

SANDY LANE BAPTIST CHURCH



**Celebrating God's Generosity
September 2008**



History of Bethel 1924-2008



**Interior of Bethel's Second Building around 1920s – 30s
(Probably a Sunday School Anniversary class)**

The Rev. Carlisle Litt, who was the author of the first 100 years of Bethel's history, resigned in 1929 after 7 years with Bethel. A number of young people had been baptised and brought into membership during his ministry, and the welfare committee had been very active in the village during this period. It is noted that They were largely responsible for securing a bus service to the bottom of the Village (1929) and also the services of a district nurse.

Use was made of students from Rawdon Baptist College to fill the pulpit, and in 1932, one of them – Rev. G. M. Wylie took over the vacant pastorate.

He reminded the members that they were 'The Body of Christ' and exhorted them to live their lives in a Christian manner and to share the Gospel with others. 500 invitation cards were delivered to the new Chellow Grange estate in an effort to draw people to the church. During his ministry (1932-1937) links were made with Allerton Baptist Church but, after his departure, this union seems to have faded.

A number of young men from the church went to serve their country in the 1939-45 war, and fortunately it seems they all returned safely.

In 1941 the Rev. Foster Sunderland was called to ministry, staying at Bethel for 6 years. He encouraged the young people to lead worship and take full part in the running of the church.

It is here that this brief history of Bethel and its journey ceases, as we have reached the present day. It is sixteen years until the 200th anniversary of Bethel's birth, and the history of those years is yet to be written.



Sunday School at Bethel 1946/7

**The steadfast love of God never ceases,
His mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning.
Great is Thy faithfulness, O, Lord.
GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS**

The following three years continued to be busy ones for the church, with three baptisms and much meeting and working with the young families through Adventurers (7-11 yrs.), Up-Front (12+), 'Toddlers' and 'Toddler Praise'. A 'Talk-Talk' group began where non-church-attending parents explored the Christian faith through an 'Alpha' course, which in turn, led to various explorations of how to introduce families to worship. ('God 'n Me' being the present form of family worship).

The older members continued to provide outreach in the community through their witness at 'Tuesday Club', 'Line Dancing' and Thursday afternoon fellowships. They were asked by the local school to take part in an inter-generational project, which was presented at a Neighbourhood Forum in December 2007. Prayer, being an integral part of the Christian faith, was (and continues to be) an important aspect of the church life at Bethel, and was given added impetus with the arrival of the new ministers. In their early ministry they engaged in prayer walks around the village – enabling them to get to know the area and some of the folk living there. The church was opened to the public on weekdays, for prayer, continuing to be on offer two mornings a week. Full days and nights of prayer were offered in support of city-wide evangelism events. The creation of a prayer room was established in 2006. It was felt that a designated prayer space would enrich the prayer time of the church, and members of the public had called in, asking for prayer when the church was open. It was decided early in 2008 to hold a special weekend on September 27th and 28th to celebrate God's goodness and faithfulness to the members at Bethel, as by the end of that month, after a final Gift Day, the church would be debt free, having taken only nine years to clear the balance. Although the members were diligent in paying off their debt on the extension, it is to be noted that they also supported many charitable causes with generosity over this period.



Sunday School Christmas Party 1948



Sunday School Class 1948



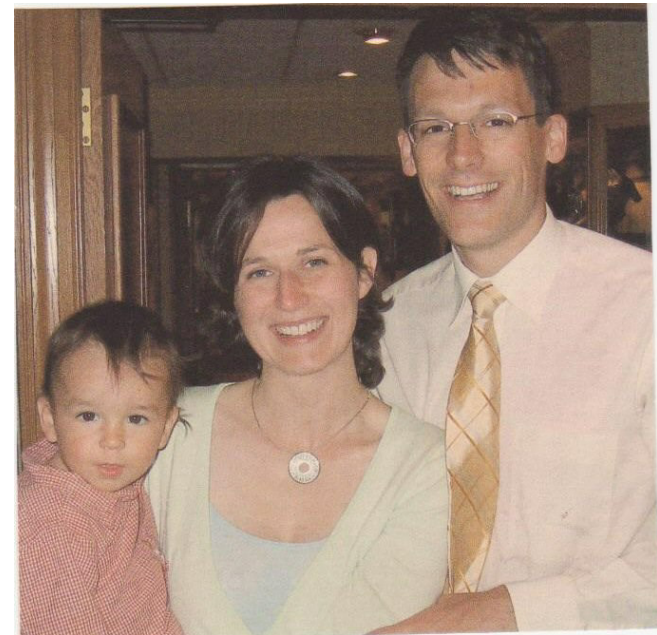
Bethel Baptist Sunday School Cricket team 1948

