



‘THIS IS THE LORD’S DOING!’



THE OPEN-AIR MISSION 1853-2003



A RECORD OF 150 YEARS OF OPEN-AIR WITNESS

By
Alan J. Greenbank

'THIS IS THE LORD'S DOING!'

An account of 150 years of open-air evangelism through the work of

THE OPEN-AIR MISSION

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Psalm 118:22-23 says, *'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. THIS IS THE LORD'S DOING; it is marvellous in our eyes.'*

It is not possible to say exactly what the writer had in mind when these words were written. Certainly they can be applied to many occasions in the life of David but they also referred to the future ministry of our Lord, as we shall see from Matthew 21:42-43. He was indeed despised and rejected by the religious leaders of His day but, in the purpose of God, became the Chief Corner-Stone, upon which the church is being built, as it says in
Ephesians 2:20

The fact that The Open-Air Mission has been in existence for 150 years is a clear demonstration of the fact that its founding was the Lord's doing and it is certainly marvellous in our eyes.

To God alone be the glory!

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FOREWORD

Alan Greenbank's choice of the quotation, 'This is the Lord's doing', for the title of this book, marking the 150th anniversary of the founding of The Open-Air Mission, aptly acknowledges our recognition of what God has done over these many years in and through the work of the Mission. By referring prophetically as it does to the Lord Jesus Christ, who took these words to Himself when speaking to the Jewish leaders and Pharisees, it reminds us that through His rejection and crucifixion, He is the living Saviour - changeless, eternal and our only way to God, the Saviour whom the Mission was founded to proclaim and has continued to make known, from the Victorian era to the commencement of the 21st century, the sophisticated modern age in which we live.

Alan has taken us through the years with insights into the many individuals who have influentially served the Mission, as well as some of those who have been touched and brought to faith through its outreach. We learn of the varied scope of the work over the years, as events and society have modernised and changed - but nevertheless with the same changeless message of the gospel.

It is appropriate, at this milestone in the life of the Mission, to acknowledge with thankfulness the dedication and service of past and present evangelists, and of the office staff, and also of the general secretaries who have so ably led the work. The late Ernest Jealous was serving when I came on to the Committee, followed by Alan Greenbank who retired in 2001 to become Deputation Speaker, and currently Andy Banton. It has been an encouragement to work with these men, all gifted preachers as well as administrators.

It has been a privilege to serve on the Committee that oversees the work and sets the policy of the Mission, with men from different backgrounds and denominations, but united in their conviction of the importance of open-air work, to tell out the good news of Jesus Christ to those who would not normally hear it!

David Helden - Chairman of the Mission

CHAPTER 1 - THE FOUNDING OF THE WORK

The ship was going down! There was no doubt about it! The fire that had broken out was gaining ground and it was only a question of time! It was 1st March 1825 and the troopship KENT was crossing the notorious Bay of Biscay in storm conditions. Just as some of the female passengers were taking to the inadequate number of lifeboats, the sails of another vessel were seen. The crew of the brig CAMBRIA had seen the smoke and were coming to the rescue.

The small lifeboats made the hazardous passage across the foaming breakers from the stricken ship to the rescue vessel and the first person passed to safety was a five-week-old baby named John MacGregor. His father was a Major in the 31st Regiment which had been posted to India and this was the reason for the journey the family was making. His mother also clambered to safety but his father did not reach the rescue vessel until some hours later, having had to swim from the doomed KENT. Many of the 641 passengers aboard lost their lives on that terrible occasion, some as a result of the ship's magazine exploding when the fire reached it.

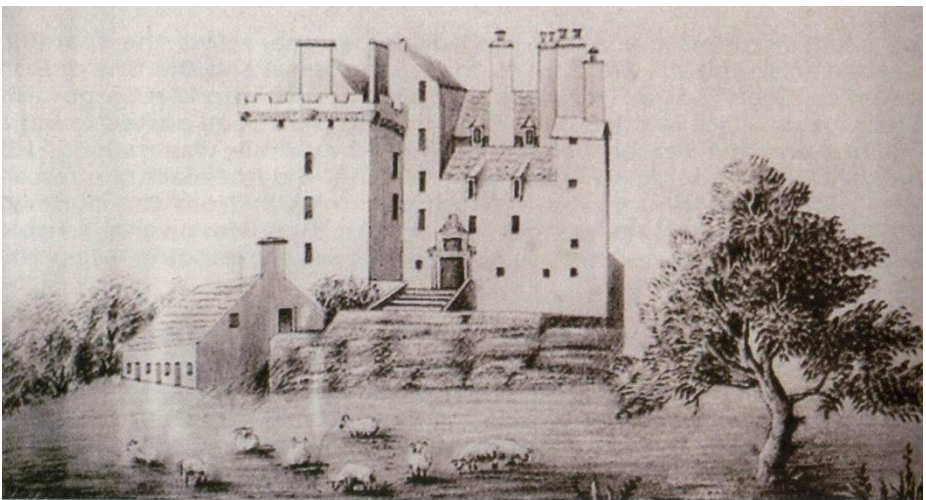
The CAMBRIA was a small vessel with totally inadequate resources of food and water for the influx of rescued passengers. Apparently conditions were appalling on the journey back to England and the ingenuity of the parents was taxed to the limit as they tried to ensure the safety of their baby son. But somehow they survived and great was their thanksgiving when they disembarked in Falmouth four days later.

A fascinating sequel to this miraculous rescue occurred 31 years later when John MacGregor was taking part in the open-air witness at Lanark racecourse. He spotted a crippled, elderly sailor who was supplementing his income by selling verses about the burning of the KENT and said to the man, "I was there!" The old sailor looked at the much younger man and said, "That you were not - unless you were the baby I helped into the boat!"

Undoubtedly God had His hand on the life of young John MacGregor! What was said of the great prophet Jeremiah centuries earlier could be said of him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you," (Jeremiah 1:5). Indeed this is true of every believer! God had the plan of John MacGregor's life and knew how he would be used as a fearless witness for truth and righteousness in years to come. His miraculous rescue was all part of that Divine plan.

In his formative years, John MacGregor and his younger brother, William, were surrounded by the Christian influences of a godly mother and father. John was often told of the incredible escape from the sinking ship and how this was something for which he must continually be thanking God. Such information must have given him a sense of purpose in his formative years and this stayed with him throughout his life. He was a chosen vessel! The parents gave a fine example of wholehearted Christian living. They surrounded their sons with prayer and taught them the truths of scripture, so it is little wonder that John came to know the Saviour in his boyhood years. He describes the occasion in these words:

"At the age of eight I was staying with an uncle and aunt, Mr. & Mrs. Smith—



Caprington Castle as it was in the time of John MacGregor's visit

Cunriingham of Caprington Castle, Ayrshire. I had been fishing one morning for some time and had caught nothing," when I suddenly thought I will ask God to help me catch a fish.' I prayed to God and soon after I caught a fish. Then the thought flashed through my mind, 'If God can answer this prayer, will He not take away my sins and give me a new heart if I ask Him?'"

The transaction was done and John became a new person in Christ Jesus. From this point onwards, there was a true growth in his knowledge of the Lord and his relationship with Him. The service of the Lord Jesus was always uppermost in his mind. He was ready to 'stand up for Jesus' in any situation. He had a wonderfully privileged upbringing, with family holidays in various parts of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. He travelled widely across Europe and Asia Minor while still in his early twenties.

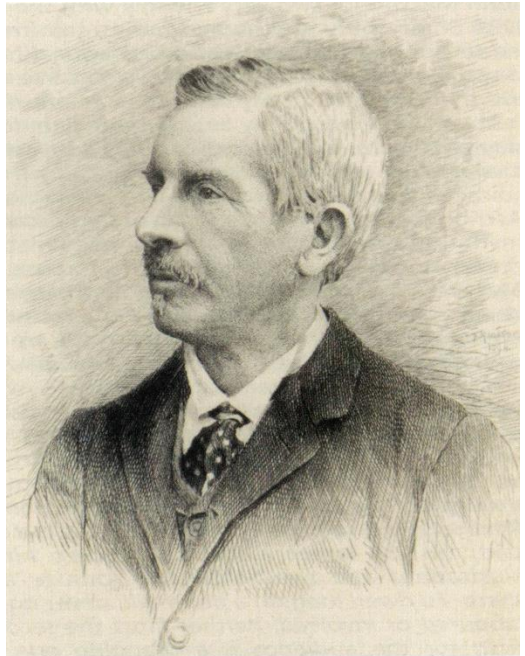
His chosen career was in law and he trained as a barrister, although it must be said that his philanthropic enterprises occupied much of his time. He was a man of immense energy, vision and drive. Whenever he encountered a need, he was eager to do something about it. At the time of the founding of the work of the Open-Air Mission, when John MacGregor was only 28 years old, he recorded in his diary, *"Among the objects now claiming my best attention are, The Protestant Alliance, The Protestant Defence Society, The Ragged School Union, The Shoeblacks, The Ragged School Shop, The Band Of Hope Review, The Town Mission, The Open-Air Mission, The Slavery Question, The Preventive And Reformatory School Society, The Lawyers' Prayer Union and The Mansfield Society."* And John MacGregor had been responsible for inaugurating at least five of these!

How did the work of the Mission begin? On 17th April 1853 John MacGregor was going to one of his beloved Ragged Schools in the East End of London. As he made his journey on foot, he witnessed an open-air meeting and was struck by the fact that people were hearing the gospel, not in a church, but where they were, in the street. An argument developed when a Roman Catholic antagonist challenged the preacher. John MacGregor could not resist the temptation to become involved and, with his sharp, lawyer's mind, was

able to refute the points that were being put forward. He was there for an hour and felt that he had been of some use. The encounter left an indelible impression on him.

Here was a way to reach ordinary people, including the riff-raff of society, with the greatest news of all time, the message of God's love for sinners and the provision He has made for them to be forgiven and saved for all eternity, through the perfect sacrifice of His Son. Many of these people would never dream of entering a place of worship. But the Lord's final command to His disciples was that the gospel should be preached to every person. This was what open-air work made possible!

John MacGregor could not let the matter rest. He called a meeting with two zealous men of God who had shown interest in open-air work and they met on June 3rd 1853. The Society was born in that meeting and John MacGregor wrote in his diary that night, *"I see in this a small beginning of what may, yea will be, a great, a noble, a blessed undertaking. May the Lord give us wisdom, zeal and love to work unitedly, discreetly, vigorously."*



John MacGregor, who worked so tirelessly for the Lord

The objects of the newly founded Society were enumerated as, *"To encourage, regulate, and improve open-air preaching, to create a bond of brotherhood between open-air preachers, to select those who should engage in the work, to assist them in their studies by lectures, conferences, meetings and the circulation of suitable books, and to issue tracts and other publications relating to the Mission."*

Open-air work became a passion with John MacGregor. He was eager to take part in the witness as often as possible and this passion continued throughout his life. His biographer records, *“He had a good strong voice which could at times tone down to great tenderness, a fund of anecdotes and a knowledge of how to use them at the right time and place; a perfect command of himself so that no interruption or insult ever made him lose his head or the thread of the argument, and what was an invaluable adjunct, a sense of humour.”*

Although he encountered physical and verbal abuse, this did nothing to make him change his mind. His diary on June 24th, 1855 includes these words, *“Some at a distance threw mud, cabbage stalks, stones and oyster shells. Hit my hat several times, my cheek and coat and waistcoat covered. Still many heard and thanked us.”* He was ready to take on the opponents and visited meetings arranged by the Communists, Sceptics and Secularists in order to promote the truth of God's Word. As soon as the meetings were thrown open to questions, up would jump John MacGregor to argue for the gospel.

John MacGregor was very friendly with the great evangelical reformer, Lord Shaftesbury and invited him to join the open-air work. The reply he received read, *“My Dear MacGregor, I have no doubt of the value, nay the necessity of open-air preaching. We must, and by God's blessing, we shall come to it. My June labours are not much less than my May labours, but I will do my best for you. I am for striking right and left, by day and night, before and behind, wherever I can find the devil; and that is at all times and everywhere. Yours truly, Shaftesbury.”*

Archbishop Tait, the Archbishop of Canterbury at that time, accepted an invitation to join him in an open-air meeting in Covent Garden and preached there in his ecclesiastical robes. He later wrote to John MacGregor, *“Truly this is a good and blessed work. The shame of it is passed away. The few short sighted ones who were shocked at people baring their arms to save drowning souls are now silent. God never gave greater blessings to any man than to allow him to labour for sinners.”*

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, whose ministry had such an immense impact at this time, commended the work of the Mission. In one of his well-known 'LECTURES TO MY STUDENTS' he spoke of the Open-Air Mission as, *"that excellent society"* and quoted from one of its papers and from a message by John MacGregor. Part of his lecture was reproduced in the Mission's Annual Report in 1880. In his typically forthright fashion, he said, *"In the street a man must keep himself alive and use many illustrations and anecdotes, and sprinkle a quaint remark here and there. To dwell long on a point will never do. The discourse must not be laboured or involved, neither must the second head depend upon the first; for the audience is a changing one, and each point must be complete in itself. The chain of thought must be taken to pieces, and each link melted down and turned into bullets. Come to the point at once and come there with all your might."*

It is remarkable to think that the founding of the Mission took place 150 years ago. John MacGregor and his companions on that June evening, could never have envisaged that the embryo society would still be functioning a century and a half later with exactly the same ends in view. So much has changed in that period. There have been immense advances in social conditions, medical facilities, methods of transport, technology, communications and a hundred and one other ways, but much has not changed one iota.

