

## The Pentecostal work in Southampton

The Pentecostal work in Great Britain started in the early years of the twentieth century. The Welsh Revival had stirred the hearts of many people and news was coming from many places that God was moving in power. There was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Asuza Street in Los Angeles and in Oslo under the ministry of T. B. Barratt. It happened again in All Saints Parish Church, Sunderland, where 'the fire of God fell and burnt up the debt.' People travelled there from all parts of the country and many were baptised in the Holy Spirit. This took place during the ministry of the Vicar, Rev. A. A. Boddy. On returning to their local churches, many people found that there was no place for speaking in tongues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit and some were actually removed from fellowship. Thus in areas all over the country small groups of believers met to worship God and fellowship in a new way which was not tied to a denominational structure. Many of these meetings were in small huts or rented halls and some took place in homes. There was no definite structure at that time and the small assemblies grew as separate entities. A magazine was produced at Sunderland and this was entitled 'Confidence.'

### *The First Pentecostal Meetings in Southampton.*

We cannot speak at length about the early days of Pentecost in Southampton, but it is known that there was a small assembly of people who met in the town. At that time Southampton was not a City. The leader of the work was Mr. George Tilling, a business-man, who was at one time the Mayor. He had previously served as Consul for Chile and Vice-Consul for Spain and was fluent in both French and Spanish. He was a gracious and godly man and some of us knew him personally in his later years when he lived in London. He would sometimes come to Southampton and invariably visited our work in Millbrook Road, especially as his niece was a member of our congregation. When he died, she showed me his Bible; it was covered on many pages with his meticulous notes, which showed something of the deep spiritual nature of this man of God. It has been said of him that 'the gold of a gracious and Christ-like character' could be seen in his life. From the year 1929 he served for twelve years as Missionary Secretary-Treasurer to Assemblies of God and for a further five years as Missionary Treasurer. We know little of the work in those early days, although I remember attending some meetings with my father around the year 1928. I think it was somewhere in Shirley and I remember one of the leaders was a tram driver named Sid Stone, who would shout 'Hallelujah!' from the front of his tram when he saw another believer in the street. Miss Candy was one of the early Pentecostals in the town and it is fairly certain she was a member of Mr. Tilling's congregation, as was a saintly lady named Miss Tripp. There was also a meeting held in the home of a Mr. Coles at Bursledon, opposite what today is Moody's Shipyard. On one occasion the meeting in Shirley was addressed by a Pastor Pomeroy, who had reputedly been raised from the dead! It was in one of those meetings that I first saw 'Redemption Tidings,' which was the official organ of Assemblies of God and was originally edited by Mr. J. Nelson Parr.

### *The Work of the Spirit of God as it moved to the South of England.*

A number of small Pentecostal works were in existence in Bournemouth and one in Southsea under the ministry of Mr. Ernest W. Moser and together with the small assembly in Southampton this was the sum total of the Pentecostal representation in this area. In those early years the Pentecostal work made little impact on the town of Southampton, but something was happening elsewhere which would change the situation completely. A number of young potential leaders were being raised at a Bible School in Preston under the tuition of Mr. Thomas Myerscough. The students included such young men as W. F. P. Burton, James Salter, who became pioneers of the Congo Evangelistic Mission, and George Jeffreys. At the Sunderland Convention in 1913, Mr. William Gillespie of Belfast heard George Jeffreys preach. He felt led to send him a letter which included three ten shilling notes and an offer to preach in Northern Ireland. From then on the Lord wonderfully blessed the ministry of this young man from Wales. Together with his friends he formed the 'Elim Evangelistic Band,' which later became the 'Elim Foursquare Gospel Alliance' and after extensive ministry in Northern Ireland they came to England in 1921, holding a campaign at Leigh-on-Sea in Essex. God began to move in miraculous power in this country and vast crowds of people gathered as the meetings spread through the larger towns and cities. Hundreds of people were saved and healed of all kinds of bodily afflictions and many were baptised in the Holy Spirit. Soon the campaigns were to come to the South Coast and Bournemouth was the first place to feel the mighty impact of the power of God in the meetings which were

held in the great tent at Moordown. It is known that over fifteen hundred people were saved and multitudes were healed. Southampton was soon to follow.....

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### The Mighty Move of God's Spirit in Southampton.

