

RED HILL BAPTIST CHURCH - A SHORT HISTORY OF THE FIRST 100 YEARS 1866 – 1966

EARLY BEGINNINGS

When we start to look at the early history of Red Hill Baptist Church, we must of necessity begin at the Kempsey branch of Worcester Baptist Church. For it was there in 1862 where the small wooden hut was erected which was to provide the first church building in the Red Hill area of Worcester four years later. It was erected at Kempsey at a cost of £28-16s-0d but the painting, varnishing, spouting, felting etc brought it up to £39-4s-11d – and another £11 for seats, desks and other fittings made a grand total of over £50.

However, this building soon proved inadequate and on 1 May 1865 the fellowship there resolved to 'arise and build', a Mr Seymour having offered them a new site. When the new chapel was built in 1866 some young men who had started a united Christian witness at Swinesherd bought the hut, having first collected the £40 needed to purchase and furnish it. They were given the lease of a site free by a Mr Green, a farmer of Newtown and the hut was re-erected at Swinesherd.

This then was the first organised Christian fellowship meeting in a church in the Red Hill area of the city. Sadly no record exists of the exact location but it was probably just outside the city boundary (the present hamlet of Swinesherd is located on the old Spetchley Road, bounded by the A4440, A422 and M5). It has to be admitted as well that almost certainly it wasn't known as a Baptist Church in those very early days – but what followed was a continuation of the work started there.

No trace of any details regarding the number of worshippers or the actual work and worship carried on week by week has been found. What we do know is that over the next few years several of the men involved in the church either left the neighbourhood or emigrated and the friends who were left and who owned the building decided to offer the structure back to Sansome Walk free of charge. The only condition was that they should faithfully carry the work on. The offer was accepted in September 1874 and the little church joined and became part of Worcester Baptist Church (a 'family' of Sansome Walk as the 'mother' church and its 'daughter' churches at Red Hill, Rainbow Hill, Kempsey, Fernhill Heath and, for a while, Ronkswood, which was to continue as one membership and for most of the time under one minister right up until Red Hill was the first to be commissioned as an independent church in 1983). The Sansome Walk friends conducted public worship and Sunday School in the little chapel for the next 4½ years. The records tell us that the pioneers of this work included Messrs Farrant, Middleton, Longmore and Smith.

MOVING ON

Early in 1879 the time came to move on. Mr Green's lease had expired and the farm had changed hands. This meant that the site had to be given up. All that time Mr Green had generously allowed the use of the land free of charge.

A new site was purchased at Red Hill Cross right on the edge of the city, though one report puts the price at £76 while another states £95. This was the site of the chapel in Cannon Street on which Christian work and witness was to continue for another 128 years. Initially however the little wooden chapel was moved from Swinesherd to the new plot of ground, mainly with the help of Mr Watson and his family of The Mill, Swinesherd, who lent his team of horses to assist in the relocation.

The chapel was re-opened on 2 August 1879, Rev J.Lewitt preaching in the afternoon and Mr James Mayglothing in the evening. At the time of the move there were 120 children on the Sunday School role and it's not difficult to imagine the problems over accommodation! These were temporarily relieved in January 1882 when the chapel was enlarged, the cost being borne by Messrs James Jones and John Middleton, both ardent workers at Red Hill. Mr Viles was the oldest teacher in the school, finally giving up in 1890.

NEW BUILD

As time went on congregations and SS scholars increased while at the same time as these went up the condition of the building went steadily down. After all, the wooden hut had given splendid service for nearly 30 years first at Kempsey, then at Swinesherd and latterly at Red Hill. It was no surprise, then, to find that something had to be done regarding a new and more permanent structure.

It was perhaps fortunate for the workers at Red Hill that 1889 marked the 25th anniversary of the opening of the chapel at Sansome Walk, because on 22 July of that year at a public meeting a special fund was launched, with a target of £1,000 (£252 having already been collected). The purpose of this fund was not only to enable the church at Sansome Walk to clear a debt and to provide additional classrooms at their premises but also to fund a new mission hall at Red Hill.

As part of the 25th Anniversary celebrations a 5-day 'Canadian Bazaar' was held from 17-21 November with the aim of reaching the target. Before the bazaar started £500 was still needed. After it closed and all expenses had been paid, a balance remained of £500-2s-7d! And so in November 1890, just after Rev Lewitt retired and before Rev Forbes Jackson came to take his place, the church was

able to accept the tender of Messrs Bromage and Evans to erect a new brick chapel in Cannon Street for the princely sum of £375 – although the furniture and other items brought the total up to about £550! The Architect was Mr Sutton, who had also acted as architect for the Kempsey and Rainbow Hill chapels.