It is interesting to note that at a church meeting in 1949, the decision was taken to discontinue pew rents, and the Pew Rent Committee was disbanded. 1948/1950 saw the church sharing ministry again with Allerton Baptist, but in 1950 the Rev. M.V. Barber was called to Bethel, with oversight for Allerton, at a salary of £350 per annum. The church celebrated its 125th anniversary in 1949 with a meal and special services. Clippings from the T&A are in the minute book regarding this event.

After 12 years Pastor Dave and Alfie decided to retire and made the decision to move south to be near their family. Once again the church found itself looking for ministry. The Rev. John Gleghorn from Bingley gave oversight of the church over this crucial period.

During this time, the membership spent a considerable time together looking at the opportunities challenging the church. It was decided that they had a heart for the community and a strong desire to share the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. A leader was needed who had vision and discernment, who would continue the Gospel-based teaching that had built up the church. He or she would also need the gift of working with the many young families, moving into an ever enlarging village, who were swelling the numbers at Toddlers.

With this in mind, a call was made in 2005 to Rev. Tom and Shona Shaw – a young couple starting their first ministry as joint pastors.



Tom, Shona and Alasdair Shaw

In 1992 there were 15 members when Dave and Alfie arrived, 21 at the end of their first year and 64 in 2004 when they left. During this period the building was extended again because of the numerous activities needing more space than was available. Activities included: 'God in the Park' (x2); 'God in the City'; Bible studies; services at Chellowfield Court and Laurel Bank; monthly family services; Tuesday club; Luncheon club; Big G; ACE; Line dancing. A number of Alpha courses were also held. They also continued many of the previous activities such as Adventurers. In addition, they started a full record of activities in their Annual Report booklets which are available to read from the archives.

The building was extended 1998-99 and the congregation had to move out to the Methodist church where worship was shared. This lasted for a year and the move back was 21st March 1999 when there was another celebration followed by two baptismal services on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. Five people gave a clear witness to their faith in those two services. The final cost of the extension was £280,000. The members promised financial support for loans on the building, and grants were acquired from Y.B.A. Other Baptist churches gave and lent money and Bethel was fortunate to receive £30,000 from a number of charitable trusts. It was envisaged that the church would be debt free in ten year's time.



