

Spring Newsletter

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Welcome to the Spring edition of the Baptist Historical Society Newsletter.

This is the first edition that some of you will be receiving by email. If there are problems with this, please let me know. If you would like to receive the newsletter by email, and have not yet told me, there is still time. Please email me at the address below.

In this edition, we have the second of four parts of a memoir of mission in Congo, this time considering issues around indigenisation. There is also a note about the 300 years of worship at Princes Risborough, as well as news of interest to members of the Society.

There are no reviews in this edition – if you have read something and would like to let others know about it, please let me know.

The newsletter editor is always grateful to receive suggestions for contributions – and contributions themselves. So if there is something you would like to read – or write – please let me know.

ruth@blossbury.org.uk

Three Hundred Years at Princes Risborough

Nobody knows exactly when Baptists first met for worship in Princes Risborough, Bucks, but on 25 February 1707 they were given a small plot of land on which they built their first chapel. Since then additional land has been acquired by gift and purchase, and the buildings have been extended several times.

Through 2007 the Church is celebrating its tercentenary with a series of events. The Revd John Rackley preached at morning and evening services on the anniversary date - a Sunday. An informal lunch was accompanied by a continuous slide show of pictures from the Church's history. On the Saturday evening a more formal dinner was served to more than one hundred members and guests by a team dressed in early nineteenth-century costume. That dinner was inspired by a reference in the church records to a dinner given to the Sunday School children on New Year's Eve 1817, when 111 girls and 51 boys consumed 92 pounds of beef, a bushel of potatoes, bread, flour, plums and currants, and twelve gallons of beer. A little arithmetic suggests that it was a substantial meal, though not excessive. The 2007 menu was also excellent, but different: roast turkey and vegetables, desserts, and coffee. After the dinner an Historic Drama of scenes and commentary from 300 years of Baptist history in Buckinghamshire and in Princes Risborough was presented in the chapel.

Other events are planned for later in the year, including special services, public lectures, a balloon

launch, a History Display, and a concert. Details are available on the church's web site [risboroughbaptist.org.uk]. The Church has published a celebratory book, *As Witness This Day*, compiled by Mary Hailey and Anthony Knight and including an account of the Church's history and a section 'Within our living memory' in which past and present members share their recollections. The final section, 'So what next?', leaves the reader in no doubt that Risborough Baptist is a living Church actively planning how to fulfil its mission in the next phase of its life.

Brian Bowers

[baptized at Princes Risborough in 1953]

April 26th;

**Dr Anthony R Cross will deliver the
Inaugural Friends of Bloomsbury
Lecture**

**The Evangelical Sacrament;
Reforming Baptism**

**Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church,
3.00 (followed by High Tea at 4.45)**

**Dr Cross is a fellow of the Centre for
Baptist History and Heritage at Regent's
Park College, and the author of *Baptism
and the Baptists; Theology and Practice
in 20th century Britain*, published in
2000, by Paternoster.**

All welcome.

OVERSEAS MISSION IN THE
FIFTIES AND SIXTIES:
BOLOBO; Pt2

The Memories of Fred Stainthorpe

The Gospel had made extensive inroads into Congolese society. It was common and very encouraging to attend baptismal services and later to participate in them, in rivers and, on one occasion, in a very cold forest pool, when numbers of inquirers confessed their faith. At the same time, it sometimes disquieted us to hear so many people say, in their testimonies, that they had had a dream telling them to take this step. God does undoubtedly speak sometimes in dreams but one wondered whether these people were fitting God into the pattern of their previous lives rather than responding to His word. This was not true of all, of course, but one day John Garside remarked percipiently to me that he felt we were administering the baptism of John to them rather than that of Christ. The subsequent history of the country shows that its people have not solved their two endemic problems, those of belief in witchcraft and inter-tribal hatred. Even in the Church they play a part in people's lives, as for example, when pastors from one tribe sometimes find it difficult, if not impossible, to minister in another area. Sadly, since then, political instability, poverty and corruption have also entered the picture.

We can be thankful that God uses all styles of preaching but I regret not having

“Africanised” my own way. Having been nurtured in the evangelical exposition of a text (into three points) I continued this and would still insist on its value but many African preachers made more use of the “story”. I imagine that much of the pioneer missionaries’ preaching must have been in this vein too. National Congolese preachers were adept at story telling. Pastor Nzanga, for example, one of the leaders of the Ba-Sengele churches, could always find a traditional tale of forest animals which brought to light and emphasised biblical truths. This often “contextualised” the message to African hearers. Years later, I recall Chris Spencer saying how valuable he had found this approach and how he was trying to develop it.

