more than double a modern 800g large loaf). No second course was mentioned - none of M'Cree's glorious plum pudding! Over the previous year the Mission had provided some 6,000 meals, 5,700 items of clothing and blankets, and 156 hospital letters, held 200 open-air meetings and made 5,000 home visits, but was struggling financially and missing the support of the late Hon. Thomas Holt.



A Children's dinner at the Meard Street Mission Hall, Soho

The Mission was based in Moor Street until 1886 when Cambridge Circus was developed and the Hall was condemned. The work had to move to a less prominent site in Meard Street, Soho, changing the name to the Soho and St Giles Mission. The new hall cost £900 to lease and £600 to put into good order, towards which the Metropolitan Board of Works gave £500 in compensation. Although they only moved a few streets, district visitors found

⁵⁶ Cutting among Baillie's papers, undated but c.1889.

the ‘continental habits’ of Soho’s foreign population rather daunting. French, German and Italian tracts had been distributed in Soho from at least 1877, and some open-air preaching was in French and Italian, with help from the French Mission in Carlile Street. In 1903-4 monthly services in French were held after the main service.



Bloomsbury Cripples' Parlour, 1907

William Harrison favoured ‘special services’: services of song, lantern services, flower services, experience meetings, gatherings for the aged, for men only, for the young. From 1896, a Mission choir arranged monthly musical services. Bloomsbury deacons agreed to add details of Meard Street services to the chapel notice-boards in 1893. The pastor continued to preach quarterly at the Mission, with Walter Benham resisting any attempt to weaken this bond.

Open-air work, now in fashion, was a regular feature. They liked Oxford Street, where ‘the only drawback was the noise of the traffic’, but four sessions a week at Cambridge Circus drew 500-600 hearers. This work was ‘energetically supported by the ladies’. Some sessions near Piccadilly Circus attracted ‘fashionable pleasure-seekers’, while they could gather poorer folk

twice a week in Broad Street. By 1894 the Mission Brass Band marched around the district Sunday afternoons, complete with banner, occasionally pausing for addresses. They wore out the Chapel's portable harmonium wore out, and acquired a replacement, second-hand from North Africa!

Other activities kept up well. From 1885 many children were sent on holiday through the Children's Fresh Air Mission: *The Baptist* mentioned nearly 100 from St Giles going for a seaside fortnight in one year. *The Times* reported in 1884 on one of the teas for sandwich-men, among the poorest of working men: 3,000 of them were paid 1s 1d a day (under £15 per year) to tramp up and down the streets for eight hours a day, with advertising boards hanging back and front. A report also appeared in the *Christian World*: 'On entering the hall they are supplied with a pint of tea and two large beef sandwiches ... It was remarkable with what attention and apparent appreciation the high-class music was listened to ...' These degraded workers found few who cared for them like Harrison and his team.

There were some new initiatives. Saturday Evening Concerts were a regular feature at the Mission by 1897. A Cripples Parlour, connected with the Shaftesbury Society, began in 1903: this soon had fifty members, all under fifteen, and each with a 'Crutch and Kindness Friend'. The Free Servants' Registry set up in 1874 had developed twenty-five years later into a full Labour Register: 'Any member of the Church or congregation requiring a temporary or permanent helper *for any purpose* is requested to communicate with Sister Margaret'. Neither party was charged for this service. The Mission Boys' Brigade, began in 1896, five years before the Chapel's company. In 1898 the Mission had the largest company at the Whit Monday March Past. The smartly turned-out boys, complete with twelve flutes, two piccolos, five bugles and three side drums, had come a long way from M'Cree's limp urchins.

The deacons noted that for some years past prior to 1888 the elders had given money to some fifty poor members of the Mission Church. Such 'Christmas doles' were not, they judged, a proper use of the Communion Fund, perhaps tickets for food would be better. Mr Hogg said this would be unpopular at Moor Street 'as the tickets for 5/- worth of food would not be suitable for a single person'. They compromised, giving thirty-three widows five shillings each from the Lord's Supper Fund and fifteen others tickets from the Christmas Dinner Fund.

Thirteen ladies and eleven gentlemen still visited the poor in 1883 and Mr Gregory developed a special mission to omnibus and cab drivers in Oxford Street. The District Visiting Association merged with Sick Poor Relief in

1892; by then only the elderly and the lodging-houses needed visits.

The area was changing for the better. New apartment blocks kept more middle-class residents in Bloomsbury;⁵⁷ insanitary slums gave way to model housing for the poor, like the Peabody Buildings which still provide many homes near Drury Lane. In 1887 the district visitors observed: 'The St Giles of the past has gone, but there is still a vast population needing the spiritual and temporal help afforded them by this Society,' but those needs were increasingly met through wholesome recreation rather than material relief.

The 1884 Year Book noted recent publicity for *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, which drew attention to the churches' failure to make much impact on the poorest classes. Taken up by W.T. Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, *The Bitter Cry* became the symbol of concern for the living conditions of the poor, which had received increased attention throughout the Chapel's life. Investigative journalists like Henry Mayhew and James Greenwood, writing in the 1850s to 1870s, had written of their plight. The Christian Mission begun by the William and Catherine Booth in Whitechapel in 1865 had grown by 1878 into the Salvation Army. Dr Barnardo founded the East End Juvenile Mission in 1867. The Church Army, formed in 1882, was a working men's mission to working men. George Sims published *How the Poor Live* in 1883.

This increase of social conscience led to the Forward Movement among the Free Churches: urban mission came into fashion. In 1885 Hugh Price Hughes challenged Wesleyans to 'go forward into the blessed opportunities and far reaching beneficence of a national religion, which preaches the Gospel to the poor'. The London Wesleyan Mission commenced that year, free from circuit and itinerancy rules: 'The Central Missions made Wesleyan aggression among the working classes more lively than ... at any time during the century'.⁵⁸ Congregationalists' central missions included Whitfield's, re-established in Tottenham Court Road in 1903 under Silvester Horne. This was particularly successful, yet found it hard to reconcile the gathered membership from the Bloomsbury squares with the clerks and shopgirls, let alone those from the poorer areas nearby.⁵⁹ Among Baptists, John Clifford 'embodied the Forward spirit' at Westbourne Park, Paddington.

Meanwhile Bloomsbury's work continued quietly along time-honoured

57 D.J. Olsen, *The growth of Victorian London*, p.129ff.

58 Kenneth S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, 1963, p.44.

59 Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers*, 1977, pp.204f.

lines, a shadow of its former self (though that partly reflected improvements to which the church had contributed). By 1905, when the separate Mission closed, many of its people attended the Bloomsbury morning service, social differences being less marked than formerly. Twelve became members of the Central Church at its inception.

Booth's findings

When Charles Booth surveyed the religious life of London at the turn of the century,⁶⁰ he found Seven Dials had 'almost lost its reputation for poverty, thieves and bird-fanciers', although Soho and St Giles were still noted for foreigners and prostitutes. The whole West Central area was rich in public houses and short of public open space. St George's was very active, 'an example of reasonable success on Broad Church lines', and St Giles made great efforts 'to find a place for itself in the lives of the people'. St Anne's, Soho, was a fashionable church but had less success among its own parishioners: 'No jealousy is felt of what others may be able to do in this direction, but fear is expressed as to the pauperising influence of some of their methods'. St Anne's parish contained a French Roman Catholic Church, a French Protestant Church, an Italian Mission, and the Bloomsbury Mission in Meard Street, at which the criticism may have been aimed. St Patrick's, the Roman Catholic Church in Soho Square, had notably good relations with the local Anglicans and Wesleyans. The Baptist church in John Street, Holborn, had a 'considerable middle-class congregation' and tried unsatisfactorily to reach the poor through open-air and lodging-house work, while Kingsgate Chapel had a small but respectable working-class congregation, and there were several Strict Baptist chapels around. The best local mission work was done by the St Giles Christian Mission (that independent off-shoot from Bloomsbury Chapel), which had become 'a huge organization' with five local stations.

Bloomsbury was the only Nonconformist church of any importance in St Giles, but its Mission presented 'a rather hopeless picture of work amongst the poor'. The 'very capable deaconess' in charge, who had previously worked in East London for both Congregationalists and Wesleyans,

compares Soho and Drury Lane unfavourably with Haggerston and

⁶⁰ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London, Third Series: Religious Influences*, volume 2, 1902, pp.169-205, esp. 188-9.

Bethnal Green, especially as regards the housing of the people. At her mothers' meetings there are about three hundred women, and hardly any ... have homes with more than one room ... the people lack energy as compared to the East End folk, and need stirring up again and again. More is done for them in the way of charitable relief than she has ever known elsewhere.

It is noteworthy that of the people of the immediate neighbourhood very few come to the religious services at the hall, and in tracing to their homes such as do attend, the deaconess is taken over a wide area, extending to the courts off the Strand.

It was by then a changed Mission in a changed district. In the 1880s St Giles' still had 219 to the acre, where London averaged 42. Booth compared conditions in the 1890s with 'the squalor, misery and neglect' of 1866, already much improved since 1849! In 1868 M'Cree had reported less 'extreme destitution', only 'pinching poverty', though visitors still found some families without clothing or furniture in 1873.

The chapel fabric

The building continued to demand attention. Three stained glass windows, a memorial to Brock, were installed over the baptistry in 1873.⁶¹ In 1876 the roof needed repair, and the following year, in spite of earlier attempts at preservative treatment, the perishing Caën stone façade had to be replaced with 'practically imperishable', 'hard brown Portland stone'. Caën stone was widely used in mid-century but decayed in the coal-polluted air. The external staircase from the gallery was added (the Board of Works opposed this in 1856), the organ gallery was brought forward three feet, and three more classrooms were built in the former side passageway off the basement hall. The architects for these works were Messrs Ernest George and Peto (Sir Morton's son Harold); the builders were Peto Bros. The deacons declined Mr Hagger's offer to redye the seat cushions free of charge, because unpicking and remaking would be expensive, and instead removed the cloth from the seat backs and varnished the wood. The church worshipped at St James's Hall while the internal work was done. A long strike of London journeymen masons delayed the external work for over a year. Meanwhile water worked through from the roof to the basement, the gallery was draughty so they added

⁶¹ With a fourth in memory of Chown, they depict John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter and Paul all preaching.

lobbies at the doors, the baptistry leaked and inspection with a view to a new bottom found the arched supports were giving way. These works in 1877-8 totalled £4,513, towards which three deacons were deputed to collect subscriptions, two more to elicit donations, two to apply to old friends, and three to arrange a fund-raising bazaar. Several members made interest-free loans. In July 1879 the deacons could report in amazed delight that this large sum had been cleared by efforts of present and past members, helped by a few outside friends.

The Sunday School continued to beg for extra classrooms. Deacons considered every nook and cranny in 1884: the towers were difficult of access, the cellars small, unsuitable and already occupied! They settled for curtained-off provision in the galleries.

In 1880 James Benham fitted a steam pipe to heat baptismal water, and soon after paid to alter the 'previously most uncomfortable' front gallery seats. The chapel was redecorated in 1884 and 1892. Ventilation, especially in the basement, remained a problem while lighting was by gas. As telephones came in there were requests to fix wires to the towers. Messrs Pullmans of Greek Street attached a wire between their two premises in 1881, and subscribed one guinea a year to the Domestic Mission. Two years later the Electric News Telegraph Company of Ludgate Circus offered a guinea a year for way-leave for two wires. James Benham interviewed the company secretary on the north tower before granting permission, having established it could be done 'without any damage to the Sacred Edifice'. Such requests were repeated until the deacons called a halt in 1894.

Chapelkeepers came and went. The church ceased to pay doorkeepers for the gallery in 1882. When Walter Benham succeeded his father as Fabric Steward in 1886, he spoke to the deacons of 'the desirability of the Chapelkeeper having a holiday' and secured ten days a year. The next year the chapelkeeper complained that his assistant 'did not quite act up to the spirit of his office': he was unpunctual and had kept £4 taken as Hat and Cloak money at a recent social.

The church arranged insurance in 1887 with the Hand in Hand Company, covering building, pulpit, pews and fixtures for £14,500, the organ for £700, and furniture, linen, books, bells, plate and clocks for £800, at a total premium of £12 10s 0d. In 1899 insurance was modified to cover the windows (£200), and the piano and two harmoniums (£100). The insurers asked the church to improve protection against burglars.

The deacons tried to purchase the freehold 'on equitable terms' in 1887, but the Attorney General replied that it probably needed 'a question in the

House'. On two previous attempts the Commissioners would have charged thirty years' rent (£6,000). The Solicitor to the Woods and Forests Office told the church, 'no grant had been made near London for even Episcopal Church assistance and certainly not (unfair though it might seem) for any Dissenting Places of Worship'. The deacons let the matter rest.

In 1897 the pastor suggested the church jubilee might occasion extensive renovations: a curious choice of celebration for the spiritual Mr Gibbon.⁶² The church resolved to spend £2,000 to make the building 'become to us what it was to our fathers, a "Cathedral of Nonconformity"'. Gibbon envisaged raising this, in cash and promises, on a single Thanksgiving Day, but he only received £920 (compared with the Metropolitan Tabernacle's £6,000 the following year). Bloomsbury embarked on the ambitious scheme, eventually spending £3,004 on the chapel and £714 on the Mission Hall. The resultant debt, £1,125 when the work was completed, hung heavy till 1905.

Bloomsbury appealed for aid in the *Baptist Times*. The correspondence evoked was reprinted in the church magazine. 'Baptist Puritan' protested: 'It would be far more pleasing to Christ if his baptized followers gave more to the Foreign Mission cause and spent less on the beautification and modernisation of their Chapels.' William Evans, a 'young working man', who often attended Bloomsbury although not a Baptist, replied: 'We have heathen at home whose tastes and habits are in some measure refined, and if we are to attract them within hearing of the Gospel ... the building must in some degree minister to their comfort and requirements.' The Bloomsbury editor saw fit to publish a long article justifying the renovations in June 1898.

The idea of replacing all the pews and pulpit proved 'not entirely popular', so they were regained in light oak. A new platform and baptistry were built in front of the pulpit, with class rooms behind, and the memorial windows were moved up. Their



Rear wall of chapel showing original position of memorial windows

⁶² Deacons' Minutes 14 December 1897.

original position is still apparent in the exterior brickwork. Heating and ventilation were renewed, and electric lighting was installed. A wood block floor was laid in the basement hall, eighteen inches below the old level. The church worshipped in Exeter Hall through the autumn, advertising this in letters five feet high on the chapel wall. The re-opening celebration in December lasted a fortnight, with visits from Augustine Birrell, J.H. Shakespeare, John Clifford, Thomas Spurgeon, William Brock of Hampstead, James Baillie, Judge Willis QC, and the Congregational ministers, Joseph Parker and J. Morgan Gibbon.

Wider concerns

The church continued actively to support the LBA, BU and BMS. Joseph Chown presided over the LBA in 1878 and BU in 1883-4. The spring meetings of the Union were usually held at Bloomsbury. Occasionally Bloomsbury arranged meals for Baptist gatherings. In January 1886 the deacons noted ninety-four luncheons for the LBA at 3s 0d per head. Two bottles of wine cost 8s 0d and lemonade £1, reflecting the teetotal majority by then.

Bloomsbury records carry only the briefest comment on the Down-Grade Controversy that rocked the denomination in 1887-8. The 1889 *Year Book* observed: 'The great and valuable labours of the Association have been much hindered this year by theological controversy forced on the officers against their will'. Even under Baillie, not the most radical of ministers, Bloomsbury had little sympathy with Spurgeon's bitter stand against modern elements creeping into Baptist life.

In 1892 Bloomsbury noted with approval that LBA work included a Lodging House for 'poor wayfarers', deaconesses ministering to the sick, and a farm in Essex which provided a 'labour test': 'Thus we Baptists keep abreast of the times'. The 1903 *Year Book* reported the LBA's achievement of thirty-six suburban chapels built in fifty-five years, wryly commenting that London Baptists had supported all this 'to the tune of a miserable average of 3½d per head'.

Bloomsbury supported the BMS keenly; a number of missionaries went out from the Chapel late in the century. In 1902 Gibbon's suggestion of monthly lectures on missionary enterprise in different parts of the world was 'quite approved'. The church collected for the BU Sustentation Fund in 1876 and formed an auxiliary to the Irish and Home Mission, but the hard-pressed church did not find it easy to meet denominational demands. In 1894 the

deacons declined J.H. Shakespeare's request for an opportunity to explain the Church Extension Scheme, and the initial reaction in March 1899 to the Twentieth Century Fund appeal (to raise £¼ million from ½ million Baptists) was that it was probably 'inopportune' for Bloomsbury. Eventually they allowed Shakespeare and the Revd A.J. Riley to address a public meeting in February 1900. By 1902 Bloomsbury had contributed £495. When the Dutch Baptist Union asked in 1894 to send a delegation in national costume to speak of their work and sing native hymns, Bloomsbury deacons agreed, provided no collection was taken.

There are few references in the records to other local churches, beyond the occasional fraternal gift towards particular appeals. When Whitfield Tabernacle was deemed unsafe in 1889, the deacons offered occasional use of the chapel. When in 1900 the officers of the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon group 'lately meeting at Whitfield Tabernacle' sought 'moral support and countenance from Bloomsbury', presumably moving because of some disagreement, the deacons decided it would be 'undesirable to accept the responsibility'. From the 1880s collections were taken for special missions, including Gospel Temperance, Fullerton and Smith, and Jack Cooke. In 1890 the church collected £54 for General Booth's Salvation Army work. The deacons agreed to 10s 0d annual affiliation subscription to the Free Church Council, formed in 1896, and the Chapel was one of the centres for the Free Church Simultaneous Mission, 26 January to 4 February 1901, though the former pastor, James Baillie, made his striking contribution through the week at Paddington Chapel.⁶³ Responding to special hardship, a retiring offering (£18) was taken in 1889 for the striking 'distressed dock labourers and their families', £26 was raised for the Mansion House War Fund in 1899, and £15 for Caister Relief in 1901.

In the last years of the century anti-Catholic and anti-Anglican feeling was very strong. The Liberation Society urged 'the importance of Nonconformist Principles' at a church social and lecture at the Chapel in 1892. Mission work in one district was reported as 'greatly hindered by intemperance and Anglicanism'. With the Mission's move to Meard Street the multicultural nature of Soho presented new challenges. An influx of Jews into Soho prompted Mr Nodes to comment at Gibbon's Farewell, 'If a new Epistle to the Hebrews were to be written today it might be fairly addressed to Bloomsbury'. Others, using a surprising analogy, 'looked forward with confidence to the

⁶³ *The Baptist*, 1 February 1901.

future of Bloomsbury as the Mecca of the Denomination'!

Use of the Chapel was granted to the Finsbury District Progressive Party for School Board Election Meetings in 1894 and 1897. In June 1896 a public meeting on the Education Bill was held in the Chapel. On 23 May 1903 Bloomsbury sent a hundred marchers, under the banner 'Bloomsbury Chapel opposes the Bill', to the mass demonstration against the 1902 Education Act, which caused such a furore in the Free Churches over supporting voluntary schools from the rates, with John Clifford leading a campaign of passive resistance. No other reference appears in the Bloomsbury records, with nothing to indicate whether any members were sufficiently involved to withhold rates or suffer distraint of property.

The church occasionally raised a voice of protest. The deacons prepared a petition in 1894 in favour of the County Council Licensing Committee over the Empire Theatre. The deacons approved Gibbon's refusal to take advantage of the new Marriage Bill, on principle, in 1899. Gibbon preached against Sunday newspapers in 1899, and rejoiced that the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* dropped their Sunday editions in response to the religious public. In 1900 the pastor and E.J. Francis were appointed to the Committee of the London Council for the Promotion of Public Morality.

PART 2: BLOOMSBURY CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH

13

RECONSTITUTION

'The new enterprise should prove of untold good'

J.C. Carlile

The need for change

Bloomsbury Chapel's ministry always extended beyond the gathered membership to the people of the city centre. The church wished to serve appropriately classes whose tastes differed, with special concern for young people, working far from the comforts, support and constraints of home. An attempt was made to minister to the destitute, inadequately equipped by nature or habit to cope with life. This wide-ranging ministry, much of it to those unable to make large financial contributions, always strained resources. Finance became increasingly difficult as prosperous members increasingly moved to suburban homes and churches.

Records imply that the the debt from the Jubilee renovations was the last straw. This contemporary feeling was probably justified: the church had undertaken major work with less discussion than in Brock's day. Jubilee was reason enough. Gibbon believed faith alone would move financial mountains, but the debt was not cleared in the usual two years, and became a restricting burden. The young Gibbon could not keep the momentum going. Watching the second minister in succession break down under the pressure, the church began to lose heart. If Thomas Phillips had accepted in 1897, Bloomsbury Chapel and its institutions might have entered the new century with renewed vigour and not needed to sell its independence - but the younger Phillips might not have been up to the task either.

In December 1902 the magazine lamented 'the difficulties of Christian work in Central London': Hugh Price Hughes of the West London Mission had just died, Dr Parker of the City Temple had been seriously ill, Mr Gange was leaving Regent's Park, ministers were leaving Tolmers Square and Tottenham Court Road Chapels, Soho and Kingsgate Street had been pastorless for some time. 'This is a very serious condition of things, and we earnestly hope and pray that God will soon send men after his own heart to

these difficult mid-London churches.’ In April Silvester Horne moved from prosperous Kensington to Whitfield’s, Tottenham Court Road, ‘under the auspices of the London Congregational Union’. His work would be ‘conducted on mission lines’.

Addressing the LBA’s northern district that summer, Gibbon spoke of ‘well-to-do, respectable and godly people’ leaving other districts of London to the ‘poor, depraved and vicious’:

The respectable people do not discharge their duty to these neglected classes by subscribing to missions in their midst. It is personal service that is wanted, even more than money. It is New Testament churches that must be maintained, not missions. If the good people will *not* live in these neighbourhoods, then they must come back to them for Christian service in the work, and particularly on Sunday. There is a larger question than Sabbatarianism. ‘It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day’ ... The Secretary of the Baptist Union is convinced what is needed is improved ministerial training ... The President of the London Baptist Association yearns for a multiplication of ... large mission churches.

In July 1903 he suggested to the deacons¹ that Bloomsbury could do with large outside help to purchase the freehold. That September the church magazine reprinted a *Baptist Times* interview with Dr Lorimer, of Madison Avenue Baptist Church, New York, arguing for large, commanding church buildings, open all the week, serving the young city workers:

The London Baptists, for instance, ought to pull down Bloomsbury Chapel ... and then you ought to buy the two adjoining churches, and on the site erect a great Central Mission Office, with all kinds of institutions, open all day long. There should be rooms ... where young women could go for their rest hour at midday to read or write letters.

Dr Lorimer did not suggest where the money would come from and Bedford Chapel had long since given place to business premises, but the idea was interesting.

¹ Deacons’ Minutes, 3 July 1903.

Forming the Central Church

Writing in 1905 J.C. Carlile observed:

The success of the 'Forward' movement has compelled Baptists to think whether they should not attempt something upon the lines of a central mission. The subject has been for years before those in London who have realized the inadequacy of the ordinary church in the centre of business houses to meet the needs of those who are away from home and for the most part left to themselves on the Lord's Day and during the evenings. Some of the central Churches are dying for the want of a congregation, though thousands of young men and women throng the streets and pass their doors...²

Informal talks with the Association and Union began in 1903. Early in 1904 the deacons met John Bradford, the LBA Secretary, and then the LBA Central Mission Committee. The LBA already intended to follow the Wesleyans and Congregationalists and establish a Central Mission. Bloomsbury's problems encouraged the idea that this church might be open to a denominational initiative, never easy for Baptists who so cherish their independence, but Bloomsbury's denominational links were strong.³

Negotiations with the LBA and BU lasted through 1904. The LBA President, Mr Herbert Marnham of the Heath Street Church in Hampstead, wanted to form a Central Church, rather than found a suburban one. An article in the *Baptist Times*, 15 December 1904, suggested that the Baptist Union favoured Dr Lorimer's idea and leaned on Marnham.⁴

The reconstitution had as much to do with the denomination's wish to have its own Central Mission as with Bloomsbury's supposed inability to continue (the reason traditionally given). In the church magazine for February 1905, James Baillie claimed that he first suggested the idea to Marnham. With Central Churches in fashion, Baillie may well have directed attention to his former church.

2 J.C. Carlile, *The story of the English Baptists*, 1905, p.307.

3 Bloomsbury has provided six BU Presidents: William Brock (1869), Joseph Chown (1883, Tom Phillips (1916), F. Townley Lord (1947), Ernest Brown (1948), and H. Howard Williams (1965), and another, John Chown (1922) of the Brondesbury church had close links with Bloomsbury.

4 Marnham was Treasurer of the LBA, 1895-1900, and of the BU 1901-35.

On 20 October 1904 John Bradford and J.H. Shakespeare, the BU Secretary, intimated to the Pastorate Committee 'that it was desirable to go forward in the recommendation of a pastor'.⁵ Two representatives were sent to Norwich to hear Shakespeare's successor at St Mary's, Thomas Phillips, and brought an encouraging report. Bradford wrote to Mr Nodes, the Senior Deacon, on 22 October, saying the Central Mission Committee would recommend selecting Bloomsbury from several possibilities for the Central Mission, provided possession, freehold and control could be obtained. As far as possible, Bloomsbury's character as a church would be retained.

The church could determine possession and control of the chapel, subject to the Trust. The Crown would now sell the freehold for £9,125. On 18 November Bradford wrote to the church, offering to purchase the freehold, take over the debts (£1,250), and 'establish a strong Central Baptist Church'. This was financed by grants of £7,500 from the Union's Twentieth Century Fund, £700 from the LBA, and £5,350 raised by Marnham's President's Fund, leaving £3,000 for refurbishments.⁶

To change the Trust and put property and work under LBA control, the Charity Commission required the church to dissolve 'as provided in the Trust Deed'. The new Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church would exercise 'its spiritual functions in the election of Elders, reception and dismissal of members, church discipline, etc.', but all other matters would be managed by a Central Committee, at first of eighteen members, nine LBA, three BU, six church. They proposed reduction after three years to five LBA, three BU, three church. In fact they decided in February 1909 not to reduce the committee, judging wide membership good for spreading interest.



Herbert Marnham

⁵ Statement of proceedings, in Deacons' Minutes at 13 January 1905.

⁶ *Baptist Times* 12 May 1905, p.337.

The LBA would 'do the utmost in its power to make Bloomsbury a centre of spiritual, philanthropic and social work, and thereby a great power in London'. Negotiations continued for several weeks, as the church sought stronger representation. They agreed the LBA and BU Secretaries would be included in their representation,⁷ and the minister, now called Superintendent, and assistant minister would attend in addition to Bloomsbury's six places. Since Bloomsbury could usually manage a good attendance at the meetings, normally held in Baptist Church House in Southampton Row, five minutes walk from the church, and the more scattered LBA delegation rarely turned out in full, so the church voice was in practice dominant by default.⁸ This has often been true down the years: distance apart, most Baptists feel uncomfortable about controlling another church, whatever the constitution. In theory, the power of the Central Committee is considerable and strange in terms of Baptist church polity. In practice, it has usually provided a helpful sounding board and has helped to access major capital finance.

Sir George Young, the Chief Charity Commissioner, required the church first to convey the leasehold interest to the Baptist Union, and then dissolve itself so that the Trust could come into play.⁹ The church was not happy but was persuaded this was the correct way to proceed.¹⁰ The lease was assigned by the six surviving trustees not to the Baptist Union Corporation but to the new London Baptist Property Board.¹¹ The Church Meeting on 1 December 1904 took three decisions: to invite Thomas Phillips to the pastorate (unanimous), to accept the LBA scheme, provided the church elect one-third of the Committee of Management (159 for, 2 against), and to authorize the transfer of Trust of the property (unanimous). After due notice, on Thursday, 22 December 1904, on a very foggy evening, with only Mr Nodes, six other deacons, two elders and a handful of members present, the church resolved: 'That we the members of Bloomsbury Baptist Church in special Church Meeting assembled hereby agree to dissolve the said Church'. Dissolution was merely a legal technicality: at the same meeting the church accepted two new members!

7 Letter: Bradford to Nodes, 22 December 1904.

8 Thus of thirteen present on 2 July 1906 eight were from Bloomsbury, four LBA, and 1 BU. The Revd T. Greenwood, for example, found each meeting entailed two and a half hours travel from and to Streatham Common.

9 Letter: Bradford to Nodes, 7 December 1904.

10 Letter: Bradford to Nodes, 16 December 1904.

11 Trust Assignment document, now with London Baptist Property Board.

The church magazine in December 1904 carried an article, 'The Future of Bloomsbury', explaining what was intended. 'To this plan the Church has now given its sanction, rejoicing that its work will now be placed upon a permanent basis, and that it will be able to enter upon a greatly enlarged sphere of usefulness'. Throughout 1905 the magazine ran articles extolling the new concept. The *Baptist Times*, 16 December 1904, had a long article, 'A Baptist Institutional Church'. This mentioned the problems of migration and a lease running out, and pointed to the success of the nearby City Temple, the new scheme at Whitfield's Tabernacle, and other Central Missions in London, Manchester and Birmingham. The article concluded: 'As Bloomsbury inaugurated a fresh era in Baptist church architecture, so we hope this new Mission will mark the beginning of a new and epoch-making movement for the evangelisation of our native land'.

In Docklands Barking Road Tabernacle wished to take the same course, but the denomination could not sponsor another that year. Robert Rowntree Clifford found other support to create the West Ham Central Mission in autumn 1905.¹² Apart from Bloomsbury and West Ham, it seems the only other Baptist Central Mission was in Bradford.¹³ This opened on 4 January 1903 with an Australian missionary, a secretary, and three Sisters, and drew congregations of 500, mostly poor, but ran at a loss and only survived until May 1905, the month in which the *Baptist Times* was hailing Bloomsbury as 'The first Baptist Institutional Church'.¹⁴

The continuing ministry

Church life continued while legally in limbo. The 1905 Year Book appeared, with a pastoral letter from 'those who have hitherto been THE DEACONS'. It explained the new arrangements, emphasizing that loss of independence was set against great advantages for church and denomination. Bloomsbury's characteristic harmony had been maintained through the negotiations. The chapel closed for renovations, including replacing the old maze of high pews with 'wide, low, roomy seats' which 'sweep round the building in a bold curve, so that every worshipper faces the pulpit and can see the preacher without running the risk of getting a crick in the neck'.¹⁵

12 Paul Rowntree Clifford, *Venture in Faith*, 1950.

13 Information on Bradford from Dr Rosie Chadwick, letter to author, 1 February 1986.

14 *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 5 May 1905, p.320.

15 *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 5 May 1905, p.320.

Tom Phillips's Bloomsbury ministry opened on 30 April 1905. An inspiring preacher and thorough nonconformist, he would try anything to bring the Gospel to the people, with striking success or dismal failure. A radiant, controversial minister, he won the love and support of his churches and was an exciting choice. Of his summons to Bloomsbury, his son Edward wrote: 'In 1905 came the call which had come to Dr Brock fifty years earlier ... but the invitation was not to preach to a comfortable congregation of carriage-folk, but to conduct the Baptist experiment in Institutionalism ...'¹⁶ Perhaps it is a backhanded tribute to Brock that his pioneering ministry with its manifold agencies could be thus dismissed in retrospect!

The inauguration of Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church was a big occasion (although the church itself was not yet formally reconstituted!). John Clifford conducted the Monday afternoon service. At the tea, the *Baptist Times* was pleased to see 'a good number of young people engaged in surrounding business houses'. 'The room was inconveniently full', which showed the need for additional premises. Organist and choir provided an hour's concert before the evening meeting, at which six young men made decisions for Christ.

That evening, with Herbert Marnham in the chair, guest speakers were the Wesleyan Dinsdale Young, George White MP from Phillips's church in Norwich, Silvester Horne from Whitfield's, Charles Brown of Ferme Park Baptist, and David Lloyd George MP, 'sparkling and witty as ever'.¹⁷ Mr Marnham was 'not altogether satisfied with the name Institutional Church. Bloomsbury will not differ from other Churches, save in the variety and completeness of its activities. It must always be a place for spiritual service, a place where men get right with God.'

Mr Phillips gave the church a motto: 'Hospitality'. As the *Baptist Times* observed: 'Nothing has happened to destroy that home-like feeling which has characterised Bloomsbury for more years than one likes to recall.' Phillips envisaged 'hospitality' exercised widely:

towards the truth of God, towards new standpoints, towards all great causes, towards new methods, towards all men, especially young men and maidens, and the men that are down, and above all towards the Spirit of God...

¹⁶ Edward Phillips, *Thomas Phillips*, Kingsgate Press, undated but c.1937.

¹⁷ *Baptist Times* 12 May 1905.

If he were convinced that any cause were the cause of freedom, of righteousness, of purity, sobriety, or peace, if any cause were part of the Kingdom of God, then even if every pulpit in London were closed against it, the pulpit of Bloomsbury would, by God's grace, be open.

Those introductory remarks carry an echo of Brock. Much was made of the new beginning, yet it was in line with the tradition of Bloomsbury Chapel.

The concept of the 'Institutional Church', as defined by Dr Edward Judson, was given in the April church magazine:

An Institutional Church is an organized body of Christian believers, who, finding themselves in a hard and uncongenial social environment, supplement the ordinary methods of the Gospel - such as preaching, prayer-meetings, Sunday school and pastoral visitation - by a system of organized kindness, a congeries of institutions, which by touching people on physical, social and intellectual sides, will conciliate them and draw them within the reach of the Gospel ... The Church contains within itself the potency for the cure of every social ill. All that good people seek to accomplish through University Settlements, Young Men's Christian Associations, Rescue Missions, and other redemptive agencies, can better be done through Churches embedded in society ... The human mind could not conceive of a more perfect machine for cleaning up the misery of a great city than the network of local Churches distributed through it, provided each Church would interest itself in the fallen and wretched immediately about it.

For Baptists, the Central Mission had to be based on a gathered church, which was not formally reconstituted until 10 July 1905, with 406 members, rising to 431 by December. Members were still expected to hold a morning sitting and make a voluntary offering; all evening seats were free, and normally full. They used the *Baptist Church Hymnal* (1900) with the *Bristol Tune Book*. Baptisms took place on Sunday or Thursday evenings. The open nature was clear: 'All persons are eligible for membership who give credible evidence of conversion to God'.¹⁸ On profession of repentance and faith, the pastor would submit names to one church meeting for acceptance at the next, and receive them at the next Communion, as formerly. Members were urged to give regularly to church and societies, according to ability. The church should aim to be self-supporting. Walter Benham threw himself 'heart and soul into the developments which have converted Bloomsbury into a great institutional

¹⁸ The rubric is taken from the 1915 Year Book, but doubtless appeared regularly.

Church',¹⁹ and became financial secretary of Church and Central Mission Committee in December 1905. In 1908 Frederick Higgs, of the building firm Higgs & Hill, agreed to become temporary secretary of the Central Committee. He was still secretary in 1927.

Although the institutions were stressed, the activities in 1906 were not very different from the old pattern, except that the separate Mission Hall had gone, its activities merging with those at the chapel. New were the Men's Meeting, the Social Union, and the Saturday Concerts.

That was only the beginning. Carlile wrote of Bloomsbury in his *Story of the English Baptists*, published in 1905,

Adaptation is one of the laws of Church life and Baptists are beginning to learn it ... The new enterprise has yet to justify itself but ... it should prove of untold good to the young people in business houses and provide for Baptists an object lesson in the art of resuscitating central churches.

The church at Bloomsbury had taken drastic steps to adapt to the twentieth century, yet the ministry was essentially the same. The aim remained the effective service of the generation according to the will of God.



The seal of the London Baptist Property Board shows the frontage of Bloomsbury as it was in 1906. From May 1999 the Property Board's office is appropriately at Bloomsbury.

¹⁹ *Baptist Times* obituary, 13 November 1908.

14

TOM PHILLIPS
SUPERINTENDENT 1905-1928

*'He had unbounded confidence in the sufficiency
of the Gospel to meet human need'*

T.W. Chance

Thomas Phillips (1868-1936)

The first Superintendent of the Central Church grew up in a tiny Pembrokeshire hamlet, Llanycefn, two miles from the village of Rhydwylym. He was only four when his father, a crofter, died. His widowed mother kept the village store. Three times on Sundays, and once or twice mid-week, she walked with her three sons to the Rhydwylym chapel, where Tom, the youngest, was baptized on 21 July 1883. He went to the local Board School and became a pupil teacher when fourteen. Later he wrote:



Tom Phillips

I am one of the many converted by the gentle, steady pressure of a religious environment ... the outstanding feature of my boyhood's landscape was the Chapel Sanctuary. Everything revolved around that. Sunday was the great day in the week ... All the songs I knew were hymns, all the books I could lay my hands on were religious, all the newspapers that came in to the district ... came through the Chapel ... and were religious. There were no cinemas, no theatres, no concerts, no lectures. There was only the Chapel Sanctuary ... I do not remember the time when I did not want to follow my Lord.¹

But 'If my conversion was gradual, my call to service was sudden and

¹ Biographical information mainly from *Thomas Phillips 1868-1936*, (no date or author given, but Edward and Margaret Phillips), Carey Kingsgate Press.

unexpected'. As he perched in a tree reading Spurgeon's *Lectures to My Students*, he heard the call to preach the Gospel to outsiders. This was puzzling, since almost everyone in the district was a Baptist! It would have seemed even stranger had the youth in that Welsh-speaking countryside realized he was to preach in urban England.²

Never really an academic, he was a keen reader and built up his own secondhand library as he studied at home to enter Llangollen Baptist College. From there he went to the University College of Bangor, graduating in philosophy in 1890. Later he urged ministers to study as much as possible but then keep quiet about their learning and not lose touch with real life.³ He had a student pastorate at Ponciau, near Wrexham, but in 1891 was called to Fuller Chapel, Kettering. The following year he married Martha John whom he had met while a pupil teacher. The move to the busy Midlands industrial town was a dramatic change for the young couple.

The Kettering church prospered, attracting young people. Soon he had two assistants and the church assisted smaller ones with a class for lay preachers: Margaret Phillips remembered riding to village chapels in the front basket of her father's bicycle.⁴ The church hosted the centenary celebrations of the BMS, when denominational leaders must have noticed the lively young minister.

He declined Bloomsbury's first invitation in 1897, but went in 1900 to St Mary's, Norwich, 'one of the most delightful churches in the denomination'.⁵ There he developed successful meetings for men. He took part in passive resistance to the 1902 Education Act. Like many Baptists he sympathized with the Boers in the South African war. Absent-minded and 'uncomfortably heedless of convention', he was ready to try anything for Christ, and cannot have been an easy minister for a church to live with, although greatly loved. As one Norwich deacon observed, 'he never knew a man who so thoroughly enjoyed being found fault with'.

In 1905 he accepted the challenge to 'undertake a new work at Bloomsbury, whose real nature neither I nor anybody else exactly knew'.⁶ He

2 M.J. Williams, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Wales and a former student of Phillips, confirmed the Welshness of Phillips's childhood, writing at the centenary of his birth, *Baptist Times* 21 November 1968.

3 *Baptist Times* 21 June 1907.

4 Margaret Phillips's memories are taken from the author's conversation and correspondence with her in the 1970s.

5 Phillips in Bloomsbury Year Book, 1928.

6 *ibid.*

was attracted to the ‘perilous adventure’. Bloomsbury wanted a preacher - and got one who ‘would conform to no instructions, confine himself to no terms, serve no master save only Christ’. He valued ‘the saintliness and forbearance of his elders and deacons, who though often puzzled by the method and doubtful of the result, yet stood unflinching by him’. He needed their loyal support for he knew failure and despair at the enormity of the task before him. He had his black days but also a great ability to bounce back, cheered by something of beauty, like almond blossom or the poems of Francis Thompson, which would restore his natural radiance. ‘His world’, observed one of his



Mr and Mrs Phillips with Sisters Connie, Joyce, Maggie and Violet

Cardiff students, ‘was alive with God’.⁷

The family settled in Harrington Square, remaining there throughout the First World War within the area of Zeppelin attack, although later they moved to Winchester Road, Highgate, perhaps because Harrington Square was too accessible.⁸ For the family the move to London was traumatic, with diphtheria raging among the children. The youngest son died, aged five. Margaret, the eldest daughter, remembered the early months in London as ‘full of hospital and illness, anxiety and grief’, in stark contrast to the triumphal *Baptist Times* reports as Phillips’s Bloomsbury ministry began.

⁷ Quoted in *Thomas Phillips 1868-1936*.

⁸ Alice Canfield, widow of a Bloomsbury deacon, in conversation with the author at her home in Buckhurst Hill, 2 August 1976, when Mrs Canfield was aged 85.

She also remembered how her parents' life was overshadowed by the need to educate and find school fees for their large family. There was barely enough money for necessities, 'to a large extent, the Non-Conformist Ministry was sustained by the generosity of the lay congregation ... my parents depended on clothes for the children from the Church and certainly presents in kind were generous.' When Idris Phillips won a Dr Williams's scholarship to Glasgow University, his sister remembered him making the journey north by coastal steamer as the cheapest route. 'Mother was struggling to keep up her social level. It is extraordinary how the educational changes have altered ... the class division. In my childhood gentility as a desired end governed so much of what we did.'

Looking back, Margaret Phillips mentioned two ladies who had been particularly kind. Miss Warmington, Walter Benham's rich aunt, gave her parents money to buy the children presents. She was probably Eliza Benham's sister or cousin, and also came from Little Prescot Street. When she died in July 1915, Tom Phillips wrote a lengthy obituary in the church magazine for a delightful old lady, with a great love for all children: 'Her piety was so beautifully natural. Prayer came to her as easy as talk. Her gossip was about the Kingdom of God.' Miss Emily Kemp, who lived near Regent's Park and was the wealthy sister of Baron Rochdale, also gave generous presents.

Idris Phillips became a professor and Myfanwy a doctor, in general practice in Highbury where she continued to live with the eldest sister, Margaret. Margaret used to describe herself as 'a publican': she was secretary to the Managing Director of Trust Houses, and herself became the firm's first Lady Director and editor of the house magazine. She and Myfanwy remained at Bloomsbury until they retired to Tring in 1958 and continued to visit occasionally. Dr Williams remembered Margaret as having 'laughing eyes and a merry face'. Olwen (Annie) married George Lloyd in July 1924 and they went to Washington DC. All Phillips's children went to university, except Esther, who became her father's secretary. When she married the Bloomsbury scoutmaster, Sydney Saunders, who was an engineer with Great Western Railway, in 1928 the deacons made themselves, or perhaps more accurately their wives, responsible for the reception. Edward gained a First in mathematics, with distinction, from Cambridge, and went to China as a BMS missionary in 1924, where he became head of Mathematics and Astronomy at the international and interdenominational Cheloo University in Tainan. He married Enid Gibbon, who also gained a First in mathematics, in Peking in

1927.⁹ Alice Canfield remembered the whole family as ‘the very best people I’ve ever worked with’; they were all drawn in as church workers and operated as a team, ‘none of them afraid of getting in a mess!’

The pre-war years at Bloomsbury were a time of hope and promise, though by no means easy.¹⁰ Phillips’ strength lay in his unbounded faith in the grace of God: from this stemmed his optimism and tolerance, for he believed God could use the most unpromising material to his glory. His first Bloomsbury sermon, ‘Christ the Emancipator of Bruised Souls’, was published in the *Baptist Times*, 5 May 1905, with the comment:

the spoken word ... comes white-hot from the lips ... of Mr Phillips. Voice and gesture are natural and free from any suspicion of studied effect ... a natural gift of illustration ... indicative of extensive and varied reading¹¹ ... And sparkling here and there throughout ... passages of poetic beauty or touching pathos, with an occasional phrase which startled one by its audacity, as when he said that the disciples at first were all Unitarians ... A new force was at work in Central London which would make Bloomsbury one of the most powerful agencies for good in the metropolis.

‘London responded to Thomas Phillips ... congregations grew and his name became familiar in hotel-land’.¹² By January 1908 the roll stood at 592, although many had already transferred to other churches - the old Bloomsbury refrain! To bring the gospel to the people, Phillips would try any method, orthodox or unorthodox, sometimes with success, sometimes with dismal failure. His enthusiasm carried the church with him. As Mr Yates was to declare at the Farewell meeting, ‘I have suffered many things because of Dr Phillips. He has been an autocrat - but a very benevolent one ... As for Mrs Phillips, she has been Bloomsbury’s sweetheart’. She made nurses her particular concern, arranging a regular ‘At Home’ day where they could relax with friends drawn from twenty central hospitals.

Tom Phillips did not have money, time or inclination to fuss about appearance. Ralph Cocks remembered how his mother ‘once reproved him for wearing a red tie in the pulpit, although the poor man was so absent-minded

9 In 1943, with their three children, they were interned by the Japanese. Later they settled in Cheltenham, where he worked for Government Communications Headquarters and was Salem church secretary. Information from obituary by David Butcher, *Baptist Times*, 20 October 1977, and letters from Enid Phillips to author, 1985-6.

10 Undated letter: Dorothy Cocks to Margaret Peden, as editor of the church magazine.

11 Alas, the striking illustrations were mostly omitted from the printed text.

12 J.C. Carlile, *Baptist Times* obituary, 30 April 1936.

that he probably did not realise that he was wearing it'.¹³ Once William Blyth of Norwich, a stickler for etiquette, was shocked to encounter Phillips gloveless in a London street, so made him a present of half a guinea to buy some. Phillips spent it in Jarrold's bookshop.¹⁴

Phillips was always looking for willing hands, and was not too bothered about their orthodoxy or even whether they were Christians. The best worker among the cripples was a Jewish lady, and theosophists offered to help visit the poor, and were accepted on condition they came to serve, with no propaganda. 'Is this sound in the faith? I am sure I don't know, but it works. An agnostic asked me, might she visit. "I don't agree with your sermons, but I believe in your spirit". I set her on, and today she is a foreign missionary'.¹⁵ Such openness made considerable demands on the church in order to open the way to conversion rather than disruption.

The congregation comprised a wider mix of people than was often found in Baptist pews. Of the local working people Phillips wrote:

Church divisions do not trouble them in the least ... A Catholic married a Jewess and they compromised by worshipping with us ...

There was a perceptible slump in our women's meeting on the Jewish Day of Atonement ...

Many of them live in one or two rooms. I know their failings. Their language is not fit for the Baptist Union, although I have known one or two Baptist Councils where it would be most appropriate. They sometimes get drunk, but I would get drunk twice a week if I lived in their rooms ...¹⁶

While primarily a preacher, Phillips took a lively interest in topical issues and often brought the two together, which accounted in part for his popularity with the young and with working men. Inevitably, his views and his adventurous methods incurred criticism, in days when offering young people tea, music and a time for fellowship was seen by some puritanical Baptists as desecrating the sabbath.

13 R.M. Cocks, in *Bloomsbury Magazine* 142, Spring 1970.

14 The story may be apocryphal yet catches something of the times and of Phillips's priorities. Found in an exercise book compiled by C.B. Jewson, presumably from colleagues' memories, and kept in the deacons' vestry at St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich; sent to the author by the Revd David Milner.

15 Thomas Phillips, 'Twenty Years in Central London', *Baptist Times*, 20 March 1925.

16 *ibid.*

Phillips's views

Tom Phillips ran a correspondence column in the *Baptist Times* for three years, 1906-8, writing on a variety of subjects in a relaxed manner, ever moderate and reasonable, although doubtless too liberal for many Baptists. However strongly he held his own views, he expressed them gently, with respect for others, his remarks often leavened with humour. In these columns one can still catch something of the magnetism of his personality. There are glimpses too of the life of Bloomsbury.

Phillips invited questions on anything that concerned readers: 'No question will be black-balled, for to the Christian every problem is religious and sacred'. He added that living near Church House and the British Library ought to help him with the answers! An example of his reasonableness was his response on preaching fees, when a small weak church thought a prominent visiting minister asked too much. Phillips explained the figure was fair, taking into consideration the cost of a substitute at his own church, and extra staff if the minister was often away, as well as the fares, but he himself would rather leave it to the church, even if sometimes out of pocket.¹⁷



He was neither a Calvinist nor a Universalist. He saw Calvinism as 'the most logical presentation of Christianity yet given to the world. Indeed that is its weakness. It is too logical to contain all the truth'.¹⁸ Paul in Romans 9 was *widening* the scope of Christianity, not narrowing it. It was possible to be a Christian without believing every word in the Bible, but 'not without being willing to believe and obey every word that comes to him from God'.¹⁹ Different parts of the Bible spoke to different people, but when they spoke they must be heeded. Inspiration was not something about which to speculate, but rather to feel and taste. This might not ensure 'absolute orthodoxy' but would give something 'real and living and practical'.

Although a speaker at Keswick Conventions, he was uneasy about the

¹⁷ *Baptist Times* 26 June 1908. He observes Keswick would pay the first class rail fare.

¹⁸ *Baptist Times* 20 July 1906.

¹⁹ *Baptist Times* 22 March 1907.

movement's aloofness from the churches and some of the 'charismatic' tendencies.²⁰ Asked about the 'second baptism' of the Spirit, he replied that really there needed to be a fresh baptism of the Spirit every day. The critical time was not at Keswick but what happened afterwards; he did not leap to judge but wanted to test by the fruits. To a correspondent worried about the gift of tongues and groups separating to form house churches, he replied, 'The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of commonsense and all these extraordinary manifestations must be judged by their influence on character and service'. These were his usual criteria for assessment, but he was reluctant to condemn anyone for their beliefs. 'Don't waste powder and shot on Darwin', he advised 'keep it for the devil'.²¹ Questions about Christian Scientists and Freemasons evoked similar gentle advice.

In 1907 R.J. Campbell's *New Theology* hit the headlines. The *Baptist Times* of 25 January 1907 offered the views of Dr Clifford, G.S. Barnett, Thomas Spurgeon, Dr Fairbairn, G.K. Chesterton, J.H. Jowett and Dr Forsyth. Alongside them is Phillips' column, full of his gentle reasonableness. He asked what was so new in questions about the divinity of Christ. 'Anything that calls the attention of men to the person of Jesus Christ cannot in the long run be an unmixed evil'. Here, as often, Phillips spoke from his faith in the grace of God rather than from theological argument: 'If the new is capable of doing similar work [to the old theology], God bless it!' The *Baptist Times* probably judged him able to speak to the bewildered laity and on 1 February published his sermon, 'The Divinity of Christ and the Divinity of Man'.

On 15 February he was back, urging Baptists to cling to the dynamic influence of the Gospel in regenerating man. 'If those of us who are working among the outcasts lose that, we lose everything'. The press was full of theology, but what men wanted was practical information on how to make God a force in their lives. As in 1999, many non-Christians were interested in the spiritual world. Popular clairvoyants were making fate and free will 'intensely living issues', so he tried to understand the appeal of the occult to the man in the street, to whom Higher Criticism mattered not at all. 'The Daily Press is settling our theology for us, and Royal Commissions are settling our trust deeds, and forms of Church government, but God will appear in his Holy Temple and settle us!'²²

20 *Baptist Times* 21 August 1906, 31 May 1907, 26 June 1908.

21 *Baptist Times* 3 January 1908.

22 *Baptist Times* 8 March 1907, 15 March 1907.

Phillips was a Liberal in politics, interested in socialism but not wanting the state to take over everything. When asked whether every Baptist church should become a Liberal Committee room for the General Election, he gave a clear 'No! I should not like to see our Churches so conducted as to make it impossible for Conservatives to worship amongst us in peace ... Christianity is vastly greater than either Liberalism or Conservatism'.²³

There are few references to his pacifism, though he was 'uncompromisingly pacifist'. He was asked how he could tolerate the Boys Brigade's military style at Bloomsbury. He replied that the Boys Brigade was like homeopathy, using the same methods to counteract the bad results.²⁴ Asked whether a church should welcome Territorials to services (as a body of soldiers, not individuals; one church had refused), he replied: 'I would welcome the possibility of addressing hundreds of young fellows ... but I would pray for grace not to trim my sails or water my gospel or compromise my principles'. The real question was whether the Territorials would dare to come. 'If they did, some might resign the next week!'

Young men had opportunities unknown to their parents and he urged them to grasp these and especially to improve their minds: he often listed recommended books. Should a young convert stay in his job, surrounded by immorality, or seek a move? 'Better convert Sodom any day than leave it'. Another new Christian faced with sarcasm at work was advised to try a little banter in return: 'it is easier to laugh than to scold people out of their faults and foibles. Humour has a place in the ministry of grace'.

Was a lie ever justifiable? What about conditional giving? Phillips answered gently that sometimes either might be justified, but the motive should be examined. Should Christians have insurance? He thought Christ did not protest against reasonable provision for the future, but rather against undue worry about it. Ought a Baptist to allow his maidservant to worship at the parish church? Yes, his example might 'make her dissatisfied with mere formalism, but religious liberty is important!'²⁵ Was the wine at Cana alcoholic? This evoked a humorous reply that it must have been 'lightly so'.²⁶ Smoking was permitted at Bloomsbury Socials, for 'our guiding principle is to permit everything in our Socials that is allowed in a well-regulated Christian home'.²⁷ Cards, however, were forbidden in the Institute: 'It may be illogical

23 *Baptist Times* 12 January 1906.

24 *Baptist Times* 8 October 1906.

25 *Baptist Times* 22 February 1907.

26 *Baptist Times* 19 January 1906.

27 *Baptist Times* 12 January 1906.

to exclude them, but it is not inexpedient.' Cards were associated with gambling, which was a sin against God because it 'places chance on the judgment seat', against society, against one's brother, against honourable trading, and against one's own manhood, since it encouraged idleness and cunning.²⁸

In May 1907 he was asked how to popularize evening services and advised: advertise well, have young people scout before the service to bring others in, and have a half-hour musical prelude (an organ voluntary, two anthems and two solos 'will suffice'). Teach worshippers good manners: 'to turn a visitor out of a pew is not only bad Christianity but downright bad manners'. Choose lively music and keep the sermon short, living, direct, making straight and strong for an immediate, decisive verdict'.

He was wary of new tunes at Bloomsbury because so many visitors only remember church years ago and familiar tunes help. He recommended hymns 'of substance and swing' to awake memories and touch hearts. 'Every tune must catch on - a musical experiment is a desecration and an execration in an evening service. Keep your newfangled horrors for the morning saints';²⁹ although he disliked the practice of preaching to the saints in the morning and sinners in the evening. He found new hymns tended to be rather slow and



The choir in 1909

28 *Baptist Times* 1 February 1907.

29 *Baptist Times* 24 May 1907.

dreary. Bloomsbury printed hymn and notice sheets,³⁰ which made a wide choice possible (with a lofty disregard of copyright!). He chose those that 'have fire and spirit and a swing and go'.³¹

In his advice for open-air work he stressed the need to avoid dishonest tactics. A dishonest way of gathering a crowd in London would be to charter a motorbus and stage a breakdown! Taking a band along to play would be honest. Plenty of supporters were needed to help the atmosphere and to talk to those moved by the preaching.³²

Among the questions about men's meetings, someone asked whether there should be discussion after the address? Open conference, advised Phillips, would be fine, 'if the world were mercifully delivered of bores and cranks and faddists ... Our own Bloomsbury men don't want any haggling at the end, as one of them very forcibly put it. They appreciate a plain, straightforward statement and the more of Christ there is in it, the more they like it'. Ordinary people need time to digest before discussion.

Church work must go one better than the devil, he declared:

Bagatelle in a dingy old classroom cannot counteract billiards in an electrically-lit public house. For the life of me, I cannot see why all chapel teas should be badly brewed and all Church bread and butter thickly cut, and all ecclesiastical crockery antediluvian.³³

Asked about Social Unions, he said Bloomsbury's had no tests of membership, grades or distinctions, which was the best way of bringing in young people. Activities like Christian Endeavour only appeal to the pious twenty-five per cent, and the church wanted something to grip those tempted to drift away. The room should be homelike, with carpets (which could be purloined from vestries!), curtains, coloured lampshades, games, and books. Two secretaries were needed: a young man 'with plenty of initiative and go, and a young woman with the same qualities plus charm and tact, and preferably married'. The doors should open an hour before the formal session, which would begin with singing and prayer, followed in weekly rotation by

30 His printer would be happy to do work for other churches and charged 2s 0d for 100 leaflets, 4s 0d for 1,000. *Baptist Times* 1 March 1907.

31 A 1907 leaflet had 'Nearer, my God, to thee', 'Throw out the life line', 'Lead us, Heavenly Father, lead us', and 'Faith of our fathers living still'. The choice for the fifth anniversary services in 1910 was 'The church's one foundation', 'Fight the good fight', 'Come, thou fount of every blessing', 'Crown him with many crowns', 'Now thank we all our God', 'Faith of our fathers', 'O love supreme, for ever near', and 'O Master, let me walk with thee'.

32 *Baptist Times* 20 April 1906.

33 *Baptist Times* 17 May 1907.

Bible study, debate, an outside lecturer, or a paper from within the membership. The evening should end with a social half-hour.³⁴

He was concerned for well-to-do girls with time on their hands, who were 'at a great disadvantage compared with their brothers'. If his correspondent could not find some Christian service, she had better come to Bloomsbury and visit tenements one day a week. 'God meant the woman's life to be as serious and noble and useful as that of man'. In one reply and again in his Presidential



Sister Maggie

Address to the Union (1916), he advocated having women ministers. A correspondent in June 1906 wondered whether deaconesses might be put in pastoral charge of poor village churches. Phillips responds enthusiastically: 'The Sister need not be called a minister, though I for one would gladly hand the "Reverend" that is sometimes prefixed to my name to any lady who would care to shoulder the burden'. There spoke one who was daily working alongside dedicated deaconesses. Phillips was one of the first to encourage the idea of women ministers, although the historian of the Deaconess Order does not mention him

or cite any Baptist leader doing so before 1915.³⁵

The most controversial theme in the column was marriage, in particular marriage to a non-Christian.³⁶ As ever, Phillips is a realist. He thinks that every Baptist minister will at some time have married a Christian to an unconverted partner. If there is a true spiritual affinity, a couple should be able to discuss religion and the Christian stick to his or her principles within marriage. He found St Paul 'rather unsatisfactory' on marriage. Asked 'Is one's marriage partner predestined and can one rough-hew the ends?', he replied: 'All of us are experts in the art of rough-hewing ... I do not doubt that a logical man can prove that man is not free. All the same he is, and our freedom is often misused in blotting the map of our lives. But even then God is not defeated, for it is the Divine purpose that we should be the best possible in the position in which we are placed. But if we are *predestined to be* the best, we are also predestined to *do* the best, and that must surely include

³⁴ *Baptist Times* 27 September 1907.