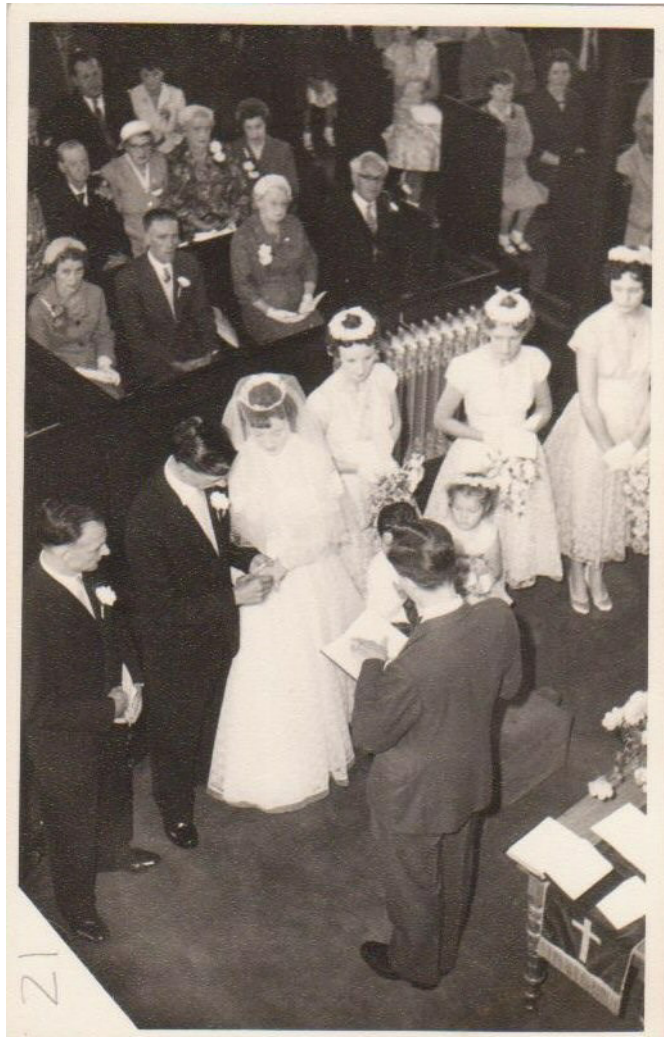
Work on the new extension

January 1950 saw the resignation of Mr. Clifford Sowden, as church secretary, after 30 years of service. He was re-elected to the post in December as no successor had come forward.

Unfortunately, Rev. Barber suffered ill-health after only 12 months of service, and sadly had to resign. One of his last comments to the church was to encourage them to work hard in drawing young people in, as the membership was ageing.

The church once again found itself looking for ministry, and a call was made to Rev. R.A. Croshaw, which was accepted (1952-55). His ministry was blessed through the Billy Graham crusades, which were taking place around the country, and a large number of people came to Christ, asking for baptism and membership at Bethel. This resulted in a very active Youth Fellowship.

A student minister from Rawdon Baptist College (Mr. J Ramsbottom) took the pastorate following Rev. Croshaw's departure to Ceylon in late 1955. He continued the work with the young people, and it was recorded in the minutes of a church meeting in 1958 that 'spiritual activity amongst the young people was high'. They were witnessing in the area, taking services around the city, and meeting regularly for prayer and Bible study.



**Wedding of Sylvia and Brian Kelle 29.08.59 conducted by Rev. J. Rams-
bo om**

Graham Holton's ministry was continued by his wife Iris until the arrival of Pastor Wilson and his wife Alfie later in 1991. Dave and Alfie had independently felt a call to ministry in the north of England and were in the process of looking around the area when they came to Bethel. It had been raining and as they looked at the church there was huge rainbow stretching over it. This was seen as an affirmation of their calling to Bethel and negotiations started at that point. This meant there was no inter regnum as when Dave and Alfie came to 'preach with a view' they started to undertake work immediately including an infant dedication, a CBBF meeting and a Thursday Bible study. They were inducted in 1992 in the Cottngley School to accommodate over 200 people. At the end of Graham's ministry there were still only 10 members but an increasing congregation and his work, it is fair to say, had laid the foundations for the expansion which came under the ministry of Dave and Alfie Wilson who continued the work he and Iris had started.



Pastor Dave Wilson (1992-2004)

Graham Holton was taken ill and died in April 1991.



Rev. Graham Holton(1987-1991) outside the new church

Mr. Ramsbottom left in 1960 to take a pastorate at Scarborough.

Rev. J. Benson arrived in 1961 but sadly found the burden of ministry too much and resigned (he later went into the prison service).

The sixties saw a steep decline in church attendance- these were the years of free expression, women's lib, hippies etc. TV was having an influence on people, and changing social attitudes in many ways. The effect on church attendance was profound – church-going became unfashionable, and it became difficult to get commitment from people. One 'upside', however, was that people attending service were zealous in their faith and this resulted small, interdenominational Bible studies being set up around the village. More prayer was called for, and church meeting would be preceded by half-an-hour of prayer time.

One outcome of smaller congregations was, of course, smaller offerings, and the ability of one church to sustain the cost of ministry began to slide out of reach. Many discussions took place regarding the problem and 1968 saw the setting up of the West Bradford Baptist Fellowship – a group of Baptist churches sharing the cost of ministry. This group consisted of Sandy Lane, Tetley Street, Queensbury and Denholme. The Rev. D. Milner (Tetley Street) would have oversight of Sandy lane.

Another minister was added to the team in 1969 – Rev. H. Godden, who took up residence at the manse in Sandy Lane and became minister with oversight of Bethel. This was the year that an Evangelism Committee was set up, and the members started looking seriously at the use of their buildings. The children were taken from the church service, across the crossroads, and into Sunday School classes every week, and this journey was becoming ever more difficult because of the traffic. The buildings were becoming a problem because of their age and repairs were costing more and more. A petition was sent to the Council regarding the need for traffic lights at the junction. Mr. Godden suggested the distribution of copies of St. John's Gospel as part of an evangelism campaign, and 500 copies were ordered. Homes were visited, but it took about 18 months for them all to be delivered.

