

The smoking flax He will not quench



**A brief history  
of  
Ramsbottom  
Evangelical Church**

Les Yates

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## INTRODUCTION

My name is Les Yates a member of the Evangelical Church in Ramsbottom. I am now a senior citizen with time and opportunity to write a brief account of the history and life of Ramsbottom Independent Evangelical Church. I have gathered as much information as possible from the other members of the Fellowship, but this record of events is mainly from my own perspective. I have tried not to get too bogged down with facts, figures and dates. I have also tried to give an honest account by following Oliver Cromwell's example of 'warts and all'.

## FIRST ENCOUNTERS

In October 1963 I attended an evangelistic service at Summerseat Independent Evangelical Church. I have vague recollections of the meeting, I do know that the Evangelist was a Mr. Boxall from the Evangelisation Society, but unfortunately I do not remember much of what he said. What I do remember most was a testimony of faith given by a lady by the name of Mrs. Duncan who was, at that time, in her late eighties or possibly ninety years old. What I also remember is the friendliness shown to me by the members of the church. I did not enter that building again for at least another year.

The reason I was in that converted Co-op building at all was through the persistence of a man by the name of Ernest Westwell. Ernest had been converted to Christ a couple of years before at a Billy Graham crusade held at Main Road, Manchester in 1961. Fortunately for me we actually worked in the same Bleaching and Dying Mill in Ramsbottom. Ernest was a mechanic and worked in various parts of the Mill and was able to share his faith with the fortunate, or the unfortunate, who worked on the various dyeing and bleaching equipment. Ernest had 'seen the Light,' a phrase that was often used in those days, and he was determined that others too would come to know the Light of the World, Jesus Christ.

I started work at the mill in 1961 and after a period on the night shift had my first encounter with 'Wessy' to quote his nickname who had by now acquired several more nicknames, 'holy Joe' being one of them. It was a lovely sunny day, I had gone outside for a smoke, Ernest was half way up the mill chimney and all I said was, 'it's about time He sent some of this sunshine.' Wessy was down in no time at all to tell me about the God who really had sent the sunshine. There followed many more such encounters over the next 18 months to 2 years.

Initially I was very wary of even talking to Ernie lest my macho image would be tainted through association with this religious maniac, but over the following weeks I began to warm to this man; his geniality and his friendliness broke down all the preconceived barriers set up in my mind. It was later that the Gospel began to make sense and the God whom Ernie served began to become real to me also. I could write many experiences of the Holy Spirits dealings with me in those days, but suffice to say on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 1964 I entered the doors of that converted Co-op well and truly saved and to cast in my lot with the members of Summerseat Evangelical Church.

## PRIMITIVE BEGINNINGS

The history of Summerseat Evangelical church goes right back to 1892, the year when the Primitive Methodist church was built on Railway street. The origins of Primitive Methodism makes quite interesting reading and helps us to piece together the Divine jigsaw of how we came to the place where we are today. Methodism, as most of us are aware, was founded by the Wesley's mainly through open air preaching. About fifty years later many felt that the Methodist churches had departed from the enthusiasm that had marked its inception and had lost their evangelistic zeal. There were, however, some ardent spirits who continued to work along the old lines and whose watchword was 'revivalism'. In 1800 and 1804 events took place in the area of Derbyshire which brought into existence the Primitive Methodist church. Hugh Bourne and William Clowes were the two original founders, in fact, Primitive Methodist were known as Clowesites in its early days.. The Primitive Methodists were very successful in there evangelism, mainly in agricultural and industrial communities. The reasons why they were called 'Primitive' Methodist was probably an attempt to describe their determination to go back to the early principles of the founders of Methodism. They put great emphasis on open air evangelism and especially the famous 'camp- meetings.'

How there came to be a Primitive Methodist church in Summerseat is hard to determine, but we do have a living member of that Church with us today and it is through Lilian Petch that we are able to piece together snippets of its brief history. It began with a few folk gathering together to worship in a hired room in the local Co-op, we are not sure of the date, but it would be round about the 1880's. They obviously gained strength and numbers for they were able to have their own Church building built a few yards down Railway Street. They probably had support and assistance from the Primitive Methodist to which by now they were affiliated. The mother of Lilan Petch, born in 1901 was a life long member, attending Sunday School in her childhood; her mother, Lilian's grandmother, was one of the godly ladies who met in the 'upper room' at the very beginning in the Co-op shop.



*Painting of the old Co-op by B. Thorne.*

## SHAKY FOUNDATIONS

The life span of the Primitive Methodist church building in Summerseat wasn't very long, just over 60 years. The two main reasons for its closure are, in the first instance, due to the fact that it was built too near the river. Lilian remembers the times when the river often seeped in to her Sunday school classroom causing the piano to float across the classroom on more than one occasion. The river, over time, slowly washed away the back foundations; they had tried to strengthen the foundations but it was always going to be a losing battle against the relentless battering of the river Irwell. The second problem, Lilian informs me, was due to the installation of a rather too powerful pipe organ. This had been fixed to the Back River facing wall of the building. Apparently the wall shook each time the organ was played and playing, 'shall we gather at the river,' brought the ever present danger of the organist falling into it; quite an amusing story now but certainly not funny at the time. Eventually there was no alternative but to abandon the building altogether.

There then followed a period where the Church members met in the home of Lilian's mother. We must not forget that not only were there members to accommodate but also the Sunday school children. The years would be 1955/56. It was then decided to meet in various homes of the members. This was obviously unsuitable and they decided to hold their regular times of worship in the car garage adjoining the home of Mr. and Mrs. Holt on Robin Road. Lilian remembers the large green curtain hanging over the inside of the garage doors to keep out the draft, and also the two paraffin heaters, one at the front and one at the back of the garage. Amazingly they managed to fit in the piano as well as members and Sunday school children. A Mrs. Foster used to lead the meetings in those days, (don't tell the Elders). I asked Lilian who the members were at this time to which she replied, 'Auntie Elsie, Auntie Doris, Mrs. Foster, Mrs Heyes, Mrs. Holgate, Mrs. Duncan, Mrs. Petch, Mrs. Isherwood and Mr. and Mrs. Everet,' she also said that some periodically came and went as they do. Thank God for those who remained Faithful! We have a lot to thank God for through the faithfulness of these dear folk for what must have been for them trying times. I remember earlier on in my Christian life being informed of the content of the prayers of these early Church members. They had prayed for years for young men to be saved and added to their little church, prayers that were abundantly answered in later years.