News of what God was doing in 1926 was becoming known elsewhere. At the beginning of the year there had been a great time of blessing in the campaign at Plymouth and this was followed by a short campaign at St. Peter Port, Guernsey. The Bournemouth campaign started in July and people flocked to the meetings by bus and tram. The following year George Jeffreys came to Southampton and held a great campaign. After the initial meeting at which a number of people were saved and several healed, the meetings grew in size as people gathered at the Central Hall to hear this powerful evangelist who preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ – the Saviour, Healer, Baptiser and Coming King. As they came, people accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and as the healing lines took place, wonderful miracles were effected by the power of God. A number of remarkable miracles were recorded during that campaign. One was Miss Florence Munday, who had been an invalid for about fifteen years and had to be wheeled about in a bath chair. Her knee was completely destroyed and in splints. The doctors had told her that she would never walk again, but after prayer she was able to walk across the hall, healed by the power of God. My mother had fallen down some steps at Winchester and had become paralysed. She could not look after a small boy and so I had to live with my aunt across the road. My father was in business and one of his customers, Mr. Frank Hurst of Awbridge, told him of the meetings in Southampton. We lived at Romsey, but he decided to go and laid my mother across the back seat of a taxi. On arrival at the meeting she was laid on the platform and when George Jeffreys prayed for her, she was completely healed and went home on the bus! Many other healings took place during those meetings and almost a thousand souls came to know the Lord as their Saviour.

### The Formation of Pentecostal Churches in the Area.

A phrase which came into existence in those days was: 'George Jeffreys always pens his sheep.' This was true, as after every campaign a church was established in the area. The Southampton church was opened at Park Road, Freemantle and another was opened by Miss Munday at St. Monica Road, Sholing. On returning to Romsey my mother and father were instrumental in the formation of an Elim church in that town. Another church was soon to be established in Eastleigh and before long the Pentecostal message took root in Andover. In the years which followed, Mr. Wellstead of Totton obtained a piece of ground at the top end of Water Lane and a church was eventually opened, although at the time of its commencement it was independent. Other believers who had been moved by the power of God in the Southampton meetings started a work on the Western side of Southampton Water, meeting at Dibden Purlieu and finally at Hardley Green. Many other churches were affected by the Pentecostal message, but not all moved on in the blessing. One notable exception was The Gospel Hall at Canada Road, West Wellow, which joined the Elim movement as an affiliated church and is still in operation today.

Little is known of the history of the small assembly which had originally existed in the town, but it must have joined the number of autonomous churches which became known as Assemblies of God in Great Britain and Ireland after its formation in 1924, Mr. Tilling becoming Missionary Secretary-Treasurer in 1929. Its work continued throughout the years. Meanwhile the Elim work in Freemantle continued apace and there was a rich variety of ministry both from Pastor Trevor who was the first minister after the formation of the church and those who followed in the general turn-round of pastors in the Elim churches. Many missionaries regularly visited the port of Southampton on their way to the mission field and on their return for a time of furlough. Often they would be present for a meeting and would share their experiences.

### The Great Southampton Campaign in 1937.

In the early part of the year news filtered through that Principal George Jeffreys was planning to hold another campaign in Southampton and it took place in the Summer of that year. There was a large open space in Commercial Road at the back of some shops on the corner of Morris Road and here a huge tent was erected

to house the 'Revival and Divine Healing Campaign.' George Jeffreys and his Revival Party arrived and the meetings commenced with hearty Pentecostal singing led by Mr. R. E. Darragh with Mr. A. W. Edsor at the piano. Crowds gathered nightly to those meetings and many young people attended to hear the message.

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Night after night the Gospel went forth in the Holy Spirit power and anointing and there were meetings in the afternoons. Once again people were born again of the Spirit of God and many healings took place. Although we do not have the actual numbers it is known that God moved in a mighty way to save and heal and many nominal Christians returned to faith in Jesus Christ. God had moved again in revival power in Southampton and the intense longing of many people for more of the Holy Spirit was satisfied as they began to speak in tongues and manifest the gifts of the Spirit. Revival was in the air and the Gospel was proclaimed on the trams and buses and in the open air, particularly every Sunday afternoon outside the Cowherds Inn on Southampton Common. At the close of the campaign the meetings continued in the Elim Church at Park Road, Freemantle under the ministry of Pastor Lemuel Morris. Many new faces were to be seen in the meetings and the church was packed to capacity. One of the new converts was a man who had been a 'blackshirt,' a follower of the radical political group led by Sir Oswald Mosley. He was fearless in the open air meetings which were common in those days. The theatres did not open on Sundays at that time and because the meetings were so packed with people, often on Sunday evenings they were held in the Grand Theatre, which was near the bus station opposite the Civic Centre, or in the Palace Theatre in Above Bar.

