

Wear Valley Christian Centre

2017: 90th Anniversary

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Foreward

If there had never been deep spiritual hunger, there would probably have never been the establishing of a vibrant Pentecostal church in Bishop Auckland. But hunger and thirst after God was evident in A Boddy who longed to see a revival like that witnessed in Wales, and invited T.B. Barrett to Sunderland; and there was hunger and thirst in the small band of people meeting regularly in the Postmaster's house in Witton Park, and who were instrumental in inviting Stephen Jeffreys to hold meetings in the Bishop Auckland Town Hall 90 years ago. That was the beginning of something that shook a whole community: Spiritual hunger and thirst combining with Holy Spirit fire to ignite a work of God that still stands today.

Thanks go to Barbara Britton who drafted the book, and Bob Woods who edited and helped publish it

As you read this book, I trust that it will provoke the very same deep spiritual appetite for God to work again - and for you to have a part in it. It can and will happen if we hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Let's make room for the presence and power of God

David Parry

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Chapter One: A Brief History of Bishop Auckland.

Bishop Auckland is a small market town and civil parish in County Durham, in the North East of England. It is situated at the confluence of the River Wear and the River Gaunless.

It has been site of an important market town since medieval times. 'Bishop', as it is known to the locals, grew most rapidly in the nineteenth century, as a colliery town, but was important in much earlier times.

Its earlier history is centred round the park and Castle of Auckland which has been the residence of the Bishops of Durham since the 12th century. Auckland Castle, also known as Auckland Palace, began as a manor house, built about 1183 by Bishop Pudsey, but was later converted into a castle by Bishop Anthony Bek in the 14th century. It is the last of fourteen country seats belonging to the Bishops of Durham.

Earlier still is a reference to Bishop Auckland at around 1000A.D, and in 1020 it is recorded as being given as a gift to the Bishop of Durham by King Canute. It is also suspected that a village existed on this site, long before that. There is evidence in South Church of St Andrews Church, as early as the seventh century.

The Romans had a lookout post where Auckland Castle is sited today and there is also evidence of possible Iron Age settlements, together with finds of Bronze Age, Neolithic and Mesolithic artifacts.

The main street through Bishop Auckland is part of Dere Street.

While County Durham is probably mostly recognised as a mining area, it first began further north in Newcastle around 1787 and gradually spread down into County Durham about 1825/26, reaching its peak in 1923 when 170,000 miners were employed in a variety of pits in the area. World wars One and Two were both instrumental in helping the industry to increase dramatically, but by 1947, when the coal mining was nationalised, 127 collieries had closed and the number of miners employed had fallen to 108,000. Times were hard and between 1950 and 1970 around another hundred mines were closed in County Durham with shattering consequences where mining was the main source of work. The pit heaps were reclaimed and naturalised into the landscape so all previous signs of the pits were obliterated, the air was clear and fresh once

again and the outlook more pleasant. This however was of little help to the people seeking employment as the dole queues grew longer.

In recent years many shops have closed in Bishop Auckland and outlying areas causing much hardship, and the large retail park has taken all the business away from the town. However, hope is beating in the heart of the town again as help has come in the form of one man investing enormous amounts of money in the area. He is repairing the castle and grounds, building a huge attraction to bring in the tourists and putting the town back on the map. There is so much history in Bishop Auckland that many people are unaware of, even people who have moved into the area from other towns, and it looks like a reawakening at long last. It will mean employment for a vast variety of work and people and will bring a refreshing air of rebirth to a dying town.

Chapter Two: A Miraculous Start.

It would probably be true to say that the Pentecostal movement travelled from the U.S.A to the British Isles in 1904, starting with the Welsh Revival. From there it breathed its way to the North East of England, into Sunderland, to a church pastored by Rev. Alexander A. Boddy, where there was a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit towards the end of 1907.

Rev Boddy had witnessed for himself the great revival in Wales and longed for such an experience himself. On hearing of a Pastor T.B.Barrett who had experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit, he travelled to Norway to witness for himself the Pentecostal revival. He was so impressed by what he saw that he invited Rev. Barrett to come to England. Arriving in Newcastle in September he began to minister at Rev. Boddy's church and although large numbers were not involved, it is significant that many of the leading personalities of the Pentecostal movement experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It became apparent that the teaching of Acts Chapter 2 was alive and well and moving among the people.



There was a small group of Christians in Bishop Auckland who met regularly together in the postmaster's house in Witton Park and prayed for a move of God in the area. They were aware of a spiritual dearth in the towns and villages and longed for a move of God to awaken people to the awareness of their need. They had heard of Stephen Jeffreys and the miraculous things that were occurring under his ministry and so invited him to come to Bishop Auckland and hold a campaign in the Town Hall. He responded to the invitation, arriving in the town at the end of February 1927 and stayed until the end of the campaign on April 10th of the same year.

At the outset the campaign was poorly attended, just a handful of people along with the group who had invited Stephen Jeffreys to the town. This could be due to the fact that life was very difficult.

Unemployment was very high, with scant hope of any improvement in the foreseeable future. The war had brought a lot of distress to the people, with a high loss of lives, and then the General Strike had added to their depression. It was definitely a time when everyone needed something to lift them up and bring them a ray of hope. There was very little money to spend on entertainment and a pall of apathy hung over the town.