## LIBERAL CLUB BUT NOT LIBERAL THEOLOGY.

By now the name of the Church had changed from Summerseat Primitive Methodist Church to Summerseat Gospel Mission and in the late fifties the venue for worship also changed when they began to meet in a hired room in Summerseat Liberal Club. Summerseat Liberal Club is also on Robin Road and directly opposite what was the Co-op shop.

About this time different visiting preachers helped out with the services occasionally, but prior to moving into the Liberal club Mr. Raymond Gregory entered the scene and became more and more involved in helping this little band of mainly faithful ladies. This became a momentous turning point in the life of Summerseat Gospel Mission.

Raymond had been a regular soldier, and at Saton Camp, in Chester, he became a Christian through reading a copy of the New Testament and on completing reading John's Gospel, often told in his words: 'he fell in love with Jesus Christ'. On his return back to Ramsbottom Raymond attended the Pentecostal Church and was soon preaching the Gospel. He regularly preached in the

open air, mainly the market place, in the Town centre. Looking through the old treasurers ledger,(the previous ledgers lost) the first entrance is written by Raymond and is dated 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1958, at one point in the book he signs himself as 'Superintendent of Summerseat Gospel Mission.'

Lilian remembers the time when her mum came with some great news, 'The Co-op is closing down,' not very good news for its employees, or its customers, but good news as having potential for a new Church home. In 1893 they left their hired room in the Co-op only to return 69 years later. It is recorded in the treasures' ledger that on the 12. 3. 62 a yearly £10 rent was paid to the Summerseat Liberal club. Shortly after this date Summerseat Gospel Mission moved into the Co-op building on a ten year rented lease. Come to think of it the Liberal club owes us some rebate! By this time, Raymond Gregory had been well and truly established as the Pastor of the Church in Summerseat and through the blessing of God on his ministry the Church began to grow.



*Liberal club, Summerseat, where church meetings were once held.*

## ANSWERED PRAYER

Round about the same time as the move from the Liberal club to the Co-op building the Church decided to join the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches which, about that time, consisted of over 400 Independent Evangelical churches nationwide. This affiliation had been formed to give mutual support, both practical and spiritual, to Independent churches such as ourselves. The F.I.E.C. is not a denomination as such and therefore has no jurisdiction over the affairs of the local church, which we believe to be the Biblical pattern. It is because the F.I.E.C. is an Affiliation and not a Denomination that member churches do not receive any direct financial support other than loans. . . This must be borne in mind by the readers of this booklet who are not familiar with the principles of churches which are independent. The financing of the local independent church is dependent entirely on the sacrificial giving of its members. However, joining the F.I.E.C. has proved to be a wise decision over the years and of great benefit to the life and survival of what was now known as Summerseat Independent Evangelical Church.

The seven year period from 1955 to 1962 can be described as a time of seven lean years and a time of uncertainty. The Church at Summerseat in the late fifties was dependent, on what were now, mainly older ladies. The faith and trust of this little flock and the burning commitment of Raymond and Muriel Gregory determined that this work of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ would survive. The early and continuing prayers of the of the faithful few in seeking to follow the commands of the Lord Jesus were abundantly answered as was proved in the next seven fruitful years.

## THE BILLY GRAHAM LEGACY

In the fifties and sixties the American evangelist, Dr. Billy Graham, was at the height of his successful evangelistic ministry. Whatever we think about mass evangelism and the invitation system we, as a church, owe a great deal to the partakers and organisers of these events and especially to Billy Graham himself. I heard Billy preach several times and his preaching was amazingly simple but powerful, to hear him was an unforgettable experience. The vast crowd, the singing of thousands of voices, and the faithful preaching of the Gospel was a challenge to the most sceptical hearer. But it was the blessing of the Holy Spirit that produced the true and genuine conversions to Christ.

In 1961 a Billy Graham Crusade was held at the Manchester City Football Ground. Raymond organised a coach party, calling on houses in the village and inviting them to come along and hear the famous evangelist, amongst those invited was Ernest Westwell. Ernie initially accepted the invitation, but later regretted his decision but, as he told me later, because he had promised he felt honour bound to keep his promise, and as we have already mentioned Ernest was soundly converted to Christ. The following morning of his conversion Ernie remembers kneeling by the railings outside the Mill and asking the Lord to help him to bear testimony to his new found faith before his colleagues and work mates, and indeed to the rest of the Mills employees. Jim Hoyle, a friend of Ernie's, and one who worked in management at the same Mill, was also converted at the same Crusade. Jim's background was Church of England, and to exchange stain glass windows and the traditions of the C of E for a converted old Co-op and Twister and Drawer as a Pastor must not have

been easy. A further coach trip was organised to hear Billy Graham in 1966, the venue being Earls Court, London. On that occasion Charles Walker was converted. Charles informs me that when the appeal to come forward was given by Billy Graham at the close of the meeting Charles, who at that time was 17 years old, almost jumped from the balcony saying to me that he would have done so had there been no other way.

## MORE CONVERSIONS

There were other conversions in the early sixties. I contacted an ex member Jean Wild, who now lives in Cornwall. Jean has figured prominently in the life of this church and Jean was able to fill me in on the details some of these conversions one of those being a man by the name of Harold Russ. Harold had been in the Navy and had taken up secular work in the local area. Harold had been intrigued by a work-mate who regularly read his Bible in the lunch hour. Eventually this man was able to invite Harold to one of the meetings held at the Pentecostal Church in Bury. By the time Harold had finished singing Wesley's hymn 'And can it be' his chains really had fallen off and was truly saved. Harold lived in Summerseat at this time and became an active member of the Church. Harold's wife, Colleen, came along to the meetings, mainly out of curiosity and was herself saved. Colleen, in turn, shared her new found faith with Jean Wild. Another remarkable conversion came about through a faulty television which belonged to Harold and Colleen. The television engineer who came to repair it, Colin Wilson, was challenged by the Gospel and was soon regularly attending the services even though he had to travel from Rochdale.

One prominent member in those days was Fred Thompson. Fred, who had been a Member of Park Congregational Church in Shuttleworth, attended a Teacher training college. I remember the testimony of his conversion very well. As the students introduced themselves one introduced himself as a member of the Church of England, other denominations were mentioned including Fred's congregationalism, and finally one man stood up saying he was a Christian. It was later on that Fred too, through the witness of this Christian with no labels, became a true follower of Christ. Fred Joined the Church at Summerseat in 1962 he was soon using his teaching skills and was given the job of Sunday school superintendent.

## ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS

The Sunday school was thriving when I joined the Church. Most of the young children from the village attended, around 60 to 80 children. There were some real characters among them. The second Sunday that I attended the Church is memorable to me for having a sore throbbing foot. I was asked to stick out my foot by one of the 6 year olds who had just come down from his Sunday school classroom. I complied with what seemed an odd request at which point he proceeded to bring the heel of his foot down on my right toe with no gentle force. After wiping the tears from my eyes and limping the rest of the day, I thought I did very well in my first test of exercising Christian tolerance.

I was teaching in Sunday school within 3 months of my conversion. You could not be a passenger for long in those days, there was too much to do. I remember one 'smart alec' in the Sunday school class shouting out, 'It's not Kapper- nay-um, its Capernaum'. My pronunciation of Bible names and characters were a bit defective to say the least, after all, I had only been reading the Bible for 3 months. The scariest bit, however, was when the Pastor

hovered into the class to see how you were doing. There were great opportunities to serve the Lord in those days, I was 24 and single and was out every night serving the Lord in one capacity or another.

Jim and Ernie were keen jazz fans prior to their conversions. Ernie actually played in the Bury Palais and the Rawtenstall Astoria dance bands on occasions and was an accomplished trumpet player. Those skills were transferred to the formation of a Church brass band. I managed to master the tenor horn in about 6 months but not without having a permanent red ring round my lips. Colin had a few bumps to his front teeth when his trombone made contact with the head in front, but the one I was particularly glad not to be playing was the double bass, especially on a cold winter nights carol singing. We occasionally used the brass band to accompany our Sunday worship. However, this was abandoned on account that no one could hear any one singing!

We held our brass band practice on a Friday night. Friday was a particularly hectic day for me. Working on a Stenter at the Mill (starting at 7.0'clock in those days) was quite physical and tiring and after a hard day I had to be down at the Church by 6. 30p.m.for the Campaigners, which I will speak about later. After Campaigners it was my job to clean the Church. The brass band gathered together for a practice about 9. 30 to 10 o'clock. On one of these Fridays about 2 or 3 of us were making our way home along Newcombe Road the time would be about 11 p.m.. You may not believe this but we actually met up with two ladies pushing a piano down the main road. The two ladies in question were Lilian and Colleen. The piano itself was an iron framed piano being transported on a little four wheeled bogey which had wooden wheels about 4 inches in diameter. They were trying to transport the piano to Lilian's house, a distance of about a mile and a half. How they would have got it down the slope in to the village without help is beyond comprehension. They had been pushing and praying and I suppose on meeting us found an answer to their prayers. I must have got to bed about 1.a.m. that night. Who said the Christian life was boring?

The Youth club on a Thursday night catered for the teenagers in the village. We had the usual games, table tennis etc., and during the evening gave a ten to fifteen minute Gospel message. Trying to give a Gospel message in the context of shouting and whistling wasn't easy, but good training. What I remember the most regarding the Youth club were the fights that occurred and the time and energy spent trying to restore some kind of order.

## CAMPAIGNERS

In 1964 the Church decided to join the Campaigners-an interdenominational evangelical movement for young people- as a means of having some kind of order and structure in the work of the young people. Campaigners were, and still are, a uniformed movement, in some ways similar to the scouts. I have forgotten by now how to tie the knots, the sheepshank and the clove hitch etc., but I haven't forgotten how to cut your toe nails-straight across. We had to go through a fairly intensive period of training to become fully fledged Chiefs, or in my case assistant chief. The six and a halves to eevens were known as Juno's and the eleven's to fourteens were the Inters. In our training we learned to march, although on occasions some of us still put the left arm out at the same time as the left foot. The uniforms the Chiefs wore were ex-policemen's uniforms and very often, on our way to the church, cars would slow down thinking we were policemen.

To wear the Campaigner uniform in public was a real lesson in self denial for me. I had only recently left a life which was dominated with life in the pub, and all the other world-

ly pastimes, and now; here I was, dressed in brass buttons and beret on public show. I remember getting on the bus once only to hear my Auntie Jennie shouting from the back of the bus, 'are you home on leave Leslie?' However those uniforms, on one occasion, did come in handy. Ernie and I had been chasing the Juno's in some game that we had devised and ended up in Black wood. We heard some terrifying screams. When we arrived at the source of the pandemonium we found that the Juno's had stumbled on a wasps nest. Initially I was a bit hesitant, but both Ernie and I knew what we had to do and went in with uniforms flying. One poor lad had 11 stings and the rest of the 12 or so boys had a least 5. Ernie and I did not receive a single sting which made me feel slightly guilty. There were many useful and positive aspects to Campaigners and this movement certainly played a vital role in our work amongst the children of the village.



*Me and some of our Junos, 1965.*

## BUDDING PREACHERS

As well as teaching in Sunday school and Campaigners some of us were encouraged to learn and develop the gift of preaching. We were given the opportunity to preach a 10 minute sermon, usually on a Saturday night. I remember my first sermon very well, my text was, 'Be content with such things as you have, for I will never leave you nor forsake you'. Raymond responded to my sermon by saying it was the best first sermon that he had ever heard, which did my pride no end of good, but he immediately followed his remark by saying that if I played around in the pulpit again he would throw the hymn book at me. This rebuke reminded me that to preach from God's word is the most responsible and solemn task a person can ever do.

As we progressed in our preaching ministries we began to get opportunities to preach elsewhere. One of my first preaching engagements was at the Ragged school in Bury. I managed to spin out the sermon to 12 minutes exactly and I remember one comment from the congregation which was 'short and sweet' I was only following Raymond's dictum: Stand up, speak up and shut up. At least I did not make the mistake that our brother Fred Thompson made when he took a service there once. Fred was forcefully making one of his points during his sermon when his hand rested on one of the two wooden balls at the end of the pulpit rails; raising his hand for emphasis, he found the ball had come away in his hand. Fred had quite a struggle to replace it back in its socket.

I remember being invited to preach at a small Church in Stacksteads. I felt quite proud of being invited to take their Church service until I saw the notice board outside the Church which read: Tonights visiting preacher, Mrs. Leslie Yates. No! I didn't preach on: 'let the women keep silent in the Churches'

As well as preaching in various local churches we were encouraged to join the R.F.A's brigade. The R.F.A's stands for Ready for anything. We had to be ready for anything, especially doing open air evangelism. 'Get a five minute word ready' Raymond would say, 'you are speaking on the next street corner,' I still remember the times I was seized with panic when Raymond held your arm and whispered in your ear. 'You next' We certainly learned to walk by faith on those occasions.

