

SOME JESUS PEOPLE

by David Batten, B.A.
and the Elders of the Church

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Foreword

Ever since I arrived as the Minister of the Baptist Church, Westgate Road, four years ago this Easter, I was immediately aware of the long, rich and fascinating history of this fellowship. From the first Sunday I preached I felt deeply privileged to be part of such a Christian heritage. A picture of the Tuthill Stairs building, where our forefathers met to worship, hangs in my study as a reminder of God's faithfulness over so many years. My only regret has been that much of the story has never been told; and it is for this reason that I now enthusiastically welcome this new history. David Batten, himself one of my predecessors, has served us well in this Centenary year. Not only has he brought our history up to date, and filled out many details that deserve to be known, but has produced a very readable account.

There are two particular reasons why I am grateful for this history. The first is that in the year of celebrating a hundred years of worshipping in this building, *Some Jesus People* is a forceful reminder that the true church is a worshipping people, not a place of worship. This is the story of a band of ordinary (and not so ordinary) Newcastle folk whose whole focus in life was and is Jesus. The second reason for gratitude is that this history confirms my belief that the church of Jesus Christ is a miracle, one of the greatest strands of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. This modest account is none other than a testimony of God's preserving, protecting and renewing power.

It is my hope that this history will be widely read, and a source of real encouragement for the future years.

A R Rollinson

Easter 1986

Author's Note

As well as to my wife, for the time she has spent typing, I am grateful to the Minister and Elders for studying the original draft and helping to improve it. Messrs. James Allan, George Clark and Joseph Young have also assisted by writing the last part of the story from 1954.

My main sources, apart from Church and Deacons' Meetings' Minutes, very well preserved in the local authority archive, and David Douglas's History of the Northern Baptist Churches 1648-1845, have been John Bradburn's History of Bewick Street Baptist Church, 1883 and continuation; W. Goode Davies's 1902 History of Westgate Road Baptist Church; the Church Manual of 1904; the Jubilee Handbook, 1935 and the Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, together with two invaluable books of press cuttings loaned by Mr Allan. I am also indebted to the Newcastle Central Library Information Service, and to Mr Edward Atkinson, a member of the church since 1921, for some architectural and other details. Finally, a Baptist Union Handbook for 1912, which happens to be in my possession, has yielded one or two facts of interest.

It has been a joy to research the detail of the history with which in outline I have long been familiar. The amount of material uncovered has involved some agonising decisions of selection. Such is beyond the compass of a short work. This is particularly the case with regard to people. I am sure that at least another hundred names might have been mentioned - like David Steel who was received by transfer of membership from the Church at Hawick on 26th May 1897. You are warned that if your first object in perusing these pages is to identify a loved one you are almost sure to be disappointed. Those I have been privileged to know and love myself could fill a much larger book. They were all 'greats'. The few 'greats' I have mentioned were key people in the unfolding of the story. All Jesus people are key people in God's eyes, and Scripture assures us that the name of even the humblest appears in His Book of Life, a rather more important publication than this one, celebrating the one hundred years at Westgate Road.

A comprehensive view of any body of people over more than three centuries will show fluctuations. These certainly appear in this story, not only statistically but spiritually. There have been lean times as well as exciting ones. Causes for grief as well as sadness must be recorded. But the overall impression is one of concern with worship, and missionary impact, rather than with temperature taking. As people have been directed to the glory and grandeur of God, so they have gone out into the world, near and far, to serve Him, as must always follow. There has been a fairly regular setting-aside of members to work as missionaries or ministers in the technical sense. Perhaps more importantly a stream of witnesses has been sent out into the daily life of the city, through the centuries. Its government, professions, trade, industry, sports fields and street corners have all felt their influence, or rather that of the Spirit through them. Professor Herbert Butterfield says in his Christianity & History "It is impossible to measure the vast difference that ordinary Christian piety has made to the last two thousand years of European history". So it is with that of the Baptists to the life of Newcastle, and beyond for the last three hundred and thirty-five years. Truly an apostolic church.

The impression gained from an overview is also one of a catholic church, in relation to its sympathies. Even in the early days, of closed membership, its rigorous discipline does not seem to have involved unchurching anybody else. Whilst some doctrines, of some other branches, must have been anathema, the general impression over the years is of partnership with other denominations in the work of the Kingdom - a recognition that each was doing God's work in its own way, even if we were the only one doing it in His! The Vicar of Newcastle, more latterly the Bishop, and the Salvation Army commanding officer have been equally made welcome. It seems to have been

accepted that too much questioning of others' faith, doctrine and standing in Christ presupposes perfection in one's own, and before long, in oneself.

In the end the story, marginally one of places, is even more than one of people, and their doings. It is about God and His doings. These are always marvellous in our eyes, and surely none more so than what He can make of ordinary people, and do with them. Strong personalities abound in this story, but people weak at the same times, fallible, as are all of us. This is the glory - and it belongs to Him, like the Kingdom and the power. When we turn from the past to face the future we must pray, with A F Bayley:

"Lord, Thy Kingdom bring triumphant,
Visit us this living hour;
Let Thy toiling, sinning children
See Thy Kingdom come in power".
and also, as Jesus people with von Zinzendorf:
"Jesus still leads on!"

Introduction

A Hundred Years of the Westgate Road Baptist Church,
Now the Baptist Church, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Not everyone connected with it could have told the church's proper name. And do you know how it began, and the way this company of Jesus people have come? What follows is a much-condensed attempt to show their roots and their fruits to date. Modern 'Westgate Roaders' together with the Baptists of Heaton, on the city's eastern side, and those of Gateshead, across the Tyne, share a rich inheritance. Before recounting the hundred years of 'Westgate Road' therefore, we look briefly at those common origins. They are dated two hundred and thirty-six years earlier.

Bridging the First Two Hundred and Thirty-six Years Up the Stairs to the Street

The Bridge

One of the many bridges across the Tyne was built in 1250. Demolished in 1771, it has since been referred to as the "Old" Tyne Bridge. Its northern end supported a small building known as the St Thomas á Becket Chapel. This was quite close to the Guildhall, and it was here that our local spiritual forefather first met. The year was probably 1650, when the population of Newcastle was about 13,000. The site had been significant strategically since Roman times, and most recently so during the Civil War. When our story starts, the town was still garrisoned by Parliamentary troops. Among these were a number of men from London and other places south who had recently been persuaded of the validity of Baptist principles. The first northern Baptist church was thus formed largely of soldiers.

We know all too little about them. No records of their meetings have survived. The only names of members known are those of army officers. Colonel Robert Lilburn, Governor of Newcastle was one, Colonel Paul Hobson, Deputy Governor, another. Captains Mason, Simpson and Spencer were among them. The first Minister, Thomas Gower, was almost certainly connected with the army. There are few things that can be said with any certainty about the church in this opening year or two. Briefly summarising: it gave 'sweet and loving' help in connection with the formation of a Baptist Church in Hexham in 1652. Then its minister, before long, entertained great bitterness toward Thomas Tillam, the leader at Hexham. The fact that Gower kept up an increasingly hostile attitude for three years until that good man left the area shows him in a distinctly unfavourable light. Finally we know that the Newcastle church rendered good service in unmasking an impostor called by Hexham in April 1653 "a child of the divell", come from Rome "to ruine this church". "With great subtlety" he "made a most glorious confession of Christ, pretending that he had been a Jew, and that his name was Joseph Ben Israel". Whereupon "he was baptised, but the Holy One of Israel, our gracious protector, brought the hellish imposture to light before he had any church communion. Ever blessed be his glorious name, for this great deliverance!"

Gower was in Durham Gaol for a time, through preaching in a house in Gateshead. We know that the next twenty-five years brought persecution for all who did not conform to the Church of England. Penalties ranged from three months imprisonment, with a £5 fine, to banishment. No non-conformist could hold public office. But we cannot judge the full effect of such repressive legislation as the Act Of Uniformity on the Baptists of Newcastle. It is quite clear that some members fell away. A number of these were restored in 1675 through the Church's second Minister, named Turner, probably an army captain. He in due course was succeeded by Richard Pitts, who served until 1698. In spite of the Toleration Act, nine years earlier, the fellowship remained weak, its condition being brought to the attention of the Northern Association of Baptist Churches in 1704 and 1706. It is doubtful whether at that time, or indeed for the another forty years or so, any minister was in charge. But when, in 1720, a wealthy members presented "new" premises for the church's use, these consisted of a large ground-floor room for a meeting-house, and rooms above suitable for a minister to live in. So faith in God for the future was not lacking.

The Stairs

The building was in fact a very old one, on Tuthill Stairs, for which George West paid £120. It was through the Association - and in particular the church at Hexham at that time - that God worked to provide pastoral oversight again, a series of ministers, mostly on a visiting basis, from 1749-1769.

From that date to the earliest years of the nineteenth century there followed seven short pastorates, including that of John Foster, the noted essayist, who came from Bristol College in 1792, the year which saw the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society. The most significant arrival during this period however, for the enheartening and strengthening of the Baptist cause in Newcastle was that of a layman in 1780. He was Richard Fishwick, of Hull, who came to set up the Elswick Lead Works. His faith and enthusiasm proved contagious, and a fellowship for long weak, and further weakened by doctrinal division, involving secession, slowly became more united, and

began to grow again. It was of course the period of the great Methodist revival, and conversion was in the air. In 1798 Fishwick, who had been the first to support William Carey with a generous annual subscription to the work of the BMS in India, was largely instrumental in the building of a new and larger chapel, in an orchard behind the old premises on Tuthill Stairs.