In 2003 human beings are still infected by the universal disease of sin. They are still alienated from their Maker and justly deserving His wrath and condemnation for all eternity. Sin is still rife with its many ugly heads. Lives are still being wrecked by man's greed and selfishness. Indeed we face increased problems as a result of the secularisation of society that has taken place in recent decades. God has been pushed out to the fringes of society and we are reaping the sad but inevitable harvest of our rejection of His laws and standards. We see it in the general immorality leading to heartbreak for thousands through the breakdown of family life with its innumerable related consequences; the desperate rise of drug taking and the mushrooming rate

of crime that is associated with it; the child abuse; the spread of AIDS and so on.

So the work of the Mission is as vitally needed today as it was in 1853 and still seeks to fulfil the objectives laid down in that year. The Mission endeavours to encourage and improve open-air preaching. It still seeks to create a bond of brotherhood between open-air preachers by its Associate Membership scheme. It continues to assist open-air preachers through conferences and by taking seminars in churches that request help in the matter of open-air evangelism. And hundreds of thousands of tracts and booklets are produced and distributed each year. Nothing has changed in those respects.

But the celebration of 150 years of witness is actually a testimony to the faithfulness of our Heavenly Father. Throughout a century and a half, HE has watched over the work. It is the Lord who has raised up men to accept the challenge of the work, men who have been burdened to take the Word of Life out to the masses around, irrespective of the reception they may encounter. It is the Lord who has moved the hearts of His people to give their financial support to this crucial work. It is the Lord who has stirred Christians to pray consistently for the work and the workers. And, obviously, it is the Lord who has blessed the work to the salvation of thousands of people down through the years. We know that we can sow the seed and water it, but the increase can only come from God. Consequently we must give all the praise and glory to Him!

CHAPTER 2 - THE EARLY DAYS OF THE WORK

So the work started in London in 1853, with 700 meetings recorded in the first year and 1400 in the second year. Income in the first year was £479 14s 8d. The Annual Reports from those early days make fascinating reading. One paragraph from the first Annual Report, which was issued in 1854, could just as easily have been written for this year's Report. The truth it contains has not changed in the last 150 years, nor will it change in the future. It seems remarkably current. It reads as follows:

"It may be asked if there are permanent results from the preaching. It will at once be perceived, however, that the effects of the Gospel, proclaimed in this manner, cannot be ascertained, because they cannot be traced. A passenger on the footway stops and listens and goes; and with him, perhaps, he carries a dart from conscience, or an arrow winged to the heart by the Spirit of God. Therefore it is that this is a work of faith. The sowers in this field may not always watch the growing seed if haply it has taken root; but sure we are that the fruit of what has been scattered will all be made manifest 'in that day'."

The reports of the workers are similar in many respects to the reports of the present members of staff. There was the usual mixture of opposition and encouragement. Fascinating conversations took place, as is still the case! But some points were unique to that period, of course.

"The steps of the workhouse doors were filled with respectably dressed females, who sat and listened to nearly all the discourse."

"The gentleman stops to listen; the cabman leaves his horse's head to hear; The door of the gin palace and the windows of the workhouse are opened; an old man leans on his stick and a little child listens with upturned face."

"A little girl, very dirty, placed herself before the preacher while she was knitting as fast as she could, now and then stopping to take a glance at the preacher; till at length, her attention became riveted and the knitting was

forgotten. Many other children paid attention, particularly a girl who was apparently returning from the shop with a cup of treacle."

Christians who were visiting the metropolis noted the effects of the work in London. It obviously made a favourable impression on them. Many returned to their own towns and cities fired with a desire to start reaching the people in their own localities with the news of the Saviour who died for them. Within a couple of years the work was spreading right across the country and this entry appears from that time:

"A Committee, similar to that of the Open-Air Mission, is conducting its operations with great benefit in Bristol and another at Windsor. Others are forming at Liverpool, Manchester, Hammersmith and elsewhere. The clergy preach out of doors in Birmingham, Winchester, Tonbridge, Peterborough, Reading, Dover, Cambridge, etc., and applications are made to the office of the Mission from all parts of Britain for information and advice which will lead to a further extension of the plan."

One of the chief aims of the Mission in those early days was to improve the standard of open-air preaching. Apparently there were some whose manner of working did nothing to promote the cause of Christ and it is not difficult to imagine the sort of pitfalls into which they fell! This paragraph appeared in the first Annual Report:

"Politics have been preached in the streets until people supposed that every missionary in the streets would preach politics. Even sound doctrine has been overlaid with verbosity, and too often an eccentric gesticulation substituted for earnestness. Good, but imprudent men, invite bystanders to discussion; controversy often follows, and contentious and angry dispute, frequently requiring the interference of the police. Such results are by no means the necessary consequence of street preaching, but in the eyes of many they have brought it into disrepute."

One preacher's report in those early days included this paragraph:

“A young man in the attire of a labourer, who had stood a considerable time to the close, with a short pipe in his mouth, exclaimed, ‘I could stand all night to hear YOU preach, but some of you folk rant so; you speak more milder (sic). I wish the criminal who is to be hanged tomorrow could hear you a little; it might do him good.’”

A pamphlet entitled “Go Out Quickly” was circulated in 1858 and ran to hundreds of thousands of copies. This also stirred many of God's people to take up the challenge of this means of evangelism. Care was taken in the choice of men who could preach under the auspices of the Open-Air Mission. One of the results of this was that open-air preaching became more acceptable to church people and many clergymen began to hold regular open-air services alongside their usual indoor programme of meetings. It is good to see how quickly and extensively the work of the Mission was admired and took root in all parts of the United Kingdom. The influence of the Mission was used to enable hundreds of thousands of ordinary people to hear the message of God's great salvation.

One very interesting by-product of this was that workers of The London City Mission were authorised to start preaching in the open-air. The work had commenced 21 years earlier and focused its efforts to spread the gospel on regular visitation of people's homes. This is a section of that Society's Annual Report dated 1854:

“The Committee, indeed, desire carefully to guard against converting their missionaries into preachers, feeling fully assured that domiciliary visitation from house to house should ever be regarded as the main and prominent design of the Mission, to which all else must be made subservient. But they rejoice to report that the experiment of holding some of the meetings in the open-air has been very successful, when tried by them, and that in these cases they have every reason to believe that domiciliary visitation has experienced no damage.”

From the earliest days, it was realised that teams of workers could profitably attend some of the great outdoor events that regularly attracted thousands upon thousands of people. As John MacGregor expressed it in the 1858 Annual Report, *“Races, fairs, executions and all other gatherings of people are mines to work where gems may be gathered.”* So, included in the 1858 Annual Report were articles from workers at Cardiff Races, Birmingham Fair, Abingdon Races, Reading Races, Barnet Fair and Races, Chatham Races, St. Albans Fair, Charlton Fair and Croydon Fair.

These extracts from the reports of that work are worthy of note:

“The 4,000 tracts given in three days were well received in every instance. On Thursday and Friday we were completely surrounded by outstretched hands and eager faces and we were not able to separate ourselves from them until we had disposed of all our stock. My colleague tells me that several of the men to whom he gave tracts went straight to the lamps to read them. On Saturday night a young man came to me and said, ‘I had a tract given me last night and I should like another.’” (Birmingham Fair)

“Our plan of proceeding was as follows: - a costermonger’s barrow was hired for a week and on a piece of white calico was written in large letters, “BIBLES FOR SALE” and “SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.” This was suspended by two sticks on the barrow and on a board were laid out Bibles and Testaments. The barrow was drawn through the town, but was eventually placed in one of the most conspicuous places where everyone coming from the fair to the town must pass.” (Barnet Fair and Races)

Another event of great significance was the witness that took place at Epsom Races on Derby Day, 1858 and, of course, there has been a witness among the crowds at the Derby every year since. It is always a challenging day with gambling and drinking going on all around the witness. In that first year, the work consisted largely of tract distribution to the crowds as they arrived and many noteworthy conversations took place, as illustrated by these accounts:

“Tracts were given to parties walking to and from the course. Also to scores of ostlers, coachmen, cabbies and drivers who were lounging about on the Downs. These were generally well received and conversations of an interesting and, we trust, a profitable nature, were entered into. Tracts were given to very many gypsies, with whom conversations were held; and to some few the Word was read and prayer offered up in their tents.”

“On coming to one tent, I found a poor gypsy woman confined to a bed of straw, suffering severely from ague and general debility. I said, “I hope you won't be offended but you appear to be very ill.” I opened my Bible and read the parable of the lost sheep and the piece of money that was lost. It was most interesting to watch the eager expression upon her countenance as the various truths that were such glad tidings were read.”

The opposers used exactly the same tactics that we still see today. “On the course there were many insulting remarks made as we gave out tracts – “Get away with tracts!” “Go to church and give them away!” “We don't want God here,” said one and many repeated it. One gentleman said it was thoroughly disgusting.”

Interestingly, Ascot races were also visited for the first time in the same year, the response being very similar to the one we still receive year by year.

“Neatly printed cards, with texts embracing the fundamentals of the gospel, as well as other things, were offered to the occupants of carriages. Occasionally the friend offering the card would be held up to the ridicule of a large party covering the roof of a four-in-hand coach or some other vehicle. In some instances the cards were received gratefully and respectfully.”

Before concluding these sketches of the early years of the Mission, mention must be made of the witness at public executions. In our sophisticated age it seems strange to think of thousands of people staying up all night to witness a public hanging early the next morning but it certainly happened regularly in

various great towns and cities across the land. The 1866 Annual Report contains articles from such events at Glasgow, Perth, Stafford, Lewes, Winchester, Swansea and Maidstone. Once again there was a mixed reception, as these reports make clear:

“Two executions have taken place at the Old Bailey this year. On both occasions a vigorous staff of preachers and tract distributors were at work. As on some other occasions, the preachers were at work all night. 70,000 tracts were distributed and services held in different parts of the crowd. None of the preachers was ill-treated and only one had his hat stolen. The banners were, as usual, read by thousands of people.”

“I know not how to attempt a description of the crowd, especially in the night and early morning. It was emphatically an assemblage of poverty and crime, the latter element predominating to a considerable extent. The poverty-stricken creatures might be counted by scores asleep in the doorways, on the pavement and against the barriers in the street. Meanwhile scores of thieves were hanging listlessly about. Oaths, blasphemies, obscenities and comic songs were freely and continuously indulged in.

Only once were the preachers set upon by these ruffians. One of our brethren had commenced preaching, when we were suddenly surrounded, laid hold of and robbed of whatever we had in our pockets. This is the first time to my knowledge that the preachers have been set upon in an execution crowd. Some may ask, “What is the good of trying to preach to such a crowd as that?” We reply, ‘Because it is a plain Christian duty. Here are hundreds of people who can never be so well reached at any other time. Here they are and will be for hours Therefore it is our bounden duty to try to benefit them in some way.’”

We see the work of the newly formed Society becoming firmly established in those early days. Hundreds of lay preachers took up the challenge of taking the great news of God's salvation out to the people who never attended a church. A pattern of working became established that has served the Society

well down through the years. God was at work through HIS servants and souls were being saved through the witness that took place. We cannot but record our thanks to Almighty God!

CHAPTER 3 - STEADY PROGRESS

The work went forward by leaps and bounds. The early Annual Reports became steadily thicker and thicker as more auxiliaries were formed. Within 25 years, the influence of the Mission was extremely extensive. The Annual Report for 1878 speaks of 398 accredited preachers, work going on in 157 towns and villages in 34 counties, over 150 regular preaching places in London alone and almost 700,000 tracts being distributed. The influence of this good work would be hard to estimate. (The number of accredited preachers actually rose to over 1,000 by 1890!)

The Mission was served by some outstanding secretaries in those days. John MacGregor was known as the President of the Society and was engaged in numerous exploits at home and abroad. The first secretary appointed was John Wilde Taylor and he served for the first seven years. In 1860 the Committee approached Mr. Gawin Kirkham and he was appointed to the secretaryship. He served with the Mission until the time of his death in 1892, apart from the seven years in the 1870's when he was engaged in other Christian work.