## FULL TIME MINISTRY

All this activity, however, had its repercussions on the lives of many of the Church members especially those who were married. Through bitter experience we had to learn to temper our zeal with good common sense. This applied particularly to those married to unbelieving partners.

Raymond was out almost every night, either knocking in nails in our renovated Co-op or involved in many other jobs that needed doing. It must be borne in mind by the reader that, though Raymond was Pastor of the Church, he was still in full time secular employment as a twister and drawer. It was because of these pressures that the church decided to pay Raymond a basic full time wage of £11 per week. Raymond commenced his full ministry on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. April 1966.

Before Raymond took up his full time ministry he felt honour bound to try and find someone to take his place at the Mill. The Towel weaving mill in question was Cobden mill situated at the bottom of Kay Brow Ramsbottom. The owner, a Mr. Eccles, was himself a Christian and who by this time was 90 years old. The weavers relied on Raymond and the other twister to get their beams twisted up so that they could make more wage on a piece-work system. The job of twister entailed sitting on a one legged stool, (you needed a one legged stool in order to rock to and fro as you twisted,) and twisting thousands of the loose ends together in order that they could be transported through the yells. Any way after that pathetic attempt to explain the intricacies of twisting all that is left for me to say is that I volunteered to leave my job and learn to twist. I still have my twisting hooks. Unfortunately full time ministry did not work out for Raymond and he was back in full time secular employment 4 months later. Raymond managed to find another job in twisting at another local towel mill.

## MALCOMBE

Before we go on to the next important period of the life of the Church there is one incident I need to mention with some sadness, but at the same time with a measure of hope. I am not quite sure of the year it was probably about 1965/6, I was going through the wood on my way to the church when I came across Malcombe who was walking his dog. I had known Malcombe since early childhood. Malcombe was a single man about 30 years old and lived with his parents. As we walked through the wood together I was given a perfect opportunity to share with him my Christian faith.

It was obvious to many that Malcombe had problems with his sexuality, which was verified in the things that he shared with me later. Malcombe was a kind and gentle soul and was very responsive to the Gospel. He began to attend the Church meetings which greatly encouraged us all. About 4 or 5 weeks after Malcombe first heard the Gospel we received the shocking news that he had died. What actually happened on that day is uncertain. The information which we received, at the time, was that Malcombe was reading his Bible and sitting on the inside of his bedroom window sill with the bedroom window open. For some apparent unknown reason Malcombe fell from the window and sustained fatal injuries.

The affect on the Church and on me personally, is hard to describe. There was the sorrow we felt for Malcombe and his family, plus the set back in our evangelistic zeal. The hope that sustained me through those days was the belief that one day I would see Malcombe in Glory.

I mentioned earlier that Malcombe had homosexual tendencies, not only did he share this knowledge with me but his demeanour was obvious for all to see. As far as I know Malcombe was never a practicing homosexual which, in those days was illegal anyway. Malcombe used to hate the whistling and the jeering from his workmates as he walked down the street during his lunch hour. The world can be such a cruel and lonely place for many and it is hard to imagine the torment Malcombe must have gone through. But for Malcombe now, there is no torment, only joy in the presence of his Saviour.

## WEDDING BELLS

In 1967/8 we had 3 weddings in the Church. We were able to hold weddings in the Church on the condition that 12 homeowner's signatures were provided and who were members of the Church. The registrar, a lady by the name of Mrs. Hall, had to be in attendance. There was nothing remarkable about the weddings, except to say that one of the weddings was mine. It was remarkable in the fact that my wife had said yes when I had proposed, after all, I had only been a Christian 3 years. On the day of our wedding Raymond had the flu and had to get of his sick bed, his voice, however, managed to hold out long enough to enable him to pronounce us as 'man and wife'. The next problem in our wedding ceremony was to try and manoeuvre past the supporting iron pillar in the middle of room as we tried to walk down the aisle. Those 3 weddings, by the way, are still going strong 40 years later.

There are many more things that could be said regarding this period in the life of the Church. I am sure that many of the older members will be reminding me of important events that I have failed to mention, but now I must begin a new chapter in the life of the Church, a period of transition and trials.



*The wedding of Colin and Jean Wilson 1967/8. Spot the young familiar faces.*

## A CHANGE OF PASTORS

In May 1968 Hal and Colleen Russ took up full time work with 'The mission to deep sea fishermen,' based at Fleetwood. This had quite an affect on the Church at that time. Their fellowship, ministry, and open home were greatly missed. But in February 1969 an even greater change took place. It was then that Raymond and Muriel were given an opportunity to serve in Home missions with the F.I.E.C. This entailed Raymond and Muriel moving away and serving the Lord in Skelmersdale on a full time basis.

At the same time, the Pentecostal minister at Ramsbottom, Robert McDonald, was experiencing grave misgivings regarding the doctrinal beliefs of Pentecostalism. Robert McDonald had been introduced to reformed theology which had transformed his views on many doctrines of the Bible. There was now a greater access to theological works such as the puritans and early reformers, and the writings of theological giants such as Dabney, Hodge and Berkhof etc.were now being made available through the 'Banner of truth' and other -publishers from the U.S.A.

Before Raymond took up his ministry with Home missions we were made aware of Roberts's intention to leave the Pentecostal church. Based on that knowledge we arranged for Robert to preach with a view to being considered as a replacement Pastor. If my memory serves me correctly, the Church voted with a good sound majority to call Robert McDonald to be the next Pastor of Summerseat evangelical church.

The fact that we found a replacement Pastor so soon and with such limited resources was a marvel in itself. Robert took up his Pastorate on a part-time basis, his salary being £6 per week. To give you some idea of salaries in those days, my wage, as a Twister, was £14 per week

## MUCH TO LEARN

At the very onset of Robert McDonald's ministry it was obvious to all that Robert wasn't a Raymond and perhaps that is one of the mistakes some made at the time, in spite of Raymond's warnings not to expect him to be so. This was not the only reason for the unrest which would follow later. Robert's preaching was doctrinally correct and even scholarly, but to begin with, a little too detached and over the heads of many in the congregation. It is difficult to try and give an analysis of his preaching, at the time; my explanation given to Robert on more than one occasion was that he was failing to reach the hearts and minds of the members; more of lecture than a sermon. Another minus perhaps for Robert was his lack of 'hands on' regarding other aspects of the work of the Church. The dominant role that Raymond had played could not be followed and it was a mistake to expect Robert to do so.