### **The Pentecostal Work in Southampton in the War Years.**

This was the pattern in the late 1930's in Southampton, but things were to change as time drew on. The political situation in Europe was causing great concern as Germany was re-arming and making demands upon neighbouring states. War clouds were gathering and with the German invasion of Poland, we were at war with Nazi Germany on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1939. Things went on much as usual in Southampton in those days, and it was not until the miracle of Dunkirk that things began to change. Nothing significant was happening in the local churches for a time, but trouble was taking place nationally in the Elim movement. Just before the war, George Jeffreys had been to Sweden and saw the great Pentecostal work which had taken place under the ministry of Lewi Pethrus in Stockholm. He came back to this country, determined to change the structure of the Elim movement. This met with considerable opposition and there was a division in the churches. There was a lot of propaganda as leaflets were printed and distributed throughout the country and as no agreement could be reached, George Jeffreys left the Elim movement which he had brought into being and formed 'The Bible Pattern Church Fellowship.' Churches were now forced to make up their minds and in July 1940 the Southampton Elim church was changed by a show of hands into the Bible Pattern Church. Needless to say, many people were saddened by this turn of events and many left to attend other churches. Those who were faithful to Elim began to meet in the Foresters Hall in Shirley, whilst the bulk of the congregation continued to worship at Park Road, Freemantle, under the leadership of Pastor Lemuel Morris. The war was now reaching a crucial stage and many young people had been called into the armed forces. Southampton and other cities suffered a terrible bombardment and the church at Park Road was struck by a bomb, rendering it unfit for use as a place of worship. The meetings then took place in the minor hall and a few rooms outside the main building. Meanwhile, the argument continued with the Elim Headquarters over the legal entitlement of the building and this continued for some time.

### **A Time of Change was now taking place.**

Due to the need for a minister at the Middlesbrough church, the Bible Pattern Church Headquarters transferred Lemuel Morris to that city and someone had to be found to take over the Southampton church. Robert Smith was a friend of George Jeffreys and had originally been the Dean of the Elim Bible College. He had resigned from the movement and for some time was living in Cornwall as a chicken farmer. He was called back into the ministry and took over as pastor of the Southampton church. He was a strong and forceful preacher and was well liked by the congregation. He was originally a miner at Dowlais in South Wales and soon found that an old friend of his, William George, who had also been a miner at Merthyr Tydfil was the

pastor of the Romsey Elim church. Thus they renewed their friendship and worked in harmony, despite their denominational differences. Robert Smith was an honourable man and it was not long before he realised that there was something amiss. They were worshipping as a Bible Pattern church in a building which was legally owned by the Elim movement. In fact, this had been the bone of contention since the beginning of the split between the two groups, and Elim had repeatedly tried to get the building back. Robert Smith told his oversight that he was not happy with the situation and said they should do the honourable thing and get out of the building. He therefore began to look for another place in which to worship.

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Some time in 1945 the Bible Pattern church moved into the Oddfellows Hall in St. Mary Street, near the Kingsland Square Market. At that time the members of the small Elim church who had been meeting at the Foresters Hall, returned to Park Road and re-established it as an Elim church, as it is to this day. The Oddfellows Hall was not the best place to hold services as at times the sound of moving beer barrels could be heard and the atmosphere was often pervaded by the smell of liquor. However, the meetings continued and the Lord blessed the work, until a difference arose between the pastor and some of the members of the congregation who followed the particular doctrine which was held by their leader, George Jeffreys. As Robert Smith could not agree to preach this doctrine a special meeting was held with George Jeffreys in attendance and those who wished to uphold this point of view left and formed a Bible Pattern church which met in the Foresters Hall in Shirley.

#### **The Formation of a New Pentecostal Church.**

The congregation now worshipping in the Oddfellows Hall had no denominational affiliation. They did not belong to Elim or the Bible Pattern fellowships and decided to form a new assembly under the name of the 'Southampton Pentecostal Mission.' The meetings continued under the ministry of Robert Smith, until in 1946 it was felt that the time was right to do something about a building. Mrs. Harland, who had been a member of the Elim church in the early days, had a house at 79 Millbrook Road. It had been bombed during the war and was then just a heap of rubble, but she wanted it to be used to build a church and she offered it to Southampton Pentecostal Mission for the sum of £350. A special church meeting was held in July 1946 and the decision was made to buy the land. It was the aftermath of the war and money was tight in those days. The church had only about £360 as its total funds, but took a step of faith to build a new church, although the stipulation was that they were not to go into debt! In those days materials were very difficult to obtain and timber was severely rationed. Plans had to be drawn up and no work could be undertaken until April 1947, when all the men who were young enough to work spent their evenings and Saturdays at the site. There were many difficulties, but they were all overcome. Half way through there was no money left and a prayer meeting was held on a Wednesday night. On the Sunday it was announced that £150 had come in and so the work continued. The new building was constructed by voluntary labour and was opened in October 1947. It was rough, but improvements were made as time went on and it served the congregation for the next twenty years. There was much labour and zeal expended in the building of the new church, but there was a lack of Pentecostal manifestation and the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit. This was beginning to worry some of the people.