The old wooden chapel was removed – one account (Souvenir of the Centenary Celebrations 1903 Baptist Sunday School, Worcester by James Mayglothling) says 'it was transferred to St Clement's church authorities and may now be seen in Church Walk' – that was in 1903 of course: not there now! Another account records that it was sold to Dr Strange for use as a soup kitchen. Perhaps the two were the same?

GRAND OPENING

The name of Captain Alexander Locke should be familiar to all of us as it's his name that appears on the front wall of the chapel. It was he who laid the foundation stone on 26 February 1891 before a large gathering and addresses, presumably in the open air, were given by three people – Mr J.S. Hanson, Mr E.P. Evans J.P. and Capt Locke himself. By way of interest there is an account of this seemingly very colourful character in the November 1895 Banner (the magazine of Worcester Baptist Church). He was born in 1802 and died 23 September 1895 aged 75, so he was 71 when he performed this ceremony.

Well, in less than four months, the new chapel (less the back room) was ready for use. It was opened for public worship on 11 June 1891. Rev J.T. Wigner, an ex-President of the Baptist Union, preached on a text from Psalm 84, 'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house' and we are told that the attendance was large. The service was continued in the evening at Sansome Walk with the same preacher. The first regular evening service was on 14 June when the preacher was – who else! – Mr Mayglothling and this was preceded by an open air meeting. At this time, according to the records, Mr James Jones and Mr Burden were joint chapel superintendents (a job share even in those days, even if unpaid!).

THE WORK GROWS

Let's go on now to mention the various groups within the church together with points of interest generally as the years go by. First of all, the Young Men's Bible Class. This was started in August 1893 with six members and the meeting was held in the kitchen underground (the lower part of the cellar, which also contained the boiler used to heat the premises). This was the only available space in the already crowded building but apparently it was made more homely by hanging some curtains. It was obviously a great success because the

numbers grew so much that its leader, Miss James, proposed that £100 be raised in order to build a larger classroom on to the back of the chapel. At first the members thought this a quite impossible task, with the result that Miss James, clearly a very determined lady, worked all alone to raise the first £40. At that point, realising perhaps that it wasn't quite so impossible after all, they all set to work in earnest and £95 was in the kitty by January 1896. What a testimony to the example of Miss James. At the time the group had 42 members but only room to seat 24! Anyway, thanks to this effort, the new classroom, known for many years, fittingly, as Miss James' room but more familiar to succeeding generations simply as 'the back room', was opened on 13 October 1896.

Meanwhile, the April edition of the Banner reports that on 15 March 1892 the Pastor and other friends conducted a Temperance Meeting, which filled the schoolroom at Red Hill. 'The interest of the listeners from Red Hill homes gave happy proof of their sympathy with our work there and said unmistakably "We appreciate your work; we shall be glad to have such gatherings repeated" '. It seems that a Band of Hope [Temperance meeting] had been established as we read of the Bands of Hope from Sansome Walk, Red Hill and Cherry Orchard having their annual picnic in July of that year.

In 1893 a Red Hill Mothers meeting was formed. On 3 February Mr T. Hilton gave them what's described as a lecture on Love, Courtship and Marriage, which no doubt they found very helpful. The Mothers Meeting held their first anniversary on 29 January 1894 and two years later we are told they went on their third annual outing to British Camp. Also in 1894 Red Hill Mutual Improvement Society had their first Social Tea when a Lantern Exhibition was given. It's not quite clear whether this was also their last tea as no more is heard of them in the records!

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

What about the Sunday School – quite remarkable in terms of numbers. Let's look at this branch of the work over a period. Remember that in the early days there was both morning and afternoon school plus of course the main evening service (morning worship didn't start until Red Hill became an independent church in 1983 – up until then those who wanted a morning service were encouraged to attend at Sansome Walk). In passing we are told in Mr Mayglothling's 1903 Souvenir that among the pioneer workers of the Swinesherd school were George Farrant, John Middleton, Henry Viles, John Lane, Thomas Smith and Thomas Longmore. The author goes on to say that in the later Red Hill days James Jones, George Matlock and Charles Burden deserve honourable mention as SS Superintendents and Josiah Everitt as Secretary for 12 years. 'Mrs Baldwyn (nee Hughes), Miss James and Mr F.G. Viles also rendered conspicuous

service and the present Superintendent [1903] was Mr C.H. Stevenson with G.W. Foss as assistant and T.J. Griffiths as secretary’.