So it was that as word spread of the wonderful things that were happening at the Town Hall, the spirits of the community lifted and they began to attend the meetings. Being the largest venue in town even the 1000 capacity was too small, how the people cried out for a larger building. Very soon there was no room to accommodate the vast queues of people waiting to get in to the meetings. People were being turned away as they stood for hours, waiting for a chance to get in to the hall and see the miracles that were occurring there. Police

were required to control the vast queues. Twice almost 2000 were turned away after waiting for 2 hours. People were coming from miles around as word spread about Stephen Jeffreys, and his message was so impressive



that many who attended his meetings were convicted and accepted Christ as their Saviour. It is recorded that 964 went through the enquiry rooms professing Christ in the first two weeks. The North Eastern Gazette reported these happenings and showed photos of the massive queues around the Town Hall. The teachings of Stephen Jeffreys were just what were needed at this time and it proved to be the awakening that Bishop Auckland was ready for.

Things were occurring that were beyond the belief of the ordinary person. Blind people received their sight, limbs were straightened, people who were so desperately ill and had been pronounced as incurable by their doctors were off their beds, fit and healthy once more. Nellie Welford from Evenwood was living, walking proof of the power of Stephen's ministry. She was brought, on a stretcher, to the Town Hall and placed at the bottom of the stairs. Unable to move, her friends went into the hall and begged Stephen to come and heal her. He



Miss NELLIE WELFORD,
and the stretcher on which she was carried.

agreed and was horrified at what he saw. The lower part of her face was covered in a massive black scab, she was unable to walk or talk and had been ill for three years, getting progressively worse as the years went by. The doctors had done all they could for her with no effect and had pronounced her incurable. Her sister Margaret had been to one of Stephen's meetings and had been amazed at the healings she saw there. Hurrying home she recounted it all to Nellie, suggesting that she be taken to a meeting in order to receive healing. This was arranged and when Stephen saw her he immediately went to her, asked her if she loved Jesus. She nodded in assent and he then asked her if she believed that Jesus could heal her. Again she nodded so he laid hands on her and prayed for her complete healing in the name of Jesus. Whilst he was praying she began to whisper and as her voice became stronger she pronounced, 'I can speak, I can talk, oh thank you Lord, I can walk. Let me get off this stretcher and try,' and she did, walking up and down the passage. Stephen himself was amazed, considering her case one of the most remarkable he had ever witnessed. An hour after she returned home, the scab fell from her face and her skin was as clean and pure as a new born child. Nellie went on to become a full time Pastor of the Evenwood Church, re-telling the story of her miraculous healing to many, a living witness to the power of God wherever she went.

It is no wonder that the queues at the Town Hall were so vast. I suspect that there may have been those who were seeking sensationalism, but this was soon squashed by the living evidence of the many healings and conversions that took place. Mrs Stead from West Auckland had been in a serious road accident six years previously and had tremendous difficulty walking, even with the aid of two sticks. Her spine was injured and was inoperable and as she was discharged from hospital she was told that only a miracle would cure her. She received that miracle in March 1927 when Stephen Jeffreys laid hands on her in Bishop Auckland Town Hall and she received her healing in the name of Jesus. She walked away from that meeting without the aid of sticks or assistance from any human being. She was completely cured.



There was thirteen year old Celia Brown, well known locally. She was born blind, no eyes at all in any form, just the empty sockets where the eyes would have been. She couldn't distinguish between light or dark, had no concept whatsoever of day or night, it was all the same to her. She was taken to meet Stephen who laid hands on her and immediately her eyelids lifted and the beginning of eyes appeared. They were very small at first as she experienced the changing light as day turned into night, but day by day the eyes grew and they became adjusted to all the different things she saw and experienced in this wonderful new world which was opening up to her. She was learning so many things too with these new eyes she had been given, how to read and write, pick up objects and move them to where she wanted, and now she could see her parents and friends. What a magnificent thing to happen to a young girl and how she must have praised God for this wonderful gift.

There were many other miracles performed but it was that particular one that brought Tom Wilson to the meetings. His mother had been at that meeting and had been rather late in returning home. Both Tom and his father were becoming quite worried, fearing something had happened to her, and when she finally arrived home, questioned her as to why she was so late. She began to tell them about Celia Brown and how she could now see. Tom chided his mother, telling her it was impossible, that Celia only had empty sockets, but his mother was so excited at what had happened that she insisted it was the truth. She explained that Stephen Jefferys had prayed for Celia that night and

she had received a pair of blue eyes and she could see. They still couldn't believe it but they very soon discovered that it was true.

The trouble lay in getting into the meetings. Every time the hall was packed to suffocation and during the first two weeks some 964 people had made a commitment to Christ. However, Tom did manage to get into a meeting and came out a different man. He discovered something very different about Stephen Jefferys. As soon as he made an appearance there was an air about him

that stirred the congregation. He was strong in his beliefs yet very tender, and when he spoke, his words were like a sword piercing the heart. People were reduced to tears when he appealed to them to 'Come to Jesus.' Tom left the hall that night under conflicting emotions and returned a few nights later to accept the challenge, being the first to raise his hand. From this encounter, Tom became an evangelist with the Assemblies of God and served with outstanding distinction for some fifty years. He was not the only one to be converted and enter the ministry during that campaign. There were four brothers, all from the same family, who became pastors with the Assemblies of God. These were Norman, Clarence, Harold and Clyde Young which shows how the power of God worked in Stephen Jeffreys. Of all the decisions made for Christ there would be a few that were simply emotional and would disappear as soon as the campaign ended. There were, however, decisions made that stood the test of time and changed many a life forever. It was suggested that once Stephen left the area the excitement would fizzle out and life would return to normal. How wrong they were! People who had never attended a church began to throng to the services, enjoying the meetings and filling the pews as never before. It was the awakening that Bishop Auckland needed and it came at just the right time. Life changed, the movement grew and the cloud of despair lifted from the town.