From about this time, records become much more plentiful. In 1799 it was decided that Church Meetings, which had often been held on Sundays, should take place regularly each month on a Thursday, "for transacting all things that relate to the order and discipline of the Church". At the same time it was also agreed that "when any of our members are negligent in their attendance upon the means, or Ordinances of the Lord's House, inquiry shall speedily be made, to know the cause, and every scriptural mode used in order to restore them". We are left in no doubt of the place accorded to Scripture in the life of the church at any stage. A few years into the nineteenth century a Statement of Faith approved at a church meeting provides an illustration of the numerous references which not only mention but stress it. The statement begins with "belief in the Scriptures of the old and new Testaments as divinely inspired, and containing the only complete and sure guide of the Christian, both in faith and practice". A member named Margaret Thomson who died in 1848 "at Carlhol Square in great peace", was "remarkable for knowledge of the Scriptures".

Fishwick had left for London in 1806, but his faith in helping to provide a larger chapel proved amply justified. With the arrival of Richard Pengilly from Bristol the following year, things really started to happen. Within ten years the membership had reached three figures, for the first time. In 1820 a gallery was built across the west-end of the chapel, as well as a new baptistry. Remaining for thirty years in all, Pengilly left his mark alike on church and city. There was much concern with social problems like slavery and alcohol, as well as with direct evangelistic outreach. In the city and beyond, Sunday School work and that of the Bible Society owed much to Pengilly's pioneering. He seems to have been a natural leader. In May 1834 he was "appointed by the Dissenting Ministers of Newcastle to visit the Metropolis to attend a general meeting of delegates from Dissenters throughout the Kingdom to consider the Grievances of Dissenters from the Established Church". He also lobbied Members at the House of Commons in this cause. Through his writing he might be said to be more responsible than anyone else, humanly speaking, for the modern Baptist movement in Germany, since its founder, J. G. Oncken, was probably converted through reading one of his tracts. The keynote of Pengilly's ministry was mission, world-wide, though "beginning at Jerusalem". One young member commended to college for ministerial training was Joseph Angus, in 1836, later to become Secretary of the B.M.S., no less, then President of Regent's Park College. Before Pengilly left Newcastle in 1845, a number of others were called to "full-time service", at least five overseas to India and Africa and three more to the home ministry. At an earlier stage however, there had been dissatisfaction or disagreement, twenty-nine members having seceded in 1816. These subsequently built a chapel in New Court, Westgate Road, before moving to Rye Hill and finally Elswick Road. Another group formed a further church, meeting in Providence Chapel Marlborough Crescent. Such action was often accepted, in those times, as permissible, if not inevitable, and, in that sense, natural. It could be taken, on sincerely-held theological grounds, and respected, without bitterness. Both of these churches, as it happens, joined or re-joined the mainstream eventually, Marlborough Crescent in less than fifty years, the Elswick Road Church

nearly a century later and in very different circumstances. From the beginning of the nineteenth century also, concern for the purity of the church involved the exclusion of members for reasons like "improper conduct, drunkenness, fornication and family-leaving". Examples could be quoted from both sexes. Members' business failures were also examined.

Bewick Street

It was the minister of the new Court Church, Rev George Sample, who accepted a unanimous invitation to succeed Richard Pengilly at Tuthill Stairs in 1845. In January of that year, incidentally, lessons on the "Omnipresence of God" and "Christ the Good Shepherd" were given to the Sunday School following one on "Preparation for Death". The most rigorous rules, for both scholars and teachers were in force. Although within four years Mr Sample's health had so declined that he was obliged to resign, this was not before the idea of a larger chapel had been mooted. It was during the ministry of Rev. Thomas Pottenger, who came from Islington in 1849, that the seed bore fruit. John Bradburn, the historian of Bewick Street, records that the chapel there was opened on 31st August 1853, on land "bought from the late Mr. Grainger for £780". Total expenditure was £4,139, and the sale of the old chapel and adjoining premises on Tuthill Stairs realised £1,400. Here, for a good thirty years says Bradburn, new members were regularly received, "so mightily grew the Word and prevailed". By the time Thomas Pottenger resigned on health grounds in 1859, the membership had increased to 347. Similar signs followed the preaching of Rev W Walters, previously of Halifax, from 1860-1871, during which time two vestries had to be incorporated to provide more seats in the chapel. In 1865, "Marie Boileau requested dismissal to the Baptist Church, Paris", if you please. It was in this year that women were first elected to the diaconate, a departure as significant, perhaps, as the opening of communion a few years later to believers other than those who had been baptised by immersion. In the three years to his death in 1875, the Rev. James Mursell, formerly of Bradford, baptised no less than 134 new members, and the new total was 486. This was the time of the Moody and Sankey revival, and expansion was taking place all over the country. In common with Jesus people in the rest of the city and elsewhere, these Newcastle ones had been much in prayer. We read, especially in the records of the preceding decade, of numerous "meetings for special prayers for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit". The church then drew up a "plan of evangelistic work", for "the evangelism of the dark and destitute parts of the town". "Stations" were allocated to members of a team of evangelists and their assistants, and the plan was revised quarterly.

As we approach the end of the Bewick Street era, having noted several significant changes - not all made unanimously, we may depend! - there is one more which should be mentioned. The introduction of an organ had caused most heated controversy, in this chapel's earliest days' Shortly afterwards came the church's first choir - the organ's "natural complement", in the words of the author of Westgate Road's Jubilee notes. This she says was "in response to the need for better psalmody". Today, of course, other opinions are abroad, and organs, as well as choirs, are out of fashion in some places. One imagines the puritans who so spiritedly opposed them in the first place rejoicing in glory with our modern philistines!

In 1877 the Rev. J. W. Stephens came to Bewick Street from Sheffield, about which time the church in Gateshead was formed, following years of pioneering Sunday School work across the river. Mr Stephens was described by one of his deacons W Goode Davies, as " a man of original mind, great intellectual ability with a lofty sense of duty and an absence of all unworthy motives".

In June the following year it was resolved that a committee consisting of the Pastor, Organist, and four choir members, with two deacons be requested to report at the next Church Meeting on "the most suitable collection of anthems and chants for use in the service". This was only one of a number of ad hoc committees set up from time to time to consider and make recommendations on matters both greater and smaller. In March 1883 it was agreed "that some competent persons be appointed to examine and report upon the best means for preventing draughts in the chapel and to provide for its efficient ventilation". No doubt this will strike one or two chords!

Shorn of vestries and sort of classrooms, and also in view of the fact that the majority of members now lived a distance from it, the chapel no longer met the growing church's need. It was thus not difficult to accept an offer of £15,000 for the property made by the River Tyne Improvement Commissioners in December 1883, though the prospect of leaving was naturally faced with mixed feelings. It was decided that instead of another central church, there should be two in different areas of the city, one in the West End and the other in Jesmond. No sooner was this agreed than the sister church at Marlborough Crescent proved that Jesus people are pilgrim people by making their desire to move to the West End and their willingness to join in common venture. The last service at Bewick Street was thus one of joyful reunion, communion, covenant making, in early May 1884. The joint membership was 539. Mr. Stephens was joined by the Marlborough Crescent minister, the Rev. F. Stubbs, and the diaconate now included four members from that church. Bradburn notes that "the church adhered faithfully to the principles of the great Reformation, to the doctrines commonly known as Evangelical, as well as to the distinctive principle of Baptist churches in admitting only believers baptised by immersion to membership in the church, and in requiring as intellectual confession of personal faith in Christ". Services continued to be held in Marlborough Crescent until the new buildings were ready.

Westgate Road

A New Start with the Spirit

The first sermon preached in the present building was based on Acts 1,4 and 5; "Wait for the promise of the Father.... For John truly baptised with water; but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost" . But of course there could only be opening services after much prayer and hard work. The first task of the Building Committee, which had been appointed was to be to decide the nature and extent of the provision to be made "for efficient and aggressive church work" in the busy neighbourhood of Westgate Road. This was perhaps a more clearly defined community in those days, and certainly a far less mixed one. I doubt whether you would have found a single Asian! - in spite of class distinction between "chiefs and Indians". With a notable exception or two, like Prospect House on the church's large corner site, the housing immediately

nearest, all round, was of modest character, mostly in the form of flats almost peculiar to Tyneside, with backyards and no garden. Several long streets of such survive, in revitalised condition amongst much new housing. Within quite a short distance, however, citizens of more substance were to be found, in streets like Brighton Grove, whilst on the south side of the main road, and down, towards town and river were still larger and more gracious properties. These were the residences of professional people and some of the city's wealthiest through trade and commerce. The church was made up of representatives of each type of background. Jesus people "gel", don't they? And while due deference was paid to gifted leaders, these were not only among the rich. But "Westgate Road" has never served a neighbourhood only. From the beginning there were members who lived further afield. The number of these has increased through the century, as the city's boundaries have extended, particularly to the west. But the church roll has also included, and includes, residents of outlying villages, such as Corbridge, Ponteland and Stamfordham. As time has advanced it does appear that the church may, on balance, have made more appeal to the middle classes than to artisans. If this is so, it is not peculiar to "Westgate Road". But in 1886 there was a good "mix".