In 1890 the numbers on the SS roll were 105 with the average attendances 59 in the morning and 74 in the afternoon. Numbers increased quite dramatically over subsequent years:

1895 – 181 total (85 average in the morning and 120 in the afternoon, with 20 teachers).

1896 – 190 although only 16 took the Scripture Union exam and 56 were members of the Int. Bible Reading Association.

1897 – 231 (100/150 plus 17 teachers)

1900 – a staggering 250 (same averages but 23 teachers).

The annual Prize Distribution in February 1895 included prizes to 33 scholars for regular attendance during the previous year. While this doesn’t quite tie in with the numbers mentioned already, it’s interesting to note that ‘Five children who travel from Swinesherd to Red Hill received a Bible each for making a fair number of attendances, considering the long distance for them to come.’ At the same occasion Miss James was presented with a silver-mounted inkstand by the Young Men’s Bible Class ‘in appreciation of the esteem in which she is held by her class’.

We have recorded a list of the teachers in the SS in 1900:

Miss Ellison

Miss James

Miss Hulin

Miss Nicholls

Miss J. Wood

Miss L. Tomkins

Miss H. Handy

Mrs Burden

Miss Mears

Mr F.G. Viles

Mr W. Wimblett

Mr F. Wheeler

Mr H. Denmed

Mr H. Dolloway

Mr H. Viles

Mr Craig

Mr W. Evans

Mr W.Blake

plus Miss M. A Hawkins (organist).

It was still 250 in 1904 with averages of 80 and 160 but for some unexplained reason the next year saw a tremendous drop to 107, though the averages were still healthy at 90 and 96. 1910 - 130 and 1915 – 175, going up again.

And there the detailed records seem to stop. Indeed it’s interesting to note that there is far more information available about the work at Red Hill and the other parts of Worcester Baptist Church at the beginning of the 1900s than in any of the subsequent years. Perhaps the First World War took its toll?

Some other fascinating tidbits stand out from the records about the Sunday School. At the 1893 prize-giving William Woodward and Annie Glover had the full number of attendances – 104 – every morning and afternoon possible! Then we read in the August 1895 Banner concerning the SS Anniversary that:

'the rain fell in torrents and thinned the afternoon congregation but the chapel was crowded at night. The scholars under the leadership of Mr Burden and Miss F. Hawkins rendered their songs well, the anthem being specially well rendered. Rain fell in torrents the previous year but it takes a lot of rain to damp Red Hillers down and all seemed to thoroughly enjoy the day.'

In August 1896 the SS joined with all the other Sunday Schools in the city for a day at Madresfield Court by invitation of the Mayor, Earl Beauchamp, and on 5 October of the same year the Teachers Quarterly Meeting was held at Red Hill. It appears that all the teachers from Sansome Walk and the branch fellowships met together every quarter and at that particular meeting a paper on the aim of SS teaching was given by Rev J. Bell-Johnston 'and tea was provided'.

The annual SS treat was always arranged for the Whitsun bank holiday Monday and for many years Crookbarrow Hill, Whittington (more familiarly known as Whittington Tump) was the venue. In one account of this in 1908 we read 'We started at 1.30 pm from the school and marched to Whittington, the infants being conveyed there on a dray kindly lent by Messrs Barnett Ltd.' Our oldest member, Beat Clinton, who started going to SS in 1915 at the age of three, recalls the annual treat with great affection. She remembers the use of Mr Gammon's dray to transport the children at 1pm. Tea was at 4pm and races at 6pm followed by a football match for all the fathers, everyone returning home about 9pm. Later venues included Cudleigh Court Farm at Spetchley and wider afield, the delights of Severn Beach, near Bristol.

Beat Clinton also recalls the older children (12+) being taken each Easter Monday (and some Saturdays too) by their teacher, Mr Yates, to Ankerdine Hill where they enjoyed a picnic dinner and tea in the woods.

WORSHIPPERS

So much for the early days of the Sunday School. Let's go back now to other aspects of church life. The annual Year Books printed in those days are quite helpful here as each one gives a brief account of the work at the Mission.

The 1890 Year Book tells us that services were held at 6.30pm each Sunday with Sunday School at 9.30am and 2.30pm. In addition to the joint Superintendency of Mr C Burden and Mr James Jones, we learn that Mr J Everett was Secretary, Mr H Westbury Clothing Club Secretary and Miss M Hill Harmoniumist. 25 were

on the roll of the Band of Hope. The report indicates that 'the teachers are looking anxiously forward to their entrance upon the new building in a few weeks' time, when they will be able to carry on their work under better conditions.'