Chapter Three: The Jeffreys Brothers.

Stephen was born 2nd September 1876 to Thomas and Keiza Jeffreys, and was the third of twelve children. They lived in Nantyffyllon Maesteg, Wales and his father was a miner, struggling with asthma, but determined to keep working to support his large family. When Stephen was twelve he had to follow his father into the mines, but soon the work became too much for his father who died at the age of 47.

Stephen continued working as a miner and married Elizabeth Lewis on Boxing Day, 1898. She was a farmer's daughter from Ynys-y-bwl, Bridgend. They had three daughters, May, Gladys and Lilian (who died when only six months old,) and one son, Edward. It was a good marriage, the family enjoying being together with nothing spectacular occurring until 1904. This was the year of the Welsh Revival when Evan Roberts had a vision of all Wales 'being lifted up to Heaven,' as he confided to a friend, adding that there was going to be a great revival, the Holy Ghost would be coming soon, so we must be ready. According to Edwin Orr the Welsh revival can be traced to the chapel of Rev Joseph Jenkins at New Quay, Cardiganshire as early as February 1904, when the stream gathered force over the next six months. When Seth Joshua, a well-known evangelist visited the chapel in September of that year, he was amazed at the spirit of revival in that place. Whilst ministering there, the momentum increased, and at a special service at Blaenannerch, Seth Joshua cried out in Welsh, 'Lord...bend us.' Evan Roberts was at that meeting and going to the front, he knelt down and cried out in a loud, fervent voice, 'Lord, bend me.' By November there was a flood tide of blessing sweeping through Wales and Evan Roberts was thrust into prominence becoming the revival's outstanding personality.

The lives of hundreds of coal miners and tin plate workers were transformed and the usually busy pubs were almost empty. It was during this time that Stephen Jeffreys attended several services and came under conviction. The Spirit of God gave him no rest during the following week and on the Sunday morning he went to Siloh Chapel and under the faithful ministry of Rev. Glasnant Jones, committed his life to serving God. He was immediately filled with the Spirit and immeasurable joy, and that wonderful day was 17th day of November, 1904. He became a member of that Chapel, was at all the prayer meetings and was involved in all the activities of the church, but most of all he

loved the open air meetings. By this time the revival was at its height, reaching into all denominations, all ages and all classes of people. David Lloyd-George likened the revival to an earthquake and a tornado. Crime decreased, drunkenness was very rarely seen and prayer meetings were being held in trains, coal mines and places of business.

It was at this time that Stephen began preaching in the streets of Maesteg, gathering such a crowd that one dear lady brought him a chair to stand on so that everyone could see him. He continued preaching until it was becoming dark, but still he carried on, so the old lady brought him a miner's lamp from her home so that he could be seen as well as heard.

He continued working in the mines for several years but at every opportunity he preached in the streets while still attending the ever important prayer meetings. There was such a hunger for seeking God that when news of the Pentecostal outpouring in Andrew Boddy's church in Sunderland began to filter through to South Wales, the fervency of prayer and praise increased until several seekers were richly blessed. One such was Rev Thomas Madog Jeffreys, along with several others. Waunllwynd became the centre for seekers and the blessing spread rapidly. In Maesteg, special meetings were arranged and Stephen, with his brother George, both received a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking immediately in other tongues, with Stephen admitting that this new power was just what he needed in his ministry. It proved a great help to him as he witnessed to some of his workmates, leading them and other people to the Lord. A mining associate of his, W.J. Thomas, had been listening to him and watching the things that were occurring during his ministry, but whilst he was under conviction, he made no definite decision until he went to a Harvest Thanksgiving meeting, held on a farm at Drysiog. Stephen could see that his friend was close to making a decision so he went over to encourage him, pleading with him to accept the Lord as his personal Saviour and on the night of October 29th Stephen rejoiced when his friend accepted the invitation.

It was around this time that Stephen received an invitation to conduct his first evangelical campaign at Cwmtwrch, near Swansea. It was so successful that he was asked to extend the campaign for another three days, which he did. It was a remarkable time, the blessings of God were flowing freely so Stephen remained for several weeks. The weather was dreadful, torrential rain, but in spite of that the people walked for miles over the hills to hear Stephen preach, so powerful was his message.

Stephen's brother George wrote to Alexander Boddy in Sunderland, telling him of the work that was going on in Wales, of the healings that were occurring, the convictions and of the many who were being baptised in the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth, Stephen's wife, attended some of those meetings and came away convinced that he had a call to the ministry. When she arrived back home in Maesteg she collected his miners clothes together and gave them to a friend because she knew in her heart that Stephen would never have any use for them again.

In January 1922 Stephen accepted an invitation to join the Elim Pentecostal Alliance which had been founded by his brother George in 1915. The brothers worked well together and during the partnership, which lasted a few years, had great success in the country. Stephen left Elim in 1926 after a disagreement with his brother but was freer then to continue his ministry. They had travelled to Canada and America during their partnership and had covered a great deal of England and Wales, seeing many miracles and conversions.