Many things could be said about that year. Income tax was 8d in the pound. One in every ten textile workers was a child under the age of ten. It was a significant year for the world, as well as for Newcastle Baptists. At Westminster, when it began, the balance of power between Liberals and Tories was held by the Irishman Charles Stewart Parnell, with whom Gladstone came to terms to introduce his fateful Home Rule Bill. In Stuttgart, at the end of January, the world's first motor-car made its appearance.

The first sod from the Westgate Road enterprise had been cut by John Bradburn in February 1885. The stone laying took place at the end of May, Alderman Jonathan Angus officiating. Following the ceremony, and tea in Rye Hill schoolroom, a meeting was "chaired" by the "Mayor of Newcastle". Addresses were given by the Reverend Doctor Landells, of Edinburgh and a distinguished minister from Bristol, another Reverend Doctor. This was Richard Glover, whose pastorate at Tynedale Baptist Church had begun in 1869 and was to continue to 1911. Two members of Westgate Road at least feel a link with him across the century, since his daughter Dorothy was still at Tynedale when one of them baptised the other in the bombed chapel there, open to the sky, in 1946.

The architect, appointed by competition, was James Cubitt of London. Whilst he and his firm have other important achievements to their credit, which would interest railway enthusiasts, among others, the one relevant fact about him was that he was an Anglican. This is almost immediately made credible on first sight of "Westgate Road". The imposing suite of buildings, with its 98 doors, comprised lecture hall, school hall with classrooms, beginners' room, ladies' and deacons' as well as minister's vestries, and lots of "usual" offices. The sanctuary itself seating 850, was stone built, in Victorian Gothic, incorporating interesting examples of other styles. The wide central aisle, lofty oak-beamed roof, the stained glass windows, stone side pulpit, and the panelled apse, even though housing an open baptistry as well as choir stalls, rendered the building almost as unlike a typical "Baptist chapel" as could be. Reflecting the security and solidarity of the age, it was clearly intended for nothing but dignified worship. Though lending itself well to music and drama, its whole

character is against the undisciplined performance passing for worship in some circles today.

A chapter could be devoted to the windows themselves all with scriptural themes, unveiled subsequently, at different times in memory of members who rendered notable service in church and community. We shall have occasion later to refer to the war memorial window and the most recent Stanley Crowe memorial. Of particular interest also is the present church lounge. Originally the Beginners' Room, designed to seat 100 infants, it was furnished with rows of smooth, heavy timber seating in 'gallery' construction. The fact that these were stepped upwards, as in theatres of the time and modern university lecture rooms, can be verified by a look at the windows. These will be seen to be shorter by regular reductions upward, from the outer door. Obviously many stories could be told of events and experiences in this, as in other rooms, through the years, as well as in the chapel itself. It was in the Beginners' Room that describing how the baby Moses was found in the bullrushes the teacher, himself patriarchal, caused amazement by producing a live baby comfortable in a clothes basket. For this we have the living word of one who was himself amazed.

Building operations, begun, as we have seen, in the spring of 1885, were so delayed by bad weather that it was not until the summer of the following year that opening services could be held. These duly took place on 6th July 1886, with Revs R H Roberts and John Aldis as preachers. Six hundred people shared lunch and tea as well as spiritual food, and the celebration continued for no less than four further Sundays - "with deepening interest", we are told. Those at Jesmond continued for three. These were held in October 1887, Dr John Clifford having preached the opening sermon. The chapel was on Osborne Road, designed and built by the same architect and contractors as "Westgate Road". Whilst the Westgate Road church undertook the responsibility for a Sunday School which had been started in Snow Street and for one which was still running at Tuthill Stairs, as well as a small mission, Jesmond had had charge of a mission established in Byker, which was to become the Heaton church. The first minister at Jesmond was Rev. Frank Smith, in 1889, with 131 members of whom farewell had been taken at a communion service in Westgate Road. As well as a total membership of over 500, the two churches counted 1,100 Sunday Scholars, 77 teachers, and Bands of Hope 300 strong.

Having acknowledged "the great goodness and mercy of God, in enabling them to report the completion of the great work", for which the financial outlay, apart from the cost of 2 organs, was £19,606 2s. 3d, the committee earnestly prayed

"that these buildings may continue for many generations, to be places of worship where the Lord's people may meet in holy fellowship, for the maturing of their spiritual life, and to renew their strength to labour for the Lord, and where the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may be published in its simplicity, as a message of goodwill and glad tidings from our Heavenly Father, to multitudes of weary and sin-stricken hearts, seeking the peace and grace which he alone can give".

We shall see, as far as we are able to judge to what extent this prayer has been answered at Westgate Road. There have been no shortage of calls for prayer over the years, and for example, the monthly circular of the Westgate Road and Osborne Road Baptists for January 1888 included the following exhortation: "Let us commence this

opening year with a determination to improve our prayer meetings The key to the whole is there" While references to prayer are frequent, throughout the records, and days and weeks of prayer were set aside for special objects, neither minutes nor previous histories convey clear information of the prayer life of the church over any period. Meetings for prayer were never held less than weekly, in living memory. These were often combined with Bible study in what was called the Mid-Week Service, an evening hour of fellowship not always well attended. From 1956 to 1959 members of neighbouring churches accepted our invitation for joint prayer on behalf of the community, and a small united group met for this purpose at seven o'clock on Wednesday mornings without fail. After a hymn, scripture reading and brief introduction, there was the utmost readiness and freedom in the prayer session lasting until seven-thirty.

We have already noticed the church's emphasis on Scripture, in an earlier age, and services at Westgate Road have always underlined it. For most of the hundred years four items in the order, at least, in addition to the Bible-based sermon, were included in the worship without fail. The opening words from the pulpit were a scriptural call to worship. Lessons from each of the Testaments were read, separated by the anthem, whose words in almost every case conveyed a Biblical message. In addition worshippers also chanted a psalm, or other passage, on many occasions. Our proximity to Presbyterian neighbours did not prompt us to preface the entry of the minister by an elder's carrying-in of the pulpit Bible, but it may be no accident that from the time of our joint services with 'Arthur's Hill' an open bible found a permanent central place, facing the congregation from the communion table. This was no empty gesture.

1888-1920

Mr Stubbs having resigned in November 1885 and Mr Stephens two years later, the Rev J. T. Forbes came from Cupar, Fife to begin a notable ministry on 3rd June 1888. In the following year at a cost of £776, the organ, built by 'Father' Willis of London, was installed. Dr. Armes, organist of Durham Cathedral, played for the service held to celebrate its opening, and afterwards gave a recital. 1889 also saw the baptisms of Sir William and Lady Angus, in middle life after years as adherents and supporters of the church. Sir William who had served as Treasurer of the Building Committee, was now elected to the diaconate. His wife became a tireless worker, addressing herself particularly to problems of finance. Amongst the women of the church she seemed a natural leader, and the Sewing Meeting was never stronger than in her day. It was through her influence that a District Nursing Association was set up, run by a 38 strong committee of women church members. The object was to provide a salaried nurse, whose work would be to visit the sick poor "(not only those connected with the church)" in their homes, to provide necessaries and comforts for their use during illness and convalescence, and to attend to their spiritual as well as bodily needs". Before long, Nurse Dixon, who lived in Cromwell Street, was appointed. She proved a much-appreciated ambassador for Christ and the church for many years. In the summer of 1890 the church agreed to support open-air evangelistic meetings on the Nun's Moor at 8 o'clock on Sunday evenings through July and August. A unanimous decision of November 1893 was "that the reorganisation of the Evening Service with a view to its increasing efficiency as an evangelistic agency be entrusted

to the Pastor". We could wish that the records gave details, and results! After a morning service about this time it was "agreed on a motion of the Pastor that collections be taken on retiring from both services next Lord's Day on behalf of the fund to relieve the distress caused by the Lock-out of the Miners in the Midland Counties". In 1894 a Sunday afternoon meeting for men was started which became a very popular part of the church's programme. This year also saw great busyness arising from the invitation to the Baptist Union to hold the Autumn Assembly in Newcastle.

By June of the following year, when Mr Forbes preached his farewell sermon, having accepted a call to Dublin Street, Edinburgh, no less than 163 had professed their faith in Christ by baptism in the seven years of this exceptionally able ministry, and two members had embarked on training for the ministry. These were Walter Lomax McKenzie and Arthur Spelman Culley, at "Spurgeon's" and Regent's Park respectively. It can safely be said that in so far the prayers of the pioneers seemed answered. Here, surely, are results - from further prayer, from worship, and from witness, as at other times in the history of these Jesus people. Again we could wish for more individual stories.

On 4th July 1897 every seat in the chapel was occupied for the recognition of another gifted man as minister of the church. This was the Rev. W. Hussey Griffith, who had been at Greenock for three years after training at Regent's Park College. A newspaper report of the time describes him as "in every way stamped by originality. He has pale, clean-cut intellectual features, and when, with upturned face, shaking back his long black hair, he utters a prayer in quiet, modulated tones, the image of a young Spurgeon is recalled". His histrionics as a preacher put at least one listener in mind of Henry Irving, and his voice, if not resonant, was even "more varied" than the great actor's. "Indeed in this respect Mr Griffith is unique, for if he quotes a hymn or some poetic outburst he delivers it as a chant, and with a rhythm that is peculiarly fascinating". He obviously knew the combined power of music and language. In October of the following year he was married to Margaret Bartlett, daughter of one of the deacons, Mr Forbes returning to conduct the service. They were to enjoy only six years together, before her death.