This is what is said in the 1898 edition:

'Red Hill is often filled with earnest worshippers and one feels it is a privilege to have an opportunity of speaking to such an audience. There have been occasional services at Kempsey on weeknights but here again, Red Hill is to the front with well attended services every week.'

And again in 1901:

'Red Hill is frequently full of attentive worshippers whose faces are a source of inspiration to those whose privilege it is to preach the word. The choir render excellent service and is to be commended for its good work. A desire having been expressed for a monthly celebration of the Lord's Supper, arrangements are being made to that end.'

The first communion service was held on 12 May 1901.

THE CHOIR

Like most churches Red Hill had a regular choir, which lasted right up to the 1970s. Indeed Red Hill was always known for its singing. The choir was almost an organisation in itself, always doing things and going off here, there and everywhere (geographically and no doubt sometimes musically as well). Take 1899 for example. The choir had their annual outing on Saturday, 12 August when they drove in a couple of brakes [open horse drawn carriages with four wheels] although we're not told where to – probably one of the mystery trips popular for very many years until car ownership became widespread. The report goes on to say:

'The 12th is the commencing of the shooting season but there were no guns in the party and no lives were lost. The day was perfect and there was an al fresco tea which was the chief item of the informal programme. Judging by the appearance of the young people as they wandered about in groups and sometimes in two's, all seemed thoroughly to enjoy the holiday.'

The following year we read that 7 August was the date of the choir's Annual Picnic. A little later we discover that 'on one Saturday in September 1912 the little choir goes off to Ankerdine to climb the hill, have tea and pick nuts in the wood'.

Much later in March 1929 the choir gave a performance of the Lion of Judah conducted by Mr Whitworth and this was repeated at Rainbow Hill in aid of their extension fund. No doubt they gave other performances of various works over the years. Mr Whitworth also conducted the children at the SS Anniversaries – they would have practiced singing their songs for weeks beforehand! For many years also the choir supported the annual Singing Festival of the Worcs. Baptist Association – a coach or even two coaches on occasions would go from Red Hill each year.

As mentioned earlier the choir continued to lead the singing at the evening services up to the 1970s. One tradition observed every year until its demise was the singing by the choir of the old Sankey hymn 'Ho, reapers in the whitened harvest' at each Harvest Festival. For a major part of the century, of course, the Sankey hymnbook was standard fare for services until replaced by the Baptist Hymnal. When the first Youth Praise came out in 1966 it was eagerly taken up by the Young People's Christian Endeavour as a breath of fresh air akin to rock 'n' roll breaking into the general music scene in the late 1950s!

YOUNG PEOPLE

1902 saw the formation of a Young People's Christian Endeavour meeting with Mr C. Burden as President, Miss Ellison as Vice-President, Mr L.W. Westall as Secretary and Miss J. Wood as Treasurer. The membership numbered 25 but there is no record of the society after 1903, so perhaps it only ran for a couple of years. Earlier in November 1899 the annual social of the Young Men's Bible Class was conducted (of course) by Miss James and the class presented 'a handsome writing desk and pair of brass candlesticks' to its secretary, Mr Frank Wheeler.

HOME RULE

1905 was an important year. The church had requested Sansome Walk to grant it the privilege of partial self-government similar to that given earlier to Kempsey. This meant in practice the setting up of a management committee responsible for the day-to-day running of the fellowship – previously everything had been run from Sansome Walk. The request was granted and the first committee comprised Messrs E.T. French as Superintendent, R.T. Blake, F. Wheeler and G.W. Foss. The name of Edward Thomas French was of course recorded for posterity when a plaque 'sacred to his memory' was placed on the chapel wall following his death in 1912 and is still there today. Over the years up to independency there was always representation from the deacons of the 'mother' church on the management committee, the first being Sam Rogers and James Hawkins.

SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY

1905 also saw the beginning of several years of intense spiritual activity and it seems there was a very definite period of revival and spiritual awakening in the fellowship (interestingly around the same time as the Welsh Revival not too far away). Take, for example, the April 1905 Banner which reported times of prayer and revival, including Teachers Sunday morning prayer meetings (to which scholars were admitted at their own request), prayer meetings after the evening service and a series of prayer and revival meetings, the first of which was attended by 80 people.