#### **Blessing under the Ministry of William Hartley in the Assembly of God.**

The local Assembly of God had been meeting in a hall over an agricultural store in Portsmouth Road at Woolston, and had moved to the Oddfellows Hall when the church at Millbrook Road was opened. William Hartley and his wife, from Blackburn in Lancashire had taken over the work. He was a man on fire for God and he moved under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The meetings were charged with the power of God and people came from other churches to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It was a time of great blessing and a number of believers left the work at Millbrook Road to be part of this move of the Spirit of God.

#### **The Outpouring of the Power of the Holy Spirit at Millbrook Road.**

Things were not going well at Millbrook Road at that time. The people loved the pastor, Robert Smith, but he was not able to lead them into the full blessing of Pentecost. He was a remarkable preacher and he held firmly to the great truths of the Word of God. He was great in visiting and a redoubtable contender for the faith in the open air, but the meetings were not moving in the power of God. As Easter 1949 dawned he was away and on the Easter Monday a number of the young people met together by the seaside. They were concerned about the state of the work and decided to leave the beach and travel to Verwood in Dorset, where Winston Shearing was pastor of a Pentecostal church called Bethel Chapel. Meetings were being held in a larger church in Verwood and the speaker was William Hartley. At the close of the meeting he prayed for those who wanted to receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and a number were mightily touched by the power of God, some were moved to tears as God dealt with them and one received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in

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bed at about one o'clock in the morning! The following evening was the Youth Meeting, but the programme was scrapped and the young people spent the entire evening on their knees, weeping and crying out to God as the Holy Spirit moved upon them. The same thing happened again the following evening and it became evident that God was doing something in the lives of the young people – something that would inevitably change the church. The pastor returned after Easter and he soon found that the whole church was moving in a new direction. He was a gracious man and tried to go along with things, but within a few months he felt that it was time for him to leave. He left on good terms and eventually moved to Titchfield, where he did a great work for God in one of the local churches.

### **The emergence of a New Ministry.**

For some time the church at Millbrook Road was without a pastor, but after much prayer and seeking the face of the Lord, Winston Shearing from Verwood took over the leadership of the work. He was a godly man and a true servant of the Lord, well liked by the people and well known in the area as he was the home superintendent of the Gospel to Brazil Faith Mission (now the E.A.B.). He was essentially an evangelist, but he had the heart of a pastor and the church progressed steadily under his leadership. Young people were taught the Word of God and a strong bond of fellowship was forged with the International Bible Training Institute at Burgess Hill in Sussex. Most of the young people went on to serve the Lord, some as missionaries, some into the ministry in this country and others to work for the Lord in other areas. One young man in particular, after his training in the church, graduated from the Kenley Bible College, entered the ministry of Assemblies of God and served for a time as a member of the executive council.

The church was independent in those days, but was open to Pentecostal ministry from other churches in this country, particularly from those who served in Assemblies of God. Through contacts which Mr. Shearing had made, James Forsyth and a number of young ministers from Northern Ireland paid frequent visits and their ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit drew people from many places. James Forsythe came on one occasion and the blessing of God was so great that the meetings went on for seven weeks without a break! The Easter Conventions were always packed to the doors and people gathered from a wide area around. There was a great deal of outreach activity in those days and a number of methods were used to bring the message of the Gospel to the people. On one occasion the Marlands Hall, near the Civic Centre became the venue for two months on Sunday evenings to reach the people in the centre of the city. Open air meetings were a regular occurrence, particularly on Saturday nights, when some from other churches joined together at 9 o'clock outside the Horse and Groom Public House in East Street. The meetings were held at all times of the year even when snow was on the ground and souls were won for the Lord as a result. On one occasion a Chinese seaman was saved through the open air meeting. He brought others to the meetings and they all gave their hearts to the Lord. They were all baptised in water and presented with Chinese Bibles!