We must also remember that when Raymond took up the work in Skelmersdale we as a church were still very immature in spiritual things. Raymond had laid a good foundation, but the spiritual building was very far from completion. Is it ever? The majority of the members had only been Christians for 6 or 7 years. I was appointed as an Elder in 1966 and had only held the office three and half years and Mrs. Tagg resigned her Eldership 2 years into Mr. McDonald's ministry. Today we have innumerable theological books, tapes; C.D.'s and also the Internet to help us in our understanding of doctrinal issues, especially the role of Eldership. My library at that time consisted of just 4 books; a concordance, a

Bible dictionary, Thomas Watson's 'Body of divinity' and Calvin's 'Institutes' which I found hard going.

These thoughts might help to explain why, later, some members left the church. The reason one member gave for his resignation was that Robert McDonald had a 'puritan bee in his bonnet'. In fairness to Robert, he himself was only a young man and had not, at that time, acquired the wisdom needed to apply reform in a more diplomatic and cautious way. The transition, for example, of singing repetitious choruses to a greater emphasis on singing psalms was an issue which caused disquiet among some. Today that would not be a problem, but in those days it was a major revolution and was probably seen by some as a step towards Presbyterianism. The unrest came soon into Robert McDonald's ministry. Some prominent members of the Church left us, which at the time, was heart breaking for all concerned and I include those who went elsewhere. There can be no greater trial for a church than to go through a period of disunity and division.

I would like to leave this period of Mr. McDonald's ministry because to go any further would not be helpful. The sole reason for mentioning these sad events at all is the fact that it is such an important part of the life and history of the Church. If there is stability and unity in the church now it is because, hopefully, we have learned from past mistakes and experiences. Maintaining and developing true Biblical standards must be done wisely, 'endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'.

I will always be grateful to Robert McDonald for introducing me to two books which I was able to purchase, one was the full version of Berkhof's Systematic theology and the other was Studies in theology by Loraine Boettner. I read and studied these books from cover to cover, as well as thrilling my soul they were the means of deepening my faith and understanding of the Scriptures. In reading these books I realised how much I needed to learn in order to be a profitable servant of the Lord. They also gave me a thirst to read more books of the same.

## SURVIVAL

Things began to settle down at the beginning of the new decade and we enjoyed a period of stability howbeit, with slow progress. In April 1971 we were able to take Robert McDonald on a full time basis. However, the wage wasn't exactly a fortune, just £12 per week; up to this time he had still been on his part-time wage of £6 per week.

There were one or two conversions at this time. One man had started coming to the meetings regularly and was showing much promise but died of a heart attack, he was 32 years old; he came from a family with a history of heart problems. In those days any baptisms were held in various local churches, but on one occasion it was decided to use the local lodge, no not the freemasons, but the springwood stretch of water at the top of Tanners st.. Bessie Petch was the willing participant on that occasion. Fortunately we did not have to crack the ice as it was the middle of summer.

As we have already mentioned, the church moved into the Co-op building under a 10 year lease in 1962 and in 1972 that lease was due for renewal. However, much to the shock and consternation of the fellowship, the Co-operative Society were not willing to continue with the lease and on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Of March 1972 we met for the last time in the old Co-op building in Railway St. Summerseat. The vacating of the Co-op building had a devastating affect on the life and work of the church. There were now no campaigners, no Sunday

school, no youth work as well as the disruption and uncertainty which affected every aspect of the life of the church. We had high hopes of being able to meet in St. Wilfred's C of E mission hall, which we did on a couple of occasions, but the hall was eventually taken over by the Summerseat players, an amateur operatic group in the village. We tried our utmost to stay in the village, but there was no property available either to buy or to rent.

Apart from the couple of times at St. Wilfred's we began to meet regularly in the home of Robert McDonald in Ramsbottom. This continued for the next 9 months.. We then began to meet in various homes of the members. This was obviously very inconvenient for church members and so on the 9<sup>th</sup>. March 1975 we began to meet at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Petch, Garnet St. Ramsbottom on a regular basis, 3 years after vacating the Co-op building. In the meantime much had been happening which I will now mention in some detail.



*The exact site where the Co-op building once stood on the corner of Railway street.*

## A VAIN SEARCH FOR PREMISES

To give exact details of dates and sequence of events of the 3 year period from March 1972 to March 1975 is no easy task. It is made much harder due to the fact that the minutes of Church meetings were lost, probably due the upheaval of the events of the time, not only were the minutes lost for this period, but also going back to the very beginning of the Summerseat Gospel Mission. Fortunately we still have records of financial accounts through the faithful record of the treasurers of the time, especially Jim Hoyle and though these records deal with finance, important dates have been recorded.

During this 3 year period every endeavour was made to try and find suitable premises. Summerseat was now a fading hope, and since most of the congregation came from Ramsbottom it was here that we concentrated our efforts. At one time, before the Broad Hey housing site was built, we were given the offer of having a church building built within the complex. We declined the offer on account of it being too distant in the future; a matter of years and not months.

There were many properties considered at this time. The telephone exchange on Crow lane (now a day nursery) the old Patmos church site at the bottom of Peel Brow, someone even suggested the Railway signal box which was vacant at that time. We even enlisted the help of a church in Pennington, Leigh, they had built there own church, had there been land available we would have had a go at doing the same



*Some of the Fellowship, date 1975/6?*

## **NO BUILDING AND NO PASTOR**

You will recall that in March 1972 we had to vacate the Co-op building which had been our home for 10 years. In September 1973 we were again knocked sideways with the loss of our Pastor. Robert McDonald had been approached by Ribchester evangelical church with a view to becoming their next Pastor, a 'call' which he accepted. The appeal of a ready made church, a nice church building with its own manse drew away our Pastor to serve elsewhere. Unfortunately his ministry at Ribchester only lasted 2 years and caused him to be even more disillusioned and which led him to leave the ministry all together.

Following the loss of our Pastor there were times when the remaining few questioned whether it was worth going on. In our church meeting dated 7/9/74 we were down to just 10 members. I remember taking a Bible-study in my home, it was summer holiday time, the only people present were Mr. and Mrs. Petch and my wife, I remember the sermon-Moses looking from Mt. Pisgah towards the Promised land, that was all we could do then, just look at the promise and hope and pray that God would bless us in His own time. We as a Church must praise God for those who remained faithful, coming week in and week out in spite of the setbacks, I cannot mention them all, but they are known to God and He will not forget their faithfulness.