From the September 1906 Banner we learn that there was a prayer meeting every Saturday at 8pm. Two years later from 25 November to 3 December a special evangelistic mission was held, led by the pastor, Rev Henry Wyatt and this resulted in a new meeting every Monday night. Things were really moving forward because in an account dated October 1912, it is said:

'Thinking of Red Hill, our memory reproduced a picture of the old wooden chapel through whose leaky roof the raindrops would sometimes trickle on the preacher, keeping him from being dry even if the sermon was. How different now – and what a hive of busy workers it is. How hard they work and how gleefully they play. Happy Red Hill, what is the secret of your success? Answer: united effort linked with faith and prayer.'

Whether or not they decided to benefit in another way from all this activity is not clear but on the first Sunday in July 1905 weekly collections were instituted instead of monthly!

THE DICKY BIRDS' CONCERT

The name of Sam Rogers, one of the Sansome Walk deacons, has already been mentioned. Evidently he was quite a character – he rode a three wheeler bike and was also something of a wit. On 15 February 1909 he wrote a long poem entitled Uncle Sam's Report of the Dicky Birds' Concert in which he likens each mission to a bird in order to report on the work there. The rhyming may be a bit corny but it no doubt added to whatever occasion at which it was first aired.

It starts:

This Dicky Birds' concert was held in a bush,
Chief singers, the Red Hill robin and the Kempsey thrush,
The Rainbow Hill sparrow and the finch of Fernhill Heath.
All joined in the chorus the branches beneath.
The programme was made up of song, chatter and talk
About mission work done for dear Sansome Walk.

It continues in relation to Red Hill:

Then up popped the robin and made our hearts thrill
As he sang of the Mission and the work at Red Hill,
Where a band of good soldiers strongly entrenched
Under Admiral Blake and Brigadier French
Said they were well off for teachers and crowded with scholars
And to pay their own way they had raked in the dollars.

And what of the Banner that hangs on the wall?
Well, if they can, they will keep it, that's all,
Except if they hold it through the next fight,
Why, fast to the wall they will nail it outright.

Congregations on Sundays the average have reached
And some very good preachers good sermons have preached,
Though we have heard that sometimes they enquire
What's up with the singing, what's wrong with the choir?

So well do they like the preaching on Sunday
That they have taken to have some more on the Monday,
With meetings on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday
With Saturday left to get the place tidy.
Just lately, I think, they've been holding a meeting
To try and devise a new system of heating.

Now ladies don't like you to mention their names,
Or else I should say that our good friend, Miss James,
Our one Lady Guardian still holds on her way,
Though some of the scholars have of late gone astray.

But just then the robin found his throat rather sore
And begged to be excused for not singing more.

Clearly the work was thriving – even if the choir was having an off day!

POINTS OF INTEREST

In succeeding years the work continued, although in a rather more steady than spectacular way. Let's pick out some points of interest.

The first Chapel Anniversary after 'home rule' was held in January 1906 and the offerings given to the Renovation Fund. Then in 1913 Mr Roberts spoke at the SS

Anniversary but apparently had his remarks cut short by the presiding chairman, Mr Mayglothing, because 'he could not see his way clear to conform to what is now known as "Red Hill time" ` The mind boggles at the prospect of the congregation walking out at a certain time in the proceedings!

On 13 October 1912 the beloved Superintendent, Mr E.T. French passed away, to be succeeded eventually by Mr T.C. Davies (all such appointments over the years being made by the Church Meeting at Sansome Walk). Mr Davies was Beat Clinton's SS teacher and she recalls that he had a very large family who would fill a couple of rows in the chapel. In June 1913 the SS won the Scripture Exam and were entitled to retain the shield. There was an honour for the new Superintendent on 21 December 1916 when he was decorated by HM the King for his valuable service in the Red Cross.

A very popular activity for ladies was the weekly sewing meeting every Tuesday evening from 7-9 pm in the chapel. This started in about 1920 and continued right up to the late 1940s/early 1950s. The meeting was run in the early years by Mrs Giles (Rob Giles' grandmother) and Kate Jones. Mrs Giles obtained the material and Mrs Jones, an excellent seamstress, did the patterns and cutting out and any elaborate stitching required. Apparently they took orders and their work featured in occasional 'sales of work' – and, of course, they also had an annual outing, often to Spetchley Park!

Outings of varying descriptions have already been mentioned. They were no doubt eagerly anticipated in the days of restricted travel for most people. What's surprising are the stop-out times in the early years of the century. In 1911, for example, the church went to Weston-super-Mare. Admittedly they didn't get there until 4 pm, having started out at 12.45 pm but they arrived back at 12.30 am! But that's nothing – the 1927 Annual Mission Outing, again to Weston (75 passengers; fare, inc. tea, 7 shillings) got back at 12.55 am. Even worse, in 1928 they returned from Barry Island at 1.30 am!