³⁵ Doris M. Rose, *Baptist Deaconesses*, 1954, p.12.

³⁶ *Baptist Times* 2 and 9 February 1906, 4 January 1907, 31 May 1907, 3 April 1908.

marrying the best woman; that is, the best for us ... Falling in love is a far deeper thing, and a far more moral and spiritual thing, than most people imagine. It is a question of affinity ... It is all very well to counsel prudence, and to think of money and position; but true love is determined by forces as old as the hills, and older - by the predestination of God himself.³⁷ As the London divorce rate increased, he pleaded for keeping romance in marriage and urged couples to continue to take an interest in each other, urging men to remember that women like a bit of chivalry in public. He wrote out of his own experience of a happy home.

His strictures on tramps were stern. Writing on 'The Tramp Problem', he declares: 'These parasites of civilisation are the pest of one's life in Central London ... Most of our Churches in large centres have some time or other tackled the tramp. The attempt has done much good to the Churches, but very little to the tramps'. Tramps have 'imaginative genius of high order': one has buried his wife ten times in the last year, but 'she always dies on Sunday night after coming home from Bloomsbury'. Sometimes he found it hard to believe in the tramp's 'salvability', but he had met a Bridgend minister who had succeeded with quite a number and found the secret lay in 'individual prayer with and for every tramp'.³⁸ These answers were written in his first years at Bloomsbury: in time Phillips too gained a reputation for helping many a derelict man back to work and a better life, but doubtless learned, like M'Cree, to detect quickly which were most open to real help.

One of his difficulties over Socialism lay in its tendency to reject the value of self-help and self-reliance.

I have noticed amongst the unemployed a chronic tendency to say, 'Will you find work for us?' 'What can you do?' 'Anything'. Such cases are hopeless, and the first thing to be done is to splash cold water in their face and say, 'The men that are needed are the men that can do something! And we don't find work for men, we only help them to find work for themselves'. I believe both in philanthropy and in State-aid, but it is a sad thing for any man who has got to depend on these instead of upon his own efforts.

He welcomed clothes parcels:

Just at present one of our sisters is doing a fine work in placing social bankrupts on their feet. She has found work for a great many and led not a few to Jesus Christ. But we are learning the meaning and value of

³⁷ *Baptist Times* 4 January 1907.

³⁸ *Baptist Times* 31 August 1906.

clothes, and are sometimes tempted to regard a collar as a sign of grace. Men who are ill-clad cannot find employment, and only this week Sister Maggie pilfered my bag ... in the vestry ... and gave my collar and tie to a tramp.³⁹

He recognized that even he was not immune to the impact of tidy dress, observing,

Just at present our Bloomsbury young people are doing a fine work among the rough boys that wander our streets. There are conversions every week, and I have come to ask almost instinctively when told that So-and-so is converted, 'Has he put on a collar?' This may sound very uppish and proper, but it is absolutely true to the nature of things.⁴⁰

He could be stern about those who came cadging, but he had a lot of time for honest working-class folk. They 'make fine Christians ... free from the disintegrating effects of respectability and convention ... social and brotherly'. He instanced a Trade Unionist who turned up when the Men's Meeting considered 'The Threatened Railway Strike', and found 'parsons were not all regressive duffers'; since then he and his wife had both become loyal Bloomsbury members.⁴¹

The Preacher

First and foremost, Tom Phillips was a preacher. He spoke very rapidly but clearly, remembered a former seat steward, Mr Merriman,⁴² who often had difficulty understanding Mrs Phillips's strong Welsh accent. Ralph Cocks, with a child's alertness to peculiarities, remembered Phillips's habit of occasionally uttering 'aw', but that in no way detracted from the impact.

The first impression of Thomas Phillips, the preacher, was of one who knew what he wanted to say and who knew how to say it. He stood erect and tall in the pulpit with scarcely a movement except that his head seemed to sway slightly as if he were trying to shake the



Martha Phillips

39 *Baptist Times* 15 February 1907.

40 *Baptist Times* 18 January 1907.

41 *Baptist Times* 17 July 1908.

42 To whom the author talked at Bloomsbury in 1970.

words from his mouth. The preacher seemed to have but one thing in mind, to share with the congregation his wonder and joy in the good news of God's grace and to send us away uplifted for life and work.⁴³

Phillips' lectures were rather different. In lectures he was

intent on disturbing and provoking the saints. Here was the enemy of conformity and convention, and yet if the shafts were barbed, the glow on his face and the sparkle of his humour, revealed one who loved his fellows too well to cause pain ... It was this humanity rather than academic excellence which made Thomas Phillips an effective teacher and leader of men.⁴⁴

When Tom Phillips died, T.W. Chance reflected that

He had all the qualities requisite in a great preacher - a commanding presence, a radiant personality, a daring thinker, a voice of rare sweetness, the imagination of the poet, the fervour of the Celt, the vision of the prophet, and a soul that glowed with the Gospel message. He had unbounded confidence in the sufficiency of the Gospel to meet human need, a courage that would not be balked by difficulties, an optimism that would not be quenched, and withal he possessed the saving grace of humour.⁴⁵

If Brock's dominant theme was the Friendship of Christ, Phillips' was the Grace of God, 'the unearned, unmerited, unexpected favour of God'. His best known sermon was a double one, *Grace and Glory*, the two parts delivered with only a short break, at the Second Congress of the Baptist World Alliance in Philadelphia in 1911.⁴⁶ The title was taken from Psalm 84.11. Grace, he said, was a New Testament word that had strayed into the Old. Frequently the Bible coupled glory with grace, and 'to regain the glory, we must reseek the grace'. Contemporary writers had tended to focus on grace in the sacraments and lose the sense of vision: 'Prayer is of grace, so is breathing; worship is of grace, so is business ... Grace is the Christlikeness of God'.

In the gospel we have grace embodied in a stainless life, in the Epistles we have grace crystallized into an articulated doctrine. In Jonathan Edwards we have a narrow horizon but it is full from centre to

43 M.J. Williams, *op.cit.*

44 *ibid.*

45 *Baptist Directory* 1937, p.345. Chance was his colleague in Cardiff.

46 Reprinted for private circulation by Carey Press, London; also published in Chinese by the Christian Literature Society of China.

circumference with grace. In Whittier we have the horizon extended to the point of breaking, but it is because the grace is so ample that he cannot find an horizon big enough to enclose it.⁴⁷

He attacked the ‘modern tendency’ to water the gospel down: some urged imitation of the faultless man instead of preaching ‘a mighty Saviour’ or submission to divine will. All worship was a means of grace. Phillips declared:

We have something to learn in this respect from the Roman Catholic. To him the sacraments are the exclusive channels of grace. But if he is crude, he is logical, if he is material, he is consistent. No service without a sacrament, because without a sacrament, no grace.

Boldly he told the Baptist Congress that he had been to Free Church services where

The preaching was cultured and the style immaculate, the music was superb and the congregation elect, but then there was no sound of a going amongst the mulberry trees, not the faintest flutter, not the softest whisper. On the other hand, I have attended a Roman Catholic service when at the tinkling of the bell and the elevation of the host, Swiss peasants have prostrated themselves in holy awe. It was superstitious and even pitiable, but in the midst of it all there was the sense of something more than human. I am a Protestant in every fibre of my being, but if it came to an imperative choice, I would infinitely prefer to worship in a Roman Catholic cathedral where I was reminded of the Unseen, than in a Protestant sanctuary where there is no breeze from the uplands. This is what humanity everywhere wants ... the grace of Christ it can only obtain where believers are gathered together in His name. The church has other functions I freely admit, but it is a specialist here.

Phillips cited as one of the gracious characteristics of Christians their enjoyment of singing - even Paul sang! Finding things that were beautiful and helpful in other faiths ‘need not disturb us, for the discovery of what is fair and lovely is the last thing to hurt Christianity’.

Tom Phillips was clear where he stood on the ‘social gospel’, for he never separated welfare work from gospel proclamation. Some Christians were making huge efforts in social reform, ‘Every day of my life I come into touch with the submerged men and women of London ... If they were all sunk into

47 Jonathan Edwards (1703-58), the American Calvinist, influenced the evangelical revival among English Baptists in the late 18th century. John Greenleaf Whittier was an American Quaker poet, hymnwriter, and anti-slavery campaigner.

the sea ... the State would not miss them, but God would. ... The evils of the world must be conquered by grace and we pray for social regeneration as we pray for personal conversion'. At the last, even in death, 'Grace will suffice'.

This sermon overwhelmed those present, who apparently rose at the end with right hands raised and remained silent for some time. Newton Marshall remembered it as 'one of the great sermons of this generation of Baptists'. The preacher was dubbed 'Grace and Glory Phillips'. His only major publication developed the same theme: *The Grace of God and a World Religion* (1928); for this McMaster University, Toronto, awarded him an Honorary DD.

The War Years

Things were going splendidly at Bloomsbury, and then came the war: four bitter years, especially for a preacher who could not reconcile any war with conscience. He could preach courage to the soldier, comfort to the bereaved, faith in the ultimate escape from horror, but 'never that there was any reason for war save human selfishness'. That was not a popular stance in World War I, which was widely perceived as a just war and supported by many Christians who had previously adopted a peace stance. 'He used to say that he did not feel he had done his job unless during the sermon someone stamped out in angry protest'. The church's hospitality was, however, extended to passing soldiers and to Belgian refugees, and the chapel basement was used as a shelter during Zeppelin bombing raids.

Soon forty to fifty Bloomsbury young people had enlisted, including some of the best young leaders, and by Christmas 1914 three hundred had gone from the various Bloomsbury bodies.⁴⁸ 'They have enlisted as a religious duty and one or two who had scruples of conscience about actual fighting have joined the Army Medical Service, which, as the casualty lists show, is one of the most dangerous of all'.⁴⁹ Phillips's sermon that week, 'The Silver Linings to the Dark Cloud', looked at the positive virtues brought out by the evil of war: self-sacrifice and the healing of internal divisions at home, and looked for the outcome of lasting peace. His sermon, 'Christmas with Herod in it', was published in the *Baptist Times*. That year his Baptist passion for freedom could take comfort from the knowledge that 'our soldiers are volunteers, not conscripts'. He speculated: 'I wonder what would happen if in normal times as opposed to times of crisis a nation were to disband its army and navy, and say,

48 Phillips' pastoral letter, Year Book 1915.

49 Phillips in *Baptist Times*, 'Table Talk', 11 September 1914.

We will suffer; we will not fight. It might mean the year one of the true Christian era.’ More immediately he argued for dealing with enemies first by love, then by reason, and, only when those failed, by force, for he conceded, ‘even brute strength becomes hallowed when consecrated to the cause of goodness ... Peacemakers are the children of God - but sometimes warmakers have been the servants of God.’⁵⁰

Many of the local women had husbands away at the front. Sister Norah remembered that the Monday evening Women’s Meeting had a large Roll of Honour apart from the Church one, and I was able with the help of some workers to contact these men whilst on active service and it was wonderful some of the letters we received. So grateful they were that we visited their homes and helped with their wives and children. It was a most worthwhile piece of work.⁵¹

Many local women were thrown out of employment so Sister Dorothy set about work creation, cutting out garments and distributing to the women to make up. Some of the church’s young women took up Red Cross work. The Women’s League sent food and clothes to ‘friendless prisoners in Germany’. Wounded men from the Endell Street Military Hospital were entertained in the Institute. With a caring ministry, congregations remained good, in spite of the departure to war of young men, the dark streets, two Zeppelin raids nearby and visitors scared out of London.⁵²



Sister Dorothy

Phillips’s unfashionable pacifism cannot have given too much offence to fellow Baptists for he was made President of the Baptist Union in 1916. He told the church that ‘while the honour of this position hardly appeals to me at all’, he accepted in order to work for the Kingdom. His presidential address, ‘Faith of Our Fathers’ was reproduced in the *Baptist Times* of 5 May 1916, though the delivery was evidently rather different, according to an account in the same issue by ‘Nicholas Notewell’. Phillips, a Welsh preacher, was not easily bound by a script. On this occasion, he began reading the prepared address but after a couple of pages,

50 *Baptist Times* 25 December 1914.

51 Letter to author, 5 August 1970, from Mrs N. Coote, then aged 81, who began as deaconess at Bloomsbury in 1914, two months before war broke out.

52 This information drawn from Year Book 1915.

showed scant regard for the printed copy ... He omitted some fine paragraphs altogether, tore up others and scattered them about him in fragments, introduced new passages, and said just what pleased him at the moment. If something of precision and elegance was sacrificed by this method, the compensations in force and directness in relation to the audience were incalculable.

‘Faith of Our Fathers’ was a plea for renewed piety. For two decades the denomination had concentrated on theological education and organizational structures but was not growing: ‘The denomination that could raise a quarter of a million sterling, could win a million souls if it were spiritually awake’.⁵³

Phillips offered an historical review of the denomination: he began by claiming Martin Luther as an Anabaptist and continued in a vein calculated to horrify Baptist historians: Principal Wheeler Robinson of Regent’s Park College attacked the President’s address on an earlier page of the same issue of the *Baptist Times*! Nicholas Notewell excused the excesses since ‘Mr Phillips is not a pedant but a poet’ and readers should make due allowance. In those days the national press took note of what the Baptist Union President had to say. *Punch* enjoyed Phillips’ comment that he knew how hard it could be to get through to some people: ‘You must hit a Londoner at least six times before he smarts’. Mr Punch did not dispute this, but enquired ‘how was the Londoner occupied while the President of the Baptist Union conducted this interesting experiment?’



*Tom Phillips
BU President 1916*

However he expressed it, Phillips had a real concern for the post-war churches. As President he did not want invitations to anniversaries and public meetings, but preferred to visit churches for two or three days to work with the minister, deacons and workers and so help the church. He realized that renewed consecration was needed if returning soldiers were not to find the church irrelevant.⁵⁴ A ‘fit state’ was not to be judged by ‘visible success’, for:

53 A reference to the Baptist Union’s Twentieth Century Fund. £250,000 raised at the turn of the century was the equivalent of more than £13 million in 1999.

54 ‘Linking hands with the lads at the front’, sermon, July 1916.

Once the Christian church is petrified into a machine, men will join the best upholstered equipage, the motorcar rather than the market-trap, the car with the best chauffeur in the pulpit, the best hooter in the choir gallery, and the best society in the pews.

Post-war ministry

The years following the armistice were full of disappointment and shattered hopes for religious workers. As they tried to return to 'normal', aware of sad gaps in every meeting, Bloomsbury's Roll of Honour listed thirty-two young men killed, but there were more not actually in membership. Survivors were apathetic and many turned away from religion; the economic depression which followed did not help.

Through the Victorian period the value of money remained stable, but dramatic inflation between 1899 and 1918 must have hit churches hard.⁵⁵ Neither people's earnings nor their giving would have risen equally fast, and as new facilities opened for young people, they depended less on churches' provision. Bloomsbury's activities continued in some strength, but never again at the fever pitch of Phillips's first decade. Nevertheless, the church remained 'a veritable hive of industry', a preaching station and an hospitable home for men and women from all over the country and the world.⁵⁶ During the first twenty years of Phillips's pastorate, Bloomsbury produced eight missionaries and thirteen ministers.⁵⁷ As Phillips said, for a London minister 'there is always plenty of keen fighting, sacred fun and spiritual romance.'

Phillips continued to accept invitations from churches all over the country. He went abroad several times, including holidays in Switzerland for which Percy Illingworth and Dr Lunn paid, and to America for the Baptist World Alliance meetings in 1911. In 1925 the church insisted that he should take a break of three months for his health. Dr Lunn offered him a trip to the Holy Land in 1927, but Phillips decided he would prefer to go to the Toronto Conference that summer. Friends thought he travelled the country too much, but he maintained these midweek visits strengthened the links with those who provided financial support and who sent their children to London. Tom Phillips was too buoyant a character to complain much if he felt the wider Baptist family had let the central mission enterprise down, but as he

55 Bank of England figures: £1 in 1899 = £53.80 in 1999, and £1 in 1918 = £20 in 1999. The author is grateful to the Revd Dr W.M.S. West for sharing information gleaned in his own research.

56 Herbert Marnham at Phillips' Farewell Meeting.

57 *Baptist Times* 20 March 1925.

approached the end of his pastorate he appealed to the denomination to recognize that if more money were spent the work could be increased:

Make my successor two. A man has to work twice as hard in an institutional as in an ordinary Church. I know, for I have been in both ... With twice the money we could have quadrupled the work ... Bloomsbury is worth holding. There is no place more difficult or more exhilarating.⁵⁸

Although Tom Phillips was impatient with organizational structures, he did his share of presiding over them, including the London Baptist Association in 1913, National Christian Endeavour Union in 1921, National Free Church Council in 1929, and the Peace Society from 1927-36. Probably more to his taste were the lectures on the purpose and practice of preaching which he gave to the Baptist College in Nottingham in 1914-15, and later to Regent's Park College.

In his later Bloomsbury years he used to return to Pembrokeshire in the summer and conducted annual summer schools there for Welsh ministers. This must have led to his nomination for the principalship of South Wales Baptist College in September 1928. Phillips, who had refused other churches' offers with higher stipend down the years, did not take this very seriously, declining to send his 'qualifications'. The *Baptist Times* of 20 September announced the election meeting, at which all churches, Welsh and English, contributing to the college were entitled to vote. There were nine nominees and a strong recommendation from the Appointments Committee in favour of Professor T.W. Chance, Acting Principal and Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Cardiff. By the next issue, Tom Phillips had been chosen, by 448 to 444 votes, followed by a unanimous invitation. He told Bloomsbury: 'I thought I had outgrown adventures. But here comes another ...'. It was certainly a surprise, expressed by one Welsh minister, Cynon Jones, in the *Baptist Times* of 18 October:

Tom Phillips a College Principal! What an anomaly! This live wire goes from town to town and from conference to conference with flaming heart and impatient soul; who says things that shock as well as things that shine; this restless impetuous soul who can thrill great audiences with his magic tongue and resonant voice; uttering the most challenging thoughts and saying the most provocative things eloquently if not always discreetly - his indiscretion too often arising out of his impatient and

58 *ibid.*

passionate desire to get things done; this animated spirit a College Principal! [It would be] like capturing an eagle and putting it in the cage of a canary’.

Phillips had one great advantage over Professor Chance, he spoke Welsh: ‘It was the consideration of language that actuated the electors in favour of Dr Phillips’. He proved an effective teacher and his lectures on pastoral theology and homiletics were the highlight of the students’ week.⁵⁹

Almost immediately he left for Cardiff, aged sixty but ‘still young; young in appearance, young in outlook, young in enthusiasm ... As irrepressible as he was on the day of his ordination’. Since 1925, however, there had been hints in the records of deacons trying to find ways of easing the demands on him, suggesting that age was beginning to show in his health and energy. He had been at Bloomsbury twenty-three and a half years, six months longer than Brock. In that time 1,600 people had joined the church. He felt he was leaving the church in good heart, in the hands of good deacons and two ‘magnificent Sisters’: ‘You will be great, as you always are, when put on your mettle’. He told them, perhaps surprisingly, that there were no financial difficulties, and the activities were ‘taken on the whole in as healthy a condition as I have ever known them’. He told the church to ‘Trust the deacons and trust the young people and trust God for the future’. Not all felt the church was so buoyant in the last years of his ministry, but Tom Phillips was always an optimist and an encourager. In going to Cardiff, he would cease to be a pastor: ‘I am content to live and die as the minister of Bloomsbury’.⁶⁰

For eight years Tom Phillips was College Principal and Professor of Homiletics and Philosophy of Religion. He sent students out eager to proclaim the Gospel. Richard Jones’s tribute gives an insight into his ability to cope with sorrow, disappointment, and criticism: ‘He used to invite us to go down to see him and discuss our difficulties. He seldom “sympathised” with us; he taught us to laugh at our problems. His faith in the men he had trained for the ministry was unbounded. He made us feel that we counted’.⁶¹

Bloomsbury’s archives contain one undated letter to the church in his hand, written from Cardiff, regretting he could not cut lectures to attend the Ash Wednesday gathering:

I am trying my best to keep young but three weeks ago I heard that Peter and Colin⁶² my two grandsons had started the Sunday School and now I hear that Colin the youngest has been taking up the collection ... When I was getting over that I heard that the Philippians were to be the hosts at

59 M.J. Williams, *op.cit.*

60 *Bloomsbury Year Book* 1928.

61 *Baptist Times*, 30 April 1936.

62 These were Esther’s sons. Peter Saunders entered the ministry and became Superintendent of the South Wales Area. His brother Colin, a solicitor, was Bloomsbury church secretary for a time.

the Ash Wednesday reunion. That knocked me quite over ... It is a good thing to have a fine tradition. May the Bloomsbury tradition grow sweeter and happier as the years roll on.

His wife, Martha, died in 1932, and he developed heart problems but kept on preaching. Late in 1934 he made a supportive second marriage. He was actively involved in preparations for an International Peace Congress in Cardiff but was taken ill just before presiding at a Peace Society meeting on 21 April 1936 and died a few hours later, much mourned for, as J.C. Carlile, editor of the *Baptist Times*, observed in his obituary:

Tom Phillips was a lovable personality, so human in his strength and in his weakness; a great friend who had a way of getting into your heart even against your judgment.



'Bloomsbury' from New Oxford Street, 1907

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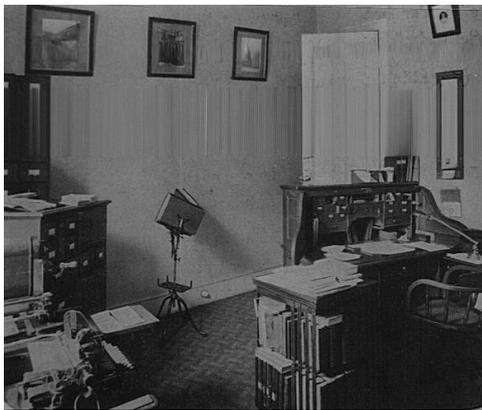
HOSPITALITY THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH 1905-1928

'Let us escape from the failure of attempting only the possible.'

Thomas Phillips, Pastoral Letter, Year Book 1917

Management

Although the church was legally non-existent between 22 December 1904 and 10 July 1905, its life continued unbroken. The deacons met on 5 January and remained responsible for the day-to-day running of the church. Now, however, there was a Committee of Management, precursor of the Central Committee, responsible for the building works and other preparations for central mission. Once the church was reconstituted deacons were elected by the church; the church appointed members to the Central Mission Committee but did not have a majority. The Central Committee was responsible for finance, ministry and strategy.



The Bloomsbury office, 1909

The new Central Committee was another bold experiment in Baptist church life, and relations between deacons and Central Committee were sometimes tense as they worked out their proper roles. For a long time the Central Committee was dominant. It took the lead in appointing ministers, kept a tight rein on expenditure, vetted all the activities, and organized the Anniversary services. In practice, the

church was expected to raise the money. The constitution deliberately gave the church a minority voice on the Committee, but in practice church representatives were more regular in attendance and were usually the majority of those present at meetings. Clearly they had the church's interests at heart

but apparently without reference to diaconate or church meeting, which sometimes meant they appeared autocratic. Some LBA and BU members of Central Committee, especially Frederick Higgs, were in close contact with the church and understood the problems and needs, but most were rather detached, rarely visiting the Bloomsbury premises, and resisted spending money. In the second half of the century the deacons gradually gained more control and Central Committee adopted its present role as senior friend and counsellor to the church and guardian of major expenditure.

<p>BAPTIST CENTRAL CHURCH "BLOOMSBURY," <i>Pastor:</i> REV. THOMAS PHILLIPS, B.A. Shaftesbury Avenue, New Oxford Street, W.C.</p> <p><i>Church to be re-formed, Monday Evening, July 10th, 1905</i></p> <p><i>I wish to rejoin (or join) the above Church.</i></p> <p><i>Name (in full)</i></p> <p><i>Address (, ,)</i></p> <p><small>Kindly hand this form, when signed, to any of the Church Officers, or to the Seat Stewards, or send it to the Pastor, by post, as early as possible.</small></p>

The Central Committee met at Baptist Church House in Holborn most months, following the smaller Finance Committee. Some time each year was spent planning the anniversary meetings, with special services on the Sunday, including the Men's and Sisterhood Meetings in the afternoon, and a midweek evening meeting for supporters from other churches. The anniversary was the major opportunity to solicit support. They celebrated Phillips's arrival and the opening of the Central Church in late April - until they found it easier to get speakers in early March, which then became the 'church anniversary' for the rest of the century. The church itself was not formally reconstituted until July.

Twelve former deacons and elders became Central Church deacons, an amalgamation of offices considered but not adopted in 1898. The number was reduced to ten in September 1907. Edward Nodes dropped out in 1904: he was

approaching retirement and moved to Cricklewood in 1908.¹

Tom Phillips agreed with the deacons that candidates for membership should be interviewed first by the pastor, then by a deacon, and finally by another member and befriender chosen by the pastor. One-third of the deacons would retire each year, but might be re-elected. Deacons' Meetings would be held at 6 p.m. on the Saturday preceding each Church Meeting.

There were changes in communion practice, but in December 1905 the deacons decided a rota of those to assist was 'not practicable'. In 1908 the church voted 76 to 7 in favour of individual cups replacing the common chalice. The extra work was quickly delegated: 'Miss Freeman would see to them for morning services. Deacons' wives to make arrangements'. By April 1924 at least three women were on the diaconate and 'It was arranged that some of the lady Deacons should be asked to officiate at this service when possible' - presumably a way of saying they were fully recognized.

Central Committee wasted much time selecting anniversary speakers: leading ministers of all major Protestant denominations, Christian MPs - preferably Cabinet Ministers, prominent journalists, and peers. They were frequently disappointed. In 1907 they tried for the evangelist Gipsy Smith, Augustine Birrell MP, David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill. Eventually Phillips got Gipsy Smith and the Rt Hon. Thomas Shaw, the Lord Advocate, with the Earl of Jersey to chair the Sisterhood meeting. In 1909 Mrs Bramwell Booth, the Salvationist, addressed the women's gathering. Canon Hensley Henson was secured for the evening meeting in 1910. George Hay Morgan KC MP² was a willing friend, appearing on anniversary platforms and often preaching in August. They still courted big names in the 1920s and 1930s - like Ramsay Macdonald and Lloyd George repeatedly - but seem often to have fallen back on the Revd Dr J.D. Jones³ of Bournemouth. In 1925 they secured Alderman Muriel Lester. Lloyd George did chair a meeting at Bloomsbury in October 1926, but this was an LBA event, with Dr Edgar Y.

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- 1 Minutes of the Central Mission Committee and the Finance Committee are extant for July 1906 to April 1912, and Deacons' Minutes up to 1908. Apart from the Bloomsbury Institute Fellowship, January 1920-September 1931, no other minutes survive from Phillips's period, and very few Year Books and magazines. Surviving records contain no reference to the gas main explosion in December 1928 which closed for several weeks New Oxford Street, St Giles High Street, Broad Street and the eastern end of Shaftesbury Avenue, with the Princes [now Shaftesbury] Theatre, and must have caused problems for the church.
 - 2 Liberal Member for Truro and Helston, 1906-18, and effectively 'Whip of the Nonconformist Party in the House of Commons'; from 1890-1900 lay pastor of Woodberry Down Baptist Church.
 - 3 A Congregational minister and leading Free Churchman.

Mullins,⁴ as preacher. Benjamin Gibbon returned as anniversary preacher in Phillips's last year.

Similarly they sought attractive pulpit supplies for the Superintendent's August holiday. Often they looked across the Atlantic, like Dr Thomas of Toronto in 1906 and Dr C.A. Eaton the next year. In 1909 Dr Gordon and Dr Maire were 'much enjoyed'. In August 1915, with war raging, they settled for home-grown preachers - Brock, Chown, Baillie and Gibbon! William Brock junior had now retired from the Hampstead church, and John Chown of Brondesbury remained a good friend of his father's church. Baillie and Gibbon 'represented themselves'. Mr Nightingale of the Free Church Council was another reliable preacher often called upon in the 1920s. Depending on visiting preachers travelling into Central London was always nerve-wracking: when Phillips was away for two months in 1911, the pulpit supplies 'all turned up which was a comfort to the responsible deacons'.

In 1911 Phillips, left to coax reluctant speakers, suggested giving up the midweek anniversary meeting, but Central Committee liked it. George Nicholls MP preached at the ordinary services that midsummer. The church had an American Day on 18 July 1920, when the morning preacher was Mr Monray Williams of the New York Bar, a distinguished Northern Baptist Convention layman, and in the evening Dr Mullins, President of the Louisville Seminary. Dr Gambrell, the eighty-year-old President of the Southern Baptist Convention, brought greetings, and the day closed with a communion service in which both Mr Williams and Dr Mullins took part. A later guest preacher was Dr Chester New of Toronto in August 1924.

The wider Baptist community invested heavily in setting up the Central Church but made no provision to support the ongoing ministry. Bloomsbury was expected to reach out widely in mission, although before reconstitution the church had already struggled to make ends meet. The whole concept of Central Missions was largely associated with Methodists, whose strong central organization meant strategic work commanded more attention. Baptists, while responding generously to occasional special appeals, expect the local church to get on with routine work. Probably the denominational leaders never really thought through the ongoing implications of a Central Mission. Down the years the BU and LBA representatives on the Central Committee have proved good friends over major capital expenditure, but Bloomsbury has had to find

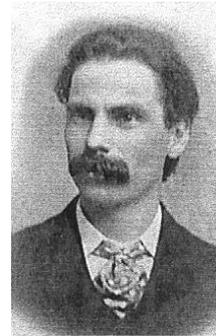
4 Mullins (1860-1928) was President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1899-1928, of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1925, and of BWA 1923-8.

the running costs itself, like any other Baptist church.

In the early years Central Committee kept a tight control, requiring that all expenditure over £3 be submitted for approval.⁵ The Superintendent even had to seek the Committee's permission to ask the Sisters for statistics of visits paid and relief given.⁶ In return, Phillips must have expected more denominational help than was forthcoming and can hardly have escaped a sense of being let down. Records show that Townley Lord and Howard Williams both came with similarly misleading expectations.

Staff

Tom Phillips had several assistants. The Revd Frank Nicholson was the first Assistant Superintendent. He grew up in Southsea, under the ministry of J. Prue Williams, Benjamin Gibbon's father-in-law, and trained at Spurgeon's College. In 1896 he settled at John Street, Bedford Row, for ten years. In 1905 John Bradford would have liked to unite this church with Bloomsbury. Instead, Nicholson became assistant to Phillips the next year. His wife was the choir's contralto soloist. He was well liked but had to resign after a few months as he had tuberculosis.



Frank Nicholson



Victor Russell

Victor Russell came in December 1906. Originally from Rye Lane Chapel, Peckham, he trained at Bristol Baptist College, having a student pastorate with James Baillie. He was minister at Small Heath, Birmingham, from 1902, where the church grew from 200 to 420 and planted another at Acocks Green. He was a hard-working, practical, vigorous organizer. His move to Bloomsbury prompted a feature in the *Baptist Times*: 'He is keenly alive to the problems that perplex the youth of today, but has a great contempt for fine-spun webs of theological refinement. If this be a defect, it is not one, I fancy, which will evoke severe criticism at Bloomsbury!'⁷ Perhaps he

⁵ Finance Committee minutes, September 1907.

⁶ Central Committee minutes, 4 May 1908.

⁷ *Baptist Times* 'Baptist Vignettes No.1', 25 January 1907.

was too able and experienced to play second fiddle: after eleven months he told the Central Committee 'there was not quite the scope at Bloomsbury for the position he had hoped to occupy, and that someone who could be engaged as Secretary to Mr Phillips would probably better fit the requirements'. By May he had failed to find other work, but went as assistant to Ferme Park in 1909, and then to Turret Green, Ipswich, 1911-16. Returning to London, he took a house in Russell Square as a headquarters for student work, but died in 1921 from heart disease.

In May 1908 Central Committee considered three possible assistants, and approached Hugh Brock, who 'had been down to Bloomsbury giving help for a time at several of the meetings', offering £200. He declined, but Frank Nicholson, feeling better but not up to preaching or late hours, offered as Phillips's secretary. He suggested that 'a telephone would be of great service in the work', and Herbert Marnham paid for a trial year. Alas, by November Nicholson's health was again precarious and he had to leave. Eager to help, Nicholson prepared the 1909 report, *Bloomsbury on Trial*, and that for 1912. He died in 1916.

Phillips said he could manage if there were enough Sisters. The Committee, concerned about him overworking, was glad when Mr Bernard Nutter, fresh from Cambridge, sought voluntary work to gain experience. He proved good, but depending on short-term volunteers was not ideal. Other volunteers occasionally came, like Mr Overstone in 1926.

When Phillips was President of the Baptist Union in 1915-16, an assistant minister was again appointed, J. Leslie Chown, the grandson of Joseph Chown. All his grandparents had been in the Bloomsbury church but his parents moved to Brondesbury, while retaining a lively interest in Bloomsbury. Leslie Chown trained at Rawdon and Mansfield College, Oxford, and came strongly recommended by Principal W.E. Blomfield of Rawdon as 'a dear, loving, lovable fellow ... He is pure gold.' Chown preached about once a month and took the midweek services when Phillips was away. He served as chaplain to the Shaftesbury Homes and officiating chaplain to the Endell Street Military Hospital, and did much pastoral visiting. His first address to the Social Union was on 'Life in Germany'⁸ He went on to a very long pastorate at Wolverhampton.⁹

8 Church magazine, December 1915.

9 The author had extended correspondence and several conversations with Leslie Chown in his latter years. He last visited Bloomsbury to speak on Wednesday, 18 June 1975, keeping the engagement although, as he let out over tea, he had come from the bedside of his dying wife, sure that had she been

From 1917 to 1920 J.A. Spurgeon assisted Phillips. This was the son of C.H. Spurgeon's brother, James Archer Spurgeon.¹⁰ In 1928 the Revd A. Graham-Barton is mentioned as Deputy Chaplain to the Bloomsbury Parliament. The gracious minister of Kingsgate Chapel, 1914-29 and an enthusiastic Hyde Park speaker, he was evidently moved to support this activity of the neighbouring church.

Much of the day-to-day work fell to the deaconesses, the Sisters 'in their uniforms of navy blue with wonderful grey veils'.¹¹ The uniforms were partly for protection, especially when on the streets at night.¹² There were usually two or more Sisters on the Bloomsbury staff, assisted by some more in training. The deaconess community was based quite near and Bloomsbury 'was the spiritual home of the deaconesses while they were in London'.¹³ They served the church well. First came Sister Dorothy Gotch, Sister Constance and Sister Lucy. Sister Dorothy's health broke down in March 1907; she returned to work but resigned in April 1909. Sister Maggie came in 1906, seconded from the



Sister Maggie

conscious she would have wanted him to fulfil a promise, yet hoping he would get back before the end.

10 The older J.A. Spurgeon (1837-99) founded West Croydon Baptist Church. His son (1883-1964) left Bloomsbury in 1920 to become Secretary of the National United Temperance Council. The grandson, also J.A. Spurgeon and a member of Queen's Road Baptist Church, Coventry, kindly confirmed the identification in a letter to the author, 30 March 1999.

11 Margaret Phillips.

12 Doris M. Rose, *Baptist Deaconesses*, 1954.

13 *ibid.* Bloomsbury records refer to the deaconesses from, variously, Havelock Hall, Guildford [*sic*] Street, and Mecklenburgh Square. The London Baptist Association set up in 1890 a deaconess home at 59 Doughty Street, where they lived as a community, bringing 'a ministry of comfort and consolation to the underprivileged and poverty-stricken' of the slums, initially the area north of High Holborn and between Southampton Row and Grays Inn Road. In 1903 the home moved to 98 Guilford Street, and in 1912 to 37 Mecklenburgh Square. The medical work settled by 1905 at Havelock Hall, off Leather Lane. Guilford Street runs between Russell Square and Grays Inn Road; Doughty Street crosses it near the eastern end and runs into Mecklenburgh Square. Their training consisted of two years at Havelock Hall, six months at a hospital, and six attached to a Baptist church or mission.

college in place of Sister Lucy, who wanted to work among even poorer people. Maggie Parker had been persuaded by her friend Constance to become a deaconess. Tom Phillips spotted her taking an open-air meeting and invited her to Bloomsbury. Soon she was doing 'a fine work amongst the men in the district', finding work for between twenty and thirty in February 1907 alone. She was paid £60 per year.¹⁴

In January 1909 the Central Committee, dispensing with the assistant minister, asked Sister Maggie to relieve Phillips by overseeing the Sisters and the visitation work. £30 was allocated for another Sister to take some of her former work - employing women was in those days financially attractive! Sometimes Sister Maggie accompanied Phillips on fund-raising tours. She wrote of visiting South Wales in November 1907, returning with £45. Sister Lottie Parker joined her sister at Bloomsbury in February 1909 at £60 and stayed till September 1910. In 1914 Sister Maggie married a missionary who helped at Bloomsbury while in England and, as Mrs Christy Davies, she left for work in Congo.¹⁵



Sister Lottie

The Annual Report for 1909, *The Arrested Progress of the Church: Bloomsbury on Trial*,¹⁶ has photos of the deaconesses at work, including one of six Sisters setting out from the church. Mrs Canfield identified these. Sister Connie, daughter of the Revd T.R. Longhurst of Abbey Road, came to Bloomsbury as a voluntary worker in February 1909, and, after fifteen months

14 Deaconesses living in the Home were given their keep and £15 p.a. for clothes and pocket money. Churches using a resident Sister would pay the Home for her service. From 1893 Sisters living out were given £60 and expected to be wholly self-supporting. Bloomsbury gave Sister Maggie an extra £5 per quarter when her rent at Mornington Crescent was £1 1s 0d a week, plus 3s 0d for coal in winter. The deaconess' stipend crept up slowly: in 1925 the Order was trying to establish a minimum stipend of £120, and in 1954 the minimum was £275. Rose, *op.cit.*

15 M. Christy Davies, *From Central London to Central Africa*, undated private publication, but after 1962. Chapter 2 is about Bloomsbury.

16 This and the 1907 Report have photographs of the work and the immediate area. Those taken in the basement hall, with large numbers of people, are remarkably clear. When enlarging them for the author, her uncle Leslie F. Carter, a professional photographer, and his colleagues were amazed at the quality achieved, with which they would have been delighted in the 1960s. Dr E.A. Payne remembered the photographer, who apparently lived at the top of Baptist Church House.

unpaid, was allowed £20 p.a. plus travel expenses. In March 1911 she was 'rather seriously ill', but Central Committee declined her resignation because she was so good with young people. It is not clear how long she stayed, but in October 1915 the church magazine notes her appointment by the Free Church Federation as Lady-superior to the new home for girls at The Retreat, Mere, Wiltshire.¹⁷

Sister Violet was Grace Jeffrey, daughter of the Revd Robert Foster Jeffrey and would have grown up aware of the problems in central London. She served for one year unpaid, and then in January 1911 asked to go on the regular staff. Central Committee temporized, giving her a £5 honorarium until the anniversary; what happened thereafter is not recorded but she eventually married Tom Coffin, then Boys' Brigade captain.

Sister Emily Sutton was a



Sister Emily

Bloomsbury member invited to do rescue work by Central Committee, when they set aside £50 for this experiment in 1907. However, her brother, Mr Sutton JP of Croydon, undertook her entire support so long as she was on Bloomsbury's staff.

Sister Joyce Waddington, a nurse, was 'lent' by the Deaconess Home for the year 1908, and retained thereafter, the church paying Havelock Hall for her services.¹⁸ Sisters Maggie and Joyce ran a dispensary, and were supplied with £5 worth of medical



The Sisters setting out on their morning rounds, 1909

17 He had been minister at Kingsgate, Holborn, 1878-83, and at Cross Street, Islington, 1900-2, and then worked for the Baptist Total Abstinence Society before going to Zion, Cambridge.

18 She had a missionary sister, as did Nell Waddington of the Melbourne Hall church, so probably came from Leicester. Information from Enid Phillips, writing to author on Nell Waddington's 100th birthday, 6 February 1986.

equipment in 1908 so that the nurse could do minor treatments herself.

The Sisters met Tom Phillips at 10 a.m. to check through the day ahead. Sister Maggie listed the main tasks: 'There were tickets to be bought for girls, and to see them off home from the stations, clothes to be bought for men whom Mr Phillips had found jobs for, but the principal work was visiting the numberless families in the high tenement houses around us.' In 1910 the five Sisters were in touch with over four thousand homes.

In 1915 the deaconesses were Sisters Dorothy, Florence and Norah; in 1920 Edith, Lois and Doris. Sister Doris entertained the anniversary meeting in 1922 with an account of her 'battles with the buyers and managers of West End and City warehouses in her efforts to reach the young people'. Sister Mabel had then joined the team. Doris and Mabel resigned in February 1924 as they planned another scheme of special work. Sister Helen came in September 1924. She addressed the deacons in October 1927 on church life, urging more prayer and closer contact with members, and asked to begin a monthly Fellowship meeting, but left to marry at the end of the year. Sister Doris relieved Sister Edith of the Women's Meeting in 1927 and returned full-time the following year, along with Sister Bertha. In 1928 the church also enjoyed the voluntary services of Miss Watson, on furlough from China for six months. Others known to have been Bloomsbury Sisters, although not in the years covered by surviving archives, were Doreen Smith, who married the Revd Stanley Voke, and Miss Kathleen Merrit, known as Sister Ruth, who married the Revd John Bishop. Their grandson, Robert, is a member of the church in 1999. Ethel Smith remembered these

Grey-veiled deaconesses; lots of them, each with a special responsibility. As children we delighted to fetch and carry for them, and their names live in memory ... Joyce, Edith (who worked especially among crippled children), Margaret; and a little later on Lois,¹⁹ who went to China as a



Sister Joyce

¹⁹ Lois Chapple went to Bloomsbury in 1918 (her Foreword to M.Christy Davies' book). She trained at St Mary's Hospital for Women and Children, Plaistow, and Bloomsbury before going to Carey Hall and then with the BMS to China, 1923-40. Back in England she taught Chinese and worked in the British Government Censorship Department. From 1944 she headed the Baptist Union's Women's Department and was also Baptist World Alliance Women's Department Secretary 1950-60.

missionary, and still later served in the Women's Dept. at the Church House. Helen, who was much the junior, and quite beautiful to look at, so some of us thought!

Sister Norah, who came in 1914, remembered the work:

'Mainly visiting the district and homes of the women who attended the meeting on Monday evenings ... We always met Mr Phillips on Friday evening and went over the Cases with him, and I must say what a great inspiration he was to us, and never failed if asked to visit a Case and give his help and advice. He was a wonderful man to work with. I thank God on every remembrance of him. I am the last one left of the team. We worked together so happily, they were wonderful workers, real consecrated women.'²⁰

The staff also included caretakers, who operated from a basement room. With so much activity they were kept busy. Finding and keeping suitable caretakers has never been easy. In May 1907 Mr Ruddock resigned because of ill health. The deacons advertised in the *Daily Chronicle* for a couple who could look after both chapel and nearby Institute and appointed Mr and Mrs Durham at £3 per week, raised by 2s 6d in December by deacons who thought their work good, even if some ladies did not care for Mr Durham's attitude. A month later the assistant chapelkeeper resigned after friction, and the replacement only lasted five months.

In 1924, the deacons became concerned that the chapelkeepers should have a regular half-day off, which meant paying for a deputy, and asking the societies to share the costs. In 1925 the caretakers were Mr and Mrs Jackman of 70 New Compton Street. They found 'late Socials' a problem,²¹ but gave many years of devoted service.

In May 1907 the Central Committee insured against accident, under the Workman's Insurance Act requirements, two chapelkeepers, the Institute keeper, and the organ-blower. In October 1909 the Employers Liability premium was increased to cover the Sisters. This was presumably accepted as a necessary precaution, although the Finance Committee was not inclined to insure too liberally; in February 1911 it dropped insurance against burglary and accidents to the public at meetings.

These staff, assisted by many volunteers from the church and beyond, were responsible for a full programme of activities, to build up the church and reach

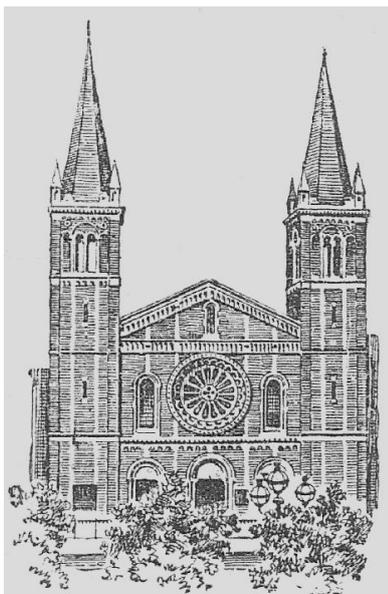
20 Letter to author, 5 August 1970, from Mrs N. Coote, then aged 81.

21 Deacons' Minutes 26 February 1926.

the local community. The area had improved, but still held a dense population of families on low incomes in streets close to the church. There were large numbers of young people in the commercial houses and great shops of Oxford Street, and an increasing number of students. Bloomsbury still had plenty of family homes for those in comfortable circumstances, while the streets of the capital continued to attract those without respectable employment. The church tried to make provision for them all, recognizing that ‘the problems presented are not uniform ... Central London needs dealing with by classes’.²²

Premises

The Chapel premises, always bulging at the seams, were inadequate. A sliding partition, costing £65, was installed across the basement in 1906 so that two meetings could run at once, which helped unless a Bible study or prayer group found itself alongside noisy children. The Sunday School hung a curtain over the partition to reduce noise between classes.²³ In 1909 Soho Chapel’s basement room was hired for some midweek activities.



The chapel in 1907

The practicalities of running the premises often required attention. Central Committee minutes for 1908 show the care taken over upgrading the lighting. In September ‘The question of replacing the present lamps in the chapel with Osram or other metallic filament lamp was discussed and the matter was eventually left to a subcommittee ... to decide’. Metal filaments were then being advertised vigorously but did not replace carbon filaments widely for some years. Frederick Higgs, builder and Central Committee secretary, ‘estimated that with a capital expenditure of £25, some

²² Central Committee minutes, 18 December 1911.

²³ Deacons Minutes 4 January 1924.

£40 per annum should be saved in the lighting bill, together with the advantage of a better light.²⁴ The sub-committee installed them. At the Institute 'Mr Yates was authorised to do all the renewals as they occurred with Osram lamps where practicable - The question of renewing wholly in metal filament lamps to stand over pending evidence of the saving realised'.

Toilet provision left something to be desired. In 1912 Arthur Matthews drew Central Committee's attention to the gentlemen's lavatories and the 'dark cavernous condition of this apartment'. He asked for an additional electric light. Tom Coffin wanted to tile the lavatories, but Central Committee (which met elsewhere) refused money for this, 'notwithstanding the protestations of the local members that the condition of the apartments is disreputable'.

The central ceiling ornament in the chapel was pronounced dangerous in 1911. Mr Coffin advised that it could be renewed in the present form or in flat zinc or in wirework (£18). Eventually Higgs offered to get it done for £10; he did not normally want to get involved with the building repairs but thought 'economy for Bloomsbury was the first consideration'. In 1912 repairs were needed to the heating apparatus, including that to the baptistry, undertaken by Messrs Benham (£22).

Central Committee expected to obtain extra space for the Institute and would have liked the adjacent French school and yard, an area of about 1,300 square feet (121 square metres). They could only afford £5,000, and in 1906 the French directors were not keen to sell. By 1913, when the French church was effectively 'defunct', the cost was too high; the French church finally closed in December 1924. Two other sites nearby in Shaftesbury Avenue were considered, and another later in Dyott Street, but in 1906 Bloomsbury rented 51 New Oxford Street, where seven rooms on floors one to four were taken for seven years at an inclusive rent of £150 p.a., with a further £150 spent on furnishing.

In the *Baptist Times* of 14 June 1907 Tom Phillips spelled out his dream for the Central Church. He would have liked

To pull Bloomsbury down and build in New Oxford Street an auditorium seating 3,000, with a platform rather than a pulpit, and cushioned seats. Next door would be the Hospitality Hall, and next the Children's Paradise, with classrooms and an evening play centre. The

24 The author's husband, a lighting historian, confirms that Higgs's estimate of the savings would have been correct.

Hall of Promise would cater for young people, and the People's University offer lectures and evening classes. To brighten dreary lives, there would be a fine Public House serving non-alcoholic drinks, a Concert Room and Theatre. Not far off would be the Labour Home 'to submit our beggars and unemployed to the saving and wholesome test of labour', and Lodgings for respectable working men. The Snowdrop Shelter would take in 'sisters of shame' and provide congenial work ...

He specified not laundry work, for unpleasant labour was no inducement to better ways! He did not achieve his dream, but in 1914 an extra floor was built over the chapel for the Institute. During the building work, the church worshipped in the Princes (now Shaftesbury) Theatre, drawing congregations of 1,500 in the evenings. Frank Whitehead, who joined the church in 1906, remembered Phillips leading a communion service from the conductor's perch in the orchestra, and harvest displays on trellises set up by the theatre management who also helpfully lowered a backcloth showing a field of waving corn.²⁵

A brochure, *The Utmost for the Highest* (undated, but c.1912), was published to aid fund-raising for this extension. The original building, 'described by a well-known journalist as a chapel with a cellar beneath', had never had enough rooms. Nevertheless, 900 people, mostly young, had joined the church since 1905. Two classes were being held off-site, one in the Wild Street schools and another near Waterloo Bridge. Some young women had had to join a neighbouring church's Bible Class as Bloomsbury could not squeeze them in. The Infants Class met in a small, ill-lit, underground room, 'subject to conditions which expose us to the possibility of prosecution': health and safety requirements were beginning to come in! William Woolland had left the church £1,000, to which his brother, Samuel, would add a further £4,000 if the Central Committee acted promptly.²⁶ In default of a viable alternative, they proposed to extend upwards, with a hall that could hold 200, four small rooms for 25, and seven larger rooms. Folding screens could turn three of these into a second hall for 100.

Higgs & Hill built this extension, completed in 1914. They put in additional large, square pillars from the foundations to support the extra floor. New stairs and a lift were built at the side of the original building, where a

²⁴ In church magazine November 1963.

²⁶ Samuel Woolland left Phillips a further £1,000 in 1924 'to be used at his sole discretion for the use of Bloomsbury Church'.

passage had led to the schoolroom. Mrs Canfield recalled the opening of the lift: the first Sunday they lost all the children, who promptly learned how to work it! The large room in the north-west corner was originally the Billiards Room, but this was no longer used by 1936, so they sent the table to Arundel House, the Baptist Union's conference and holiday house at Brighton. The ladies refurnished the room as 'the Parlour' (in 1999 it has been divided as part of the LBA's office accommodation). Even with extra rooms it was often difficult to fit everything in. In 1928 the deacons were driven to set up a sub-committee to regulate the societies' usage.

The church fabric continued, of course, to need more repairs and renovations than Central Committee could afford. The spires began to give problems: a letter concerning these was 'received from a Steeplejack' in 1926, and hastily passed by the deacons to Central Committee. The church closed for repairs in August 1927, apparently without alternative arrangements, for the deacons noted that with no payment for pulpit supplies they could afford a 'well got up book' about the church to leave at local hotels, but Mr Frame, the hotelier, advised that a framed notice for hotel lifts would be more effective.

With so much happening on the premises, the deacons were concerned about theft. The Guildry, Cubs and Scouts would have liked to lock their rooms, but multiple use made that impossible; they were allowed locked cupboards, kindly provided by Mr Moule. In 1928 the deacons decided the kitchen and scullery doors, leading to the caretaker's room, must be kept locked. As more doors were secured, they had to ensure that those needing access could obtain keys.

Members of church and congregation

In 1905 all the deacons but one lived within walking distance. By 1925 five lived in Hornsey, five in Golder's Green and the treasurer had migrated to



MOTTO: "HOSPITALITY."

The extended chapel, 1914

Harrow-on-the-Hill.²⁷ The congregation was transient. Phillips observed wistfully: ‘throughout the years the Church roll has been like a never stopping escalator, grinding on and on. Sixteen hundred people have joined the Church, and if they had only a little of the leisureliness and tenacity of the Norwich saints every service would be crowded out with Church members.’²⁸ Few made a long-term home in Central London.

The immediate district was still densely populated. Mrs Watson spoke of the French children next door and Norman Redding’s Department Store close by. Dorothy Cocks recalled Endell St and Seven Dials as still ‘quite a slummy area, but the Gower Street side was much more respectable. When my family first went to Bloomsbury we used to walk to Church along Gower St and the basement kitchens provided much interest to us children’. Her brother observed the former Prime Minister reading *The Times* as they passed the Asquith’s house at 44 Bedford Square. The Cocks family lived in a three-storey maisonette over a butcher’s shop in Torrington Place; the parents, three children, grandmother and aunt all walked to church together. Living so near they often took young people and the Sunday School Superintendent, Harry Jones, home to tea on Sunday afternoons.

Many in the congregation travelled in from the suburbs, with public transport cheap and good, but the membership still included plenty of local tradesfolk. Among these were the Matthews family, ironmongers in Charing Cross Road. Ebenezer and Burton Matthews were followed by Joseph A. Matthews, who lived in Oakley Square and was Church Secretary, but died by 1915. His bachelor son Arthur ran the afternoon fellowship in the Institute for some time and also became a deacon and Central Committee secretary. Arthur Bell Jones, a deacon from 1915, had been in Bloomsbury all his life and met his wife there. The Webbs, a family long in the church, still had their cheesemongery and ‘wonderful cooked-meat shop’ in Tottenham Court Road.²⁹ Their daughter conducted young ladies’ gym displays, remembered

27 Phillips’s reflections on twentieth anniversary. No list of deacons survives for 1925, but in 1928 living near the church were A.H. Bray (elected 1918) of Drury Lane, Mrs Dodkin (1918) of Fordham House, Percy Sears (1919) of Hazelwood House, New Oxford Street/Shafesbury Avenue; further afield were G. Myrddin Evans (1926) of 6 Chester Place, Regent’s Park, Henry S. Harris (1890) of Oakley Square, Frank Whitehead (1926) Gray’s Inn Road, Mrs Percy Bray (1923) of Highgate, T.W. Coffin (1910) of Finchley, Walter G. Freeman (1918) of Stroud Green, Walter H.W. Idris (1918) of Highgate, and Arthur Matthews (1918) of Golders Green.

28 T. Phillips, ‘Twenty years in Central London’, *Baptist Times* 20 March 1925.

29 Margaret Phillips’s memory.

with pleasure by W.T. Manns.³⁰ Spending her last years in the home of Mr and Mrs William Webb, was Mrs Laetitia Lambert, an active member since Brock's day. For many years she led the young women's Bible Class at Moor Street, then went to Algiers to direct a hostel in connection with the North African Mission. She died in 1915 aged 87.

Mr Thick was a grocer at the corner of Endell Street. The Bray family had an Oil and Colour Warehouse in Drury Lane: the two brothers and Percy's wife were deacons at various times, and their daughters, Peggy and Joyce and their cousin Elsie, were all active in the church. Frank Bray died in 1915, aged only forty. Frank T. Smith, the proprietor of the umbrella shop opposite the church, was a deacon; he died in 1942, after many years of service in the church. T.F. Smith was also an active member. The Coffin family were builders, decorators and sanitary engineers with offices at 17 Arthur Street (where Centre Point now stands). Tom Coffin, a deacon, often helped with building matters, but was also involved with the Boys' Brigade, the swimming club, and much else. He married Sister Violet. The Bult family, stationers of Quebec Street, had three musical daughters who taught Junior Choir and ran the Junior Christian Endeavour. The Misses Glave had a dress shop in New Oxford Street. Walter and Hugh Idris, makers of soft drinks, were members, and Walter a deacon.

H.E. Jones, remembered by Ralph Cocks as 'that saintly man', lived near Parliament Hill. Harry Jones was a member for fifty years, deacon for twenty-five, Sunday School Superintendent for thirteen, and church secretary for fourteen, handing over in 1922 to F.J. Moule, corn dealer, of Rochester Terrace, NW1. According to Ethel Smith, Mr Jones was 'never too busy on more important matters to listen to a child's confidences. He was, I suppose, the most approachable and beloved of all the deacons of that period, and his passing in 1926 was mourned by all who knew him, both young and old'. Deacons' Minutes record 'His faith was simple, his life was straight, and his service unselfish and ungrudging'.

Ralph Cocks saw the Financial Secretary, 'never to be called Treasurer', as 'that formidable figure, Arthur T. Yates'. To Margaret Phillips Yates was 'a faithful friend'. George Foss, himself a meticulous accountant, told the author that Mr Yates used to work out the proportional cost of printing magazines to charge the church societies appropriately: 'He must have spent considerable energies on this which might have been more profitably employed elsewhere!'

30 Letter to Margaret Peden as magazine editor.

He had a printing business in Wigmore Street and was active in the Men's Meeting before becoming a deacon in 1906. In the 1928 Year Book the term 'Treasurer' is used of Yates, now living at 12 Wellacre Road, Northwick Park, Harrow. He served as treasurer until 1937, having been a church member from 1891 and deacon from 1906. He died in 1947.

Dr Norman was the only doctor Margaret Phillips could remember in membership; his surgery was in Canonbury and he was very good to her mother. A deacon before reconstitution, he declined to continue in 1904. There were, however, a number of medical students, including Myfanwy Phillips who won a scholarship of £60 a year at the Royal Free Hospital in 1915. One of the girl medicals' father was proprietor of Chilprufe in Leicester. Margaret Phillips remembered him subscribing to Bloomsbury because 'the endorsement of his cheques required a statement of belief in the Second Coming'. The Bywaters family came when Regent's Park Chapel closed in 1922 and proved great workers with children and young people. One of their two sons became a distinguished physician, in charge of Cliveden Hospital; their daughter Margaret also became a doctor. A memorial booklet among the archives commemorates another young doctor, Douglas H.D. Wooderson MB, BS, BSc, Captain RAMC, who was killed on 16 August 1916 while attending to the wounded in a dug-out in France. He and his brother Bernard were 'Bloomsbury boys', where their father Robert was a member.³¹



Captain Douglas Wooderson MB BS BSc

³¹ Wooderson won a series of prizes at school and Barts medical school. Commissioned December 1914, he went to the front in March 1915, was invalided home July-Oct 1915, and mentioned in dispatches June 1916. *St Bartholomew's Hospital Journal*, August 1915, published a letter, written before his death, from an RAMC corporal who worked with him, moved to write in appreciation of a skillful, prompt, and life-saving amputation of a foot under bad conditions. Bloomsbury still receives about £5 a

Mrs Dodkin appears to have been the first woman deacon, elected in 1918, although the dates are not known for Miss Louisa Bolton, a headteacher, who was another of Phillips's deacons.³² Mr and Mrs Dodkin ran Fordham House, the Shaftesbury Home alongside the church. Mrs Dodkin was also the first woman to serve on Central Committee, from January 1929, replacing the ailing Walter Idris. Mrs Roebuck and Mrs Carey Bonner were deacons by 1924, but neither was able to continue after 1926. Mrs Percy Bray was on the diaconate by 1928.