Chapter Four: Assemblies Of God Church: Bishop Auckland.

Praise is due to the few Christian people who met together at Witton Park praying for a revival because it was the start of the Bishop Auckland Church. After Stephen Jeffreys left the area, meetings began initially in the Temperance Hall under the joint leadership of Pastor Entwistle and Miss Frost. During this time the Church became established under the Assemblies of God in Great Britain.

By 1934 the church had moved into its own premises in Railway Street. It was an old building which the Assembly purchased and plans were drawn up to convert it into a church. A bricklayer was contacted and the work began. The Pastor and several members of the Assembly were the labourers and soon the new church took shape. It had the capacity to seat 600 people, there were vestries either side, a baptistery under the platform and a modern kitchen at the back.

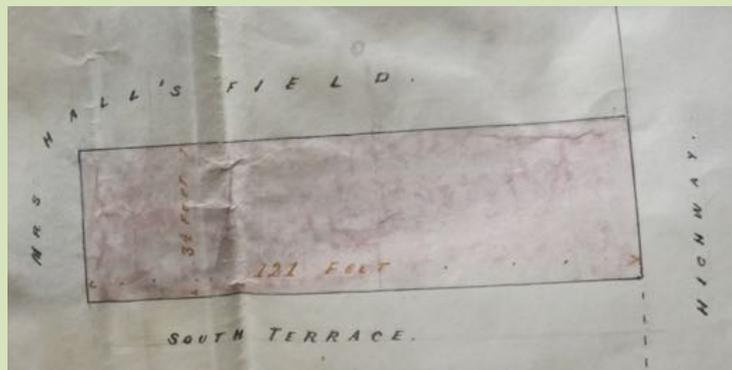
The official opening took place in 1934 during the August Bank Holiday weekend. John Carter performed the 'turning of the key' ceremony and the guest speaker was C.L. Parker. The church flourished and began to grow. Every Saturday night a march of witness walked from the church and down the main street to the Market Place, carrying banners. A vibrant open air meeting then took place with the speakers bringing a powerful message to the people. A prayer meeting would follow this which always seemed specially blessed of the Lord.

During the 1939 to 1945 war the church was commandeered by the army, leaving it necessary to find alternative accommodation. The Salvation Army opened its doors to us until we finally managed to rent an upstairs room in Back Bondgate, with a smaller room leading off from it. This was over a chicken house and the smell would drift upstairs, but it didn't inhibit the worship in any way. It was a far cry from the comfort of the Railway Street Church but the services seemed to take on such an energy of their own that the surroundings became unimportant. God was in his Heaven and His people were being blessed.

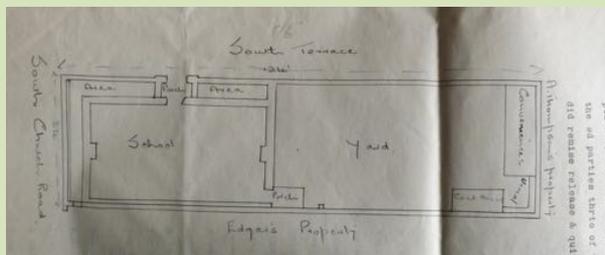
The work continued to flourish in spite of the difficulties that came with the war and in the early months of 1945 Stanley Pinchbeck arrived to continue the work. Finding accommodation for him was difficult, but eventually lodgings were

found and his ministry in Bishop Auckland began. It was while he was in lodgings that he suggested that the church buy a house for the presiding minister. This involved a great deal of earnest prayer but eventually a house was purchased and Pastor Pinchbeck was the first incumbent to take up residence on 4th December, 1945. The people were so encouraged by this that it was suggested that it would be a good idea to pray for a building where they could establish their own church. Money was a huge problem but it didn't deter the people in their prayers. There had been offers of interest free loans and gifts of money when praying for the church house, so if it could work for that, then surely it would work again for a church building.

A building came up for sale, on the corner of South Terrace and South Church Road, in the centre of town and Pastor Pinchbeck went to bid for it. Title deeds show that this property known as 'Mrs Hall's Field' was sold in 1846 to



'King James Free Grammar School'. 1861 saw the sale of the land and buildings to others including Joseph Pease. 1946 again saw the property, now



the Friends Adult School, for sale to the highest bidder. The bidding went against Pastor Pinchbeck and was purchased by a man in the 'betting trade'. The buyer wanted to turn it into a restaurant where alcohol could be

served, but on discovery that the Deeds stipulated that no intoxicating liquor was to be served on the premises, he offered it to the church at the price he paid for it. God moves in mysterious ways when he answers our prayers!

Negotiations for the purchase began on 23rd November 1948 at the price of £3,600. As there was £2000 left from the sale of the Railway Street building and Manse it was deemed wise to put this together with a £2500 mortgage which also enabled the purchase of a Manse: 22 Oak Terrace, Cockton Hill.

The Assembly of God Church in South Church Road was officially opened on Saturday, 26th February, 1949 by Mr Aaron Linford, Chairman of the Durham D.C, with great rejoicing at the wonderful answer to prayer. The church now



felt well established, having its own building and a manse, and continued in its ministry to the people in Bishop Auckland and the outlying villages, and continuing to enjoy the ministry of Pastor Pinchbeck until 2nd July, 1950.