Mr Frank Wheeler, who was to play a prominent part in the life of the fellowship for so many years, took over the position of Secretary from Mr R.T.Blake in 1916 and then became Superintendent in 1925. The post of Secretary was taken up by Mr B. Giles, the father of Stan Giles.

A tremendous step forward was made in January 1927 when that marvellous new invention, the electric light, was used for the first time at a special Sunday service. According to Beat Clinton, the money to pay for this was raised by the Ladies Sewing Class, primarily from a Sale of Work opened by Mr George Cadbury who started the fund with a handsome donation of £5. In the same year, 80 were present at a tea and concert given by the young people. The concert included selections by the band. In July of the following year it was

decided to hold a communion service on the fourth Sunday morning in each summer month at 8am but there's no confirmation that this was continued in subsequent years. Also on 6 December 1928 a social was held, presided over by Mr Wheeler, to welcome Rev C.C. Chambers to the ministry of Worcester Baptist Church. He was to be the pastor over Sansome Walk and the branch churches for 25 years. Beat Clinton tells us that Red Hill hosted a social evening each year on the Thursday after Christmas for the young people of the whole of Worcester Baptist Church (ie Sansome Walk, Kempsey, Rainbow Hill and Fernhill Heath) when they played such games as musical chairs, kissing in the ring and postman's knock!

1929 saw the 50th anniversary of the site and the former minister, Rev H. Wyatt, spoke at special services. Two years later the chapel interior was renovated and re-opening services held in September. It was at that time that a large text was painted on the rear wall of the main hall, reflecting the focus of the mission's work over the years: 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth' (Ecclesiastes 12 v1). This text remained on the wall for over 40 years and would have been very visible to all worshippers, since in those days there was a platform against that wall for the pulpit and choir.

In 1932 Mr B. Giles moved away. The July Banner of that year records 'This is the last time Bert Giles will appear under Red Hill notes for we shall be in our new home at Wolverhampton by the time these notes appear. Thanks especially to the friends at Red Hill for the parting gifts to us in the beautiful grandmother clock and fountain pens. We shall treasure them.' His place as Secretary was taken by Mr Bert Preston. Although his two sisters went with their parents, fortunately for Red Hill Stan Giles stayed in Worcester.

Gifts were clearly the order of the day. In 1933 the choir gave an umbrella to their leader for many years, Mrs Stubbs – and the following year clocks and oak candlesticks were presented to two of the SS teachers 'who had recently entered marital bliss'. In 1936 the secretaryship was taken over by Miss Alice Dolloway. She served in that position for a remarkable 32 years – another example of long and faithful devotion to the work and witness of the chapel.

QUIETER YEARS

From that time up to the early 1960s recorded information about the activities and organisations of the church is patchy, to say the least. The Second World War and its after effects took their toll on the band of workers, many young men in particular not returning to the chapel after the horrors of war. In August 1943, for example, morning Sunday School was discontinued 'owing to a lack of response'.

Things generally seemed to go down a bit, so much so that in 1943 Mr Wheeler made an appeal for support from Sansome Walk for our special services - these would normally mean Anniversaries of various sorts – Chapel, SS – or Harvest, although for many years the Good Friday service for Worcester Baptist Church was held at Red Hill, usually led in latter years by Mr Reg Hook from Sansome Walk. Nevertheless during September 1943 open air meetings were held in different parts of the neighbourhood before Sunday evening services.

In 1946 a fund was launched for a new organ and this was installed in September 1948 – a second hand American organ/harmonium (which required the player constantly to pedal away in order to produce any sound!). Stan Giles had already been the chapel pianist/organist for a good number of years – by the time he retired from that position in 1992 he had served amazingly for 64 years!

Frank Wheeler resigned as Superintendent in 1949 and Mr George Collins (Beat Clinton's brother/Di Levin's uncle) was elected in his place. The following year saw the death of Mr Wheeler, a tireless worker for so many years. Indeed over the 1920s, 30s and 40s his name is synonymous with all that took place at Red Hill.

The years after the war and through the 1950s were difficult, requiring perseverance and dedication without much outwardly progress. The evening congregations were poor and in those days to reach a total offering of £1 was considered good – the average being 17s6d! The Sunday School, like many others, also declined gradually in numbers and it was difficult to keep youngsters in the church once they reached early teenage. There was a Junior Christian Endeavour for a year or two at the end of the decade but didn't survive for long.