In 1970, it was suggested that a pre-fab be erected in the church grounds for the Sunday School, clearing, then selling the Sunday School buildings, but no progress was made on this.

The condition and use of both buildings was the topic of discussion at many meetings during the 1970s. Many different ideas were mooted but nothing decided on. The Sunday School building continued to be well used during the week, with a Toddler's group, Badminton Club, Youth Club and the Village Society, who were suggesting that it could become a Community Centre.

The West Bradford Baptist Fellowship was experiencing problems as a group, and after lengthy discussions, a new grouping of churches was formed in 1974. Sandy Lane became part of the Central Bradford Baptist Fellowship, along with Tetley Street, Girdlington and Westgate. The Rev. H. Godden was leaving the area, so Rev. D. Milner would again have oversight of Sandy Lane. Because Sunday school numbers were dropping (Sunday football had come along!) it was decided to run a mid-week meeting, and in 1975 the Adventurers group began. This proved very successful with 30-36 youngsters attending regularly. Summer play schemes also proved popular and many children heard the Gospel proclaimed – some for the first time in their lives. The young people were again meeting on Sunday evenings, the Bible studies with other Christians, held mid-week, were also going well, and 1977 saw the introduction of 'Family Services' monthly. The Rev. E. Whalley (Westgate's new pastor) also took responsibility for Sandy Lane. There were 5 baptisms of young people in 1978.

Decisions were still ongoing re: best use of the buildings, and also how the church should go forward as a witness in the area.

1980 marked a crucial time in church life – the Abundant Life Church began in the city centre, attracting Christians from all over the city including some from Bethel. Whole families, who had been very active in the church, left a very depleted membership. Some families were also on the move because of work, and the congregation was at its lowest for many years. The local Methodist church was approached with a view to sharing worship, but nothing came of this venture.

In January 1981, it was decided that all the church business would be discussed monthly and that no deacons be elected as there had been no nominations for the vacancies. Increasingly the old church building was feeling like an albatross, both through the costs of maintenance and its domination of church meeting agendas. It was at one of these meetings that the decision was taken not to spend any more money on the buildings. The members realised that serious decisions would have to be made, and in December 1981 all the options were stated in a paper (see the minute book) given to each person. Again, links with the Methodist church in the village were explored, but once again were non-



The American Evangelist Team September 1990

Alan Shackleton was still pastor at the time of the opening and ordained summer of 1986, with the service held in the village school hall, as the church would not hold all of the congregation. He had to move, because of rules about trainee ministers not staying in the church where they had been students. He was subsequently inducted as pastor at Westvale Baptist Church Halifax, in September 1986.

At the time of moving into the new building there was a group of nine members who had seen the project through and all the effort of moving and building meant there was little opportunity for expansion of members. This came through the ministry of Rev. Graham and Iris Holton from 1986 – 1991.

Activities they set up included services at Stoney Ridge hospital and Chellowfield as part of ministry to the elderly. There were meals with families where there were speakers and games and also family outings. In 1988 they started a mid-week toddlers/Bible study, in the home of Cathy Chadwick, for the young mothers and their families who had started attending the church. There were also retreat days at Mirfield.

The work with the families and Adventurers brought growth to the Sunday school meaning causing a shortage of space. At this time there was the death of a key church member, Arthur Hunter, who had been keen to expand the building further. He left his house, contents and money to the church, to the surprise of the membership. Along with the sale of the former Sunday school premises there were sufficient funds to extend the church's worship area and the addition of two Sunday school rooms and a vestry. This did not entail moving out.

The youth club was started in 1988 and after the church had prayed for more workers along came Beryl and Bill Rapley who undertook the work of the youth club. The Adventurers continued throughout this period. A weekly keep-fit class was also begun at this time. The 'Mums and Tots' group moved into the church premises because of growing numbers.

1990 saw a great witness and outreach programme in the village, with the arrival of a team of American evangelists. The Lord Mayor welcomed them at City Hall, (see photo), and contacts were made with local schools, hospitals and many homes.

productive. There was much prayer at this time, that the Lord would make His will clear, and in June 1982 the decision to demolish the church building was passed unanimously. Worship would continue in the Sunday school, as this was the most useful building. The last service in the church would be the baptism of a new young couple, Alan and Christine Harris, and would take place on September 26th 1982.