*Mrs Dodkin,
the first woman deacon*

Alice Canfield³³ was born in West Central London and in 1907, aged seventeen, followed Sister Lottie to Bloomsbury from a smaller church nearby. She was baptized in 1912, aged twenty-one, one of seven candidates that evening, although there were often up to twenty-four. She remembered one 'mass baptismal service' during the war when the candidates were all Jewish converts. Her husband's family lived in New Oxford Street and he grew up in Bloomsbury. They met at the church, were married at Bloomsbury on Christmas Day 1922, and worked there for over fifty years. Will Canfield, who had a car electrics business, became a deacon and they were close friends of Ernest and Eva Brown.

Mr Harris, Mr Freeman, and Mr Matthews were remembered by Alice Canfield as 'the gentry ... with high hats and frock coats'. Margaret Phillips recalled 'there was a recognizable procession of top-hatted Baptist church-goers' walking to the church on Sundays. Mr Harris died in 1928, having been active for the church and responsible for the Lord's Supper and Christmas Dinner Funds until the end. Walter Freeman could be counted on to argue with Arthur Matthews at the lively monthly church meetings. Lady Tarring, who chaired the Sisters' meeting at the 1915 anniversary, had grown up in the church. Another wealthy member was Mr Myrddin Evans, whose 'very charming wife', Elizabeth, supported the Welsh chapel. He joined the diaconate in 1926, serving the church faithfully through an illustrious civil service career.

year from the Wooderson Trust, set up in his memory in 1917 by his father.

31 According to the magazine, when she died in March 1964.

33 The author visited Mrs Alice Canfield, then aged 85, at her home in Buckhurst Hill, 2 August 1976, and took extensive notes of their conversation.

As a child, Ethel Smith was in awe of those ‘majestic figures of bearded, frock-coated deacons’, little knowing she would be among their successors. Ethel remembered her parents walking to Bloomsbury from Holland Park, but her father died when she was still a young child.

The Deacons were impressive figures, all in tail-coats and stiff collars. But we children looked for the sweets which were sometimes secreted in their pockets. One deacon, Tom Coffin, asked me what I wanted for Christmas. With no inhibitions I replied ‘a doll’s pram’ to my mother’s considerable embarrassment. However Mr Coffin was quite equal to the occasion. ‘Bring her to my office on Christmas Eve’ he said, ‘and she shall have her doll’s pram’. So it came about that I received by far the most expensive toy of my childhood.

Others known to have gone to Bloomsbury include the actor, Forbes Robertson,³⁴ and Mr and Mrs Frame, proprietors of the Bonnington Hotel, ‘the outstanding Temperance Hotel in London’, which celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1936. Among the voluntary workers was Kingsley Lester, associated with the mission in Bow where his sisters, Muriel and Doris, had a pioneering and influential day nursery.³⁵ Kathleen Reeves, from an old Baptist family in Wiltshire, found Bloomsbury ‘a home from home’ in 1923-31, and her sister Marjorie joined her at Bloomsbury for a time and, on becoming an Oxford scholar, took her friends from the Home Circle for a tour around that city.³⁶

Malcolm Thomson, a candidate for the ministry, was commended to Regent’s Park College in 1907. He took a first, followed by scholarships to Gottingen, Berlin and Heidelberg Universities.³⁷ Others may have gone into ministry, but surviving records only mention Mr Gemmower, commended to Rawdon in 1924. Many in humbler circumstances made their contribution to the church: one such, at Bloomsbury for many years, was May Eveleigh, who ‘did’ for the Cocks and was mentioned affectionately by Ralph.

34 J. Leslie Chown, letter to author, 3 January 1969.

35 Kingsley Lester died in 1914. Muriel Lester, a radical Christian and pacifist of Baptist background, subsequently developed a wider work among the poor at Kingsley Hall and was a leader in the Fellowship of Reconciliation. See Paul R. Dekar, ‘Muriel Lester, 1883-1968: A Baptist saint?’ *Baptist Quarterly* 34, July 1992, pp.337ff.

36 The author met both sisters in author in 1992. Kathleen Reeves provided much information about the Girls’ Guildry and also some photographs. Both appear in Bloomsbury records and magazines.

37 Dr Thomson was pastor at Muswell Hill 1915-17, then became a forces’ chaplain. His only pastorate thereafter was at the Drummond Street Mission, 1925-28. He lived in Hampstead and kept in touch with Regent’s Park College, eventually retiring to Yeovil. Probably this scholarly minister worked in education or for other bodies, and the Drummond Street pastorate was part-time.

Attempts to discover from Post Office Directories the jobs of deacons listed with addresses in 1905, 1915 and 1930 suggest that most were not separate householders. By then there were many flats around the church, ranging from poor tenements to the smart Bloomsbury mansions.

The numbers of overseas visitors increased, some making extended stays. An Association of Danish Men in London made their base at the Bloomsbury Institute from 1908 until they moved to the new Central YMCA in 1912. The church magazine noted in 1915 that three of these young Danes and former Bloomsbury members were now ministers in Denmark: Grarup at Brande, Jensen at Aarhus, and Johannes Norgaard at Svendborg. In 1909 'at least six nations' were counted at tea one August Sunday. By 1920 the church had had members from Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Germany, France, Switzerland, Austria, Nigeria, Central Africa, Korea, India and Ceylon. A prominent South African Baptist, Mr King of Williamstown, worshipped at Bloomsbury for three months. There were Australians almost every Sunday, and at least one New Zealander. Dr Nichols of the Central Church, Philadelphia, spoke at a Thursday evening meeting; Dr Truett³⁸ of Dallas at another. All these visitors returned home with news of Bloomsbury's work. Apparently 'The correspondent of the only daily newspaper in Bucharest wrote a description of our work in its columns!'

Members serving as missionaries overseas were listed in the 1928 Year Book: in Congo the Revd and Mrs J. Sidney Bowskill, Mrs Christy Davies, and Mr A. Guest; in China the Revd Edward Phillips, Miss F. Major, Miss Lois E. Chapple, and the Revd George Young; in India Mr John Dawson and Mrs Taylor; in Morocco Miss J.A. Jay and Miss C.S. Jennings, and in Spain the Revd P. Buffard. Soon after Mr Vincent Thomas went to India and Nurse E. Stephens to North Africa.



Sister Lois Chapple

38 Truett (1867-1944) was President of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1929, and of the BWA, 1934-39.

At home Miss Kathleen Savill became the church's Missionary Secretary in 1928. She had grown up in Regent's Park Chapel and was baptized by F.B. Meyer in 1913 and at the North London Collegiate School with Phillips's daughters. She came to Bloomsbury in 1922, and worked for the BMS for forty-two years, at one time as W.Y. Fullerton's secretary. She loved classical music, collecting some 600 records, and singing as lead contralto in the Morley College Choir conducted by Sir Michael Tippett. At Bloomsbury she was in the choir 1923-45, and responsible for the flowers 1945-68. Her friend Ethel Smith had returned to Bloomsbury in 1936, by then a civil servant in the Post Office Savings Bank and later at the Board of Trade. She served as Bloomsbury's missionary secretary for a time and was national treasurer of the BMS Girls' Auxiliary. Remaining in London in the war, she was involved in fire-watching and ran the Bloomsbury Girls' Club until it had to close. Ethel sang in the City Temple Choral Society and was a member of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. She and Kathleen Savill were made life deacons in 1962, and always kept in touch with the church although they retired to Eastbourne in 1968.



*Kathleen Savill
in later life*

Phillips himself travelled. Reflecting on recent visits to the USA and Canada, he observed in the 1928 Year Book that 'like some of the London firms, we send our products to every part of the world. I never visited a place where I did not meet people who had worshipped at Bloomsbury, and who, in some instances, had been signally helped'.

As in Brock's day, there were some regular visitors who came when in London, including Members of Parliament, like Sir John McCallum and Percy Illingworth.³⁹ Phillips did not like to list distinguished people drawn to his ministry, yet their presence was an encouragement:

A critic tells me that Institutional superintendents are the greatest swanks in the Kingdom of Heaven. But when criticism comes thick and hot and several people walk out of the service under one sermon, there is one

³⁹ Illingworth was Liberal MP and Government Chief Whip, who died in 1915 when set for a brilliant career. *Hospitality* (the church magazine), May 1920, and Margaret Phillips.

thing that gives me comfort. When Sir Edward Russell⁴⁰ of the *Liverpool Post* came to London he generally worshipped with us. So one takes courage and rams the guns for the next volley.⁴¹

The pacifist minister could use military analogies. The congregation also contained some more Bohemian characters. In May 1920 the magazine listed actors, a snake charmer, a champion woman wrestler, and a Spanish dancer!

World War I hit this church full of young adults hard. By January 1915 seventy-two men from the congregation were in the forces, and Idris Phillips was staffing 'a YMCA tent at one of the military bases' in France. Miss Emily Kemp, with a party of ladies, doctors and others, had also gone to France to set up a voluntary hospital at their own expense. The church took under its pastoral wing the Military Hospital for 500 men in the former Endell Street Workhouse. In the magazines Phillips quoted extensively from soldiers' letters to him, often amazed to discover how much the church meant to them. The magazine for February 1915 brought sad news:

Mr Langhaus, a young German engaged to Miss Ella Smith, has been shot in the head at the battle of Lodz and instantaneously killed. It is strange that the first of the Bloomsbury young men to fall should have been fighting in the German ranks.

By the end of 1915 over 300 had enlisted from the church and its agencies, and nine Bloomsbury boys had received commissions. Nine Sunday School teachers were in the forces. Phillips estimated that a thousand of those now serving had passed through the church in the past decade. After the war a memorial tablet listed thirty-two church members killed, and there were many other adherents.

Phillips's ministry never recovered its pre-war vigour, although the Superintendent's buoyant enthusiasm, coupled with the dearth of records, somewhat masks this. The church was still vibrant, but sadly conscious of reduced numbers. It was a difficult time for churches generally, but other factors came into play at Bloomsbury. Many members were living further away and less willing to come in for evening meetings. Possibly too, with so much control vested in Central Committee, members' felt their responsibilities diminished, affecting support for church meetings.

These were discussed in Phillips' magazine letter in April 1920. Were

40 Sir Edward Russell, born 1834, MP 1885-7, was an able dramatic critic and political writer, knighted in 1893.

41 'Twenty years in central London', *Baptist Times* 20 March 1925.

these 'formal committees for strictly business purposes' or 'a means for the growth of fellowship'? Business meetings after the Thursday evening services were poorly attended, yet people came for occasional socials with songs and recitations rather than prayers and reports. That March Henry Harris had arranged a social hour followed by 'the best Church meeting I have ever known. It was a church meeting on church meetings', with lots of contributors. Harris had offered three reasons for church meetings: to know new members, to know how their money was being spent, to receive reports from the various societies of the church. Phillips observed, 'In discussing the difficulty we had solved it'. A second Church Social Meeting was held on 17 June, hosted by Tom Coffin. Whether these became a regular feature is not apparent, due to lack of records.

Church life

Although money was a continual struggle, the Central Church got off to a fine start, drawing large numbers and seeing a steady stream of conversions (420 in the first 2½ years). In 1911 a weekly Early Morning Prayer Meeting at 7.30 a.m. was arranged at the request of young members. The Midsummer Morning Service was followed by breakfast at 6d per head, with eggs and strawberries, 'but no ham!' (Was it too expensive or were they reaching out to neighbouring Jews?) These early services were discontinued in 1926, 'as the reason for holding them had gone'.

The deacons decided to charge 3d each for the 1905 Year Books, except for new members. The next year they did not print a Year Book, for 'want of appreciation', but prepared a more general report. Reports from 1907 and 1909 survive, both illustrated and designed to win support for the work, rather than inform members.⁴²

The midweek programme in 1907 ran:

Monday:	Women's Meeting, Boys' Brigade
Tuesday:	Social Union
Wednesday:	Cripples Parlour, Boys' Brigade, Band of Hope, Men's choir rehearsal
Thursday:	Chapel services
Friday:	Church Choir, Girls' Gymnasium
Saturday:	Concerts, League of service, Outings.

42 Year Books survive for 1915, 1917, 1920, 1928, 1929 and 1930/31.

Attendance at worship services and support for the various ancillary societies was encouraging during Phillips's early years. On 1 June 1908 the Superintendent could tell Central Committee 'There had been conversions he thought in connection with every organization and the membership of the church now stood at 612'. That October 'the ideal of one convert a day had not yet been realized but he hoped he would soon'. Good congregations, decisions every Sunday, and a flow of new members continued. In March 1909 Phillips reported morning congregations 'quite as good as Whitfields and the evenings excellent'. The Mayor and Councillors of Holborn attended the service one Sunday that July.

In July 1909 Phillips sounded less cheerful than usual. He wrestled with the relationship between the benevolent and rescue work and the 'more purely spiritual part of the work': 'both appealed to him strongly', but emphasis on either was bad for the other. The West End Mission 'solved' this by retaining St James's Hall for the better class and using other halls 'for the lower or trump element'. He sought advice. Mr French suggested a second evening service at 8.15 'for the lower grade'. Period language aside, this suggests that the church may have been feeling the loss of the separate Mission Hall. Throughout the twentieth century Bloomsbury, deeply committed to an 'open door' policy, has struggled with the problems inherent in welcoming all manner of people on the one site, yet minutes sometimes comment on the excellent spirit in the church.⁴³ Phillips modified his preaching that autumn, 'treating deeper questions which may be perhaps less popular but which appear to have been appreciated by the regular congregations'. That October evening attendance fell, 'perhaps from Mr Rattenbury's musical services at the West End Mission', and December congregations were twice affected by Whitfield's Theatre Services, although offerings increased. Bloomsbury talked with Whitfields about jointly taking the Oxford Music Hall on Sunday afternoons for a 'Forward Movement' men's meeting, but this fell through.

A major new feature was the Sunday Social, aimed especially at young people. The Sunday School was dismissed at 4 pm and half an hour later volunteers were ready to serve tea for up to 250, followed by 'social intercourse, with vocal and instrumental music'. The *Year Book* found it necessary to defend these socials:

Dwellers in suburbia, in their comfortable homes, may be inclined to criticise, but 'Bloomsbury' is not in the suburbs, and only those who

43 For example, Central Committee minutes, 8 October 1909.

know the grim discomfort and unhomelike atmosphere of the common sitting room of a large business house, the stiff formalities of boarding house life, or the loneliness of a visitor in a large hotel, can fully appreciate the cordial welcome, the genial intercourse or friendly atmosphere of the Socials.

Each autumn session opened with a week of prayer. Periodically there were special weeks of evangelistic services, sometimes with a visiting preacher, as in March 1916 when the preacher was William Olney, a city merchant who had been one of Spurgeon's deacons. In 1924 Phillips suggested a Mission of Laymen to London, using a business man, a working man, an actor (Forbes Robertson), a journalist, and 'a woman of prominence' (Lady Astor). The following January a well-advertised 'evangelical service' featured Dr Glover. The deacons encouraged a series of lettings for the Children's Special Service Mission through autumn 1928.

At least one disillusioned soldier found new hope at Bloomsbury. Stanley Baker, who later became an effective evangelist himself, remembered going there during one of the special mission weeks after the First World War:

A well-known preacher was crowding the building nightly. Ex-61645 led the way up the stairs and hesitated as if to escape, but she gently held his arm - this girl friend who believed in him, when his faith in himself and society was in tatters; who had prayed for him when to a bewildered mind it seemed all but a mockery. The preacher talked about a Divine love that had become personal and of the obstinate faith of Omnipotence that became tremendously intimate for a stumbling, cursing fisherman called Simon. 'Follow me', said the Man of Galilee. Then, horror, the preacher's long bony finger fixed the Cockney misfit - 'Young man, God wants *you* for a bit of movement'. 'God: me?' With a sigh that was near a groan, his head between his hands, he felt her touch upon his knee...

The preacher and he knelt in the quiet pew below... In a quiet spot he knelt and all the eager faith of his boy-hood returned to grip his stammering tongue: 'God, I'm r-ready for anything!'⁴⁴

In March 1910 Phillips felt they were at last touching the business houses. The gallery congregation was largely young, especially young men. On the last Sunday in February, instead of the usual prayer meeting after the evening

44 The Revd A.B. Greig of Park Baptist Church, Dalbeattie, wrote to Barrie Hibbert on 13 November 1997, with this quotation from the evangelist Stanley Baker, who led a team of five Baptist ministers in Birmingham, 'The Contacts Team', 1946-8, through whose ministry Sandy Greig was converted.

service, Phillips held a conference with the young men, excluding the deacons to ensure free discussion. As a result ten joined the church. The young people told him that 'John Lewis and Marshall & Snelgrove are opening their recreation grounds on Sundays now', which was a counter-attraction. That June and December wet weather affected attendance at all places of worship. This excuse recurred in 1912, but Phillips recognized that 'the fact that such a large proportion of the members and congregation are young business people makes for irregularity to some extent'.⁴⁵

Phillips was 'growing in the conviction that the spiritual side of his work was the only one worth effort'.⁴⁶ He still won new members every month (nearly forty in May 1911 alone) and small 'prayer circles of about six' were beginning within some of the church societies. By 1917 membership had risen to 794, though voluntary offerings only to £583. As Phillips observed in 1912, his work was 'not satisfying but gratifying'. Once the premises were extended the only real problem would be money. Writing for the church magazine in October 1915, 'Nicholas Notewell', a member of the Central Committee, observed:

A few years ago, when the new order was established, for a little while 'Bloomsbury' was regarded as an experiment. We have got beyond that. 'Bloomsbury' is once more an established and powerful auxiliary of the Kingdom of God in West Central London.

Soon after the BBC began broadcasting in 1922, the church expressed an interest in religious programmes. In July 1925 Harry Jones was sorry to report to Central Committee that the BBC was not then prepared to make arrangements to broadcast from Bloomsbury, but it is interesting to see how quickly the church was eager to use the new medium.

In Phillips's last full year thirty-six joined the church, while twenty departed, making the total membership 637, though the roll had not been revised for four years and attendance was dropping. Phillips reflected, 'I sometimes feel disappointed that our sanctuary is not as crowded as it was in the pre-war days', but believed Bloomsbury had never been 'a more effective spiritual workshop than we are today. We have probably as large a percentage of workers as any Church in London'. They were certainly needed, for the diary was full, as can be seen from a typical week in the 1929 Year Book.

45 Tom Phillips's report to Central Committee, February 1910.

46 Central Committee, 19 September 1910.

Sunday:	Public Worship at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. <i>Afternoon:</i> Sunday School, Miss Hazell's Bible Class, Fellowship, Junior Fellowship, Women's Bible Class <i>Evening:</i> Prayer Meeting, Lodging House Mission, Musical Prelude <i>Later evening:</i> Social Hour
Monday:	Wolf Cub Pack, Slate Club, Women's Meeting, Boy Scouts, Home Circle, Elocution Society
Tuesday:	Children's Play Hour, Junior Christian Endeavour, Junior and Primary Preparation Class, Model Parliament, Choral Society
Wednesday:	<i>Morning and afternoon:</i> Nurses' At Home, Junior Cripples (monthly) <i>Evening:</i> Senior Cripples (monthly), Girls' Guildry - Junior, Girls' Guildry - Senior, Christian Endeavour
Thursday:	<i>Afternoon:</i> Women's PTA <i>Evening:</i> Women's Prayer Meeting, Public Service, Church Meeting (monthly)
Friday:	Junior Fellowship Club, Choir Practice

In addition, the Year Book reported on subscriptions to the Lord's Supper Fund, London Baptist Association, BMS Auxiliary, Christmas Dinner Fund, Sick and Destitute Poor Relief Society, and Children's Fresh Air Mission. There were also the Baptist Women's League and the monthly meetings of the League of Nations Union. The Women's Meeting ran its own Excursion Fund and Christmas, Slate, Clothing and Blanket Clubs. The Maternal Society was carried over into the early years of the Central Church, while Cheap Clothing was renamed the 'Dorcas Society'. Band of Hope had 300 attending, and the Total Abstinence Society eighty-seven.

After Phillips left all these activities ran on 'like a well-oiled machine'. Twenty-three joined the church during 1929, but a careful roll revision reduced membership by about 200. Central Committee observed that this was 'somewhat disconcerting but essential ... in order that the new minister might not be misled by Handbook Statistics'.

Music

Tom Phillips saw music as a powerful attraction, and wanted more than the church could really afford. Phillips observed that 'The few churches that are crowded in London today have a superb musical service ... Preaching cannot get them in. Music can ... Preaching converts, but it is music that draws.'⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *Baptist Times*, 20 March 1925.



The chapel between 1905 and 1914, with the old organ

Albert Wood, the church organist, told the deacons in February 1906 that his pay ought to be increased because of 'the very considerable additions to his engagement' under the new regime. It was an ill-timed request at a meeting struggling with a deficit of £265 on the first year's work. Both Mr Wood and the choir master, Mr Carter, were paid £95 in 1911, when Central Committee wanted to economize by combining the jobs. Phillips wished to keep Wood as organist and seek a volunteer choirmaster. The choir thought Wood could do both, but that did not work well.

A drop in evening congregations in January 1911 was blamed on wet weather, and no soloist: when several local churches had a strong musical programme such economy was counterproductive, so they paid soloists again. Evening congregations were affected by Sunday Theatres and Sunday League religious concerts. Phillips wanted lively music to enhance worship, but recognized that Bloomsbury could never satisfy those who chased the latest fashion. In a written report he suggested:

We can only compete with them by a first class orchestra as they have at Whitfields and the Lyceum. But personally I am more out of sympathy with that kind of thing than I have ever been. I do not condemn it. It is right for some people and it might be right at Bloomsbury, but I know I

am not cut out for it. At the King's Weigh House I have been told that when they have an ordinary service they have a congregation of a hundred, but when Olive Mulvarey is announced to recite after the sermon the place is packed. There is a great craze for excitement. It is the hardest thing to fight which I have known since I have been in London. But the spiritual life of the church has never been so deep and real and with patience and courage we are bound to crowd Bloomsbury with a stronger congregation than ever. But it is the time of testing and the church will have to rise to the occasion.

Evening worship was preceded by an half-hour organ recital: fine, except that the organ was wearing out. In 1908 the bellows were faulty, minimal repair would cost £4, but releathering was recommended (£26). The Finance Committee sanctioned £4 and sought an independent opinion 'as to the advisability of spending much on an old instrument'. Meanwhile, the deacons decreed that the organ should be kept locked, only the organist, the chapelkeeper and deacons having keys. Those wanting to practise on it would be charged. In March 1909 Lewis & Co advised the church not to waste further money on repairs, which had exceeded the cost of tuning for some time. Central Committee still asked 'how best and cheapest to patch the instrument up for further use for a year or two'. After an independent report by Mr Douglas Redman, Phillips was instructed to write to Dr Carnegie for assistance towards a new instrument.

Brindley & Foster rebuilt the organ in 1914, as part of the extension works. In 'adapting the old building to modern requirements', the organ presented a problem: 'Owing to the limitations of space, it was necessary that the instrument should be built entirely overhead, so that the whole of the available ground space could be devoted to the accommodation of the choir.' The 'Charles Brindley System' was adopted, wherein the organ's tone qualities were adjusted to the acoustical properties of the building, multi-pallet wind chests gave an independent and unvarying wind supply to each pipe, and the stops were sub-divided and provided with manipulative devices for ease of playing and accuracy of sound. The centrifugal blower was operated by an electric motor. Brindley & Foster looked after the organ for some years, but in 1936, they seemed to treat communications 'with complete indifference', so maintenance was transferred to Yallop & Sons.

The opening recital on 19 March 1914 was given by J.A. Meale, FRCO. The programme included three of his own compositions, including the new, 'Song of the Breeze', yet to be published by Stainer & Bell.

The organist-choirmaster who stands out later in Phillips's time was Arthur F. Tate. He was paid £100 p.a. Several people remembered him writing a successful wartime song, 'Somewhere a voice is calling', which, Ralph Cocks recalled, had 'an immense sale, but the composer had unfortunately sold his rights to the publishers for £10', so Tate received nothing more and efforts to write another such were unsuccessful. Later Ralph came to appreciate Tate as 'a brilliant hymn accompanist'.



The Brindley & Foster organ, built in 1914

A surviving church magazine from 1920 carries an advertisement for Mr Tate, of 23 Windermere Avenue, Finchley, 'Organist and Musical Director, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church', offering organ, pianoforte, singing and composition lessons. He had probably not been long at the church then, for the magazine, reporting on the choir's selections from Stainer's *Crucifixion*, comments that this venture, 'undertaken at a very short notice, is an earnest of choice things yet to come'. The *Crucifixion* became a regular Holy Week feature for some years. Lilian Goulden joined the choir about 1922 and remembered it was led by a paid quartette for many years.

A Choral Society, formed in 1928, gave several concerts at Bloomsbury and in other churches. It aimed to draw 'those young people of Bloomsbury who were fond of music and who were not attached to any other particular organization'. In 1928 Tate arranged a selection from the *Messiah* before Christmas, and 'Hear my prayer' after the evening service at the New Year. His successor, Mr Willmott from Quex Rd, Kilburn, first came with his choir to strengthen Bloomsbury's on some of these special occasions.

Finance

Money was as much a problem throughout Phillips's time as in the previous century. Getting rid of that nagging ground rent did not solve the church's money worries. By February 1906, there was already a deficit of £265: the deacons planned a gift day and asked everyone to avoid 'waste in connection with the Electric Light'. Writing from Plymouth in October 1906, Phillips drew Central Committee's attention to the large sums voted from the Congregational Union to Whitfields Tabernacle during its first two years, and to further large sums voted to the Claremont and South London Missions. He referred 'to the lesson that had been taught by several of these Missions that in London to do things in second or third rate style especially in the matter of advertising, was to fail'.⁴⁸ Bloomsbury's work was widely advertised in the local press, at the tube stations, and in hotels and lodging houses, although they decided in October 1910 that advertisements in the *Daily Chronicle* and *Holborn Guardian* were not worthwhile. Central Committee instructed Phillips in 1912 to have someone responsible for keeping advertisements on the Hampstead Tube up to date.

By September 1907 they knew that VOs would raise about £500 that year and the Thankoffering Day another £400, so the deficit was likely to exceed £500; Messrs Marnham, Benham and Benson personally increased the bank guarantee to £750. Marnham and Shakespeare agreed to arrange some meetings to appeal for the Bloomsbury work; these helped the funds but added to the pressure on the Superintendent. Mr Greenwood offered to accompany Phillips on visits to London churches to promote both the LBA and Bloomsbury. Phillips and Sister Dorothy spoke at the Muswell Hill home of Central Committee member, Mr Porter, winning promises of £17 17s for the next three years. Phillips made fund-raising visits to Norwich, Northampton, and Wrexham that year, and in subsequent years five-day tours to South Wales, Yorkshire, and elsewhere.

The deficit on the 1907-8 financial year was £870. By 1909 the situation had improved 'mainly through the Superintendent's efforts in stumping the country for Bloomsbury': now expenditure was only £60 over budget, and

48 Methodist Central Missions appear to have relied heavily on special appeals and contributions from supporters and well-wishers, but they were a more centralized body which would have affected attitudes to appeals and had a number of affluent contributors, like Joseph Rank. Letter to author from Martin Astell, Wesley & Methodist Studies Centre, Westminster College, Oxford, 8 March 1999.

receipts only £150 below. That was apparently all right because the bazaar more than covered the difference but Phillips was 'getting a little tired of the eternal money appeal question', although he supposed it was inevitable for an Institutional Church.⁴⁹

Lettings brought some income, although the premises were heavily used by the church, and Baptist bodies enjoyed fees reduced by one-third. In 1908 the chapel was booked for the annual meetings of the BU, BMS, Baptist Total Abstinence Association, and the Railway Temperance Union. Such meetings made more Baptists aware of Bloomsbury.

The Finance Committee held a special retrenchment meeting to 'suggest some plan whereby equilibrium between receipt and expenditure might be attained in the near future'.⁵⁰ They found little scope for reduction. Music might be pruned: organ, choir and orchestra cost £131 in 1910, but Phillips was reluctant to cut back on this. Phillips was paid £550 and an Assistant Superintendent £250: they would have to give up the assistant. It cost £2,000 a year to run Bloomsbury, the church could only raise £1,000, so £1,000 was needed from outside sources. That year Herbert Marnham made a challenge promise of £500 in March, matched by other giving by December.

Walter Benham succeeded Nodes as treasurer, but suffered heart trouble from early 1907 and asked for Arthur Yates, who lived near him, as an assistant. The overdraft stood at £700, although most payments look modest: stipends apart, by far the largest was £33 for a winter quarter's electricity, explaining the attention given to lighting in the early twentieth century.⁵¹ Benham died in 1908, leaving the church £650 and its societies £150, which Dr Benham paid, even though his unworldly brother's bequests exceeded his estate. Walter was eccentric, but Tom Phillips badly missed his encouraging devotion to the church. His short spell as treasurer had come at a critical transition time and his enthusiasm for change must have been influential.

Central Committee's attitude to Americans was somewhat mercenary: in the pulpit they should attract August congregations and in the pews they might give generously! Central Committee had some discussion 'with regard to the attendance of strangers - Americans and others - at the Sunday Services and the possibility of obtaining more adequate response from such through the

49 Central Committee minutes, 7 February 1910.

50 Central Committee minutes, September 1907.

51 The electricity bill then was about one-twentieth of the church's income, not a hugely larger proportion than in 1999, although then only for lighting.

voluntary offerings to the claims of an Institutional Church'.⁵² Later they lamented that many Americans came but 'it is to be feared do not do much for the funds'.⁵³

Yates and Matthews still hankered after pew rents: they wanted to label members' sittings as an encouragement to regular weekly offerings by envelope. They suggested 'small celluloid labels', screwed on and indestructible, since cards at pew ends had been destroyed by the Band of Hope children!⁵⁴ A year later in March 1911 Central Committee agreed to allocate evening seats with cards. After the war costs soared. In 1919 coal and coke cost the church £35, rising to £78 the next year, although a mild winter. Giving, of course, advanced more slowly.

Records jump to 1925 when the deacons wondered about the wisdom of giving away *all* the loose cash when having a special collection for a good cause. Some churches deducted the average Sunday amount for church funds and only gave away the extra; Bloomsbury decided against this. A month's experiment that year in taking the offering after the sermon did not help.

Statements of accounts at the end of Phillips's ministry show the continual struggle: 1926-27 income £1,808, expenditure £1,914, with cumulative deficit £744; 1929 income £1,635, expenditure £1,692, deficit £647. Spending on the fabric was especially unwelcome. There was a continual tussle between deacons anxious to maintain the premises in good order and Central Committee determined to spend as little as they could get away with.

The 'institutions'

In clearing Bloomsbury's 1904 debts and purchasing the freehold, the BU and LBA wanted something to compare with the Methodist Central Halls and Congregational ventures like Whitfield's Tabernacle - central missions being the current fashion. There was much talk about the institutional church as something new for Baptists, but really it amounted to a church with various agencies and activities all ultimately designed to draw people to Christ - hardly new for Bloomsbury, or other big city churches like Westbourne Park and the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Tom Phillips shared Herbert Marnham's dislike of the term 'Institutional Church': '*Church* connotes too much and

52 Central Committee minutes, July 1907.

53 Central Committee minutes, July 1910.

54 Central Committee minutes, 7 March 1910.

mission too little ... Until we get a new name, we call ourselves *Bloomsbury*; but if the name is barbaric, the thing itself is in the New Testament ... spiritual, converting, healing, helpful, social, joyous'.⁵⁵ Asked if institutionalism was a passing phase in church life, he answered 'a living church will never cease to adapt itself to its environment'.⁵⁶

Something has been done on the great scale ... spiritual effort aided by up-to-date social auxiliaries; and Bloomsbury is in a fair way of making itself felt, as never before, in its immediate vicinity, of offering an alluring spiritual home to many of our young people, who come up to London to sojourn during two or three of their most formative years, and of setting the pace for advanced Christian effort in the greater cities of our land.⁵⁷

Certainly much interest was created, at least for a short time. George R. Sims even wrote a popular novel, *The Devil in London*, based on Bloomsbury's work, complete with Sisters, social evenings, Saturday concerts and a Phillips look-a-like, the Revd Arthur Selwyn. The Bloomsbury magazine wryly commented that the only unfamiliar character was the young millionaire who gave £5,000 to the work!

Ethel Smith⁵⁸ recalled:

The church building always seemed to be full, or nearly so for Sunday services. From the front seat of the gallery which served as our family pew, just about where the organ is now situated, it was possible to look around on the congregation, with a fine view of millinery down below, and to see the organist conducting the choir behind his curtain at the back of the pulpit. On special occasions there were the smart uniforms of the Girls' Guildry on the left, with the Scouts opposite. Just once we had to ascend to the top gallery because of the crowded congregation. Truly a bird's eye view from up there! ... Baptismal services were usually held on a Thursday evening, and new church members received at the next following Sunday Communion service. Immediately the right hand of fellowship had been given the congregation sang 'Blest be the tie'.

Memories of that period all include the church anniversary, to Central Committee the major fund-raising day, but memorable from the pews for all

⁵⁵ *Baptist Times* 26 January 1906.

⁵⁶ *Baptist Times* 11 May 1906.

⁵⁷ *Baptist Times* 5 May 1905.

⁵⁸ Miss Ethel Smith, deacon and life-deacon, in letter to author 4 March 1978; similar reminiscences appeared in *Bloomsbury Magazine* 220, December 1990.

the white floral buttonholes. Flower arrangement had not yet been developed into a popular art form, but Dorothy Cocks remembered the ‘large black bowl on the Communion Table that was always used attractively’; it stuck in her memory because she filled it one Saturday with three dozen tulips which all drooped by Sunday morning!⁵⁹

Refreshments and social activities also figure in most memories. ‘My mother ... began to attend both morning and evening service. She recalls coffee being served downstairs’.⁶⁰ ‘Mr Freeman used to organise outings on holiday days in the summer and social Saturday evenings in the winter, both were well attended for you have to remember these were the days when very few people had a wireless set let alone television.’⁶¹ Repeated references show how much the various outings were enjoyed. The Sunday School, Bible Classes, Cripples Parlour, Choir, and Women’s Meeting all arranged their



The choir outing

own. The Choir outing regularly included a cricket match, Ladies v. Gentlemen. Before 1914, Christmas Parties were also arranged by the church on Boxing Day for people without homes or who could not afford to go home.

59 Dorothy Cocks, writing of the 1920s, in undated letter to Margaret Peden, the magazine editor. Her brother’s memories appeared in *Bloomsbury Magazine* 142, Spring 1970.

60 Mrs Victor Watson’s memories were sent by her daughter Ann in 1990, the year of her parents’ Diamond Wedding. *Bloomsbury Magazine*, 220, December 1990.

61 Lilian Goulden in letter to Margaret Peden, 26 February 1978; also letter to author, July 1976. She first went to Bloomsbury Sunday School in 1914, aged eight.

Tea, games, and supper were provided for 1s 9d.⁶²

The intention of all the activities was to attract people to the church: 'to permeate the surrounding neighbourhood with a Christlike atmosphere, and to make the people realize their fellowship one with another, by their common redemption through Christ'.⁶³ They succeeded to a considerable extent. The first priority was to make Bloomsbury 'a House of Prayer', from which would flow strength and power to deal with the practical problems, so the midweek evening service, when half an hour of united and silent intercessory prayer preceded Bible study, was 'in some senses the most important meeting of the church'.

When Enid Gibbon came to London as a student she appreciated the wholeness of this ministry:

Sundays were happy days for me and I enjoyed taking a Sunday School (Junior) class and feeling that I belonged - and certainly T.P. was a forceful preacher. I enjoyed the music too, of the choir and organ, and the tea in the Institute and the friendly hospitable atmosphere.⁶⁴

In his magazine letter in May 1920, Tom Phillips reflected on the nature of Bloomsbury. It was a *missionary church* with the mission field on its doorstep, as much in need of a new language as any foreign mission, for the people 'have no understanding of the terms in which we talk of life and God'. More than words were needed to be intelligible. It was an *open-air church*, open to passers-by from all corners of the world, 'Our people come and go, look in and pass on': there was no second chance to reach them with the gospel. It was an *institutional church*: the Institute was no mere restaurant or club, but a base for mission. It was also a *children's church*, especially for the street children. In the suburbs it was easy to have a full congregation, but he took courage: in twenty-two years Dr Brock had added 2,000 members, and in Phillips's fifteen to date, five of them war years, 1,300 had joined.

62 Leslie Chown, relaying his mother's memories.

63 1915 Year Book.

64 Enid Phillips, née Gibbon, in letter to author, 6 February 1986.

THE SOCIETIES 1905-1939

'Our heavenly Father ... condescends to work by human agency'

James Benham, 1872

Children's activities

Tom Phillips made babies welcome, offering a public dedication service at the close of morning worship, as he judged it was 'not a minister's job to rob any Christian of the liberty of public prayer'. 'Dedication fills a gap in our Baptist Church life, and I think every true Baptist welcomes and appreciates it'.¹ He personally would receive children of non-Christian parents, feeling this could lead to their consecration.

Activities for children were generally held in the basement, while those for young people were mainly off-site until the extra floor was built, when they moved there. In 1906 the Sunday School had 492 scholars and fifty-six teachers. Several people left memories of the Sunday School during Phillips's ministry. Mrs Victor Watson's daughter wrote:

My mother has such happy memories of her membership of Bloomsbury Chapel, particularly recalling Sunday School, which was held 'downstairs'. There the children would separate, according to age, going into different rooms with teachers for Bible stories and written work. Later they would all gather together for prayers and general instruction. On arrival they would have produced their 'cards' to be marked for punctuality and attendance, stars being awarded.

In 1915 the Sunday School had 401 on the books, although average attendance was lower: 47 primary, 122 intermediate, and 66 senior scholars, with 60-70 teachers. Numbers declined later, then began to rise again to 315 in 1928. Ethel Smith was born in 1910 and went to Bloomsbury as a baby; she thought her Sunday School memories probably went back to 1915. After her father's death, she went to Shepherd's Bush Tabernacle Sunday School nearer their home in Portland Place. She was baptized at Shepherd's Bush but transferred to Bloomsbury in 1936. As well as much service to Bloomsbury,

¹ *Baptist Times* 27 July 1906, 1 February 1907.

she was later National Treasurer of the Girls' Auxiliary of the BMS. She had happy memories of her Bloomsbury childhood:

Sunday afternoon teas in the Institute Lounge were one of the highspots of the week for a somewhat lonely only child. On occasions a row of youngsters would line up to be measured for height by the minister's waistcoat buttons! Then Bible games and quizzes with one of the deaconesses until it was time for evening service. Dr Phillips' oratory sometimes roused this small girl from sleep.

Mrs Alice Canfield remembers helping in the Beginners' Class with up to a hundred tiny children in the old basement kitchen, led by the younger Phillips



'A slum in Bloomsbury', 1909

girls. Some were members' children, like Ethel, Dorothy and Ralph, but the majority were poor children, 'thin, cold and ill-clad',² and their parents did not attend Sunday worship. Before special functions the teachers summoned the children an hour early, put bowls of water along the platform and, led by the Phillips

girls, scrubbed them clean. Ralph Cocks doubtless came in a wholesome state to Mrs Canfield's class, but he recalled how the

Lecture Hall was warmed chiefly by two large open grates which gave out a gratifying heat. Many of the scholars came from an appalling rookery of slums which stood only the other side of Earnshaw Street where now rise the towers and spires of some bureaucratic palace...

There was plenty of grinding poverty in those days ...

Jessie Bolton,³ a medical student who helped in the Primary, wrote of

-
- 2 Mrs Watson's memories. The author found herself marvelling at the way middle-class parents accepted the social mix - and then remembered how she used to make a joke with her own sons over Sunday night flea hunts; the instinct to protect one's children is strong, and the exposure of a more Christlike approach always a challenge.
 - 3 Jessie came from Melbourne Hall, Leicester, during World War I to study medicine at the Royal Free Hospital, a fellow-student of Myfanwy Phillips. She was a keen Christian from girlhood and intended to

Frankie, aged 1½, who had ‘to come to Sunday School because his mother takes the opportunity of having a good drink on Sundays, and so he is sent with the other boys - their father was killed only a few weeks ago’. Jessie was greatly drawn to the slum children and longed to specialize in children’s work, but supposed a missionary doctor would need general practice:

These poor little bits of children are all God’s lambs ... They stir me up most awfully sometimes, it’s hard not to cry ... most of them are wrong somehow - squints or bow-legged, and they’re all dwarfed and undersized; they have such old faces, yet they’re the jolliest kids out; it’s lovely to see some of the poorest of them giving up a game or toy to a younger brother or sister. I can tell you, it makes me feel sad.



The Girls’ Gym Class, 1907

Writing in 1918 she reflected ‘It’s funny - I couldn’t bear children two years ago and now I love them. Bloomsbury has taught me that if nothing else’.

Dorothy Cocks remembered playing the piano for Esther Phillips’s Beginners’ Class in the vestry behind the pulpit. Lilian Goulden, once taught by Dorothy’s aunt, Miss Fry, added,

‘I think somewhere about 1922 the Sunday School was graded under the leadership of Margaret Phillips... Later on Mr Victor Brown took over ...’

When few had holidays, the Sunday School anniversary and treats were highlights of the year. Of anniversaries, Ralph Cocks wrote, ‘one of the big days of our year ... we packed into one side of the gallery and sang as loudly as we could hymns by H. Ernest Nicol.⁴ In the afternoon we were addressed by Mr Will Cowie, one of the most remarkable speakers to children that I have ever heard. I can still recall him speaking about the Feeding of the Five Thousand and bending down as Andrew to encourage the lad to give his simple meal to his Lord’. Ethel Smith described the summer outings,

become a missionary but died after an appendectomy. Benjamin Gibbon, *Doris Jessie Bolton: A spiritual autobiography*, Religious Tract Society, 1919. One chapter, drawing on her letters, was about her time at Bloomsbury. Margaret Phillips wrote ‘She was one of those *reliable* people of whom there are so few’.

4 Nicol wrote, for example, both tune and words of ‘We’ve a story to tell to the nations’.

... when the sun always shone! First the march six abreast down to Charing Cross Station behind our very own Bloomsbury SS banner, all blue and gold, with tassels. Then the 'special' train chartered for us and at last the arrival in the country. Games, races, and all kinds of sports in which folk of all ages took part, and dignified church officers showed themselves to be quite ordinary 'dads', then the prizes and an enormous tea.

Ethel's memories were not spoiled by the day at Bricket Wood when she 'played ball with a coconut and caught it on my nose, leaving a deformity'. Mrs Watson remembered country outings to Eastcote and South Harrow and two pence as first prize for races.

Jessie Bolton left a teacher's view of a Sunday School Christmas Party:

We arrived soon after dinner to get ready for the children, who had been haunting the doors since 9 o'clock in the morning. At last the door was opened at 3.30, and then the fun began. There was a Christmas tree covered with toys and piles of toys all round it, and of course this was the central attraction, and it was all the teachers could do to restrain them from picking the things up... After a strenuous half hour round the tree the tea came in and then we had a comparative lull. One very small boy - a perfect dear he is, and so saucy - would pour his tea into his saucer, and then put his face right down into it and just wink at you over the edge; he had three cups. We gave them a very good tea, and it was almost pathetic to see how they enjoyed it, and to hear their comments about the Food Controller.

After tea we had wild games. What they liked best was being jumped off the platform by willing teachers, who, by the way, all had stiff shoulders yesterday. Then the teachers did a play that Margaret had written. It was a story of the unkind stepmother who, for the sake of her own horrid child, sent the good child into the forest to find strawberries and violets in mid-winter. There upon the hill she discovers the months, who take pity on her, and March produces violets and June strawberries. It was awfully pretty that scene ... After the play they had their presents, and I played marches hard to keep them in lines.

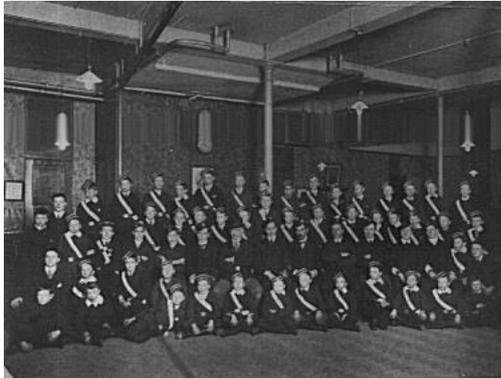
Ethel Smith provided a child's memory of 'The huge Christmas Tree touching the ceiling of the Lecture Hall crowned by a sparkling fairy doll. Its proud recipient was a closely guarded secret until all the other presents had been distributed. It invariably went to the most deprived small girl known to the SS staff'. Margaret Phillips was grateful to Charles King of Mudie's Bookshop, a member of the church and choir, who helped with books for

Christmas presents.

The Ash Wednesday reunions continued. Margaret Phillips, who organized them for some years, found this ‘a curious gathering which met annually for reassembly of its old scholars ... known as the “Ash Wednesday lot”’. Some two hundred would come for a social evening and reminiscence. Enthusiasts for this were Arthur Yates and Fred Mancey, the latter ‘a sort of father figure to the Ash Wednesday gathering and a generous host’.

Midweek there were a variety of meetings and brigades for the children. In the early years these included Boys’ Brigade. W.T. Manns remembered earning a number of blue ribbon medallions before 1910 in the Band of Hope, led by Mr Smith from a Temperance Hotel in Southampton Row.⁵ On Friday evenings there was a Guild of Play for a hundred children, aged two to ten, mostly from the Seven Dials area - ‘we do our utmost to introduce some brightness into their lives’. For the ‘babies’, there were games and organized activities like bead threading, mat weaving, and paper plaiting. The juniors had Morris dancing and old English songs. Both groups ended with a hymn and prayer.⁶

An elderly lady, Grace Launer, told the author in the 1980s that she had always lived in or near Charing Cross Road and used to attend the Cripples’



The Boys’ Brigade, 1907

Parlour as she suffered from rickets.⁷ In 1917 there were seventy-five juniors meeting between 5 and 6.30 for tea and games, with a short address, followed by twenty-three Seniors, who were taught needlework and basket-making. Help was available, in conjunction with the Ragged School Union (later Shaftesbury Society), for surgical appliances and holidays. Home visits were

made every month. In 1917 they appealed for more young people to become

⁵ Letter: W.T. Manns of Plymouth to Margaret Peden, 19 January 1979.

⁶ Report in 1915 Year Book.

⁷ Rickets, a vitamin deficiency disease of children, with softening of bones, especially the spine, and bow legs, used to be common in poorer districts.

‘Crutch and Kindness Friends’. Sir William Treloar provided Christmas hampers for disabled families in need; in 1917 Bloomsbury commended to him forty children. A New Year’s Party for the cripples was arranged by one of the Young Women’s Bible Classes. Bloomsbury’s Parlour received a second-class certificate for ‘exhibits including painting, knitting, and basket work’ at the Cripples Annual Industrial Exhibition in 1917, at which twenty-nine Parlours were represented. The Cripples Parlour still had ninety-two on the register when Dr Lord came in 1930.

As poor local children, Grace and her brothers and sisters were at the chapel almost daily for one activity or another. She joined the Girls’ Guildry, led by Grace How and Esther Phillips (‘the lively one’), and treasured memories of the Sisters in their grey habits, especially Sister Doris and Sister Edith, who ‘was lovely’.⁸ Children and mothers enjoyed outings in ‘open brakes’ to Epping Forest, Boxmoor, and Hayes Common; ‘the worst cases were taken by taxi’ to the station. Poor children were still being sent on holiday in 1927, when fifty-two had a fortnight at Whitstable.

In 1906 Christian Endeavour had been reformed on a broader basis with optional pledge as the Bloomsbury Endeavour Society, but they later conformed to CE again.’ The children’s Christian Endeavour led to a senior group being formed. In 1920 this was ‘well up and running’ with fourteen members. Lilian Goulden was enthusiastic about Christian Endeavour, popular with the more committed children and young people of the church:

some of us went through the Juniors, Intermediates and Seniors. We had to stand up and read aloud a verse of Scripture or Hymn or paper we had written and to this we owe the ability to be heard when speaking in public (not like some people of today who just mumble through their teeth so that nobody can hear a word they say).

She also wrote of the

Girls Guildry run by Miss Annie Phillips⁹ and Miss Grace How. The dress was rather striking, I think, white blouse, navy skirt, red sash over blouse, white straw hat with red band round it, white gloves, black shoes

8 T. Phillips, ‘Twenty years in Central London’, tells how Edith came to him, a suburban lady devastated by sorrow. He asked her to ‘call on two or three appalling cases’. She helped in the Women’s Meeting and ‘when the Sister-in-Charge married the women unanimously elected her leader, and although she had never spoken in public before she came to us, she has become one of the brightest and most original workers in London’.

9 Esther is usually associated with the Guildry, but her sister may well have been earlier.

and stockings, all this for Parades, of course, for drilling, gym slips.

Bloomsbury's girls' drill classes had branched out into wider educational and social activities and in 1911 linked into the Girls' Guildry movement, which began in Glasgow in 1900 to help bridge the potential gap between



Guildry girls around Esther Phillips and Grace How

Sunday School and church membership. Like the Girls' Life Brigade, Guildry was more positively Christian than the Girl Guides. It combined drill and other physical activities with needlework and crafts, singing and basic first aid and nursing. Bloomsbury's Fourth London Company had senior and junior sections and little Sunbeams, drawing eighty to a hundred girls in all. Ancillary activities included the White Ribbon Band

(promoting total abstinence), a Savings Bank, and Prayer Meeting. In 1915 two holiday parties went to the sea at Canvey Island. In 1919 Bloomsbury won the shield in the inter-company competition, but came second to First Ealing the next year, when the new London Centre held its first display at Bloomsbury.¹⁰ Kathleen Reeves helped with the Guildry from 1923 on, when working as a secretary in London, and was the 'Guardian' in her last two years. When she left London in 1931, Lily Brown took over.

Programmes for the Girls' Guildry Annual Display and Prize Giving for 1931, 1932 and 1933, reveal that twelve women and older girls were involved in running this. In 1933 the display was chaired by the wife of the Home Secretary, Lady Gilmour, perhaps secured by Mrs Ernest Brown who presided the previous year. The display items give some idea of the range of



At Federation Sports

¹⁰ Church magazine, May 1920. Other information from Kathleen Reeves, including letters to her from Lily Brown.

activities: eightsome reels and Irish jigs, vaulting horse and physical jerks, flag drill and hoop drill, verse speaking, wand exercises, garden songs, 'peeps at many lands', and the exciting high jump (Guildry v. Scouts). Senior girls went on overseas holidays: Germany in 1937, Switzerland 1938, and Belgium in 1939.¹¹

When Edward Phillips started the Fourth Holborn Scout troop in 1922, Ralph Cocks was one of the first members. A Wolf Cub pack followed. With the constant pressure to find space at Bloomsbury, the scouts turned 'a cellar', presumably under the front pavement, into their den in 1924, with a brazier for a fire. The deacons checked carefully and concluded this was safe. F.E. Kennelly began a Rover Group for older scouts in 1926. That year the Bloomsbury Scouts entertained those from St Giles for a lively evening. The Deacons' Minutes record 'They had got somewhat out of hand and two chairs had been broken', which prompted other deacons to complain about the scouts' 'lack of restraint' and noise disturbing other meetings. They were charged for the repairs. Never a large troop, there were only seventeen scouts in 1928, advertising 'room for recruits'; the deacons agreed to flags being brought into church at parade services.



Girls on holiday at Liège with two Belgian soldiers



Pantomime chorus of juniors, 1938

Dr Lord took a great interest in the Scouts and boys and leaders had a great affection for him. At that time Ralph Reader was a scout leader at the nearby YMCA and Bloomsbury Scout Concerts contributed to his idea for Gang Shows in which Bloomsbury scouts, especially Dinkie Rew, took part. Rew was in the 1954 Show, given before the Queen.

¹¹ Miss A.R. Benzie sent the author an album of Lilian Brown's photographs after they met at Shobha and Mark Westbrook's wedding. She remembered Margaret and Myfanwy Phillips well as members in Dr Lord's time, but did not know they were daughters of a former minister until she read the author's booklet, *Called to the City*.

Dr Lord classed all the children's activities together as the 'Youth Club', with attendance at Sunday School a 'club loyalty'. The Youth Club put on pantomimes, e.g. Dick Whittington in 1937, and Puss in Boots in 1938, at the YMCA's St George's Hall. These were revived after the war. By June 1939 the Youth Club also boasted a harmonica band.



The Institute Billiard Room

Young people's activities

Most young people plunged into adult life at fourteen, when school was left behind and they went out to work, the more fortunate into apprenticeships leading to skilled trades. Many 'lived in' at work, as in previous centuries. Bourne & Hollingsworth, an Oxford Street department store, had a fine hostel nearby in Gower Street, and a number of Bloomsbury's young men lived at a good Club in Cartwright Gardens. Many, however, endured harsher conditions. With shorter working hours they sought comfort and friendship in the evenings. As Margaret Phillips remembered, 'There was no cheap public entertainment and no leisure occupation for young people without money, so anything the Church could lay on was well patronized'.



Sister Connie

The Institute catered for them, providing a club where they might relax without unwholesome temptations. Phillips observed that in a small country town he would probably stress the value of home life, but in the city, where respectable young couples went to pubs for lack of alternative, he advocated institutional work.¹² The rooms opened at 6 p.m. midweek for reading and writing, with refreshments and activities from 7.30 to 10.30; Saturday hours were 3 to 11, and Sunday 4.45-6.45 and 8.30-10.30.

By December 1908 the Institute had 200 members. The Rules, agreed by

¹² *Baptist Times* 17 May 1907.

Central Committee in March 1907, determined that members must be over seventeen and pay an annual subscription of 6s 0d (quarterly 2s 0d). New members were vetted by the Committee of Management, whose officers were appointed by Central Committee, with six men and six women elected from the Institute membership. Smoking was permitted in the Billiard and Smoking Rooms; card games and gambling were strictly prohibited. Central Committee was willing to pay for a new billiard cloth in December 1909 since this was ‘a good source of revenue’.

In 1910 Phillips told Central Committee that this flagship for the ‘institutional church’ was not really a success: ‘he thought that very few such Institutions are ... the young people of the Business Houses for whom they are intended do not use them’. Whitfields Institute had experienced similar comparative failure. Bloomsbury’s was too small and inconvenient but, since they needed the rooms for Sunday classes, it was allowed to continue,



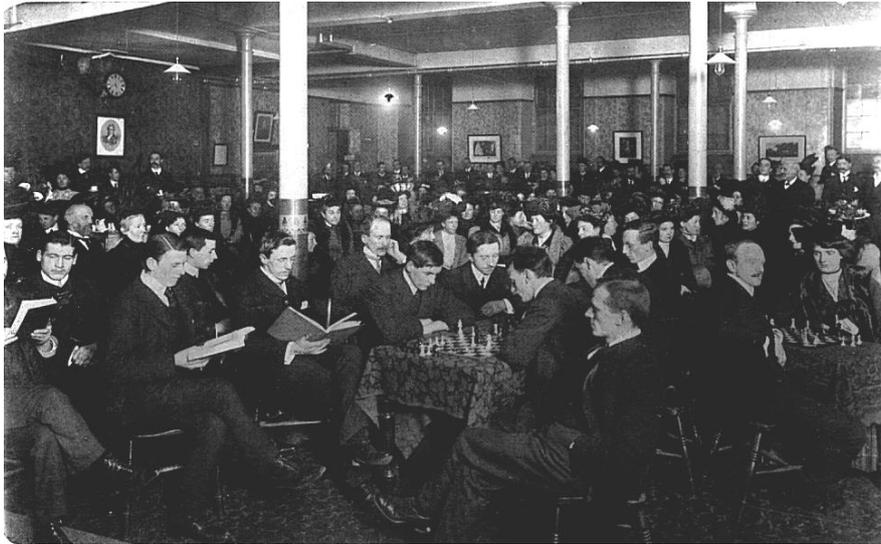
The Institute Ladies Room

although ‘very doubtful if the Institute justifies its existence’. By the end of the year, it was ‘becoming a sort of home for many young people who though belonging to Bloomsbury did not necessarily live in the district’. It served the church’s young people but largely failed in terms of outreach.

In September 1911 the Management Committee asked to disband and the rooms were thrown open to the young people who started three new classes there. They wanted organized educational and social gatherings more than relaxation rooms. Detailed records are slight, but French, German and Nursing classes are mentioned. Meanwhile, activities at the chapel went well: the Social Union on Tuesdays was excellent, really touching the classes they sought to reach, and the Sisters contacted many young business women.

The initiative for regular social evenings came from the men, but Phillips wanted at least one evening for mixed young adults. The Bloomsbury Social Union had a ‘distinctively religious part’ which Phillips conducted.¹³ The Lecture Room was open from 6.30 to 10.30 for ‘a combination of Bible-Class, Christian Endeavour, Parliamentary Debating Society, and of every other

13 Central Committee minutes, 15 October 1906.



*The Social Union, 1907
in the Bloomsbury basement hall*

society that is worth its sauce'. It sounds similar to the Young Men's Association of Brock's time. The 1915 Year Book reported surprisingly good numbers: having moved to the upper lounge in 1914, they returned to the basement for safety because of Zeppelin raids but continued to enjoy 'a bright pleasant evening' to which young people could invite visitors.