The Church continued under several ministers each having a different kind of ministry and then in 1968 Pastor and Mrs Parry took over, having worked as missionaries in the Congo and China for many years. They opened up new ministries in the church by starting children's meetings on Monday and Wednesday evenings each week. This was a great venture which proved to be very fruitful. The church had a converted ambulance, so by using that and hiring a bus, over 100 children were brought to the church every week to attend these special services. The senior citizens of the church were catered for with meetings adapted to their needs and meetings for women were a popular addition to the church's programme, so all ages were blessed by the ministry of Pastor and Mrs Parry.

It must be mentioned that during Pastor Parry's ministry at Bishop Auckland, four men went to train at Kenley and Mattersey Bible Colleges, two of the men being from the same family. The church also housed a good bookstall which was managed by Mr Bob Moses who was also the Sunday School Superintendant.

Pastor Parry also began a new work by collecting a number of willing people together to go and minister into Tindale Hospital, bringing to them a mini service of hymns, prayer and a short message from the bible. This work was extended in 1975 to include Care Homes in the area, and continued successfully until 2013 when Government cuts were being made and several Care Homes were being closed down, thus causing us to cease our ministry in that area.

Pastor Parry shepherded the church for eight years and four months after which he received an invitation from the Overseas Missions Council asking him to go to Nairobi as the Principal of the Pentecostal Bible College. As he had done overseas missionary work for a great number of years, his heart was for those people, so he accepted the invitation. Mrs Parry, also a faithful worker for the Lord, and a great helper to her husband, went to take charge of the work of the Bible correspondence course which enrolls thousands of students.

This left the church without a Pastor for a while but the church had a number of dedicated and able men who carried on the work. There were also various Pastors who visited and ministered along with a number of lay preachers who willingly offered their services, so the church continued supplying help and comfort, along with spiritual guidance to the community.

The children's work continued to flourish with John and Mary Holliday working hard, having a very good attendance of children in the Woodhouse Close area. Later on John Marlin took over in the church as Superintendent of the Sunday school, which continued to flourish.

Several Pastors took up residence over the ensuing years, keeping the work flowing nicely. (A list of all the Pastors can be seen in Chapter ten.)

The time eventually arrived when it became clear that the church needed to be updated and plans were drawn up for the renovation and extension that was required. This was undertaken in two stages, and the necessity arose once again to find premises where we could hold our meetings.



Early in the 1980's a new hall was built taking in the yard and external toilet area. The old hall was reconfigured and new roof matching that of the new hall

included. While the builders (JRG Builders) were busy with the extension, the church held their weekly meetings in the Masonic Hall in Bishop Auckland.



The members returned to worship in the new facility in November 1981. A church hall with baptistery, minor hall, toilets, entrance and foyer, kitchen, a small store area / Library and an office made up the facilities.

Then in August 1983 Pastor Jim Briton, with his wife Christine took up the Pastorate in Bishop Auckland, moving into the manse. Andrew, their son, was just a baby while Joanne was at primary school. They had previously travelled down from Glasgow, where they pastored a church, to check out the Bishop Auckland church with a view to taking up the challenge there, and had liked what they had seen. Because of this they had been to St Anne's school to secure a place for Joanne, when the new term would start in September. The headmaster had to tell them that all the places were filled and there was no chance of Joanne becoming a pupil of that school. As Pastor Briton walked away he told the headmaster that Joanne would be there in September. When the time came, sure enough, Joanne turned up and was accepted. God had moved into the situation to secure her a place. Apparently some time after Pastor Briton's visit someone must have changed their mind about the school and a vacancy had arisen, allowing Joanne the place she needed. In time, Andrew also became a pupil of that school.

The church had a membership of about 80 people at the time that Pastor Briton took over the leadership. There was a busy weekly programme of prayer meetings, Sunday School and a Youth outreach, which were regularly attended, but Pastor Briton was eager to include further meetings and activities which would bring in more people, with the prospect of them becoming Christians. There was to be no pressure put on them, they must come to a decision by their own free will.

We were soon able to boast a thriving children's work while reaching out into the community in several different ways. A playgroup was started, also a baby and toddler group, with the Youth group still being well attended. We continued ministering into the Care Homes and Pastor Briton began a very successful prison ministry which produced a good number of conversions. Several of these proved genuine as they found churches that continued to pastor and guide them when they were released from prison. We heard many times from Pastor Briton about the progress of these lads and it warmed our hearts to know that they were continuing on in their journey with the Lord.

A very successful work was a weekly meeting with the 'over sixties'. It was named 'The Silver Lining' and was very popular with many folks, bringing in several from across the road where there was a complex for the elderly. Every week there was a different speaker so no-one got bored hearing the same voice

week after week. We had refreshments at the end of the meeting and a chance to catch up with friends and chat with the speaker too.

Pastor Briton, as well as caring for the people of the church proved also an excellent children's worker, and soon won the admiration of the children in the church. Nativity plays were put on each year which encouraged the children and were always greatly enjoyed by the members. There was a large youth following that took up one whole portion of the church every Sunday morning and evening and was a really encouraging sight.

With a growing church even the new building was considered inadequate, so in 1992 designs were drawn up to extend, but this time the extensions had to be upwards as there was no more ground available for the church. GRW were contracted to take on the building works and whilst out of the church the fellowship met in Henknowle Community Centre for 7 months.