### **The Elim Church in Park Road, Freemantle.**

After the people returned to their own building it took some time for them to increase. The first pastor was George Canty and they met for some time in the minor hall and a couple of small outside rooms. Eventually a new pastor arrived. His name was Jack Newman. The time had come to rebuild the church and a brand new edifice was erected on the site of the bombed building. It was light and airy and far different from the original building which had been destroyed by enemy action during the war. People gathered from the other Pentecostal churches on the opening night and prayed for God's blessing upon the work. At one time they brought an evangelist from Canada. His name was Lorne Fox and meetings were held in the Central Hall, with many people saved and healed. The pastor who followed was Charles Brookes. He came in 1956 and started a youth work in Redbridge, Aldermoor and Freemantle. He arranged coaches to the Royal Albert Hall on Easter Mondays and the Whitsun Conventions which had always been a feature of the church were once more bringing in many people. He formed a choir which sang in Trafalgar Square and in many other churches in the area. Charles Brookes was an evangelist and was followed by Arnold Brooks, who was a true shepherd and a great encourager. He had been a miner – 'from the pit to the pulpit' summarised his ministry, which saw the congregation increase, with a strong choir and musical ministry. The following ministers were J. Craig Kennedy

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from Northern Ireland and a member of the Executive Council, W. J. Maybin who was a lecturer at the Elim Bible College, J. Kay, from Scotland, who was a real pastor and an excellent teacher. The present minister is Brian Wallis, a young man whose ministry is blessed by the Lord.

### **The Bible Pattern Church in Shirley.**

After a time of worshipping in the Foresters Hall in Shirley, the leaders felt that it would be better to have a place of their own in which to hold their services. Accordingly a piece of ground was obtained at the top end of Cannon Street, near the corner with St. James Road, and here a building was constructed to house the congregation. It was in the form of a Nissen hut and it served for a number of years, George Batten being the leader of the church. They had ministry from a number of people and at one time Mr. Fisher, who had been a missionary in China was the speaker. The church eventually moved to a new location. An evangelical church had been in existence for many years in the main Shirley Road, but due to falling numbers and an ageing congregation, the Bible Pattern church was able to secure the building. They set about the work of changing the appearance of the church and made it into an attractive place of worship. The work has carried on there for many years, with a number of events and special speakers, including the evangelist Peter Scothern. A feature of the church is the large notice board facing the main road, which provides a message for the many people who travel that route. After the death of the pastor, George Batten, the work was supervised by Jim Palmer, who brought his many years of experience to help for a time. He has now left to deal with his Barnabas Ministry work and the church is now under the leadership of a recently appointed pastor, David Vincent. He had originally been in the church, but moved into the New Forest and was worshipping at Hardley Green.

### **The Assembly of God and its change of location.**

The ministry of William Hartley in the Oddfellows Hall had been a time of great blessing and a tremendous outpouring of the Spirit of God. When Mr. Hartley left, Don Harper took over the pastorate of the work. They remained in the Oddfellows Hall until some time in the 1960's. Mr. Harper lived in Cannon Street, Shirley and as Winston Shearing was looking for a house in Southampton, they came to an arrangement by which they changed houses. This left Winston Shearing free to move to Southampton to pastor the Church at Millbrook Road, whilst Don Harper took over Winston Shearing's bungalow at Verwood and became pastor of the Verwood Bethel Chapel. The Assembly of God was not long without a pastor, as Mr. Holmes came to take over the work. He was a gracious man and was well liked by everyone who knew him. When he left, Mr. Weare became the pastor and he was faithful in the work of the church. Some time in the 1960's they moved to a Scout Hut in Cranbury Terrace, finally worshipping for a short time above some offices in Carlton Place. The church needed a place of their own and this became possible when they were able to purchase a building

in Northumberland Road and they were established there for a number of years. For a time the church was led by Michael Vincent and Herbert Piddock, until a new pastor arrived and Paul Finn and his wife Janice took over the work. The church progressed well under his ministry, but a new road scheme was planned for the area and the church had to be demolished. An Anglican church in nearby Northam Road was available and the church, known as Southampton Christian Fellowship, was able to move in to their new permanent location, St. Augustine's. Today Paul Finn is doing a great work for God in a very needy area of the city and for a time the church provided a spiritual home for the Southampton Asian Christian Outreach.

### *The Apostolic Church.*

The Apostolic church is a Pentecostal work based in Wales and had branches in many parts of the country. They had a work in Bournemouth, but had no representation in Southampton. They decided to hold some meetings in the latter half of the twentieth century. They hired a hall in Dean Road, Bitterne and held a series of meetings. They were not able to establish a work in the city and the meetings were eventually closed.