It was at about this time that the work at Benwell began. The Tuthill Stairs Mission and Sunday School had been obliged to move and found temporary accommodation near the old Elswick Station in 1889. This was now proving altogether inadequate, particularly for the growing school. Accordingly a fund was started at Westgate Road in 1897, and in less than two years' time a hall had been opened on a site in Buddle Road large enough to take a chapel as well. Costs of £1,800 were met within a further year or two. By March 1899 the Rev. W. Ridley Chesterton had been called, from Spurgeon's College, as Minister, and by 1904 the mission had so prospered that it could become an independent church. Thus in April of that year the whole church met at Benwell and the new church was inaugurated with the reading of the roll of founding members, and communion.

On 23rd February 1899, the following resolution was adopted: "This Church gladly hails the recent Rescript of the Czar of Russia invoking the aid of the European Powers towards mutual understanding on the question of armaments as a hopeful indication of the dawn of a better day, when the nations will be drawn together in the

bonds of humanity and of Christ the Prince of Peace; and the Church requests its Pastor to co-operate in any measures which may be adopted for promoting the Czar's aims and the interests of peace". Within a further few years among other resolutions adopted was one expressing "the horror and indignation at the present conditions of Macedonia". This pleaded for the "appointment by the Great Powers of Europe of a Christian Governor", and called upon His Majesty's Government "to seek to bring about a Concert of European Powers to press such proposals upon the Government of Turkey". Shortly after that, a unanimous resolution "that this Church offers its strenuous protest against the proposed conditions before the importation of Chinese labour into the Transvaal because it is [sic] opposed to the broadest principles of Christianity, inimical to freedom, degrading to our common manhood, lowers the dignity of labour and reverses the noblest traditions of our national policy" was sent not only to city Members of Parliament but to the Prime Minister, Colonial Secretary, and the Leader of the Opposition. Such action, more common as it may have been at that time than now, nevertheless speaks volumes for a church's faith in God and in its own standing and influence under God. Does it not make our own hand wringing in the face of wrong, and our protests, only, too often, on issue affecting ourselves, seem feeble? Of course we pray, about evils and injustices, as well, but so also did our forefathers.

Sunday the 30th May 1900 saw collections on behalf of the Indian Famine Relief Fund. In that year also, Thomas Reid McNab, a member of the church, began training at Spurgeon's College. He was to begin his ministry as assistant at Eld Lane, Colchester. Subsequently he held influential pastorates at Tonbridge and elsewhere. In 1901, a "united Free Church Mission" to the city brought "many converts and much blessing". In March of the following year the Baptist Council of Newcastle and Gateshead was formed, to strengthen the links between churches whose membership totalled 1,400. This from a roll of 29 in Pengilly's time a century earlier! "Yet we cannot boast," said the speaker at the inaugural meeting. "God has blessed us, but a greater blessing would have attended greater faithfulness. New opportunities await us. To these let us, by God's grace, be found more faithful."

At a special Church Meeting on 13th May 1903, "it was unanimously resolved to recommend our young brother Mr. J. Arthur Bell, for admission to Regent's Park College". In due course he became a missionary to China, his address at one time being in the province of "Shensi, via Siberia". The church's influence certainly was worldwide, since other members were living in Canada, Malaya, Nigeria, South Africa and Shanghai about this time. One had been in the Royal and Merchant Navies, and thereafter stayed at home, died in 1904 aged 82 --John Potts, and what a character! A few years previously he had attended meetings of the Baptist Union, in Glasgow, where one speaker had been pleading for "good musical arrangements", in the chapel, "the interior adorned with all that taste and beauty can suggest". Whatever one's views about worship, one heart at least goes out to such a refreshing non-conformist among non-conformists as could write to the "Baptist Times" of the day: "To my mind this is dreadful from the land of the Covenanters. What would Claverhouse say? The musical arrangements have been the curse of the meeting house. The flowers and other abominations are a disgrace to us Baptists. No sir; let them preach the simple gospel or shut up. 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me.' It is no use making our meeting house a training ground for

the pantomime. The money that has been wasted on chapel buildings would have done more good on the Congo".

As if in answer to such criticism, the organiser of an annual Choirs Festival at Westgate Road took as his slogan: "We stand for the music of worship and not for the worship of music". In addition to the choir and Sunday Schools, Bible Classes were held for young men and women - separately - a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Meeting for men, Pleasant Monday Afternoon meeting for women, Christian Endeavour societies, Band of Hope and National British Women's Temperance Association branch. But as well as keeping the buildings buzzing with activity, the church also looked outwards. Supporting the work of the Kingdom in distant places as it did through the B.M.S., it was nevertheless not blind to the needs, both spiritual and physical, of people around its doors. Not only the Nursing Association but a Church Mission Committee expressed concern with outreach, arranging regular cottage meetings and also weekly lantern services ("Limelight Gospel Services"). These were held on Sunday evenings in the Lecture Hall. One at six o'clock, for children was often 'packed out'. A second, for adults, followed the evening service, at eight o'clock, and part of its attraction for years, was the playing of a ten-piece orchestra. References to free Sunday morning breakfasts may also be found about this time, but, like those to a church cricket team, they are sparse and comparatively short-lived.

Do we think of Jesus people as dour? Earnest they could certainly be, and yes, some perhaps stern, But by the early years of this century, at any rate, there was lot of fun and humour among them. Much of that which appears in print seems to have been of the "does-your-mother-take-in-washing? - Well,-you-don't-think-she'd-leave-it-out-all-night" variety, but it is clear in their relationships that the lighter side was not missing. One choir secretary in reporting the year's work referred to the annual outing as the lark of the year, and called the Annual General Meeting of the choir the runner-up for that title. There was little decent entertainment anywhere, of course, except that which the churches provided. At Homes, Conversaciones, Socials and Soirees abounded, as well as concerts. These were variously titled "Grand", "Sacred", "Miscellaneous", "Peoples", and "Weekly Saturday Evening", though all had a similar, if not common format and even programme. There was always a formal Chairman, and sometimes, even on a Saturday evening, this could be the Minister. Admission might be as little as a penny, with the promise of a warm hall. Social Institutes and the like, sponsored by Jesus people and widely attended on church premises, afforded opportunities for discussion of contemporary issues. They could also provide excellent training in public speaking and debate. At least one distinguished foreign secretary of this century paid tribute to classes held by a Baptist Church from this point of view, namely Ernest Bevin, who always said that he learnt his trade at St. Mark's, Easton, Bristol.

Seriousness and humour were conspicuously combined in the person of Mr George Davis, who succeeded Mr James Kinnear's thirty-two years as organist and choirmaster at Westgate Road in 1909. In our own easy-going age we may find it difficult to understand that there could be grown-up people in the church as recently as 1958, when he died, in office, who were not only dismayed at disappointing a loved leader, but actually scared to disobey him. He could be strict with the minister, too. Hymns not to hand in time for tunes to be chosen and practised by the choir on Thursday, would not be sung on Sunday. The choirmaster's own choice would have

to do. The Holy Spirit according to George Davis was also a spirit of order and of timely, rather than last minute, inspiration. Yet with his strictness he showed, always, utmost courtesy, good nature, and often humour as well. A twinkle was never absent from his eye for long. And he disciplined no one more strictly than himself. His reputation for scrupulousness in all things and punctuality at all times was awesome. His life style if not spartan, was austere. Who else could so combine frugality and humour as to reward a party of carol singers from the church with nothing except a drink of liver-salts, one year? He and his sister, Maggie (later Mrs. Matt. Crowe) were conductor, accompanist and soloist at innumerable musical services and choir festivals, and at many of the other concerts referred, not only in Baptist circles, and not only in Newcastle. The pair gained a wide reputation and were much in demand. Incidentally it was during the Davis era that the choir, at one stage, boasted as well as a Crow (e), a Bunting, a Rook and a Swan - a fact which other people used to find funnier than did the choirmaster, as it happened. It must be said that the standard of the church's praise and the choir's music was never higher than during his time.

In 1912 the formation of a Westgate Road branch of the Baptist Women's League was agreed by the Church. Mr. Griffith accepted a call to Whitley Bay in 1913, and was succeeded in the following year by the Rev. T. J. Whitman, who came from a flourishing first pastorate at Woodberry Down, North London. Described as "a thoughtful and attractive preacher, with a pleasing voice and delivery". his work had been most fruitful among young people. At this time Dedication Services, in connection with the birth of children were agreed, "to be held at the close of morning service as desired". Special "People's Services" were arranged on Sunday evenings monthly, with printed Orders of Service previously distributed throughout the district. These evenings were concluded with a Social Hour, from September 1916.