Because the church was growing and had a good youth following it was realised that they needed room for their various activities, so upwards it had to be. The minor hall was demolished and the sanctuary extended into part of this. A new smaller minor hall, kitchen, toilets, and entrance hall were built on the ground floor. A stairwell was built from the entrance hall leading up to the first floor housing an office for the Pastor, a lounge, youth room and separate toilets for men and women. An unexpected addition was through the architect changing the design of the roof beams to provide a further large room, used for children's work. This was now the second floor. When completed for Easter 1993 it proved to be exactly what had been needed, so children's and youth work could carry on uninterrupted in future.

Sadly moving back into the new premises never saw the continued growth that was present previously. The church remained strong with good children's and youth work continuing.

Chapter Five: Billy Graham.

It was during the time of Pastor Briton that Billy Graham came to Wembley on one of his tours. The year was 1989 and the Spectrum Centre in Willington erected a satellite dish on their roof so that people could avail themselves of his ministry. Ministers and churches from Bishop Auckland were supporters of the campaign. Once it was up and working correctly people from all the outlying villages and towns filled the centre, eager to hear the word of God. Thousands of people attended the meetings during the time he was in London. He had previously been to Roker Park in Sunderland, during 1984, setting up meetings which were filled to capacity night after night. It was amazing how the weather kept fairly good, a little chilly in the evenings, but no rain, which was a blessing as all the meetings were in the open air.

The message was so stirring that hearts were moved, all these received counselling, but as always happens for some it proved to be a temporary decision. However, a large number really had been convinced and went on to serve the Lord in a variety of ways.

Chapter Six: Assembly of God: PAIS Project.

Young people taking a year time out are taken on by the PAIS project, based in Manchester, and form teams across the United Kingdom. Over the years this has extended to be international.

Individuals are based in different nearby churches and come together to form a team working in schools.

Bishop Auckland has had a number of young people giving up 1-3 years of time to serve the Lord by joining the PAIS project.

In 2001 one of these felt an urge to do something to help the youth. This was Yvonne Woods who was 18 at the time. There had been a tragedy when one of the young girls died, and it affected Yvonne greatly, resulting in her seeking the Lord as to what she could do, how she might be a good influence in the lives of these boys and girls. She went on the Internet and found an organisation that trained young people to go into schools and their churches and to reach out and help the youth with their problems as they grew up. Teenagers and young adults face all kinds of difficulties as they mature and find themselves in a very confusing world and Yvonne thought that this sounded like the ideal thing for her to do. She approached the Pastor and several trustworthy people, asking them to pray for her and this project, to see if she was going in the right direction. After much prayer and deliberation Yvonne applied for an interview with PAIS and eventually was called to Manchester where she went, feeling very nervous, to see what God had in store for her. The course was for one year and she would have a team leader who would be there for any problems that arose. The team consisted of only five people from various regions and Yvonne would be based in Heywood, Manchester, at a small Methodist Church. It was a huge change for her. She had never been away from home, she was just 18 and had very recently passed her driving test and now she was being thrust into a great big world. She was a very quiet girl, and lacked a little confidence, but she had a mentor close at hand and could always phone home for a little encouragement. It didn't take long for her to settle in to her work and as the weeks went by her confidence grew, and very soon she was coping with problems as they arose, with ease and speed. She banned one young man because of continual bad behaviour. He was about 25 years old and causing disruption and unrest all the time, so after several warnings she banned him

from future meetings. That night, as she went out to her car, she discovered that it was smashed up so she sent for the police. She suspected who had done the damage but as there was a lack of sufficient evidence the case was dropped. Fortunately there were no further incidents and life proceeded fairly smoothly through that first year with Yvonne passing her graduation successfully. She stayed on for another year as leader of a new group, returning home after that year was completed.

Following this she decided to go to Durham University to read 'Youth and Community Work' which was a three year course. After graduating she returned to PAIS, working part time as a Pastoral Director offering support to the teams. For two years she travelled many miles giving help and advice to struggling groups until she realised that her desire was to work in her own church in Bishop Auckland. Through the years she received a lot of support from her church with finances, prayers and letters of encouragement. Since that time she has worked unstintingly in the church, always eager to help in any way that she can, and is dearly loved by the youth and all the people of the church. Her ministry is surely blessed.

In 2007 we had a young man come to our church on a PAIS project so Yvonne was able to help him in many ways. He was called Ben Johnson and very quickly fitted in to the work in the church. He had a great personality and was soon very popular with the youth, joining in with all their activities and began playing the drums in the church during the meetings on Sundays. After his year was over he returned to his home in Burnley but became unsettled and returned to Bishop Auckland, making it his home and settling down. Eventually he married a girl from the church and, in time, started a family. When a P.A. system was installed in the church, Ben was a great help and assisted many times in the running of it. He was also a great help in taking equipment up to our church in Wellington and setting it up there, dismantling it all at the end of the service and bringing it back to Bishop Auckland.

Chapter Seven: Present time.

In 2002 Pastor Briton retired and a new Pastor took up residence in the area. This was David Parry with his wife Ann Parry. It was almost like the sheep returning to the fold because David was the son of Idris Parry who had previously pastored the church. It was useful in the fact that he knew the area and also a good number of the members of the church. His induction into the church took place on Saturday, November 2nd 2002.

He was eager for the church to increase and used as his strap-line, 'Making room for the power and presence of God.'

He worked hard for the church to build it up and had a strong team behind him, encouraging new ideas to attract people to the meetings. These worked for a while and several new converts were added to the membership, but as always, a lull came and there were no new names to add to the list. There was no need to start worrying because this was a regular occurrence in most churches and at least numbers were not diminishing.