In spite of these set backs there were many encouragements. After Mr. McDonald left most of the preaching was shared by Ernie Westwell, Jim Hoyle, Myself and John Hannott. John had recently joined us and had been trained at Moorlands Bible college, he joined our Fellowship in 1972. John was appointed Elder in 1975 and was a great asset to the life and ministry of the church, sadly for us, John and his family moved to Australia in 1979. Looking through the treasurer's ledger there are records of money allocated for football shirts etc., reminding us that there was still plenty of things going on in spite of our limited resources and accommodation

## **HELP FROM RAYMOND GREGORY**

Maintaining a constant preaching ministry at each church service became more and more difficult plus the general organisation of church life and activities. In October 1974 we were still meeting in different homes and things were far from ideal. By this time I was still the only elder and my work with the Lord's Day Observance Society was taking me away from the church more and more, especially on Sundays.

In the meantime Raymond Gregory, had by now, established a local church in Skelmersdale and through F.I.E.C. home missions had been provided with a mobile hall, and later, a permanent church building. I called on Raymond in October 1974 and asked if it was possible for him to lend us some help, particularly in the role of preaching. The outcome of this meeting was a major turning point in the life and future of the Evangelical church. Not only did Ray offer to take our services at least once a week, but also to chair our Church council meetings. In the church council ledger dated 3/3/75, the first council meeting chaired by Raymond, is recorded these words: 'Mr. Gregory said that our business in the church must be done decently and in order, in spite of our current condition of being without a church building'. This entry in the minutes really sums up the transformation, and the inspiration, Ray brought to the battle weary troops and servants of the Lord in Ramsbottom.

The fact that Ray could take some of our meetings was made possible because there were other members with the preaching gifts in Skelmersdale, not only to stand in for Ray, but also to preach, on occasions, in our church. These arrangements continued through to July 1976.

In July 76 Ray felt that his work in Skelmersdale had reached its completion. His final work was to see a permanent church hall built, and felt that that was the best time to move on. It must be borne in mind that Ray was a Home mission's evangelist, whose task was to establish a local church and eventually move on to further needy areas. It was to our great delight that the F.I.E.C. agreed for Ray to take on the work at Ramsbottom under the role of Home missions. This move brought great advantages for the church in Ramsbottom. One of the benefits to the church was that most of Ray's salary would come through Home missions enabling us to put more money aside for a church building. Our financial assets, by this time, were only £1200.

## **LOSS AND GAIN**

Shortly after Raymond joined us Ernie and Heather Westwell moved to Anglesey, North Wales. Ernie is currently one of the leaders of the local church in Rhosneigr doing a valuable work, however, to lose Ernie and Heather at this time was a great loss to the Fellowship. But prior to Ernie and Heather moving to Anglesey they stayed a few months in Accrington with Ernie's daughter and son-in-law, Maurice and Louise Blezard. Louise had been a member of the Sunday school in Summerseat, but though she still believed had drifted away and was drawn further way from the Christian faith through her marriage to Maurice.

Inevitably Ernest took his God given opportunity to remind Louise of the Faith she had abandoned and to challenge Maurice with the claims of the Gospel. During this period Maurice was very antagonistic and totally against the Gospel, so much so that he threatened Louise that if she became a Christian he would leave her. Louise was desperate for Maurice to become a Christian, and though willing to return to Christ herself, did not want to lose her husband. Louise actually made vow to God saying she would willingly follow Christ if He would convert Maurice. Maurice and Louise stayed with Ernest and Heather for a short holiday at Ernie's new home, again Maurice was challenged, and on their return home could find no peace and knew in his heart he must repent and believe the Gospel. On the Saturday night they had arranged a party at their home, but instead of Maurice and Louise having their usual drinking spree they both knelt down in submission and prayer to Christ. Maurice and Louise joined our little Fellowship in the home of Lilian's the next day. Maurice is currently one of our Elders, and both Maurice and Louise have been an indispensable influence in the life of the Church.

## **THE SEARCH FOR PREMISES GOES ON.**

It is recorded in the minutes 7/10/76 'Rev. Gregory felt there was a good sense of fellowship with great preaching liberty.' There was now stability and order in spite of the fact that we were still meeting in the home Mr. and Mrs Petch. The search for premises continued. At one point we tried to arrange for Home missions to provide their mobile hall, which they were quite willing to do, but we could not acquire any land to place it on. We applied to Bury Council on more than one occasion, especially in the area of Summerseat, but they informed us that Summerseat was a marked out area for conservation and renovation. Today, Summerseat is indeed quite a select and residential area, very different from the days of Summerseat Gospel mission.

The Co-op in Ramsbottom became vacant, but had already been marked out for other uses and is now a restaurant. A Mr. Sandiford of Summerseat had given us first choice to purchase his saw mill, but due to the price for renovation, plus the £5000 price tag, we declined the kind offer. I think our last ditch attempt to stay in Summerseat was to consider renting a room at the children's home, but this would have only been a short term solution.

## PATIENCE REWARDED

One of the Church members, who had been with us since the early 60's, Mrs. Jean Wild, lived at No.5 Bridge Street in Ramsbottom. Both she and her husband Stanley owned the adjoining properties, numbers 7 and 9. In March 1977 number 9 was empty and up for sale. Jean and Stanley gave us the first choice of buying this property at a reasonable price.

Number 9 had been leased out by Jean and Stanley and was used as a betting shop. The reason it came up for sale, as far as I understand, was remarkable in itself. Apparently, one of the betting shop customers had not been very lucky in his choice of horses and lost quite a bit of money to the proprietors of the betting shop. Through the misfortune and proceeds of this punter the Betting shop was able to move further up the road to larger premises. The Lord, indeed, moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform.

These properties have had a significant bearing on my past. I am not sure which number it was, but at 7 or 8 years old in one of the upstairs rooms I had a tooth extracted under gas, I can still taste the gas now, plus I can also, almost, remember the silly dream. I used to have my hair cut at one of those properties, a Mr. Beswick, until he almost scalped me, (he probably did a perfectly normal haircut, but not suitable for a vain 17 year old teddy boy) I moved on to a kinder barber, Bert Williams, higher up the street.