For most of Mr Whitman's five years in Newcastle local men, of course, were away in the Forces. A Christmas parcel was sent each year to all connected with the church. Soldiers were also stationed here in considerable numbers. Many of the church's rooms were commandeered for use by the army, but through more than one winter there was a recreation room with a canteen, staffed by church volunteers, open every weeknight. In befriending the stranger and sharing the hardships of his people, the minister was used by God as the instrument for bringing many to faith in Christ, and became greatly beloved. In July 1919 W. Goode Davies, at one time Church Secretary, author of the 250th anniversary history, and a well known solicitor and magistrate, died at the age of 74. There was sorrow too, when the minister announced his departure for Manchester, at the end of 1919 - but this was not before the church had welcomed home its survivors of the war. A special thanksgiving service lasting half-an-hour was held in April, after which a Weymouth's New Testament was presented to every man. This was followed by entertainment beginning with a supper of beef, ham and pickles, plus stewed apple and custard, blancmange, jellies, cakes and tea or coffee. The minister and three deacons made speeches of welcome, to which three servicemen replied. One of these was Tom W. Gill, of whom more is to be heard later. The eighteen members of the church and congregation who did not return are commemorated in a memorial window on the east side of the chapel, unveiled in 1920. In the "Welcome Home" year the Sunday School, which since 1915 had included the former long-established Snow Street school, held a Peace Outing. This was to Newburn, on return from where, thanks were given for a delightful "day in the country"!

1921 – 1953

It was not until January 1921 that the pastorate was filled again. The new incumbent was the Rev. T. Miller Johnson, whose previous charges had been in Watford and Rochdale. Among those who took part in the public welcome to him were the "Vicar of Newcastle" and the Vicar of St. Philip's, both of whom expressed the hope "that all denominations of the church might soon be united in one". Three-minute speeches were also given by representatives of a dozen of the church's organisations, which by this time included the Boy Scouts. In May of that year a member moving to China was thanked for his work, especially the help he had given young people. Not only at this time but for fifty years previously as well, the church minutes record movement of a surprising number of members, in and out. The large majority, of course, were from, and to, churches in this country, but all parts of the British Isles were involved. We tend to think of family mobility as a phenomenon of our own time. It has certainly increased, but is by no means new.

For nine years Mr. Johnson worthily upheld established high standards of pulpit ministry, and encouraged the church through the early difficult post-war period. Through his influence many young men, in particular, were led to Christian allegiance, and one to training for the ministry. This was Thomas Woodman Gill, who responded at the "Welcome Home" celebrations. After a course at Rawdon College he held pastorates at King's Lynn, Rushden, Fulham and, for many years, at Cambridge, and was much loved everywhere.

Activities typical of the times included a rendering by the choir of Saul's cantata "Ruth" at the evening service of the 1921 Harvest Thanksgiving Sunday on 11th September, and a performance of Mendelssohn's "Elijah" with the help of the Heaton United Methodist Church choir the same year. On a Thursday evening in March the following year a "Japanese Tea Garden", admission 9d, was arranged "in aid of the Manse Fund". According to the local press, "all the colours and radiance of the Orient were represented", but this exotic event appears to have been largely a performance of traditional music. A picture of the choir on the stage shows them thirty-four strong, with their conductor, the ladies, certainly, being in colourful attire.

It was at about this time that sudden death overtook the Church Secretary, Mr. Thomas Purves, who was also secretary of a firm of carriers in the city and was described as "an authority on all matters of railway and inland transport". He had joined the church at Marlborough Crescent in 1873, and served as deacon, Sunday School secretary and teacher for 30 years. His is a story of faithfulness and service notable though not rare in the church's history. In 1923 Mr. E. H. Angas, Church Treasurer, completed fifty years' membership.

In July 1922, open-air meetings were held in Bell Street and an autumn mission in the church. This was preceded by the customary period of special prayer. In October of that year we read of "a young sister's slip into sin. Her letter of resignation was received, but since there was evidence of true penitence, the deacons felt it would be more in harmony with the Spirit of the Master to temporarily suspend her membership

rather than accept resignation". The absence of any follow-up information is tantalising.

Another reference in the deacons' minutes of the same month provides a further insight into the life of the church at that time. An application to start a Badminton Club was "left over, having led to very earnest discussion on the whole question of amusements, the grave fear being expressed that these were absorbing time, thought and talent which ought to be devoted to the cultivation of the Christian graces and the building-up of strong Christian character and consequently a strong Christian Church". We do know the sequel to this. A badminton club was formed in 1925, three years later, with thirty-eight members. Athletic, and even some non-athletic types were still enjoying the game on the premises more than twenty-five years later, in which time several people who came to play remained to pray, in the sense that they found Christ, or vice-versa, and were baptised.

Mr. Johnson moved to South Shields after nine years and was succeeded by the Rev. John O. Barrett in 1930, who stayed for the same length of time. He came straight from a lengthy and distinguished course at Rawdon and Regent's Park, Oxford, colleges, having been Baptist Union Scholar in 1928. Almost immediately the Benwell Church sought reunion with Westgate Road, and Mr. Barrett was instrumental in the appointment of the Rev. Ian R. Henderson as Assistant Minister with oversight of Benwell in 1934. He was followed by the Rev. Norman B. Jones, whose pastorate of five years saw the development of a thriving youth work. Although since his departure there have been great changes in the neighbourhood of Buddle Road and a steady decline in the work, young people were still coming forward for baptism and church membership there throughout the 1950's, and the brief ministries of John Neilson and the Rev. D. K. Blades, at the end of that decade, and that of the Rev. Wallace Swift, 1961 - 64, also bore fruit. From that time it became increasingly a question of holding the fort, and various stalwarts from Westgate Road have striven valiantly in doing so, against mounting odds. The fine suite of buildings, completed in 1937 through the generosity of Mr. W. R. Kirby, of Harrogate, and named in memory of a distinguished Principal of Rawdon College, Dr. Thomas Blomfield, was partly leased to the Newcastle Corporation in 1975, and is now in use as a community centre. But many have been influenced for good within its walls, and a significant number for Christ, while from its ranks of young people, Gordon Weston now serves as minister at Mansfield, after training at Rawdon and pastorates in Cheshire, Rossendale, and Rawdon with Guiseley.

Mr. E. Y. Richardson, a dental surgeon, died in May 1933 after devoted service as Church Secretary. He was succeeded in office by Mr. Leonard M. Carling. We read that in 1937 the Junior Christian Endeavour Society had been revived under the leadership of Miss Edna Wemyss, with an average attendance of 40. This lady, still exercising a caring ministry, married George McGaw, a Benwell Boys' Brigade enthusiast. Together, for many years, they served the Saviour in very many ways - not least through Christian parenthood, and the hospitality of their home. We must never give the impression that service in the church's activities on church premises is all. Indeed, to our shame, how much of this, sometimes, has been at the expense of our family! God has used "Westgate Road" to produce, in every generation, example after example of Christian holiness -- people who having prayed together, with fellow church members, have made their home a church, sharing both uproarious fun, and

consolation in times of tears, with a whole host of others, through the years. Such homes have provided a welcome for many strangers, and true Christian fellowship for many lonely, while such a gift for friendship has meant that some have "caught" Christ in a very real sense. This is more important than the church's formal teaching of Him, though He can be "caught" as well in the fellowship of formal worship where there is real preaching.

In 1938 Sunday School teachers went to "Westhill", the famous Midland training centre. During "Holy Week" three evening meetings were held in celebration of the Fourth Centenary of the Reformation. A pageant was presented on this theme in the autumn. In February the Rev. William Mutch had preached on "Is the Bible Inspired?" one result of which was a women's home Bible Study group. On June 12th, Bible Thanksgiving Services were held in all Newcastle churches, that at Westgate Road being attended by members of Toc H.

Mr. Barrett was used to influence many for Christ, among them the present Elders of the church. There can have been few, in the three hundred and thirty-five years altogether, whose service has equalised, that rendered by Messrs. J. Allan, G. Clark and J. H. Young. Their fifty years' leadership, in all branches of the work, including the Sunday School, has had a telling effect. As young men they rallied to support their Minister, and have given unfailing support to his successors ever since. They freely confess their debt to Christ and "J.O.B.". A book could be written on this triumvirate alone, and however long, it could never include all they have done. Each has given endless hours of energy and effort known to few, if any, save the Head of the Church. To say that Mr. Allan, already superintendent of the Sunday School, succeeded Mr. Davis to become only the third Westgate Road choirmaster and organist of the century, and that Mr. Clark and Mr. Young served as Church Secretary and Treasurer respectively, is to state only a few of their story's bare bones. As lay preachers, as well as leaders, the last two have contributed much to the work of the Northern Baptist Association, of which Mr. Young was Treasurer for ten years and Moderator in 1964. Mr. Clark's work for Home Mission, and his membership of the Baptist Union Council for twenty-six years have made him a beloved byword throughout the denomination. Like one of his predecessors in the church-secretaryship, Mr. Clark has long been "an authority in all matters of railway and inland transport", and the church has also benefited from this facility. During the years of support given to the West Ham Central Mission, parties visited "Greenwoods", its rest and rehabilitation centre in Essex, and a carriage was reserved on a railway excursion to Wembley when Newcastle United were involved in the Cup Final. Only names of people who promised to be at Sunday morning service as usual were accepted for this Saturday trip!