John Kirk, (later Sir John Kirk), was appointed for that period. It is interesting to note in passing that a plaque commemorating the philanthropic work of Sir John Kirk is on the wall of a building only a few yards away from where the offices of the Mission are situated in John Street. He was closely involved, as was John MacGregor, with the work of the Ragged School Union, which became The Shaftesbury Society. Under his lead, the Mission progressed considerably and one fascinating fact comes out in his biography. *"In the first Annual Report written by Kirk, there is a reference to the fact that under the superintendence of Rev. W. Booth, meetings were held in the Fish Market, Hastings. Shortly afterwards, the Rev William Booth had become founder of The Salvation Army."* How interesting it is to note that the great William Booth's preaching career included a period in the ranks of The Open-Air Mission!

When Gawin Kirkham came back into the work in 1879, for some years his role was that of Travelling Secretary. Reading about his years of service almost takes one's breath away. He travelled widely and preached on numerous occasions. In his first year as Travelling Secretary, he visited 59 of the London districts, 85 towns and cities, addressed 338 indoor meetings, of which 89 were for Christian workers and 5 were at Colleges, preached in the open-air 252 times including 16 at race meetings and fairgrounds, and formed 7 new auxiliaries. He was tireless in preaching and promoting the work of the Mission.

Frank Cockrem, who succeeded him as secretary of the Mission, wrote a biography of Gawin Kirkham and it includes this passage on his appointment:

“Gawin Kirkham's great endeavour was not only to direct and organize the work from headquarters, but also to lead his brethren in the holy war against the powers of darkness. With enthusiastic energy he threw himself at once in the thickest of the fray, proving himself from the first, by his courage, zeal and faithfulness, a God-sent man and attracting the warm affections of his growing band.”

Later in the biography, referring to the period of the Mission's history during which Gawin Kirkham was secretary, Frank Cockrem wrote:

“Under his fostering care, the Open-Air Mission had grown to an organisation of the first importance, even though its income was lamentably small and totally inadequate. Marvellous work had been accomplished with very limited resources. The principal races, fairs and galas were being visited by agents of large experience and appropriate gifts. Men of God were being sent forth and were being used in the winning of souls at numerous open-air services. Churches were being increasingly stirred by the publications of the Mission to a recognition of, and response to, the great command to ‘go out quickly,’ while by the same means many labourers were being encouraged, equipped and thrust forth into the harvest field.”

On several occasions he made overseas trips and in these other lands he always sought out opportunities for preaching in the open-air, at times with the help of interpreters. On one of his visits to Holland he saw a poster that took his attention. It was a picture of 'The Broad and Narrow Way' and had been painted originally by a German lady named Mrs. Reilhen. The one seen by Mr. Kirkham had been translated into Dutch and he determined to bring a copy back to London with him as well as the booklet giving an explanation of the picture. A young Dutchman translated these items into English and Gawin Kirkham realised that this could be a powerful evangelistic tool. The picture and the explanation were published and hundreds of thousands of copies were sold. An advertisement for it at that time offered it for sale at a price of one shilling, or two shillings and sixpence for a copy that was mounted on canvas and varnished! At one time there was hardly a Sunday School in the country that did not have a framed copy of the picture adorning its walls. Its message has spoken to many thousands of people.

Gawin Kirkham had a large copy painted on canvas, which could be erected on a wooden frame, so that it could be used in the open-air. Two subsequent versions were made as the old ones wore out with constant use. The last one was 12 feet high and 9 feet across and Gawin Kirkham used a snooker cue to point to the various parts of the picture about which he was speaking at a particular time. He kept meticulous records of all his service for the Lord and he used the picture 1,118 times in the open-air. His successor in the secretaryship of the Mission, Mr. Frank Cockrem, carried on this work after Mr. Kirkham's death. In one of his books about the work of the Mission, Mr Ernest Jealous, my predecessor as secretary, recorded this incident:

"A story of blessing had its beginning at the Bank Holiday Fair on Hampstead Heath in days when men sported beards and frock-coats and women promenaded in bustled dresses and huge flower-garden hats. Robert was just a schoolboy at the time and when he set out for the Heath that day, he did not know that this was to become a day of destiny.

Through the crowd he pushed amid the blaring hurdy-gurdies, coconut shies, swings, roundabouts and side-shows. The air was filled with noise and excitement. Loud-voiced barkers proclaimed the attractions of their respective performers and Robert moved with wide-eyed wonder from one garish show-booth to another.

He stopped before a thick-set, frock-coated man who had displayed a huge painting which he called 'The Broad and Narrow Way.' He introduced himself as Gawin Kirkham, secretary of the Open-Air Mission, and explained that he had brought the painting over from Holland and had been lecturing on it in many parts of Britain.

He said that the picture portrayed the teaching of our Lord in the Gospels. It showed how we are all brought to the crossroads in the journey of life and reach the place of decision. The schoolboy stood, entranced by the preacher's message. This was surely God's call to young Robert as when the Saviour looked upon Andrew the Galilean fisherman and called him.

Young Robert walked home that day as if he were walking on air. He knew that something transforming and wonderful had happened to him. Through the message of this stranger, who stood under the banner of the Open-Air Mission of London, he had surrendered his heart to the Lord. His resolve now was to serve Christ to the best of his ability. And how wonderful it is to think that the boy, whose heart had opened to the love of God on Hampstead Heath that day, later went forth to serve the Lord in China and laboured as a missionary in that country for some forty-five years!"

It is impossible to calculate the number of people, like Robert, who were influenced for good by the picture in those days but there is a sequel that is worth recording. In 1993 Dame Thora Hird used the picture as a basis for a sequence of Sunday evening television programmes in her "PRAISE BE" series. This meant that millions of people saw the picture that Gawin Kirkham had brought to this country all those years ago. A letter was sent to Dame

Thora outlining the history of the picture and a reply was received, part of which can be quoted here.

"Thank you most kindly for your very informative letter re "The Broad and Narrow Way." I have received from fans whose grandparents had the very same poster."

It is interesting to consider the fact that the picture was probably seen by more people in those television programmes than in all the previous years of its existence.

The reports of the work conducted in the years leading up to the end of the century contain so many gems. This one is from 1895:

"On closing our meeting in Gloucester Road one Sunday evening, I requested all who were willing to receive Christ as their personal Saviour to stay behind. Two men and one woman accepted the invitation, all of whom, after conversation, professed conversion. The last was a man named Walter, who patiently waited while I dealt with the others. It was nearly 11 o'clock and he made the following statement.

'Three months ago I left my wife and home and have been wandering about since in a most miserable, despairing condition. I slept on a seat in Finsbury Park last night. I was awakened by hearing music. I found it was a band. I got up and followed and then saw there was to be a meeting. When you spoke about a man — a poor drunkard - who had given himself to Christ on Saturday night at your open-air meeting, I felt you telling out about myself. You spoke about the Prodigal Son and the swine's food, and I felt it was for me, for I had only eaten of some potato peelings picked up from the street in the last thirty hours. On your asking anyone to stay who would like to be spoken to, I had not the courage to do so though I wanted to. You announced a meeting in the evening and I determined to stay in the park until then. The time came and you were not there, so I wandered about the streets, not knowing what to do. Coming through Seven Sisters Road I heard singing and

to my great joy and wonder I saw you stand up and invite poor sinners to be spoken to. I determined to do so.'

This man definitely yielded himself to Christ that same night. It was a joy to hear him cry to God for pardon of past sins and for restoration to his wife and home. We looked after him for about three weeks before he went on his way. Since then I have received a letter from him in which he thanks God for restoring him to his family and says: — 'I thank God for leading me to the park that Sunday morning for I never knew what happiness was till that day. Since then everything has changed, and I do thank God that there is forgiveness for a sinner as black with sin as I was that Sunday.'"

Many thousands of East End people spent their holidays at the hop farms of Kent, where they toiled as hop-pickers. The conditions were primitive but they earned a small wage and were prepared to put up with the hardships. Teams of Mission workers visited these folk regularly and this is one of the reports from that time:



In a Kentish hop garden

"Five weeks labour of love among the Hop Pickers. I was well received by all and the dear children were as attentive as ever. I have seven farms to go on and seventeen encampments to visit, going from bin to bin and hearing many sad tales as I spoke to the people. I preached in the lunch times and in the evenings, being helped with the magic lantern in the evenings. The pickers numbered 2,580 and I have held 79 services. According to their statement, seven souls have been brought to trust in Jesus as their Saviour, three men and four women. The Lord's name be praised!"

The years passed inexorably and every year's witness was crowned with blessing from God. The public proclamation of the gospel was the central feature of the work but, as is always the case, this led to personal contacts with individuals and the wonderful privilege of leading some to Christ. The literature distribution continued unabated, thus enabling thousands upon thousands to read the story of God's dear Son, who loved us and gave Himself for us. Every passing year brought fresh triumphs in the work, alongside the inevitable trials!

CHAPTER 4 - THE FIRST WORLD WAR

When Germany declared war on Russia and France, and Britain subsequently declared war on Germany on 4th August 1914, few people could have foreseen the untold and unimaginable horrors that the war would bring. As is always the case, the whole spiritual atmosphere in our country changed dramatically as a result of these events. It was immediately realised by the Committee that the normal pattern of the Missions work could no longer be followed and necessary adjustments to the programme were introduced. The Annual Report for 1915 includes these words in its editorial:

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord.’ Isaiah, in the cloudy and dark day, saw not only the calamity but also the enthroned Lord above and beyond it. So it is given to the child of God today. The War fills our vision. We are in the presence of calamity unspeakable and immeasurable, but in looking upon it, the Spirit—taught soul can say; ‘I saw also the Lord.’

We, as a Society, in this sixty-second year of our history, have been permitted to ‘see the Lord’ mightily at work. Especially since the outbreak of War has it been given to us to see and rejoice over a new spirit of seriousness and concern, evident in the minds of multitudes, where formerly for many years a heart-breaking spiritual indifference had seemed to reign supreme.

And most especially has this been the case in our work among the Troops, to which, in this War-time, the Society has almost entirely devoted itself. How cheering and delightful has it been to watch the ready response given to the Lord's message by tens of thousands of men of the New Armies, the eager and thankful reception of our literature, the earnest hanging upon the spoken Word, and to hear on every hand the frequent expressions of gratitude for our efforts among them! What a contrast to the Racecourse, for instance, with its experiences of coarse and brutal oaths; vile and blasphemous language, descending to the level of the unbelievable and inconceivable; open abuse and scorn, and sometimes of actual violence - all levelled at God's witnesses in their midst!

Who, too, would have thought it possible a few short months ago, that THE OPEN-AIR MISSION should be engaged on Britain's soil in ministering the Word of Life to thousands of German soldiers, paying intense heed to the Message and pressing round with almost indescribable eagerness for the offered gifts of Scriptures and other booklets in their own language! And so we give God the praise for His mighty working. We see the calamity but we 'see also the Lord!'"

Christian workers were despatched by the Mission to well over 100 military camps to bring the message of Christ's redeeming love to the thousands of troops who had been mobilised. In two instances, Mission Halls were erected and staffed permanently throughout the period of the war. They were each called 'The Open-Air Mission Soldiers' Welcome.' On other camps, the same work took place in large tents. This gave the troops a place for refreshments and quiet relaxation when time permitted and, of course, Christian workers were on hand to speak to the men about their eternal welfare.



The Soldiers Welcome at Catterick Camp

The blessing that was seen as a result of all these labours was tremendous. Men wanted to hear the old, old story of Jesus and His love! They wanted to receive the New Testaments and other literature that was offered. Life was uncertain. Death could be only a few days away and so eternity was in the minds of these men. The reports from this time contain many stories of conversions. It was a fruitful season indeed! I trust these extracts will thrill you as much as they did me in researching them! They are typical of pages and pages of gripping records of what the Lord was doing through His servants in those days. The first are from 1915.

“In another tent we had an even better meeting. At the close, when we sang ‘When I survey,’ and came to the last verse, I called for a show of hands from those who were willing to yield to Christ, and quite twenty hands shot up.”

“God gave us a most blessed time with the 4th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. In the afternoon, while we were unfolding the way of salvation, four men expressed the desire to get right with God. We found an empty tent and dealt definitely with them, with the result that two confessed Christ there. At our evening meeting four others knelt, seeking and finding the Saviour.”

“I have had a splendid day at Luton, so far as one can say, by the many who professed to receive the Lord Jesus. It has been rich in soul-winning from the very first. A fine opportunity opened at once to speak to the men, and a young fellow, who seemed really anxious, decided for Jesus right away. Several took cards.”

“The chief meetings among the Highlanders were in Bedford Market Square. The presence and power of God were manifest at all these gatherings and it was delightful to see these fellows who had joined the forces riveted, convicted and converted, and made by the grace and love of God prepared to live and ready to die. As many as twenty-five to thirty men came forward for Decision Cards each evening.”

From the 1916 reports come these encouraging stories.

“We had a delightful service. One young man who had been anxious about his soul for several days came and knelt down and confessed his sins and beautifully saw the truth and accepted Jesus as his own personal Saviour. He went away with a smiling face saying, ‘I am going to tell my mates!’”