Bloomsbury also offered these young adults Sunday teas and various sports clubs. Presumably Regent's Park facilities were in too great demand, so for some years the Tennis and Cricket Clubs met in Old Oak Road, Shepherds Bush. Cricket lapsed during the war, but tennis, swimming and hockey continued. Sports clubs helped keep 'the young people of the congregation together during the summer'.¹⁴ In 1915 a new study circle on Tuesday evenings was formed 'as the outcome of a conversation on the tennis-ground recently'; the focus was 'the study and discussion of problems aroused by the War, more particularly in its relations to the teachings of Christ.' As London University developed its centre not far off in Bloomsbury, a considerable body of students began to come to the church. A group of male medical students were early members of the Institute and keen supporters of the sports clubs.

14 Central Committee minutes, 6 September 1909.

Alice Canfield remembered Margaret Phillips's Elocution Class putting on plays, like 'Quality Street' in 1920, starring Olwyn Phillips, and 'Mice and Men', lit by Will Canfield. Young Ralph Cocks had a walk-on part in 'Bardell v. Pickwick', performed in the church lounge (the large central room on the top floor). The Christian Endeavour Society produced a play about 'William Carey' which toured other London churches, raising funds for mission. With churches' inadequate washing facilities Bert Ransley felt he looked a suspicious character travelling home in the tube in brown make-up, with a suitcase full of white cotton robes! All these activities recognized that young people needed opportunity to relax without corrupting influences.

Leaders emerged among the young people. Walter Freeman led a monthly rambling party on country walks and visits to places of interest. Arthur Matthews was Speaker of the Parliament, and A.E. Cocks the Leader of the Opposition.¹⁵ In 1928 the

Bloomsbury Parliament still had 150 members debating social and political matters. Mr Cocks also led a Young Men's Bible Class. These men all became

devoted deacons in due course.



Sister Joyce's Bible Class

There was a Young Men's Brotherhood and various Bible Classes; there were three classes just for younger women on Sunday afternoons by 1917. Alice Canfield remembered being in a class of thirty to forty women led first by Sister Joyce, then by Mrs Harry Jones, and later by Miss

Bolton. One class had sixty to eighty business girls for some years. Sister Doris started another Women's Bible Class in 1928, with up to fifty members. The first two years they studied St John's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. The Sunday Afternoon Fellowship developed from the Sunday Bible Classes and was held in the upstairs lounge. Tea was served downstairs (5d per head in 1915), followed by a prayer meeting and for some years community hymn

¹⁵ Ralph Cocks, *op.cit.*

singing until the evening service. In 1927 they reverted to a 'musical and solo programme' for the half-hour before the service. They tried a monthly Young People's Service, organized by the societies and choir in 1924, but decided this was not worth repeating the next year.

Mrs Canfield remembered the lower hall fairly full for Sunday teas, and the Institute lounge open nightly, with two people in charge (usually the Brays), serving light refreshments to those from business houses. 'We did not rise to providing lunches then, but a great many teas were served', recalled Dorothy Cocks, 'and I used to help to cut masses of sandwiches for various functions; many of these were for outside organisations meeting in the church, and quite a large revenue was collected as a result of these catering efforts'. Once Mrs Percy Bray proved catering could be profitable, the church began to equip itself. In 1927 Mrs Moule gave some tea urns. With the LBA coming annually for tea and sometimes lunch for 250, Mrs Cocks hired some equipment but decided to buy cutlery. She asked for a grant of £10 towards the cost of £30, but the Central Committee decided to reimburse her husband in full. Catering tables were purchased in 1937, but it was November 1947 before the church bought a refrigerator.

Meetings often brought together those whose occupation gave them something in common. The Girls' Fellowship for Domestic Servants drew sixty in 1931. There was a noonday prayer circle for young people from one neighbouring business house. A prayer meeting for students developed by November 1937 into the Students' Union, meeting monthly on a Sunday evening. The president of this in 1938 was David Charley, a medical student and later BU President.

A minute book survives for the Bloomsbury Institute Fellowship, January 1920-September 1931. This was open to all but mainly drew young adults. They were organized into several committees: Reception and Social, Musical, and Prayer. Sister Doris was in charge of arrangements, but until 1925 Phillips usually chaired meetings. Each year a motto was chosen: in 1920 the young people wanted 'Ready for anything' but that was deemed unsuitable! Instead they took 'Live, love, serve and sacrifice'. The programme included addresses and discussions on Bible topics and applied Christianity, like 'Should politics be preached from the pulpit?' and 'Is my religion a reality or founded on tradition'. Frank Whitehead asked 'Can a business man be a Christian under modern conditions?' and Percy Bray spoke of 'My experiences as a prisoner in Germany'. Women often led sessions. They had occasional musical evenings, and usually one outside speaker each month. One term in 1925 they studied 'Jesus the Revealer', from *The Search*, the Adult School Union book,

and the next the ASU material on 'The Fundamentals'. They resisted too highbrow a programme: the 'primary aim should be mainly Christian subjects and aspects of Christian belief and life.' The 1929 programme deliberately reverted to more mixed subjects, including an Indian on 'The West through Eastern Eyes', and Margaret Phillips on 'Romance', soon followed by 'Is war inevitable?' and a debate 'That Disarmament is undesirable and impossible'. In the early 1920s the Fellowship was responsible for the Cripples' Summer Outing. Later they arranged a social for 'elderly ladies in this locality'.

When Dr Lord came there was some frank talking in the committee about the Fellowship. It was established that Dr Lord would chair alternate weeks. They adopted a Fellowship Prayer which he arranged and helped with the church's Young Life Week in October 1930. Some joint meetings were held with the Whitfield's Fellowship.

Work with men

Spearheading outreach to the immediate neighbourhood were the Men's and Women's Meetings. A large Men's Meeting gathered in the chapel on Sunday afternoons with topical subjects: 300 came regularly by 1907, and 800 to hear Will Crooks MP on 'Conversion by Contact' at the 1907 anniversary. Phillips was good at relating the gospel to issues of the day but he could not speak every Sunday afternoon and it was not easy to find enough suitable speakers 'with the highest tone'.¹⁶

Central Committee minutes mention as particularly good Canon Bickersteth of Canterbury and Vicar Waldron of Brixton. Avoiding controversy, they kept to 'spiritual subjects' at election time. In December 1910 they noted that the Men's Meeting had been well attended in spite of



Sister Lottie recruiting for the Men's Meeting, 1909

¹⁶ Central Committee minutes, 17 October 1910.



Some of the men

Whitfield's alternative attraction of both Dr Clifford and Silvester Horne 'fresh from his political triumphs'.

It was not always easy to get the middle and working classes to mix: in November 1909 Central Committee heard of 'a deplorable spirit of caste among the men coming from the Business houses which operates against the spirit of Brotherhood until their ideas are changed by the Spirit of the Christ'. Tom Phillips did not overlook the more respectable folk in the high mansions around the church. According to Sister Maggie, they mustered a large number of faithful supporters who visited homes regularly with invitations to church activities, especially the men's and women's meetings. 'We were invited to go to their homes for prayer and discussion on the work which resulted in further large numbers attending'.

The scale of this work with men was, within Bloomsbury's ministry, unique to Tom Phillips's early years. In the difficult years after World War I work with women and children went on strongly, and much was still done with young people, not least those prepared to give serious thought to Bible study and issues of the day, but the limited sources do not suggest an ongoing large work with mature men, so deeply affected by the war and the subsequent Depression. If the numeric decline was mainly of men, that would have accentuated the sense of disappointment.

All Bloomsbury meetings spawned ancillaries. By March 1906 the Men's Meeting used the north half of the partitioned basement on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings, spending £10 on chairs and games. The deacons conceded that 'to make the meetings a success' smoking should be permitted. Clearly these evenings were aimed at the younger men who moved to the Institute in New Oxford Street a few months later.

The Men's Meeting formed its own choir and a brass band, with members purchasing their own instruments. To recruit for the Men's Meeting some men made a 'Saturday evening perambulation of the District' with a band and 'occasional stoppages', where a member would speak and Mr Phillips give a 'terse presentation of Gospel truth'. A Slate Club early Saturday evenings helped men save against illness and misfortune. At a social in 1920 the leaders discovered that most of the original Slate Club members had moved away but returned regularly from places like Kennington and Harringay!

The Poor Man's Lawyer was ready to help those in need. Margaret Phillips remembered Mr Hogan who lived in Endell Street with his sister, a scholarly pair who gave parties for the young people with 'intellectual competitions'. Alice Canfield's memory was of another Poor Man's Lawyer, Mr Scott-Duckers, so scruffy he appeared near destitute himself. On first finding him in the vestry, she actually called the caretaker to throw this suspicious individual out!

The work of social redemption continued, for 'all true institutional work is also spiritual work'¹⁷ and they went into the slums with Gospel hope. Tom Phillips tried walking the streets in scruffy clothes to experience how destitute men were treated. The church helped the unemployed find work and rescued some of the 'down-and-outs'. Bloomsbury people regularly penetrated the common lodging-houses. Sister Maggie told how she and Phillips would go

after the evening services down to the doss houses, and there we would get into touch with these sad people. I have seen them standing outside Bloomsbury and pointing to Mr Phillips saying, 'There's the man who helps us find jobs', and he did. Besides, out of the dross he found gold, - for many stood through the years and helped us to win others.

It was not just the pastoral staff either. The Lodging House Mission was led by J.P. Francis for many years and later by Frank Whitehead, tiny in body but big in heart. He worked for the National Deposit Friendly Society. They

¹⁷ *Baptist Times*, 20 November 1908.

tried to touch cheerless lives. Ethel Smith had her own vivid memories:

On one Sunday evening each month a group went to conduct a short service at about 6 pm at the Men's Lodging House just off Drury Lane. It was not considered unbecoming for a young girl to recite a temperance poem at these services, and 'The lips that touch liquor shall never touch mine' must have sounded a bit incongruous from a delicate-looking fair girl of around eleven years surrounded by the London 'drop-outs' of those days. Some of the men listened, some went on cooking kippers or bloaters or a bit of bacon for their meal. The smells, hardly pleasant, almost assail my nostrils again as I write. The group usually arrived back at Bloomsbury in time for the sermon in the evening service and how welcome was that after church cup of tea or coffee on those Sundays!



Ethel Smith in later life

Mrs Canfield also remembered the grim smell of those basement kitchens, with fish over the fire adding its aroma to dirt and sweat. She recalled visits to three lodging houses each month, Bruce House, Parker Street, and, the worst, Shorts Gardens, and regular visits to the Workhouse near Soho Square too. For a short time they went to the Lodging House in Red Lion Square: when Alice first told her parents she had been there, her father exclaimed, 'Where that murder was committed last week!' These young people went in large groups with the Sisters and found that 'a bright hour' was appreciated.¹⁸ They still took the portable organ to monthly meetings at Bruce House, and the Parker Street lodging-house in 1928, commenting in the Year Book, 'Most of those we meet at the Lodging Houses are old Sunday School boys'. By then they were helped by members of the Lay Preachers' Association. In Dr Lord's day they reported audiences of 50-100 homeless men.

Open-air services, run by the Sisters, were held in front of the chapel and outside a public house at Cambridge Circus. Again they took a harmonium and Alice Canfield and Edith Cracknell used to sing solos. They found the audiences generally appreciative so the young women maintained this witness through the war years.

18 1915 Year Book.

Meetings for women

The Women's Meeting or Sisterhood (earlier called the Mothers' Meeting) on Monday evenings was huge: by December 1908 there were 1,100 on the books, with 700-800 at each meeting, and these numbers kept up through the 1914-18 war. A crèche was provided. Mrs Phillips was President, but a deaconess, supported by lay volunteers, led the Gospel service. Various clubs assisted those who came - like the Self Help Fund, Penny Bank, and Blanket

Club. On Thursday evenings there was a class for new converts.

With many from the poor district nearby not regular church-goers, there was the occasional problem. When Alice Canfield and her friend first went to Bloomsbury to see Sister Lottie, the Sisterhood had just ended and two departing women had a fearful fight on the doorstep. The girls were



Sister Joyce ministering to sick children, a family of seven living in one room

not impressed with their sisterliness! Sister Maggie told of the church workers' despair over Mrs Laurence who:

would sit at the back of the church completely fuddled with drink. She would keep up a running commentary through the whole service every Monday. One day a deputation of three workers came to me saying, 'Maybe we should turn her out.' As our motto was 'Every woman a sister' I asked, 'Can you turn out your sister?' She remained! At last they came again in desperation. Said they, 'Maybe God could do something about her', and they suggested they'd come next Wednesday to Bloomsbury and pray from 3.30 to 4.00 o'clock and would I go and see her then? I passed them on the street wending their way to the vestry. Entering a lower flat ... I found Mrs Laurence lying on the floor in a drunken sleep. No fire and dirt abounding everywhere. Lighting the fire, I then waited beside her with a cup of tea ready. She stirred. I saw by my watch it was ten minutes to 4 o'clock. She then woke up and drank her

tea ... Suddenly, falling on her knees, she cried out, 'O God! If there is a God, can you do anything about a person like me?' I looked at my watch. Just 4 o'clock. An answer to the prayers of three simple women ... Later she rejoined her husband and boys, who became in time members of one of our churches.

At Christmas the poorest were helped to give their families a special dinner. In 1906 the deacons wondered earnestly whether a Goose Club would be better. George Jones came to explain how Ferme Park's Goose Club worked, but the deacons concluded this would not work well at Bloomsbury with 'a poorer class of people', so they continued to give a hundred free dinners. In 1928 the deacons questioned the Christmas Club and received a letter signed by twelve women in appreciation: 'It is known for a fact that many, many families would have been without Christmas Dinners had they not have been able to pay in small amounts into the Club, and so to obtain a really fine parcel to help make their Christmas much brighter'. The deacons contented themselves with asking the Sisters to purchase goods from local tradespeople.

Mrs Lord remembered the Christmas Club holding a big sale each year in the basement with lots of turkeys and geese, and other festive provisions: 'It used to look like Smithfield Market'! Mr and Mrs Cocks, as treasurers to the Sisterhood, were responsible for ordering poultry and groceries for 700 families, perhaps through the butcher's shop below their apartment.

For younger mothers the Pleasant Thursday Afternoon meeting was started, with its own crèche. By 1920 a number of these attended Sunday worship, and the church had just received two of the mothers into membership, along with one's husband. In one afternoon dedication service, five babies were committed to Christ's care. That year these young mothers and their children had a boisterous river trip to Kew Gardens: the report reads as though the young Sister in charge found the day nerve-racking!

The women solved the 'caste' problem by having different meetings.¹⁹ The ladies of the church had a branch of the Baptist Women's League (BWL), run by Mrs Phillips, with ninety members in 1915. There was still also the Women's Missionary Auxiliary. In 1909 the BWL established a Ladies' League of Help, and that December sought permission to hire a gas cooker 'for sweetmaking undertaking'. The BWL ladies made large numbers of

¹⁹ No contemporary suggestion that this might be inappropriate has been found; perhaps the church women were just more realistic about class differences than the men. FB

flannel shirts for prisoners of war in Germany, as well as new baptismal gowns for the church.

The Home Circle Class for young women over eighteen spent an hour in sewing, crochet work, painting, and reading, or making baby garments 'so needed in our Women's Meetings', followed at 8.30 p.m. by a participatory study time, using a devotional book, like H.E. Fosdick's *Manhood of the Master* in 1920. In March 1939 the Home Circle debated 'Should women enter the ministry?' Bloomsbury with all the Sisters and women deacons must have come as a culture shock to young people from some Baptist churches, and the place of women was often the subject of discussions in the various societies' programmes.

For girls drawn to the 'bright lights', there were monthly midnight suppers for 'girls that Sister Emily had met during her walks in the neighbourhood at night'.²⁰ The Sisters would invite thirty to forty girls. 'After supper Mr Phillips would talk to them like a brother, and tears were in many eyes as they left - one here and one there began to live a new life and work was found for them'. Returning to London years later Sister Maggie was thrilled to find some of those rescued in responsible jobs as buyers and managers.

On Fridays there were teas for theatre girls. These were begun by Mr Forbes, but continued by the church from 1910 at his widow's pressing request. Some sixty 'ballet girls' (dancers from the music halls), came; the Sisters found them beautiful but disillusioned. Sister Maggie wrote: 'We were so happy when we could persuade one here and there to return to their homes and help them to do so'.

Prostitutes and ballet girls told the Sisters how impossible it was to find respectable lodgings when they first came to London, and so they were lured into degrading work. Sister Maggie, still young herself, set out to test this late one evening, dressed as a respectable girl out of work, with nowhere to sleep



A BWL outing, seated are Mrs Bray, Mrs Phillips and Mrs Dodkin

²⁰ Central Committee, 4 January 1909.

and 6d in her pocket. She tried a women's lodging house in a basement, but could only sit on a form there. She got into conversation with a desperate newcomer and persuaded her to try the Central Church next day, whence she was helped to return home. A policeman directed Maggie to a religious house but, although after midnight, she was turned away as she had no reference. Finally she followed some girls into a West End house where she was kindly received and given coffee and a bun, but soon realized it was 'a house of ill fame'. She reflected that 'The children of this world are wiser than the children of light'. It was clear how easily girls could be tempted into prostitution. She and Tom Phillips worked hard to get decent lodgings and hostels open to any girl in need, and the church advertised their readiness to find lodgings for young men and women coming to London and to arrange for them to be met at the railway termini.²¹

Mrs Lord remembered this ministry of escort and accommodation continuing to occupy considerable Bloomsbury time in their early years. In the 1930s Alice Lord largely confined her church activity to the Women's Meeting and the Home Circle, but after the meetings she would 'often walk to and fro along Oxford Street between Shaftesbury Avenue and Tottenham Court Road till 11 p.m. talking to girls about their troubles.'

The Women's Meeting or Sisterhood had dropped to 300 but in the 1930s grew again to 500, bringing 'good cheer and fellowship into drab lives'. These working-class women were not all trained in church ways. Mrs Lord remembered ruefully one trip, with five full coaches, when the return half-way stop was at a public house, as few places would take coach parties. The deaconess sent Mrs Lord to round up the 'very jolly' party. She was so horrified she felt unable to attend the Women's Meetings the next few weeks, as the quietest way to express her disapproval.

Sister Doris arranged a Women's Campaign week in April 1937. In 1938 a new Tuesday morning meeting, the Women's Christian Fellowship, was introduced to deepen spiritual life.

Free Saturday Concerts

A great attraction in Phillips's first years were the free Saturday Concerts, packing the chapel to the upper gallery with Guards' bands wedged into the choir stalls behind the pulpit, from which the sergeant conducted. Phillips

21 e.g. on back of Anniversary leaflet, 1910.

would give a ten-minute Gospel address on some topical issue. The *Baptist Times* of 6 October 1905 reported on 'The Costers' Saturday Night: A new departure at Bloomsbury'. The Londoner was used to the busy Tottenham Court Road area on Saturday nights with shops, stalls, and music halls, but

to find a dense throng, with attendant policemen, outside a Baptist chapel at 7 o'clock on a Saturday evening is something that altogether upsets his sense of the fitness of things. And when ... he finds the side door surrounded by Coldstream Guards in brilliant uniforms, he gives up trying to explain the phenomenon and goes inside to seek enlightenment.

By 8 p.m. the chapel was packed, with people sitting in the aisles and up the gallery steps, as well as filling the upper 'birdcage': there were 'costers; harassed housewives; young people predominate; and the inevitable baby, a County Councillor or two, a sprinkling of well-known ministers, journalists, church members and deacons'.

For this series of free concerts, the church had engaged some fifty well-known artists, so the concerts were 'not shoddy though free'. Tom Phillips's first topical talk addressed the Congo atrocities and the nation's responsibilities. Avoiding party politics, he argued for morality: 'What we want as a nation is Jesus Christ at the Foreign Office ... It is of no use being theologically sound if we are ethically rotten'.

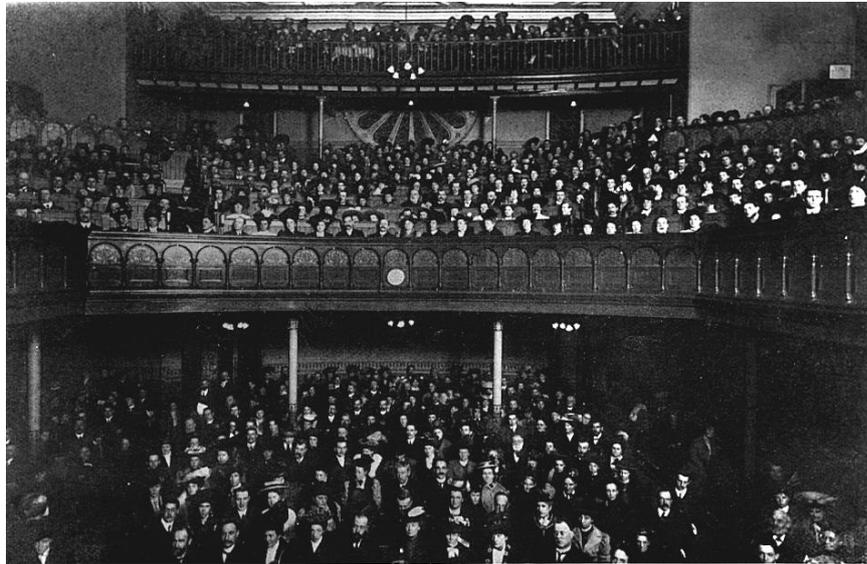
At the end of the second season the *Baptist Times* looked back over forty-six concerts, so popular that often hundreds had to be turned away. Arranged by F.A. Atkins, 'a well-known journalist',²² they enjoyed the best singers and reciters and the bands of the Grenadier, Coldstream, Irish and Second Life Guards. A special Sacred Concert was arranged for Good Friday, with the Hon. Artillery Company Band, and Mrs Nicholson as soloist.²³ Sale of programmes and collections more than covered costs, leaving a small profit for the church's institutions.²⁴

22 Frederick Anthony Atkins (1864-1929) contributed to a variety of journals, including the *Christian World*, *News Chronicle* and *Manchester Guardian*. His books included *Moral Muscle: a book for young men*, 1891.

23 *Baptist Times* 29 March 1907.

24 *Baptist Times* 15 May 1908, Table Talk: cost of artists and band £268, printing and advertising £84, hire of pianos etc. £29; programmes and collection £452.

But there were problems: in October 1907 Dr Hogan and Mr Martindale drew the deacons' attention to the over-crowding: camp stools blocking the aisles would not be allowed by the London County Council (LCC) in a place of entertainment! Central Committee heard on 1 June 1908 that the LCC, 'whilst declaring that they had every desire to treat the work at Bloomsbury as of a philanthropic and charitable nature, yet desired that in consequence of the Saturday evening concerts being held in the winter, the committee should apply for a music licence'. Holborn Borough Council threatened to assess the



A Saturday concert audience, 1907

church for rates if used for other than religious purposes. Phillips, instructed to apply for the licence, could see no difference in principle between his outreach concerts and St Paul's organ recitals.²⁵ It all became too difficult, and Mr Atkins could no longer arrange the concerts, so they were dropped.

There were concerts in later years but less ambitious. The deacons realized again in 1926 that by admission charges 'the Church was making itself liable for local rates and also (if the charge exceeded 6d) for Entertainment Duty'. Societies must not charge, but might sell programmes. Again in 1932 Central Committee reminded the church that there could be no charge for admission to

²⁵ *Baptist Times* 3 April 1908.

concerts, but programmes might be sold in advance and on the day at 2d or less, 'except a higher amount is voluntarily offered'. A silver collection for the society's fund was permissible. This lesson, it seems, has to be learned afresh in each generation.

On New Year's Eve Phillips used to get a well-known band, like that of the Horse Guards, to lead a party through the streets, stopping at each public house to deliver invitations. They would return to the chapel a larger body, though some were the worse for drink, and Phillips would preach to a crowded chapel about making a new start.

The Grand Bazaar

Combining a social occasion with the urgent need to raise funds, a three-day Bazaar was held in December 1908. A huge amount of effort went in to achieving the £500 target. A surviving programme described the stalls: handmade children's clothes, cushions, art needlework, fancy goods, jams, jellies, tea, household articles, electro-plated goods, pottery, books - including a special compilation of members' favourite quotations, fruit and flowers in a rustic summer-house, itself for sale, refreshments, a Christmas tree, and a photographic studio. There was a weighing machine, a cake competition, a display of 'animated photographs', an electric fish pond, a shooting gallery, and a parcels room where purchases could be wrapped, with delivery at moderate charges. With all this effort they cleared the year's deficit.

The Baptist Women's League and young people of the Athletics Club decided to run a Sale of Work in December 1911 and raised £106 for church funds. At another large Bazaar in 1925 they expected so many that a policeman was engaged to control admittance. They were strict over children, allowing only two per adult on Wednesday, and none alone. On Thursday children who had made items for sale were allowed tickets. After the manse was purchased, annual Sales of Work covered the interest on the bank loan.

Charitable giving

Apart from supporting the church's various agencies, Bloomsbury continued to collect regularly for the BMS, Baptist Home Mission, Baptist colleges, the National Refuges for Homeless Children, and a variety of local or topical charitable appeals. A Save the Children Fund collection in 1920 prompted church ladies to make nearly 300 garments for the needy in Armenia, Serbia and Northern France, devastated by the recent war. Distressed areas could

command a generous response, whether in distant China or Pontypridd. In June 1926 two retiring collections were taken for miners' wives and children suffering in the prolonged Coal Strike. In the 1920s the Salvation Army was sometimes permitted to take a retiring offering at Bloomsbury.

In December 1924 the deacons discussed the proposed Ministers' Annuity Fund, liking the principle though judging the details needed more thought. When this was launched as the BU Superannuation Fund in May 1926, seeking a capital sum of £300,000, the deacons were happy to support it. The church also made efforts to help clear BMS deficits. In 1925 the deacons heard that the LBA wanted to raise a Jubilee Fund of £60,000, from which Bloomsbury would receive an annual grant of 'a few hundreds'. Harry Jones suggested Bloomsbury might raise £250 towards this but with the competing claims the church only managed £86 by October 1927.

Political action was played down more than in the Victorian period, but a League of Nations branch met monthly. In April 1926 Gilbert Roebuck, a young deacon, urged some action over the Betting Tax. Tom Phillips agreed to draft a letter to the Chancellor, Sir Douglas Hogg, and to local MPs. The Chancellor replied, and Phillips took part in a delegation to Winston Churchill on the matter. The church arranged some Peace Society meetings in February 1928, seeking Maud Royden and Sybil Thorndike among the speakers. These went well and Phillips suggested other topical series, such as 'Co-operation between masters and men'. In July 1928 the church was urged by its League of Nations branch to support the call for an international agreement on arms reduction and for arbitration to settle international disputes.

Although denominational support was disappointing, and space and money were always restricted, the enthusiasm and loyalty of the members enabled Bloomsbury to bring a remarkable range of people together under its roof, brightening drab lives, dispensing hope, and winning many for Christ.

17

FRED TOWNLEY LORD
MINISTER OF BLOOMSBURY 1930-1958

'Constant cheerfulness through good times and bad'

Guildhaume Myrddin Evans of Dr Lord

Fred Townley Lord was born in Burnley, Lancashire, on 27 October 1893 into a 'working-man's home where the Bible and prayer were familiar.'¹ His father had worked in cotton mills from the age of six. They moved to Accrington and Cannon Street Baptist Church. The *Accrington Observer* in 1950 described his parents as 'Mr & Mrs Jonathan Lord of Haywood Street, prominent Baptists and temperance workers, who attained their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary in 1943'. To their granddaughter Monica they were 'lovely, dependable, salt-of-the-earth people, proud of their younger son's achievements'. When, as rather deaf old people, they retired to their room to pray, their voices used to echo around the house, a source of amusement to young grandchildren, but impressive in retrospect.



Fred Townley Lord

Their younger son won scholarships to Accrington Grammar School and Manchester University. Called to ministry early in his teens, he proceeded to Rawdon College, winning a Ward Scholarship in his first year, and gaining the London BD degree.

In the Cannon Street church he met Sarah Alice Entwistle, whom he married in 1917, a year into his first pastorate at Turret Green Baptist Church,

¹ Press cutting, by 'BW', but otherwise unidentified, in F.T. Lord's presidential scrapbook, kindly lent to the present writer by his daughter, Monica George. This chapter draws on this and two other scrapbooks, which Dr Lord compiled with a view to a history of Bloomsbury, given to the author by his widow. Unfortunately Dr Lord's sense of history did not rise to ensuring that press cuttings were clearly identified by journal title and date. The author also has notes of her lengthy interview with Mrs Lord nearly thirty years ago. A slightly fuller account appeared in Faith Bowers, *Called to the city: three ministers of Bloomsbury*, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 1989.

Ipswich. They had two children, Marcus and Monica. As a minister he was in a 'reserved occupation' during World War I but, although newly wed, chose to go to France with the YMCA as Staff Lecturer in Social History and Citizenship with the Army Service Schools, British Expeditionary Force, working with off-duty soldiers behind the trenches. Howard Williams remembered Lord's amused delight in his one certificate for service during World War I: an elaborate one recording that he played cricket for the YMCA at Ipswich!

In 1920 he became minister at Acton in West London. There he had 'notable success in drawing about him a strong band of able young men'.² He was 'the very model of a modern Baptist minister',³ receiving glowing commendations and attracting the attention of leading Baptists. Seymour Price, church secretary at Acton, remembered:

the vigour with which problems were tackled, the fertility and originality of the minister's mind, and the long and strenuous hours he worked ... Dr Lord kept the church at the spiritual level which made great things possible ... He works, he gets on with the job instead of philosophizing on the glory of hard work.⁴

While at Acton he gained the London DD in 1925, then the youngest recipient of that degree, with a dissertation on 'The Christian conception of soul and body in relation to modern psychology'. Published as *The Unity of Body and Soul*, it was recommended by the *Church Times* as a thorough, careful and important contribution on the theory and practice of church life.

From 1926-29 Lord was pastor of Queen's Road Baptist Church, Coventry. Students were drawn to his ministry and he developed a strong interest in the Student Christian Movement (SCM). His ministry was widening: it was said that he could normally be found in one of three places - the pulpit on Sunday, the golf-course on a weekday, and the railway station on any day! He listed his recreations in *Who's Who* as golf and tennis, and 'was keen to stress the recreational side of church life, the uniformed organizations, the tennis, bowls and rugby clubs',⁵ believing a healthy body was the fit habitation for a healthy mind and soul. This emphasis attracted young people, but equipped him less

2 E.A. Payne, *Baptist Handbook* obituary.

3 Clyde Binfield, *Pastors and People: The biography of a Baptist Church, Queen's Road, Coventry*, 1984, p.183.

4 In the press profile Seymour Price wrote on the BWA President, 1950.

5 Binfield, *op.cit.*, p.193.

well to face disease. Some mentioned reluctance to visit the sick, even close colleagues, as a pastoral weakness.⁶ He had a ‘fine manner and fine mind’ and his pulpit skills were masterly, yet some in Queen’s Road found him lightweight. He was described as a ‘scholar preacher’ and had proved himself a capable scholar, but his knowledge and wide reading was used to inform and illustrate rather than to display pedantry. He preferred to speak and write at a ‘popular’ level and was concerned with Christian life in the present. One Coventry worshipper recorded the three questions Lord said the world would demand of the Church: ‘What kind of God do you worship? What kind of fellowship do you produce? What kind of impact do you make on the social order?’⁷

In 1927 he turned down the new Baptist Union post in Young People’s and Social Service Work, and when Bloomsbury first approached him he declined. A year of searching later, Bloomsbury returned to him and this time Lord was persuaded, under some pressure from denominational leaders, that this was God’s calling. He led the Bloomsbury church for the next twenty-eight and a half years.

At the opening service, Lord’s broad approach struck a young member, Miss E.T.P. Frame, then fifteen:



Dr Lord

Anyone who heard him speak could see that he is broadminded in the extreme, for he was not only preaching to the Baptist Churches, but embraced all: Roman Catholics, Church of England, Anglo-Catholics etc., in his sermon. He said that whatever a person’s religion or nationality may be, if he is a true Christian he will be able to journey through life as a brother to everyone, bringing peace and amity with him wherever he goes. Surely there is nothing narrow-minded in that!⁸

In January 1930 the family moved somewhat reluctantly to London. Mrs Lord had no wish to bring her children to central London, with Marcus in poor health, so the church wooed them with a suburban manse in Hendon Way, Golders Green, whence they commuted to

⁶ Author’s conversations with various Bloomsbury members from his time.

⁷ This paragraph draws on Clyde Binfield, *Pastors and People*, 1984, p.183.

⁸ One of Dr Lord’s press cuttings, journal not identified, possibly the *Baptist Times*.

the church by public transport in the early days and later by car.⁹ A move to Gower Street was once contemplated, but it came to nothing.

Alice Lord felt so long a pastorate was only viable because World War II divided it into three quite different periods. Pre-war the multi-faceted work inherited from Phillips needed re-invigoration but there were still large numbers. During the war, with very few helpers, Townley and Alice Lord kept the central witness and service going for those who had to be in the centre bereft of its resident population. Post-war the work had to be rebuilt from a very small surviving base. In the 1950s, when Dr Lord presided over the Baptist World Alliance, his ministry embraced the world. His mixture of dignity and geniality went down particularly well in America, perhaps better than in prim and proper mid-century England. For the present author it was the American press cuttings which really 'brought him to life again'.

The man

The American press delighted in his appearance, imposing like his name yet homely too. He was 'a happy looking man with a somewhat rolypoly silhouette and an optimistic outlook', and 'a jovial Englishman with a twinkle in his eye and a happy outlook on life ... could well be Lord Somebody or other or, by the look of him, Winston Churchill's younger brother'. One 'Pen Portrait' began:

Big, jovial F. Townley Lord ... came into Georgia last week and in four days did a superb job of selling Baptists on the magnitude of their task ... Neither his 57 years nor the terrific pace that had been set showed in the vigor with which he threw himself into every address or in the warm clasp he gave to every outstretched hand ... Few men capture their audiences as quickly as does Dr Lord. He has a keen sense of humor, which contradicts his dignity. In it all, is an urgency of responsibility to draw Baptists together for their world-wide task of evangelism... Dr Lord is one of the great preachers of the world ... He speaks eloquently, never faltering for a word, and with a forceful message.¹⁰

When he came to Bloomsbury, a minister's wife present at his opening service wrote that Townley Lord 'looks above everything a kind-hearted man,

9 Mrs Lord told me years later she believed this had been a bad move for the church. She hoped that future ministers would not live so far away.

10 *Christian Index*, 14 June 1951.

and kindness is the form which Christianity must take in the hard places of London'.¹¹ Young Miss Frame observed,

As he spoke we could see his deep blue eyes twinkling behind his round spectacles, and his whole face beamed kindly. On first seeing Dr Lord I was impressed by the benevolent expression on his fresh countenance, and even before I saw his broad smile, I experienced some of the happiness which seems to radiate from him.¹²

Therein lay Townley Lord's charm and much of his power to win people for Christ. Therein too lay the buoyant outlook which coped with the changing circumstances at Bloomsbury.

There is no suggestion in Dr Lord's appearance of burning the midnight oil. He is kindly and genial and understands youth, and he will help many to solve the riddle of life ... It is said that ninety per cent of the city's crime is hatched or perpetrated between Bloomsbury and Charing Cross. The Bloomsbury minister will need his Master's eye of compassion for the multitude.¹³

Fred Mardell¹⁴ remembered that Dr Lord could seem 'autocratic and single-minded and often times in another world', yet he was 'still very approachable, friendly and responsive'. Iris Mardell described him in his later years as 'a kindly, portly, fatherly figure'.

Mrs Lord chuckled as she remembered his way of filing everything meticulously, often in duplicate, partly with an eye to history. He hoped for a good account of Bloomsbury's story for the centenary in 1948, and was disappointed when his friend, Seymour Price, only managed a thin booklet. He meant to write an autobiography but retirement proved too brief. He was always writing, his widow reflected, and many a companionable evening was overtaken by 'I've just had an idea ...'

Dr Lord found time to write 'a shelf of books on religious subjects' and became 'one of the first and most successful religious broadcasters'.¹⁵ His books included *Great Women of the Bible*, and *Great Women in Christian*

11 This and other descriptions from press cuttings, sources unidentified, pasted into scrapbooks by Dr Lord.

12 *ibid.*

13 Undated *Baptist Times* cutting in Lord scrapbook, probably 1938.

14 Fred Mardell has been a deacon since the last year of Dr Lord's ministry. He and his wife Iris wrote some of their memories at the author's request in 1989.

15 *Baptist Handbook* 1963 p.370.

History. Lord wrote popular histories of the BMS (for the ter-jubilee in 1942), and the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), and was joint editor of the *Baptist Quarterly* in the early 1930s, and a Vice President of the Baptist Historical Society from 1953. With Frank Whitehead's research assistance,¹⁶ he could easily have churned out a popular history of Bloomsbury himself; that he did not perhaps suggests he felt something substantial was required.

His homeliness struck Helen Thames Raley, wife of the President of Oklahoma State University. She was taken aback when their distinguished visitor, instead of relaxing between engagements in the guest suite, perched on her kitchen stool and asked 'Do you mind if I watch you cook?' He was fascinated by gadgetry unknown in post-war England.¹⁷ The prosperity of 1950s America was a culture shock: he told the Raleys he came from a country where rationing still limited each person to a meat quota of about one hamburger and one egg a week. He doubted whether more than twenty English Baptist ministers had an automobile and he, doubling as *Baptist Times*' editor, was the only pastor to have a secretary. 'You pay your janitors more than we pay our pastors!' The mill-worker's son lamented that English churches had already lost their hold on working men: 'You haven't lost the American working man yet. See that you don't.'¹⁸

Lord was heard on the radio as early as 1936, only a few years into British religious broadcasting.¹⁹ He was soon a regular broadcaster and a member of the BBC Religious Advisory Committee. According to Edwin Robertson,²⁰ in June 1939 the Head of Religious Broadcasting, James Welch, wrestled with the problem of the broadcast sermon, and called together a small but distinguished group of preachers, J.S. Whale, W.R. Matthews, Leslie Hunter and Townley Lord. Townley was the junior member of this team, of which George MacLeod was very critical.

On 18 November 1937 and 10 February 1938, Dr Lord broadcast from St Michael's, Chester Square, at 10 p.m. The first Bloomsbury broadcast service seems to have been in May 1938, with organ recital from 7.55, and service 8.00 to 8.40 p.m. This was on the National Wavelength and was recorded for the

16 Whitehead, as 'Nemo', wrote a series on Bloomsbury's history in church magazines.

17 Helen Thames Raley, *The President's Residence*, 1996.

18 *Christian Index* 14 June 1951.

19 The *Baptist Times* of 7 May 1936: 'Next Sunday morning at 9.30 on the National wavelength, a service is to be broadcast from the studio, with address by Dr Townley Lord'. C.H. Dodd had done regular Bible studies on the national network from 1931.

20 Letter to author, 29 May 1989.

Empire Programme. Always eager to grasp whatever opportunities came his way to promote the Gospel, Lord played the main character in a religious film, *Generous Spirit*. In 1940 Lord gave four weekly talks on the Forces Programme on 'A man's religion', and both he and J.B. Middlebrook preached on the radio from Bloomsbury in 1943.

After the war Lord did three broadcasts in December 1948. The BBC was developing a new format to put religious broadcasting on the Light Programme (the successor to the Forces Network, later modified into Radio 2) with *Sunday Half Hour*, *Chapel in the Valley* and the *People's Service*. Richard Tatlock was responsible for the *People's Service* on Sunday mornings and, looking for denominational balance, invited Townley Lord to join a panel of preachers, who would each take the services for a month.²¹ That year he was appointed to the BBC's Central Religious Advisory Committee. In October 1949 a series of *People's Services* were broadcast from Bloomsbury, and a further series in October 1953: 'Townley Lord did this well and in fact put more content into it than any of the others'.²² He received a number of letters after these services, mostly appreciative. Then *Sunday Half Hour* was broadcast from Bloomsbury. In February 1954 Lord provided a week of early morning *Lift up your hearts*, and in March another series of *People's Services*, and another on 16 May, replying to questions raised by his earlier broadcasts. An overseas broadcast, a *People's Service*, a Home Service programme and a telerecording followed in 1955, and then his first televised service on 3 July. He opened 1956 with a week of *Lift up your hearts*, a *Silver Lining* in March, and made his commercial debut in an ITV programme *About Religion*, when he interviewed John James and Dink Rew, both from Bloomsbury. Another evening service was broadcast by the BBC, and then one on the Overseas Service. On 11 July 1957 Dr Lord spoke on the popular series, *The Silver Lining*. On 19 January 1958 the morning service was broadcast on Associated TV.

The preacher

Dr Lord was called to Bloomsbury as a preacher. Writing a retirement tribute

21 Information from Edwin Robertson, *op.cit.*

22 Edwin Robertson. He assessed Lord as 'moderately good and developed a style of his own', but did not really broaden out into other formats. Soon more skillful users of the air-waves emerged, like Leslie Weatherhead, Donald Soper and George MacLeod.

to Sir Guildhaume Myrddin Evans for the Bloomsbury magazine,²³ he spoke of the stalwart deacons of 1930, especially Henry Harris, Arthur Yates, Tom Coffin and F.J. Moule: 'As Sunday by Sunday they ushered me into the pulpit, I used to feel the weight and dignity of the Bloomsbury tradition'.

Lord in his preaching gown personified that weight and dignity.²⁴ Blessed with a 'deep, effortless and comfortable' voice, which carried well, 'he spoke in even tones, clearly, naturally, every syllable sounded, and with a restrained spiritual fervour which laid hold of heart and mind'. He 'preached extempore, with only an occasional reference to his notes', drawing illustrations from his wide reading and from everyday life. He was not afraid to use humour, and he could be provocative and would deal with controversial themes, although concerned always to promote fellowship and understanding not argument. E.A. Payne judged him 'a preacher familiar with the problems of ordinary men and women'.

His church secretary, Sir Guildhaume Myrddin Evans appreciated his pastor's 'brilliant mind' and 'commanding presence':



Scholar, writer, administrator, he could have reached the top of any profession he had adopted. He chose to be a Minister of the Gospel ... He did not avoid modern problems, but he disdained sensationalism. The Christianity he preached was a joyous religion; his message was the simple one of the all-embracing love of God through Jesus Christ.

George Foss tried to explain the popularity of Lord's sermons with such a wide range of hearers:

His preaching suffers from no affectations, and while it is simple and direct, it is developed

²³ Also quoted in the *Baptist Times*, 3 March 1960.

²⁴ In Coventry he wore a 'warm red' gown, but seems to have preferred black at Bloomsbury. The gown he left in the vestry is still used occasionally.

and illustrated in a way which reveals a profound sincerity and the widest and deepest study. He has the gift of all great expositors of making the difficult and profound appear beautifully easy and perhaps this is one of the reasons why on many Sunday mornings during term-time it is possible to be a member of a congregation of whom more than half are young people.

Iris Mardell was among those young people. She first came to Bloomsbury in 1949, a working girl with 'no allegiance to any particular faith, except a strong belief in God and the Good Book'. Usually her mind wandered easily in sermons, but something held her in Lord's 'very enlightened and modern' preaching:

I was led to see the bible in a new light ... yet still remaining the word of God, just as relevant to that day as in past history ... Dr Lord was visionary, tempered with kindness and a huge understanding of modern day life, although he seemed a little in awe of the great scientific changes and achievements taking place, and would drop the word 'nuclear fission' into his sermons as if not quite sure what they were but firmly convinced that they were very important.

Lord's own description of his preaching was 'the old-fashioned salvation, expressed in modern terms'. He told the *Boston Herald* he was 'not impressed by "explosive evangelism": I believe in evangelism but it must be evangelism with some thinking in it. It must be more than emotion'. Contemporary culture was important to the preacher - as he told Mercer students in 1951: 'The challenge of the Gospel is always a challenge to the minds of men. I do not see how men can possibly give their wills to the service of Christ unless they first of all give him their minds.'

A cutting from an unidentified Southern Baptist journal in 1955 described this 'superb preacher':

Sometimes referred to as 'the most American of the British', Dr Lord can understand and is understood by Southern Baptists ... Always popular for revival meetings in the South, he will continue to be invited into our larger, more affluent, world minded churches. He will surely be used for special occasions and assemblies.

The revivalist preacher in demand in America, indeed declining pastorates in Boston and Toronto, at the very time that Billy Graham's visits were exciting British Christians, was for the present author a new image of Dr Lord, not conveyed by English memories.



Dr Lord speaking in Cleveland, Ohio

A number of his sermons are extant, but a sermon read is always a mere shadow of a sermon preached and Lord's do not lift off the page as powerfully as those of Brock and Phillips. In some ways, not least the language of British Empire, Lord's now seem the most remote, but at the time their impact was considerable. He advertised sermon themes in advance, sometimes provocatively - 'Measuring Jesus by modern standards', 'Was Christ a communist?' 'Is immortality reasonable?' Sometimes he would advertise a series with discussion afterwards. Fred Mardell remembered that

At a time of acute religious conservatism, Dr Lord preached a series of sermons on comparative religion. He was very forthright in his views and in the denunciation of some cults but emphasized the broad consensus of belief by many of the religions. He took a broad view of the 'Christian Way' and expected his congregations also to be like-minded.

Mrs Lord confirmed that he often preached on comparative religion and on deeply philosophical themes. When he dealt with various sects, they would often send representatives to hear what he had to say. Interruptions during sermons were quite frequent, as well as attacks in the subsequent discussion. On 15 September 1957 Dr Lord was guest preacher at St Martin's-in-the-Fields.

When Fred and Iris Mardell moved back to the East End they tried to settle in local churches but ‘somehow the preaching never seemed to be up to the standard to which we had become so accustomed’. How many Bloomsbury folk down the years have known this experience all too well?

The Bloomsbury ministry

Tom Phillips believed he left the fellowship strong and vigorous and the church maintained activities like ‘a well-oiled machine’ through the year without a minister, but the situation looked grave to the Lords when they arrived. In retrospect, Alice Lord felt they had virtually to begin again in 1930. The active membership had dropped and Dr Lord overheard someone outside the chapel observing that the church was finished and would become a cinema within two years. It is hard to reconcile these accounts. Phillips would have painted a rosy picture to encourage the church but the range of continuing activities could only have been sustained by a live church. The denominational leaders who ‘twisted Lord’s arm’ probably gave him over-high expectations. Phillips and Lord were both natural optimists and it is unlikely that Lord started by depressing the church with his doubts. The corollary was probably that his wife took the brunt of his anxieties and so her memory was mostly of the downside. The truth probably lay somewhere between. It would have taken the Lords a little while to grasp that special, encouraging quality of Bloomsbury’s fellowship which Phillips knew so well.

When the Lords went to Queen’s Road the membership was 679 and the financial situation ‘very satisfactory’.²⁵ During his pastorate Queen’s Road congregations began to decline, though not the membership: Coventry offered a wealth of choice for sermon-tasters. Nevertheless, Bloomsbury’s congregation would have been noticeably smaller and finance one long battle with deficits.

How alive a church is depends on one’s perspective. There was life in the old church yet, but it needed to be rejuvenated to serve the new generation. The 1929 Year Book reveals 442 members, after careful roll revision, quite large yet little over half the size of the church fifty years earlier. The Sunday School had 249 scholars and 51 staff, the Women’s Meeting numbered 300, the Pleasant Thursday Afternoon meeting 100, and the Choir 45. There were three deaconesses and twelve deacons, including two women; two deacons,

25 Binfield, *op.cit.*, p.186.

Myrddin Evans and Frank Whitehead, would survive into the next ministry. Townley Lord was greeted with twenty-four candidates for membership, most new converts seeking baptism. The challenge facing the new minister was summed up by David Lloyd George, sending a greeting to the Welcome Meeting: 'The man who goes to Bloomsbury is doing a gallant thing. Give him a "Salute to Adventurers" from me.'



The Bloomsbury interior 1914-63

It felt like an adventure. Mrs Lord observed: 'Bloomsbury is not like any other church. I realized that when I came.' She had to rethink all her experience as a minister's wife and her husband had to adjust similarly, though not, of course, the truths he preached. Dr Phillips

welcomed him as one 'True to the old Gospel, and true to the new light. Evangelical without blinkers'.

Dr Lord led worship in a quiet, reverent way. He introduced congregational responses in prayers. Ancillary meetings were not all in themselves devotional but normally ended with an epilogue.

A year into his ministry membership had risen to 500 and voluntary offerings to £979, the highest for any year since 1895, though still inadequate to support so much activity. Having a manse and a mortgage was a new responsibility for the church.

By April 1932 the church had grown by 135 since Lord came and most activities reported increasing numbers. Lord spelled out the aims of the church, as it ministered in the 'Centre of Pleasure, Healing, Learning, Commerce and Hotels', as 'to maintain the highest traditions of the Baptist denomination in the central city of the Empire'. This would include ministry to the poor and unfortunate, to young men and women in London for business or study, to visitors, to those in hospital, and to children.



The pulpit and table platform with glazed doors to rooms behind

the evening, making this ‘one of the finest congregations in Central London’, as Lord wrote in 1938:

All problems of central London need spiritual fellowship. Bloomsbury exists in all its activities to meet this need. Minister and members make Bloomsbury a House of God wherein everybody shall be able to find the presence and power of Christ our Lord ... Fellowship! That is the great need of these days.

Lord already had strong links with the YMCA and SCM. He led Christian study groups in London colleges and business houses and at the Central YMCA. When the SCM began its Religious Book Club in 1937, he was on the Advisory Editorial Committee. A series of University Extension Lectures was arranged at Bloomsbury in 1938 with Dr Lord as the lecturer on ‘The Christian idea of God and modern thought’. This course was ‘intended to meet the needs of all London Baptist churches’. The course included written work under the lecturer’s direction and students could take an examination for a university certificate. The fee was 7s 6d and forty to fifty attended. A travelling library was available to students. A further series was planned for 1939 on ‘The making of the New Testament’ but, alas, other things intervened.

The impact of war

War was declared on 3 September. Attendances at Bloomsbury dropped to forty almost overnight and everything changed. Only three deacons remained. The Treasurer, A.E. Cocks, worked for the Admiralty and was moved out of London by 15 September. The Church Secretary, Myrddin Evans, took over finance too, but he was busy in the War Cabinet Office and was lent to the US Government in 1942.

Dr and Mrs Lord, with the handful of remaining helpers and the faithful caretakers, Mr and Mrs Robert Grant, kept the church open throughout the war. Residents and tourists vanished, but many service personnel passed through London and were glad of a welcoming church. Dr Lord was made chaplain to a Royal Navy unit quartered at Regent Street Polytechnic, and wore an official armband which gained him access to



The narrow, gloomy vestibule, with war memorial facing entrance

places he could not have entered as a civilian. He was effectively unofficial chaplain to American servicemen too, while his honorary YMCA chaplaincy opened another 'fruitful sphere of personal ministry'. He used to take a Sunday afternoon service there, open to men in the forces and National Defence organizations. The church also ministered to the remaining local residents, not least those rendered suddenly homeless. With courage and his undaunted energy and cheerfulness, Townley Lord led the remnant through the war.

Dr Lord added to his responsibilities in November 1941 the editorship of the *Baptist Times*, amid printing and paper restrictions. During his editorship, circulation doubled. When he retired from this in 1956 Dr Payne described him as 'one of the ablest, friendliest and best-known religious journalists of our day', observing that it was 'characteristic of Dr Lord to avoid controversy and to promote fellowship and understanding ... No easy task in our denomination!' Lord kept politics firmly out of the pages and worked closely with E.A. Payne in reporting Baptist life.

He enjoyed public duties. A civic chaplaincy had come his way in 1930 and again in 1936-7 when Councillor W.H. Martin JP of Muswell Hill was Mayor of Finsbury. In 1942 Dr Lord was President of the LBA, and of the BU in 1947: he 'thrived on Presidencies'.²⁶ Twice he presided over the British Sunday School Union.

George Foss, church treasurer and banker, admired Lord's 'great gift for business'; he 'made the work of Secretaries and Treasurers easy by his promptitude, accuracy and judgment, and not least by his willingness to undertake many tasks which would not normally be expected to fall within the province of a minister ... [He had] an extraordinary capacity for sustained effort'.²⁷ The Lords must have been encouraged by having their married children and before long little grandchildren in the church.

In 1947 Townley Lord was elected one of seven Vice-Presidents of the BWA, and then became President 1950-55. How he managed to direct the *Baptist Times* as he travelled around the world is a wonder: it was hardly surprising that his contributions often took the form of a travelogue. Probably he should have given up the editorship when undertaking these other roles, but would have been reluctant until a suitable successor emerged.

As the victory celebrations faded, it became clear that people were not returning to live around the church in the old way. Office blocks replaced residential tenements. After those heroic years, there must have been a sense of anticlimax as the church grasped that there could be no return to the 'good old days'. Alice Lord recalled the heartbreaking realization that they had to start again from scratch in these inauspicious circumstances. Committed to Bloomsbury they were determined that this church should not die.

At his Twentieth Anniversary in 1950 Townley Lord could claim he had averaged only seven absences per year from the Bloomsbury pulpit, including holidays, Sunday School Anniversaries and Missionary Sundays, when special guest preachers were invited. He had missed sixteen Sundays through illness. In those first twenty years he had welcomed 600 new members to the church. Absences would increase as he travelled the world for the BWA.

President of the Baptist World Alliance

Bloomsbury's ministers can hardly fail to make international contacts. In 1938

²⁶ E.A. Payne, speaking at the Farewell Service, July 1958.

²⁷ George Foss, speaking at the retirement service, July 1958.

the Lords went to Toronto for a month, and he occupied a pulpit there. It was the first of many transatlantic visits.

His BWA predecessor, Oscar Johnson, had asked what was expected of the President, and was told to maintain the closest contact with the various groups of Baptists throughout the world.²⁸ Lord took this to heart: it was a role for which his warm-heartedness and energy equipped him well. Air travel was readily available, though slower than in the jet age. E.A. Payne, in a postscript to Townley Lord's jubilee history of the BWA, reflected that:

No previous President of the Alliance has, during his term of office, travelled so many miles or met so many Baptists. Dr Lord possesses great gifts as a preacher, writer and broadcaster, but he will probably be longest remembered in every part of the world for his brotherliness and geniality ... there can be no doubt that the journeys of Dr Lord between 1950 and 1955 have greatly strengthened Baptist unity and fellowship and have rooted the Alliance in the life of our far-flung communities more deeply than ever before.



Dr Lord receiving the keys to New Orleans from Mayor Chep Morrison, watched by Dr J.D. Grey of First Baptist Church

Lord's travels began as Vice President. Over the next few years, he visited much of Europe, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. He did not get to Africa or Asia, but he set a precedent for travelling BWA Presidents.²⁹

His scrapbooks of two American tours survive.³⁰ The English think whirlwind foreign tours are an American speciality, but Lord's schedule struck American journalists as newsworthy: 'the globe-trotting man of God' (*Shreveport Times*); 'An affable Britisher ... in Houston Monday long enough to make two speeches ... before he bustled off ...', 'Dr and Mrs Lord are

28 F.T. Lord, *Baptist World Fellowship: A short history of the BWA*, London 1955. The Alliance Executive in 1952 asked Lord to write this for the jubilee. The latter chapters of this work provide the most comprehensive record of Dr Lord's presidential travels.

29 More details of Lord's travels were given in Faith Bowers, 'Fred Townley Lord, President of the Baptist World Alliance, 1950-1955', presented to the Heritage Commission, 7 July 1997. Unpublished, but copy deposited with the BWA.

30 Monica George kindly lent these to the author in 1997. They cover 1950 and 1951 tours.

moving about at jet speed ... He came into Atlanta on Saturday, having made 105 addresses in almost 70 days ... he left the following Thursday, after having made nine addresses in four days' (*Christian Index*).

Dr and Mrs Lord went to the BWA Congress in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1950 when he became President. 44,800 Baptists from fifty-two countries attended the Congress. Lord explained: 'The world is still terribly shaken by the after-effects of war. What we need is a spiritual awakening that will give us new moral stamina to face our problems'. The themes were summarized as peace, totalitarianism, communism, racialism, and religious liberty.

He told the London *Evening Standard*, he planned 'to use his office to increase unity among Baptists and to promote evangelism ... The New Testament should be restated in terms of the modern world'. He had a deep concern for society, but his 'Coronation Address', 'None Other Name', focused especially on personal evangelism. Baptists needed to recover the urge to save the individual human soul.

Townley and Alice Lord spent a further two and a half months in America in 1951, taking part in the Southern Baptist Simultaneous Revival meetings, visiting black Baptist Conventions (a striking inclusion at that date), and making a coast-to-coast tour of Conventions across the northern states.

He preached on 'Belief and Life', to the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in San Francisco, declaring that belief matters because it 'is a dynamic thing - in persons and communities'; belief 'transcends the merely intellectual', and 'shapes our actions, determines our course, casts its glow over every part of life ... The trouble with our age is not that it does not believe in God but that it puts the wrong God on the throne ... power or chance or even humanity ... Many are the functions and opportunities of the Christian church at the present hour but central among them is the challenge to present Jesus as Son of God.' That autumn he visited much of Europe, 'securing an interview with the Italian Minister of the Interior in the interests of greater freedom for evangelicals'. In 1952 Dr Lord attended the First European Baptist Federation Conference in Copenhagen, and spent three months in the Americas. In 1953 he delivered his two thousandth sermon at Bloomsbury, and went to Canada and Rio for the Fourth Youth Conference.

The visit to Soviet Russia, 17 June to 1 July 1954, was a significant breakthrough in East-West contact.³¹ The President went with W.O. Lewis, BWA Secretary for Europe, and E.A. Payne, General Secretary of the British

31 See Bernard Green, *Crossing the Boundaries*, 1999, pp.27-8.

BU, at the invitation of J.I. Zhidkov, President of the Russian Baptist Union, and A.V. Karyev, Secretary of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. 'Both city and country churches were visited, and the three visitors were able to enjoy the hospitality of some Russian Baptist homes'. They met with the Council of the AUCECB and had a useful interview with the Government Minister in charge of religious affairs. Everywhere they received an enthusiastic welcome and found thriving churches. In Moscow they saw twenty-one young people baptized. They returned with an honest account of the legal restrictions and difficulties facing Russian Baptists, and fresh awareness of their isolation. This historic visit received much prominence in the world press.