Two keen sportsmen who had given their lives to Christ were accepted for ministerial training during Mr. Barrett's time in Newcastle. Charles Cameron Wallace became a chaplain to the Forces and was killed on active service in Italy. Joseph Cowen Harkus, who had been on the Sheffield United as well as the Newcastle United playing staff, was also a chaplain for six years, to the Royal Air Force, and later for a further thirteen years, after a pastorate at Shepherd's Bush. His second and last pastorate was at Taunton. He also, like Charlie Wallace, is remembered with affection.

Through Mr. Barrett's initiative a club for unemployed men did good work through years of dire industrial depression, and has continued in the form of the Contact Club. He it was who saw the Sunday School re-organised on fully graded lines. In the words of the Diamond Jubilee Souvenir "He took a prominent part in the wider life of the City and the denomination. He was a founder member of the Newcastle Theological Society, which, during his secretaryship, filled a unique place in the religious life of the city. He was also secretary of the Northern Baptist Association, and a representative on the Council of the Baptist Union". Following his second pastorate, at Kettering, for ten years after leaving Newcastle in 1939, Mr. Barrett was until 1963 the General Superintendent of the North Eastern Area.

It was in 1939 that the deacons, each of whom had long since accepted responsibility for district visitation of members, undertook in addition to maintain links with church organisations. In the Spring a campaign at Benwell resulted in twenty applications for membership. Many of these were by young men, six of whom formed a witness team.

A proposal to rope-off back seats at Westgate Road was rejected. In September the Ladies' Vestry was fortified for use as an air-raid shelter. A church Air Raid Precautions committee was formed, a first-aid box installed, and times of evening services were made flexible in order to beat the black-out. Evacuation of children in large numbers meant that the Sunday School was decimated. Its work was maintained among the few, as was contact with the many absentees as far as possible. By November the blacking-out of the church was completed.

Mr. Barrett was followed by the Rev. Fergus G. Little, who came from Huddersfield in December 1939 and stayed for nearly fifteen years. War left its mark on the first six of these. In 1940 the Church Missionary Council was formed, and also a Children's Play Hour. Seven more names qualified for addition to the church's Roll of Honour. Three who died at home after lifetimes of Christian service were Mrs. E. H. Angas, founder of the Women's Meeting, Mr. H. G. W. Tennant, a deacon who worked at Benwell as Sunday School Superintendent and served as secretary of the Newcastle upon Tyne Sunday School Union, and Mr. Sankey D. Punter, Elder, and for many years Sunday School Superintendent. The youth work, including Scouts, Guides, Cubs and Brownies, struggled on and eventually recovered from the effects of the evacuation, while all other church organisations also continued. Amongst them all, and especially in the homes of the people, both Mr. and Mrs. Little fulfilled a tremendous ministry of encouragement and comfort. They are remembered above all for this aspect of their service, which can never have been surpassed.

From September 1941 a letter was sent to 49 men and women in the Forces each month. In December of that year we read of plans for visiting a thousand homes in the neighbourhood. In July the following year a fifteen minute prayer session before the first Sunday evening service each month was inaugurated. October 2nd 1942 was set aside as a Day of Prayer for the B.M.S. Towards the B.M.S. Ter-Jubilee Fund £250 was raised.

In October 1943 a copy of the New Testament was sent to each man and woman on the church's list of contacts serving with the Forces. 1944 was a year of concentration on spiritual issues. In addition to the Mid-week Service, prayer circles were arranged in the homes of three members. Participation in the Northern Baptist Association two-

year Spiritual Revival Campaign was begun. In December the deacons agreed to devote their January meeting to discussion and prayer about the campaign. In April 1945 the Minister reported definite signs of a spiritual movement in the church. Association campaign meetings were hosted by the church for a week in October, led by the Revs. Maxwell Berry, Ernest Buckley and Eric Rust. In common with the experience of churches everywhere there had been a large response to the announcement of a Service of Thanksgiving on the Cessation of Hostilities in Europe, at 6.30 on V.E. Day, 8th May. In February 1946 a Welcome Home to the Forces was arranged for the 19th March.

The Diamond Jubilee celebrations covered no less than five months of 1946. Preachers at special Sunday Services included four previous ministers, the General Secretary of the Baptist Union, the Home Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, and Dr. F. Townley Lord, the minister of Bloomsbury Central Church, London, later President of the Baptist World Alliance. It was not in Newcastle that grace was announced by the nervous chairman of a church tea, in the presence of that great man, as "Be present at our Townley, Lord", but we have his confirmation that it did in fact happen, somewhere. Like many another who has gained world renown, he is still remembered familiarly at home - in his case a Lancashire cotton town, and as "Fred". In general, Newcastle churches have not been unduly impressed by great names and reputations, and if God's Spirit was not prompting people to come and worship Him at Westgate Road the visit of a "distinguished preacher" did not often spur them to appear. There is no doubt that faithful, if unspectacular work was in progress through all the years of Mr. Little's ministry, and many have cause to thank God for him, as is the case with his predecessors. For years already, of course, no one had been attending church services because it was the "done thing", or because there was nothing else to do. By now the days were long past when families either worshipped together almost as a matter of course, or even observed Sunday as a day to spend together. Many were involved in Sunday work, especially since the war years. More women were working outside the home, and the Free Churches had lost touch with the working men. Many children were sent to what were still thriving afternoon Sunday Schools, including Westgate Road's, without their Sunday dinner, because "Medad" did not get home from the club in time. If the thirties saw a material slump, the decade following witnessed a spiritual one, from which only today we may perhaps be beginning to emerge. This raises interesting questions about the nature of Christianity, historically a minority movement, finding it easier, perhaps, to be true to itself when things are hard, and so on, but questions which are outside the scope of this story.

In April 1951 Mr. J. M. Allan, a greatly loved Elder, was called home after having served the church faithfully. He and his wife Mary had come to Newcastle from Glasgow and for a short period were members of the former John Knox Presbyterian Church, Elswick Road. He became convinced of the validity of believers' baptism as a result of a series of lectures given in the Newcastle Y.M.C.A.

1954 – 1985

1954 saw many changes in the fellowship. Mr. and Mrs. Little left in March for Sheffield, Mr. Little having accepted the pastorate of Beauchief Baptist Church.

Several of our elderly members were called home, including Leonard M. Carling, esteemed Elder and former secretary, and Tom Hobbs, a much loved deacon, but the work and witness of the church was faithfully maintained by the membership and we were finely served by visiting ministers and lay folk. A representative Pastorate committee was formed to liaise with the General Superintendent to find a successor to Mr. Little and the church agreed in April that efforts be made to procure a suitable manse. Attendances at Sunday worship and mid-week meetings were maintained and by much prayer we were led to call the Rev. David Batten, B.A. of Cleveleys, whose induction took place on the 4th December 1954. The Rev. Dr. G. Henton Davies M.A., M.Litt, shared in the service with the Rev. John O. Barrett, M.A. As a result of the Thank Offering in December most of the monies (£2,200) for the purchase of 25 Tiverton Avenue (our new manse) were received. Our oldest member, Mrs. Helen Leach, donated £50 in March 1955 and this cleared the debt to the Bank. The coming of a new minister and his family always creates interest and in the early stages of Mr. Batten's ministry arrangements were made to hold a deacons' election, the possibility of extension in the West of the City was explored and the internal re-decoration of our premises was planned. Nine applications were received for Baptism and church membership in May, and later in the year six of our young folk joined an enquirer's class, so that fifteen baptisms took place in 1955. A site for a church was earmarked in Netherby Drive, Fenham, and the possibility of Sunday School work in the area, housed in the Scouts hut on Silver Lonnen, was explored by Mrs. Alison Lord. The October Quarterly Meeting was used to spell out the meaning of a working church, in which it was stressed that it was necessary for every member to do some definite piece of service. In November 1955 the church lovingly called William W. Rutherford and James Allan to serve as Elders and life deacons along with Herbert J. Armstrong and George Davis. Although development at Fenham did not prove possible, the church was involved in outreach and the 60 "Mahogany Flats" in Elswick Street were repeatedly visited but the response was sparse. A few new Sunday scholars were recruited, and eventually one elderly gentleman, William Percy, was won for the Lord. He was baptised, making an impressive witness, and became a bright Christian. More young folk came forward for baptism and we were active in the neighbourhood, particularly in making contact with Sunday School parents and members of uniformed organisations. One of the first Hunger Lunches, in sympathy with our Third World brethren and sisters, if not the first, in the city, was held about this time. It followed a Sunday morning service attended by the Lord Mayor and local Members of Parliament, at which the Vicar of Fenham was guest preacher. It was repeated for several years, the whole proceeds being devoted to Christian Aid.