“Today has been one of the busiest I have had. Men were waiting round the tent at 9 a.m. to come in. We have been able to have personal dealings with many of the men throughout the day. One young man, who had only been out of Dartmoor Prison for a short time, was quite broken down as we spoke to him of Jesus, the mighty to save. He came to the evening service and there he confessed his sins and yielded himself to the Saviour.”

“The Lord has been working in our midst today. One young man, only nineteen years of age, who has been anxious about his soul for some days, has definitely accepted the Lord Jesus as his Saviour and stepped into light and liberty.”

“At this evening's meeting, six men were on their knees seeking the Saviour. God has again set His seal on the work by saving men at the Welcome!”

The current of blessing continued to flow in 1917!

“Long before the evening meeting started, the men began to assemble and at half past five every available seat was occupied. God gave me the right message and, at the close, many came out boldly and accepted Christ as Saviour. One boy who accepted Jesus last week came and thanked me saying he had never been so happy in his life.”

“At the close of the evening service four came out boldly for Jesus and, as I was dealing with them, two Scotch boys came weeping their way to the Cross. At the close, four N.C.O.s, who came out on the Lord's side some weeks ago,

and who leave tomorrow, expressed a wish to hold a prayer meeting and we wrestled and agonised with God for these young converts.”

“On Sunday last one of the wounded men passed away to be with the Lord. I was with him and he gave a clear testimony of having received the Lord Jesus during his stay in hospital. He was beautifully saved two weeks ago. Ten days before he died, I said to him, “Norman, is there anything I can do for you or bring you?” With a sweet smile he said,



A group of soldiers at the Grantham Soldiers Welcome

“Yes, come and see me and pray with me whenever you can, for it is through you I found Jesus.” It was very touching and worth all the time bestowed on him. This is only one of many who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.”

“Here is a convert’s testimony as given in the hut. ‘In that little room over there,’ pointing to the parlour, ‘I done it (sic). Now I feel I can’t get here often enough. I was as bad as any of them - gambled and swore. Now they say in my hut, ‘What’s come over old Tom? We can’t make him out!’”

We move on to 1918 and see that the Lord's power to save was still very much in evidence.

“The meeting in the Welcome was well attended and the testimonies were splendid. Two soldiers, in their messages, said they were converted in our hut fifteen months ago. They are out-and-out Christians and their lives are a continual witness to the saving power of Christ.”

“Four lads came out for Christ at the Gospel service; they each seemed real. It was splendid to hear them confess their guilt before God, and to see the work of the Holy Spirit in them, enabling them to grasp the blessing their souls desired.”

“There have been about twenty conversions during the period under review - some of them exceedingly bright and real, and their progress in the new life is very manifest. A man who desired to speak to us at the close of the meeting on Sunday was greatly distressed on account of his sinful state. Like the publican of old, he cried out, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” It is some time since I saw a sinner so conscious of his condition. It was some time before he could grasp the way of salvation but he assured us that he had done so. On the following Tuesday he was sent off to France. How good to know that he was assured of salvation before he went away!”

“It was a very solemn meeting. As the Spirit of God revealed the deceitfulness of sin, we could see signs of conviction on many a face and it was lovely to see twenty-two of these young men rising to their feet to accept Christ as their Saviour.”

“At the close of the address an invitation was given to those desirous of accepting Christ as their Saviour to arise from their seats. Slowly one arose, then others, then from all parts of the ‘Welcome’ in twos, threes and fours until it seemed that half the congregation had arisen. The staff was quite

During the War the Open-Air Mission has

Erected and Opened Halls and Tents as "Soldiers' Welcomes" in many Great Camps—comfortable and bright places of Christian hospitality for the troops, where a tired soldier may rest and read, write letters, or obtain a simple meal; and where, night by night, the glorious message of Redeeming Love is delivered. Hundreds of warm-hearted testimonies, from the men and from their relatives, bear witness that the blessing of God is richly outpoured on this great work.

Missioned in the Camps—holding meetings in the soldiers' huts and mess-rooms, and in the open-air; telling of saving grace in informal but effective ways, in all possible places—cook-houses, guard-rooms and cells, and at wayside halts, seeking all the time to win souls for Christ.

Visited the Sick and Wounded—in the Hospitals, both in London and at the sea-side and in the Camps, distributing lavender-bags with texts, and speaking words of comfort and cheer of the great Divine Sufferer who was "wounded for our transgressions."

Missioned in some of the British Camps in France—greatly to the satisfaction and spiritual profit of the troops.

Despatched a French-speaking Missioner to work among the vast Armies of our French Allies. He has conducted many meetings close to the firing line, amid devastated towns, and among the French soldiers and sailors in many parts of France.

Accomplished a Great Work among German Prisoners of War (Military and Civilian).

Distributed Vast Quantities of Testaments, Gospels, and Scripture Portions, in English and French, together with hundreds of thousands of specially-prepared booklets, such as "Going to the Front," full of the Gospel.

YOUR HELP IS VERY URGENTLY NEEDED FOR THE SUPPORT OF THIS GREATLY-BLESSED AND FAR-REACHING GOSPEL EFFORT.

insufficient to deal with them all personally but thirty-seven Decision Cards were signed and returned to us that night."

It was a period of unparalleled blessing in the records of the Mission. The page opposite concluded the 1919 Annual Report and shows something of the scope of the work that was done.

Before leaving this period, there is one outstanding member of staff whose service with the Mission commenced during the war. Jim Bryant was given charge of the Mission's Welcome at Larkhill Camp on Salisbury Plain and he served there for four years with a great measure of fruitfulness.

What an amazing character he was! Born into a drunkard's home, Jim himself became a drunkard while still a young man. His excesses led to two terms of imprisonment and, disillusioned by his inability to stop himself drinking, he decided to go to London and turn over a new leaf. But a change of scene did not result in a change of nature and he was soon in the wrong company, living a dissolute life of gambling and drunkenness and finding, like the prodigal of old, that the path of the sinner was a downward path. It was while in the depths of despair that Jim stumbled on an open-air meeting in Cambridge Circus and listened to the life-changing message of the gospel. A great conviction of sin enveloped him. He saw himself teetering on the brink of hell but fear of what his mates would say held him back from receiving the Saviour.

Jim fell in love and was married on August 8th, 1889. Perhaps the influence of a good woman would tame his wild nature: but any improvement was short lived and soon he was sinking deeper and deeper into sin. Even the birth of his little son did nothing to stop the nit. The neighbours were fed up with the constant scenes that took place at the house occupied by the family in Fulham, but some local Christians were praying for him to be converted. One evening his wife invited him to go for a walk with her and led the unsuspecting husband to the site of another open-air meeting.

By a strange series of circumstances, Jim ended up speaking to the preacher and confided that he wanted to have his life changed but did not know how. The promise of John 1:12 was shared with Jim, that God gives power to become sons of God when we receive the Lord Jesus. The evangelist urged Jim to read God's Word for himself but he confessed that he could not read. However he memorised a couple of verses and the evangelist prayed with him before Jim and his wife went. He was determined to get the matter settled that night and at 3 a.m. as he continued to plead with God for salvation, the light broke in. He described the occasion in these words:

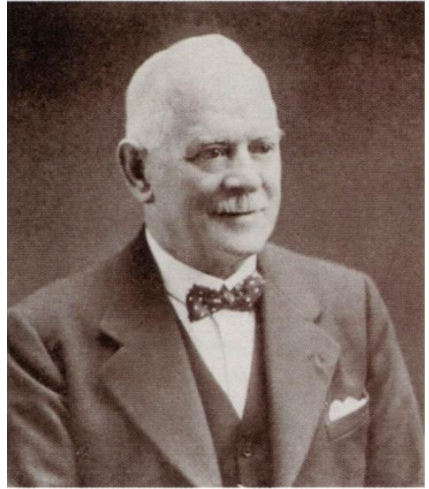
“In a moment, He broke the power of cancelled sin and set the prisoner free. It was instantaneous. I arose from my knees born again by God's Holy Spirit. He took the desire to do evil out of my heart and in its place He put the desire to do good. I was a new creature in Christ. Nobody could gainsay this glorious experience. I was there when it happened. Just as there was a time when I was born into the family of my earthly father, so I can point to a definite moment of time when I was born again into the family of God, my Heavenly Father.”

So started a life of amazing fruitfulness in the service of the Lord, some in this country and some in Canada to which he went as part of his responsibilities with Fegan's Homes. The late Dr. Fullerton wrote of Jim, *“He had such God-given power with men that souls seemed to fall into his hand like ripe apples from a tree.”* The first thing to which Jim applied himself was learning to read. A well-educated lady called Mrs Cartwright was a help in that direction and Jim pointed her to the Lord as she taught him to read the scriptures! She was wonderfully saved from a background of agnosticism.

Jim laboured tirelessly for many years, including the four years of the war already mentioned. He had a wonderfully gracious manner that disarmed opponents and sceptics. He had a bright sense of humour that was often used in the open-air to defuse tricky situations. He was a great encourager of younger workers and a tremendous example of a Christian gentleman. Mr. Ernest Jealous, in his early days as secretary of the Mission, travelled widely

with Jim for deputation and evangelistic services. He was therefore uniquely equipped to write Jim's life story. The ensuing book, 'HAPPY JIM,' had a wide circulation and stories of the blessing it brought to Christians and, non-Christians alike are countless.

Oliver Styles, who spent many years as a Scripture Union evangelist, and who served on the Committee of the Mission for many years, recalls Jim here:



Jim Bryant, known to all as 'Happy Jim'

"Some people make such a deep impression that you can never forget them. Jim Bryant, 'Happy Jim,' was like that, although it is 67 years ago since I first met him. I had been accepted by The Open-Air Mission as a student helper for the summer vacation, and was sent to Hastings to help the meetings on the beach each evening, to do tracting, speak or give a testimony. In addition, I was to take part in the regular morning prayer meetings which were well supported by holidaymakers and local Christians.

'Happy Jim' was always smartly dressed with a bow tie and a boater hat and he had a white moustache. He had a lovely cockney accent and a great sense of fun. His quick repartee made him a fascinating open-air speaker and his wit often calmed a nasty situation. He always led the meetings on the beach and, with a large group of supporters, we sang hymns, shouted quick-fire verses of scripture and there would be several speakers each evening. Everything was carried through smoothly and, on many evenings, there were those that responded to the appeal and were linked with one of the counsellors.

On Saturday and Sunday nights the meetings were hard going. We had Blackshirts (Fascists) on one side and Communists on the other. At times the police had to intervene because they were throwing pebbles at each other right over our heads. 'Happy Jim' never seemed to be shaken but he

encouraged us to stand our ground, reminding us that the larger the crowd, the more would hear the gospel, and they all needed the Saviour.

I learned so much from his example of good leadership, his kindly words to his helpers and the encouragement and advice that always followed a talk one of us had given. One thing I found daunting at first was that he might call on you, without warning, to speak, so it was important to be ready at all times. But I noticed that he never called an inexperienced speaker when there was rowdyism or heckling. He kept everything under control and would always encourage, advise or correct. He was so warm and friendly. I have a snapshot of him walking arm in arm along the front at Hastings with another student helper and myself. At the end of the evening he seemed so fresh as he bade us 'goodnight' and went off to his caravan where he stayed with Mrs. Bryant."

CHAPTER FIVE - ON THROUGH THE 20th CENTURY

Two matters of considerable importance followed hard on the heels of the war years and both were to influence the work of the Mission for decades to come. The first is recorded in a minute from the meeting of Committee that took place on April 25th 1919:

“It was decided to adopt the plan submitted by the Kingsley Wagon Works and to appeal for funds for the purpose of building a Gospel Motor Wagon, the motor chassis to be second-hand and the total cost up to £500.”

This is the first reference to motorised caravans, a form of accommodation and transport that served the Mission incredibly well for many years. The caravans were purpose built and the near-side could be opened up when at a suitable site for preaching. One half folded upwards and was supported there to act as a sounding board as there was, obviously, no P.A. equipment in those early days. The other half folded down and became a platform from which the preaching took place. They were a great innovation and caused something of a sensation wherever they went. Crowds gathered to hear the message of God's Word and much good was done in this way, in town centres, at factory gates, at shipyards and many other venues.

The idea quickly took root. Indeed later in 1919 there is a minute to this effect:

“The secretary reported the kind offer of Mrs. MacRae of Stonehouse, Thornhill, Dumfries-shire to provide the sum of £750 (Seven hundred and fifty pounds) in payment of the cost of a Gospel Motor wagon for Scotland and it was decided to accept this offer with much gratitude, and to go forward with the matter. Mrs. MacRae to be asked to allow the Motor Wagon to sometimes operate on the English side of the border.”

So began the pattern of working that stood the Mission in good stead for the next half a century. Full-time workers, usually working in pairs were



An early motorised caravan

employed to man the Gospel Wagons. Having their own independent living accommodation meant that they could range far and wide with the precious seed of the gospel. The wagons were very distinctive with gospel verses sign-written on them. The picture shows one of the early ones. They rapidly became the hallmark of the Mission and its work and some supporters still have the old collecting boxes that were made in the shape of those early vehicles.