When I was about 16 or 17 I used to spend most of my evenings in the temperance bar which Jean had set up. I tried hard to make my sarsaparilla last the evening so I didn't have to buy another. I remember one particular evening almost having a scrap (fight) with one of my mates just outside the front door but my interfering brother intervened and broke us up. It is strange to think that where I had my tooth extracted is where we meet for prayer in the vestry, where I drank my sarsaparilla is now where I drink in the Word of Life, and where I wanted to punch my friend is where I welcome worshippers on the Lord's Day.

*Stephen Wild next to his mum's temperance bar which was later to become our church premises*

## ROLLED UPSLEEVES AND OVERALLS

From the day of purchase, April 77, to the end of the year, came the mammoth task of changing the former betting shop into a place of worship. We had the assistance of a Mr. Byrom, a Christian surveyor, who advised on the best way to utilise our available space. We obtained a substantial loan from F.I.E.C. A lot of work we did ourselves, with Raymond leading from the front as usual. We were able to have some meetings in the church within a couple of months. I cannot find any official record in the church minutes as to when we actually finished renovations, but there is a minute dated 1/12/77 which tells us of the Gas board installing the heating system and of material being bought for sound proofing for the main hall, prior to this I think we met up stairs. However, by January 78 we were well and truly settled in our new home. The accommodation was far from ideal, enough for each row to have 5 or 6 chairs, but much better than meeting in a private home. At the time we did not consider it to be long term solution, but the Lord had other ideas.

In 1978/79 we were not only taken up with building matters, but were praying and seeking a new Pastor. The Pastoral role played by Ray was not intended to be permanent. During the following months 4 candidates were invited to preach on 4 separate weekends. We engaged in the usual procedure of interviews and discussions with these men. Of the four a Mr.G.Daley, who had trained at South Wales Bible College, seemed the most promising and was asked to preach again on another occasion. However, in 1980 after much consideration and prayer we decided on a change of direction. We were not convinced that seeking a Pastor was the Lord's will at this time, none of the men had come over as being the Lord's choice. It was decided, in the end, to continue with Ray's help and concentrate our efforts and financial resources in seeking more adequate premises. Ray continued in his role as Home missions' evangelist. We were so grateful, at this time, for Ray's ministry and the continuing support of Home missions. These arrangements also had the added benefit of helping Walkden Evangelical church, which had by now, come under the umbrella of Raymond through Home missions.

## THE PROTECTION OF ANGELS

We were very grateful that there were no serious accidents during the renovation of the building, but there was one incident which could well have been very serious. In May 1979 we began to hold midweek children's meetings under the name of 'Seekers' a dozen or so children involved in activities, games etc..

My wife and I had the responsibility of running these meetings. One evening, later on in the year, we had just cleared up, the children had gone home apart from our own children, two boys aged 6 and 9. It was a wet night and I gone out through the back yard with some rubbish. As you stepped into the backyard there was a wooden platform which I had always thought served as another step. This particular night as I took the rubbish out to the bin I slipped on, what was by now, a soggy slippery, moss covered health hazard. I returned back to the kitchen and then decided to remove this dangerous extra step into the yard. I was totally unaware that this platform was covering an open manhole which led to the cellar. I lifted up the platform and stepped forward and fell into the hole, parts of the cast iron manhole cover were still there and I ended up in the hole up to my waist with jagged pieces of the cover scraping my back in the area of the kidneys. I managed to scramble out of the hole and lay in the wet yard moaning with pain. Ann, by this time, having heard my calls of distress came running out and she too stepped into the hole one leg in and one leg out. I was still lying on the floor, Ann managed to prise herself out and go across the road and

call an ambulance. I was taken to the emergency department but after x-rays etc. they found no serious injury and I was allowed home the same evening.

The next morning we decided to have Ann checked out by our G.P. as she had a bruise on her bottom the size of a dinner plate. Fortunately it was just a severe bruise, but I remember Dr. Sarkar saying at the time, 'What! You went to the hospital and your wife didn't?' This made me feel a bit of a fraud. How we praised the Lord for His deliverance from serious injury on that day. Psalm 91: 11-12. Many years later, that same cellar was transformed into a Baptismal pool; a place of danger transformed into a place of blessing.

## ANOTHER IMPORTANT MILESTONE

The years 1978 to 81 were possibly the most important years in the history of Ramsbottom evangelical church, not only because of the obtaining of permanent premises, but because of the conversions of several young men. Before I go into the details of these conversions it is necessary to go back to 1972. In 1972 11 years old Gary Hilton started to attend our Sunday school through his friendship with Graham Westwell. Young Gary continued to attend the Sunday school faithfully for the next few years, in spite of opposition from his immediate family. Through Gary's friendship with Graham, Gary had quite a lot of contact with Ernest and the obvious influence of the Gospel. In 1975 shortly after Ernest had moved to Anglesey, Gary, who was by now 15 years old, stayed with Ernest and Heather for a holiday. During that week a tent/beach mission was held and it was at one of those meetings that Gary Hilton was converted. It was round about this time that Graham also became a Christian.

Graham and Gary had gone to the same school, Tottington High. At the same time there were two more boys who attended that school which have a bearing on events which were to follow. The names of those boys were Rob Stredder and Jeff Kinsley. About four years after their conversions Gary and Graham went to work at Porrits and Spencers in Helmshore, which would be about 1979. It was here that they came into contact with their ex-school colleague, Rob Stredder. Over a period of faithful witnessing from Gary and Graham, Rob became not only a friend, but a brother in Christ. But God had not finished yet, Rob's brother, Gary also confessed Christ through his brothers changed life. It was four years later that Richard Sharples, through the testimony of Rob Stredder also became a Christian at the same Mill. But as the well known comedian says, 'thers more,' Jeff Kinsley was intrigued by the change in his friends and accepted an invitation to one of the meetings which happened to be a communion service. It was in that service that God spoke to Jeff and he too became a Christian which formed an inseparable union of friends for life, and indeed, for all eternity.

These young men later married, and along with other young couples in the Church bore children, children that now form our vibrant Christian youth fellowship of today.