The evening services, as they had been over the years, were faithfully served by lay preachers drawn not only from the Baptist family but also from other churches from around Worcestershire. Many were faithful in their exposition of the Word, usually taking a single text, but there was no continuity of teaching. Some were real characters. One very Welsh preacher used to recite all the verses of each hymn beforehand in a rich lilting accent, so much so that the actual singing afterwards was something of an anti-climax! Communion, as was the custom with most free churches, was always a separate short service after the main worship, giving an opportunity for some to leave. For a period in the late 50s/early 60s the minister at Sansome Walk, Rev Gordon Jackson, used to dash up after his service to lead this time. Otherwise, with in effect five congregations to support, visits on a Sunday were infrequent.

LOOKING UP

Things began to change in the early 1960s. In 1961 a Women's Fellowship started under the leadership of Mrs Pike. Later this role was taken over by Mrs Phyllis Hill who led faithfully for many years. At that stage there were still no midweek activities for children or young people but in 1962 a Young People's Christian Endeavour group started on a Friday evening with several of the older SS youngsters under the leadership of Rob Giles. This group grew and developed over the years and made a real impact on the life of the church. A year or two later a Junior Club commenced which developed into an activity of a more devotional nature called Adventurers. Numbers in the SS remained quite low but with a slight increase. However, evening congregations improved a lot in the few years leading up to 1966, including a growing number of young people. Average numbers were in the region of 35-45, occasionally higher. Finally in 1966 Stan Giles took over as Superintendent, a position he held for ten years.

FAITHFUL WORK AND WITNESS

So, there we are – 100 years of faithful work and witness. A firm foundation laid down on which to build over the subsequent years. As we look back we have much to be thankful to God about, especially as we consider the lives of men and women who so faithfully gave of their time and talents to serve God in and through Red Hill. People like Miss James, Edward French, Frank Wheeler, Henry and Alice Dolloway, George Collins, Stan Giles, Phyllis Hill. They and many others kept the work going in the good years and the more difficult times. Their faithfulness, dedication and perseverance are an example and inspiration to those of us who follow on. They are surely now rejoicing with us as they see the way the church has grown and developed since their day - more especially as we enter into this exciting and challenging new phase of our life together as Red Hill becomes St Peter's Baptist Church.

'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.'

Hebrews 12 vs1/2

Rob Giles
May 2007

APPENDIX 1

Superintendents and Secretaries over the years up to Red Hill becoming an independent Baptist Church in 1983

YEAR	SUPERINTENDENT	SECRETARY
?	J. Jones	W. Buckingham
?	G. Matlock	
1892/3	C. Burden	J. Everitt
1901		T.F. Griffiths
1903	C.H. Stevenson	
1904	E.T. French	
1905		G.W. Foss
1906		C.E. Hawkins
1909		R.T. Blake
1914	T.C. Davies	B.G. Rowley
1915		R.T. Blake
1916		F. Wheeler
1925	F. Wheeler	B. Giles
1933		A.E. Preston
1936		Miss A. Dolloway
1949	G. Collins	
1966	S.R. Giles	
1968		Mrs E. Collier
1976	P. Loe	Mrs D. Levins

APPENDIX 2

Extract from the Worcester Herald – Saturday, 28 February 1891

BAPTIST MISSION ROOM AT RED HILL, WORCESTER

Yesterday the foundation stone of the Mission Hall which is being built by the Baptists of Worcester at Red Hill was laid by Captain Alexander Locke. The afternoon was beautifully fine and a number of the congregation were present. Amongst these were the new pastor (the Rev Forbes Jackson) and Mrs Jackson, Captain Locke, Mrs Larkworthy, the Misses Larkworthy, Mrs Giles, Mrs Temple Bourne, Messrs E.P. Evans, J.S. Hanson, J. French, W.R. Cosford, Ebenezer Baylis, Jabez Swannell, J.G. Harlow, Heath, C. Burden, S. Darby, J. Jones, A.J. Allbutt, W.L. Frost and Mrs Frost.

Captain Alexander Locke, in addressing the gathering, said: 'The year before last, the 25th anniversary of the building of our church, the friends thought this a good opportunity to raise £1,000 for building a small hall here costing about £450; also to build seven classrooms by the side of our present school in Sansome Walk and to pay off £100 now owing to the incidental fund. I consider this is a very suitable way on our part to celebrate the 25th anniversary and I am sure the citizens of Worcester will think that too. I will conclude by congratulating the teachers and friends meeting here on the Sabbath that they now will be sheltered from the rain and cold of winter, which they were not in the wooden one just removed.'