The second significant development concerned the Mission Headquarters at 19 John Street. The Mission had moved into that building in 1911 as tenants. In 1920 the President of the Society, Captain Dawson, purchased the freehold of the building and presented it to the Mission in memory of his son-in-law who had been killed in the Great War. This was a wonderfully generous and far-sighted action, which meant that the Mission had a base in London without having to pay rental. For many years other Christian societies occupied the floors that were not needed by the Mission but when rents rose dramatically in the 1960's, the other societies moved to more economical accommodation in the provinces. The spare capacity at John Street was rented out commercially, thus giving the Mission a boost to its income.

For several years the work of the Mission spread over into Europe with workers engaged in open-air evangelism in France and Holland. Similar blessing was seen in these places and it was obvious that the Lord was at work. But the storm clouds of war were gathering. There was a period when nobody knew what Hitler was going to do, but once the forces of Nazis were unleashed, it was obvious that a long and costly war was the inevitable outcome. When the Second World War broke out, there was some precedent on which the Mission workers could draw when it came to adapting the Mission's witness to suit the circumstances. The Annual Report in 1940 included these words in its editorial:

“September 1939 - Britain at war! As we commence this survey of our Mission's toils and triumphs during the past year, this solemn fact stands out in bold relief overshadowing every other event on the calendar. It means that the long-threatened clash between right and wrong has come at last. Our nation has taken up arms in a life-or-death struggle, a fight against 'evil things — brute force, bad faith, oppression and persecution.’

The country summoned its young manhood to war. And they mustered in their scores of hundreds and thousands. From our great cities and towns, from quiet villages, from farmsteads and factories they gathered. They go to defend the Mother Country from the perils which threaten her from land, sea and air.

So the evangelists of the Mission have temporarily forsaken their old 'battlegrounds' - the racecourse, market place and fairground - in order to carry the Gospel message to Britain's War Camps. The purpose of all their labour is to win these men of HM Fighting Forces to the Saviour.

Stern tasks face Britain and many of her sons have already been called upon to make the supreme sacrifice. And surely, while these intrepid sailors, soldiers and airmen are bending every energy of mind and body to winning the war against tyranny, we who name the Name of Christ will be willing to give ourselves to prayer if we may but win their allegiance to our Lord and

Saviour! It is our hearts' desire that they may choose Jesus Christ and His salvation for their foundation."



This group of Irish troops includes two who were brought to the Lord through the ministry of the Mission

Once again every effort was made to spread the message of salvation among the forces. Again huts were opened on certain military camps to be 'The Open-Air Mission Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Welcomes.' The tried and tested formula from the First World War was again employed. They were places where the troops could relax, write letters to their loved ones, purchase refreshments and, above all, hear the story of God's redeeming love in Christ. The troops valued them enormously and they became centres of Christian witness and testimony where thousands heard the gospel.

One unusual opportunity for witness came about as a result of the camp missionary, Charlie Hodges, having been a wireless officer on destroyers in the First World War. One day he entered a hut where young men were busy learning the arts of telegraphy. He tapped out a message in Morse Code and asked the young men to read it back. The answer came, "JESUS SAVES!" When Mr. Hodges' expertise was made known to the authorities, he was asked to take on some work as an instructor alongside his work as an evangelist. This was gladly undertaken as it gave him a wonderful opening for

getting to know his pupils on a more personal level than would otherwise have been possible, and he always used the words of scripture in his lessons! Many young men thus learned the way of salvation through following their chosen trade in the forces and the Lord used His Word in the lives of many.



The 'Daily Remembrancer' being passed on

Mr. Ernest Jealous compiled a little booklet of Bible verses, suitable hymns and short incidents which could be distributed to the troops. It was called 'The Soldiers' Sailors' and Airmen's Daily Remembrancer' and it ran to over 300,000 copies. A special issue was subsequently produced for American military personnel, as was another special issue for female members of the armed forces. These were distributed widely and were highly valued by many of those who received them. As was the case in the previous World War, life was uncertain, death a terrible reality and eternity could be only a stone's throw away for any of the recipients. The booklet gave them the secret of peace with God through faith in the Lord Jesus. What a treasure it was in those grim circumstances!

It also offered a free copy of the New Testament to anyone who requested one from the offices of the Mission. Over 1,500 such requests were made from all parts of the world and the office staff dealt with these as promptly as

possible, knowing that service personnel are frequently moved at short notice.

One day a letter was received from a sailor, which read as follows:

“Dear Sir, I have just been brought into naval barracks from a ship that was torpedoed at sea. While I was in the water, hoping to be picked up, I was half drowned and my past came before me like a picture. I then saw what a foul life I had led and promised God that if only He would rescue me I would repent. A boat picked me up and I was brought to the Royal Naval Barracks, Chatham. Almost the first thing that happened to me here was that someone gave me a copy of your Sailors’ Daily Remembrancer. I have read it and been blessed by it but I want to know how to get right with God, as it is put in your booklet. Please write at once as I am expecting to be drafted again soon and before I go I want to know that I am right with Christ.”

Mr. Jealous saw this as a cry from the heart and contacted his friend, Rev. Richard Rees, (brother of the well-known evangelist, Tom Rees), whose parish was very close to Chatham. A letter was soon received from him saying,

“Dear Mr. Jealous, Thank you for your letter. I was able to visit this dear lad last night and had the joy of leading him to Christ. I have great hopes for his future. Yours sincerely, Richard Rees.”

Again the Annual Reports are full of stories of God's blessing in the salvation of souls. Here are some samples:

“We had a wonderful time of blessing during the weekend. Friday and Saturday crowds of men visited the WELCOME, and on Sunday night we had the hall full twice. The power of God was manifested in our midst. Two services were held. At the close of the first, eight soldiers came boldly out and professed to receive Christ as their Saviour, and at the close of the second,

many more came out and accepted gospels and decision cards. To God be the glory!"

"At 9 p.m. every evening the hymn books are passed round and whoever is playing the piano is asked to play the chosen hymn. A few verses of scripture are read and the comments on them develop into a Gospel message followed by an appeal for decisions for Christ. Sometimes a few of the men continue with their draughts or other games but, almost invariably, these are forgotten during the message and by the time the appeal is made there is rapt attention. At the close of one such meeting five men came to another room for conversation and, on their knees, professed faith in the Lord Jesus. On another occasion, three others, one a Jew, did likewise."

Once again the blessing was not confined to troops from our own country. Openings were given among American troops stationed here as this report shows:

"An invaluable opening was granted to us at the Garrison Guard House, a detention stockade for American soldier, defaulters. There is no compulsion on the prisoners to attend this weekly service - in fact the first meeting attracted only ten, but now we have two hundred or more. One day I was in a hut filled with coloured troops and I offered copies of The American Soldier's Remembrancer and Testaments. Every man came forward to receive a copy although some of the soldiers had been lying on their bunks, tired out, for they do sixteen hours work a day. I then devoted half-an-hour to explaining God's Way of Salvation to them. "Come again soon!" they chorused as we left. Great kindness has been shown by the American Commanding Officers who have made a practice of sending either a jeep, a command car or a weapon-carrier in order to bring our evangelist to the these various meetings."

Great were the celebrations when the war ended in 1945. The forces of Nazism had been driven back and freedom prevailed. It meant that the work

of the Mission could return to its usual pattern in the crowded places of our country. The Annual Report for 1946 has this article:

“The year 1945 brought to an end not only hostilities in Europe and the Pacific, but also the Mission's work among men and women of the Forces. Some six years have been devoted to this service and not without very marked evidences of God's approval and blessing.

The Soldier's Remembrancer booklet, which was adapted for all the services, eventually went into over 300,000 copies and brought such a welter of letters to Headquarters that our hearts could not but be cheered by these evidences of a real concern about spiritual things on the part of the many men and women in uniform.

Vivid memories will always remain of how God blessed His Word as we visited soldiers in their thousands being embarked for France in 1939/40, then ministered to the remnants who returned after Dunkirk, as the evangelists went into Prison Camps for Allied and German detainees and as the Word was taught to eager young aircrew over Morse buzzers. Surely all these years of witness are a 'labour not in vain to the Lord!'"

Once the war was over, the usual pattern of work was resumed. There is never any shortage of opportunities for open-air outreach! Most towns and cities have suitable sites in the market places and busy shopping areas. Also, of course, people began to flock once again to the race meetings, the great fairs and many other events which gradually returned to normal after the rigours of the war years. And so it was back to normal business for the workers, reaching out once again with the Word of Life. The only sadness was that the spiritual concern, that had been such a marked characteristic of the war years, soon evaporated and was replaced by a more indifferent attitude to the things of God.

Seasons came and went, each with their distinctive patterns of witness. Churches saw the possibility of holding special evangelistic campaigns among

adults and children and the evangelists were called upon to conduct these events, especially through the colder winter months when open-air work was difficult. Many Christian people around the country can trace their conversion back to such opportunities. They were fruitful indeed. It also meant that members of the churches that were visited became regular supporters of the Mission and remained friends with the particular evangelists throughout the years.

There was no slackening of the pace. The gospel caravans travelled far and wide in the cause of Christ and the workers seized the many opportunities to share the message of God's love that arose throughout the course of the years. The vision was still clear. Reach the masses just where they were and share the gospel with them!

CHAPTER 6 - "THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US!"

The objective in all gospel preaching is the salvation of souls. Most of a preacher's work is sowing the incorruptible seed of the gospel. Certainly the workers of the Mission spend the majority of their time engaged in this way. Many gospel messages are delivered both indoors and out-of-doors, thousands of gospel tracts are distributed and hundreds of conversations take place each year.

The preacher prays earnestly that the Lord will use his work to bring those he is contacting out of nature's darkness and into God's marvellous light. He longs to see people responding and being born again of the Spirit of God. It is only the Holy Spirit who can bring about conviction of sin in the hearts of our hearers. We are so conscious of the fact that "salvation is of the Lord!" We cannot and would not want to manufacture conversions. It is the prerogative of God alone but the other side of the coin is the fact that we can be workers together with God. He uses our words, with all their limitations, to bring people to the point of decision and, from time to time, we have the inexpressible

privilege of sitting alongside someone as he or she takes the step of trusting the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour.

We have already seen that the Lord has worked mightily through the testimony of the Mission to bring precious souls to Himself. We will devote this chapter to further stories of conversions. It is always thrilling to read of the way the Lord deals with individuals in this matter of salvation. We remember that, although we can sow the seed and water it, the increase has to come from the Lord of the harvest. The glory therefore must be His!

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It was September 1938 and 14-year-old Marjorie Hall was fed up! Her parents had both been converted and had started going to church every Sunday. They expected Marjorie to attend with them and even to go the Bible Class on

Sunday afternoons. This did not seem very exciting to an active teenager and so she made an arrangement with one of her friends that would enable her to miss the Bible Class during the week of the St. Leger Race Meeting in her home town of Doncaster.

Leaving home at the usual time, she met her friend in the next street and together they made their way to the area of the races. Perhaps they would see the famous tipster, Prince Monolulu, holding the crowds with his clever repartee and the promise of naming the winner of the next race. In any case it was not so boring as the Bible Class. All was bustle, noise and excitement. The girls saw a crowd in front of them and pushed through to see if it was Prince Monolulu but, to their disgust, it proved to be an open-air meeting. A hymnbook was pushed into their hands and they felt trapped. This was NOT what they had come to do!

When the hymn finished, the Open-Air Mission evangelist started to preach. His subject was the Second Coming of Christ and Marjorie was riveted. She had never heard this truth before and she drank in what the preacher was saying. He spoke about the fact that, at the Lord's return, true believers would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air whilst the unsaved would be left behind. "Where would you be if the Lord Jesus returned today?" The challenge rang out from the preacher and Marjorie suddenly saw the truth. The Spirit of God opened her eyes to the fact that her mother and father would be taken to be with the Lord and she would be left behind.

This was too much for Marjorie. She could not bear that thought. Standing there on the grass, she yielded her life to the Lord and received Him as her Saviour. There was no time to have a word with the preacher. He never knew of the eternal transaction that took place that afternoon. Marjorie knew that her mother would be expecting her home from the Bible Class and so the homeward journey was made, but there was a wonderful lightness of heart for the new convert. Her mother was thrilled, of course, and assured Marjorie that she and her father had been praying for this to happen ever since they came to know the Lord for themselves. "You must go and tell your

Bible Class leader what has happened,” declared her mother and this was duly done. The leader was only too pleased to forgive Marjorie for her absence that afternoon! We may try, but we cannot run away from God!

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Elderly Nora Crang was walking along the promenade at Ilfracombe, her home town, one summer evening when she came across a team of young people conducting an open-air meeting under the leadership of two Mission evangelists. She was pleased to have someone with whom she could talk about spiritual things because her husband had died only a few weeks previously and she was thinking seriously about where she would go when she died. Nora stayed for well over an hour that first night and her many questions were patiently answered by the worker concerned. She was given a copy of 'Journey Into Life' to take with her and invited to return the following evening to carry on the conversation.