Pastor David's vision was to see the Wear Valley impacted for God, to see all the outlying villages and towns working together to bring the word of God to their homes and families and into the schools and work places. Out of this vision the church was renamed 'Wear valley Christian Centre' (WVCC).

His word over the fellowship came from Leviticus chapter 26, verse 9. 'I will look on you with favour and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you.'

The church was beginning to look a little shabby so new carpets were laid, chairs purchased, and a split level platform erected with lighting and a P.A. system installed. It was a big improvement and met with today's more modern standards. Further developments were necessary to embrace the ever expanding technologies of today so the church now has a Website, Social media, Email and Podcasts.

To meet the spiritual needs of the assembly a variety of programmes were arranged, such as Encounter weekends, Teaching sessions, Gospel meeting, School's work, Women's weekends, Men's breakfasts, Campaigns and Special Sunday night services, (which served as our shop window)

Our campaigns, ranging in time from a weekend to 6 weeks, have been varied and purposeful. Two concurrent campaigns saw the church explore the Ten Commandments along with arranging transport and inviting people along to see J. John as he ministered weekly at Preston Park. It was a wonderful experience as he also went through the Ten Commandments over the weeks, bringing understanding and humour to a rarely talked on subject.

A further campaign brought Roger Sapp, (an American Healing Evangelist.) to our church with amazing evidence of the moving of God. As Roger Sapp taught us how to develop a healing ministry we saw evidence of people who were crippled, running up and down stairs, a young lady who couldn't raise her arm above her head without experiencing severe pain was able to raise her arms easily and wave them about. Eighteen months later she is still pain free. Our own Pastor was greatly troubled with digestive troubles, including pain and sickness and now he can eat anything he likes without trouble.

We have also enjoyed 'Christ for all Nations', studying a book by Rick Warren called, '40 days of Purpose', and together 'Taking Time To Listen' using cds/mp4s to hear the New Testament, along with associated study and preaching.

The church has run Alpha Courses with great success, and these have been followed by a commitment and shortly afterwards by baptisms.

Sadly, in September 2012, our Pastor's wife Ann died after suffering for some time with cancer. It was a great loss to Pastor David and the church, but the leadership granted him time off to recover and very ably took over the running of the church. No meetings were cancelled and the leadership took it in turns to lead and preach, sometimes calling on local preachers to fill the gap. It was a very difficult time for all but the leaders did a sterling job and proved their worth.

Chapter Eight: Extending Our Boundaries.

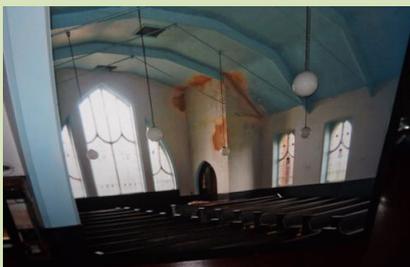
Over the years ministry has not been confined to our centre. As has been mentioned a Sunday school was held on Woodhouse Close Estate and good contacts were kept with home visits by John Marling. Young people have taken time out working in other churches. Others have felt called into full time ministry notably Clyde Sandry, Steve Young, and Cliff Henderson.

Ministry has also been provided to local churches by some of our church members.

Pastor Parry saw the work of the church as reaching not only the Bishop Auckland area but out to the Wear Valley. During 2006 WVCC was given the opportunity to take on a former Assembly of God church in Willington.



Willington lies about five miles away from Bishop Auckland. A small town and like all the other towns and villages in the area was principally a mining community. After the closure of the mines, there was a great deal of hardship in the area and work was hard to find, but the Northerners have an indomitable spirit and soon perked up, making life agreeable again, believing in their God, that all things would come right. The 2011 census shows a population of 9147. On the corner of North Lane and West End Terrace lies the Phoenix Christian Centre (PCC). A building initially built in 1814 as a Presbyterian Church and then becoming an Assembly of God Church whose last minister was Pastor Robinson. With dwindling numbers the Church closed down and later became the property of the Northumbria Region of the Assemblies of God. It was offered to WVCC with the proviso that within 5 years it would be handed back if the project failed or WVCC closed. After this the title deeds would transfer to WVCC.



The prospect of bringing it back from a derelict state into use was a daunting prospect, the building being in very poor repair and totally unsuitable for multifunction use. Pastor David Parry had a burden

to see a work established in Willington and had the WVCC pray diligently for guidance over the problem. It was a huge undertaking for the church, particularly financially, and could prove to be an albatross around the neck of the church. However, God definitely seemed to be in favour of the project because very soon, through a chance meeting, a builder was found to start the work of renovating and renewing a very tired old building and making it into something really attractive and functional.



We prayed for finances to pay for the renovations and the then Wear Valley District Council, who were very encouraging, supplied our needs, along with individual donations and bequests. Work on the building was carried out during 2007/2008 and so the church became operational for some time before being officially opened on 20th May 2011. Along with an attractive new church it was renamed the Phoenix Christian Centre, a very apt name as the church had virtually risen from the ashes, just like the phoenix! One significant development was appointing Mrs Helen Sanderson as the centre's manager, ensuring that all the various activities run smoothly.