Captain Locke then laid the stone, which was inscribed: 'This stone was laid by Captain Alexander Locke, February 26th 1891.'

Mr E.P. Evans said 'he was very pleased to be present, for the Baptists were the friends of all in that locality and the enemies of none. It was a most difficult matter for parents even in the best-regulated families to get their children together and instruct them in the old, old story of the Gospel in their homes. But in the schools they were classed together according to age and knowledge and the teachers attended week after week to instruct them. The people round should appreciate this self-sacrifice and they should send their children regularly to be instructed in the school which they were building.' He congratulated Captain Locke on the way in which he had discharged his duties; and he hoped the blessing of God would rest on the structure.

A collection was then taken amounting to £15-12s-4½d including 10s contributed by the children attending the Sunday School.

APPENDIX 3

An even shorter history of Red Hill from 1936 – 2000 written for inclusion in 'The Worcestershire Baptist Association Remembered' at the time the Association was amalgamated into the new Heart of England Baptist Association.

RED HILL 1936-2000 : A BRIEF HISTORY

In the years around the War and on through the 50s the work was maintained by a faithful group of members, most notably Frank Wheeler (Chapel Superintendent 1925-1949), Alice Dolloway (Secretary 1936-1968), George Collins (Superintendent 1949-1966) and Stan Giles, who fulfilled a number of positions over the years including a remarkable 64 years as Church Organist. These were generally quiet years but signs of new life appeared in the early 1960s with new work starting up:

- A Women's Fellowship in 1961 – still flourishing today, although more recently changing its name to Tuesday Fellowship to accommodate men also!
- A Young People's Christian Endeavour in 1962, soon to have a real impact both in terms of numbers of young people attending Sunday worship as well as in practical ways, in particular the conversion and extension of the chapel cellar to form a coffee bar and new toilets
- In the mid-60s a Junior Club (later Junior CE) followed some years later by an Inters CE

Although withdrawing from the CE movement in the late 1980s, these groups have continued over the years under various names (currently Junior Explorers, XL and Backrow). As to the Sunday School, new leadership and staff in the early 1970s revived a work in real danger of closing and numbers steadily grew. A week long Holiday Bible Club was started, continuing every year since then and attracting up to 200 children at times – supplemented in recent years by an Adventure Camp for 11-16 year olds.

In 1976 Philip Loe took over the Superintendency from Stan Giles, giving new vision and leadership. The growth in numbers (especially families) and activities made it more difficult for members to be involved effectively at Red Hill and Sansome Walk. The result was that in 1983 Red Hill was commissioned as an independent Baptist Church with 60 founding members transferring from Sansome Walk. A year later (the church having in the meantime purchased a manse), Trevor Woodget was inducted as its first pastor, with Home Mission support for the first three years of his ministry.

Over the ten years of Trevor's ministry the church grew steadily – most notably seen on Sunday mornings. From a handful of adults meeting in a house in 1983 (in addition to the Sunday School at chapel) through Nunnery Wood Primary School (first the TV Room and then the main hall) and the 6th Form College (all together for the first time), since 1998 an average of 200 of all ages has met every Sunday morning at Nunnery Wood High School.

Clearly the 100 year old chapel was no longer adequate and since 1993 the church has been actively searching for a new site – so far without success and with disappointments along the way, not least when a possible site in Walkers Lane was lost on planning appeal and more recently over local hostility to a new church on the St Peters Estate. Yet we still trust that God will open up the way in His time.

In 1996 the church called Martin Hodson as its second pastor – followed in 1999 by the appointment of Steve Thomson as Assistant Minister with special responsibility for youth and children's work. Also in 1999 Simon and Kate Harry went out to Nepal as career missionaries with the Baptist Missionary Society.

Developments over the last few years have included:

- A growing involvement with the other evangelical churches in Worcester under the banner of 'Jesus in the City'
- A Link with Osijek Baptist Church in Croatia, fostered by prayer, practical support and mutual visits (including a planned holiday together later this year)
- A new leadership structure of Church, House Group and Task Group Leaders, releasing those with relevant gifts into more effective ministry
- Regular Alpha courses and the Jesus Video Project
- The adoption of a Vision Statement to 'believe, be and share the Good News of Jesus Christ'

And so the church enters the new millennium with a membership just short of 200; with an emphasis on relevant teaching, contemporary worship, fellowship, service and mission; with thankfulness to God for all He has done; and with expectation for the future.