The weather on the following evening was most unhelpful – continuous torrential rain and so the team did not venture forth. The next evening, however, they were back at the same spot and Nora was waiting for them. "Where were you last night?" she asked curtly. "You told me to come back to carry on our conversation but you weren't here. I dressed up for the weather, used my umbrella and came down here but the promenade was deserted. Why didn't you come as you promised?" The worker concerned realised that Nora was in deep earnest and had another long conversation with this anxious lady. Her questions were sensible ones and they came thick and fast but answers were given and received gratefully. Nora was still not at the point of decision but said she would come back later in the week. One of the young ladies on the team spoke with her then because the other worker was not present.

Nora said, "I've made up my mind. I am going to receive Jesus as my Saviour. I want to do it out loud with you listening and then I shall have a witness to the fact that I have become a Christian." In a slow deliberate way she read

through the prayer at the back of the booklet 'Journey Into Life' and then looked up. "Do you know?" she said, "For the first time in my life I know that God loves me!" It was learned later that Nora was 81 years of age when she took that step of faith. What a shame she waited so long before coming to that realisation but what a blessing she learned it in time! Contact was maintained with Nora for the next three years until her home call. There is no age barrier when it comes to the great matter of salvation!

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This next story is taken from a book by Mr. Jealous.

As Ralph Webster was led from the Magistrates' Court towards the prison cells, he could hear the busy life of the city throbbing around him. Yet, louder still, there echoed in his brain the words just addressed to him by the presiding magistrate, "I have listened with much sorrow to this record of your life and I have come to the conclusion that you are a piece of wasted humanity: you must go to prison again..."

Could this be the sober truth? Was he trapped by his own relentless lust for life, for ill-gotten gain, for the excitement of pitting his wits criminally against society, law and authority? Well, perhaps he was — but at least he was man enough to be proud of the fact that they'd never managed to subdue him by these repeated prison sentences.

Still, he didn't like that tag - a piece of wasted humanity! He was still a young man, very strong and daring, with a reputation many envied. Was his life really wasted? During the weeks that followed he had ample opportunity to brood over the matter and there can be no doubt that the Spirit of God had probed his conscience. By the time Ralph came out of prison, he was in a more serious frame of mind than he could ever remember.

It was then that he heard the news. Preachers! - he'd never had any time for them, but he'd never really troubled himself to listen to them as he listened now. There seemed to be something deep within him that was crying out for deliverance. He listened. *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him!"*

And Ralph Webster came. He prayed, he wept, and as he did so the iron door of his heart opened to the love of God. His burden was lifted! He knew that he was waste no longer! The change in his life, his habits, his home became absolutely radical. His companions now were the people of God and, whereas he had carried such evil into the daily life of the neighbourhood, he now carried the grace of Christ. People who had once scorned him came to respect him for the probity of his public and private life. He became a preacher of the gospel and pointed many people to Christ. He went into business and prospered. Before many years had passed he had a lovely house in the same road as the magistrate who had sent him to prison. They became friends.

Every year one of his chief delights was to open his home and extend hospitality to the evangelists of The Open-Air Mission when they came north for their race-week campaign. He stood with them amid the vast crowds on the racecourse, telling out of a full heart what great things the Lord had done for him.

One day the magistrate fell ill. It was serious; he knew that he was approaching the end of life's journey. Feeling the need of spiritual counsel, he sent a message, *"Would Mr. Webster come to the house and pray with me?"* It was some time later, in the privacy of that sick-room that Ralph Webster had the holy joy of leading to Christ the very magistrate who, in committing him to prison, had once described him as 'a piece of wasted humanity.' Could any incident from twentieth century life more aptly fit the scripture which says, *"As ye were a curse, so ye shall be a blessing!"* (Zechariah 8:13)

George Hynd was a prisoner at Barlinnie Prison in Glasgow in 1987 and, on one occasion, was left alone in an interview Room. On the table was a pile of magazines and George looked through these while he was waiting. Among them was an Open-Air Mission Gospel of John and George slipped it into his pocket. Willie Docherty was a regular visitor to Barlinnie in those days, helping the witness that went on in the Prison Bible Class. Willie always finished his message by offering Gospels of John to those who wanted to follow up what they had heard and a good number were requested at each visit.

Apparently one copy had been discarded by the recipient and had found its way into the Interview Room where George found it. When there was time, he read it through and realised his need of the Saviour. The transaction was done. George became a new creature in Christ. He made this known to us by sending the card from the gospel to the office and helpful literature was sent to him including a Bible. A few months later he was transferred to Shotts Prison in Lanarkshire but some of his possessions were lost in the move, including his precious Bible. Here is a section of the letter he sent at that time:

“My faith is still as strong and I have been baptised and it is all down to you for the help you have given me when I most needed it. For that I will always be grateful. I go to church every Sunday and during the week have meetings with the minister, who is a great help. I have found a peace like never before and I take this sentence one day at a time as the Lord intended me to do.”

I don't like to ask this of you but, as I said, my property went missing and with it the Bible you sent me. If at all possible would you please send me one more. It was a gift! felt the loss of very badly. I would like to think it is helping someone who needed comfort. It is true, seek and ye shall find. I did and I am very happy walking the way of the Lord. I would like to say to you and all who do God's work in the Mission a very big thanks from me. God bless you all and the work you do.”

A new Bible was sent off in the next post!

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Many stories could be told of prisoners who were brought to the Saviour as a result of such visits. Workers of the Mission love to take part in such outreach whenever there is such an opportunity. Joe Hayden and Derrick Cole took part in the Bible Class at Winson Green Prison in Birmingham for a number of years and saw the Lord's blessing, as the following story shows.

Jimmy McNally had lived a life of crime and over half his life had been spent in prison. He had served one stretch of 12 years, one of 6 years and was halfway through another 6-year sentence when he attended a Bible Class run by Joe and Derrick. Something had spoken to him during that session and when one of the men asked Jimmy if he would ever be back in prison again, he pointed upwards and said thoughtfully, *"Not with HIS help!"* He realised that there was an answer to his life of crime. He needed the Lord to save him.

At a subsequent Bible Class, Jimmy suddenly went ashen white and collapsed on to the floor with a heart attack. Medical help was immediately summoned and the rest of the class were sent back to their cells as Jimmy was rushed to the prison hospital. Joe arranged to visit the hospital the following day and found Jimmy alive but very weak. *"I was nearly gone, Joe,"* said Jimmy. Joe replied, *"Well Jimmy, you should make sure of eternity by committing your heart and life to Christ."* *"I want to do that,"* said Jimmy and prayer took place at that hospital bed, with wires and tubes still attaching Jimmy to the monitors that were necessary at that time.

Jimmy made a good recovery and was back in the Bible Class a few weeks later as a new creature in Christ. He shared with Joe that he would like to be transferred to Maidstone Prison so that he would be nearer his relatives. *"We can pray about that,"* Joe assured him. Six weeks later the transfer took place. Jimmy decided that he wanted to be baptised and arrangements were made for this to take place in the swimming pool at the prison. Joe and his

wife, Mary, attended that service and were thrilled to see Jimmy baptised with five other men, one of whom Jimmy had led to the Lord since he arrived at Maidstone.

On his release, he became a fervent witness for the Saviour, giving out tracts in north London and getting alongside the drug addicts and alcoholics so that he could share the gospel with them. He rather nervously gave his testimony at our Annual Meetings in London some years ago.

“From that day when I prayed in the hospital bed I have never looked back and I know the Lord has always been with me,” he told us. Jimmy is now in glory following a fatal heart attack shortly after that meeting.

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This chapter could go on and on. The stories of those whose lives have been changed by the saving power of the Lord Jesus through the witness of the Mission would fill many volumes! But for every story that comes to our attention, there are many others about which we have no knowledge. The work of God in human hearts goes on constantly. It is HIS work and to Him alone be the glory!

CHAPTER SEVEN - PREVIOUS MISSION PERSONNEL

When I joined the Mission in 1969, I met some of the stalwart workers of that time and working alongside them for many years taught me invaluable lessons. So many memories are imprinted on my mind and here are some personal recollections of the characters involved.

BILL GALYER commenced 31 years of valuable and fruitful service as a Mission evangelist in 1949. He was known and loved by many Christian people as a result of his winter deputation tours to places like South Wales and Liverpool. He visited numerous churches, particularly the Brethren Assemblies. He was himself in fellowship with the Assembly at Canbury Park in Kingston Upon Thames. Alongside his ability as an open-air preacher, he was gifted in Bible teaching and was often asked to take part in Conferences and special gatherings. In all his years of service, he was aided by his wife, Marjorie.



He possessed a truly balanced wisdom and younger colleagues knew that they could go to Bill for counsel and thus receive the benefit of his godly advice. He was also gifted in training younger evangelists who were placed in his care. Dick Saunders and Ron Spillards, both of whom went on to lives of great fruitfulness in the work of God, were amongst those who started their full-time service on FAITH CARAVAN with Bill Galyer and they, along with many others, would acknowledge their debt of gratitude to him for his wise advice and help.

For many years he conducted seaside services at Weston Super Mare, with a short break in that period when he went for the same purpose to Lowestoft. He had his own unique style with the children and would lead the singing with his small concertina that he nicknamed 'Long John Silver'. He never

raised his voice or waved his arms around but seemed to keep perfect order in his rather old-fashioned way.

Bill toured the country widely and was just as much at home in open-air preaching as any other branch of the work. Many people trusted the Saviour as a result of his ministry. One of these was Bill Crookes who has served as the Mission's Area Representative in Sheffield for many years. As I travel the country for deputation work, it is not unusual to meet folk who tell me that they came to know the Lord through the ministry of Bill Galyer.

Another feature of his years in the Mission was the consistent annual work he did in the fairground witness at Bridgwater, Barnstaple and Cambridge. His faithful visitation of the showground people, his sympathetic ear and his helpful advice broke down the barriers and won him many loyal friends among that group of people. This led to openings for the gospel, of course.



George Harris in the thick of the action

GEORGE HARRIS lived on the Wirral and was well-known in the many Brethren Assemblies around the Birkenhead and Liverpool areas. His wife, Ethel, was a constant support to him and held the family together during the

long periods of absence from home that the work demanded of George in those days. He was a fearless open-air worker and a great strength to the team in every situation. He also had a fruitful ministry and many could testify to the fact that they had been saved as a result of George's work for the Lord. He spent many of his summers conducting children's services on the beach at Blackpool.

George was the one that visited the famous racing tipster, Prince Monolulu, when he was in hospital. Prince Monolulu was a well-known figure at all the main race meetings of his day. With his distinctive feather head-dress and his usual cry of *"I've got a horse!"* he could attract the crowds wherever he went. He opposed the preachers of the Mission and gave them a hard time on many occasions but George held no grudges. He paid him a visit and was amazed to hear the ward sister say that he was the only visitor the patient had seen in a protracted stay. On the race course Prince Monolulu attracted thousands of followers but in his hour of need, only one person showed concern for him. Such is the ephemeral nature of man's applause! George patiently went through the gospel message with the sick man and his parting words to George were, *"Get the brethren to pray for me!"* Only the Lord knows what transactions were made in his last few days!

George had a wonderful gift of ministry to the Lord's people. There was something particularly rich about his Bible exposition and many will recall him with much affection. His colleagues who worked with him on his caravan also remember him with affection but it is mixed with a certain amount of exasperation! George was not the most organised person and his plans were often changed to suit a particular set of circumstances.

For example, one morning during a strike of bakery workers, George went off on foot to see if he could buy some bread for breakfast in the local town. His colleague, in this case Bob Loughborough, waited and waited and thought George must have met with an accident. He decided to trace George's route to the shops and see what had happened. When he arrived in the town, he found the bakery selling bread and a queue of people outside because bread

was so scarce. There was George, preaching to the people in the queue which meant a constantly changing congregation as people joined the queue and worked their way up the front to make their purchase before going on their way. Bob reckoned that George would have been there until the supply of bread ran out! Many similar stories could be told from his 20 years of service that concluded in 1970.

FREDDIE WALTERS had the nickname 'Fearless Fred' among the other members of staff. Fred stood just over 5 feet tall but was a spiritual giant when it came to open-air work. He was ready to take on all comers and his voice became louder and louder as the heckling increased. His 'face would become increasingly flushed as he hammered out the truths of the gospel in a noisy confrontation with the hecklers on Derby Day or in some other situation.



A meeting on Rhyl beach where Freddie's ministry was so fruitful

Fred and his beloved wife, Lilian, lived in Rhyl and the seaside campaigns on the beach there were some of the highlights of Freddie's' service in the Mission. Vast crowds of children gathered daily for the meetings, and the promenade would be thick with adults by the conclusion of those meetings. Gospels of John would be offered to those who wanted to follow up what they had heard and there would be a stream of people making their way

down from the promenade to the sands so that they could receive copies. They were fruitful campaigns and the Lord's blessing was evident from the increase that was seen.