In 1960, the educational side of our work changed. The new independent government africanised the leadership of all primary schools and this left us a number of us free. While this offered me the chance to do more church work, it also raised the possibility of beginning a secondary school. Up to this point we had only been able to send a few of our best students to Kimpese in the lower River area and so a number of able boys were losing out. John Garside, Lynn Collis and I drove down to Kinshasa to talk to W.D.Reynolds, a former Field Secretary, who had come out from retirement in England during the interregnum between Leslie Taylor and Harold Casebow. (Someone ought to do some research on the Field Secretaries of the Congo

Mission, who did sterling work for many years.) The Society was keen to establish at least two secondary schools, one of which could have been at Bolobo. The other one was at Ngombe Lutete and Peter Briggs became its first headmaster. The advantages of such schools were obvious, although a minor concern was that if we did not set them up, many of our students would seek out Catholic ones. My willingness was the vital factor in starting the Bolobo school and after some heart searching I agreed to become its Directeur. In lighter moments, I used to tell my family afterwards that this was my one claim to fame, although, even if I had refused, someone else would have done this later on. We took the opportunity and this gave numerous students the opportunity to prepare for service in state and church. To begin with, the syllabus was based completely on the Belgian secondary system. Much of this was unsuitable for the Congolese and no doubt they have considerably altered it by now. These schools have helped to produce better-educated pastors for contemporary Congolese society, although the general state of Congo since then has hindered progress. Many of their teachers have not received their salaries for months.

I often wish that I had kept a diary of the school's first year. Three of us taught the one class. Angus Macneill, newly arrived from "Mpot", the Africans' word for Europe (a corruption of "Portugal", from the earlier

centuries when Portuguese influence was strong in the Lower river area), taught English and Religious Education. Jean M'Cullough (later Pradier) took Geography and Maths, while I did the French and Science and (I think) some PE. We had only one classroom-the Wallace Arr Hall, originally built for teacher-evangelists, and next to no equipment. Later, Lynn Collis, our engineer-builder colleague, made some desks for our next year and we made a classroom out of one of the internat dormitories but had little else. A published account of our work might have been as popular as Peter Mayle's "A year in Provence" was later but could one have justified spending so much time on it?

The Society has a stand booked for the Exhibition hall. If any Committee member is attending the Assembly and would be willing to lend a hand on the stand for, say 30 mins or an hour, then please let Peter Shepherd or me know.

A request for information

I have discovered that Cousens was briefly minister at Aylesbury in 1837 before going to Cradley Heath. Last year I tried unsuccessfully to find Cousens' grave in the very, very overgrown and neglected graveyard at Cradley Heath - hoping to find a detail of date and place of birth, etc. I wonder if there is any record of that particular burial ground, or if any one locally has located the grave? It would be good to see it restored and accessible.

David Killingray

If you can help with this, please contact David directly, or through the newsletter editor, at the email address on the front page.

For Sale

Thomas Crosby "History of the English Baptists" volume 4 only. OIRO £40.

If you are interested, please contact: Mr D.Meller, 'Hawthorns', Odstone Road, Barton in the Beans, Nuneaton, CV13 0DF

Local History Society to raise funds for
redevelopment
of
Charlton Kings Baptist Church

March 27th 2007 will see the publication of 'John Burgh Rochfort Preacher Extraordinary' An historical account of a very interesting Godly man/evangelist who was led to start Charlton Kings Baptist Church as part of his life long Christian ministry.

The booklet has been compiled by David A O'Connor a member of Charlton Kings History Society. The History Society has very generously donated the proceeds from the sale of the booklet to the redevelopment fund for Charlton Kings Baptist Church.

The Booklet costs £3.00 and can be purchased from the Church office, 38 Church Street, Charlton Kings, Cheltenham. GL53 8AR or you can contact the office 01242 261507 office@ckbc.org.uk There will be a small charge for postage £1.00 per copy

Charlton Kings Baptist church is extremely grateful for this kind offer of financial help as we are currently trying to raise £1.2 million to redevelop the first chapel building built by Mr John B Rochfort in 1875 for the sum of £500.00. The existing chapel and adjacent

premises have served us well but now require a considerable amount of money to be spent on them just to maintain them in their present order and they are unfortunately no longer adequate to meet the needs of an active church in the 21st Century.

We received planning consent for our new building in September 2005.

The new facility will provide

- 200 seat worship/auditorium
- modern coffee shop/reception area
- new offices and crèche facility
- new toilets and kitchen
- easy level access for all
- small conference/training venue
- available for community events,
- concerts, drama and dance productions

We believe that the new building will enable the Church to extend its blessing and service to the local community of Charlton Kings helping us to fulfil our mission '*To know Jesus and to make Jesus known*'