Dr Payne and Dr Lord are welcomed in the Baptist Church in Budapest, 1955

A few weeks later the Lords flew off to New Zealand and Australia, where he found one or more former Bloomsbury members in every church he visited! In 1955 he and Dr Payne again crossed the Iron Curtain to visit Baptists in communist Hungary.

The Golden Jubilee Congress in London in 1955 emphasized the fellowship nature and historic Baptist principles of the Alliance.³² There were some tensions over ecumenism, with Dr Lord constrained to explain on behalf of British Baptists, 'We will pray with anybody and work with anybody for the extension of Christ's kingdom. But we do not share the views of those who talk about the organizational divisions of Christendom as "sin".' Having just written the jubilee history, his main address, 'The Baptist World Alliance in Retrospect and Prospect', was 'full of wholesome Christian tradition and sound, clear truth':³³

We do not profess to have the whole truth, nor do we unchurch those who differ from us; but we believe that our witness has been vindicated

32 The authority of the Bible for faith and conduct, the fellowship of believers, evangelism, soul liberty and separation of church and state.

33 *Watchman-Examiner*, the National Baptist weekly, Pennsylvania, 8 September 1955.

by the remarkable response to it ... we build our theory of the church not on papal claim or episcopal orders, but on the idea of a regenerate community ...

The nature of Baptist unity allowed for freedom of conscience and independent action and conviction within the overall fellowship.

The *Watchman-Examiner*, reflected that:

During his term of office, the cords of our Baptist fellowship have been lengthened. By the fraternal visits made to far-away places in the earth, Dr Lord has smiled upon and spoken to more of our Baptist people than any of his predecessors. In a remarkable way he has increased our mutual interest in each other.

An active retirement

At the end of 1957 Dr Lord announced his intention to retire in July and go as Visiting Professor to Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina. He told the church, 'I do not like leaving Bloomsbury, but I feel that the church has need now of a man with more agility and exuberance'.³⁴ He was leaving the work 'in good shape; we are fortunate in a virile church fellowship and in gifted and consecrated leadership by our laymen'.³⁵ On their final Sunday the special soloists were Isabel Bailey and Trevor Anthony. At the farewell meeting Mrs Lord thanked the church 'for allowing her to serve in their own way'; the tributes made her feel as if she had 'lost a hat and gained a halo!' Sir Guildhaume Myrddin Evans, the Church Secretary, summed up Dr Lord's special gift, that of 'constant cheerfulness through good times and bad, and particularly the bad times. I never once saw him depressed. He radiated faith and optimism and thereby gave us all courage and strength'.

He returned to his old pulpit on two occasions,³⁶ but died suddenly of a heart attack in Greenville on 9 February 1962. Dr Payne described his old friend in the *Baptist Handbook* obituary:

A cheerful, companionable man, with a great capacity for enjoyment, an able preacher with a voice of singular beauty, a wise counsellor, a faithful pastor, and a World Baptist figure, whose unusual combination of gifts enabled him to make a unique contribution to the strengthening

³⁴ *Baptist Times*, 31 July 1958.

³⁵ F. Townley Lord, resignation letter, 31 October 1957.

³⁶ On one of these the author was in the congregation.

of Baptist fellowship.³⁷

His body was flown to England but a memorial service was held at First Baptist Church, Greenville, where the pastor, Dr D.M. Nelson, spoke of Townley Lord more poetically as one who

was a Christian, not daytime, not nighttime, but all time. In season, out of season, under pressure, with no pressure, in the quietness of the home, in the bustle of the crowd. He was loyal to God and to God's church ... He added to the solution to problems rather than the creation of problems ... He took life tiptoe to the very end ...

Dr Theodore F. Adams spoke for the Alliance:³⁸

Townley Lord brought to the Baptist World Alliance something we very much needed ... our Baptist World Fellowship means infinitely more because he gave himself so gladly to the service to which his brethren in the Lord Christ had called him.



Alice and Townley Lord

Later Alice Lord returned to Bloomsbury, grateful to her husband's successor who insisted she belonged there. When a door steward enquired if she was a visitor, she was delighted to think that she could disappear successfully into the congregation. In June 1970 she told the author there was nothing left in the church from their ministry: all the activities had changed, although there were plenty of continuing members. This left her nostalgic but not distressed, for the church had to move with the times to serve the present generation. She and her husband had made their contribution in their day.³⁹

37 E.A. Payne, *Baptist Handbook* 1963, p.370.

38 At the memorial service in Greenville. Dr Francis W. Bonner, Vice President and Provost Emeritus, Furman University, kindly supplied information and a transcript of the memorial service. The author is grateful to Dr James Pitts, Chaplain to Furman University, for this contact.

39 Into old age Alice Lord continued to serve morning coffee regularly with her daughter and son-in-law. It was Mrs Lord who first introduced the author's son to church work, getting the small child with Down's Syndrome to save her bending to the bottom of the trolley. It was a delight to see the old and very young work together.

18

**FELLOWSHIP
THE CHURCH 1930-1958**

*'One of the most pleasant features of the Bloomsbury work
I have so far discovered is the large number of workers'*

Fred Townley Lord

The church in the 1930s

The search for Phillips's successor showed tensions between the diaconate and the Central Committee, hitherto most apparent over the cost of fabric maintenance and music. Central Committee set up the Exploration Committee, with Mr Yates representing the church. Dr Aubrey had the bright idea of getting the college principals to supply the pulpit for a month at a time, but the deacons judged this 'would be seriously detrimental to the best interests of the church and they could not agree to it'.¹ In the surviving records this appears as the first time the church strongly resisted external domination. It was agreed that the church secretary should arrange supplies. Two months later the deacons required further assurances that the church's independence was not being surrendered in the choice of minister. Central Committee undertook to consult the church fully, but demanded repeated assurances that church and congregation were contributing generously. Mean-while Tom Phillips often returned to the pulpit having left at short notice. The anniversary preacher was Dr J.C. Carlile, editor of the *Baptist Times*.

Townley Lord was not easily persuaded to leave Coventry, where he led a prominent church, without the extra problems of 'central mission'. He was coaxed with a stipend of £600 and the promise of a suburban manse, with rent and repairs covered by Central Committee, leaving him to pay rates and mains services.² Dr Carlile eventually persuaded him to come in the autumn. Central Committee paid for season tickets from Coventry until they bought the manse in Hendon Way, Golders Green. This cost £2,142, towards which friends gave £500, the rest being covered by a bank loan at 4½% interest. It was bought in the name of Bloomsbury and Arthur Yates, the Financial Secretary, signed the deeds, the 'Baptist Property Board' apparently having no funds available for so

¹ Deacons' Minutes, 25 October 1928.

² Central Committee Minutes, 3 July 1929.

important an investment'. The manse freehold was eventually bought in 1959 for £340. Dr Lord was allowed £10 towards the cost of the 'essential phone' at the manse.

The *Baptist Times*, announcing Dr Lord's appointment to Bloomsbury, said the church had twenty-five societies ministering in the neighbourhood. Numbers had dwindled, but 'a little band of brave workers ... have done valiantly'. The writer judged that two or three other Baptist causes in the vicinity³ ought to amalgamate with Bloomsbury, combining resources, for 'Bloomsbury is a strategic point; it is the key to Central London. The denomination cannot afford to be weak and inefficient in the centre.' Carlile continued 'There is a great future for the pulpit and Bloomsbury is a pulpit rather than a Church. First and last it will mainly depend upon preachers. Of course, other things are required, but Bloomsbury will be preached into prosperity'. Dr Lord came as 'one of the most promising of the younger men' to this pulpit at 'the centre of the Empire'.

Lord was struck by the range of specific responsibilities undertaken by church members, commenting on this in his first pastoral letter, written for the 1930-31 Year Book, which listed by name 133 different lay people who undertook one or more identified jobs for the church. There were three Sisters: Edith since 1920, and Bertha and Doris who both came during 1928. Sister Doris had been one of the Bloomsbury Bible Class members, as Margaret Curry before joining the Sisterhood. That was not the sum of active workers. A leaflet of 1931, for example, identifies a further nine girls and women helping to lead the Guildry. The Sunday School listed eighteen active officers and section leaders, plus thirty more teachers. Even assuming some of the unnamed teachers already appeared as named officers of other bodies, this suggests that a third of the 442 members (after careful roll revision) were committed to specific duties. This is the context in which Dr Lord identified two striking features of the Bloomsbury church:

the love and devotion which Bloomsbury inspires in those who make our church their spiritual home, and the opportunities for service in Central London ... Witness for Christ can only be maintained in the heart of London at the cost of sacrificial service on the part of a willing band of helpers.

Twenty years later, in a wholly changed situation, Dr Lord could still remark

³ The Baptist Union would have liked the churches at John Street and Kingsgate in Holborn, both struggling and without ministers, to amalgamate tidily with Bloomsbury. The churches did not choose to be pushed.

at the 1950 anniversary that 'An outstanding feature of Bloomsbury was the deep love and affection of its members for the church'.

Dr Lord thought Baptists undervalued the communion service: He wanted a new table more 'in keeping than the present one', placed more centrally and brightened the pulpit with a new cloth for the reading desk. An early report speaks of 'true beauty of worship' in the evening service, with a pervasive atmosphere of devotion as the worshippers assembled 'almost noiselessly'. Lord introduced responses by the worshippers at the end of prayers of petition and the sung 'Amen'.

His other early concern was for improved publicity. Notices at the Tube station and in the *Sunday Observer* were given up: Dr Lord judged a free booklet distributed locally more effective. In October 1937 a new, four-page magazine was launched. There had evidently been a long break since the last series. 3,000 were printed for worshippers, subscribers, friends and the neighbourhood. The editor was H.C. Hagger, who lived at Wembley.

Although the work continued along the well-established lines, it was a struggle to build activities up again. Some were modified but little taken over from the previous ministry was lost. The church still served a large resident population, mostly quite poor. Mrs Lord remembered four-storey tenements packed one behind another stretching all along Theobalds Road. The difficulty lay not in attracting people but in maintaining continuity, because people moved so often.

At all periods Bloomsbury has had a nucleus of members who have given long and faithful service but many others have been transient, spending short periods in central London. The number of visitors from overseas increased as travel became easier. Meanwhile, the old apprentice system, which kept young people in one place for several years, was gradually going. Students' training was generally shorter and they came and went around the year. Medical students continued to meet at Bloomsbury: in February 1933 Central Committee noted the large number from various hospitals who met in the Lounge alternate Fridays. Early reports speak of morning congregations 'largely composed of young people of the student type'; the development of student work was to be a major feature of Lord's ministry.

In June 1932 Dr Lord was tempted by an approach from Hampstead Garden Suburb Free Church. He liked the fellowship at Bloomsbury but was disappointed in denominational support. He was persuaded to stay with the church paying manse rates and a further £50 p.a. towards his expenses. In agreeing to stay he 'expressed the hope that the Denomination as a whole would realize their responsibility in the work at Bloomsbury as a Central

Church and do all in their power to maintain it’.

In March 1935 the Central Committee spent an hour considering the conditions laid down when the chapel freehold was bought. ‘The Chairman read in detail the various clauses ... and the position was made quite clear ... as regards control and the doctrine to be preached’. The Committee eventually endorsed this ‘almost unanimously’. On 21 March the Trust Deed was signed; it appears that this had been an omission in 1905. This determines membership of Central Committee as five representatives of the London Baptist Association, three of the Baptist Union, and six elected by the church worshipping in the trust premises (a slight shift in the church’s favour). The doctrinal requirement was for

a church of Protestant Dissenters of the Baptist denomination who hold the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ and the sole authority of the Holy Scriptures and that interpretation of them usually denominated Evangelical and that only is Christian Baptism which is by immersion in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit of Believers on confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and that while membership of such Church shall be open to believers who have not on confession of such faith been so baptised no regular minister or pastor shall be appointed to such Church who has not been so baptised and does not hold and teach the doctrines aforesaid.

With a constitution providing a measure of external government alien to Baptist ecclesiology, ongoing tensions within Central Committee were hardly surprising. The Central Church concept was a mission strategy, but driven by financial considerations. Central Committee found it easier to press the financial brakes than to steer the church around obstacles to mission. At this period the church found Central Committee more restrictive than supportive.

In 1936 the church representatives wanted to buy the revised *Baptist Church Hymnal*, published in 1933, but at two meetings the Committee Secretary, Seymour Price, strongly opposed this on grounds of cost. Irritated deacons went through the old stock, throwing out all books in bad condition, then reported there were only 553 fit to use, which was not always sufficient. Permission to buy the new books was given. That July, when they discussed finance, lighting and musicians’ salaries, the minutes observed the meeting ‘was rather of an argumentative nature’ but ended happily.

Music

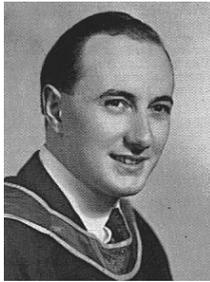
Press reports⁴ of the Welcome Meetings observed: 'The music at Bloomsbury has long been controlled by efficient minds, and is thoroughly congregational'; it was taken 'at a pace which suggests faith and action'. 'There is quality in the well-trained choir, the organ voluntaries really helped the service, and there was splendid volume and heartiness in the congregational singing'. Lord wanted as much music as possible.

When he came the choir was about forty-five strong and gave two concerts a year. Hopeful under the new regime, in 1930 Mr Tate suggested a 'more progressive initiative in music', but Central Committee promptly rejected this as too expensive. The next year one soloist, Mrs Kemp, joined the church; Central Committee promptly discontinued her honorarium, since a member should give her services and that saved £16 a year. After a long session with Arthur Tate in September 1931, Central Committee declined to increase his salary, but agreed to another professional singer at £16. A year later his request to have the small Reading and Writing Room 'effectively warmed' was rejected. Tate resigned in July 1933. The tenor, Donald Finch, served for twenty years to 1943 for an honorarium of £20-£30.

Subsequently Percy Hills became organist and Comber Smith musical director at £35 and £50 p.a. respectively. Again Central Committee discussed music at length: 'comments being made from all directions, most of them hardly suitable for the Minutes'. Comber Smith was granted better lighting for the choir and over the Institute piano in 1935. After repeated requests, Hills's salary was raised to £45 and Smith's to £55 in 1938, the latter only to be cut to £30 in 1940 when war reduced requirements. Dr Lord then asked Hills 'to play more appropriate music before the commencement of the Service, introducing into his selection pieces which were not quite so highbrow and more acceptable to the general assembly; also to reduce the volume of his playing after the Service. Apparently little heed has been taken of this request'.⁵ So Church and Central Committee Secretaries interviewed the organist, concluding 'Mr Hills was a handicap to the Services in more than one way' but took no action, hoping he would soon be called up; they had to wait another two years. His deputy, Clifford Knight, took over until he became fatally ill in 1944. Comber Smith continued to supervise such choir as could be mustered, and was again briefly joined by Hills at the end of the war.

4 In Lord's scrapbooks, so not identifiable.

5 Central Committee minutes, April 1940.



Gerald Barnes

The organ, not surprisingly, needed attention after the war in 1947. In 1945 Walter Young took over organ and choir until he moved to Torquay late in 1955. Young was a sound engineer, with Phillips, RCA and J. Arthur Rank at different times. Later he and his wife followed their sons to Adelaide. Marcus Lord was one of the deputies until he became organist and choirmaster at Brondesbury in 1958. In 1956 Gerald Barnes, who had done postgraduate studies under Eric Thiman, came from Shepherd's Bush Tabernacle as organist and choirmaster at £150 p.a. A teacher, examiner, and performer, he was one of the founders of the Baptist Music Society in 1961, and the first Free Church organist invited to give a recital at Westminster Abbey in July 1970. He built up a strong choir.

The premises

Maintaining the premises continued to require vigilance and money. Generous gifts furnished the pastor's vestry 'suitably'. New ropes for the lift were deemed a 'wise outlay' of £30 in 1930. The next year repairs were needed to the spires, now given lightning conductors, and to the heating apparatus and lift. A gale in 1933 brought a tile down from one tower, damaging a car, but this was covered by insurance. The new central heating boiler was duly insured against risk of explosion. Dr Lord had Phillips's 'Hospitality' sign taken down because so many vagrants were turning up expecting a night's lodging. Signboards were renewed, with a new main sign in gilt letters and an illuminated sign projecting a metre from the building. A ladder had to be bought so that the caretaker could keep the gilt sign 'in proper condition'.

Lighting was a recurrent concern. A 'new contract for electric current' saved money in 1930, but there were complaints of inadequate lighting in 1933, presumably as people became used to better lighting at home and work: 'It was suggested that the Crompton type of lamp [coiled coil filament] be adopted of which good testimonials had been received'. Central Committee sought the advice of the General Electric Company on more efficient church lighting. Consultation was protracted: a system of 'defused' [diffused!] lighting was recommended but would be expensive in wiring. They looked at lighting in the Acton church and at Messrs Harcourts' showrooms before deciding on indirect lighting.

Until the end of 1934 the church divided the electricity bill between

different parts of the building, but this proved too complex. In January 1939 the church was recommended to 'go on the unit rate'; the cost might go up £30 a year, but 'if tactful economy was carried out, this sum might easily be substantially reduced'. A telephone was installed at the church: they charged 2d per call for its use, so the church account would benefit by three-farthings. Soon after 'instruments for the use of the deaf' were considered but decision was deferred in July 1939 - doubtless for some years. Someone suggested a portable typewriter for Dr Lord.



The Institute Lounge in the 1930s

By 1934 the church cushions and seat mats badly needed replacing so the church ladies were asked to obtain material and make new covers. The Institute settees were repaired and eventually cleaned, when Mrs Dodkin firmly lent the caretaker a vacuum cleaner and supervised its use.

Extensive renovations were undertaken in 1937, during which the church worshipped at St George's Hall, Central YMCA. This involved thorough roof repair, redecoration of the chapel, lobbies and staircases, exterior pointing, and new lighting. The total cost was £1,648. Dr Lord hoped donors might carpet the aisles. The linoleum in the Institute and galleries would wear a little longer, but the lecture room platform was newly covered with 'corticine'. Red tiles were chosen for the church vestibule, and new notice boards fixed there, although there was little room to linger in the narrow passage.

Mr and Mrs Jackman gave much satisfaction as caretakers for seventeen years, as did their successors, Mr and Mrs Grant. Nonetheless, when Central Committee was advised in February 1935 that Mr Jackman was not an insurable person under the Employment Insurance Scheme, 'This statement was very cheering', presumably in saving money! For a long time the caretakers received a fixed sum and paid for any additional help they required. In 1938 Central Committee decided to reduce their wages but pay separately for other help. When Jackman became ill and resigned the next month, the church gave him £50 in appreciation of good service. The Grants were already Bloomsbury members and Robert Grant had been a member of Dr Lord's church in Coventry. They were employed at £4 per week.

In February 1930 the deacons heard that the deed box had been opened and the morning offering stolen. The loss claimed was ten guineas (in contrast to

£900 when the safe was burgled in 1999!) Insurance was altered later that year to cover personal property left in the care of an authorized person and property of church societies stored under lock and key. The Central Committee was pleased in July 1936 to hear that cover for personal property lost anywhere on the premises had been negotiated 'at an exceedingly low premium' with the Baptist Fire Insurance Company: 'It was naturally decided not to broadcast this good news, otherwise carelessness might easily result'. Dr Lord's office in the Institute was provided with a lock in March 1939.

Deficits continued to be the norm, although £537 struck Central Committee as 'somewhat heavy' for October 1930. They seemed content to accept a gradual build up through the year, hoping to defray this at the anniversary. Giving increased after Lord's arrival, including one new member promising £100 p.a. Offerings totalled £970 in 1930-31, the highest since 1897. When Wild Street chapel was sold, the proceeds were divided equally between the St Giles' Christian Mission, the Baptist Union Corporation and the trustees of the Association of Strict Baptist Churches. The BU invested this, giving Bloomsbury two-thirds of the annual interest, £282.

In 1933 Central Committee again questioned whether members of the church and congregation were giving properly to the funds, but Myrrdin Evans 'was able to convince those present that generosity existed in quarters that some members of the Committee were quite unaware of'. That July, when the deficit was £255, Mr Yates pronounced the church finances 'generally healthy'. By autumn 1937 subscribers were being urged to make seven-year covenants, so the church could obtain tax benefits. That financial year was 'from every standpoint eminently satisfactory', with repairs almost paid for, offerings up a little, and the deficit only £273. The church felt cheerful, with fifty-two new members that year, the largest growth so far under Lord.

In 1935 Holborn proposed a substantial increase in rates, to which the church objected, seeking complete exemption since circumstances had changed since the original assessment. They succeeded in getting the increase 'dispensed with'.

Anniversary speakers were still chosen with care. Those for the 1930 anniversary included the Rector of St Anne's, Soho, the Revd A. Bouchier. In 1936 they tried, in vain, to get Sir John Reith of the BBC. In 1936 Central Committee judged that the Revd M. Lloyd Jones 'might be a very acceptable alternative'; he came for the 1940 anniversary. Dr Truett made a return visit on 27 June 1937.

Church meetings had long been a problem. With members' homes more scattered and business controlled by Central Committee, attendance was poor.

In October 1934 Dr Lord gave full details of a ‘scheme which had been formulated for the governing of the Church, apart from the Central Committee’, which was heartily endorsed.⁶ These details do not survive, but passing references suggest there was a Church Council, with the various societies represented.

People of the church

Some of that willing band of workers were distinguished in other fields. The Church Secretary through most of Lord’s ministry was Sir Guildhaume Myrddin Evans CB KCMG (1894-1964), a top civil servant. A son of the manse from Abertillery, he joined Bloomsbury in Phillips’s time, having already taken a First at Oxford and held a commission in the South Wales Borderers until invalided out of Flanders. His memorial to those of his generation who died in that war was his own dedication to work for peace. He was then attached to the Prime Minister’s Secretariat, and in 1919 became Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet. He spent ten years at the Treasury, often attending conferences abroad, then moved to the Ministry of Labour in 1929, becoming Deputy Chief Insurance Officer under the Unemployment Acts in 1935. In 1938 he was appointed to head the International Labour Division of the Ministry, which lent him in summer 1940 to the War Cabinet Office as head of the Production Executive Secretariat. In 1942 he was sent to the US Government as adviser to the War Manpower Commission, for which he received the USA Medal of Freedom with palms. He also advised the Canadian Government on manpower. He was a member of the British Government delegation to the conference at San Francisco which set up the United Nations in 1945, and to the General Assembly of the UN from 1946 to 1953. From 1945 he served as Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Labour. He represented the British Government on the Governing Body of the International Labour Offices at Geneva, occupying the chair in 1945-7, and 1956-7, and presiding over the International Labour Conference in 1949. The first civil servant to hold that office, Myrddin Evans played an important role in rebuilding the organization after the war and making it a specialized agency of the United Nations. In



*Sir Guildhaume
Myrddin Evans*

⁶ Central Committee Minutes 5 October 1934.

1955 he was appointed Chief International Advisor to HM Government.

Although a 'high flyer', Myrddin Evans was not one to thrust himself forward. In the church he rarely spoke from a public platform, although when necessary he did this well. When he retired in 1960, Dr Lord described him as 'generally to be found a little in the background, but always there with clear-headed guidance and loyal support. His quiet voice and unassuming manner could never hide the great depth of his conviction or his unwavering strength'. 'A tactful, friendly man, widely popular with his colleagues',⁷ Myrddin Evans was knighted in 1947. When he died in 1964 the memorial service was held at St Martin-in-the-Fields.

Through this distinguished career Sir Guildhaume served his church as Secretary for twenty-seven years (1932-59), doubling as Treasurer at the start of the war. He was concerned lest his frequent and lengthy travels were detrimental to the church, but Dr Lord preferred to make arrangements for routine work and keep the colleague with whom he was 'so much mentally and spiritually in accord'.

In marked contrast but with comparable dedication to the church, was the politician, the Rt Hon. Ernest Brown PC CH (1881-1962). He came from Torquay, where his father, William Brown, was a lay preacher, fisherman, and lifeboat coxswain.⁸ The Browns were members of Upton Vale Baptist Church and in the Sunday School their son first met Eva (1879-1962), whom he married in 1907. From then until their Golden Wedding there were few weeks when both were not involved in speaking at Christian meetings.



Ernest Brown

After war service, gaining a commission in the Somerset Light Infantry and the Military Cross, Brown went into business in Salisbury, but his heart was already in Liberal politics. He stood unsuccessfully for Salisbury and for Mitcham, but was elected for Rugby in 1923-4. Losing that seat, he represented Leith from 1927-45. When the party divided in 1931 he joined the National Liberals and

⁷ *The Times* obituary, 17 February 1964.

⁸ Personal communication from the Revd Walter Fancutt, 22 January 1991. Walter and Amy Fancutt were close friends of the Browns, having a weekly meal with Eva, and Ernest when his work allowed, for twenty years. Fancutt would have written a biography of his friend, but Brown did not relish such memorial and ensured his papers were destroyed. Other material is drawn from press obituaries, the *Baptist Times* obituary, 22 February 1962, and the memories of Alice Canfield.

served in Government under Stanley Baldwin, Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill. When Chairman of the National Liberal Party, Brown tried in vain to effect reconciliation with Sir Archibald Sinclair's Liberal Party. In spite of his brusque manner and fierce advocacy of causes he believed in, he maintained good personal relations with political opponents.

'A most competent and hard-working Minister, he could be counted on to render loyal and effective service and to stand his ground against either pressure or attack ... Gifted with a tremendous and far-reaching platform voice and an unusual aptness and power of persuasion ... he became one of the most effective of the Liberal platform speakers, especially in the open air'.⁹ His voice was extraordinary. When first elected to Parliament, 'Naturally enough there was some speculation as to how he would adjust his stentorian gifts to the restricted space of the Lower Chamber. At first he found some difficulty in doing so, but later they were to become more amenable and permit his vocal qualities to be appreciated ... Nobody in politics better embodied the Nonconformist conscience. It was impossible to silence him for two reasons. He was always convinced of what he said; and he said it in a voice which made the thunder of Niagara seem a mere whisper. "Never since Cromwell", Sir Winston Churchill once observed, "has such a voice gone out"'.¹⁰

This 'statesman as rotund in body as in voice, but essentially gentle in thought and action',¹¹ was a man of many ministries. He served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, and then at the Department of Mines. He was Minister of Labour, 1935-40, to which was added Minister of National Service, 1939-40. Next he served as Secretary of State for Scotland (1940-41), Minister of Health (1941-3), and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1943-5). He chaired the Select Committee on Procedure in the House of Commons, and was Minister of Aircraft Production in Churchill's caretaker government (May-July 1945). From 1935 he was a Privy Councillor. Brown lost his seat in 1945 when a few elections were postponed awaiting candidates' release from the Forces. Leith was the only one of these where a prominent MP was being opposed so the Labour Party wheeled out its leadership in support of their young army candidate. Eva described the campaign as a 'dirty and malicious fight'.¹²

9 *The Times* 15 February 1962.

10 *Daily Telegraph* 17 February 1962. Stanley Baldwin is said to have heard a booming voice as he went along a House corridor: 'Who on earth is that?' 'That's Ernest Brown speaking to his constituents in Leith', 'Then tell him to use the phone', Baldwin barked.

11 *Daily Telegraph* obituary, 17 February 1962.

12 Fancutt, *op.cit.*

At the end of the war, when both these church officers received honours, the editor of the magazine observed that Bloomsbury's notepaper was going to look imposing with the Secretary's CB on one side and the Treasurer's CH on the other!

Ernest Brown was a man motivated by Christian faith and political activity never prevented him giving high priority to the church. He joined Bloomsbury just after Dr Lord came, and would often take a night train from Edinburgh to be in his pew next morning. Dr Lord remembered:

He sat at the front and he knew all the hymns by heart. Sometimes when I had launched on a Biblical quotation, I would hear him completing it *sotto voce*. It was great just to have him there, and a benediction to have his word of encouragement. Never did he miss giving his minister a book at Christmas. Here he was in a field he knew well, for like his lifelong friend Isaac Foot, he loved books and his library (which is now in the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Texas) was one of the finest, for range and quality, of any layman I knew. His wife shared fully in all his life. Ernest and Eva Brown were a team, perhaps the most remarkable team of our time. They both lived on platforms - political, ecclesiastical and railway ... here were two devoted servants of Christ who found their chief joy among our people.

Proud of his humble origins and proud to be a Baptist, as a lay preacher he was always happy to serve small congregations, declaring 'There are no small churches, only big churches in a small place'. At Bloomsbury he regularly took the last Sunday of the year because 'our pastor should not be asked to preach on a day when, through holidays, the congregation will be thin'. He supported all church functions, whether they appealed to him or not, 'because a church member should help his church at all times'.¹³ He served on the Baptist Union Council from 1929 and was President 1948-9, following Dr Lord. Perhaps with a smile, he took as his presidential theme 'Listening to the voice of God'. He was also the BMS treasurer for fourteen years and Chairman 1954-5. This was quite an arduous treasurership as it came at a time of great change for the Society. In 1959 he was elected to Honorary Membership of BMS General Committee, which gave great pleasure to a man who had firmly declined the Government's offers of titled honours. He was also President of the Free Church Choir Union. At the Baptist World Alliance Congress in Copenhagen he delivered a 'characteristically forthright address' on 'The Baptist Contribution to World Peace'. He went with Dr Payne to the

¹³ George Foss, in church magazine, Anniversary 1982.

WCC Central Committee in Lucknow. Mrs Brown was active in Baptist women's and served on the BU Council in her own right.

The Browns lived at 4 Exeter Mansions, Shaftesbury Avenue, convenient for the church. They were always interested in Bloomsbury's activities. Lilian Goulden remembered with pleasure a Bloomsbury party taken around the House of Commons by Ernest Brown. Never a man of property or wealth, Brown sold his fine library to pay for their world tour in 1950. They had no children, and on his death he left only £2,144. In 1953 Mr and Mrs Brown had seats in the Abbey for the Coronation of Elizabeth II; Townley and Alice Lord watched it on Canadian television.

After lives of such activity, the Browns' closing years were sad. A stroke ended his active career, but not his interest in political and religious affairs. Walter Fancutt was grieved to see his friend's fine brain slowed and great voice slurred. Meanwhile, his wife's mind failed. Years later Alice Canfield spoke bitterly of his loneliness at the end, depending almost entirely on his secretary and Kathleen Savill, as few others cared enough to visit, although one welcome exception was Bloomsbury's new minister, Howard Williams. These once distinguished people ended in St Pancras Hospital, to Mrs Canfield still 'the former Workhouse', yet at his funeral so many came that they had to have police in attendance.

As well as these illustrious church officers, Bloomsbury had other distinguished citizens, including Sir Edward Brown who had been a member at Westbourne Park but transferred to Bloomsbury ten years before his death in 1939 aged 87. He had been Secretary of the National Poultry Council of England and Wales. Ernest Thomas became President of the National Association of Local Government Officers in 1950. They were both deacons. Sir Percy Stocks was a distinguished Medical Statistician, eventually working for the World Health Organization, but also active in good works at Bloomsbury. Sir Hugh Ernest Griffiths (1891-1961),¹⁴ was a Harley Street surgeon but also ran a free East End hospital out of his profits, working there himself on Sunday mornings.

Then there were the millionaire Needhams, flamboyant and generous. Thomas Needham JP FCS was a chemist and millionaire businessman. He died in 1949 aged 92. The Lord children dubbed his emerald-bespangled wife

14 Sir Hugh trained at the University of Wales and St Bartholomew's Hospital, and held various hospital appointments around London, and was Hunterian Professor at the Royal College of Surgeons, 1922 and 1943. He was knighted in 1949. He wrote on the 'treatment of the injured workman' and 'the surgeon in industry'.

‘the Duchess’. She was generous but inclined to patronize, enjoying being ‘Lady Bountiful’. Mrs Lord remembered their care that she should not realize that the old man who sat next to her at communion was a pensioner on a pittance, knowing he enjoyed feeling they approached the Lord’s Table ‘on equal terms’. The Needhams wintered at Monte Carlo and once, almost as a joke, insisted that Dr Lord paid them a ‘pastoral visit’ at their expense. They took him to the exclusive Sporting Club, with an invitation made out for ‘Lord Townley’.

Councillor William Martin and his wife, who was the first Lady Mayor of Finsbury in 1937, were both members. Arthur Matthews became an Alderman of Holborn Borough Council and Chairman of the Holborn Chamber of Commerce. A bachelor, he was the third generation of this family of ironmongers to serve Bloomsbury faithfully. He died in 1956 and his legacy bought a stock of the *Baptist Hymn Book* for the church. His connections may have been a factor in the civic services held at Bloomsbury in November 1936, March 1939 and again in 1943. The National Caterers’ Protection Society also held an Annual Service at Bloomsbury for several years, at least until 1940, joining with the morning congregation for this.

Dr M.E. Aubrey, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland 1925-51, was in membership at Bloomsbury, where his children, Betty and Peter, were baptized on 2 December 1937. W.O. Lewis and his wife worshipped at Bloomsbury while based in London for the BWA. Also a member was the Revd James Turnbull, Secretary of the World Council of Christian Education. He helped supply the pulpit during Lord’s absence.

A distinguished American politician, Harold Stassen, was often in London in mid century and always worshipped at Bloomsbury.¹⁵ He was remembered as ‘the personal representative of the American president’, yet slipping quietly in to the church, with a friendly word to the pastor and one or two others as he left.¹⁶

Walter Idris, soft drink manufacturer, died in October 1939, having maintained his ‘deep-rooted family connections with Bloomsbury’ to the end, in spite of ill health. Another deacon, William Bales, came to Bloomsbury

15 Stassen was governor of Minnesota at the age of thirty-one, the personal aide to Admiral Halsey during the war, and a serious candidate for the Republican nomination for president in 1948 and 1952, and joined the Eisenhower government in 1953 as Director of Foreign Operations Administration 1953-55 and then Special Assistant to the President on Disarmament Problems 1955-58, was often in London before and during World War II. A lifelong Baptist, he was President of the American Baptist Convention 1963-4. I am grateful to Professor Richard Pierard for this information.

16 George Foss, in church magazine Anniversary 1982.

when Regent's Park Chapel closed on the expiry of its lease. A commercial traveller, he threw himself into church and Sunday School work, as well as evangelistic work at Regent Street Polytechnic. He died in 1951. W.P. Hamsher, a *News Chronicle* journalist, was a church member; he stood for the Liberal Party at Acocks Green, Birmingham, in the 1945 General Election.

Among the younger men was Leslie Brice, a metallurgist working for the Ministry of Defence. An active leader of the Sunday Afternoon Fellowship, he wrote a little in the magazine about his visits on government business to factories, universities and research institutions in the United States, Canada, Paris, and Iceland, where the party was met at the airport by the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Primate! He was also involved with the Field Lane Mission and Royal National Institute for the Blind. He suggested that there should be a welcomer in the vestibule for half an hour or more before the service, and undertook this in the evening every Sunday for a quarter century or more. In winter it was a chilly duty: he relished the day the young Sister Barbara greeted him as one of God's frozen people! Later he was heavily involved in the 1960s Reconstruction. He died in 1985.

David Charley joined Bloomsbury as a medical student in September 1939. A Leeds physician, he was President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 1982 and returned to his former church to preach.

George Foss, the church treasurer 1951-73, joined the church in December 1938; coming from Worcester, he had worked for the Midland Bank since 1920 and became Chief Accountant in 1954. He was involved in many new advances in banking, including the development of personal loans, personal cheques and credit clearing. In a reserved occupation, during the war he was an ARP Warden in Putney and helped run YMCA Information Bureaux at Waterloo and elsewhere. Beyond Bloomsbury he served on the Councils of the LBA and BU, was Chairman of the London Baptist Property Board, on the BU Corporation, on the Council of John Groom's Crippleage, and active for the Midland Bank Pensioners Association. Christine Thomas came from Wrexham, via Homerton College and the Robert Hall Society for Baptist students in Cambridge. She came to Bloomsbury while taking an advanced teaching course in London, and stayed while teaching at Bow. Her school was evacuated to Taunton during the war, where she helped at a YMCA canteen. Returning to London and Bloomsbury she helped organize the Sunday Fellowship, with Leslie Brice, Cecil and Florence Bray, and George Foss, whom she married in 1950. He retired from the Bank in 1965, aged 60.

It is always easier for historians to identify members who were distinguished in their own fields, but Bloomsbury was never a homogeneous church and there were plenty of other ranks in the pews and, indeed, some on the diaconate. By mid-century the Civil Service was a major local employer, bringing many young people into central London.



A group of Bloomsbury people

John Morgan Wynne worshipped at Bloomsbury for a time, while doing National Service. The magazine in July-August 1956 noted his first prize in the Senior Scripture Examination - hardly surprising, for he was later to become New Testament Tutor at Regent's Park College, Oxford, and Principal of Bristol Baptist College. Bloomsbury could boast another 'first' in the 1957 Examination, achieved in a younger section by Valerie Ritchie.

Boys from Fordham House continued to worship at Bloomsbury, along with Mr and Mrs Dodkin, who ran the House for many years. Most of these boys suddenly disappeared in March 1939, and on enquiry it was found that their Committee was suddenly making them go to the parish church after many years at Bloomsbury. After tactful negotiation, the boys returned.

Sister Edith gradually reduced her Bloomsbury activities; as Miss Ada Phillips she had been a member of Elm Road, Beckenham, since 1894, with her Bloomsbury service as an extra. She eventually became headmistress of a Beckenham school and died in 1947. When Sister Bertha left to marry a minister in 1932 she proved hard to replace: the deaconess home could not come up with anyone suitable. By then girls were being trained as church leaders rather than slum nurses but Bloomsbury still wanted the older kind of pastoral worker. Sister Doris was left to cope, sometimes with help from

student Sisters, and Mrs Lord tried to plug the gaps. When Sister Doris acquired a small car in 1933, the church gave her £15 a year toward running costs. In 1937 they added a further £1-5s-0d per quarter for petty expenses, and told her to speak to the treasurer if she needed more, for Central Committee recognized she 'should not be called upon to meet petty outlays in connection with her work'. They could feel a little more generous than usual, for this had been a healthy year on all fronts, including £1,500 raised in six months for renovations. Among later deaconesses who trained at Bloomsbury was Enid Clarke, who was later a member as Mrs Enid Adams, when her husband Leslie was General Secretary of the Central YMCA.



Sister Doris

By then the treasurer was A.E. Cocks, father of Ralph, Geoffrey and Dorothy. He was a keen lay preacher, and had assisted Mr Yates with Bloomsbury finance for several years. Widely travelled, he worked for the Admiralty, becoming Deputy Director of Stores, and was away much of the war; in 1944 he and his wife moved to Alton.

Bert Ransley arrived in Bloomsbury the first Sunday in 1930, as the new ministry opened. He was quickly drawn into the Christian Endeavour, run by Victor and Dorothy Brown, but had to go on a waiting list for six months before there was a place for him to teach in the Sunday School! He married Mary Davis, daughter of the deacon, Richard Davis. Bert himself became a deacon just before the war. After the war Bert and Mary were leaders in getting youth work under way again. From 1954-63 he was deacons' and maintenance secretary, and on Central Committee from 1955.



Frances Pounds

Kathleen Savill and her friend Ethel Smith worked on steadily throughout the Lord years. Kathleen was responsible for church flowers, normally doing them herself, from 1945-68. She also made huge quantities of marmalade for sale for church funds: in 1956 alone she produced 400 lbs! Frances Pounds came to the church as a medical student during Dr Lord's time, and remains, a quietly faithful member, in 1999.

Activities

Ethel Smith¹⁷ remembered ‘the doldrums of the interregnum’ and how ‘things began to look up’ when the Lords came. By then she was working in the City as a civil servant, first for the Post Office Savings Bank and later for the Board of Trade. ‘My hours were such that I could join the ladies of the Baptist Women’s League for tea, which was a feast of good things provided in turn by one of the members’. In those pre-war years there were annual three-day Sales of Work, full of fun and excitement: ‘Bales of cotton came down from Lancashire’ and were made into bed linen: ‘We slept between Bloomsbury sheets and laid our weary heads on Bloomsbury pillow cases’. She remembered the lively Christian Endeavour meetings, and in 1936 joined the church and choir and became Missionary Secretary. In those days BMS Valedictory Services were regularly held in Bloomsbury, and at least two more missionaries went overseas from Bloomsbury: Miss K.M. Westmuckett to Congo in 1933, and Miss M.H. Langley to India in 1934.

Work with women and children was largely left to the Sisters; Dr Lord liked to see provision for children, though he did not like children disturbing worship, which could be difficult for families living at a distance. In the early



Sister Doris

1950s Mrs Lord ran a separate service for children. Dr Lord tried to keep in touch with the various meetings, occasionally devoting a week to visiting them all. On Tuesday mornings Sister Doris dealt with a queue of enquirers seeking material and spiritual help. Communion offerings relieved distress among the poorer church members, supplemented by the other benevolent agencies of the church. There was still a variety of social service work, visiting the poor and aged, and those in hospital and nursing homes all over London, often on behalf of distant churches, because ‘in a real sense Bloomsbury is at the disposal of the whole Baptist denomination’. A Guild of Service, run by enthusiastic girls from a neighbouring business house, made garments for the poor and visited the aged and blind.

There were open-air services in summer: ‘The crowds in the West End gather attentively, and occasionally provokingly, for the hymns and addresses. The Gospel Message is badly needed, and, it is felt, sometimes even wanted when presented in a sympathetic if uncompromising manner’.

¹⁷ In church magazine 220, December 1990.

Dr Lord, already well known to the organization, was soon involved with the Central YMCA, taking classes and helping to train leaders. London University was developing in the 1930s, when Senate House was built in Bloomsbury. The monthly prayer meeting for students developed into the London Baptist Students' Union, with Dr Lord as chaplain. This major new initiative was one of his favourites. He campaigned for student work as he went around the country, believing that in this London led the way. The *Baptist Times*¹⁸ article, headed 'Bloomsbury - A University Church', hailed this 'greeting gate of the Baptist world'.

Lord's hard work, preaching, and gift for fellowship, allied with Bloomsbury's faithful core membership, gradually built the work up again in the pre-war years. A new Anniversary Social Gathering was introduced, with three-minute reports from the societies in 1934. Four years later Dr Lord wrote in the magazine, 'Witness for Christ can only be maintained in the heart of London at the cost of sacrificial service on the part of a willing band of helpers ... Fellowship! That is the great need of these days'.

One Sunday in 1934 Dr Lord welcomed 'a doctor from Canada, another from Baghdad, a Chinese postgraduate student, three Indian students, and a young Baptist from Germany.'¹⁹ There were often Indians, with the Indian YMCA nearby. In 1936 Lord noted young people from India, Burma, South Africa, Canada, South America, Holland, Germany, China and Japan. The *Sunday Chronicle* of 15 August 1936 carried a report of a visit to Bloomsbury by 'The Wanderer': 'I was not disappointed with either the service or the sermon. I was not disappointed either with the welcome I, as a stranger, received'. Dr Lord, shaking hands at the door, had asked a member to show the visitor around the building. Amused at going down to go up and by a church having a lift and a lounge, the reporter recommended other churches to adopt a similar approach to give an inviting sense of fellowship.

By late 1938 offerings had reached a peak and 'the congregation on Sundays, especially for evening worship, was one of the finest in Central London'.²⁰ Mrs Lord remembered regular morning congregations of 500 and 800 in the evening. Against this background Dr Lord could declare:

Bloomsbury was more than a preaching station ministering to men and women from all parts of the world; it was a lively fellowship of workers, combining study groups and university extension lectures with devotion

18 Undated cutting, but 1938 or early 1939.

19 Anniversary letter, 3 April 1934.

20 Dr Lord's own notes on the period.

to the needs of the lonely and distressed. The movement out of Central London was as rapid as ever, yet the church could report the best congregations during the present ministry and the largest offerings this century.

Seymour Price, in the chair at that 1939 Anniversary, believed 'Bloomsbury had persisted because at the centre of all its work there had been a live and virile church and because it had changed with the changing years. It was seeking to minister to the London of today.' It was all going so well until ...

The war years

The change was sudden and dramatic. Ethel Smith, who worked in London throughout, remembered the day war was declared. 'A note was passed up to the pulpit and, as the sirens sounded for the first time, Dr Lord told us to adjourn to the basement for the continuation of the service.' Young men were called up, Sunday School children were evacuated, all but two teachers left for various forms of national service, students dispersed, hospitals moved out of London, and few lay leaders were left. Almost overnight congregations dropped to forty.

Two weeks into the war Mr Cocks was 'sent away on important work' and Myrddin Evans became temporary treasurer as well as church secretary. Only two other deacons remained. When Evans was sent to America in 1942 Walter Freeman took over and later Dr Lord by default. Bert Ransley, a new young deacon was around initially, being disabled, but evidently was moved out of London later, for victory tributes only mention Walter Freeman and the Lords providing continuity throughout the war. One Sunday in 1943 the girls vanished from the choir: as civil servants they had been moved to Bath and Bristol during the week.

Dr Lord tried to keep in touch with his dispersed flock. He wrote regularly to those in the forces. In January 1940 he wrote to every evacuated Sunday School child, enclosing a gift. Magazines were sent out in alternate months, because of the paper shortage; presumably compiled by Dr Lord from 1941 when Mr Hagger became a Pilot Officer. They listed Bloomsbury members in the armed services and national defence forces. The Youth Club, now mainly the Scouts, produced a monthly leaflet, *Four Winds*, to send to scattered members.

Sunday worship continued, although the evening service was moved forward an hour, and sandbags surrounded the building. For a time they had to

worship underground in the evenings until an anonymous donor supplied black-out curtains for the chapel, which was no mean gift. Only the midweek service was dropped. Dr Lord recorded that 'Through the worst period of bombing we maintained our worship, frequently having to seek refuge in the lower hall', because 'in time of war men and women need a refuge from the tumult of the outer world, a fellowship in which they may gain strength to meet each day's demands, a symbol of the eternal truths which cannot be shaken'.²¹ They never missed a service, although windows were blasted out, the pulpit had a great crack through it, the organ was affected, and one spire was damaged. They worshipped with windows boarded up and no daylight. One winter the government banned evening activities, so they had morning and afternoon services. On returning to the evening they settled for 6.30, rather than 7 p.m. as in the past.

In the midst of all this Sister Doris died in January 1940, having entered hospital for surgery while Dr Lord himself was ill for six weeks. For the first time the Central Church had no Sister. Mrs Lord took on more, assisted, especially in visitation, by student sisters, like Miss Henderson Smith, Miss Moody, Sister Joan Magill, and Sister Mabel. In 1945, to Bloomsbury's relief, Sister Elsie Chapple was appointed full-time, serving until 1957 when she returned to Drummond Street, where she had been 1934-42, followed by three years at Berger Hall, Bow. Her stipend was £185 plus £40 expenses.

When Baptist Church House was bombed in October 1940, Central Committee, migrated to Mr Frame's Bonnington Hotel, taking the precaution of having organ and furniture valued. After Ernest Brown, then Minister of Health, joined the Committee in 1942, he hosted meetings at the National Liberal Club.

At the start of hostilities, the authorities made Central London cinemas and theatres close but asked churches to stay open. In June 1940 Central Committee instructed Dr Lord to let it be known that the Institute would be available in emergency, since 'such arrangements should be made in days of anxiety and demands for accommodation'. Dr Lord later wrote:

In the national emergency we began a ministry of help in our lower hall, which had been reinforced by girders. During one winter some 1,000 people bombed out of their homes found temporary shelter in our premises. We had a doctor and a nurse in constant attendance. The LCC, impressed by this work, took over part of our premises as an official Rest Centre.

21 Dr Lord, church magazine editorial, April 1940.

Early in 1941 Lord reported that the London County Council (LCC) were taking full control of the basement as an emergency dormitory. The authorities had looked at the facilities, not expecting to use them, but soon after rang Dr Lord when the area was badly bombed overnight and they urgently needed a Rest and Feeding Centre. Lord gave orders to open the church and take the people in: he and Mrs Lord would be along directly. The LCC bricked up the basement windows and installed 250 bunks, allowing the church a small open space for meetings. A Holborn Air Raid Precautions post was established there, and one part equipped as a first-aid hospital. The LCC paid six-sevenths of the lighting, two-thirds of the caretaker's wages, and were 'generous as regards cost of gas, coal, etc. which might be used'. After a year Lord told Central Committee he was impressed with the LCC's 'fair and pleasant conduct in their dealings'. He was moved too by his caretakers' gracious ministry. They slept on site, ready to help. Mrs Grant always called the refugees 'our guests', and would bring some up to the Sunday services.

The LCC took over the Fourth Floor too, with rest rooms and offices for their staff, and made the lounge into 'a commodious dining hall', where 150 children were fed daily in 1942, rising to 300 in 1944. A recent visitor told the author she had been among the children who marched 'in crocodile' to the church daily for their dinner.

Bloomsbury's open doors cost the church a good carpet stolen in broad daylight, to Mrs Lord's annoyance. Taken up from the Parlour, it was rolled up behind bookcases in the baptismal changing room. Investigating noises, the caretaker saw it disappearing on a van. At the end of the war the LCC paid the church £70 compensation for this.

For the remnant, not least the Lord family, church life went on. In 1940 Marcus and Monica and their friend Roy George joined the church. Soon Marcus Lord was in the RAF and Roy in the Navy. They had wartime weddings: Marcus and Daphne in 1941, Monica and Roy in 1944. A year into war Bloomsbury had fifteen men and four women in the forces, and others in the Auxiliary Fire Service, Home Guard and Police. Seven members were killed in the first wave of bombing. By October 1942 forty-five members were in the forces. Other servicemen came to Bloomsbury: Tony O'Connor, from the Caribbean, became a Christian in the forces and was baptized by Dr Lord while on leave.²²

22 Conversation with the author when both were serving on the BU Council, c.1990.



*The wartime wedding of
Monica Lord and Roy
George*

The last links with Brock's church were going, as Miss Emily Kemp died at Christmas 1939 and Miss Helena Shaw in 1942.

Sister Joan and Will Canfield got the Sunday Afternoon Fellowship going again in April 1942.

That September Dr Lord and Dr W. Graham Scroggie of the Metropolitan Tabernacle arranged a pulpit exchange.

In November 1944 the church magazine described the congregations 'liberally sprinkled with uniforms', drawn from all over the world. The offering was brought up by men in National Fire Service and naval uniforms. Dr Lord wrote:

With the entry of USA into the war we reorganized our work so as to render the maximum service to the men and women of the Forces. Our congregations were largely made up of service personnel. The social gathering after evening worship became a popular feature of Bloomsbury's work, and through the war period thousands of men and women in the Forces found in Bloomsbury a spiritual home. Thus began my contact with men from overseas ...

By then the Canfields lived in Highgate and had worshipped there for a time but now returned to help at Bloomsbury. Mrs Canfield stayed at home in the mornings to prepare lunch for the American servicemen her husband would bring home from church. In the afternoon the Canfields took a packed tea to Bloomsbury, until Dr Lord found them picnicing in the vestry and asked if they would serve tea for everyone after the service; so began those wartime social evenings. Rations were stretched to the limit. A pint of milk, normally reckoned enough for twenty cups of tea, was supposed to do twenty-four in the war, but Bloomsbury's had to stretch to thirty. They often served over a hundred with tea and fish paste sandwiches, and cakes whenever they could

muster ingredients. Alice Canfield remembered Eva Brown supplying much of the tea, saying she and Ernest were out so much they did not need their ration. The kitchen facilities were grim and conditions cramped between the surrounding bunks. Women spared all they could from their own rations.²³ When American care parcels came to the Baptist Union, Bloomsbury usually received one. Those weeks Mrs Lord rejoiced to tell her women she could manage without their rations. She half-hoped for a confinement, because a lovely layette came in one American parcel: the set included a beautiful nightdress for the mother with a 'lavender sachet' pinned on it, which proved to be a tea-bag, a novelty in England. They did not have a Bloomsbury baby but there was at least one romance for Florrie Holliday first met Reg Howe down there during an air raid. They were church members from 1944-86, while Reg worked as a ticket collector on the London Underground, and returned to celebrate their Golden Wedding in 1996.

Those served were mostly servicemen, many from the USA and Canada: 'a nice, refined class of boys', observed Mrs Canfield. Agnes Hammond remembered how they loved to sing, especially 'Standing on the promises of God' and 'He leadeth me', often to the accompaniment of air raid sirens.

The church maintained a surprising amount of activity through those dreadful years. They combined the Sisterhood and the PTA in a United Women's Meeting on Tuesday afternoons in the lower hall, drawing 200 in October 1939. The Savings Club money was repaid early in the war. The Home Circle and Women's Bible Class kept going. Women made balaclava helmets, mittens, socks and scarves for service men, and sent clothing and gifts to evacuees. Mrs Lord remembered going along Theobalds Road after an air raid seeking absentees from the Women's Meeting and finding a dazed woman wandering the street with a fur coat over her nightdress. In 1940 the church still provided Christmas coals and provisions for the needy poor. Voluntary offerings for the autumn quarter fell from £276 in 1938 to £134 in 1940, but the church doors stayed open.

The Girls' Club continued for a time, led in the early part of the war by Ethel Smith. The Scout troop kept going throughout the war, thanks largely to Fred Mardell and another Rover. From 1941 their numbers were swelled by

23 The rations varied a little according to availability of commodities, but a typical adult's weekly ration was 8oz (335gm) of sugar, 2oz (50gm) of tea and of butter, 4oz (100gm) of margarine, 3oz (85gm) of cooking fat and of cheese, 1 egg (if available) with one packet of dried eggs (= 12 eggs) per month, 3 pints of milk, and a little meat and bacon, jam and sweets. To eke out the rations carrots and sometimes other vegetables were used in cakes, and vinegar stretched the dried egg. Giving some of the family's ration to the church regularly would have been sacrificial.

boys evacuated to London from Gibraltar. Fred did his national service in the Royal Navy, 1945-7, in dockyard repair work, and then worked at the Post Office Telecommunications Headquarters in Cheapside. He was selected in 1955 as one of the London Scout contingent to go to the World Jamboree in Canada, and became District Commissioner for the Scouts.

Agnes Hammond was glad of those open doors. She came to London from Exeter in July 1943 for war work, during a 'fairly quiet' period:

Lonely and bewildered in wartime London, I attended another church for two Sundays and then - I discovered Bloomsbury! I first arrived on Sunday evening, during the first hymn. The atmosphere was such that even while I was being shown to my seat, I was saying to myself, 'This is my church'. I think too of the time during one morning service when a loud 'bump' was heard, due I think to a flying bomb not far off, when the congregation seemed to just rise from their seats as one and settled down again to find Dr Lord calmly carrying on with his sermon as if nothing had happened.²⁴

That evening Ernest Brown was preaching on the text 'Revive thy work, O Lord, in the midst of the years'. Agnes remembered him singing the hymn at the end 'with great gusto and without hymnbook, as was his wont'. She remembered the welcome in the basement with its two fireplaces and folding partition which often refused to draw, and what a lift she used to get from 'the view of Bloomsbury as one walked up from High Holborn, with its twin spires rising above the trees, and one felt that here was a home, if not within the wilderness, at least amidst the trials and anxieties of those days'.



Agnes Hammond

The dark clouds of war had a bit of silver lining: the partial requisition of the premises proved good for the church's finances. The treasurer must have thought the LCC a godsend, for with the regular payments in November 1942 the church actually invested £500 in 3% Defence Bonds, another £1000 in October 1943, and a further £1000 in June 1944.

The post-war years

In the late summer of 1945 the church was optimistic. The LCC

²⁴ Bloomsbury magazine, July 1976.

derequisitioned the premises. The new musical director was efficient and interested in the work. Offerings were rising weekly. Ernest Brown had lost his seat in Parliament but became Church Treasurer. Various meetings were re-opening: the Sunday School with just three scholars. 'The whole position was very satisfactory and encouraging'. A victory thanksgiving social in October 1945 was well attended, although the Church Secretary was on government business in Paris and the treasurer in the Midlands. The church could rejoice in still having a building and a band of loyal workers. It was a joy to have harvest decorations again, even if there were gaps in the sanctuary windows. A year later the blast walls, 'unsightly but useful', were removed from the Lecture Hall.

By 1946 the church grasped that people were not going to return to the area. Mrs Lord recalled the heart-breaking realization. The tenements behind the church had gone, to be replaced with office blocks. There were no longer large numbers of women living nearby but Sister Elsie ran a more modest Women's Meeting. Dr Lord did not appear too distressed by the reduced numbers, Fred Mardell thought; he just set about building up the fellowship through meetings of various groups to cement friendships which helped hold people within the church. As one member, at Bloomsbury for over fifty years, observed:

We migrate to the suburbs and try to leave, but we seem to come back to the old place and take up a bit of work again, spending time and money to do it. We come now because we want to come, and not because the church is convenient to our homes. Bloomsbury now, as in the past, continues to draw us into the fellowship.²⁵

The congregations became increasingly cosmopolitan, and radio and television opportunities 'helped to give Bloomsbury a national and even international significance'.²⁶ Ministry to visitors became ever more significant.

In October 1947 Walter Freeman, stalwart deacon of the war years, died. He had grown up in the church and served there all his life, as teacher, deacon, Central Committee member, VO treasurer, and sidesman. That month Fred Mardell came into church membership. The service of these two men spans the century. The church celebrated its centenary in 1948, with the Dean of St Paul's as one of the principal speakers. The centenary was also marked with that disappointing little apology for a history by Seymour Price, although he and Townley Lord were both prominent members of the Baptist Historical

²⁵ 'V.L.N.', Bloomsbury Magazine, No.53, March 1951.

²⁶ Dr Lord's own notes.

Society and really should have been able to do better.

In 1947 Ethel Smith joined the diaconate, after some years without a woman deacon. Iris and Fred Mardell were both baptized in 1950, the same year as Peter and Colin Saunders, grandsons of Tom Phillips, and Fred began to teach in the Sunday School. He became a deacon in Dr Lord's last year at Bloomsbury. George Foss deputized as church treasurer when Ernest and Eva Brown went on their world tour, and took over in 1951. Ralph Cocks, now a schoolmaster, joined the diaconate, a year after the Australian singer, Max Worthley. Mid-century Bloomsbury demonstrated its ability to claim service from members of long-standing and recent arrival.