The old building was finally closed in 1982 and the church saw the future as a journey to something new. It was likened to Moses' journey in that the church was unsure where the tent would be placed. Demolition took place almost immediately and there is a photo album available showing the procedure.

The graveyard would be legally closed.



Telegraph and Argus 1982

At this time, one of the members (Mr A. Shackleton) felt a strong call to ministry, and was accepted into training at Northern Baptist College. Half his week would be spent at Bethel and the other half in study – a new form of training named Alternative Pattern of Training (APT). He became part of the CBBF team, taking over pastoral care of Bethel.

After the move to the Sunday school building, decisions were made to explore the possibility of re-building a multi-purpose church on the vacant site.

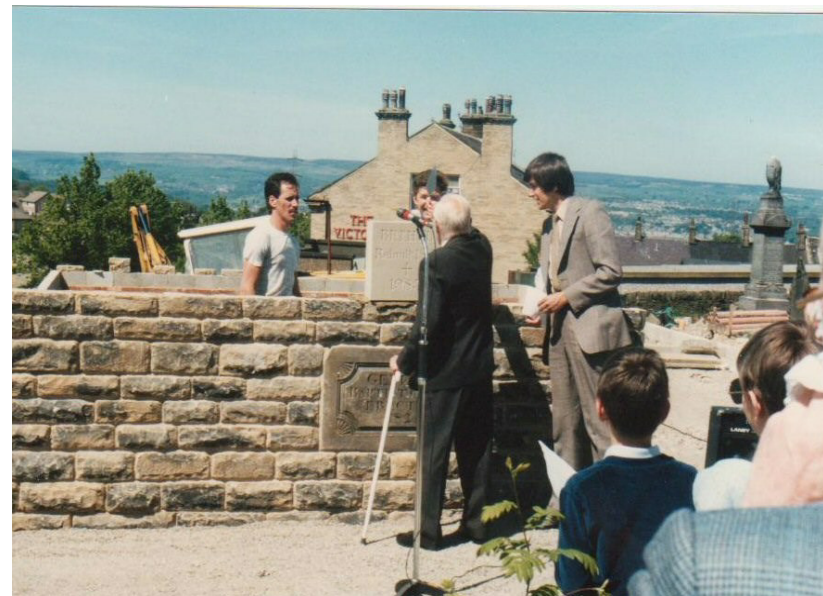
Antique furniture was sold and the proceeds put into a Special Project Fund to start the re-building process.

Although a lot of energy was being put into planning Bethel's future, the members were keen to share their faith in the village. The Evangelism team had organised events around the village, including coffee mornings in homes, a film evening and an outing to Shibden Hall by bus, which included all the Adventurers and their families. An Adventurers' Dedication Service was held, and was well attended by parents. A day of Prayer and Silence was held at Mirfield Monastic Retreat for all the fellowship.

Members were asked, in May 1983, if they would make promises of gifts of money for re-building, and this resulted in a formal request being made (Oct. 1983) to Mr. R. West (architect) to work on plans for a multi-function building on the old site. In 1984 a grant was sought from Manpower Services for a new church but this was not granted as the church was not in an inner city area.

Various explorations for funding the project were made- not always successfully – but after prayer and fasting – loans were secured, plans were passed and the new building became a reality in September 1985, when the first service was held.

After three years in the 'wilderness', the church was again on the move to its new premises. The members felt that God had really blessed their journey, and held a celebration weekend on 28th/29th September 1985. (Bethel will again celebrate on this same date in 2008).



Stone-laying by Mr. A. Hunter, at the new Baptist church Sandy Lane June 1st 1985

There was great excitement at having a new building. It was simpler than the old building and constructed to be low-maintenance. The last week before the opening was very hectic and last minute but all was finished ready for the Saturday grand opening. There was a parade from the Sunday school to the new building with a large number of people, who had been involved in the fundraising, coming from great distances. There was a service of thanksgiving followed by a tea. Sunday was also the Harvest Festival which became a double celebration.

**This celebration leaflet has been
compiled by Sylvia Kellet drawing on
her years of commitment to Bethel
Baptist Church from 1955-present.**

**Sincere thanks to her for sharing her
memories for this special occasion**