Title deeds transferred to WVCC Trustees on December 16th 2011. We acknowledge God's provision of finances to see the building renovated and were able to go forward with confidence and began our activities at the church. These were:

- After School Club (Create).
- Mother and toddler Group.
- Community groups.
- Regular Church Service.
- Carol Service.
- Bonfire.
- Fairs
- Coffee Mornings.

The aim of the PCC is to serve the local community with the Christian message, and also to provide the community with attractive facilities. We have also had the great pleasure of hosting a couple of Civic services which were very well attended.

Internationally WVCC has had a long-standing commitment to support missionary work that is truly worldwide. Both prayer and financial support has been given to individuals, organisations, and projects. Under Pastor David Parry's leadership key projects have been:

- A much needed roof for a church in Burkina Faso
- A water supply for a village in Brazil
- Involvement in the rebuilding of a Bible college in Bukavu in Congo in particular the kitchen area.

Chapter Nine: Ministries of Wear Valley Christian Centre

Over the years since the inception of the church the various ministries have included:

- Sunday schools.
- Alpha courses, helping people to come to know and understand the Bible and God's purpose.
- Prayer meetings, especially helpful for reaching out for healing and daily guidance.
- Bible studies for understanding the necessity of God in our lives.
- Youth meetings.
- Play group.
- Mother and toddler, a pre-school ministry.
- School's work, meeting children at all ages in a school environment.
- Children's meetings, teaching them in various age groups.
- Children's and Youth weekends away.
- Foodbank.
- Computer Café, ideal for people of any age wishing to learn new skills.
- Coffee mornings, held at both churches.
- Bible Times Exhibition, held annually and a good outreach for the schools and public to see many artifacts from all over the world that are closely connected to the progress of religion throughout the world.
- Children's summer holiday club.
- Open air services, often held in the town centre.
- Small groups, that includes house groups and independent meetings where a few people feel the need to pray for certain issues and people
- Silver Lining, which was specifically for men and women over the age of 60. This was always well attended and was popular because of its informality.
- Barbeques were always popular and often attracted people from the surrounding areas.
- Walks. Again a popular activity for fellowship and ideal too if you had a dog to take with you.
- Website, Social Media, Email and Podcasts.

Chapter Ten: Ministers of Wear Valley Christian Centre



When the Stephen Jeffreys' campaign ended Hubert Entwistle, with Miss Ella Frost as his Co-Pastor, took over the church.



After this the following ministers took up the pastorate

XXXX – 1928
Hugh Horler,
died in service.



XXXX – XXXX
Robert Raine.



XXXX – XXXX
John Carter.



XXXX – XXXX
David Powell.



XXXX – XXXX
Howard Carter.
Invited to come and
supervise the
organising of the
Assembly.



XXXX – XXXX
Ivor Wellington.



XXXX - 1936
Frank Taylor, with
Bobby Smith.



1945 – 1950
Stanley Pinchbeck



1950 – 1958
Ernest Colley



1980 – 1982
Jim Ivinson

No Photo

XXXX – XXXX
Albert Hibbert.



1983 – 2002
Jim Briton



XXXX – XXXX
Colin Whittaker.
3.5 years



2002 - 2017
David Parry



1968 – 1975
Idris Parry.



1978 – 1978
Peter Cunningham.



Chapter Eleven: A wider ministry

As previously mentioned the ministry from Bishop Auckland has had an effect across England and further afield. Some of those are listed below:

- Robert Raine became a pastor at Bishop Auckland and later pastored at Birmingham, Douglas and Liverpool.
- Clarence Young held pastorates in Scotland, then Chapelton and Coundon.
- Tom Wilson became an Evangelist; well known throughout this county and also overseas. He also ran a summer holiday camp in Scarborough with Veron Kinkead. The spiritual impact on many young people cannot be underestimated.
- Harold Young held pastorates in Scotland, Sheffield Woodhouse, Brentford, Darlington and the U.S.A.
- Albert Sains held pastorates at Watford, Market Raisen, Birtley, Paisley, Sheffield Woodhouse and Macclesfield. (Home call 1947)
- Norman Young held pastorates at Wallsend, Risca and Walthamstow.
- Clyde Young held pastorates at Birtley, Ryhope, Gateshead, East Ham and Sunderland.
- Fred Brown pastored assemblies at Paisley, Glasgow and Norwich.
- Jim Watson held pastorates at Knott End and Gillingham.
- John Chopping held pastorates at Willington, Cockfield, Richmond and Canley.
- Mildred Serjeant nee Bell, (one of the early converts with a remarkable testimony of healing under Stephen Jeffreys' ministry), has pastored Lakenheath Assembly for many years.
- Nellie Welford, well known to many friends and acquaintances as the beloved Pastor of the Evenwood Assembly for many years. (Home call 1976)
- Clyde Sandry: Pastorates at Hull, Amblecote, and Nottingham
- Steve Young: Pastorates at North Shields, Hartlepool, and Crook. and as part of the Leadership Team at Billingham responsible for planting churches at Middlesborough, Redcar, Stockton, and Seaton Carew.
- Cliff Henderson: Planting and establishing churches in Billingham, Middlesborough, Stockton, Redcar, and currently a new church plant in Seaton Carew.

Acknowledgements

‘Frenzied victims and a hypnotic pastor’: Degree assignment: Catherine Simpson

Jefferys Website Blog: <http://stephenjeffreys.blogspot.co.uk>

Various historical documents: Bishop Auckland Library

History of revival

Bishop Auckland Assembly of God: Golden Jubilee: Booklet

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