Colin Saunders

A local visitation campaign was undertaken with Dr Lord's guidance and blessing. There were still some residential areas not far away, above or behind shops and offices. The fortnight's campaign yielded recruits for the Sunday School but few for the congregation. In 1955 twenty-five young adults again organized a Visitation Campaign, the 'Mission to Holborn', greeting people, learning about the district, and inviting people to worship. They visited 2,000 residents and asked for 'older help' in following up those who showed interest. Dr Lord praised this 'first-class piece of evangelism'. They repeated the exercise the next two years. By 1957 they perceived they needed to offer practical help as well as an invitation to church, babysitting to let a parent go to worship, or arranging cars for the elderly.



Max Worthley

Dr Lord still worked with the YMCA, and campaigned hard for student work as he travelled the country: 'Steadily our congregations gained in strength, notably in the accession of London students and nurses'. The London Baptist student group was revived under the new name of the John Clifford Society, meeting fortnightly on Fridays from 1946; this grew to a large, lively weekly meeting in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Institute lounge was made comfortable and homely again, with carpet, settees, grand piano and gramophone. Betty Thirsk remembered sadly the 'very comfortable' settees being banished later when the lounge was redecorated. The Sunday Afternoon Fellowship was started afresh to prepare young people for Christian life and service. Their meetings were informal, with records, talks, discussions, brains trusts, sometimes hymn singing, and

always a devotional epilogue. The 6d tea at 5 p.m. was the only fixed item. The Sunday evening Social Hour flourished. Florence Bray took on responsibility for all church catering from 1945 to 1958, when her loyal lieutenant, Mrs A. Rust, took over.



*The Caterers: Mrs Ann Cleidon, Mrs Florence Bray,
Mrs Bickers and Miss Jean Bickers*

a week for gym and games. A cheaper sport, hiking, was popular in 1950. Younger children played billiards, table tennis, draughts, skittles and lexicon²⁷, while an older group went in for gym, educational games, and play readings. In 1950, however, Sister Elsie lamented the effects of war on the children, 'still seen in undisciplined behaviour, lack of ability to concentrate, and, in some cases, in physical and nervous disability'. A Girls' Life Brigade Company replaced the old Guildry, with twenty-five juniors and a Pioneers section for girls in their late teens and twenties being trained for citizenship, home and church life. The Scout troop, which had never closed, provided a good base for relaunching youth work, with twenty-four boys. Their Group-Scoutmaster, L.W. Willis, was appointed District Commissioner for Holborn in October 1946. Dinkie Rew took over from Les Willis as Scoutmaster, with Fred Mardell among his assistants. In March 1947 a senior section was begun for 15-18 year olds (after which they went for national service).

Children's work was not easy. The Youth Club had grown to fifty by 1947. The next year they began a gym club, obtaining singlets, shorts and plimsolls with help from the LCC and Board of Trade. Some forty-five children, aged seven to fifteen, came twice



Sister Elsie

²⁷ A word game popular at the time, played with letter cards.

After the war it was hard to get equipment for the Youth Club, for everything was in short supply. The deacons bought a new billiard table in 1947, and rented a cricket pitch on the London Playing Fields Society's ground at Raynes Park, but had difficulty finding places for football and tennis. A Monday evening meeting drew twenty young business women to consider aspects of religious life. The Baptist Womens League, incorporating the Women's Missionary Association, had a devotional meeting with interesting talks.

A group of modest size but significant for the development of those involved was the midweek Young People's Fellowship, revived in the late autumn of 1945, when London was full of bewildered people, coming to terms with being alive. Several former members have enthused to the present author about the YPF. Betty Thirsk sent detailed information.²⁸ Sister Elsie called together a few of the older young people, including Dr and Mrs Carey Heard (a South African with English wife, who did not stay long in England), Joan Jackson, Ann Cledon and Betty Thirsk. The proposed Fellowship was to be predominantly devotional and educational. At first rarely more than ten used to meet around the basement fire, with two Africans among the first members. Betty remembered particularly Moses Oyemade, later a magistrate in Nigeria, Ernest Martin from British Cameroon, and Dilip Kumar Santra, a pharmacist from Orissa, studying for a PhD. He threw himself into the life of the church during his four years in London and kept in touch for years after. Agnes Hammond recalled that 'we welcomed so many visitors from our own and other countries that one member said she would never be surprised to see a Red Indian walk in in all his warpaint and feathers'.

They depended heavily on Sister Elsie's leadership until she fell ill, and then the members just got on with it: 'we all held forth on subjects which would have daunted an eminent theologian', like 'Why should I forgive?' (from everyday offences to the War Crimes Commission), 'The Greatness of Humility - is it right to want to count?' (led by Agnes Hammond, a lady of retiring nature), and 'Prayer' (Joan Jackson). These early meetings were characterized by the 'vigour and intensity' of discussion. They tried a formidable series: 'The Primitive Community: the individual overshadowed', 'Individualism: the community ignored', 'The individual in the family', 'The family in the community', 'The nation among the nations', and 'The

28 In a paper she gave to the Fellowship on 17 June 1953, reminiscing about the years from 1945. Betty Thirsk attended Bloomsbury for forty years, but was not a church member. She worked for the British Council and was in due course awarded an MBE.

generation in the generations'. They nearly came to blows over 'The equality of the sexes', obviously a recurrent theme; in 1953 a debate was arranged between the Fellowship and John Clifford Society on 'Whether married women should go out to work'. Ann Cledon developed her own line in racy biographies to illustrate virtues through lives that exemplified them.

In the winter of 1946-7 the YPF had an occasional guest speaker on particular themes, like the significance of the 'Victory Thanksgiving Fund'. In that cold winter, with acute fuel shortage, they moved to the small deacons' vestry, which had a gas fire: 'The piano stood outside the door, and it was a terrific crush to get everyone in'. The group was affiliated to the Young People's Departments of BU and BMS, and in 1947 their photograph was taken for a brochure about deaconesses, to show Sister Elsie leading 'an intellectual youth group'.



The Fellowship, 11 June 1947, led by Sister Elsie Chapple, with (from left) Betty Thirsk, Audrey Foot, Fred (from Sweden), Winnie Richardson, Agnes Hammond, Ann Cledon, John James, Muriel Clements, Violet Braham, Jo Crome, John Swain, Moses Oyenade, Gladys Greenfield, Kathleen Livingstone, Bridget Davis, Joan Jackson, Dilip K. Santra, Kathleen Marshall and Jean Bickers (photo and details from Betty Thirsk)

From autumn 1948 they turned increasingly to more authoritative guest speakers, and were served 'by a range and quality of speaker really out of all proportion to the size and nature of our Group'. A series on 'Many Churches: One Church', brought 'representatives of most branches of the Protestant

Church. Sister Elsie still gave many talks, often making her hearers uncomfortable, yet encouraging and strengthening them.

This serious-minded group permitted some lighter evenings. A missionary evening was remembered for Ethel Smith's Chinese Supper. There were occasional play readings, musical evenings, and film strips or a film, 'with all their attendant projector and lantern troubles'. In 1952 Leslie Brice told Central Committee they would like to darken the lounge, which had skylights, to show films on Sunday afternoons. With less needy people on the church's doorstep, the YPF arranged a regular party for old people from Poplar and Berger Baptist Tabernacle. They also arranged group outings and visits, including one to the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in St John's Wood.

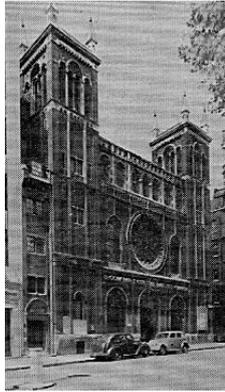
The YPF adopted a Declaration of Purpose in 1956:

Having accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and resolved to live by the strength of his Spirit, we declare it to be our united purpose

1. To strive, by God's help, to lead others to Jesus Christ, and to establish his Kingdom throughout the world.
2. To give to the Church our loyal and intelligent support, and seek in its fellowship a deeper life in Jesus Christ.
3. To study the problems of our time.
4. To seek daily the guidance of God's Spirit, and strive in all things to do his will.

By 1950 the church experienced a new sense of growth, with many baptisms and marriages. Three members were accepted as BMS missionaries, Margaret Becket, David Pearce (the first BMS dentist), and Mrs Stainthorpe, née Cragg. It was often difficult to welcome all the visitors, for sometimes they made up half the congregation. That year the anniversary appeal was for £1,500 instead of the usual £500 because roof and other repairs were needed. Young people, especially students, were more numerous than ever, and church parades mustered sixty Scouts and Brigade girls. Fifty came for the Sunday Afternoon Fellowship; two years later there were sometimes over a hundred. They justified the wide variety of subjects studied because 'if we are to understand our Christian mission, everything that happens in the world is relevant to our purpose'.

The spires, blast damaged in the war, came down in 1951. In October 1950 Central Committee had received a report on the state of the towers and roof. A month later one tender was accepted. The work was evidently done without reference to the church: another example of the separateness of Central Committee, even though the church's representatives were usually deacons. In



*The chapel minus
spires*

September 1951 the church secretary 'suggested that in future any drastic alterations regarding the Building, such as the dismantling of the Towers which had recently been attended to, should be forwarded to the Church for consideration and approval or otherwise. The Committee thought this would be a very wise course.' Judging from other minutes, there must have been considerable irritation in the church for the quiet Sir Guildhaume to speak out. As the building lost the striking extra height, a neon sign was put up to attract attention and the magazine had to adopt a new cover photograph.

In the Festival of Britain summer of 1951, the YPF was responsible for a scene in the Commonwealth and Empire Pageant, 'Hearts Ablaze', at the Albert Hall. The Bloomsbury Choir took part in the Free Church Choir Union Festival there, as part of the 1,500 strong choir which performed with the London Philharmonic under Sir Adrian Boult. Less exaltedly, Bloomsbury took its turn each year leading community hymn-singing in Russell Square in a series arranged on summer Sundays by Holborn Borough Council.

The magazine chuckled over the arrival in church of Smut, the church cat, 'to welcome Dr Lord back' in July 1951. During the anthem the cat appeared and walked along the rail in front of the choir, greeted Dr Lord and descended the pulpit steps. A few years later another caretaker's kitten tested the baptismal water with its paw: the author was among those accused of letting it into the sanctuary, but Bert Dye was ready to blame 'those dratted students' for anything! Christmas 1951 saw another first: a Nativity Play put on by the Sunday School and YPF.

In the 1950s Sunday School Anniversaries were revived, and the old scholars' reunion in 1952, drawing about seventy as part of the anniversary weekend. The evening service that anniversary Sunday saw the largest congregation since the war. By then Bloomsbury was the only central London church still holding a midweek anniversary meeting. The guest speaker was the Dean of Manchester, the Rt Revd J.L. Wilson, who had known Dr Lord in Coventry.

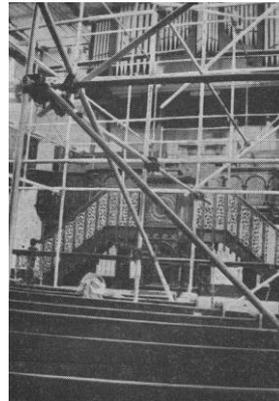
Joan Jackson, who worked for the BBC magazine, *The Listener*, became editor of the church magazine in 1953-65, when Constance Worthley, fatally ill, returned to Australia. Trevor Anthony, the singer and hotelier, and his wife

Olga joined the church in 1953; Trevor had already sung with Max Worthley in various musical programmes at Bloomsbury. Once a Welsh miner, and in due course an imposing Bloomsbury deacon, Trevor sang in the special choir at the Coronation, and years later at the Investiture of the Prince of Wales.

On 29 November 1953 the BBC's *In Town Tonight* featured Dr Lord on his Latin American tour and Dink Rew joining Ralph Reader to talk about the original Gang Show. The Free Church Empire Youth Service was held at Bloomsbury twice in the 1950s. When in 1954 some of Billy Graham's Haringay converts came to Bloomsbury, Dr Lord wrote in the magazine:

Some critics have pointed out that Dr Graham's interpretations of various Biblical passages are somewhat strange to those brought up in a different tradition. Of course! But on the great central themes he is so much 'on the beam' that I, for one, rejoice that he is able to gain the ear of thousands in the cause of Christ and his Church.

Major renovations were undertaken in 1954 before the Baptist World Alliance Congress at the end of Lord's Presidency. The building was redecorated throughout, for the first time since 1937. This time the church worshipped in the Lower Hall while the sanctuary was in the workmen's hands. The organ was cleaned and repaired, the lift overhauled and the outside woodwork repainted at a total cost £2,000, of which half was received at the anniversary and the rest raised by October. They knew further work would be needed before long on electrics, lift, and heating. In 1956 they installed oil-fired central heating, which made economic sense at that time, although it proved expensive later.



During the renovations

Townley Lord was often away while BWA President in 1950-55, but his travels brought more and more visitors to Bloomsbury. When the Lords went to Australia, they found in every church visited at least one former Bloomsbury member! The BWA Congress was a big event in 1955, with the largest sessions held in the Albert Hall; among events at Bloomsbury was a Communion Service so crowded that people sat up the pulpit steps.

Among those who threw themselves into Bloomsbury life were Bob and Vicky Le Pere from Texas while Bob was doing postgraduate work in heart

surgery. A number of Swedes came to the church; Hanna Lansberg joined the church in 1954 when a student at Bedford College, and still treasured memories of Bloomsbury when she took the author's family to the central church in Stockholm in 1970. Following the Hungarian uprising in 1956, three young refugees worshipped at Bloomsbury, although with some language difficulty. On 30 June 1957 the Rt Hon. John Diefenbaker, Prime Minister of Canada, and his wife worshipped at Bloomsbury, as Baptists visiting London.

The deacons decided to revive the Thursday Evening Prayer and Bible Study in 1955 from 6.30, with light refreshments beforehand to suit people on their way home from work. Dr Lord was available afterwards for interviews. That year Kathleen Savill, Beryl Oxbury, Leslie Brice and Colin Saunders joined the diaconate. Two years later Frank Whitehead celebrated fifty years as a church member and thirty as a deacon, but he continued for many more years: of the older deacons when she first went to Bloomsbury it is the tiny, kindly Mr Whitehead whom the present author remembers most clearly.

The last year of Dr Lord's ministry must have felt like the end of an era. Mr Grant, who had lost his first wife and married Barbara Linstead in 1950,²⁹ became ill and died in May 1957. Bert Dye, borrowed from a neighbouring firm to stoke the boilers, was appointed caretaker that November at £8 10s 0d per week. Dr Lord felt keenly the loss of Robert Grant who had been 'much more than a caretaker'. That year Sister Elsie returned to Drummond Street, and Eileen Stevenson became the Bloomsbury deaconess. Dink Rew gave up as Group Scoutmaster but was succeeded by Fred Mardell, who became a deacon too. The church, with beds supplied by the War Office, accommodated many scouts overnight on their way to the World Jamboree at Sutton Coldfield. The Slate Club was wound up in 1958, no longer needed as the standard of living of the poorer classes had risen.

It was a time of change, but new life was flowing in to the church too. Douglas and Mary Stewart joined Bloomsbury in 1957, when he became Assistant Head of Religious Broadcasting for the BBC. Meanwhile the John Clifford Society was growing future leaders, not least for Bloomsbury: among the students in the 1950s were Maurice Johns and his future wife, Margaret Elsdon, and in 1957, Brian Bowers.

The week's programme at the end of Lord's ministry looks busy enough, although slim compared with the pre-war schedule:

29 This was a real Bloomsbury wedding with Fred Steele and Max Worthley as best man and 'bride's father', for the church was the only family she had known.

Sunday	Worship at 11 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. Communion Services on first Sunday morning and third Sunday evening each month 3 p.m. Sunday School and Pathfinders 3.45 p.m. Bloomsbury Fellowship 5 p.m. Tea 5.40 p.m. Prayer Group
Monday	7.30 p.m. (alternating) Baptist Women's League and Women's Missionary Auxiliary 6.30 p.m. Cubs 7.30 p.m. on: Scouts, Rovers, and Seniors
Tuesday	3 p.m. Women's Meeting 6.30 p.m. Girls' Life Brigade
Wednesday	6.30 p.m. Youth Club (11-15) 7.30 p.m. Young People's Fellowship
Thursday	6.30 p.m. Prayer and Bible Study 8 p.m. Choir Rehearsal
Friday	John Clifford Society

In December 1957 Dr Lord announced his impending retirement. Income had dropped noticeably, partly because certain generous contributors had moved or died, so the church appealed for a massive 50% increase in giving. In May 1958 the magazine noted among recent visitors to the pulpit: Godfrey Robinson, Leslie Larwood and Howard Williams. Baptist Assemblies had by then outgrown Bloomsbury's capacity, but at Lord's retirement meeting Ernest Payne could still refer to Bloomsbury as the 'Baptist Mecca'.

19

HOWARD WILLIAMS
MINISTER OF BLOOMSBURY 1958-1986¹

*'He took the nonsense out of religion and made us realize
that a man of faith was not entirely an idiot'*

Howard Williams of his mentor, Principal Underwood

Born on 30 April 1918 into a manse family² in the tiny, Welsh-speaking, Breconshire village of Soar, Howard was the fourth and youngest child of Henry and Edith Williams. His grandfathers were respectively a police sergeant and a farmer. He was

nurtured in the faith in a tiny village chapel ... like a house but bigger [in days when] to be a 'member' of a dissenting church meant a good deal ... Their homes were sacred with the daily prayers offered in them ... and their knowledge of the Bible was marvellous. They read nothing else, of course, and they read it very closely for was not every word in it 'the word of God'?³



Howard Williams

When Howard was seven, they moved to Abercynon, a small mining town in 'a part of Britain important for understanding ... the declining influence of church and chapel'.⁴ In South Wales, unlike Northern England, the owners of mines and

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- 1 From this point on the author is writing of her own time in the Bloomsbury church. It is not possible to write with the same detachment of people she has known and loved, of decisions to which she has been party, and of events in which she has been involved. Howard Williams was her spiritual mentor, pastor and friend. To broaden the perspective she drew on others' memories; unless otherwise cited, quotations come from conversations and correspondence in 1997-98. She is grateful to many, named or unnamed here, who helped build the overall picture. They are more fully acknowledged in her Benjamin Henton Lecture for 1998, 'H. Howard Williams: preacher, pastor - prophet without honour?', *Baptist Quarterly* 37, July 1998, 316ff.
 - 2 His father trained at the Old College, Carmarthen, and University College Cardiff, and had pastorates at Bethel, Lower Chapel, Brecon; Sardis Chapel, Soar, Brecon; Moriah, Aberbargoed; Moriah, Abercynon.
 - 3 Howard Williams, *Old Memories and New Ways*, Presidential Address to the Baptist Union, London 1965, p.9.
 - 4 Howard Williams, *Down to Earth: An interpretation of Christ*, SCM 1964, p.9.

industry did not live locally as paternal overlords, so the workforce organized the communities: 'in South Wales the chapel was their home. They were deacons and teachers on Sundays.'⁵ Chapels still looked back to the Welsh Revival of 1904-5, with its persistent aftermath of disappointment which made him wary of revivalism.

The Depression hit hard. The meagre manse income was stretched to help those in dire need. He never forgot the unemployed miners, let down by chapels afraid of controversial political activity: 'so they watched their women folk getting ready for chapel while they opted for the club or the Workman's Hall.'⁶ Williams could never after be happy with 'a view of the Christian faith which was primarily concerned with the reality of heaven ... This is not to deny the value of a true eschatological hope but simply to assert that no view of "the end" can be granted validity by denying the proper claims of the earth.'⁷

Williams observed that 'Most of what was good in Welsh Nonconformity came to me because of my mother and father, but I also owe a debt to those who made it uneasy to rest too comfortably in tradition. From time to time we are all aware both of our need of roots and a desire to tear them up'.⁸ Baptized at sixteen, he found his father's Calvinism comforting, but arguing with friends at Mountain Ash Grammar School about politics, psychology and religion, he 'felt the need for some apologetic'. The questions of atheist friends mattered, because 'If the Book proved vulnerable to the sharp darts of young, bright critics then the way of life which I had been taught to follow would become a dead-end'.⁹ He read avidly and widely. An older friend, Elwyn Broom, encouraged him 'to probe and question, to be more concerned with truth than with certainty'.¹⁰ Struggling with creation and eschatology, Genesis and Revelation, he read *The Fundamentals* (1909 on). Their conservatism and their authors' academic distinction, reassured him: 'I felt that the trembling ground had become safe'. He read with joy A.T. Pierson's

5 Howard Williams, *Song of the Devil*, on the temptations of Christ, Epworth 1972, p.10.

6 *Song of the Devil*, pp.11-12.

7 *Down to Earth*, pp.14-15.

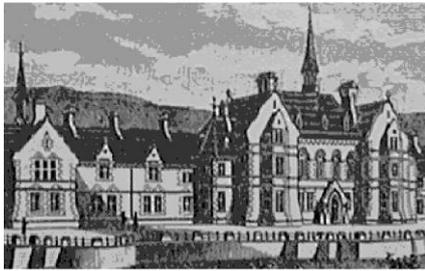
8 *Down to Earth*, preface.

9 Howard Williams, 'Room to grow', p.27. This unpublished 'autobiographical novel', reflects his childhood, college days, and first two pastorates. The typescript was kindly lent to the author by his son, Professor Gareth Williams of Salford University, along with a collection of broadcast sermons, newspaper articles, etc.

10 Broom, trained at Rawdon and Oxford, eventually became Chief Probation Officer in Cardiff, and ministered to the Taffs Well church. Howard Williams, 'Portrait of a minister', *Baptist Times*, 5 January 1989.

Many Infallible Proofs. He contemplated a career in socialist politics as ‘possibly more useful’, but the call to ministry won, because the vision of the Kingdom went beyond politics in building a caring society.¹¹

At Rawdon College, he warmed to Principal Underwood’s teaching: he



Rawdon College

‘took the nonsense out of religion and made us realize that a man of faith was not entirely an idiot ... His passion was roused not so much by the struggles and tensions of life as by conservative castles built to protect the Gospel from the world.’ Harold Rowse and L.H. Marshall completed the staff. Williams encountered the writings of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788-1870), F.D. Maurice and other Christian

Socialists. Marshall stressed the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite value of the human soul - familiar themes to anyone who sat under Dr Williams’s ministry. Rawdon students also studied at Leeds University where J.N. Schofield proved an inspiring lecturer in Hebrew and Old Testament Studies (his grandson is a Bloomsbury deacon in 1999). A scholarship would have taken Williams to a German university¹² but war intervened, so he continued at Leeds, with a doctoral dissertation on ‘The religious thought of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: its origin, nature and influence’ (1951).

Student preaching in Yorkshire was a culture shock: the chapels were much larger and the congregations even smaller than in Wales, but the generous hospitality was a delight to hungry students! Williams’s early sermons, ‘seasoned by a combination of Welsh *hwyl* and extreme criticism’, were received with the kindly stolidity of Yorkshire. Students ‘sallied forth ready to encounter the prophets of Baal only to meet a group of people who had a way of reducing the most splendid occasions into a meeting of friends... These were the people who, in a dry season, were preserving the faith for future generations while we worried about the problem of belief’.¹³ Entering a

11 ‘Room to grow’, pp.53-5.

12 Memory of author’s conversations with Howard; I think it was to have been Marburg. FB

13 ‘Room to grow’, p.90.

reserved occupation in 1943, Williams's conscience was haunted by contemporaries in the forces. No-one taxed him with it, but at times he 'was ashamed of being alive'.¹⁴

His first pastorate was at Blenheim, Leeds, a large church for a young man. He was told it was 'down-town in the tone of voice that suggested it should be in some other place', but city ministry appealed to him: 'the people were there with all their problems and all the wealth of community and city life'.¹⁵ An open membership foundation, Blenheim had a remarkably mixed membership in income, education and culture: 'with all its perils', Williams warmed to the openness.¹⁶

After the war, with society to be renewed, politics seemed 'the arena in which faith would fight and triumph'.¹⁷ Less enchanted with politicians, he caused a stir with a 'wayside pulpit' after the General Election in July 1945 when Clement Attlee had led the Labour Party to victory: 'CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT. One lot of sinners out! another lot of sinners in!'. It caused uproar. With the minister on holiday, embarrassed deacons covered the poster with plain paper. On his return, Williams substituted 'A change of government alone will not bring a new order' and wrote to the *Yorkshire Post* explaining that *all* men were sinners and the current crisis was not just economic and political but also moral.¹⁸

Although suspicious of the Superintendency, Williams formed a close friendship with his Area Superintendent, John Barrett, who drew Ernest Payne's attention to this young minister 'of rare potential'.¹⁹ His church treasurer, Robert Gawler, Clerk to Convocation of Leeds University, regularly gave Williams lunch, seasoned with academic discussion. Such friends developed his taste for dialogue.

While at Blenheim, Howard Williams married Athena Maurice, who was not bred in Baptist ways; he valued her detachment. She was a primary school teacher with a great love of children and a quietly pastoral heart. While regularly at Sunday worship, Athena was not heavily involved in the life of the church. It was at times of need that one got to know her. She observed at their

14 *ibid.* pp.122-3.

15 *Old Memories and New Ways*, p.119.

16 'Room to grow', p.143.

17 *ibid.* p.124.

18 Dr Williams kept the local press cuttings about this. The offending words were a quotation, attributed to Studdert Kennedy, 'Woodbine Willie'.

19 John Hough's memories: he was a student in Leeds where his sister and her husband were members of Blenheim and edited the church magazine.

retirement that her chief contribution to Bloomsbury had been the generous gift of her husband's time. Raising a young family in a distant manse, she provided a safe haven to which he could retreat to unwind. Bronwen and Gareth were small children by the time they came to Bloomsbury, and Huw and Gwilym were born in London. Howard and Athena used to laugh about the deaconess praying soon after they came for an increase in the Sunday School and felt they did their bit to help.



Sister Eileen, Athena and Howard Williams with Gareth and Bronwen; behind are Kathleen Savill, Leslie Brice, Bert Ransley and Ralph Cocks

In 1953 they left Leeds for Beechen Grove, Watford, a long-established, wealthy church in the town centre.²⁰ They found the change quite difficult. By then Watford had become a prosperous commuter suburb. The church won their affection, but Dr Williams remained wary of confusing respectable, middle-class ways with the Kingdom of God: Christians busy providing nice activities could fail to expose the church

to the world and the world to the church. 'The Church as a social structure has never ceased to scare me', he wrote, because it was so easy to shut people out.²¹ His preaching drew five to six hundred hearers on Sunday evenings. Mrs Kathleen Barclay, wife of the BMS president for 1998, was then teaching in nearby Bushey, and found Williams a particularly acceptable speaker at her school's Christian Union and was puzzled when she heard other Baptists question his evangelical credentials.

The Selection Committee to find Dr Lord's Bloomsbury successor consisted of all Central Committee members, plus two other deacons, George Turnbull and Ethel Smith, with Kathleen Savill keeping careful minutes. They nominated Howard Williams, and Dr Payne, Sir Guildhaume and George Foss were sent with the invitation. Williams met Central Committee on 13 June

²⁰ Membership in 1953 was 409, with a further 61 in the daughter church at Kingswood. Many were, however, elderly or no longer resident locally. Some 250 attended regularly. I am grateful to Alan G. Speed, a deacon at the time, for this information. Eileen Blackall remembered the large evening congregations filling the ground floor, but lamented their disappearance once Williams left.

²¹ 'Room to grow', p.167.

1958, and then the deacons. Like Brock, he knew his way of relating the Gospel to the contemporary scene was likely to offend some in the wider Baptist family. Addressing Central Committee he emphasized

the need for the Minister to enjoy the 'freedom of the pulpit' so that he would have no fear that his pulpit utterances would be brought under adverse examination by those outside his own Church membership and congregation. He also expressed the hope that in view of the close links with the Baptist Union and the London Baptist Association, the Minister could rely on the support of those bodies in connection with the work, especially insofar as the wider, central, ministry of Bloomsbury was concerned.

The Revd B. Grey Griffith, in the chair for that meeting, assured him that it was a glory of the Baptist tradition that when a minister was invited to a pastorate he was entrusted with the preaching of the Word and the ordering of the services. The Union and Association understood their responsibilities to Bloomsbury and would continue to give sympathetic support.

The new ministry began on 12 October 1958, with Williams telling the church this was a frontier ministry, sustained by fellowship in the Spirit. Bloomsbury was a place where the church and world could meet. Early in his ministry Williams explored 'the vocation of the church in a setting that was about as stable as a bottle of spilled mercury'.²² Meanwhile, the strong Welsh contingent in the church celebrated his arrival with a Daffodil Party on 17 January, which was reported at some length in the *Holborn Guardian* and the *Evening News*. Contemplating the new task, Dr Williams wrote:

I felt excited about the opportunity of working in a great city... The city has its own peculiar problems and the troubles seen in town or village are multiplied. There is a society rather than a community of people ... It is strange at first to step into the streets and find the world passing by as though one were invisible ... I shall not be satisfied with a life conditioned simply by the functions of people. Somewhere society and community must meet.²³

He set about renewing premises and people for more effective ministry.

From Bloomsbury he served in wider spheres. In demand as a preacher but impatient of committee work, he was drawn to the religious media. He was a director of the *Baptist Times*, for which his writings included a major series on

²² Maurice Williams on Dr Williams and Bloomsbury in January 1979, *Baptist Times*.

²³ 'Room to grow', p.186.

twentieth-century theologians,²⁴ and on the editorial board of *New Christian*, 1965-70. He wrote for the *Methodist Recorder* and other religious journals, and supplied a good number of 'Face to Faith' columns for the *Guardian*; one sermon appeared in *The Times*, and another in the *Radio Times*.²⁵ His books appeared during the Bloomsbury years.²⁶ Although slender volumes, the main works made a considerable impact. Within weeks of arrival in Bloomsbury he did an Epilogue for BBC TV, on 23 November 1958, with the subject for his brief talk, 'Write that letter'. He served on the Central Religious Advisory Committee of the BBC 1962-5, and the Religious Advisory Council of the Independent Television Authority 1965-70. An effective broadcaster, he is remembered especially for the TV epilogue the day of the Aberfan disaster. He led a *People's Service* from Bloomsbury in June 1959, but he was particularly called on at the high points of the Christian Year. His broadcasts included four advent services in 1960, the Christmas morning service on BBC TV 1964, the Easter service on ITV in 1966, incorporating the dedication service for Shobha Bhansali, followed by the Whitsun service for BBC TV that year, with a follow-up discussion in *Meeting Point* that evening. Williams preached on how the Holy Spirit can become a force for reconciliation, and the subsequent discussion was with a group of students of different races, nationalities and religions, including a Sinhalese Buddhist, an English agnostic, an Indian Hindu, and Christians from Nigeria, Singapore and the Bahamas.

For a time he was chaplain to Baptist students in London, as in Leeds, a director of the Central YMCA and on the Northern Baptist College Committee. He represented the Baptist Union on the British Council of Churches, and in 1984-5 was Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council. While President of the Baptist Union he went with Ernest Payne and Douglas Hicks to the Soviet Union, when visits were difficult during the 'cold war', taking in the eightieth birthday celebrations at Moscow Baptist Church of the Russian Baptist leader, Yakov Zhidkov. He also served as Arbitrator for the Printers' Pension Association. He led a tour to the Holy Land in 1969.

24 In 1975, introducing Barth, Buber, Bultmann, Tillich, Bonhoeffer and Niebuhr.

25 'God with a face', *Radio Times*, 16 December 1965; 'Wisdom of the way of redemption', *The Times*, 4 January 1971.

26 As well as *Down to Earth*, *Old Memories and New Ways*, and *Song of the Devil*, he wrote *Noughts and Crosses* (CKP 1965), *Personal Religion* (BUGBI Christian Citizenship Department, n.d.), *My Word: Christian preaching today* (SCM 1973), 'An Apology for Dissent', Moderator's Address (*Free Church Chronicle* XXXIX, Summer 1984), and *If words mean anything*, the C.R. Batten Lecture (London Baptist Preachers' Association, 1986).

The preacher

‘Held by a faith’ that he ‘could not have disowned at any period without enduring wounds’, Williams was devoted to Jesus Christ. He marvelled at God choosing to dwell with men, which meant that Word and Sacraments ‘must



Dr Williams preaching in Bloomsbury, 1962

grapple with the places where men have chosen to live and work even while they complain of city life’.²⁷ He believed in those twin Baptist principles, evangelism and freedom: the Good News must be proclaimed and hearers be free to respond, not coerced. God did not require people to ‘do violence to their reason’, but response would involve responsibility for others.²⁸ He believed the ‘effectiveness of preaching was not primarily about drawing crowds, but rather faithfully and seriously addressing the issues of belief and truth’. It had to be done in the context of a time when it was not easy to reach any valid belief at all.²⁹

²⁷ ‘Room to grow’, pp.92, 186f.

²⁸ Seth Stephens’ memories recorded for the author in March 1998.

²⁹ *Australian Baptist*, 5 February 1986, reporting on his address to the Protestant Dissenting Deputies and Ministers of London.

Critics questioned his orthodoxy. Dafydd Davies, former Principal of South Wales Baptist College, suggested³⁰ that in Williams's itinerant preaching, mostly for special occasions, the great doctrines of the faith did not loom large, so 'it was wrongly ... assumed by his critics that he queried their validity', whereas from his own pulpit he provided a balanced, biblical diet. Dr Williams himself considered:

The contents of early Christian preaching ... the fulfilment of prophecy, the early life of Jesus, the crucifixion and resurrection, the exaltation of the Lord, the gift of the Spirit and the universal judgment of Christ - there is enough there to believe or not believe. It is historical, redemptive and catholic ... If a man is a Christian preacher these themes will be an essential part of his message.³¹

I was taught and now hold to the view that Jesus is a man who walked in Palestine ... I know that the Jesus of history is elusive ... is bound indissolubly with the Christ of experience ... This ... enables theology to move into realms which speak of glory and mystery far beyond the memory of recorded events or sayings.³²

He did not major on the penal aspect of atonement: 'If we have Good News to give, let's give it! Put Encouragement and Hope first, before Judgment - show the possibility of repentance'. 'The root of repentance is ... in a spontaneous response to the overwhelming grace and love of God... It is a gift before it is an obligation'.³³ He certainly preached that all would come to judgment, and the media looked to him for advent sermons.

He was accused of 'universalism', because he asserted that, since all people were created by God and so had something of Christ within them, whether or not they recognized it, Christ died for all and was open to all. Faith should result in a dynamic new attitude towards all. Speaking on 'Evangelism Today' at St Paul's in January 1969, he expounded the Gospel as a three-way relationship: not just 'God and me' but 'God, me and my neighbour'. After the war many Baptists revolted 'against an Evangelicalism which narrowed the Gospel to a message of individual salvation. We believed that the nature of the Church was of immense importance and that the Church should see its role as a community among communities.'³⁴ The church should make *all* who come

30 Letter to author, March 1998.

31 *My Word* pp.77-8.

32 'The real Jesus', *Baptist Times*, 19 May 1977.

33 Howard Williams, 'Face to faith', *Guardian*, 20 March 1976.

34 'Room to grow' p.125.

welcome, yet at the same time Christians must maintain the integrity of their own beliefs and lifestyle.

He cared passionately about the local church, where people in Christ ‘touch and talk to each other’.³⁵ He wrote that the fellowship he had experienced ‘convincing me, more than anything else, that the Christian Way can create a community not limited to people of like mind’.³⁶ He loved the whole Bible, at a time when many seemed to find the Old Testament an ‘embarrassment’, because ‘old pictures need interpretation’.³⁷ Beginning with the Bible was the most effective way to preach because ‘The Bible view of life and of God’s way with men has the capacity of going like an arrow straight to the heart’.³⁸ Living among Jews in Golders Green, he was keenly aware of Judaism and liked its ‘moving sense of the sacredness of the life of the world’.³⁹ He was sure that ‘there is no hope for any Church which will not face the future, welcome the advance of knowledge and be open to the complicated ways of truth’, so he warmed to biblical scholarship, while still treasuring the heritage of ‘the little Meeting House where men of character and personal faith believed quite simply that the church must consist of Christians and where they heard the word and broke the bread knowing that Christ is the head’.⁴⁰

Dr Williams approached God with a sense of awe, which came through in reverent worship. He trusted the context of worship with its inherited traditions to provide the counterbalance to adventurous sermons. Again this was easier in his home pulpit, where he was in control of the whole service.

‘No-one in his right mind would choose to be a Nonconformist minister’, he declared. ‘Preaching is a work to be avoided if at all possible’, yet ‘the pressures brought by the Holy Spirit are so strong that a man can resist them only by being untrue to himself’.⁴¹ Inspired by great preachers ‘who talked of the Gospel with enthusiasm’,⁴² he shared his father’s sense of solemn responsibility when he ‘entered the pulpit with Christ as God’s representative

35 ‘Room to grow’, p.179.

36 *Noughts and Crosses* p.7.

37 *Down to Earth* p.36; *Song of the Devil* p.6.

38 *My Word* p.113.

39 *Down to Earth*, p.30; *Personal Religion* p.8.

40 *Old memories and new ways*, p.8. Howard often used ‘male’ language: in those days most of us used it inclusively. His later writing shows some attempt to be ‘politically correct’.

41 *My Word* p.30; ‘Face to faith’, *Guardian* 7 October 1978; ‘Room to grow’ pp.102-3.

42 He instanced his own father, his tutor L.H. Marshall, Leslie Weatherhead, W.E. Sangster, George McLeod, and Martin Luther King. *If words mean anything*, p.7.

before the people ... the aim of the sermon is to bring people to Christ'.⁴³

He was fascinated by the 'perplexing vocation' of the preacher who must use his gifts yet not display them, for 'the people who come are to see Christ, not the preacher'.⁴⁴ Dr Williams once explained the job thus:

I tell people how they may be saved. Saved from what? There's the rub. At one time it was clear. Saved from hell... or death ... Now, I'm not so sure, for what point is there in saving people from a place in which they no longer believe or from a condition which is inevitable? ... No-one seems to want to be saved ...⁴⁵

In more solemn vein he explained: 'Preaching means a declaration which speaks directly to the hearer and challenges him to a specific reaction. It is this personal encounter with the truth of the living Christ in which I am primarily concerned, where dead men may come alive in Christ.'⁴⁶

The preacher must bear in mind not only his own competence but the needs of a congregation who hear of scholarship only through occasional sensations in the daily press. If the preacher is blandly intellectual he will soon find himself delivering a monologue which he alone hears. If he is wilfully blind to scholarship he will in time become effective only to the dying and the dead. How is he to give a word to the living?⁴⁷

In order to 'go to the people making the Gospel relevant to their lives',⁴⁸ he read the papers before going to church and brought current events into prayers and sermon. Some of Williams's finest sermons dealt with matters on people's minds that week, like a mining disaster, the Coal Strike, and the deaths of Steve Biko and Martin Luther King, who had preached to a packed morning congregation at Bloomsbury on 29 October 1961.⁴⁹ Dr Williams remembered him 'being astonished that he could do so without being surrounded by

43 'Room to grow' p.19.

44 *My word*, p.20; see also preface to *Down to Earth*.

45 'Room to grow', p.1.

46 *Down to Earth*, pp.76-7.

47 *My Word* p.55.

47 'Room to grow', p.150.

49 I have been asked about his sermon. This note was recorded by the late Eleanor Bowers: 'The vision given to John on Patmos of the new Jerusalem, the city whose dimensions were equal in length, breadth and height, leapt into contemporary terms as he spoke on the three dimensions of a complete life. The length – harnessing and developing given talents to the full; the breadth ... of outgoing concern for the welfare of others ... the need to include God as the height in this vision of a complete life – to recognize him in every situation and to realize that personal and humanitarian plans without this third dimension are too small.' FB 19 July 2016.

security guards'. King remembered that his parents had worshipped in Bloomsbury in 1955, and he enjoyed a meal at the manse, feeling 'at home' among four children.

Dr Williams lamented that, much as he loved to converse in his mother tongue, he lacked the formal Welsh of platform and pulpit. He had, however, the *hwyl*, which he described as 'when speech poured out like a song and, in full sail, the words took wings as they were borne by the wind of the Spirit. The preacher no longer manipulated the text, the words controlled him.'⁵⁰ He recognized the power and danger of this very Welsh gift.

Legend has it that Howard Williams did not prepare properly: that he would nip down to Blenheim Saturday night to discover his advertised theme. Probably he joked thus, but it is hard to reconcile with his high view of preaching, or with the stack of sermon notes his daughter has kept. Each is on a paper cut down to 9" x 8" and folded in half. The front gives text, readings, place and date; the middle spread has outline notes, with key words underlined in red; on the back are notes of subsequent re-use. Some have quotations or modified versions tucked inside.⁵¹ Disliking a rigid scheme, he would mull over a sermon through the week, perhaps modifying up to the last minute, responding to inspiration or the day's events. This might well look like last-minute preparation. Occasionally his light structuring let him down; at other times his ability to speak spontaneously rescued a meeting. He needed space for words to 'take off', and found irksome the need to keep to a full script when broadcasting.

He distinguished between preaching a sermon and giving an address; the latter might be impromptu. David Russell recalled how in Central Committee he would often appear to speak 'off the cuff', yet could be prophetic: 'his manner was often flippant, but what he said was penetrating and even profound'. He had 'a well stocked mind', reflecting much serious thought, and was 'well versed in politics and economics as well as theology. To him these disciplines belonged together in the service of the Gospel'.

His sermons were eagerly anticipated. John Hough remembered equal appreciation from the Scottish scholar, William Barclay, and the Baptist Church House caretaker, Mr Bassett. Dr William Barclay wrote in the *British Weekly*, 'A few weeks ago I worshipped in London in the church in which out of all churches I would choose to worship, in Bloomsbury Baptist church, and

50 *My Word*, p.25.

51 Bronwen Williams has some 365 such bundles, a pile 14 cms high. Of these 52 were delivered once, 86 twice, 34 three times, many several times, 5 twenty or more times.

there I heard that great preacher Dr Howard Williams preach'.⁵² On Mondays Mr Bassett would relay choice morsels of Sunday's sermons. Williams used everyday language, 'free of clap trap and religiosity'.⁵³ For Daniel Jenkins, minister of the King's Weigh House church, writing the *Guardian* obituary, 5 March 1991: 'Bloomsbury ... could be depended on for sound biblical exegesis sharpened by theological insight and homely, often witty, illustration.' The sermon always ended in prayer.

Many appreciated worshipping *with their minds*. Going home, Douglas Stewart (Assistant Head of Religious Broadcasting, BBC) would observe, 'What a remarkable thing to say!' and he and Mary would delight in discussing the sermon. 'He was so varied and light-hearted', she remembered, 'yet he stood you up - you had to think for yourself. It was a profound help in facing everyday living.'⁵⁴ Rosemary Taylor, frustrated by the gap between scholarship and much contemporary preaching, found the Old Testament and Cross were 'given back afresh' as part of her religious framework. She found his infant dedication services 'among his most eloquent sermons', with the sense of life as a gift and of mutual responsibility as 'a powerful social agent, not just a warm feeling.'⁵⁵

Williams did not strive for instant conversions but his preaching led many to Christ, and perhaps even more had lost faith restored. At Bloomsbury they came reluctantly, to be gently led back by Dr Williams's respect for honest questions to 'a lively encounter with the risen Christ'.⁵⁶ These were years when much media attention on Christianity focused on apparent challenges to traditional faith from within the Church, including the furious debate over Bishop John Robinson's *Honest to God*, the 'death of God debate', and the later appointment as Bishop of Durham of David Jenkins, who questioned the Virgin Birth. Williams had much sympathy for anyone seeking to make the faith real for the modern world and for anyone persecuted for unorthodoxy. He seized on the opportunities presented to get people talking theologically.

Faithful Christians were given fresh insights. The Revd Robert Archer, a Spurgeon's College tutor, knew the criticisms of his conservative friends were unfair. Dr Williams preached 'not the old liberal "social gospel" but the gospel of Jesus Christ, both spiritual and social in its very nature'. Williams's

52 Repeated in *Baptist Times*, 13 September 1962.

53 George Betts, an Anglican often at Bloomsbury: letter to author, 12 May 1991.

54 Mary Wilmshurst, formerly Stewart: telephone conversation with author, 8 December 1997.

55 Letter to author, 8 December 1997. Rosemary is a Bloomsbury member and Vice President of the Baptist Historical Society.

56 Revd Robert Archer, letter to author: 6 December 1997.

sermons were striking even at secondhand. John Barrett, strokebound in a wheelchair in the Bloomsbury aisle, relayed some to a younger friend, Raymond Brown (later Principal of Spurgeon's), who still remembers some texts and exposition.

He had 'no time for pomp or cant', remembered Bernard Green, but he 'never knowingly hurt anyone'.⁵⁷ On a personal level he would gladly minister to or work with anyone, however different the theology or politics. He



Barbara Stanford

admitted to some surprise the day he found himself comforting tearful conservative Southern Baptists, just after division rent their Convention.

The preacher was a pastor too. His colleague, Barbara Stanford, bore the main pastoral responsibility, but Howard Williams enjoyed people. Warm and friendly, his personal charm drew people to him. He got alongside people, whatever their race, creed, or intellect, high in the land or living on the street. He had time for the very young

and for the aged. Amid increasing professional specialisms, he saw the minister's role as keeping the *whole* 'human person in view'.

Children were drawn to him. In his bachelor days, children would knock at his landlady's door to ask 'Can Mr Williams come out to play', knowing he might oblige. Asked for their memories, people of all ages mentioned his hugs. Today, when ministers are warned to keep their distance, especially from children, because of the abuse of a few, it is easy to forget the precious impact of *good* physical contact. Dr Williams could express more in a squeeze of the arm than even he could put into words.

When the lecture on which this chapter is based was reported in the *Baptist Times*, Norman Tate, then ninety-six, was moved to phone the author. He used to run a garage in Golders Green and serviced twelve ministers' cars. Eleven received normal customer treatment, but when Williams came in Tate enjoyed watching all his workmen down tools as they 'just dashed to talk to him!' The proprietor indulged in theological discussion with Williams; the mechanics simply enjoyed his company.

Dialogue appealed to him: 'If people wished to talk then I was content to let the conversation take its course whether it was deep or superficial'.⁵⁸ Often

57 Memorial Address published in *Bloomsbury Magazine* no.221, April 1991. Bernard Green was General Secretary of the Baptist Union 1982-91.

58 'Room to grow' p.128.

conversations ran deep, prompted by his sermons. He was available after worship informally sitting long in conversations over coffee.

He remembered people, 'not just names, but he would know the connections'.⁵⁹ His many contacts were often called on to help others. It was a cardinal principle with him that *all* people, whatever their worldly state, were of equal value before God. Respectable middle-class members had to learn to welcome those whose lives were not so clean and tidy. At worship no disturbance would deflect Dr Williams's concentration, so the congregation took anything in its stride.

His inclusive love of people drew varied congregations. In his early Bloomsbury days he would marvel from the pulpit to see Americans worshipping alongside Japanese. A Hindu and two Sikhs came regularly before they had temples here. The chapel was let for an occasional inter-faith service; one year the Dalai Lama provided an excuse for at least one church to leave the LBA. Dr Williams defended getting to know others, but was dismayed when Christians seemed to admire the sacred writings of other faiths more than their familiar Bible. In the early 1960s he was once involved in a TV programme which discussed Freemasons: Dr Williams declined to be drawn to attack masons but simply stated 'Jesus Christ is enough for me'.⁶⁰

Those who joined the church were expected to serve: he could be a hard taskmaster, discouraging any member from making a suggestion unless prepared to be active in implementation. Under such discipline, busy deacons with fertile minds think hard before promoting a new idea, but when people care enough, things happen. In church and deacons' meetings he was concerned to 'seek the mind of Christ', wanting to reach a common mind rather than determine by vote. He was wary of giving too many jobs to women, partly from fear that men would opt out, yet he encouraged girls too and often pointed to Jesus's radical attitude to women.

Prophet without honour?

Dr Payne described the Baptist Union President for 1965-96 in the Annual Report as 'Dr Williams ... always stimulating and not seldom controversial.' In his journal he wrote of the difficult task Dr Williams had undertaken, going to Bloomsbury when congregations were declining. 'He was proving a challenging and radical pulpit figure, deserving every possible support', but in

59 Freda West, in telephone conversation. As a student preacher, Howard often visited her Bradford home in her youth.

60 This stuck in the memory of John Barclay, BMS President 1998, in conversation with author, in summer 1998.

the denomination at large 'there was little general realization of the importance of a worthy Baptist centre in the heart of London and near the rapidly expanding London University'.⁶¹ A voracious reader, Williams was aware of new thought and movements ahead of most people, and drew attention to issues like world development, ecology, and the multi-cultural society before the terms became familiar. Indeed, he tended to move on, leaving earlier concerns to others once they came into fashion.

In the 1960s the Baptist Union had some churches like Bloomsbury, favouring scholarship, ecumenism and care for society, and others on the conservative wing focusing chiefly on evangelism; these tended to polarize, although many churches steered a middle course. Internal struggles put conservative evangelicals on the defensive.⁶² Today the balance has swung and conservative theology is dominant, but with a broader understanding of mission which Dr Williams rejoiced to see developing. Much of his 'heresy' was the advocacy of an 'holistic' gospel and 'Kingdom theology' a generation early. He observed the tension, recurrent in church history, between 'modern and political or old-fashioned and fundamentalist'. 'Yet', he wrote, 'it is only when both are held together that we see Christ in his incarnation and cross coming alive again'.⁶³

Conservative Baptists attacked him cruelly, leaving minister and church somewhat isolated. Looking back Williams wrote of the Welsh fundamentalists among whom he grew up as 'warm, friendly people, most of them quite unlike the nasty practitioners I have encountered throughout my ministry'.⁶⁴ He did not mind people disagreeing to his face and arguing their case, but 'stabbing in the back' was different. Probably he could not get on the same wavelength as his critics, who felt threatened by discussions he found stimulating.⁶⁵ Bernard Green thought they 'could not hear the gospel in which Howard Williams firmly believed because he did not use conventional terminology', but couched his message 'in words and thought forms that spoke prophetically to contemporary men and women' - except those who only understood the language of Zion!

61 E.A. Payne's private journal, consulted at the Angus Library by kind permission of his executor, Dr W.M.S. West, pp.527f.

62 Raymond Brown: letter to author, 8 December 1997, and subsequent telephone conversation. The *Honest to God* debate was traumatic, and conservative evangelicals were also divided over ecumenism, with Martyn Lloyd Jones urging them to leave mainstream denominations and John Stott wanting to work from within.

63 'Room to grow' p.56.

64 *If words mean anything*, 1986.

65 This was the view of Ron Cowley, former Superintendent, Western Area.

Unusually, Dr Williams was honoured most ‘in his own country’, in the churches he pastored, in Yorkshire and in Wales. He always retained some friends across the Baptist spectrum because ‘to know Howard was to love him’.⁶⁶ Where known, his gentle, humorous manner let him get away with much that might otherwise have given offence. His letters to his old friend, John Hough, always included some attack on the corridors of power: the Baptist Union, Baptist Missionary Society, British Broadcasting Corporation, Superintendents, the Billy Graham organization, London Baptist Association, or even the management at Lords who demanded that cricket spectators wore ties on a hot day.

He would say startling things to get attention: Bloomsbury recognized the rhetorical device, but elsewhere he could be misunderstood. He had a mischievous streak and enjoyed stirring up the complacent to make them think: ‘above controversy for the sake of it’, he could not resist ridiculing cant.⁶⁷ Such tactics can be effective, but demand a thick skin. His gifts brought him a prominence he did not covet: some aspects he doubtless enjoyed, some irked him, and others hurt. Some criticisms bewildered him: Barbara Stanford remembered many times when he was very low. Colin Marchant, President of the Baptist Union 1988, has only seen three brother ministers weep, and two were at Bloomsbury: Townley Lord and Howard Williams were both vulnerable to attacks by fellow Baptists. Raymond Brown, assessing conservative evangelical reaction, observed: ‘We may have misunderstood him’, but he appeared ‘almost deliberately confrontational if not adversarial - even relishing a provocative discussion ... evangelicals of my generation found him a rather threatening figure’. After *Honest to God*, it was tempting to see him as ‘a Baptist John Robinson’. It did not help that Ernest Payne, deeply suspect among conservatives for his ecumenism, liked Williams. As ever, those who knew him warmed to him: Dr Brown chuckled about the time he spoke on Calvin at Bloomsbury and Williams told him he ‘was less than fair’ to the Reformer!



Howard Williams
Sketch by Bernard Pike

66 The Revd Frank Goodwin, also a past President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, in conversation with author after Dr Williams’s funeral. In 1969 he became Director of Evangelism for the LBA and seems to have been the one conservative evangelical who actually had face to face dealings with Howard over London’s ‘Shared Evangelism’ campaign and the affair of the Bloomsbury lectures.

67 Bernard Green, in letter to author, 1998.

Dr Williams addressed the Baptist Assembly in 1951 on 'The Lord of all life'. The *Baptist Times* report was bland: 'a well received address, delivered with freshness, force and fervour', but Williams set up argument and counter-argument and then exclaimed, 'Damn it all, you can't have it both ways!' Swearing from the platform offended a number of Baptists, not least Arnold Clark, the Vice President, who wrote a censorious letter which failed to elicit a duly contrite reply. This was hardly an auspicious contact between Bloomsbury's future minister and a member of the Central Committee. Dr Williams's next Assembly address in 1960, hailed by some as 'a breath of fresh air', prompted six months of scandalously irrelevant correspondence in the *Baptist Times*, a glaring example of how not to hear a prophetic voice!

In 1964 Dr Williams was elected Vice-President of the Baptist Union, the first minister in pastorate since Dr Lord in 1947 and youngest President since 1912. He had served on the BU Council since 1954. Nominated by the smallest Association (Wiltshire and East Somerset), he was one of six candidates.⁶⁸ With the conservative vote split, Williams was elected on the controversial alternate vote system. It was not a role he coveted, and meant facing 'frequent carping criticism from certain conservative circles'.⁶⁹

The *Baptist Times* serialized extracts from his book, *Down to Earth*, which drew complaints, mainly about an inadequate view of substitutionary atonement, although the *Baptist Times* editor's review⁷⁰ found it 'fundamentally evangelistic'. When entering inner city ministry, Colin Marchant, from the Spurgeon tradition, found *Down to Earth* singularly helpful. Overseas, antipodean Baptists were wary, but in Gore, in New Zealand's deep south, the latest SCM book was chosen for monthly discussions by the ecumenical fraternal dominated by Presbyterians with multiple degrees in theology. The young Baptist minister enjoyed new-found respect for his communion's scholarship and wrote to thank Dr Williams. Barrie Hibbert treasured the reply, not dreaming he would be Williams's successor.

Of Dr Williams's Presidential Address the *Baptist Times* (20 May 1965) reported: 'A Welshman breathing fire and fresh air came to an assembly a very few years ago ... and was practically howled down in the correspondence columns of this paper. This year, accepted as president, he said the same

68 The others were Mr W.J. Edgington JP of Doncaster (nominated by four associations), Revd H.W. Janisch of Worthing (four), Revd A.J. Potts of Dorking (two), Mr D.C. Shedden of Birmingham (one), and Revd S.A. Turl of West Ham (five).

69 E.A. Payne, note in his private journal, p.619. The author is grateful to his executor, Dr West, for permission to consult this in the Angus Library.

70 Walter Bottoms, 13 August 1964.

things, was heard with respect and acclaimed for his message!’ Not everyone agreed. Dafydd Davies recalled the evening in Leeds: ‘No one could have been unmoved on that occasion except, possibly, Howard’s critics. Their discomfort was apparent to all. The truth sometimes hurts, and it undoubtedly did so then.’

The *Baptist Times* published an abridged version, retitled ‘The Church for others’. As the President fulfilled engagements around the country he suffered some unpleasant attacks. The only evidence in print appears to be Ian Paisley’s diatribe, twenty-two pages of vitriol entitled *The depths of the Baptist Downgrade: C.H. Spurgeon’s prophecy comes true: An exposure of the infidelity and unitarianism of the President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland*. It had section headings like ‘Dr Williams versus the truth of God’.⁷¹ With a foreword by the Revd Brian Green of Hounslow Baptist church, it was sent to all Baptist ministers. Dr Williams was not too distressed by Paisley’s reaction, but the Baptist attacks really hurt.

Four Lectures by Rev. Rex Mason MA BD, Spurgeon’s College

How God shows himself in the Old Testament

- 2 Oct. (i) *Events*
- 14 Oct. (ii) *In Relationships*
- 21 Oct. (iii) *In Word*
- 28 Oct. (iv) *In Worship*

Two Lectures by Rev. Michael Walker BD MTh, Highams Park Baptist Church, on

- 11 Nov. *The Troubled Ark: The church and the world*
- 18 Nov. *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Heaven and Hell*

Two Lectures by Howard Williams BA BD, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, on

- 25 Nov. *The Lord’s Prayer*
- 2 Dec. *Christian love*

One Lecture by Professor William Barclay, Glasgow University, on

- 9 Dec. *The Christian Ethic in the New Testament and in the Twentieth Century*

The incident that rankled most came in 1969 and related to educational lectures on the Bible and Christian doctrine, with opportunity for discussion, for which he thought he had LBA backing. Barbara Stanford remembers how carefully he chose lecturers he believed would be acceptable: William

⁷¹ Dr Williams showed the author his copy, sent by the Paisley supporters, many years ago.

Barclay, Rex Mason (then a Spurgeon's tutor), Michael Walker, and Williams himself. Arrangements were well advanced when the LBA withdrew support, under conservative-evangelical pressure. Dr Williams wrote later of 'those LBA evangelical rotweilers appointed to guard the property of the faith'.⁷² The lectures took place on Tuesdays in the Friendship Centre but as a Bloomsbury event with little wider support, to Williams's great disappointment. Serious consideration was given to a further series on the relevance of the Christian faith in the 1970s in conjunction with the London Baptist Preachers' Association, to be led by a mixture of ministers and laymen, but joint ventures did not take off. Bloomsbury was left to mount a range of midweek studies, with an ever open door for anyone interested.