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### *The Pentecostal Work in the Totton Area.*

The independent work which Mr. Wellstead opened at the top end of Water Lane, Totton, continued in that form for some time, under the name of 'Ebenezer,' but it became a Bible Pattern Church upon the formation of that movement and the name was changed to 'The Church of the Cross.' During the war years there was little activity at the building, apart from the fact that Mr. Strong, who had been a member of the Elim Church in Freemantle, walked across to Totton every Sunday to run a Sunday School. When the Bible Pattern Church took over the work, it was under the leadership of Pastor Gilbert Marsh, but when the time came for him to move from Totton to oversee a church in the London area the work was led by the deputy leader of the Bible Pattern churches, Lt. Cmdr. Donald H. Macmillan. After his death, his wife Una took over the church until she moved to Clapham in London to take charge of the work in that place. Roy Chewter, who was a Bible Pattern pastor from Newbury had some input into the church in those days and he was followed by a young man called Joe Snowden. The pastor at the present time is Ron Archer.

### *The Elim Church in Sholing.*

This was started after the great crusade by Principal George Jeffreys in 1927. It was as a result of the miraculous healing of Miss Florence Munday and her sister Ivy became the first pastor. The church had originally been known as 'The People's Mission' and it is thought there was some connection with the Primitive Methodists in the early days. A number of pastors have followed Ivy Munday. Ron White, who was a member of the Elim Church in Park Road, Freemantle, served in that capacity for a number of years and John Holes, also from the church in Park Road was pastor for a considerable time. The pastor now is Alan Higgins.

### *The Southampton Pentecostal Fellowship.*

During the period of the 1950/60's a spirit of unity arose between the Pentecostal churches and a series of rallies and united prayer meetings took place under the title of 'The Southampton Pentecostal Fellowship.' The rallies were well attended by people from the churches in the city and by many who came in from the country churches in the New Forest and elsewhere. The meetings were usually held in the Marlands Hall, near the Civic Centre and speakers came from a number of places. The gatherings were times of great blessing and most people were glad to join together with friends from other churches. Some of the rallies were held in other areas, such as a school at Hardley, but most were in Southampton, because it was an easier location for

the people to attend. The Marlands Hall has since been demolished and the B.B.C. now occupies the site. The prayer meetings were held in different churches in Southampton, some of them as all-night gatherings. On one occasion, about three o'clock in the morning when the going was rather heavy, someone started a chorus, 'Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home.' The leaders must have taken the hint, because not long after they decided to close the meeting for the night!

### *The Church of the Open Door at Millbrook.*

Among those who were drawn to the ministry of William Hartley was a young couple from South Africa, Alec and Vera Stanbury who lived in the town centre. Towards the end of the 1950's a great expanse of housing was taking place in Southampton and a large estate was being built at Millbrook. Vera and Alec were moved by the council to a flat on the estate. They invited young people to their home, but it became too small and the vision for a church was born. The young people themselves chose the name, 'The Church of the Open Door.' A number of the people who lived on the West side of the city felt constrained to help and evangelise the area and they started by holding open air meetings on the greens, led by Edgar Parnell with his accordion. Many children were attracted by these meetings and Sunday Schools were set up at Newlands School and the Queen Mary School in Cumbrian Way. Several sites had been earmarked for places of worship and when one

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became available at the corner of Wimpson Lane and Kendal Avenue, the people felt they should do something about trying to buy it. The site was going for a reasonable price from the City Council and they got the money together and purchased the land. It took much time and effort to get the plans drawn up and when the approval came they were ready to go. It was a derelict site and much work was needed before a church could be built. The big drawback was money and intense fund-raising was undertaken before they were able to purchase the iron girders on which the building would be raised. In the meantime they felt that something should be done to erect a small place of meeting on the site and a wooden building was obtained and erected for this purpose. A number of the people had come from the church at Millbrook Road and they started with the blessing of the leadership thereof. Although the money was not available at that time to build the church, it was decided as a step of faith to lay the foundations. Accordingly the men from Millbrook Road joined with the ones who were now on the Millbrook Estate to dig the foundations. They paid for the concrete and laid it in readiness for the forthcoming structure.