The seventieth anniversary of the opening of our premises was suitably celebrated in July 1956 and our former minister, the Rev. J. O. Barrett broadcast from Westgate Road church on 5th August 1956. Joint services with the congregation of Arthur's Hill Presbyterian Church began in August and proved to be worthwhile. This innovation for the holiday month continued for many years. A review of the church roll in February 1957 regrettably resulted in 25 deletions, leaving 205 members. Fabric matters continued to demand constant attention - roof repairs were needed and a new heating boiler. An open Youth Club attracted large numbers, some members of which were among those who responded to the challenge to fill pews nearest the pulpit at Sunday services. Young people also accompanied the Minister and his wife to B.M.S. Summer Schools on several occasions. Some recent office-bearers in the work of the church were members of such parties. The church carried on its witness

and service, supporting both the B.M.S. and the Homework Fund of the Baptist Union. Good work was done in the Women's meeting and their members supported the church in service and giving. The Men's Contact Club, though small in number, was a good introduction for men and continues its work of friendship. In May 1957 the Sunday School worthily celebrated their 150th anniversary, the services being conducted by Rev. Angus McLeod of Whitley Bay, and there was a fine reunion folk from far afield. A pageant by the scholars was chaired by Walter Wilson of Carlisle, greatly loved leader of our Christian Endeavour Society in the 1920's who suffered internment in Japan 1939/1946. The church minutes reveal we had a "recurring" roof problem, the object of many appeals; indeed our then oldest member, Mrs. Margaret Metcalfe, on her hundredth birthday on 6th January 1958 told the secretary "that we were only tinkering with the roof"! Mrs. Metcalfe died in August 1962, over 104 years old and surviving another member of long standing in Mrs. Hardwick, of Brighton Grove, who died in 1961 aged 103. Newsagents expressed surprise when we asked for birthday cards 100 and 101 and so on respectively.

Interior decoration dating from 1936 and renovated in 1950 was renewed in 1958, costly items when there was no substantial Fabric Fund. 1958 saw a further exodus of folk from the district and it was planned to pull down many streets north and east of the church. This started a further drain on our Sunday School scholars. Only many years later were the high rise and other blocks of flats to be completed. On September 22nd 1958 our beloved Elder Mr. George Davis, Organist and Choirmaster, was called home and the following extract from the resolution was minuted:

"As we mourn the passing of our brother, George Davis, we the members desire to place on record our deep sense of personal loss, and our appreciation of his life and example."

Stewardship of time and money became watchwords and in July 1958 we agreed to launch a new weekly offering envelope scheme. In January 1959, 136 members agreed to share in this, based on the four points (a) Loyalty (b) Faithfulness (c) Appreciation of proportionate giving (d) Greater love. We thank God for the worthy response. On Sunday, December 13th 1959 we celebrated Mr. Batten's fifth anniversary on Thanksgiving Day and rejoiced in steady progress, the fine support of our people, and our worthy participation in the wider work of the denomination.

After a comparatively short pastorate Mr. Batten intimated his acceptance of the call to the Union Baptist Church at High Wycombe, where he was inducted in May 1960. During the 'interregnum' which followed we were finely served by visiting ministers and lay folk, whilst the Rev. Cyril Barnfather, B.A. formerly of "Wyclif", who was residing in the area, joined the choir and was helpful in assisting with pulpit supplies and visitation. Both Cyril and Sheila Barnfather played a full part in the fellowship before leaving for Wednesbury in 1961. The Rev. D. K. Blades, who was minister at Benwell also helped us during the vacancy before he left for Hawick at the end of 1961.

At about this time it was found necessary to limit the numbers attending the open Youth Club led by Dr. John Ringrose and George McGaw, to 35 per night. Among several "Rutherford Boys" who attended was Harry Weatherley, who accepted Christ and later studied at Bristol Baptist College and Regent's Park College, Oxford. The

Rev. Harry Weatherley, M.A., is now the Missioner in the Yorkshire Baptist Association after fine pastorates at Barrow in Furness and Leeds.

The next minister at Westgate Road was the Rev. Samuel Boyd, M.A., who came from Dunfermline in 1962. His scholarly preaching gifts were much appreciated.

The maintenance and modernisation of the church fabric was ever in the minds of officers, and in the sixties and seventies three significant developments were effected.

Facilities were much improved by the creation of cloakrooms or vestries in the centre of the vestibule, made possible financially by a gift from the widow of Mr. Stanley Crowe. The alteration meant the removal of a number of pews from beneath the balcony at the rear of the church - at one time very popular with the younger members of the congregation. Stanley Crowe left this country many years ago for Canada, but had always remembered the Westgate Road Church.

The installation of the public address system was an improvement greatly appreciated by those members whose hearing was impaired.

A lectern was erected in the apse opposite to the pulpit giving greater flexibility to our worship by providing a second speaking point.

Although often admired by visitors the high standard of decoration came as a surprise to some who were accustomed to the plain architecture usually associated with Baptist Churches. One Baptist visitor commented that the Church must have originally been Anglican and was amazed to discover that it had been planned as a Baptist Church.

In 1964 and 1974 the Church was host to the Northern Baptist Association annual assembly, and in 1974 took on the task of catering for the event too. That year there were very few members who were without a job to do in connection with the assembly. The Church provided 400 young and not-so-young people with refreshments on the Saturday evening at the end of a memorable occasion. The assembly was also very successful financially.

During this time the Church was not only concerned with the fabric of the building, but took a very active interest in the wider work of other Church organisations. A number of members were active in the N.B.A. The contributions made by George Clark and Joe Young have already been mentioned. The Rev. Sam Boyd was elected Moderator in 1969 and a number of our members have rendered great service on the N.B.A. General Committee.

In an effort to draw the churches together Westgate Road took the lead in the formation of the Newcastle Council of Baptist Churches, the objective of which was to explore the possibility of linking all five churches as the Newcastle Baptist Church, whilst they continued to worship at their various sites and to provide a regular service of Baptist preaching to those three churches, Benwell, Jesmond and Wycliffe, who were unable to afford a Minister by this time.

To fulfil the second objective Baptist ministers working in the area but without churches were invited to take part and for a while a good pulpit rota was possible, but as some of the men moved away the system fell into disuse.

The first objective, inspired by an organisation set in Dagenham, was possibly introduced too hastily and without sufficient research, making the idea difficult to assimilate, and the Council came to an end. It is encouraging to note, however, that it created considerable interest and at least gave some indication of forward thinking.

There was another revival of the Junior Christian Endeavour (C.E.) Society in the late sixties and early seventies and it was good to have so many young people attending each week. As often happens with youth organisations after a short burst of glory it faded, but it was grand to have them with us for a time.

For many years it appeared that the fellowship developed young people in the church only to find, just when it looked as though they would be useful in the work of the church, they moved out of the district, following their careers and there never seemed to be as many newcomers. However, in the mid-sixties the trend was reversed and the Church rejoiced in being able to welcome experienced workers who came in willing to serve. Madge Higgs, and Abel and Sybil Rees were in the forefront of this movement.

In the early seventies the Church was pleased to welcome the first of the students at the University and Polytechnic who came to worship with us.

It was an accepted fact that the premises were not used sufficiently, and therefore it was with great willingness that we agreed to start a weekly Luncheon Club to provide a hot meal for elderly people. The idea was to provide a place for people coming out of hospital, especially from mental hospital, to be reassured and helped to regain their confidence in the outside world. One man came for three meals before he was able to speak to anyone, but gradually regained his assurance. At first we had two ladies noted for their cheerful approach acting as hostesses to welcome all who came, particularly the diffident, and so commenced a work which was to continue for many years, for in conjunction with the Newcastle branch of Age Concern hot meals have been provided regularly for thirty to fifty people each week.

At the end of 1973 the Rev. S. Boyd took up an appointment in education. During the interregnum discussions were held with the City Planning Officer to ascertain what effect the proposed West dual-carriageway would have on our building. Assurance were given that there would be no major infringement of our site. In the event the plan was dropped in favour of a Western by-pass to the north of the city.

In connection with the pastorate, the Area Superintendent, the Rev. S. F. Clark, was contacted and a pastoral vacancy committee appointed. On 20th December 1974 a letter was received from the Rev. D. E. Smith of the Church of the Redeemer, Birmingham, accepting a unanimous call from the church to the pastorate at Westgate Road. The Induction took place on 12th April 1975. The Moderator of the N.B.A., the Rev. Alan Pringle, presided at the Induction service, and the Rev. Trevor Hubbard was the preacher assisted by the Rev. Edgar Wright. More informally at teatime, the

Rev. D. E. Smith, his wife and their three sons were warmly welcomed to Westgate Road.

One of the important events of the first year of Mr. Smith's ministry was the "Come Alive '75" Campaign, when four American friends, members of a 150-strong team in the North-East, led the Church in an Evangelical campaign in the West End of Newcastle. This lasted a week and, while results were not sensational, the church felt the effect of the Holy Spirit working through the leadership of this dedicated group of American friends in Christ.

In order to assess the problems and potential of our neighbourhood a survey was conducted, culminating in the visit of the Rev. Lewis Misselbrook from the Mission Department of the Baptist Union. Mr. Misselbrook stayed for a week during which time he observed closely the life of the church, visiting several homes. He produced a report posing the question "Are we a local or a central church?" Results of this survey were the revival of the house groups, to be known as "Watch and Pray Groups", the holding of family weekends at Stocksfield in the autumn of each year, and, shortly afterwards, the introduction of coffee served in the schoolroom following morning service.

After long and difficult negotiations, the site at Netherby Drive, no longer considered essential to our future needs, was sold.

In 1973 the Government provided funds for the cleaning-up of public buildings and, after much sandblasting and remedial work to the stonework, the building emerged in its pristine glory and gave us a vision of what our church looked like in 1886.

In 1978 the possibility of Wyclif church, on Elswick Road, closing down commenced a series of discussions and, at a joint church meeting in 1979, it was agreed that the two churches enter into a "Deed of Amalgamation" and that the official title of the amalgamated church be The Baptist Church, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne. To mark the closing down, communion services were held at Wyclif in the morning and at Westgate Road in the evening of Sunday 9th October 1979.