Freddie and his junior colleagues travelled widely. Again it is not uncommon to hear testimonies of those who came into blessing through his ministry. I have heard of some in the Birmingham area, who were converted as a result of indoor campaigns that he conducted there. His was a fruitful ministry indeed. He finished his years of active service in April 1969.



Arthur was always at home in the children's work

ARTHUR CONEY seemed to be from a slightly different mould from those of many of his fellow workers. He was of a very sensitive nature and seemed diffident at times. Arthur was certainly a deep thinker and was a great student of Bible prophecy, producing an enormous chart of Bible dispensations that he showed me, rather hesitantly, on one occasion. Nevertheless he readily took his part in the open-air work and was a zealous member of the team, ably backed by his wife, Win.

He was extremely gifted musically and composed many choruses that were used widely in Mission circles. He was also clever with his hands and constructed models to illustrate his Bible stories for children's meetings. One of these illustrated the story of the house on the rock and the house on the sand, with the second house collapsing at the appropriate moment!

The partnership between Arthur Coney and Charlie Biddle is legendary in the annals of the Mission. They served together for over 20 years and a separate book could be written about their exploits in the years of their partnership. When not engaged in team events they travelled the country extensively and conducted numerous children's campaigns. They were known to the children as 'Uncle Jim and Uncle John'. Seaside services at Southsea were a regular part of their programme and the seed of God's word must have been sown in the hearts of thousands of children as a result of all their labours.



Charlie in action on Epsom Downs

CHARLIE BIDDLE was looking through 'The Christian' early in 1949 and spotted an advert for workers that were needed in The Open-Air Mission. The question from 1 Chronicles 29:5 was in the advert, *"Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?"* Charlie looked at the question and saw it as a direct challenge from the Lord Himself! He immediately responded in his heart, *"Lord, I'm willing!"* He applied to the Committee and was accepted. Thus commenced 31 years of service as a front-line evangelist, with the strong and constant support of his wife, Doris.

Charlie was a tower of strength in every situation. Team leaders did not have to ask Charlie to be the first speaker at any given event. As soon as the team

arrived, Charlie would be making a start while the rest of us were sorting out our Bibles and tracts! Hecklers would rail against him but could not match Charlie's powerful voice and winning way. He seemed to thrive on the opposition and loved nothing more than lifting up his Saviour's Name before the crowds.

He also had a special gift when dealing with policemen. As he and Arthur were touring, they would park the caravan at a suitable spot in one of the towns through which they were passing, open up the loud speaker flaps and get on with their job of proclaiming the old, old story of Jesus and His love. Those were days when double yellow lines were appearing in town centres and a policeman came up to Charlie while Arthur was preaching one day. *"You can't park there!"* stated the policeman forcefully; *"Can't you see that it says that parking is for unloading only?"* *"But we are unloading, officer,"* replied Charlie with a smile. *"What are you unloading?"* asked the policeman, looking puzzled. *"We're unloading seed,"* said Charlie in his most courteous voice, *"Precious seed!"* *"I didn't realise that,"* said the policeman, *"Carry on sir,"* as he walked away.

EDDIE DUNBAVAND is another name that will be known to many of our supporters. Eddie commenced 37 years of service in May 1937. He was led to the Lord in a campaign at Urmston under the ministry of Albert Long, another well-known name in the annals of the Mission. (Albert spent many years as Scottish Secretary of the Mission and exercised a most fruitful ministry, especially through the war years.) Eddie was a fearless preacher of righteousness and was ready to take on any threatening situation. For many years he was team leader and would have charge of the witness at some of the great open-air events that are a regular part of the Mission's programme, such as Chester, Epsom and Ascot Races and some of the Fairground work.



Eddie presents a prize to this young lady

Eddie did regular winter deputation tours to Devon and Cornwall leaving his wife, Muriel, to cope with home and family. He also was from a Brethren Assembly, Bedford Row Gospel Hall in Worthing, and made many friends for the Mission in numerous Assemblies in the West Country. People still talk in most affectionate terms about 'Dear Mr. Dunbavand' and they remember his ministry of God's Word to this day. He did not enjoy the best of health and had many operations that kept him out of front-line work for some periods of time. It is obviously impossible to estimate the influence he had for good and for God throughout that long period of service.

WILLIE DOCHERTY's period of service is one of the longest on record, having commenced in 1946 and only concluding in 1992! With the unstinting aid of his wife, Evelyn, particularly in the secretarial department, Willie was (and still is!) an all-rounder, as much at home on the race-course, in the fairground evening meeting, with the fairground children, in a seaside campaign, an indoor children's meeting, a prison Bible class, a ministry meeting or a ladies' meeting. He has more or less covered the country in the course of his service, especially north of the border and including visits to the Orkney and Shetland Isles.



A meeting in progress on the foreshore at Largs

He had three particular partnerships that proved to be effective and fruitful, one with Ray McKeown, one with Don Bridge and the other with Bob Mullin. One of the areas that Willie visited frequently for gospel outreach was the north part of Cumbria and between Carlisle and Whitehaven. Many people trusted the Saviour through those campaigns that were normally conducted in small village chapels and churches. Those contacts have been maintained down through the years as we see from the generous support for the Mission that still comes from that area every year.

No record of Willie's service for the Lord would be complete without reference to the seaside campaigns that were held for many years on the front at Largs in Ayrshire. What memorable times they were! In the early years of that witness, the services ran for 8 weeks and in the latter part for 6 weeks. It was not unusual to have 200 boys and girls gathered morning by morning taking part in the programme of choruses, Bible quizzes, memory verses, competitions and so on. Children would come forward after some of those meetings wanting to receive the Saviour for themselves. The Lord was undoubtedly at work, as is evidenced by the fact that some of those children went on to lives of great usefulness for the Lord, either in secular positions or in full-time service for the Lord both at home and abroad.

There was Una from Glasgow, who went as a missionary to Uruguay, now married to a pastor and with a pastor as her son-in-law. There is a United Church of Scotland minister who received the Lord at Largs as a boy of 12. Another boy received the Lord as a 9-year-old and went on to become a maths teacher. Another teenage girl became a history teacher and is a Sunday School superintendent. The list goes on and on and includes 11 year old Alan, who received the Lord as his Saviour at a teenage squash at Largs. His obvious love for the Lord and the change in his behaviour impressed his parents and they attended the seaside services the following summer. One evening they heard a message on 'The Lamb of God' and Alan's father left the meeting with tears streaming down his face. When they got home, he and his wife knelt down and received the Saviour. They were eager to tell Willie and Evelyn about this the following summer!

Holidaymakers strolling along the Largs promenade in the evenings would hear a child singing through the loudspeakers on GOOD NEWS CARAVAN and would stop at the open-air meeting. Very often there was a considerable crowd who would hear bright singing, testimonies of the Lord's power to save, question and answer sessions and a clear gospel message as the evening wore on. When copies of John's gospel were offered at the close of the meetings, there was always a demand for them and conversations with enquirers when the meeting had concluded would be a regular feature of those great meetings.

Willie is a wonderfully gifted open—air preacher and his handling of difficult situations is legendary. His eyes would light up as soon as a heckler started to shout and Willie's colleagues knew full well that the heckler was doomed to disappointment and failure. So many have gone away shaking their heads as if to say, *"It was a waste of time trying to get one over him!"*

BOB LOUGHBOROUGH always seemed to me to be the last of 'The Old Stagers'. His service commenced in 1961 and he spent time as junior evangelist to Freddie Walters and George Harris amongst others. While he was away from home for some 9 months every year, his wife, Pearl, kept the home fires burning, always supporting Bob 100%. He has been involved in countless children's campaigns. Many, many boys and girls have heard the glad tidings of salvation through Bob's years of faithful service and there are those whose testimonies refer to special campaigns conducted by Bob.



Making the message clear and plain

He was well known and loved by many Christian people in the Liverpool and Wigan areas and also in the Newcastle area. His winter deputation tours won

countless friends for the Mission and their support continues to this day. Bob has a wonderful love for the Word of God and constantly kept the focus of his co-workers correct by his pleas that we should "PREACH THE WORD!"

His service included the leadership of the team for a number of years after Willie Docherty's retirement and, even before that, he led the team for many years at the Hull Fair witness that takes place in October each year. It is a tough place for evangelistic outreach. The godlessness and iniquity are desperately sad to see. The opposition can be both vile and violent. It can be daunting for any Christian worker, especially new evangelists in the Mission. Bob would take them under his wing and help them through, his pastor's heart sensing what they were feeling. The last of 'the old stagers' retired in 1997.

Obviously no record of the staff in those days would be complete without reference to the secretary, ERNEST JEALOUS. He had joined the staff of the Mission in 1929 and was originally responsible for the Mission's publications but was asked by the Committee to assume the secretaryship in 1939. This meant that he was largely responsible for the Mission's activities throughout the Second World War, during the early days of which the London offices were evacuated to Hastings. His wife, Grace, was his constant companion and helpmeet.

Thereafter followed a long period of consistent Mission testimony under his able leadership. He was extremely gifted in both his literary ability and his public speaking. He travelled the country widely for deputation work, sharing many meetings in the early years with 'Happy Jim' of whom mention has already been made. He gained friends for the Mission wherever he went and good support was maintained throughout the many years of his service. One of his most important qualities was the way he inspired confidence in the work he represented among the Christian public at large.

He was an excellent editor of the Mission's publications and wrote a number of books about the Mission's work, including 'On The Beaten Track' which was published in the Mission's centenary year, 1953. He organised the first witness in Trafalgar Square in that year, at a time when London was buzzing with excitement over the coronation of our present queen. The Square was packed and the meeting was wonderfully blessed by God with hundreds of people responding to the offers that were made of John's gospels for those interested in following up what they had heard. An annual witness was held in the Square for many years thereafter.



Mr. Jealous in action on the hillside at Epsom

I counted it a privilege to work with him in the office as Assistant Secretary for some five years when I first joined the Mission. Undoubtedly I learned much from him, especially the great fund of stories about past workers that he delighted to tell. Following his retirement in 1974, he maintained his keen interest in all that the Mission was doing. He still loved to join the teams at Epsom and Ascot Races and he still travelled the country with me for deputation work. He revelled in meeting the friends he had made over his long period of service and in the opportunities to bring them up-to-date with news of the Lord's continuing blessing on the work. We shared hundreds of meetings and this continued throughout his years of retirement until the Lord called him home in 1997.

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Mention must be made at this point of the Committee of the Mission. Meetings are held on a bi-monthly basis and it is at those meetings that the oversight of every aspect of the work takes place. I had the privilege of working with almost twenty different Committee members over the years and have the warmest possible memories of each of them. I can honestly say that in my years of service there was never a moment of tension or strain in any of the meetings that took place, despite the fact that members came from a variety of backgrounds and denominations. There was always a true unity of purpose in desiring the spread of the gospel and I am delighted to put this on record!

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It has been wonderful to see God's providing workers down through the years. Unless a man is called into the work by God, he will not last long as an open-air preacher. It is a demanding calling, with many frustrations and discouragements, but we know that when the Lord calls a person to serve Him, He also equips that person. The Lord's provision financially through 150 years has been remarkable to observe but His provision of workers is an equally significant part of His supply. We give Him the glory!

CHAPTER EIGHT - BRINGING THE STORY UP-TO-DATE

The passing of the years bring inevitable changes in the world around us and throughout the history of the Mission there have had to be adjustments to the pattern of working according to the prevailing conditions. The needs of man's heart do not change; neither does God's remedy for sin. These are fixed points of reference, but the pattern of work in spreading the glad tidings of salvation does have to be considered and amended from time to time.

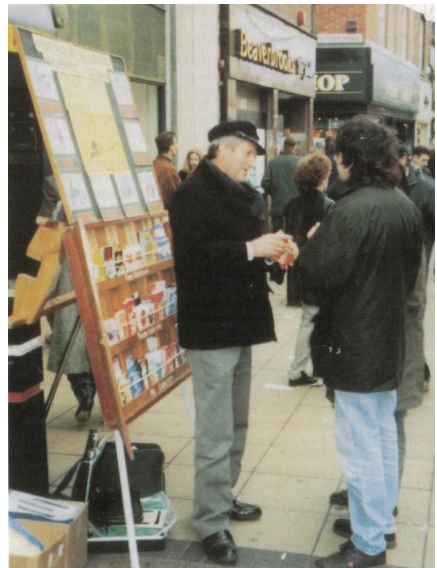
For many decades the Mission ran a fleet of motor caravans with two men living and working together on each van. This pattern of working served the Mission extremely well. It meant that the men were mobile and could respond to needs that arose in a given area at a particular time. One clear example of this is the way FAITH CARAVAN was able to get to Abertillery when the terrible mine disaster took place at the Arrael Griffin Colliery in 1960, which resulted in the death of 45 miners. Bill Galyer and Ron Spillards were working some miles north of this scene of grief but changed their plans when news of the disaster reached them. They were well received by the townsfolk and were able to distribute much literature to the grieving inhabitants.