As time wore on they held meetings in the small hut and Sunday Schools were held in the day schools, with various outreach meetings on the greens. They held times of prayer, asking the Lord to provide the money for the building. A Christian builder in the city was approached and Harry Lane agreed to erect the building. Edgar Parnell stood guarantor for a Bank loan, so the project and work proceeded. There was no wall around the building at that time and the site was covered in rough grass and rubbish. They managed to get a quantity of floor tiles with which to cover the concrete and for heating had to use four electric fans and a number of Valor oil stoves. The roof was not lined and when there was heavy rain it created a very noisy atmosphere inside. However, the place was now built and open for worship. People gathered from many churches to welcome this new venture, which commenced with a series of special meetings at which the evangelist Tim Donovan was the speaker.

A great task now lay ahead of the people who had launched the work on the Millbrook Estate. Brian and Mary Parnell were asked to pastor the church and together with others who had caught the vision, formed the core of the new church. Others joined to help, including John and Ena White and Yola Stubbles and her mother. John and Ena White formed a strong relationship with the children which lasted for many years and older people living in the district still remember the days they spent in 'Sunshine Corner' at the Church of the Open Door. Some of the young people are now adults with their own families and are members of the church today. For some time the church had been in fellowship with Assemblies of God and the time had come to appoint a new pastor. Brian and Dorothy Benney, who came from the West of England, laboured faithfully

until it was time for them to move on. The congregation was now meeting in the minor hall, as it was far too cold in the main hall during the Winter months. The work among the children had gone well, but there was little impression on the people of the estate, and after a meeting of all concerned, it was decided to write to the Pentecostal Church in Millbrook Road, asking them to take over the work 'lock, stock and barrel.'

### **The Pentecostal Church in Millbrook Road.**

The work in Millbrook Road had been progressing steadily through the years. Winston Shearing was the pastor and Don Cox was with him as elder. Arthur Snelgrove was in charge of a lively Sunday School. The Bible Class was going well and the young people had been trained to move out in ministry for God. There was a lovely spirit of unity with many of the country churches and this was emphasised at the great Easter Conventions which attracted huge crowds, so that the windows had to be opened for people to stand outside and share in the meetings! Speakers came from all parts of the country and abroad and a number of the great names in Pentecostal history stood to speak at the Millbrook Road platform. It became necessary to increase the eldership of the church and three more were added. This eased the situation, as both Winston Shearing and Don Cox were often out ministering in other places.

These were days of great missionary activity and the church became known as a 'missionary church.' This was true of other churches at that time, as Southampton was known as 'The Gateway to the Empire,' and great liners sailed to many parts of the world. Missionaries would stop over for a few days on their way out or back and people were thrilled to hear of what God was doing in other places. A strong bond was formed with many of the people who had been called to serve on the mission field and some of them became personal friends. This resulted in a rich diversity of ministry and the church profited thereby.

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### **The Pentecostal Work in Southampton**

But clouds were on the horizon! Houses and flats in the district were giving way to light industry and the catchment area was receding. This became obvious when Sunday School children were moving to other parts of the city and the leadership felt it was time to pray for the leading of the Lord concerning their future location. From its inception the emphasis of the church had been to reach out with the Gospel to people who were unsaved and there was no thought of remaining in a backwater to become a 'bless-me club.' It was then that the letter arrived from the Millbrook Estate. There is no doubt that this was an answer to prayer and after consultation the Oversight agreed that the Lord was showing the way forward and they must be obedient. The people came from a wide area of Southampton and some would have problems travelling to the Millbrook Estate, but the decision was made and the move took place on 7<sup>th</sup> May, 1967. A tremendous amount of work was needed as a lot of equipment had to be transferred to the church building at Millbrook. All the seats had to be dismantled, painted and re-assembled with new covers. People had to work every evening to get it done and Frank Dyer from Hardley gave himself wholeheartedly to the task, only to receive news of the home-call of Albert Mundy in Brazil. Without hesitation he gave up his employment at Fawley and moved out to take over the work of G.T.B. in the north-eastern area of Brazil.

### **The Pentecostal Church at Millbrook.**

The church had known a young evangelist named Tony Stone for many years and plans were made for him to join Winston Shearing in order to evangelise the Millbrook Estate when the move was completed. The building at Millbrook Road was sold to a local firm of newspaper distributors and the church moved to its new location. A tremendous amount of finance was needed at the new location and as soon as the money was received for the old building, work began apace. The outstanding money was paid, central heating installed, an electronic organ was purchased and a wall and car park were built. The two churches had now joined forces and a time of consolidation took place. As time went on it became clear that Mr. Shearing was not well and he was eventually diagnosed with a brain tumour. This affected his speech, so that in the end he was unable to preach. Tony Stone had other responsibilities, but he came to the church as soon as possible. He took the funeral service for Winston Shearing and was inducted in January 1971. Winston Shearing had

served as pastor since June 1950 and was loved and respected by everyone in the church and a wide area around.