A little later that autumn two members accompanied the Minister and his wife on an inter-Christian visit to Gelsenkirchen, Newcastle's "twin" city in the Ruhr. They stayed with Pastor Siegfried Ast and his wife Anni, as guests of the four-hundred-member Gelsenkirchen Baptist Church for a week. Pastor Ast had been at the Westgate Road manse and church for a similar stay the previous year, and in 1980 Mr. Smith was among a party of Newcastle clergy who went on a study-conference with their German counterparts. These interchanges proved a source of considerable benefit to the churches, as well as the individuals concerned.

In 1980 the church, in conjunction with the Fenham Christian Council, successfully settled a Vietnamese family in the West End of Newcastle. During this time, too, a friendship with the Anglican fellowship of St. Paul's, Havelock Street, was commenced. This has been developed, with some significant results, one of which is described on a later page.

After 28 years of dedicated and efficient service Mr. J. H. Young tendered his resignation as church Treasurer. His generous suggestion to introduce his successor to the work involved in the finances of the church was warmly received, particularly by his appointed successor, Mr. Ron Wilson. Mr. Young's term of office was marked by meticulous attention to accuracy and a deep sense of responsibility.

Mr. George Clark, appointed Church secretary in 1939, served Christ and the church in this capacity until April 1979 - a record unsurpassed. An outline of his deeds is earlier recorded, but cold words cannot convey the warmth or depth of his devotion. Mr. J. B. Lidgate, B.Sc., was unanimously elected as his successor.

During the Rev. D. E. Smith's gracious ministry, despite many deaths and transfers to other fellowships, the membership held steady with a number of baptisms. Mr. Smith, a music lover, took a keen interest in the work of the choir. His study was partly devoted to reading for an Open University degree in general arts and he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1976. His five-year ministry was characterised by warmth and friendship, and particularly in comfort to those who had lost loved ones. Mrs. Smith on behalf of Westgate Road, made a valuable contribution to the community as a Sister Tutor in our local hospitals. Philip, the second son, was accepted for the Northern Baptist College and is now working in South Wales as an educational chaplain. In July 1981 the church received Mr. Smith's resignation, he having accepted a call to the Baptist Church at St. Helen's, Lancashire. His induction there on 10th October 1981 was attended by a party of friends from Westgate Road and, at the reception, greetings from our church were expressed by Mr. Brian Lidgate.

On 9th February 1982, the church invited Andrew Rollinson, M.A., a student at Spurgeon's College, to the pastorate. The invitation was accepted and on 24th April 1982 the service of induction was held. The Rev. M. Nicholls (Spurgeon's College) gave charge to the minister, supported by Rev. John Ireland from Hull, and the Area Superintendent the Rev. Tasker Lewis.

An abstract from our reply to a Northern Baptist Association questionnaire states that "We do see the future in terms of advance and it was with the idea of gearing ourselves for this desired forward movement that, after much prayer and consideration, our new minister was appointed".

We feel that God is blessing Westgate Road under this leadership. Changes have been made, and some of us do not like changes, but there is an atmosphere of dedicated vitality and expectancy which augurs well for the future of Jesus people in this hallowed place.

A number of baptisms have taken place, some from the increasing ranks of students, whose youth and enthusiasm are enriching the Fellowship. Our friendship with St. Paul's Anglican Church, born during the ministry of Rev. D. E. Smith, has deepened, and at a joint service two of its members were baptised by our minister, assisted by Rev. B. Seaman, who received special permission from the Bishop of Newcastle.

As part of our efforts to integrate with our locality, door to door visitation was undertaken, and use made of the Moorside Community School, where religious films have been shown. On one memorable evening, two ex-Maze prisoners, one Catholic

and one Protestant, spoke of their conversions while serving sentences for terrorist behaviour.

Recent developments have included the provision of pew Bibles (New International Version) and new praise books. By altering the Beginners' Room and the Deacons' Vestry, the church has acquired a Church Lounge and Office. New lighting and sound systems have been installed.

In 1983 the following Responsibilities of a Church Member were adopted. "Having confessed Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and having entered into membership of this local church where Believers' Baptism is encouraged and practised, a member should endeavour to express that commitment to the life and witness of the Fellowship in the following ways:

- By regular attendance at Worship.
- By regular attendance at the church meeting and participation in the decision-making of that meeting.
- By giving a calculated proportion of income, as the Lord prospers, to the work of the Church.
- By seeking to employ God-given talents in the church and community.
- By taking part where possible in those activities, such as Bible studies, prayer meetings and fellowship groups, which are organised for the support of, and building up the faith of, the members.
- By devoting time daily to private prayer and Bible study, and by witnessing for Jesus Christ, in whatever way one is able, in the course of daily life."

The church had the joy of welcoming some converts from "Mission England", the Dr. Billy Graham campaign of 1984, for which the Minister was in charge of local publicity. They would certainly benefit from the above summary of privileges and responsibilities, which also serve as a useful reminder to older members, and a good "watchword" for the future

Ministers

1652 - Thomas Gower

1674 - James Turner

1689 - John Turner

1689-98 - Richard Pitts

1749 - Mr Weir

1752 - David Fernie -Mr Pedan - Mr Rutherford (itinerating)

1762 - Mr Bowser

1762-69 - David Fernie

1769-71 - John Allen

1780 - Henry Dawson

1781-90 - William Pendered

1792 - John Foster

1792-95 - Thomas Skinner

1796-1801 - Thomas Hassell

1803-04 - Thomas Berry

1807-45 - Richard Pengilly
1845-49 - George Sample
1849-59 - Thomas Pottenger
1860-71 - W Walters
1872-75 - James Mursell
1877-87 - J M Stephens
1888-95 - John Thomas Forbes
1897-1913 - William Hussey Griffith
1914-19 - Thomas Jones Whitman
1921-1930 - T Miller Johnson
1930-39 - J O Barrett
1939-54 - Fergus G Little
1954-60 - David Batten
1962-73 - Samuel Boyd
1975-81 - Donald E Smith
1982-94 - Andrew R Rollinson
1996-Present - Paul Merton

Centenary Hymn

Tune: Was Lebet

God of the centuries past, how we worship You!
Working Your work through mere fallible men
Using Your Spirit to make clear Your purposes
Christ being exalted again and again.

Saviour of Gower, and Fishwick, we magnify
Not them but You for their grit in lean years
Richard Pengilly you called to be harvester
Reaping rewards of their faith on the Stairs.

Bewick Street witnessed Your power, and the glory
Of lives made more Christ like and showing more love.
Fellowship strengthened - the world given fleetingly
Glimpses of heaven on earth as above.

So in this place, for these hundred years following
Young and old, rich and poor, praised You as one
Living stones quarried and shaped by Your craftsmanship
"Westgate Road" loves You for all You have done.

God of the future, we trust You for everything
Only concerned that we follow Your will
Live by Your Spirit so love remains paramount
And urbs et orbis shall see Jesus still.

David Batten 1918 -
April 1986

Since this book went to print we all at "Westgate Road" have been saddened by the sudden death of our respected Elder Joe Young.

His contribution to this book must have been one of the last things he wrote in connection with the church and people he loved.

We thank God for him and for all he meant to so many of us.

Church History Update 1986-1989

The book, *Some Jesus People*, was written to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of Westgate Road Baptist Church. Its story stops short of the anniversary itself and this is an attempt to bring things up to date for the 350th anniversary of the Church of which Westgate Road is the latest building.

The anniversary year itself had a number of significant features: perhaps the most important of which was a 'Renewal' Weekend, held in March, led by a team from Gold Hill Baptist Church. They brought a very powerful ministry and people were stirred up in a variety of ways. The good effects of that weekend are still to be seen in the Church today.

Along with this event, a number of new initiatives were started, some of which still continue. We took on our first student pastor from Northumbria Bible College in the shape of Jim McNaughton. He had a very significant effect in the church and was widely appreciated. He was followed by others including Winsley & Rosemary Gomez and Nick Blaney. As a result of the contribution, which these folk made to our ministry, we began to talk tentatively of a "Second Full Time Worker". A Play Group was started which developed into our present Parent & Toddler Group which maintains contact with families in the community.

With 1986 being such a year of importance for the building it was felt that a centenary building project should be undertaken. This didn't actually happen although stirrings began but it was several more years before anything actually happened.

In 1987 a dry rot problem arose and had to be dealt with and serious discussion began on how the building might be developed. At about the same time we received notice that we had been given Listed Building status. This came as a mixed blessing. It was also in 1987 that we lost the second of our three Elders with the sad death of our greatly loved organist and choirmaster, James Allan. It was doubly sad because it meant he was unable to be involved in the organ centenary in the following year when a recital was given by James Lancelot from Durham Cathedral.

'Action In Mission' was launched by the Baptist Union in 1988 and we joined the Evangelical Alliance. Our Minister began (further) part-time theological studies.

The first signs of a desire to have a presence in the local community appeared in 1989 with the possibility of opening up a shop or drop-in centre in vacant premises on Stanhope Street. Unfortunately the owners could not be contacted and the idea was

shelved but eventually came to fruition in 1991 when the CHAT Shop was opened in collaboration with other churches in the area.