But the large motor caravans were becoming something of a problem in certain situations. The volume of traffic was increasing rapidly and parking restrictions in town and city centres meant that it was no longer possible to park on busy streets to preach to the passing shoppers. New car parks were springing up but many of them were multi-storey and it was impossible to take the large vans into them. Alongside this problem was the dramatic rise in the price of petrol. Some of the old vans only gave 12 or 14 miles to the gallon. Another factor was the rapid spread of pedestrianised shopping precincts. These would be ideal situations for open-air preaching but the large vans would not be needed for such work. Was it time to consider a change in the *modus operandi*?

Consideration was given to this question by the Committee. Ideas were being put forward by the evangelists and, eventually, some far-reaching proposals were agreed. It was decided that the workers should be supplied with cars rather than motor caravans but that a number of trailer caravans should be purchased so that the team could still be self-sufficient as far as accommodation was concerned at team events such as the race course and fairground work. Those team events had been central to the witness of the Mission since its inception and there could be no question of them being abandoned!

As well as the change of vehicles, it was agreed that the men should be given the opportunity to spend less time away from home and seek rather to exploit the opportunities for open-air work in the towns and cities around their homes, thus taking full advantage of the pedestrianised precincts. Most of the members of staff were glad to make this change but two of the evangelists who had been Mission evangelists for a long period, namely Willie Docherty and Bob Loughborough, retained the old pattern until their respective retirements.

Other changes were afoot! The use of sketch boards in the Mission was pioneered by Edwin Baker and many of the other workers saw the value of this approach and adapted accordingly. It meant that the gospel message could enter the minds of the passers-by through both ear-gate and eye-gate! Using this method means that headings are added as a message develops or a gospel verse is on display as the preaching unfolds. (In one sense the use of visual aids was not new. We only have to think of Gawin Kirkham and his



Edwin working from a sketchboard

enormous picture of The Broad and Narrow Way!) Most boards now have a rack built into them for free Christian literature and it adds a certain sense of authority to the witness for the name and address of the Mission to be displayed.

Another development was in the production of literature. This was going right back to the original objects of the Mission as delineated by John MacGregor at its commencement. It was decided that the Mission should produce a range of gospel tracts, including specific titles for use on the race courses, in the fairgrounds and on seaside campaigns. Four general tracts were also put into production, and the original thought was that these would simply be used by the Mission staff. However, the tracts found favour among many other Christian people and the Committee gladly took the decision to make these tracts available for general use. Other titles were added and the number of tracts produced and distributed in recent years has risen to over 300,000 annually.

Various booklets were also produced including 'The Unique Jesus' which has proved useful in many situations. The material from this booklet has also been put on to cassettes and CDs and these have had a wide circulation. A series of Bible studies about the way of salvation in John's gospel was published under the title 'Life Through The Lord Jesus' and this is sent, along with a copy of John's gospel to the many enquirers who request further information as a result of the tracts that are distributed. The London office is dealing with just over 1,000 such enquiries each year and this has considerably increased the volume of work.

We hear from a number of these who say that they have truly received the Lord Jesus as their Saviour and these are followed up with further suitable literature being sent and the offer of help in getting linked to a local church. But the wide-ranging effects of this literature work are impossible to calculate. Tract slips come in from many countries in the world and we have no idea how the literature has arrived in these countries. In some cases it is

taken by Christians from this country as is shown by the following extract from a letter received in the office in 2001:

“Since I know one does not get much feedback from outdoor ministry, as a word of encouragement I will tell you the following story. The Christian brother I mentioned above, who was given some of your literature whilst in the U.K. had been witnessing in Johannesburg to a Catholic man from England and gave him your booklet ‘The Unique Jesus’ because the man said he was very confused about the roles of Mary and Jesus. To cut a long story short, the booklet had answered many of his questions and, after reading it, he asked my Christian friend to pray with him to be saved. This is a powerful demonstration of the eternal consequences of giving a booklet to someone which God used to save a man 6,000 miles away from where it was originally received!”

Another development of the work in recent years has been the Associate Membership scheme. In a sense, this was going back to the early days of the Mission when all the preachers were voluntary workers. The Mission wants to do all possible to encourage those who are engaged in regular open-air testimony. Those who are accepted as Associate Members are supplied with Mission literature free of charge, can receive help in applying for permits where necessary, are assured of the prayers of the Mission supporters, (their names appear in our Prayer Guide for this reason), and are invited to the Teaching Seminars that are held for the men of the Mission every two years. At present there are now 21 men on this list and they all seem to value the help given them in this way and are glad to have a positive link with a Society that is focusing on open-air work.

The idea of Teaching Seminars for the staff was put forward at one of the Committee Meetings by Richard Thomson. His reason was compelling. Our evangelists spend so much of their time giving out in preaching the gospel and ministering to others, surely there should be occasions when they take in from the ministry of other preachers. The

first one was held in January 1987 and they have been held every two years since.

Prior to this, in 1976, the Committee decided to hold the first Staff Conference for the workers and their families. This meant that the wives and children of the evangelists would come together with the men, (and the Committee Members and their families, plus retired workers), for two or three days of fellowship in a relaxed atmosphere. Ashburnham Place in Sussex was the venue and the event proved to be enormously valuable in strengthening the bonds between the respective families.

The wives had their own sessions where they were able to share some of the problems that they faced, especially at times when their husbands were away from home. The men were able to discuss issues of common interest and concern, with the objective of making the witness of the Mission more effective. Joint sessions were also held where the ministry of God's Word proved helpful and encouraging. The children had a full programme arranged for them and all seemed sad when the time for parting came on the Friday morning. Everyone concerned was clamouring for more such conferences and they have been held on a biennial basis ever since.



A recent Staff Conference

To finalise thoughts about conferences, consideration was given to organising a Conference For Supporters and the first one was arranged in October 1994. Those who attend these conferences love to hear the reports of the workers and to meet them on an informal basis. The programme includes Bible Ministry, Prayer Sessions, Question Times and Afternoon Outings as well as the reports from the front-line. These also are held every other year.

Another significant development in recent years is the use of the Mission's Bible Exhibitions. There are three available. The first one takes an overview of the whole Bible; the second focuses on the life of the Lord Jesus and the third covers the Acts of the Apostles. They consist of a series of pictures illustrating the theme on display boards. School children are shown round the exhibitions a class at a time and then have a questionnaire to complete before returning to their schools. The exhibitions have met with a most favourable response from schools in every part of the country.

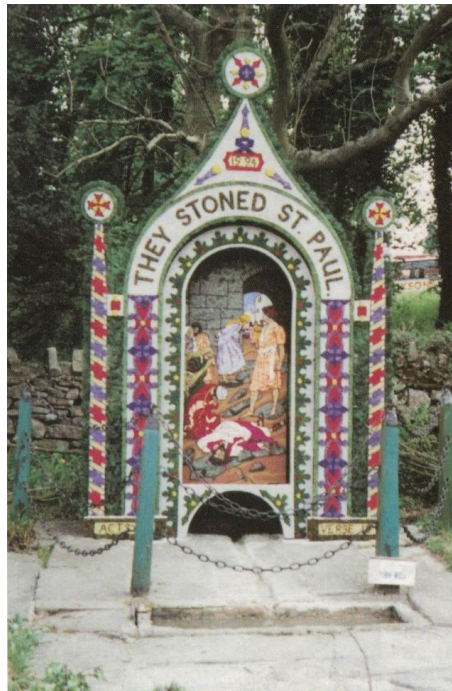


Some 10,000 children a year visit the Bible Exhibitions

For many children this is their first look at the Bible. Sadly they know virtually none of the well-known stories that we love so much. Teachers who accompany the classes often comment on the good behaviour of the children while they are hearing events from the Bible. Each exhibition has a series of costumes so that local church members can dress as characters from the stories and tell their part in the proceedings. This really brings the stories to

life for today's children and these occasions will be in their memories for a long time. Approximately 10,000 children a year pass through the exhibitions and we feel that it is a valuable adjunct to the open-air emphasis which characterises most of the Mission's work. (A new exhibition based on John Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress' is just coming on stream and will be a further extension to this side of the work.)

There is never any shortage of opportunities for open-air work. One of the best new opportunities opened up during my period of service as secretary was at two of the Well Dressing events that take place in Derbyshire each year. The villages concerned are Tissington and Youlgreave and both have thousands of visitors for 5 or 6 days to admire the well dressings, which are undoubtedly works of art. At these two events, the dressings set up around the villages are always based on Bible themes, which means that the visitors are looking at Bible pictures as they make their way around the beautiful villages.



One of the beautiful well dressings at Tissington

The Mission has the use of the Methodist Chapels in both cases and a video entitled 'The Making and the Message of the Well Dressings' is shown every half-hour throughout the period when visitors are present. It means starting at about 11 a.m. and continuing until 7.30 or 8 p.m. These people see the 15-minute video which explains how the well dressings are made and gives a straightforward gospel message from past years' pictures. At the conclusion of the video, one of the staff give a five minute gospel challenge and offer copies of John's Gospel to any who want to think further about their need of salvation.

These are two great opportunities in the Mission's calendar. The programme is seen by upwards of 4,000 people each year and over 5.00 of these go on their way having received copies of John's Gospel with the promise that they are going to read them. Some churches organise coach trips to these events as part of their outreach, knowing that unsaved neighbours and friends will hear the gospel in a relaxed environment.

Another event at which there is now a regular witness is the Eisteddfod at Llangollen. This annual event draws in thousands of people from all over the world. International teams come to contend in the many musical competitions that are organised and, of course, there are thousands of visitors for this special occasion. It means that thousands of tracts can be distributed and contacts are made with visitors from every part of the globe. There is also a good opportunity for preaching the gospel from the rocks in the River Dee. We are glad to share in the witness that goes on throughout those days in July.

The Edinburgh Festival is also an event at which we have been able to help the witness. In the latter half of August each year, the city is bursting with visitors from all over the world and there is no difficulty in finding crowds among whom the outreach can take place. Working with the local Christians, tract work occupies the team in the afternoons and the preaching is added in the evenings. It is one of the few places these days where a standing crowd can be expected as the preacher holds forth the Word of Life. Thousands

upon thousands of passing visitors will hear something of the gospel in that situation and many will take with them the tracts that are distributed.

The Mission has always been concerned to encourage other believers to be involved in open-air work and seminars have been held at a good number of churches around the country for this purpose. These are often the spur needed for a regular witness to be started and maintained. Alongside this, we have invited others to join the witness at three of our regular team events and it has been encouraging to see teams of up to 15-16 people taking part at Chester during Race Week, at London early in June and at Hull Fair in October. These are all great opportunities for holding forth the Word of Life among the crowds and blessing has resulted.

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So the work goes on apace and, in many ways, it is exactly the same work that John MacGregor started 150 years ago. The Mission has never needed to change its name, as has been necessary for some Christian Societies. It has never had to change its emphasis or its original objectives. The task throughout the many years of its history has been simply to take the gospel message out to the people around us so that they might hear the glad tidings of salvation. We want them to know about the love of God, that is so vast that He sent His Son into a world of sin to make a way of reconciliation to Himself. We want them to know that the Lord Jesus died for them at Calvary and that His blood alone can cleanse from sin's stain and we must warn them that they are in danger of God's eternal wrath if they fail to come to Him in repentance and faith. We want them to know that the Lord Jesus rose again from the sealed grave as the Victor over sin, death, hell and all the powers of darkness and that He is now seated at the right hand of God, ready and able to save to the uttermost all who come to God through Him. Paul's rhetorical question in Romans 10:14 often goes through our minds, *"How shall they hear without a preacher?"*

The celebration of 150 years of the Mission's work is primarily an occasion when glory must be ascribed to our God and we ask all who read this book to join us in giving praise to Him! Undoubtedly it was God who put into the mind of John MacGregor the need for a Mission which would concentrate on taking the gospel to those who seldom, if ever, attend a place of worship. From its humble beginnings in 1853, the work of the Mission has come right down through a century and a half and one can only conclude that God has had His Hand upon the work. Throughout that long period, the workers and the finances required have been forthcoming. Hundreds testify to the spiritual help they have received through the testimony of the Mission. We can only concur with the psalmist that *"THIS IS THE LORD'S DOING and it is marvellous in our eyes!"*

We look into an unknown future with many dramatic changes taking place in society and cannot predict what is going to happen in even a few years' time. But our God is the Sovereign Lord of the Heavens and we have a sure conviction that:

*"He who has helped us hitherto
Will help us all our journey through!"*

We are in His great hands and cannot be in a safer place. He knows the end from the beginning and has promised guidance and provision to His children. It was Hudson Taylor who said, *"God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supplies!"* Such truths are more than enough to give us a quiet confidence that the Mission will continue to prove that our Heavenly Father is indeed JEHOVAH JIREH — the Lord our Provider!