During Tony Stone's ministry the church expanded dramatically. All the seats were filled, including the gallery and people often had to sit or stand in the vestibule, with the inner doors open. The increase was largely made up by about fifty or more young people from the Southampton University. The House Church Movement was emerging at that time and the students eventually left to hold meetings in various houses throughout the City, eventually forming the Community Church. When Tony Stone left the church to set up his headquarters in the Midlands, there was an interlude until Chris Spicer came from Daventry. He was inducted in July 1975, eventually leaving to take charge of a Bible School under the ministry of Bryn Jones. Another interlude followed, during which a number of people left to form Evangel Church. This continued for a number of years and they called David Birchall to be their pastor for a time. He is now with the Pentecostal Church at Millbrook and the Evangel Church has ceased to exist. Aubrey and Hilda Birchall came in 1982, but had to leave for health reasons in November 1983. Don Cox looked after the church for the next two years until Jim Palmer arrived in 1985. During this time the church changed its name to 'Millbrook Christian Centre' and applied to Assemblies of God to become a member church. It had always been known as 'Kendal Avenue Pentecostal Church,' but with the introduction of post codes it had to be known as 51a Wimpson Lane.

### **Millbrook Christian Centre.**

Jim Palmer had an evangelistic ministry and the church grew at a tremendous rate, with the baptismal font being open on numerous occasions. He appointed Don Cox as co-pastor to serve with him and the work continued apace. Some time later Peter Twinn arrived from Bristol and joined the ministry team. The work in the schools had been growing steadily with several young people leading the work. It is now under the

### **Page 10.**

### **The Pentecostal Work in Southampton**

control of Peter Howard, who with his wife Vanessa also runs a flourishing youth work at the church. Due to the vision of Jim Palmer a massive construction work was undertaken and a new building erected over the original minor hall. The whole project cost in the region of £200,000 and has been completely paid for. The work of expansion was envisaged and a work started at Woolston, under the leadership of Richard and Sarah Taylor. This continued for a number of years, but has now ceased to exist. The Manse was not considered a useful place for the minister's residence, and is now a Day Nursery, managed by the Church Council and under the control of Rachel Cunningham. Jim Palmer's son David is pastor of a church in Vallejo, California, consisting of many people from the Philippines. David was taken ill and Jim felt it necessary to go to California to take over the church for a time, leaving Peter Twinn in charge at Millbrook Road. On his return to England, Jim Palmer took over the work at Hardley Pentecostal Church, and for a time supervised the work at Emmanuel Church, Shirley. He is now actively involved in Barnabas Ministry, a work which he founded to reach out to the Philippines and other places abroad. Peter Twinn had friends in the USA and he eventually felt the call to move to Florida. Colin Benton, who had originally been pastor of the Winchester Assembly of God, had moved to Southampton and joined the ministry team at Millbrook Christian Centre. He continued his work with Southern Light Ministries, which reaches out to churches in a wide area of the South of England. When Peter Twinn left, Colin was asked to take over the church for a time. He met Mark and Ann Starbuck at an AOG Conference and they eventually came to Southampton. Mark is now the senior pastor of the church and his wife Ann is heavily involved in ladies conferences.

### **New Life Church at Midanbury.**

During the time that Peter Twinn was in charge at Millbrook Christian Centre, a man named Paul Franklin, who had recently been converted, went to a Bible College in the West Country. He eventually left the church at Millbrook and started a new work which meets at All Hallows, Midanbury.

### *The Charismatic Churches.*

During the years a number of charismatic churches have grown in Southampton. Some have evolved from evangelical backgrounds, whilst others have been launched as pioneer works in the city. Most are members of the Evangelical Alliance and a number join in fellowship in the 'Joshua Partnership.'

### *Prospect.*

There is a growing sense of unity amongst the churches in Southampton today. Barriers have been broken down and with the emergence of the charismatic churches, the Pentecostal truths which were treated with suspicion by some people have been widely accepted by many and acknowledged by those who could not enter fully into the experience.

*"To God be the glory, great things He has done"*

(The contents of this survey are to the best of my knowledge correct. Some of the details are from my own personal knowledge, others have been passed down to me and others are the result of current enquiries. It is hoped this survey will show something of what has been accomplished in the Pentecostal Churches in Southampton in the twentieth and early twenty-first century).

*Don Cox* – October, 2004.