The whole situation was more complicated than it sounded when Dr Williams harked back to it later. Williams, typically dismissive of committees, had discussed the idea with, Geoffrey Haden, the Superintendent, but made arrangements without working through all the 'proper channels'. Bloomsbury, struggling to pay off the reconstruction debt, had not responded warmly to a request for £1 per member to finance the LBA's Shared Evangelism initiative, which the deacons judged poorly thought out. The promoters were the same men who blocked the lectures. Soon after, the LBA made a generous grant of £750 towards an assistant to work in the Friendship Centre, but a disastrous Bloomsbury appointment effectively wasted the money. All this contributed to a period of soured relationships between church and association.⁷³

In Wales as in south-east England, there were distinct groups of 'traditional evangelicals', who appreciated Dr Williams, and those who prided themselves on being 'real evangelicals'. When Williams addressed a gathering of two thousand at a Baptist college Valedictory in Cardiff in 1959, the 'real evangelicals' marched out when he declared that the judgment question at heaven's gate would be 'Where is your neighbour?' - 'the twinkle in his eyes was too much for them'.⁷⁴

Baptist critics drove Dr Williams back into Bloomsbury, or into appreciative ecumenical circles, lamenting that 'the only people who have

72 In a letter to John Hough.

73 The saga is recorded in the Bloomsbury Deacons' Minutes, and church members remember how it rankled with Howard. When Geoffrey Haden was dying, Howard told John Hough, 'I liked him and his company when away from the LBA context. After retiring he became the attractive person he sometimes felt compelled to conceal'. Williams seemed to equate the Metropolitan Superintendent with the LBA, apparently not grasping the delicate relationship of the Union employee to the Association.

74 Dafydd Davies made these distinctions, and noted that all but three signatories to the protest letter to the college senate failed to become or remain Baptist ministers.

tried to stop me preaching are some of my fellow Baptists'.⁷⁵ The prophetic voice, if not silenced, was muffled. After his presidency, he rarely appeared at BU Council or Assembly. He did, however, preach in Westminster Abbey on 22 July 1973. He teased the author when she joined BU Council, but quizzed her on the business: he had not lost interest in wider Baptist life. He wrote kindly to every incoming Union Vice-President.

Like an Old Testament prophet, Howard Williams sometimes spoke sternly to Christians of his day. Those who could not digest an uncomfortable word found it easier to mishear and cry heresy. He never found the prophetic calling easy, but it was what the Lord required of him. He knew God's truth could stand up to modern testing. He adopted, and insisted that his churches practised, an open, tolerant approach, and was constantly taken aback when Christians excluded people.

He was a 'remarkable mix of Welsh valley piety and enthusiasm ... plus a clear Christian socialism ... plus a love of people to whom he wanted to declare the good news of a God who loved them, whoever and whatever they were'.⁷⁶ He preached to all who 'had ears to hear', content to leave response to the Holy Spirit. The Arminian in him believed that 'all who will may come', while the old Calvinist sensed that there was a limit to how far the preacher could determine the outcome.

His disagreements with other Baptists stemmed as much from his very Baptist-ness as from 'liberal' theology. Kenneth Slack claimed that Dr Williams identified himself with the whole Christian church while remaining 'outrageously Baptist - almost irredeemably Baptist!'⁷⁷ Williams was an independent Baptist who ploughed his own furrow. He liked people and readily won love and respect in personal encounter, but he was a dynamic leader, and not a natural team worker, more effective as a student chaplain than as a Senior Friend. This made very special the fine working partnership he enjoyed from 1961 with Barbara Stanford, as deaconess and then assistant minister, after the BU recognized all serving deaconesses as full ministers.



Howard and Athena Williams in 1986

⁷⁵ 'This is what I would go to the stake for', *Baptist Times*, 16 October 1980.

⁷⁶ Bernard Green, writing to author, 1998.

⁷⁷ *Baptist Times* 10 June 1965.

Relations with church officers and deacons were good, but he liked to generate the ideas, or mull them over until ready to own them himself.

He did not like denominational structures and was severe on ministers who left local pastorate for any other sphere of service, yet his ministry drew several such ministers to Bloomsbury. Politics and academia had tempted him, but could not compare with the high calling to pastor a church and to proclaim the Good News of the risen Christ.

Writing at his retirement, Brian Cooper observed, 'Unpopular in certain Baptist circles for his fearless denunciation of fundamentalism and biblical literalism, Williams won much respect for his sheer ability as a communicator of the things of the Gospel, particularly to many on the fringes of organized church life or quite outside it'. He was not concerned with literal biblical truth, 'but about the fundamental truth of the Bible's message'. He showed that such preaching, 'while recognizing and using critical scholarship, can be as enlivening and powerful as any fundamentalism'.⁷⁸ Williams told Brenda Forward, a more typical evangelical Baptist who wrote a sympathetic retirement feature for the *Baptist Times*, that his ideas came too early. In the 1960s

There was a strong division between people who believed you should express Christian living in terms of winning the world and people who thought you ought to escape from the world altogether or turn your back on it, and that the only thing you did with the world was try to convert it ... You can't really talk about religion at all in Christian terms if you are using it to distinguish it from life... Being willing to open the Bible to all kinds of examination and study without feeling you have got to defend it is the way forward. It sets the church free. It makes the church able to live within its own time, and respond to what is happening now.⁷⁹

He recognized that more recently evangelicals had become better at this than more radical theologians, who had become 'academically stiff'. His own instinct was to enter into dialogue with anyone, 'A big disappointment has been that I've not found it possible to work with people whose views are markedly different from my own. I believe we must be willing to accept with integrity what another person is doing.'

As Bloomsbury's 'Minister Emeritus', Dr Williams retired to Cardiff in 1986, since he remained, as he put it, 'daft about Wales'.⁸⁰ He continued to preach, appreciated not least because he had not become too grand to give

⁷⁸ CWN Series, 17 October 1986.

⁷⁹ *Baptist Times* 27 November 1986.

⁸⁰ *Guardian*, 'Face to faith', 1 March 1980.

time to the smallest churches. But his lungs were already failing, and his preaching was increasingly confined to the milder seasons. He died on 27 February 1991.

20

**FRIENDSHIP
THE CHURCH 1958-1986**

'Bloomsbury was not a church in which members were likely to be idle'

Baptist Magazine, May 1889

In March 1959 the church held a conference on the future for the central church, led by Douglas and Mary Stewart. Douglas contrasted the suburban church, much of whose work was directed toward home and school and preparing young people to move away, with the central church which received them, as they came to London to seek jobs, to study, or to take up responsible positions. Bloomsbury ministered where people worked. The area was a centre for study, art and entertainment, for tourists, and for denominational work. People wanted a place of refreshment and encouragement there, rather than extra meetings. The area claimed a day-time population of 250,000, a student and nursing population of 50,000, but only 40,000 residents. That was the setting for Bloomsbury's ministry.

In April Williams told Central Committee that, although the roll needed drastic pruning, the church was generally healthy, with good evening congregations. The site was first class, but the building needed improvement. He warmly supported Arnold Clark's suggestion that the church should be open at certain times midweek and was considering how best to arrange this,

Like Tom Phillips and Townley Lord, Howard Williams was given false expectations about denominational support for the Central Church and soon began to feel let down. When he came, Central Committee was still dominant, even capable of telling the church whom to elect as representatives!¹ The Committee often took major business a long way before consulting the church. Minutes reveal months of discussion with the BU and LBA about redevelopment possibilities before Dr Williams reported in April 1961 that he had 'laid the full position before the Deacons at their last meeting'.²

There was a marked change of approach under Dr Williams. Townley Lord had encouraged a variety of small groups of people with similar interests,

1 Thus on 5 March 1948 Central Committee had recommended Leslie Brice and Ernest Thomas, who were both duly elected.

2 Central Committee Minutes, 21 April 1961.

believing that these fostered friendships which in turn helped bind people into the church fellowship. Specialized groups rang alarm bells for Williams, who wanted to draw all together into a single community. He was wary of cosy clusters, fearing not so much dissentient cabals as the limitation of narrow horizons, restricting love and concern to those of their own kind. He would quote, as a dreadful warning, the prayer of the introverted: 'God bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife, us four, no more, evermore, Amen'. He saw the tendency to care only for members and exclude the rest as a dangerous temptation for any church. The over-full midweek timetables of mid-century churches could insulate Christians from the world and so deny to others the opportunity of encountering the risen Christ.

Dr Williams therefore ended a number of Bloomsbury's specialist activities. To the members' sorrow the YPF was closed, to be succeeded from September 1959 by the Wednesday Fellowship, open to all, with similar subjects on its programmes but a different dynamic. Family Church, with children leaving part-way for their classes was introduced in March 1959, replacing the small afternoon Sunday School. Bloomsbury's children were all brought by their families, mostly from a distance. The Girls' Life Brigade vanished, and the Scouts were transferred to Whitfields. There was still a Women's Meeting in summer 1959, but it did not last much longer. The Baptist Women's League clung on until July 1967, as did the Tuesday Afternoon Working Party, the 'Knit and Natter Circle', which was still making items for the BMS in 1969. The last national BWL president from Bloomsbury was Mrs Enid Adams in 1975. The Sunday Afternoon Fellowship survived for some years, presumably because open to anyone, but did not transpose comfortably to the larger Friendship Centre and eventually closed, although teas were still served. The large and vigorous John Clifford Society (JCS), which drew students to Bloomsbury from far beyond the church membership, escaped the assault on specialist groups: Dr Williams was the chaplain for a time from 1959.

The Reconstruction Scheme

In February 1958 A.R. Brown of the Hammerson Group of Companies enquired of the Baptist Union whether the Bloomsbury site might be for sale. Developers were finding churches could often be enticed to move from old buildings on prime central sites to modern premises elsewhere. Certainly Bloomsbury had problems with building and fittings, but deserting the city

centre had no appeal to Howard Williams and only a central location could draw the widely dispersed membership.

That July Leslie Brice told Central Committee that the organ needed a new motor and blower, and perhaps an humidifying plant because the new central heating system was drying the leather. The flue had been sited too close to the organ, and could not be insulated without removing the organ casing. To move the organ would cost about £4,000, but would open up possibilities for remodelling the pulpit area. An electronic organ was a possibility: a suitable one would cost £1,800.

Dr Williams disliked the narrow, gloomy vestibule. Central Committee discussed possible improvements in October 1959 and agreed to spend £75 on a grille over the radiator, but that would hardly make much difference. The chapel, with woodwork black from varnish and grime, was 'gloomy and sombre'.

In April 1959 a memorandum from Sir Cyril Black, inserted into Central Committee Minutes, suggested a scheme similar to Christ Church and Upton in Westminster Bridge Road. A developer would rebuild on site with church accommodation on basement, ground and first floor levels and seven floors of offices above. The suggested scheme allowed for a maximum congregation of 450-550 which seemed inadequate when evening congregations often exceeded 500. A new building would have had to provide underground parking, a usage less appealing than it would have been in the late 1990s, with street parking drastically restricted.

The church representatives thought that the sanctuary should seat 800, with a further meeting room for 300. In 1960, 50-100 were coming on Sunday afternoons and Wednesday evenings, and 100-200 students on Friday evenings. The church would want good vestries, a bigger vestibule, and cloakrooms. Dr Williams, used to the 'big seat' of Welsh chapels, wanted enough space around the table for *all* the deacons to sit there at communion.

Central Committee looked for an alternative site without success. Once again wistful eyes were cast on the adjacent premises. On 17 June 1960 Central Committee had a major discussion, 'Looking to the Future'. The Union said the LBA must take the lead. The LBA would have rebuilt from scratch rather than redevelop the old building. Sir Cyril offered a revised proposal in September for a new building to meet Bloomsbury's needs and give six floors of office space. This would cost £176,250, of which the church would need to raise £25,000. Colin Saunders expressed concern about keeping the church together over two years of rebuilding, and George Foss doubted

whether there would be enough space for the church and questioned Black's furnishing estimates.



George Foss

Dr Payne was keen to bring the BU, BMS and LBA into joint headquarters, which appealed to the Bloomsbury representatives more than being part of a commercial development. In October Central Committee put the idea to the Baptist bodies, but the LBA could not afford such a project, and the BMS did not share Payne's enthusiasm. By March it was clear that a joint project was not viable, so the church was left to modernize the existing building. Thereafter Central Committee seems to have become a less dominant force. Although the constitution was unchanged and major expenditure and staff appointments have to be approved by Central Committee, the church has taken the lead in developing policy.

On 24 January 1962 the Church Meeting approved the Reconstruction Scheme, and the Appeal for £60,000 was launched on Friday, 9 March. The church set about raising the money, eventually about £100,000. The loans were not paid off until 1974. To show the way forward, the church began to serve coffee in the lower hall after morning service. Members took many fundraising initiatives, like Ruth Campbell's candlelight musical soiree in the John Clifford Room, raising £55. Gerald Barnes organized various recitals and concerts; David Lovegrove was active in promoting Bloomsbury music at this time. The church organized a visitation campaign and area survey in September 1962, and made good contacts with the hotels.

On 19 September James D. Shearer was appointed architect, and Hill, Norman & Beard organ builders. It was a bold commitment on the part of a church which, that August, numbered only 269 members, of whom 48 were no longer in London.³ After reconstruction numbers rose a little: in May 1969 there were 320 on the roll, of whom 44 were distant.⁴

The appeal went out far and wide. In the USA the *Watchman Examiner* carried a substantial article by John W. Bradbury, with a picture of

3 Of the remaining 221, 34 lived in central London postal districts, 45 North-West, 33 North, 30 West, 21 each in South-East and South-West, and 17 in East London, with 10 apiece in Surrey and Middlesex. Of those further afield, 4 were overseas, 2 as missionaries, and 4 in the process of transfer to other churches. There were six for whom the church had no current address.

4 47 in WC1 and WC2, 152 in other London postal districts, 77 in Home Counties commuterland, 10 overseas, and 34 elsewhere in the UK.

Bloomsbury on the front cover.⁵ Bradbury argued

the need of a great, challenging, serviceable Baptist center in the heart of London ... Dr Lord dreamed of a center and, in cooperation with the London Baptist Association, fulfilled a part of the dream ... Bloomsbury is the best location for a Baptist Center to serve not only London and provincial Baptists who visit the city, but also Baptists from any part of the world.

Bradbury wanted to see an International Baptist Center, with a good hostel: 'All members of the Baptist World Alliance should have an investment in its establishment since they all may benefit from it if they visit London'. The BWA would channel American gifts to the Bloomsbury Construction Fund.

All levels of the building were remodelled. The vestibule was improved and the front of the sanctuary was completely changed, with a high extended pulpit area capable of holding a large platform party. Below, the new rostrum, open to the congregation, replaced the smaller, fenced table platform. An elegant new communion table, nine feet long of African teak, was given in memory of Ernest Brown.⁶ Kathleen Savill made new linen for this. Behind the table curtains of old gold velvet screened doors to the baptismal changing rooms; the baptistry was still below the table. The pulpit front had a symbolic dove descending across a rainbow in different shades of wood. Above, instead of choir stalls and organ, within an arch to harmonize with the windows a wooden cross soared against a blue sky. The fluffy white clouds were the inspiration of the workman set to paint the backdrop



Builders at work on baptistry

Note the surround of the memorial windows left behind when these were moved up. They were only bricked up in 1964.

⁵ 5 December 1963, pp.896-8. The journal is subtitled *A National Baptist Paper*, and it appears to carry news relating to several Baptist Conventions in the USA.

⁶ The old communion table, complete with cloth made by Ethel Smith and Kathleen Savill, ended up in the Burchier Chapel of Little Easton Parish Church in Essex, where it was sometimes used for communion with all sitting around it. Letter to author from Ethel Smith, 6 July 1980, after she visited Little Easton and talked to the Rector.

plain blue. The paintwork throughout was white, blue and old gold. The high pulpit was fine for addressing the gallery, but its use was diminishing. The upper gallery and some pews were removed, reducing seating from 1,200 to 900. The woodwork was stripped light, which made a dramatic difference. Memorial plaques were removed from chapel and lower hall, and the information transferred to a special book in a display case in the gallery.

For the first time the rose window was visible from inside. The three-manual pipe-organ was divided either side of this window. Initially only two manuals were installed, but provision was made to add the Choir Organ when it could be afforded, and this was given in 1969 by Mr and Mrs P.L. Summers of Chesham in memory of Tom Phillips. The organ contains nearly 3,000 pipes and is played from the console in the south gallery. There are 58 stops in all, 44 of them 'speaking', the others being couplers and tremulants. The visible pipes are all dummies.⁷

Once again the church worshipped in the rather gloomy basement. Later, while the basement was renewed, activities moved to the upper floor, where a pilot scheme of Sunday lunches began in June and July 1964, prepared by two young women, Ruth Everett and Janet Done, with the ever-faithful Esther Saunders. This was liked so lunches resumed that September, with Ralph Cocks presiding over the tables.



Looking through baptistry hole to chairs set ready for worship below

⁷ Philip Luke kindly supplied details of the organ. The 1990 re-build by John Males of Eastbourne includes pipe-work by Brindley & Foster and Hill, Norman & Beard.

The sanctuary re-opened on Saturday, 25 April 1964, with a service at which Dr Ernest Payne presided and Professor William Barclay preached. Payne wrote in his journal 'The reopening services ... were for me one of the



The reconstructed sanctuary, 1964

most emotional occasions during my secretaryship, partly because visits to the church had meant so much to me during my teens and early student days, partly because the whole enterprise had involved considerable faith and persistence, partly because, though the interior of the church was transformed, those most devoted to the building felt at home in it'.⁸ Barclay described the chapel as 'unrecognizably beautiful', and reporters were struck by the sense of space and light. Next morning the Mayor and Corporation of Holborn attended worship.

The re-opening was

reported on 25 April in the *Morning Post*,⁹ impressed that 2,000 people had contributed although the church only had 300 members, and the *Guardian*, which observed, 'Nobody would claim that the Baptists have a strong aesthetic tradition. But the splendid renaissance of the Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church ... breaks cleanly from brown paint and sober dirt into a place of colour and light to lift even a heathen heart.'

A mural, six feet by four in size, was installed in the improved vestibule. Originally intended to show the church in the centre and people moving towards it, it



The mural - and Graham Webb - in the vestibule

⁸ Dr Payne's private journal in the Angus Library, consulted by kind permission of his executor, Dr W.M.S. West, pp.527ff.

⁹ *Morning Post*, 25 April 1964, report by the 'Daily Telegraph correspondent', with a photograph of Dr Williams in the pulpit. The *Methodist Recorder* published a long article in anticipation on 20 February.



The mural

finally emerged as scenes of contemporary London life amid which a figure knelt in prayer at the foot of the Cross: ‘an expression of human life within which the church acts as a servant of the Word all held together under the promise “The Dwelling of God is with men”.’ Painted by Mrs Patricia Champness, mainly in blues and greens, in the cryla medium ‘which gives the effect of oil painting though mixed with water and is not expected to crack with age’, the mural was the gift of Alderman and Mrs Claude Barker of Kings Langley and cost £375. It could be seen through outer glazed doors.¹⁰

The exterior walls were cleaned and repointed and the top floor was partly remodelled to create a flat for resident wardens in the north-east corner. A temporary coffee bar was installed in the large room overlooking Shaftesbury Avenue. Finally, the basement was transformed into the Friendship Centre, bright and cheerful with orange and black chairs, white tables, and easy chairs and curtained windows in brown, dark green and orange. The architects saw the colour scheme as one of ‘restrained gaiety’.¹¹ The partition walls, reminiscent of old school classrooms, had gone and the pipework that used to look like a ship’s boiler room was hidden behind a suspended ceiling. Oil-

¹⁰ Details from *Daily Telegraph* 19 October 1964.

¹¹ Architect’s details, Friendship Centre issue of church magazine, 1967.

fired central heating was retained as economical at that time, but with a new boiler and flue and some new radiators. Some people were sad to lose the open fire, but all welcomed the well-equipped catering kitchen.

The *Guardian* report on the Friendship Centre, 26 September 1967, conveys something of the novelty at the time. “It doesn’t look like a church hall”, said Dr Howard Williams, with some satisfaction. “There are some people who think it looks more like a West End night club.” The reporter described ‘a slightly raised gallery, with plenty of natural pine, around what looks

like a dance floor ... The new centre is a Christian venture indeed. Though operated by the Church and its volunteers, it is not for the benefit of its own members.’ The architect intended the raised sides to break up the large area into more welcoming areas.

The church magazine gave details of the Friendship Centre General Committee, unusually mentioning members’ employment, since Dr Williams wanted to recognize and use assorted talents and experience. They included



The coffee bar



The lounge area

Bill Birtwell and Claude Turner who both worked for the BMS, John Hough from the BU, Edgar Brown from the LBA and Pamela Warren from Camden Social Services. Bloomsbury personnel included as publicity officer Irene Innes, who was a Personnel Officer with a large paper manufacturer, and Elizabeth Keen, a secretary at the National Association of Boys’ Clubs.

Since then many churches have redeveloped Victorian premises to give a modern worship place and community centre, but at the time it

was another bold experiment. The pioneering concept of the Friendship Centre was taken up by a number of city churches around the world. The *Methodist*

Recorder found the idea interesting: the Centre would resemble a hotel lounge with comfortable chairs, coffee bar, light meals, and a place to relax. Dr Williams described the city centre as the place where 'ideas are manufactured, fashions created ... We must be people who accept the city for what it is. We must be there not because we want to grab a bit of the city for the Church, but to help create a good and just city because we believe in the men and women who are there'. It did not matter if the core membership were small as long as there were enough workers: 'This is a living concept of the Church. There is no point in people becoming members because they cannot get on in their local churches. But if they want to serve, then that is important.' Among church members there was a variety of experience rarely tapped for the church, and Williams hoped to draw on this in developing 'a working membership and a working ministry'.

The preaching station was important only in making the gospel live, showing its relevance to social and political life: 'Preaching which makes life real and significant makes the lives of people significant ... The wrong thing about the Church is that the doors are shut'.¹² Dr Williams loved to sing at communion 'Ye gates, lift up your heads on high': he wanted to fling wide the gates of the church to let people meet the King of Glory.

The hope was to have the Friendship Centre open 'all day every day' for people to drop in at any time, but with various organized activities through the week. A Friendship Centre Management Committee was appointed to run programmes and catering day to day, while the Friendship Centre General Committee became the Council, giving a wider overview, with outside bodies represented, as well as the church staff and members. The Reconstruction brochure, *Things to come at Bloomsbury*, expressed the intention to

throw open the lounge to the general public and use every means to encourage people who work or live nearby to use it regularly. The objective is to make it a way of bringing ordinary folk, who believe that the church has nothing relevant to say in this modern age, into contact with us. We shall be offering them good food, service and modern surroundings, together with opportunity for friendly contacts, rest and relaxation. Also at lunch times and in the evenings carefully arranged programmes of talks and discussions on various subjects of social concern, London history, hi-fi recordings of classical and 'pop' music, etc., will be held.

¹² *Methodist Recorder* 20 February 1964. One of a large number of cuttings relevant to Bloomsbury collected by Ron Barton and found after his early demise.

The idea is that through the skilful use of these programmes we can alert people to Christian attitudes towards life and through this to the fact that Christ is 'The Way Ahead' ... for them and for the world.

This hope of being open all week was never fulfilled: it was too much to achieve on voluntary labour. Beyond the ministers and wardens, the work depended on a large number of volunteers, mostly from the Bloomsbury church but with invaluable help from some kind helpers from other churches.

Staff

Eileen Stevenson was already deaconess when Dr Williams came, and must have found the changes quite difficult. Sister Eileen used to preside over the evening Social Hour in the upper lounge. For JCS students, including the author, this was the opportunity to get to know Bloomsbury people. It was an informal time, in friendly groups around small tables, with alert hosts encouraging visitors, students and members to mix. After refreshments, visitors were introduced and invited to choose hymns. For some of us it was a new experience to meet people from all over the world. How visitors loved to sing 'Blest be the tie'! There we learned the new hymns in the 1962 *Baptist Hymn Book*. Community hymn singing was probably a dated attraction (Stephen Winward told JCS it was 'an abomination to the Lord'), but the author remembers the keen sense there of being bound together in Christ.

Sister Eileen resigned in March 1961 and, like most deaconesses by then, took pastoral charge of a church, at Blockley in the Cotswolds. Bloomsbury still wanted a primarily pastoral deaconess and appointed a young woman fresh from college. Barbara Stanford came in September 1961 for her two years as a probationer, with assurances from the leader of the Deaconess Order that if she found the minister difficult to work with she need not stay that long. Dr Williams was not seen as an easy colleague, but this partnership was 'made in heaven'. Few team ministries can have been closer and lasted



Barbara Stanford



Barbara about to baptize Shobha

longer than that of Howard and Barbara.¹³

Sister Barbara was taken aback in 1976 when she suddenly found herself upgraded to the Revd Barbara Stanford. She had not realized the Baptist Union was about to recognize all serving deaconesses as full ministers. Dr Payne thought she was the only

deaconess still in the old 'sisters of the people' ministry, rather than in pastoral charge.¹⁴ Bloomsbury was delighted, having no doubt of the validity of her ministry, including Word and Sacrament. Barbara took longer to feel comfortable about the change. It became more real when Dr Williams was off sick for some time, leaving her to baptize the six waiting candidates. Don Black gave her a crash course in immersing, practising on his wife Muriel at a swimming pool! The young candidates, five of whom had been in her senior Sunday School class, could all relate to her as 'the minister'.

At Bloomsbury Barbara found that, amongst other things, she was a personnel manager with a constantly changing volunteer workforce of about a hundred men, women, and older children. A couple of families leaving London could play havoc with the rotas. 'You do sometimes have to scratch around a bit', Barbara observed in 1971. 'When I'm sitting at my desk ... I never know from one moment to the next whether I shall have to reach for my Bible or my cookery book'.¹⁵ Somehow Barbara, who was



*Early training for volunteers!
Rosanne Emery, aged 2, helping dry
up at Bloomsbury*

¹³ The use of first names across the generations came in quite early at Bloomsbury, probably as a result of the deliberate efforts to create a keen sense of belonging. Indeed, it is recorded of William Brock that he was unusual in his use of personal names. The author remembers this startling people coming from other churches in the 1960s, including her mother who was shocked to hear a young deacon speak of the minister as 'Howard'. Some years later the author remonstrated with her schoolboy son for addressing an elderly deacon as 'Hilda'. He protested that when working side by side in a kitchen team it would be artificial if he alone said 'Miss Smith', and Hilda agreed.

¹⁴ Observation made in conversation with the author.

¹⁵ 'Bloomsbury Personalities: No.18 Barbara Stanford', magazine 147, Spring 1971.

always mislaying mundane things like her keys, kept everything running smoothly, ensuring that many people would happily come back for more hard labour. After working with Barbara for a year Ruth Gouldbourne identified a key factor in her mentor's approach: 'She has taught me how to laugh instead of being angry, and how to love and have time for everybody because that is what God does'.¹⁶



*Children taking out harvest parcels
for the elderly*

Barbara Stanford 'does anything and everything', including youth work, social work and hospital ministry. Dr Williams observed at her tenth anniversary that she managed to create 'the illusion that there is a number of people ready for any call. Many people who have shared the hospitality of the Centre have been astonished to discover a solitary deaconess doing the work of half a dozen people'.¹⁷

In 1980 she became the first woman to chair Westminster Christian Council,

which includes Westminster Abbey, and Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Cathedrals.

Interviewed by the *Baptist Times*, 8 August 1985, Barbara reflected sadly that the people helped had got wayfarers, job hunters, alcoholics, drug addicts, mentally ill people, and prostitutes as part of her day's work. Much appreciated have been her summer outings for the elderly, and a number of weekends away with the young people. Whether walking the Malvern Hills, exploring York, or day-tripping to Calais, these created



Barbara's class play a Fair Trade game

opportunities for longer conversations about their concerns than were possible on Sundays. Barbara has been a good friend of Bloomsbury's young people and carried the main responsibility for the teenagers of the Sunday School.

In celebration of Barbara's twentieth and twenty-fifth anniversaries, the

¹⁶ Church magazine, December 1988.

¹⁷ Church magazine, Autumn 1971.

church's gifts were holidays in India in 1982 and Singapore and New Zealand in 1987. In Singapore she stayed in a devout Buddhist home, the guest of the family of two young women she had made welcome when they wanted to practise piano in London. Former Bloomsbury members were eager to show her New Zealand.

With the Friendship Centre nearly ready, Harry and Gladys Watton came as Wardens in Spring 1967. Their role went well beyond caretaking, with responsibilities for catering and welcoming and helping all who came. Gladys was a minister's daughter who married one of her father's deacons. Harry had worked in engineering, as a press setter



Harry and Gladys Watton, with Ruth and Frank

for a firm of toolmakers. He had been scoutmaster at Astwood Bank from 1941, a deacon from 1944, and Sunday School Superintendent for sixteen years. They moved into the new flat on the fourth floor in 1967, with their two teenage children, and exercised a fine practical ministry, getting the Friendship Centre activities well established. Gladys died suddenly in 1975, and Harry left in April 1976. Much later, their son Frank returned as caretaker 1996-98.

Jim and Win Phillips came from Falmouth as the next Wardens, from autumn 1976 to February 1978, followed by Maurice and Marcia Crabbe from Regent Place Baptist Church, Rugby. Maurice was excited at the prospect of a



Howard and Barbara with Win and Jim

job which combined administrative, caretaking, catering and pastoral work and they settled in happily, with their daughter Joanna. Unfortunately Maurice's health broke down, and he returned to Rugby in July 1982, followed by Marcia a few months later, although Jo remained in London and Bloomsbury.



Maurice and Marcia Crabbe

Howard and Barbara really needed more paid help. A part-time student chaplain was based at Bloomsbury in the 1960s, with financial support from the BU. Paul Ballard was Assistant Chaplain 1960-62, and also worked for the Student Christian Movement. Ray Vincent was shared with the BU, 1963-67. For a few weeks in 1967 Barbara had help from a 'Time for God' volunteer, again shared with

the BU. Barbara Brookfield, aged eighteen, wrote of her two months in London in the *Baptist Times*. She had been staggered by the multitude of poor and lonely people in central London.

After two experimental years in the Friendship Centre, Bloomsbury asked those representing the BU and LBA on Central Committee whether their commitment to Bloomsbury was to mount a rescue operation in a wilting emergency or to 'strengthen an already strong witness ... The members feel there is something strange about the position which refuses to recognise strong growing points within the denomination'. In 1970 the LBA produced £750 and the BU £250 to pay for another staff member to enable the church to keep the Friendship Centre open for much longer hours. A 'job specification' was produced:



Sunday lunch at Bloomsbury

We are now looking for a man with a broad conception of ministry who is at the same time un-ashamed to do menial tasks. He must be a man with a liking for people, willing to share and accept responsibility in community work which deals with people of all ages - Christians and non-Christians. He would work as one of a small staff with a large number of voluntary workers. In addition to care for the functioning of the Centre along with the Warden it would be good if he could accept responsibility for both creating and sustaining programmes of

community service ... The work would be rewarding for anyone who has guts and love - and is willing to engage in experiment without being easily disheartened.

It was hard to define precisely what was wanted because Bloomsbury really needed several more staff but could not afford them, so they looked for an assistant warden, who was a good organizer, interested in community work, and able to work pastorally with visitors and strangers.

An appointment was quickly made but tragically the opportunity was lost before much could be initiated, through a sad failure of faith and morals. Bloomsbury has adopted such a tolerant, welcoming approach to people who do not have a strong Christian faith that those looking from outside have not always realized that this openness makes extra demands on the church's leaders, professional and lay. People of goodwill help alongside church members, and sometimes this becomes part of their journey into belief, but those who lead the church need to be sustained by a deep faith, without which their practical gifts are of limited value. Some younger deacons who had protested at the hasty manner of the appointment were dismayed to find their misgivings realized; those directly involved must have been devastated.

The disastrous appointment, coming hard on the heels of the disappointing lack of support for the theological lectures, was a great blow to Dr Williams and a turning-point in his ministry. The great dream of an ever-open door went under. Thereafter he maintained a fine pulpit ministry and the established activities continued, bringing much blessing to many people, but there were no further major initiatives, although there were further attempts to find staff. In 1971, with some money still in hand, Dr Williams tried hard to interest ministers, perhaps some recently retired, in the idea of part-time help. In January 1972 Dr Williams laid before Central Committee a paper on 'Future Developments in the Friendship Centre':

The purpose of the Friendship Centre at Bloomsbury must be understood in terms of the Church's ministry in a City ... The Friendship Centre seeks to foster a creative community in a very difficult situation. It deals not only with the people who move through the City as though it were an escalator but also with the continuing stream of people who come to work or study for a limited number of years. This means that marked denominational allegiance is rarely witnessed. The people, quite simply, come with varying needs and they view controversies about the Person of Christ¹⁸ neither with alarm nor obvious interest!

18 Christological debate had been consuming much time and energy within the BU.

... The aim, therefore, is to offer not only community but also to make an attempt to interpret the Christian faith within the setting of the problems of the world. Various magazines show the lists of speakers in public life who have spoken in the Centre and engaged in discussion. Almost every conceivable question has been raised at some time or another and it is frequently encouraging to see the way in which speakers are honestly wanting to respond to the demands of a relevant faith ...

The real need at the moment is for some additional help in the day to day work of the Centre. There are people who would like to have additional evenings to explore both the Faith in theological understanding and also time to look at problems of the world more intensively than is possible in a short lunch hour or a more general evening meeting. There would be no difficulty in arranging a further lunch time at Bloomsbury apart from the fact that we cannot give the Warden any further responsibilities.

The church could not afford full-time help with living accommodation but any further development needed more personnel. Conversations with Camden Social Services had envisaged events with music and other cultural contributions from different ethnic backgrounds - Caribbean, Indian, Far Eastern, British. Dr Williams wanted 'to encourage the sense of community and to do it within the Christian setting ... but plans had to be tailored to the era. There was a great deal of opposition because people felt it wasn't really what Christians ought to be doing. If you talked about the things of community people thought it was opposed to witnessing to the Christian faith'.¹⁹ No further ongoing series of activities materialized. One-off events were possible, drawing on volunteers, but more required regular extra staffing and finding and retaining suitable wardens was proving difficult enough.

When the Crabbes left, the church decided not to appoint another warden but found a non-resident caretaker, Albert Torilla. In 1983 Barbara moved into the flat, assuming considerably more responsibility for the premises, and Menna Smith took on supervision of the catering part-time.

There was a change of organist too. Gerald Barnes celebrated twenty-five years as organist in 1981, but resigned a year later. By then there was no regular choir, as midweek rehearsals had become impossible. Philip Luke was appointed from January 1983. Trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and a teacher of singing, organ and piano, he brought and has sustained great enthusiasm for music in worship. He is an encourager with a pastoral

19 Howard Williams to Brenda Forward, *Baptist Times*, 27 November 1986.

heart and has brought a number of talented singers and instrumentalists into the church.

Activities

The flagship of the Friendship Centre programme was the Tuesday Lunch, with a three-course meal and guest speaker. The subjects ranged widely because the world should be the arena for the church. Speaker and questions were confined to half-an-hour, 1.15 to 1.45, to fit into the lunch hour of local workers. This drew good numbers for years, and later, when flexi-hours encouraged office staff to grab a sandwich at the desk, it became more a haunt of older people, some continuing after retirement to make Tuesday their day in town. Speakers for the first session in autumn 1967 included the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Michael Ramsey, Lord Soper, Lord Macleod of Fuinary, and the Bishop of Woolwich. Tony Benn proved a loyal friend, always guaranteed to fill the Centre. An impressive and varied list of speakers down the years has included many MPs, journalists, clergy from across the churches, and individuals speaking of their work or current projects.

On Sundays the Centre was open all day, except during worship services. Coffee, lunch, tea, and evening refreshments kept caterers busy. Teams of volunteers, women and men, learned to cope with mass catering, never sure how many would actually stay until after serving had begun. Catering on Sundays and midweek required many cooks and waiters and much arranging of rotas, largely by Barbara, while the wardens organized food supplies and menus.

On Wednesday evenings the church ran another meeting with a varied programme, including guest speakers, Bible studies, and music. Initially the programme was arranged by the Fleet Street journalist, Penry Thomas, the musicians, Trevor Anthony and Gerald Barnes, and Mary Stewart, then working for the BBC African service. Each planned one a month and invited speakers, while Brian and Ingrid Nicholls were the regular host and hostess. Programme planning subsequently fell back on the ministers, but volunteers down the years provided light meals for people coming from work, and church members have been among the speakers. These meetings went well at first but then attendance declined. Dr Williams was disappointed by church members' failure to support the meetings. Although speakers and subjects were wide-



Philip Luke

ranging and topical, some found the discussion in such open gatherings unsatisfactory. The minister complained to the deacons on 17 December 1971 that 'Young Christians seemed to be regarding the unintelligent in an unchristian manner and people in the 25-30 age group were withdrawing when they should be taking responsibility.'

Some, remembering studies and discussions in the old YPF or in JCS, wanted to explore subjects at greater depth. Several times church members tried leading study groups to meet this need, with Dr Williams's grudging consent. The present author remembers helping to lead some in the early 1970s with quite ambitious topics, like Communion, and Vatican II, which required considerable preparatory work.

There was a recurrent tension over such study groups. It was possible both to understand and be committed to the openness and inclusiveness of the main activities and to yearn for the occasional time of study and prayer within the community of faith. There was more opportunity to sit and debate theology, religion and politics, than for fellow Christians to explore their faith together in a supportive rather than argumentative way. With the challenging pulpit ministry such meetings could have been helpful, alongside the more inclusive. Howard Williams always feared they would be detrimental to Wednesday attendance, but members were not going to travel substantial distances midweek unless they found those meetings satisfying. Those who felt this lack might fill the gap with midweek fare offered by churches nearer their homes, and for some this must have weakened the commitment to Bloomsbury and contributed to declining numbers.²⁰

A significant number of those who stayed in Bloomsbury have worked out the challenge to active, seven-day-a-week discipleship partly in voluntary service with a variety of other Christian and charitable bodies: Field Lane Mission, the Shaftesbury Society, Christian Aid, the Settlements, Mildmay Hospital, etc. Others, like Julian Fulbrook and Frank Brean have engaged in local politics in a kindred spirit of concern for others. Bob Peden has been a leader of his local United Nations Association. Dr Williams rejoiced in such dedication, but craved their support for the Wednesday Fellowship too.

There were similar recurrent problems over church meetings, which had long been difficult at Bloomsbury. Again Dr Williams feared anything which might detract from the Wednesday Fellowship. In 1974 there was extended discussion about church meetings. Were they primarily for decision-making,

²⁰ The author and her husband went to a local church's house group for some years, although committed to Bloomsbury. This met a perceived need and the timing was much easier on babysitting.

for inspiration, or for those accountable to report? Some would have liked them on Sunday afternoons, which became the norm in the next ministry. One suspects that ministers have often had bad experience elsewhere of church meetings being controversial and conservative and hardly risk them, yet Bloomsbury has always been harmonious and willing to look at new ideas.

Links with the Borough were strengthened. In the early years Camden Council of Social Service ran the Crossways Club on Thursdays, which spread the resources further in serving the local community. Crossways was intended



*Alison Shapton
stirs the soup*

for over-30s, with a buffet lunch and attractive speakers. Down the years Barbara Stanford has maintained good contacts with local social services, helping to bridge the gap between professional workers and the various voluntary bodies. Social workers have been glad to turn to Bloomsbury for help with specific needs. The accepting Bloomsbury atmosphere has made the Friendship Centre a helpful place for some getting back into circulation after personal crises, mental illness, or other

confidence-sapping troubles.

There has usually been a weeknight meeting for students. The John Clifford Society drew large numbers for some years, but waned as denominational societies lost out to the cross-denominational, evangelical Christian Unions and to decreasing interest in religion in society at large. Again, the memory of former numeric strength probably made it harder for the ongoing smaller group. Never exclusive to university students but embracing nurses and other students and young people, JCS continued for a long time with Seth Stephens as chaplain. Eventually it died out, but it was not long before a new group of similar nature emerged in the next pastorate.

By January 1969 the *Baptist Times* could report a hundred regularly staying for coffee in the Centre after morning worship and fifty for lunch. Soon lunch numbers rose to 100-120, with seven or eight in the kitchen. Although numbers eventually dropped back to around eighty, the lunches have continued without break to the present day. Many lonely people have regularly enjoyed a traditional Sunday roast with friends, while visitors and newcomers have had the opportunity for longer conversations with Bloomsbury people, often forming real friendships.

The Bloomsbury Overseas Luncheon Club for Women, later simply the Overseas Women's Club, was a Bloomsbury initiative. In 1959 three church

members, Sister Eileen, Mrs Christine Foss and Mrs Lois Gulley, an American in London because of her husband's business, conceived the idea of a meeting where women from overseas, often lonely in London while their husbands worked, could make friends and discuss political, economic and social matters with British women.

Americans in Bloomsbury knew how hard it could be to make friends in a foreign city. They decided the Club ought to welcome women from all countries without distinction of nationality, creed, race or colour, so should not become a church organization. They wanted to provide a meeting-place over a simple meal, which members would take turns to prepare. Speakers would represent 'the best in British life'. The subscription was modest but new members had to be introduced by a sponsor.

The first experimental lunch was held at Bloomsbury on 13 May 1959, with sixteen Americans and twenty-five British women. Among the Bloomsbury members heavily involved were Mary Ransley, Mary Stewart, Mair Ryland Thomas, Ruth Johnson, Judy Dye, and the Catering Secretaries Ena Earnshaw and Margaret Britt. Betty Wilmshurst, Margaret Raw and Mali Browne from Sutton Baptist were also keen members. The Club has drawn



Christine Foss

members from many countries and enjoyed a wide range of distinguished speakers, like Sir Alec Douglas-Home, TV personality David Frost, and the missionary heroine Gladys Aylward. The success of Christine Foss, the Secretary, in attracting prominent speakers was central to the Club's popularity. The willingness of Cabinet ministers, media personalities, industrialists, trades unionists, authors and church leaders to accept her invitations suggests the Club gained a good reputation with speakers. Sir Harold Wilson and Margaret Thatcher both spoke on three occasions, and Enoch Powell on four. The Club went from strength to strength, arranging a variety of outings and receptions elsewhere, but holding the monthly luncheons at Bloomsbury. This continues, with waiting lists for membership, although fewer Bloomsbury members are now involved.²¹



*Members of the Overseas Women's Club
Sir Harold Wilson and Howard Williams*

21 *The Overseas Women's Club 1959-1984, by an 'Outsider' [George Foss], edited by E.M. Mitchell and*

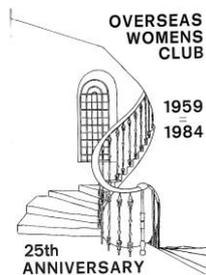
There was already a London Baptist Men's Luncheon Club which now met in the Friendship Centre on the first Wednesday of the month, while the women had the second. There were ideas for an afternoon Pensioners' Club, to be run by Camden Council of Social Service, and a Saturday evening programme for young people on their own in London, but nothing regular materialized.

Sister Barbara explained that, where the local problem used to be poverty, now it was loneliness, with individuals feeling they did not matter in the busy and impersonal city:

The Centre is here not just in order that members of the church can have a comfortable and attractive place in which to meet. It is first and foremost a centre for mission, not in the restricting sense of counting conversions but in real outreach to people in need of friendship and help - and this we shall seek to offer in the name of Christ ... We grapple with live moral and social issues through discussion, debate and action. Our young people are already active in their care for old people and in hospital work ... the Centre will be the base from which we go forth.

You may well say that this is not specifically Christian, any community centre warden might write in similar terms. Where does Christ come in? We believe that he is here already - it is his service in which we are engaged. It is our prayer that the fellowship at Bloomsbury may become increasingly alive to the problems of people today and ready to offer Christian love and care to anyone in need.²²

Dr Williams was justifiably proud of the range of people prepared to roll their sleeves up and work together, and chuckled at the thought of how amazed some of their weekday colleagues might be to see them on Sundays.



But, in spite of a succession of dedicated volunteers supporting the paid staff, the church could not keep the Friendship Centre open all week. Since meeting places in accessible central London were in demand, the premises did not stand idle and hirers kept the rooms, and existing staff, busy during the week. Bloomsbury exercised some control over lettings, with a graduated scale of fees for Baptist bodies, other charitable causes, and more general lettings. The building has

Mary Sellers, 1984. The striking cover of this simply produced A4 booklet is just a sketch of the Bloomsbury stairs with the curling iron banisters.

²² Church magazine, Friendship Centre issue, 1967.

been in continual use and lettings have brought in useful income while serving Christian mission, humanitarian concerns, and various activities that have helped build community and brighten people's lives. Some bodies held regular meetings at Bloomsbury, developing good relations with pastors and wardens. As a result, many people who have never worshipped with the church mention Bloomsbury with affection, remembering happy hours at Crusaders' meetings, Telecom Christmas parties or the Recorded Vocal Arts Society. The Brethren held Saturday evening meetings at Bloomsbury for some sixty years.

There have been two resident tenants. International Christian Films functioned from offices on the fourth floor for many years until 1991. Then the offices were used by the Children's Rights Development Unit, set up by children's charities to look at UK policy and practice in the light of the United Nations' Convention and make recommendations. Other regular users of the top floor late in the century were theatre groups wanting rehearsal space. Care was taken to avoid anything too noisy or disturbing to other users, although the author has had to explain to a committee in the Parlour, startled by the occasional blood-curdling scream, that it was just part of 'Barbara's industrial chaplaincy'! The assistant minister often had deep conversations with the actors and others involved. In return, Bloomsbury's elderly volunteers enjoyed free matinées at local theatres.

Down the years Barbara Stanford has ministered to all these users of the premises; her constant, unflustered kindness has much to do with people's fond memories of Bloomsbury.

Writing about churches in the city centre in the *Baptist Times*, 10 May 1984, Peter Wortley, the LBA Secretary, mentioned the work of St James, Piccadilly, running an open-door prophetic ministry, and of Baptists at Bloomsbury and Broadmead, Bristol. Bloomsbury he described as a church where distinguished people went and also vagrants in need of warmth and a cheap meal. 'On Sundays there is still every sign of "the gathered church"', with more at morning service than at any time since the war, and a "preachable congregation" in the evening'. The switch of the larger congregation from evening to morning occurred during Williams's pastorate but was widespread across the churches. Wortley noted that Bloomsbury's work with students was affected because 'the Christian Unions do not recommend it as it lacks a conservative image'. He observed that city centre work was ill understood in the church at large, and especially among Baptists who found it 'so far removed from the traditional Baptist expectation of what a church is'.

Bloomsbury people

Having tried to give some picture of the membership in earlier periods, it seems right to do so for more recent years, although it is hazardous to mention some and omit others. To some extent the selection has already been made by magazine editors who featured some 'Bloomsbury Personalities' and carried news items about others. Those mentioned should be seen as representatives of the wider church and congregation.

Many remained from earlier ministries, remarkable in their willingness to accept with grace the changing ministry. Frank Whitehead (1887-1974), joined the church in 1906, taught in Sunday School before World War I,



Christina Edwards

became a deacon in 1926 and VO Secretary from 1947, and remained active until 1967. Of the older deacons when the author joined the church, the tiny, cheerful Mr Whitehead was the one who made most impression on her. He made students feel welcome when they were a large and rather separate body, with something of a 'town and gown' relationship to the church.

Bert and Mary Ransley continued to do well whatever was wanted of them, with Bert devoting many hours to the Reconstruction process. Dr Williams remembered this frail yet tough man, disabled from early in life, limping in to meetings evening after evening and again on Saturdays after his week's work at Hambros Bank. He had come to Bloomsbury at the start of Dr Lord's ministry but remained a loyal minister's friend to his successor, and served as secretary of both church and Central Committee.

The records, especially the magazines, are full of people who first came to Bloomsbury 'by chance' and were immediately so attracted to the church that they stayed for the rest of their time in London, whether long or short. Sam Edwards, tallest and quietest of deacons, was reliable and kind. Once a policeman, he served the British Consul General in the USA, where he met and married Christina, there as a children's nurse. In London he worked at the Mansion House, serving a succession of Lord Mayors. Sam and Christina first entered Bloomsbury in 1944, when too late for their usual church in Leicester Square. They stayed.



Frank Whitehead

Sam presided over the vestibule for years, coming early to welcome people. Christina ran the crèche for twenty-five years. These were gentle people who worked with little fuss and great reliability. Another such deacon was Percy Woodfin who quietly got on with anything that needed doing.

A number of ministers, in posts other than local church pastorates, have chosen to join Bloomsbury. Walter Fancutt, while working for the Mission to Lepers, and Douglas Stewart, formerly at Heath Street and Pinner but by then with the BBC, were already members before Williams came. Stewart died in November 1962, aged 54, but his widow, Mary, remained in Bloomsbury for some years and served as a deacon. She was national BWL President in 1958. She worked for the British Council of Churches Overseas Scholarship Department, mainly looking after African students, and spent 1964-5 in Uganda, then joined the BBC African Service. Later she married John Wilmshurst and settled in the Sutton church until her death in 1998. The former Superintendent, John Barrett, and his wife Gladys became members after a crippling stroke forced him to retire. Don Black, a senior member of the BU staff joined Bloomsbury, as did Thornton Elwyn, a chaplain with the South London Industrial Mission. Seth Stephens, formerly a BMS missionary in Sri Lanka but by then a Religious Education teacher, looked in at Bloomsbury one Sunday and was 'hooked'.

Several lay members of the BU and BMS staff joined the Central Church while these bodies were based in London, including David Lovegrove, Ann Tooke, and Sian Williams. Missionaries went out from Bloomsbury: Hilda Beavan to India as a BMS nurse in 1964, Chris Green to Vellore on a short-term contract as a medical physicist, and Richard and Judy Henderson-Smith



David Shapton

as doctor and nurse-midwife to Bangladesh in 1980. Hilda Smith had been a BMS missionary in India, 1927-53. Invalided home, she worked at BMS and BU headquarters and joined Bloomsbury, having known the Lords in Ipswich. She took over marmalade making for church funds, and her small flat must have smelled continually of oranges! She joined the diaconate at the same time as Brian Bowers, and relished being wanted by a church that could also call on young men.

David Shapton was Principal Microbiologist at



Hilda Smith

Heinz. As a Bloomsbury deacon, he looked after the VO records for many years, a necessary task compatible with sudden business absences. His wife Norah, who trained in dairying, was also a micro-biologist in the food industry. She used to claim as she toiled at the Bloomsbury sink that she was the only well qualified church member - with a degree in washing up! When they retired to Dundee, their daughter Alison was elected to replace her father on the diaconate, until she moved back to Bristol.



*Hilda Smith, Annie Fisher,
Brenda Burkham, Gertie Oxbury
and Christina Edwards*

A group of recently retired ladies made up the first Tuesday Lunch team, continuing until they were octogenarians and more. Gertie Oxbury grew up in Norfolk, and worked in shoe sales. She retired to London in 1962, going to live with her brother John and his wife Beryl, a Bloomsbury deacon, in Golders Green. Gertie was active in the BWL and Overseas Womens' Club,

and loved to work in the Friendship Centre, continuing until very late in life. She died in 1997, aged 92. Agnes Hammond, Brenda Burkham, Millie Bartliff and Doris Smith were all members of the Tuesday lunch team.

A succession of people from overseas have enriched the church. Max Worthley returned in 1960 with his second wife, Edith. He was then a member of the Deller Consort. Having worked in a bank before turning professional singer, he served Bloomsbury as assistant treasurer. He and Edith moved to the University of Arkansas in 1967.



Sandy Porter

Among others from afar were the Canadians, Fred and Dorothy Fleming. Fred was the national Meat Merchandising Manager for Fine Fare, which then had some 500 retail supermarkets in Britain. At Bloomsbury he was a lively Winter Fair organizer and auctioneer. Other Canadians have come and gone but Dave and Sandy Porter settled in London and have undertaken an assortment of jobs for the church. Alvan Richards-Clarke, a Jamaican, discovered Bloomsbury in 1964. He is now a Presbyterian minister in Pontypridd. While several



*Alvan
Richards-
Clarke*

Welshmen spoke at Dr Williams's funeral, Alvan alone addressed the company in Welsh, which would have delighted Howard.

Miss Wokie Rosalind Tolbert, daughter of the ill-fated Vice President of Liberia,²³ worshipped for a year while training in dress design. She returned home to marry the President's son, William Tubman junior. A Nigerian chief with his two wives, always identically dressed, and many children made an interesting addition to the congregation for some time, until a coup at home plunged them from wealth into poverty. One daughter, Bessie, a worker in the church kitchen, said it was the fourth such change in her nineteen years.

Paul Tucker, a chemist-spectroscopist, had worked in atomic research at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He spent some years in London as Managing Director of Phillips Petroleum UK Ltd. He and Beverley were Southern Baptists who threw themselves into Bloomsbury with enthusiasm. Another American, Glen Gulley was world salesman for Olin-Matheson Ltd, machinery manufacturers. Bloomsbury had a number of lively American members in Williams's early years, though less came after Whitfield's was converted into the American Church. Some, however, still prefer to be part of an English church while in London and Bloomsbury welcomes many visiting Americans.



Paul Tucker

Nathanael and Dorcas Sonoda joined the church in 1964. He worked with the Japanese Christian Union in London. This led in time to the Japanese Christian Fellowship meeting at Bloomsbury on Sunday afternoons. In 1962 Mr A.Z. Phizo, President of the Naga National Council, and four fellow Nagas worshipped at Bloomsbury for a time. Dr Kurt Immerwahr spent his early years in his family's timber business in Germany and Russia, but became an engineer in the 1920s. His wife was a Christian but had Jewish blood so they came to England to escape the Nazis. Looking down from the pulpit, Dr Williams took great delight in seeing men and women from so many countries worshipping as a single people. In the 1950s it felt a real achievement to have Germans and Japanese alongside British and Americans, all united in Christ.

²³ William R. Tolbert Jr was Baptist minister who became Vice President of Liberia in 1960 and President in 1971. He was also the first black BWA President, 1965-70, but was assassinated in 1980. His widow and daughter returned to worship at Bloomsbury one Sunday a few years ago. FB

Joan Jackson, the former YPF secretary, became a deacon and edited the magazine for several years, followed successively by Norman Allen, Margaret Peden, and Libby Brown. Norman and Libby both became head teachers. The membership included a number of teachers at all levels. Several people worked in local government. Fred Croft, an Anglican who accompanied his doctor wife Eirian to Bloomsbury, was Town Clerk and Chief Executive of Islington. He was a willing helper in the Friendship Centre. Julian Fulbrook was a young Mayor of Camden in 1985, when a Civic Service was held at Bloomsbury, attended by Council dignitaries and his toddler son. Arthur Downes has divided his time between Hinde Street Methodist Church and Bloomsbury. A working man fascinated by theology and politics, Arthur was one of the early students of the Open University, obtaining his degree in 1982. In recognition of many years service as a Labour Councillor, he was made Mayor of Tower Hamlets to the delight of his many friends. Freddy Earnshaw was a youth officer 1947-72, for nineteen years with Islington, and then as Senior Youth Officer for North West London. One deacon, John Sheppard, was a trades union officer. John Britt worked in the family shipping business. Already active church workers, he and Margaret came to Bloomsbury in 1963. John and Margaret and their three daughters were among the pioneer Sunday lunch cooks in the Friendship Centre. John continues to exercise a considerable ministry in making visitors welcome, undaunted by increasing deafness..

Florrie and Bill Edwards were caretakers of the Printers and Allied Trades Union Building in Doughty Street. Florrie, a lifelong member of the Labour Party, appeared as an elderly widow in a number of TV programmes giving a senior citizen's view. She wrote in the magazine of her first TV appearance in 1972, when she advocated telephones for lonely pensioners. The author remembers her as a frail but cheerful widow, who always found good things to say about life in the old people's home. Retirement gave Lilian Frances, who had worked as a live-in cook, the delight of having a council flat, her first real home.

Changes at other local churches led to others coming to Bloomsbury. Kingsgate Chapel and Kingsway Hall both closed, and then the Drummond Street church, a mission of the former Regent's Park Chapel. The Drummond Street church secretary, Annie Marks, who had worked for the Actors' Benevolent Fund, came to Bloomsbury. Her friend, Annie Fisher, came too; a cheerful old Londoner, she could



Annie Fisher

still cope with the streetwise children at the Boys' Club where she did voluntary work well into old age. While wistful for the old days, these and others took pleasure in the Bloomsbury fellowship.

Clem Evans and his wife Lilian ran a guesthouse in central London. He succeeded Bert Ransley as Church Secretary, handing over in 1972 to Maurice Johns, who had come from Portsmouth and met Margaret in JCS. After studying electrical engineering at King's College London, Maurice was in the Instructor Branch of the Royal Navy 1957-67, becoming a Lieutenant Commander. He and Margaret returned with their children to Bloomsbury while he was at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. Subsequently he became a Senior Lecturer and eventually Vice Principal of the South East London Technical College in Lewisham. Brian Bowers, another King's electrical engineer and a curator at the Science Museum, was co-opted to the diaconate as assistant treasurer in the summer of 1969, and was carefully groomed by George Foss to succeed him in 1974.

Bill Somerville came as a postgraduate student, and became Reader in Astronomy at University College London. In 1962-63 he had a Fullbright Scholarship at Princeton University, New Jersey, and in 1966 spent three months at the University of Ife in Western Nigeria. He was a deacon and Friendship Centre treasurer for some years.



Bill Somerville

Bob Peden, a salesman in wholesale clothing, began in 1977 to organize walking holidays around Britain. Like many Bloomsbury activities, these have brought together a range of people, from very young to quite elderly, families and singles. The system of graded walks, with people choosing their level from day to day, suited everybody, and child care could be shared. These holidays, which still continue, have developed friendships within the church. Similarly, Fred Mardell's family picnics in Regent's Park, replacing earlier Sunday School outings, became times when all ages came together. Some elderly folk living near the church rarely got to the Park and were delighted to be driven there, settled in garden chairs to watch mixed cricket and rounders, while babies played at their feet, and then to share in a picnic tea.

Law and order was represented at various levels in the membership. John Bugg was a Buckingham Palace policeman and Bloomsbury deacon. At least two prison officers were members. The church had several lawyers, including Ryland Thomas CB, Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions. The Law Lord,

Lord Edmund-Davies, often came with his wife, a Bloomsbury member, although he belonged to the Welsh Baptist Church in Eastcastle Street.

There were always a few regular adherents whose lives had dropped out from the social norms. Jim Murray lived on the edge of society and the law. He first came to Bloomsbury in Dr Lord's day; his pride in being a church member could need tactful handling with visitors. The church undoubtedly improved the quality of his life over the years and mourned his passing. Mary Greaves, a 'bag-lady', insisted on sleeping in her chosen doorway even in bitter winter weather, but spent many an hour in the Friendship Centre, leaving at night with a thermos of hot coffee. Visiting her in hospital during her last illness, Barbara Stanford was moved to find understanding nurses let Mary sleep on the floor between beds, where she felt comfortable.

Representative of those who contributed much in a few years at Bloomsbury was David Hartley, who came from Yorkshire as a patent agent in 1969 and soon became a deacon and assistant church secretary. He was active in the music and social life of the church: in his day washing up was enlivened by cheerful songs around the sink. He married Sue Sanderson in 1977, and they moved away, but sadly David died of cancer while their daughters were still small. The church grieved for him, as they did with the Weller family as Joy faded inexorably with leukaemia during Dr Williams's last year of ministry.

In spite of the church's desire to serve local people, the membership had become increasingly commuting and professional. It proved easier to reach visitors in the local hotels and the destitute on the streets than to make contact with local residents. New residential property was again being built in the Covent Garden direction, but secure modern apartment blocks are protected against friendly information and invitations as well as malevolent intruders.

Ongoing church life

Professor William Barclay demonstrated his affection for Bloomsbury by preaching eight times between 1960 and 1969, usually in August. He took the last service before reconstruction work began on 18 August 1963 and spoke at the reopening on 25 April 1964. He must have let the church know when he would be coming to London from Scotland, for he spoke at three Tuesday lunches and gave one evening lecture. Few people from so far can have returned so often.

In September 1962 the Rt Hon. John G. Diefenbaker, in London for the

Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, again worshipped at Bloomsbury, bringing with him the High Commissioner for Canada, the Hon. George Drew. Other distinguished visitors have included Alexander Karyev, General Secretary of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR, who came on 5 July 1959. The former Dean of Johannesburg, the Revd Canon Gonville Ffrench-Beytach, who had been imprisoned for his views, spoke on apartheid at the Tuesday lunch in 1973. The church was kept well informed down the years of the horrifying effects of apartheid.

The church year was cheered along by light-hearted socials at New Year and Harvest, and more serious social meetings at Anniversaries. Winter Fairs were good communal occasions and raised useful money for church, BMS and the BU Home Mission. From time to time there was a special effort for some particular cause, as in 1985 when Mollie Barnett and friends arranged fun activities to raise £2,000 to build a well in the Sudan. Their efforts included a competition for Easter bonnets enjoyed by young and old alike.

One magazine tells of the busy Christmas of 1978, when Christmas Eve fell on a Sunday. There was an exceptional effort, only possible because people were used to undertaking such work for the church. The day began with an extra 9.30 a.m. service for Radio 4. The BBC team must have been taken aback when a rather strange woman adorned in several layers of garments and tinsel trimmings mounted the platform and proceeded to conduct the hymns. The Bloomsbury congregation could take such things in its stride! Afterwards the Bevis family served breakfast before worship at 11 a.m. The Crabbes and Bowers produced a traditional Christmas dinner, to which invitations had been issued widely to local residents and overseas visitors, including transport for those who were disabled. The butcher had given the church a 58lb turkey - quite a challenge for housewives used to 10-12 lb birds!²⁴ Others took over the kitchen to



Marcia Crabbe receiving the gift turkey

23 It went into the oven overnight and we all slept in the wardens' flat to check it late and early. Author's memory.

provide tea and evening drinks. An informal service was held in the Friendship Centre at 6.30 p.m., in which fourteen church members, aged between thirteen and seventy-five, shared in Christmas reflections. Next morning the congregation was back to celebrate Christmas Day.

Catering was a constant, but increased dramatically for a week in alternate years when the Baptist Assembly met in London, with a series of lunch meetings at Bloomsbury. Natural gas reached the church in 1975, with many jokes about conversion. New equipment was occasionally added. Susini Wijesekera, a member from Sri Lanka, secured a number of useful secondhand items, especially the double boiler for custard, on the closure of the YWCA hostel where she worked. A new cooker and water heater were purchased in 1980 and the dishwasher in 1986. For some years ten free Sunday lunches were given to the very poor each week. In 1985, with very large numbers of homeless people on London's streets, the church decided it would be better to spend the money on more meals of a simpler nature, and the 'alternative lunch' was introduced. Forty received a meal of soup, a meat-filled roll, bread and tea. This was done in the Friendship Centre in parallel with the roast dinner for those who could pay the modest charge (£1-40 in 1985), but those served welcomed the change which made them more sure of a meal if they came in good time.



Serving the alternative lunch



Barbara Brown cooking

This meal was a drop in the ocean of need but it has helped a few and kept the church aware of their plight. London's hostel provision had been reduced at a time when homelessness was rising, with an increase in broken families, and of addiction, and also the closure of large mental hospitals. Many former patients, especially men, failed to settle in the provision made for them and often ended on the streets, bewildered, miserable and not easy to help. In recent years the numbers of homeless have fallen somewhat, but there are still far too many in great need and the church has continued this 'alternative lunch' provision to the present day. The

church's modest efforts to offer something in the way of food, an afternoon in the warm, sometimes some warm clothing secondhand, has been appreciated. This is perhaps most clearly seen when a disturbed newcomer causes a commotion and the regulars are anxious to quell trouble quickly. Deacons, uncomfortable as 'bouncers', have to suppress a smile as disreputable-looking individuals call urgently, 'Phone the police, Barbara!' One bad-tempered drunkard was taken out of the deacons' gentle hands, dragged up the stairs and dumped on the pavement, with instructions in no uncertain language not to 'queer a good pitch' for the rest of them.

Using the one hall for different kinds of ministry at the same time has proved less difficult than many expected, although it has its occasional excitements. What has shocked the wider community more have been some even more 'open' activities arranged by others hiring the premises. The church always gets the blame, of course. Inter-faith gatherings prompted comment, especially the well-publicized one at which the Dalai Lama spoke. When in November 1986 the British Council of Churches arranged a meeting which was addressed by leaders of various churches in Namibia, political extremists demonstrated outside and accused the church of supporting torture and execution of Christians by SWAPO terrorists. Their leaflets shouted: 'Take action to defend God's house and Christian values'!

After the 1969 theology lectures, serious consideration was given to a further study series with the London Baptist Preachers Association, to be led by ministers and laymen, on the relevance of the Christian faith in the 1970s. Some Whitley Lectures were given at Bloomsbury, as well as the London Baptist Preachers' Association's annual Batten Lectures. While the YMCA was closed for rebuilding in 1971 and functioned from a building in Endell Street, the Association held joint 'Topic' evenings with the church in the Friendship Centre on Tuesday evenings.

Occasionally Bloomsbury organized its own conference on some pressing issue which needed more time than was possible in the regular programme. In 1980 members discussed aspects of the church's life, with groups considering theology, pastoral matters, outreach to neighbourhood and visitors, and the particular concerns of parents, or of students. Another conference in 1983 on Nuclear Weapons had the Revd Paul Oestreicher and the Revd Ulrich Simon as speakers.

In the magazine for Christmas 1970, George Foss reflected on twenty-five years as treasurer. The church had emerged from the war in a healthier financial state than ever before, thanks to fees from the LCC, the fidelity of scattered friends at thankoffering time, and the generosity of wartime visitors. When Ernest Brown took over, there was nearly £5,000 in hand. £3,500 was spent repairing damage, and £980 was received in compensation for the windows. George Foss spent many happy evenings with Brown over the accounts, before he took over in April 1950. Then



George Foss

disaster! The spires began to disintegrate, and had to come down. This was not accepted as war damage and cost £1,455. The church raised £2,500 for the 1954 redecorations. Arthur Matthews' legacy paid for oil heating (£1,200) and 800 Baptist Hymn Books (£450). The church bought the manse freehold in 1959 for £357, and raised £461 for the BU Ter-Jubilee Fund. Many gifts in kind were received during Foss's time, including the silver communion chalice.

Then Howard Williams arrived with the enormous Reconstruction project. The sanctuary cost £40,000, the flat and Friendship Centre £23,500, the Institute Rooms £4,500, and the Exterior £6,500. Towards this the LBA contributed £5,500, BU £3,500, and the London Baptist Property Board, Baptist Building Fund and BU Corporation made loans totalling £26,500. An intensive decade of fund-raising followed. He saw VOs and cash offerings rise from £1,400 to £5,076, and 20 covenants in 1946 had increased to nearly 100 in 1970. Most money figures had tripled (and rampant inflation was yet to come). The Friendship Centre was paying its way.

His successor had to find about £8,000 for necessary Fire Precautions work in 1978, when requirements for public buildings were more stringent than at the Reconstruction. This involved much thickening of doors and fitting of door springs, which was labour-intensive work, and the provision of emergency lighting. In the magazine the next year Brian Bowers listed those involved in treasury work, arriving at ten names, without other deacons who counted Sunday offerings. The work has always been spread across a number of willing helpers, although for much of his term Bowers' chief assistant has been Anne Emery. George Foss, who was a model predecessor, never critical

but always happy to advise if asked, only once proffered unsolicited but sound advice to his successor: at the end of the service in which Anne Barlow, as she then was, was received into membership, George dived across the aisle to say, 'A statistician! Grab her quickly for the treasury!'

In 1980 £1,500 was spent on lift repairs, and £386 on redecorating a room upstairs for International Films. The previous year volunteers, led by Anne and Julian Emery, had redecorated the whole Friendship Centre for £200. A pinnacle fell in 1983 and the remaining seven were removed before any harm was done. At that time 'Listed Building' legislation did not oblige the church to spend money on restoring the original appearance of the pinnacles (the chapel was in a Conservation Area, so Listed Building controls applied to the outside of the building even though the chapel was not then a Listed Building).



Anne Emery



The chapel minus pinnacles

The general pattern of the church's finances remained fairly stable for the rest of the century. The actual figures rocketed with inflation, with ordinary annual income rising from £14,000 in 1975, reaching £103,000 in 1994, and then remaining constant for several years. Most has been the regular giving of members and friends, though income from letting rooms for meetings rose from 12% of income in 1975 to about 30%. Money for major projects has come from special appeals, to which members have responded generously, and legacies. Direct giving by the church to other charitable agencies has, however, been much less proportionately than in the nineteenth century, though not all such giving passes through the church accounts.

BARRIE HIBBERT'S PASTORATE

'The man who goes to Bloomsbury is doing a gallant thing'

David Lloyd George, 1929

When Dr Williams announced his retirement, a Pastorate Committee was set up, consisting of all the deacons and, as chairman, Bernard Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union, this time the only representative of Central Committee. The Pastorate Committee said any serious suggestion would be considered, but was put to the test when one deacon, an Australian, tentatively mentioned Barrie Hibbert, whom she heard when visiting Adelaide. She felt he was right for Bloomsbury, but it was not easy to send others to hear him. Months passed without the church feeling led to the right person, until one summer day Barrie and Judie Hibbert walked into Bloomsbury on holiday. With alacrity he was invited to preach the following Sunday. The next January he returned for a week 'with a view', after which the invitation was extended and accepted, but with a year's delay to allow for all the necessary arrangements. Meanwhile Dr Williams postponed his departure.



Barrie Hibbert

Barrie Hibbert was born in Gisborne, New Zealand. His father had emigrated from Lancashire as a child. Barrie's wife, Judie, was born in Bengal, where her parents, the Revd and Mrs B.M. Eade, had met as missionaries, her father from New Zealand and her mother from the USA. Barrie trained at the New Zealand Baptist Theological College in Auckland, and had pastorates in New Zealand at Tamaki in Auckland, Gore, Tawa, and Dunedin, giving him varied experience, and from 1979-86 was minister of Flinders Street, Adelaide, South Australia. He was inducted to the Bloomsbury pastorate on 7 February 1987.

Barrie asked to live reasonably near to both the church and a park. The church had already decided to sell the manse in Golders Green and now



Barrie Hibbert speaking at the induction service

bought a recently refurbished flat in Mornington Crescent. His other main requirement was a specified footage of book shelving, which the treasurer duly installed at the manse. The ministry opened well, and the international element became even more prominent in church life, but in their first months the Hibberts had to wrestle with divided loyalties, with elderly parents dying in New Zealand and a first grandson born in Adelaide, making the distance keenly felt. They rejoiced when Shelley and Robert decided to bring baby Riki to London, and stayed until 1998, with two further grandsons born in London.

Barrie Hibbert has proved to be another fine Bloomsbury preacher, at a time when many think great preaching is a thing of the past. His sermons, prepared with meticulous care, have been delivered with a light touch, and are unusual in the variety of approach and style used effectively. He excels in bringing to life a Bible character, even a minor figure, to deliver a succinct but challenging message for the present day. When late insertions into the service leave a curtailed sermon slot, with great skill he fits into the remaining time without obviously cutting or hurrying the message. At Bloomsbury the congregation continues to anticipate the sermon eagerly as a high point in worship.

Barrie Hibbert built on the already good relations within the Westminster Christian Council. Coming from countries without established churches, he

was free of some of the 'hang-ups' of British Nonconformity. Those bred in Baptist ways watched with interest the ease with which he introduced advent candles and then a peace candle at Bloomsbury. The churches in Soho and Bloomsbury had increasing contact, fostered in regular breakfast meetings of their clergy. They face many common problems and have shared in a number of joint activities. One, at Bloomsbury on a Palm Sunday afternoon, was a meditation on Jesus' words from the Cross. Each of seven churches took one saying and brought a poster of a cross embellished with pictures or symbols relating to their meditation. Thus Crown Court Church of Scotland produced a celtic cross with missionary pictures prompted by 'I thirst', and Bloomsbury, beginning with 'Into thy hands ...' offered a collage of hands and a reflection on their use in God's service.

In 1987-88 Ruth Gouldbourne, a church member with a vocation to ministry, spent a year on the pastoral staff. She had a fine academic record but needed practical experience before acceptance as a probationer minister. She assisted Barbara generally and began a new group for students and other young people, which was subsequently continued by Mark Westbrook and others. Ruth and five other Bloomsbury young people attended the BWA Youth Conference in Glasgow in 1988. Her work received financial support from the BU and LBA. At the end of the year she was ordained and moved to the Bunyan Meeting at Bedford, and in 1999 is a tutor at Bristol Baptist College.



Ruth and Ian Gouldbourne



Barbara Stanford

At Ruth's ordination Barrie Hibbert was delighted to observe that no-one referred to her gender. Commenting in the December magazine, he wrote of those who oppose ordination of women: 'Their arguments I find theologically offensive and intellectually incredible, but their feelings I do try to understand'. On this occasion he rejoiced because 'That which was unsaid spoke as powerfully as all that was said.' It made Barbara Stanford conscious afresh of the strange way she had been 'elevated' without formality from deaconess to minister. On 12 February 1989 a belated ordination service was held for her. After Ruth left, Peggy Bryant, the widow of a former

minister at Vernon, King's Cross, was recruited to work part-time midweek in the kitchen and to help with hospital visiting.

Some years later the BU and LBA entered into a new partnership with Bloomsbury to provide a dedicated full-time Baptist chaplain to higher education in London. The Revd Stephen Heap, who had had pastorates at Wrexham and Blackbird Leys in Oxford, was appointed in 1992. He was to be based at Bloomsbury, where he developed the student group 'Footsteps', but would spend much of his time in the colleges. Working as one of a team of chaplains, he has particular responsibilities for City University and the School of Oriental and African Studies, where he works with staff as well as students. The church's role has been primarily supportive, providing a base, sharing the cost, and taking an interest in the work generally. The church has welcomed students and appreciated the presence of Stephen and his wife Liz, a senior children's social worker. With Stephen, an apparently casual conversation will



Stephen encouraging impromptu Bible study at lunch with students

soon prompt a probing question leading into stimulating theological discussion. He came to London used to an ecumenical congregation of mixed ethnic background, but found new challenges in working with overseas students who are not always given an easy time by British authorities. Among the young people who were in the church for an extended time were Bo Tominova from the Czech Republic and Sunday Wuyep from Nigeria. Sunday would probably not have completed his PhD

without Stephen's advocacy at the Home Office. He and his wife so valued the chaplain that back in Africa they named their first child Stephen.

With the end of apartheid the General Secretaries of both the Baptist Union and the Baptist Convention of South Africa visited Bloomsbury. Barrie Hibbert, Stephen Heap and Don Black, together with Northern Baptist College, formed Christian Connections UK-South Africa, to promote theological education for African pastors. Stephen has visited South Africa twice, on the way to the BWA Youth Congress in Harare and as a lecturer at the Baptist Convention College's Winter School of Theology in 1997.

The extensive catering ministry continued, led between 1991-96 by Jo Small, daughter of Maurice and Marcia Crabbe, the former wardens, with the



Eirian Croft, Margaret Bevis and Hazel Beynon dishing Tuesday lunch

help of her husband Gary, a school cook and Bloomsbury deacon. When they moved to Cornwall, the responsibility was taken over by Margaret Bevis, another deacon and one of the leading volunteer cooks for many years. She taught Home Economics and had been a Deputy Head Teacher, until severe illness led to her early retirement. She has also been a key figure in overseeing the development of the building and

succeeded Libby Brown as magazine editor. She now works for the church much of the week.

In 1999 the church secretary is Howard Brown, a chartered accountant, and the treasurer still Brian Bowers, an electrical engineer. The fourteen elected members of the diaconate are by profession another accountant, a financier, two nurses, one doctor, a teacher and a school secretary (both retired), a senior academic, a statistician, a secretary, a Christian Aid staff member, a film editor, a violinist, a retired newspaper distributor, and an electronics engineer. Fred Mardell, Seth Stephens and Maurice Johns, all life deacons, continue active in the church. The local businessmen of the days of Brock or Phillips have largely been replaced by professional men and women. Until 1987 the number of women on the diaconate was restricted to five. In May 1999 there are six women deacons and eight men, but the officers and life deacons are at present all men. Perhaps more to the point in Bloomsbury, they nearly all work regularly in the church kitchen!



Howard Brown, Christine Farr and Timothy Gee cheerfully washing up

The church membership in March 1999 stood at 228, about half of whom are extremely active: Bloomsbury has never been a church in which members are likely to remain idle. Of these 104 have addresses in London postal districts (8 WC, 4 EC, 25 N, 22 NW, 10 W, 9 SW, 18 SE, 8 E). A further 73 live in counties near London (12 in Hertfordshire, 9 Essex, 16 Kent, 16 Surrey, 14 Middlesex, 4 Berkshire, 2 Buckinghamshire). Forty-four are spread over the rest of Britain and seven have overseas addresses. But this data does not give the true picture: some living quite near the church are no longer seen, while the organist's address is in Suffolk! Among those in Kent, two live in a London borough but are rarely seen at Bloomsbury while another family travels frequently from Ramsgate.

The membership, as ever, includes some who are distinguished in their own fields, but at church all join in worship and work together, equal before God. It is a joy to watch the author's son, whose mental ability is restricted but not his will for Christian service, exchanging rota duties with university don, doctor or train-driver. Where else but church could he meet them on equal terms?

From 1987, before and after *glasnost*, Seth Stephens has been travelling to and from most countries of Eastern Europe forming supportive friendships with Baptists there. He has made friends in Romania and Russia, Poland and the Czech Republic, the Ukraine and Albania. A number have visited his home for holidays. He has promoted the work of a Romanian artist and enabled his doctor wife to take a course at the Maudsley Hospital. His contacts have informed and enriched Bloomsbury through years of dramatic change in Eastern Europe.



Seth Stephens

Two older members, Brenda Burkham and Len Finch, received the Royal Maundy in 1991. Recipients are chosen for lifelong Christian service to the church and community. Brenda had her twin leather purses and coins framed for the church. Mr Finch, who had been caretaker of Baptist Church House, has since died, but Brenda Burkham has continued to preside over coffee-making, although well over ninety. She grew up in the Westbourne Park church, worked as a secretary for various Christian bodies, and has been in Bloomsbury a long time.



Brenda Burkham

The courageous cheerfulness and

regularity at worship of several members with terminal cancer in recent years has been a grievous yet faith-enhancing experience for the church. Margaret Johns, Ruth Page and Dorothy Pracey are remembered with particular affection and gratitude for years of service and for the persistence of their faith in Christ through those months and, for Margaret, years of pain and anguish.



Maurice and Margaret Johns



Ruth Page

Ruth Page had been a member of Ferme Park but came to Bloomsbury when she retired after nearly thirty years as a BMS teacher in Congo/Zaire. She became a well-loved deacon, for she was an encourager, especially of young people and Africans. When a pastor in exile was ordained at Bloomsbury, with an African translating everything between English and French, Ruth announced she would address the young man in his mother tongue. The translator gasped, as it was not his. Ruth told him to relax and delivered her piece in Kikongo, Lingala, French and English, receiving a great ovation from the largely African congregation. Ruth's memorial fund, devoted to the Christian education of African women, made a critical difference to the establishment of the Baptist Convention College in Soweto.¹

Through Barrie Hibbert's ministry Fred Mardell has been the senior deacon and also maintenance officer, caring for the building, often with his own hands. He and his family have been responsible for much running repair and redecorating. At seventy he retired as Sunday School Superintendent: the children, especially lively little boys, always related well to him. They warmed also to his successors, Mark and Shobha Westbrook (née Bhansali),



Fred Mardell

¹ Dr Louise Kretzschmar, who chaired the governing body, told the BWA Heritage Commission meeting in Durban in 1998, that the college 'would have gone under' but for the opportune arrival of Bloomsbury's gift. The author and her family visited the college in 1998, meeting some students including one of the young African women undertaking theological training and working in a township church.

who were baptized and married at Bloomsbury and are now doctors in general practice. Gwenda Walters and Sandy Porter also help with the Sunday School. Mark and Shobha are gifted artistically and prompt some colourful work from the children. In the way of Bloomsbury, attendance is erratic and teachers cope with different combinations of children from one week to the next. The children, who together make a junior rainbow nation, all turn up for the annual nativity play, if not for the rehearsals. At Bloomsbury everyone learns to shrug off such difficulties with a smile.



*Shobha and Mark Westbrook
with some of the children*

The church in the late 1990s is rich in teachers, doctors and nurses, engineers and musicians. Ten professional musicians, nine medical doctors and a dentist are in membership. The doctors include Professor Dafydd Walters, who has been head of the Department of Child Health at St George's Hospital Medical School since 1994 and a Bloomsbury member since 1981. His wife Gwenda is a senior nurse at King's College Hospital, a Bloomsbury deacon, Sunday School teacher, and active in catering and pastoral work. Jackie Ballard came to Bloomsbury as a new student nurse at St Bartholomew's Hospital. She went into district nursing and is now a Macmillan Nurse, and a deacon. She married Bill Somerville in 1997.



Jackie Somerville

Among the women deacons is Jean Harrison, a Religious Education teacher who came to the church after joining the staff of Christian Aid. Her work takes her to countries not usually on the tourist list, like Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the Brazilian rainforest. She ensures that the church has some understanding of the plight of the poorest countries and peoples and the grim effects of the debt crisis. In 1995 she volunteered for three months' relief work with refugees at Osijek in Croatia. The desire to give Jean the support of contact with her church encouraged Bloomsbury to acquire a FAX machine.



Jean Harrison

Several members have work involving international travel, including the new church secretary, Howard Brown, and the treasurer, Frank Brown, a

chemical engineer, and Mark Chataway, in scientific public relations work, probably disappear to distant lands most often. Frank is particularly good at making contacts in churches at which he has worshipped. Mark attended the Rio Earth Summit. Colin Watson, from Tasmania, disappears for longer periods as a civil engineer involved in major construction projects around the world; when at home he commutes each Sunday from Wiltshire.

Never exclusively Baptist, Bloomsbury embraces people from different denominational backgrounds. Some remain active members of other churches but come to Bloomsbury for extra worship and work - they usually join in with a will. Mary Page started coming with her sister Ruth for the preaching, after attending her own early, Anglican service, and has become one of Bloomsbury's most regular attenders and dependable workers. Another such 'borrowed' worker, often to be found dealing with the rubbish on Sunday evening after most have left, is Peter How. He is an inter-city train driver, but also a lifeboatman whenever he can get away to the coast - an improbable occupation for someone in Central London!

The ABC group, chaired by John Beynon, was formed to look at matters of outreach and publicity. They introduced the Bloomsbury logo, and a range of related information material, put Bloomsbury 'on the internet', and arranged for a number of signposts to the church in the immediate area, for which a number of visitors have expressed appreciation.



Michael Schofield

The organist and choirmaster, Philip Luke, accepts that midweek choir rehearsals are impossible but he gathers a good number of musicians, amateur and professional, singers and instrumentalists, all glad to offer their gifts in worship. The church's professional musicians in 1999 include the singers, Heidi Pegler and John Langley, Robert Bishop, a violinist in the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and his wife Jo (French horn), Cathy and Michael Schofield (violin and viola), and Rachel Maher (violin). Music students bring other instruments. The gifted Peat family provide recorders and cello.

Philip Luke works with whoever turns up early to rehearse before the

morning service. It is a delight to see the blending of professional and amateur, and the encouragement the 'pros' give to children. For the author, who is not musical, two memories stand out: the Mozart Horn Concerto played by four experienced professional musicians and a thirteen-year-old cellist, and the rapt expression and stillness of small children transfixed by a soaring anthem from the choir when all close together in the underground hall.



The choir



Philip Luke

The acoustics of the sanctuary make it attractive for recitals and concerts.

Arts Festivals were held in 1986-8, with varied programmes. The second Arts Festival in July 1987 included the Mynnyddislwyn Male Voice Choir, soloists Beti Mary Owen and Rodney Macann, Trudie Baker and Julian Jensen, the Goldsmith's String Quartet, the Downland Consort with early music, the Choir of First Baptist Church, Cleveland, Ohio, Cathy and Michael Schofield's violins, and the Bloomsbury Sinfonietta led by Robert Bishop. Organ recitals were given by Dr Francis Jackson, formerly at York Minster, Geoffrey Morgan from Westminster Abbey, and the young Paul Lavender. There was an

international evening, and a choral celebration 'Go forth and tell'. A display of paintings by Roberta Hart provided another interest and Barrie Hibbert used these to illustrate his sermons.

The organ gave trouble in 1989, with severe cyphering in the Swell. Estimates for repairs were daunting, the lowest being £42,000 from John Males. The Swell and Great soundboards needed replacing; Males suggested that the most economic approach was to fit new, all-electric soundboards, which would not merely repair but improve the instrument. As an employee of the firm who moved the organ in 1964, he had been unhappy with some aspects of that work and was disposed to be generous. The church questioned whether it could be right to spend so much on the organ. The matter was laid before the church meeting on 29 January. After some uneasy discussion a deacon suggested that members be given a month in which to

tell the treasurer what, if anything, they were prepared to contribute. To general amazement a month later Brian Bowers had received promises of almost exactly £42,000; the decision was made. This unexpected outcome actually resulted in increased overall giving: some, unwilling to give to the organ, felt obliged to increase their giving to the general church work; most four-year covenants for the organ were later renewed for the church. There was a further happy spin-off, for John Males and his wife invited Barbara to take one of her coach parties of older people to their home at Polegate for a garden party, an invitation repeated in subsequent years and much appreciated.

A number of other concerts have been given over the years, arranged by Philip Luke, Robert Bishop and others. Programmes and offerings have raised money for various good causes. In 1997 the choir produced a tape recording of *Bloomsbury Praise*. Working closely with Barrie Hibbert, a number of services have gone beyond hymns and anthems in using music to illustrate and illumine the message. During the months of rebuilding in 1998-99 the musicians made extra efforts to lift hearts in worship under physically difficult conditions.

Activities

In some ways Barrie Hibbert's ministry has been a time of transition, often dominated by plans to renew the building, but plenty has been going on meanwhile, and the happy fellowship of Bloomsbury has been sustained and renewed as people continue to come and go. The Wednesday Fellowship gradually declined further and was eventually dropped. Tuesday lunches have continued, even through the disturbance of building work. A church conference led by Dr Colin Marchant in October 1997 encouraged members to take stock and undertake fresh commitments. When members began to run the various rotas (Sunday lunch, Sunday tea, evening coffee, flowers, Bible readers), the church realized how much of Barbara's time had been consumed organizing volunteers down the years.

The church was pleased to see serious issues taken up in conferences on the premises. In 1989 there was a Day Conference on Environmental Issues, jointly sponsored by the Baptist Union and the United Nations Association,



Barrie Hibbert
drawn by Bernard
Pike

and organized by Bob Peden. A conference on AIDS was arranged by Thornton Elwyn, as chairman of the LBA's Social Responsibility Committee. The church itself arranged a conference with the Association for the Pastoral Care of the Mentally Ill in 1989. Keith Clements of the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland arranged an ecumenical consultation on the former Yugoslavia in 1992. Bloomsbury also assembled twelve food parcels in 1991 to be sent to Bulgaria as part of the European Baptists' response to need there. In anticipation of the General Election in 1997, the church arranged three seminars looking, not at party policies, but rather considering the responsibility of Christians in relation to politics.

Since autumn 1989 the church has run two monthly house groups, Northern and Southern, and for a time a Central one too. The scattered membership make this almost ridiculous, as some take longer getting to house group than to Bloomsbury, but it has been good for building relationships. Although the groups study the same material, their dynamics have proved quite different. The Northerners relish penetrating discussions, while the Southerners easily divert into pastoral concerns and seize every excuse for a party. Since members have long been taught to look after visitors and those in need before talking to their friends at church, house groups provide a time when members can relax together with a clear conscience.

Barrie Hibbert was the Pentecost preacher at First Baptist Church, Washington DC in 1988. This led to links with that church and with Moscow Baptist Church. After helping a troubled young couple in London, Barrie was asked by their families to travel to Mexico at their expense to take the wedding: Bloomsbury's ministry is worldwide! Barrie and Judie have taken the opportunity to take holidays in Europe, as well as making periodic visits to New Zealand. Every journey provides fresh sermon illustrations.



Stephen Heap

The appearance in the church of a young unmarried mother led to contact with Gilbert Place, a mother and baby home for girls with particular needs and without settled homes. Barbara Stanford was able to work with them, and chaired their committee for a time. The possibility of closer co-operation was explored, but Bloomsbury's premises were not acceptable for extended children's work, having no outside play area.

Stephen Heap introduced the church to occasional Taizé-style worship and to Christian Passovers. In 1992 a

Jewish passover meal was held in the Friendship Centre, with explanations for Christians invited to be present.

This was a period of considerable ecumenical development in Britain, with new 'ecumenical instruments' in which Roman Catholics joined. Although some Baptists were unhappy with this, the majority were glad to work together constructively. Bloomsbury welcomed the developments. Basil Hume, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, intimated to the Secretary of the Free Church Federal Council that, to demonstrate that relations really were changing, he himself would welcome an opportunity to preach in a Free Church. He was directed to Bloomsbury and on 9 December 1990 the Cardinal delivered from the Bloomsbury pulpit a biblical homily on seeking and finding God. At the local level, good ecumenical relations have brought gifts of money for Bloomsbury's work with the homeless from other churches, including Roman Catholics. The French Protestants of Soho Square provide helpers to take a regular turn serving the alternative lunches.

A day in the life of the Friendship Centre

Barbara spends many hours in the Centre, but is also out and about on pastoral work and as a hospital chaplain. A relay of volunteers provide cover and undertake a variety of jobs for the church midweek. In recent years this work has been undertaken by Norah Shapton, Muriel Black, Margaret Johns, Dorothy Pracey, Hazel Beynon and Judie Hibbert. Judie wrote an entertaining account of a typical day for the church magazine in March 1995, all too recognizable to anyone who has been at the church midweek.



Dorothy Pracey

10 am Enter through the blue door. Discover the lift isn't working and traipse up the stairs to the 4th floor to close lift door. Descend to basement to find phone and doorbell ringing simultaneously. Answer doorbell to someone wanting to practise organ, climb up stairs to gallery to unlock gallery door. Descend to basement again and have first welcome coffee of the day. Greet Albert. Work on accounts/computer/bookings briefly before answering doorbell and phone simultaneously (of course). Deliveryman brings groceries down and while signing for them in the kitchen the phone goes again. Someone wanting the address of an obscure Baptist church in Outer

Transylvania. Do best to help them, while doorbell rings several times for members of upstairs theatre group. Not sure who Jemma Slimjane or Judd Strongjohn are, but let them in in faith. Albert appears with more coffees and many words of advice. Mary arrives, bringing her whole life with her in several carrier bags. Barbara has lost her keys. Fred arrives.

11 am Money doesn't balance, but try again. Phone ringing hot with people trying to book Institute/Parlour/Friendship Centre for meetings over the next twelve months ('But we came last year, and of course it will be free for us this year - and we want coffee, tea, a projector, a screen, 6 geese a-laying, 5 golden eggs...'). Money balances at last, another coffee consumed, Albert has brunch, Mary has coffee.

12 noon A group of Believing Baptists start arriving for their lunch meeting. Make coffee for them, and rush across road for sandwiches. Return to find Fitness Addicts Anonymous have started to arrive, and they're very alarmed at meeting Believing Baptists in the lift. Suggest they use the stairs (good for fitness). The theatre group want an extra telephone, and this causes all the phone extensions to pack up. Call our handyman-Minister to reprogramme them. Have well-earned coffee with ministers, another coffee for Mary, wash up all cups and Albert's saucepan. Albert goes home. Fred completes jobs.

1 pm Toilet is blocked so attempt to fix it. Clean ensuing flood. Sink is also blocked, cut finger trying to clear plughole. Order some more sticking plaster for bleeding fingers. Hunt for blue-tack and eventually stick notice on blue door with small grubby portion left from 500 BC. Order more blue-tack. Dorothy calls in for teatowels.

2 pm Another coffee for workers and Mary, another tray of coffee carried upstairs for meeting. (Lift isn't working again). Close lift door and descend to basement. Answer phone to newspaper reporter: 'Is your church used during weekdays?' YES! Answer doorbell to heavily accented muffled voice; after many struggles to understand, go up to blue door and find homeless person wanting money. Retrace steps, consult with ministers, decide on and deliver luncheon vouchers.

3 pm Have long chat on phone to lonely person, who has just rung for a chat. Wish we could send a cup of coffee over phone. Ring around shops to find reasonably priced saucepans/cups/jugs/beanbags/potties ... Fill sugar basins, plastic cup holders, call handyman-Minister to unjam photocopier, sweep up broken glass in kitchen (after great hunt to find dustpan). Help Mary out. Fred still working.

4 pm Go home! Recover with a coffee.

Judie was much involved in the 'Open Doors' experiment, getting the church open for some hours on two days a week for people to drop in. They came, though not in large numbers, tourists and some who lived or worked locally. The idea of one day for mothers with small children and the other for the elderly did not find much support, but individuals came in and chatted over coffee. This helped the church to see how a better entrance foyer might be used. A number simply sat quietly in the chapel, enjoying the peaceful atmosphere so close to London streets. The vestibule might be cramped and the paint peeling, yet the space and colour of Bloomsbury, 1964 model, was still ministering effectively to them. In 1987 an additional room was constructed in the south tower, initially as a store room for International Films and later adapted as the chaplain's office. That year the building was insured for £2,455,000, and the organ for £80,000. Theft insurance was tested when the amplifiers and microphones were stolen from the chapel; in replacing these an induction loop was fitted to improve the aid for those with hearing problems.



Barrie and Judie Hibbert

But the building was getting shabby and giving problems, in spite of the efforts of Fred Mardell, John Beynon, Frank Watton and others to keep things working and looking reasonable. In the gales of 15 January 1990 part of the roof blew off. This was a wooden frame with glazing above the skylights, built some years earlier to improve waterproofing. Barbara, with her usual ability to cope through laughter, wrote about it in the magazine:

The real problems began when the rains came. At one stage we had twenty-three receptacles attempting to catch the drips ... from waste bins to baptismal bowls, from buckets and saucepans to flower vases and tea pots ... we had a game, trying to match the biggest drips (or torrents) with the largest receptacles. At times it was all quite musical. Barrie and Fred attempted to tackle the problem from the roof-top, whilst Brenda and I prayed fervently for their safe return, mopped up and made tea.

By 1990 ideas for another redevelopment were beginning to emerge. Thirty years of continual use since the 1960s reconstruction were telling, and the use of space now felt restricting rather than creative for community activities. A

structural survey in 1992 confirmed that Peto's building could stand further alterations. After exploring various possibilities, the church entered into negotiations with an ecumenical project, Pentecost 95, for a London-wide initiative to be funded by all major denominations and backed by the various senior church leaders. The focus was to be on a Great Banquet on 3 June 1995, with many ancillary banquets around London that week. The leaders of Pentecost 95 envisaged this raising a large sum of money to fund an ongoing 'legacy project'. They favoured the redevelopment of Bloomsbury to provide increased community facilities, including extension of the Gilbert Place provision for needy single parents. Plans were drawn up with eight bedsitter flats on the fourth floor and a further floor above. The gallery was to be floored across to provide a sanctuary seating 400, with good lift and perhaps escalator access. It would double as a conference centre. The ground floor would be remodelled to provide meeting rooms and facilities for child care and other community needs. The basement was to have a café, counselling rooms, and church offices. All would function as an integrated whole. The church voted in principle for this proposal on 24 April 1994. The concept was exciting, although some feared it might be over-ambitious.

In response the Department of the Environment promptly listed the building, imposing restrictions on permitted alterations. The same Department liked the project enough to suggest a possible grant of £800,000 over three years, but with changed plans this never materialized. The business played on the hopes and fears of the church for months.

The banquets duly took place. Bloomsbury hosted one, a 'quality event', inviting people with whom the church had contact. The Mayor of Camden came, along with a Rabbi and two priests, the bank manager, the butcher, and many others whom the church wished to thank. People were surprised when there was no 'religious bit' or appeal for money. Incidental music was provided by the Schofields and a talented pianist among the homeless people who came regularly for lunch. The Roman Catholic priest described the event as 'an acted parable of grace'. Meanwhile the church sent Shobha and Mark Westbrook and Emma Brown, to the Great Banquet at the Whitehall Banqueting House. As a community-building exercise the banquets were splendid, but in terms of funding a legacy project a total failure.

Bloomsbury soon realized no money would be forthcoming from Pentecost 95, and the architect's expensive plans were found by quantity surveyors to be drastically under-priced. Development seemed doomed. Discussions were reopened with the London Baptist Association, who had been renting offices in a Methodist building at Bow since the Baptist Union moved out of London

in 1989. The idea of LBA offices at Bloomsbury, with meeting rooms used by Association and church, had been explored a few years earlier and rejected by the LBA, but a more central location for the offices remained tempting.

In February 1997 Martin Heijne RIBA of Bisco Craig Hall, the surveyors and architects serving London Baptists, came up with a more realistic scheme likely to get planning and listed building consent. He believed the building could be renovated and refurbished to meet the needs of the worshipping community, the wider local community and visitors well into next century. His plans would make the building more accessible, secure, and flexible. He wanted to maximise the use of space, conveying a sense of openness. The foyer would be enlarged by relocating the back wall of the sanctuary. Ramps and a new lift would give good access for those with disabilities. The existing flat was too far from the stairs to meet current safety requirements, so he redesigned the top floor around the large central room, with offices, meeting rooms, new kitchen and toilets, and two flats, one two-bedroomed and the other a bedsitter. The exterior and the sanctuary would be cleaned and repaired, the pulpit area altered, and the old deacons' vestry converted into a side chapel suitable for small meetings. Heating and electrics would be renewed. The basement would be remodelled, with new kitchen and offices for staff, while keeping a good-sized meeting space.

The LBA finally decided to share in this project, making Bloomsbury a Baptist centre for London in a new way. The church voted for the scheme on 26 January 1997. Fund-raising commenced again. The regular giving of members and friends, together with income from lettings, covered Bloomsbury's ordinary expenditure – about £100,000 a year – but with little to spare. In round figures the church needed one million pounds and had one quarter of that available. Gifts totalling £200,000 from the BU, the LBA and two generous individuals made a good start. A further £60,000 was received from charitable trusts. Contributions flowed in from far and near, including 53p from a 'down and out' man. This Barrie put on display as an encouragement and has kept it for the final payment.

At one stage it seemed that raising the whole sum was impossible, and the plans were cut back. Then a totally unexpected gift of £300,000 brought the total amount almost up to the estimates and the cut items were restored. In planning the appeal, the church had agreed to borrow against promises of future gifts and then up to



Brian Bowers

£50,000 more. The Central Committee backed that approach, and even urged the church to be prepared to borrow more in faith. That attitude was a great encouragement at the outset. As this book goes to press it seems possible that all the money will have been raised before the final bills have to be paid. If the church does need to borrow, the amounts will be much less than for the 1960s' reconstruction.

Such experiences make the treasurer reflect on church finance. Money was always a worry for Victorian Bloomsbury which was frequently in debt. Since 1950 the church has been solvent although a smaller membership has maintained a similar staff and premises. There is rarely much in reserve, yet when needs are perceived in terms of the church's mission money is forthcoming. Often we do not know what makes people give, though sometimes the treasurer has 'inside knowledge'. Many unexpected gifts are a response to a friendly welcome or some kindness shown in the past by ministers or members.

The Victorian church often raised more for its Domestic Mission and other charitable bodies than for its own funds. Today Bloomsbury gives away about £15,000 a year, mainly to Baptist bodies and Christian Aid. Several members are active in fund-raising for various charities: members' giving to these do not appear in church accounts. While raising money for redevelopment the church has also increased such giving by an appeal from which 'Christmas gifts' have been made to a number of causes.

The annual accounts are now drawn up to comply with the elaborate requirements of the Charities Acts, whose full implications are still being worked out. The accounts show the cash in the bank, but can never show the accumulated fund of good will. This 'treasure in heaven' is not subject to audit, but is a vital asset as Bloomsbury moves into the future.

Building work began in July 1998. The builders thought the church could retain the basement for worship and other activities while they worked above. A kind offer of accommodation from St George's, Bloomsbury, was not taken up but led to a number of shared evening services, enriching both churches. Bloomsbury's ministers, Philip Luke, Margaret Bevis, and others put great efforts



The train – the distortion at the front from this angle is due to the pillar

into making this period as bright as possible. Barrie Hibbert developed the idea of celebrating the 'Underground Church', with a series of sermons drawing on the underground theme, from the catacombs to the blitz, including various underground resistance movements, and the 'Westminster Ten', modern Christian martyrs. Mark and Shobha Westbrook adorned the centre with appropriate signs, and involved young people in painting a 'pulpit backdrop' of a tube train, on which the children stuck a crowd of faces representing the congregation. A crown of thorns was hung over the driver's place.

Children were encouraged to sit on floor cushions at the front, which helped when space was tight and encouraged items addressed to them, not previously part of the regular pattern. A simpler lunch was served to all comers, often prepared with some difficulty but maintained throughout the works. The church agreed to clear the Centre quickly after lunch to make way for the Japanese Christian Fellowship. The greetings in swapping over at 2.00 and 5.30 p.m. have made the two worshipping bodies more aware of one another and a joint communion service was held one Sunday evening.



The 'Underground Church' at worship

The builders found they needed to penetrate the Centre to put in supports for the gallery while the new wall was built, and later to gain access to heating pipes and electrics. Once they broke through, the dust and inconvenience were

considerable. Nothing could be used without prior cleaning - several times each week. At one stage mains services kept failing. Deacons ran round during hymns replacing fuses to restore the amplifier. Heaters were hired, with a battery of gas cylinders. One week, after manoeuvring through the plastic sheeting and round the holes in the floor, we found the toilets lit with a candle on each cistern. Warily Barrie Hibbert made a joke of each week's problems, ensuring the congregation coped with a smile. A burglar got in through the works, used builders' tools to break through several internal doors, cut a large hole in the back of the safe and made off with the money. The next Sunday

Barrie unveiled the damaged safe to the children's fascination and preached a Gospel sermon on being 'Safe and secure'.

In Spring 1999, as this book goes to press, Barrie Hibbert is in the closing months of his ministry and Barbara Stanford is approaching retirement. Stephen Heap's contract as chaplain has three years to run. Don Black has been retired for some years from the BU but retains an ongoing social responsibility brief for the church. A resident caretaker, Sharon Cashman, has just been appointed. Maurice Johns retired as church secretary in 1998, after a quarter century, passing this responsibility to Howard Brown, who was already responsible for the financial aspects of the development project. The treasurer, Brian Bowers, is about to present his twenty-fifth set of Annual Accounts, not yet defeated by the complications introduced by the Charities Act of 1992. Philip Luke continues as organist, choirmaster and general enthusiast of musicians.

The church returned to worship above ground on 2 May 1999. A few days later the LBA moved into its offices on the top floor. Building work would continue in the basement for a further three months. The church has now to find the next minister and determine the best use of its renewed premises. There is a sense of general renewal ready for the twenty-first century.

* * * * *

It is too soon and the author too involved to attempt an historian's assessment of the pastorate now drawing to a close. There have been disappointments and sorrows, but it has been a joy to share in the church's life. People are still drawn to this church. The reflections below come from some of those who have made their spiritual home in Bloomsbury in recent years.



Sunday Wuyep

The first is Sunday Wuyep, from the University of Jos in Nigeria. Sunday pursued doctoral studies in Science Education at the Institute of Education. He has been back in Nigeria for several years but has kept in touch with the church. His glowing tribute was written early in 1999.

I arrived London on 12 September 1991 as a total stranger. It was my first time in England, for a study programme at the Institute of Education, University of London. On a Saturday evening I was out again in search of another place of worship, an attempt to locate a fourth church after having worshipped in three different ones, none of which seemed to have provided me with what I thought I desperately needed.

No doubt, my life was then quite lonely, boring and frustrating, so I needed love, companionship, understanding of my situation, all of which would give meaning to my spiritual desires and the growth being sought for in a church.

Indeed, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church was to be the miracle church, situated on Shaftesbury Avenue. Its sign post, though not attractive, was conspicuous. I found it, visited it the following Sunday morning. Aha! that was it, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church was to me a home away from home. Yes, I found fulfilment in this church where the LOVE of God radiates from the pulpit, in its concern for the needy in society, in truly welcoming other nationals visiting London, and in its community-oriented programmes. No wonder a FRIENDSHIP CENTRE exists here!

It wasn't long before I was totally overwhelmed with the Christlike life of this church; yes, I truly forgot that I was from a different race and a visitor to London. The acceptance and love I had was so total that I did not only participate freely in the life of the church, but also joined fully as a member and in initiating some programmes within the church, e.g. FOOTSTEPS, a term-time informal meeting for students and young people. Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church is, indeed, a church where Christ is truly being worshipped and honoured practically. I will not hesitate to recommend it for any visitor into London - you are sure to find someone there to share love with you.

Margaret Cooper taught in London for six and a half years. Returning to New Zealand in October 1996, she wrote of her feelings in the church magazine:

Bloomsbury has become a group of friends whom I have laughed with, mourned with, celebrated with and commiserated with. Working alongside people in the kitchen, going to the theatre, sharing hospitality, going on holiday ... have been lovely ways of getting to know so many of the congregation. At church on Sundays I have been moved by thoughtful, well prepared sermons, well chosen, relevant hymns, pertinent prayers and high quality musical items. Bloomsbury's strength is its acceptance of individuals from varied backgrounds, its unpretentiousness and the genuine love of its members. These qualities are reflected from the leadership down and make it a very special place to be involved with.

Don and Judy Olive and their children came from the United States to spend some months in London 1998-99. They too felt the need to express appreciation to the church before they returned home.

As we as a family leave London we realize how blessed we have been in the Bloomsbury fellowship. This blessing has come so easily and naturally that we think sometimes that the fellowship of this church does not realize how well it does what it does. In the extension of the Lord's grace to outsiders, it has done the Lord's service to the least of these, his brethren. The fellowship has taken us in; it has made outsiders into insiders. And it began almost at once. The second Sunday of our attendance Sara, our sixteen-year-old daughter, was invited to the home of one of the elderly ladies of the church merely to visit and see where she lived. The next week this daughter was overheard to say excitedly to a friend, 'A lady from *our* church invited me to her home'. Later in our stay, Austin, our extremely shy six-year-old son, reported that a nice lady wanted him to be a shepherd for the children's Christmas service. To our surprise this reaching out was enough to overcome his shyness. And shepherd he was! Afterward with absolute superiority he said to one of his friends, 'At *my* church I was a shepherd. You can only be a shepherd if you rehearse at the British Museum² and wear a robe'.

Listening to myself with that transcendent ear that sometimes allows us to hear what we are saying, I found myself extolling the beauty of the music of the choir and the energy of the playing and directing of Philip. 'Our pastor, Barrie Hibbert,' I said, 'is one of the best preachers I have ever heard. Each sermon is carefully crafted and masterfully delivered with humor and gentle spirit'. A hundred other like statements could be cited, but they would all reveal the same thread: Bloomsbury has become *our* church; outsiders have become insiders. Bloomsbury is the welcoming spirit of Christ lived out in the most unselfconscious, inclusive way by his people.

Graham Redding, a Presbyterian minister from Auckland, and his family spent a study period in London in 1998. Having met Barrie Hibbert in New Zealand, they duly looked him up at Bloomsbury - and returned most weeks. On departure Graham was moved to tell the church why they made Bloomsbury their home-from-home church.

As a visitor to London for 10 months, what was it about Bloomsbury Baptist that compelled us to worship there, as opposed to anywhere else? Several things:

The preaching It is clear to anyone who visits Bloomsbury that this is a church with a strong preaching tradition, in which sermons that engage the mind as well as the heart constitute the heart of the worship event. The value of this should not be underestimated at a time when the

2 The 'Underground Church' was using a room close to the Museum for the Sunday School.

traditional 20-minute sermon often gives way to slick, interactive modes of communication which, for all their initial appeal, generally lack the intellectual rigour and theological depth of a well constructed sermon.

The music If preaching is important to the congregation at Bloomsbury, so too is the music. The phrase that comes to mind is 'theology in music'. The choir anthems are always moving, the congregational singing always rousing. It is good to experience worship where the hymns are carefully chosen, the music is well coordinated and the congregation prefers music of substance over the trite and the trendy.

The outreach In an age when many churches seem to have little energy for doing anything more than catering for the spiritual needs of their own members, it is encouraging to see a church that has such a strong commitment to ministry in the inner city, whether it be to the homeless, the student community or the local business and residential community.

It has been a privilege to worship at Bloomsbury this year. I get the sense of a congregation being gently led by God into a new stage of life and ministry, of which the refurbished church will be a key component. We wish you well.

Perhaps those who find a home in a distant land are more inclined to acknowledge this, but British people are drawn to the church too. Heidi Pegler, already well known as a soprano, joined Bloomsbury in June 1996. Since then she has married another singer, John Langley, and he too has become a member. Heidi reflected on 'Why we come to Bloomsbury':

I have been coming to Bloomsbury for about three years and my husband, John, for nearly two years. There are many reasons why we choose to come to Bloomsbury.

Firstly, it is a very friendly church. There are people who really take the time to care about others. Everyone is important from the very youngest to the oldest. We have both attended churches where the congregation is extremely large and it is very difficult to feel part of a family in these situations. We instantly felt welcome at Bloomsbury and part of the family and we believed that we were genuinely embraced.

Secondly, the preaching is outstanding. Unlike other churches where 'worship' is often the focus of a service, at Bloomsbury the preaching is very important. As part of the congregation, we both find that we look forward to the sermons rather than using them as a time to drift off into our subconscious! The teaching of the word is so very important if a church like Bloomsbury is to remain focused and alive. The teaching of God's word is also very important for our own personal development.

We always feel challenged by the sermons at Bloomsbury. We enjoy the fact that Barrie preaches about current issues that face us all today and it is good that he is not afraid to be controversial or debatable in the pulpit. We enjoy the way he not only writes a sermon, but also constructs a service so that everything from the anthem to the hymns to the prayers has a reason and a purpose.

Thirdly, we appreciate the work that Bloomsbury does for the homeless. There are some churches that are happy to give to homeless causes but are not happy to have hands-on involvement. Bloomsbury is right in the heart of the West End where homelessness is high and it is facing the issue directly by integrating homeless people with regular churchgoers.

Fourthly, we enjoy the music at Bloomsbury. Music is a big part of our lives and we are happy to be part of the ad-hoc choir that achieves great things on very little rehearsal time. Other churches need weekday rehearsals to present an anthem each Sunday, but we know that we would not be able to pledge ourselves to such a commitment. Therefore we are happy that we are able to come along on a Sunday morning and make music together for God's glory.

Lastly, we know that we would feel happy about bringing our non-Christian friends to Bloomsbury, as they would also feel welcome and safe. This is an important consideration as we try to spread God's word.

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POSTSCRIPT

*'A living church will never cease to adapt
itself to its environment'*

Tom Phillips, *Baptist Times* 11 May 1906

William Brock gave Bloomsbury a distinctive character, open, outward-looking, socially concerned, evangelical, ecumenical. He had no difficulty in holding in balance the evangelistic and social implications of the Christian faith: he preached and practised a whole Gospel. The 'institutional church', that ugly name bestowed on the reconstituted Bloomsbury in 1905, had always been this church's nature. By location and by deliberate policy Bloomsbury has served a wider social mix than many churches. Because Brock saw his work as for 'the present generation', those he taught were not afraid of change to make the Gospel freshly relevant to later generations, and several of his people were influential at the formation of the Central Church. If Brock

were looking at the church 150 years later, he would be saddened by the numbers, but not despairing - after all, he began from scratch. He would smile gently to hear talk of the scattered membership: given contemporary transport it felt scattered in his day. He might regret that there was not more 'social prayer'. He would be glad to see Bloomsbury still 'religiously attractive' to visitors from other countries, to hear the old Gospel preached with contemporary relevance and to see members actively caring about people beyond the worshipping congregation. He would rejoice to find Bloomsbury still an harmonious church and not surprised that it still has an organic existence, a corporate identity peculiarly its own.

A Devon lion, a Yorkshire statesman, a Scottish evangelist, a passionate Welshman, a genial Lancastrian, a prophet from 'the valleys', and a quiet antipodean: what do Bloomsbury's pastors have in common? None were Londoners, several emerged from remote and humble



*Bloomsbury in 1999 looks
little changed outside but a
ramp improves access*

origins, brought to prominence by their devotion to Christ and their will to develop God-given talents. Clearly preaching ability has always been a primary factor in Bloomsbury's choice. Alongside that, originality of ideas and dynamic energy are repeatedly mentioned, and also a quality less easy to pin down, a radiance that emanates from both personality and faith. These, apart perhaps from the highly strung Baillie, have been essentially happy men, warm, humorous, big-hearted, sustained by loving homes and a willing church. All the ministers have had times of black despair, but almost all have found the inner strength and confidence in God to keep giving the church new direction and fresh hope.

Bloomsbury is a church that has always made enormous demands on its members. It has been a strong church, but never in the 'top league' for size or wealth. It has organized activities out of proportion to its resources of people and money, so there has always been a struggle to sustain all the church has wanted to do - but mostly it has managed somehow. There have been a succession of fine leaders within the church and a massive commitment from virtually all the members, a will to escape 'the failure of attempting only the possible'.

The range of social and welfare ministries and lack of conservatism in the church's evangelicalism have sometimes been viewed less than enthusiastically by other Baptists. Earlier in the twentieth century it seemed easy to pin on Bloomsbury the suspect 'social gospel' label. It may even have been convenient to much of the denomination to dismiss Bloomsbury thus, when wanting to turn deaf ears to the Central Church's repeated appeals for financial support for work beyond the usual boundaries of a Baptist community. The reputation that passed down to the author, even within the church, did not prepare her for the realization that Tom Phillips and Townley Lord were great evangelists, winning huge numbers of converts in their prime. The church has not gone in for 'charismatic renewal', yet in Bloomsbury one is often conscious of the movement of the Holy Spirit.

The central ministry never has time to rest on its laurels, or even to build on its successes, because the area and the people are constantly changing. London life moves on with a speed that gives a transient quality to congregation and membership. In contrast, there have been four very long ministries among the nine that span 150 years. Alongside these the church has had a succession of long-serving lay leaders who have given devoted years of service without trying to hold the church in the past. James Benham, Arthur Yates, Guildhaume Myrrdin Evans, George Foss, Maurice Johns and Brian Bowers have all held responsible office for well over

twenty years. Others have been devoted leaders across several decades, like Charles Denny, Henry Elliot, Walter Benham, Henry Harris, Joseph and Arthur Matthews, Harry Jones, Ethel Smith, Walter Freeman, Frank Whitehead (48 years a deacon), Kathleen Savill, Bert Ransley, Fred Mardell. The list could run on. Their long service has been balanced by their own need of helpers who give a few years or even months to Bloomsbury. Long service has not prevented the church from developing an unusual tradition for change.

Bloomsbury was founded as an open church in all possible senses and today that openness is still constantly cited by both members and visitors as part of its attraction. The church enjoys making people welcome. Down the years Bloomsbury has resisted the constant temptation to be a bastion of middle-class respectability. Few churches can have persuaded more well-heeled citizens to serve the very poor and ‘get their hands dirty’ in practical work - not just by giving money. James Harvey plunged into the slums with news of redeeming hope in Christ. Eliza Benham spent hours at Moor Street teaching and encouraging poor mothers. Young Alice Canfield and Ethel Smith, while yet a child, coped with the smells of the lodging-house kitchens. Housewives stretched meagre war-time rations ever further so that the church could refresh weary servicemen and bewildered bombed-out families. Busy members, men as well as women, have learned to be mass caterers. In recent years friendly hands have served food to people living on the streets. None of this is naturally attractive work: it is done by people constrained by Christ to serve.

The Central Church of the twentieth century has been a difficult concept for Baptists within and beyond this church. It has ensured the survival of the church and made possible major initiatives, but introduced an extra tier of government which brought inevitable tensions. By the end of the century a helpful way of working together seems to have emerged, but with such a constitution much depends on the personalities involved and their will to work together for Christ and the Kingdom of God.

The ‘organic existence’ of Bloomsbury comes from the way its people have worked hard together from Brock’s day on. To be a regular worshipper at Bloomsbury is enough to commit most to extra effort in one aspect or



The new side chapel

another of the church's life and mission. To belong to Bloomsbury is to be involved, and from that week-to-week involvement comes much of the church's adaptability and harmony. This is the practical outcome of preaching that constantly holds Christ before the people.

Although smaller the church is in better heart in 1999 than in 1899. With the LBA offices now on the premises there are new possibilities for developing the Central Church as a London Baptist Centre. As we enter the new millennium, Bloomsbury is poised with its building renewed ready to serve the coming generation in Central London in the name of Christ.



*The first baptism in the renewed sanctuary,
May 1999.*