## STAYING PUT

In March 1981 the shop next door, number 7, was for sale priced at £7,000. With alterations, including the removing of the dividing wall, the whole estimated costs were between £12,000 and £13,000. There were other alternatives at this time, one which included The Technical College on Stubbins lane, but this was deemed to be too large. In October 1981 planning permission was granted by the Council and so the decision was made to go ahead and purchase number 7

In May 1982 number 5 came up for sale, Jean and Stanley having already sold 7 and 9 had now no reason to stay in this end property. Looking back we can see that the timing of this sale was of the Lord's doing. Initially, we were very concerned that someone might buy the property and become a potential problem as next door neighbours. The access to the back of the building may have been a problem plus the noise inflicted on neighbours who might not have been sympathetic our church activities.

In 1980 Raymond and Muriel were living in council accommodation in Farnworth which at the time was suitable for their ministry in Walkden and Ramsbottom. By this time the work at Ramsbottom was taking up more and more of Raymond's time and the sale of number 5 was seen as a great opportunity for Ray and Muriel to move back into Ramsbottom. In one of the minutes dated 19/5/82 is written 'We will find capital to enable Mr. and Mrs. Gregory to obtain a mortgage to purchase this property' In October 1984 Raymond left Home missions and was confirmed as full time Pastor at Ramsbottom living in a home next door.

By 1987 accommodation for church members was becoming more and more restricted. Since moving into number 9 our membership had increased quite substantially. We had used every conceivable method of utilising space, including moving the partition between Church hall and vestry which gave us 10 extra seats. In 1995 extensive renovations were made on the church building which were completed in October. During this time we held our services in St. John's mission hall in Shuttleworth.

Though most of our time, during this 14 year period, was taken up mainly with building matters the Lord continued to build His church made up of living stones. There were many opportunities of serving the Lord through door to door work, evangelistic meetings, youth work and for those called to preach. Seeds were also being sown in the hearts of children in the Fellowship which would bear fruit in the coming years. Personal reminiscences concerning the life and history of the church could be given by many members; especially of this period. Perhaps one day they too will put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, and fill in the gaps.



*Some of the Fellowship round about the late 1980's or early 90's.*

## HANDING ON THE BATON

One of the challenges in writing the history of the church is how to head the chapters. This one is no exception! Amazing developments was one title I could have given. In 1997 Raymond, in his wisdom, realised that the time had come to look for a new Pastor. Raymond was now 67 years old and had been serving the Lord faithfully for over 40 years, and like Paul had been 'in labours often. Ray was now looking forward, somewhat reluctantly, to retirement.

In our Church council meeting dated 24/3/97 Raymond outlined some important elements we needed to consider in seeking a new Pastor: We had to be flexible and allow God to move. We had to consider what sort of Pastor we were looking for, whether an associate, co-pastor or full time replacement. We needed to give much credence to the doctrinal and educational aspects of his ministry. Finally we needed someone who could command respect for his belief and learning. With these thoughts in mind and much prayer, our quest for a new Pastor began. As a matter of interest the membership of the church had risen from 10 in 1974 to 40 in 1997.

## **PASTOR OLIVER ALLMAND-SMITH.**

Having approached the F.I.E.C. for a list of accredited ministers who were reformed and lovers of the doctrines of grace, we received 3 names along with their credentials. I had already written to a couple of them when we received a further nomination, a young man by the name of Oliver Allmand-Smith. Oliver lived in Macclesfield which wasn't too far away.

In October 1997 we were informed that the speaker, who was down to take our anniversary services, was ill and would not be able to fulfil his commitment to preach to us on those dates. We contacted Oliver who was more than willing to stand in and take our meetings on the Saturday evening and both services on the Lord's Day. I was singularly impressed with Oliver from my first conversation on the telephone and even more impressed on meeting him personally and hearing him preach, the more I heard and saw of Oliver the more I was convinced that this man, and his dear wife Allison, were the Lord's gracious provision for the Lord's people in Ramsbottom. These convictions were confirmed at our next church meeting when the church decided, unanimously, to call Oliver Allmand-Smith to be our next Pastor. The principles laid down by Ray in what we must look for in a Pastor were more than met in this young and mature Christian man.

### **WHY DO YOU DOUBT, OH YOU OF LITTLE FAITH?**

In order to save embarrassing current members of the church, and Oliver, I do not think it is wise to go into too much detail of the years of Oliver's ministry, results speak for themselves. However, it would be remiss of me not to mention some important events that have happened over the last 8 years. By the year 2000 we were again struggling to accommodate an increase in church members. In 1989 we already had planning permission to build a double storey extension over the backyard, but this was considered to be too expensive at the time. We decided to step out in faith and go ahead with these plans. We also decided, at the same time to purchase number 5 allowing Ray and Muriel to move to a new home in Dundee lane. However, before we could go ahead with these plans there was a slight obstacle to overcome. We needed £130,000 to complete the task. It is a real joy to be able to write that our God abundantly supplied our needs. The money for number 5 came in one lump sum from an anonymous donor; we borrowed the rest of the money, which will have been paid up by the year 2008. Our God has richly blessed us in so many ways, but the greatest blessings of all were seeing most of our young people baptised. We still have our trials and tribulations, especially my dear wife who contracted Multiple sclerosis in 1996, but we have learned more and more that the Lord will never leave us or forsake us.

None of us would claim any glory for ourselves for what has been achieved. On the contrary, we would wish that we had prayed more, shared our faith more, wished we had been more faithful, more diligent, more watchful; acknowledging that what we have done for the Lord we could never have done in our own strength; 'for without Him we can do nothing'.

We certainly do not want to give the impression through this brief account of the Evangelical church that we 'have arrived.' We have only just begun, There is so much more to do, many more exploits, many more bulwarks of Satan's kingdom to break down, many more lost souls to win for our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

## PERSONAL APPEAL

I do hope that this brief historical account of the Evangelical church in Ramsbottom will be a source of encouragement to present and future members of this Fellowship. It is also my prayer that it may be read by a wider audience in the local community. Most people in Ramsbottom have never been inside the front door of our Church premises and must wonder what goes on in our meetings. What I have written may help to dispel some of the preconceived ideas about 'that religious lot' in Bridge Street. We are just normal ordinary folk, a cross section of the local community of Ramsbottom. There are the young and the old, the healthy and the sick, the clever and not so clever. We have policemen, nurses, business men, mill workers, retired and the unemployed. What we do have in common, however, is a living and vibrant faith in a living and wonderful Saviour, Jesus Christ. We do not claim to be more righteous or better than others, but recognise that our only hope of acceptance with God is through the mercy, righteousness and the finished work of our precious Saviour. We did not join the church because we have some kind of religious bent, or that we needed some kind of prop, we came because God called us through His Gospel, the most challenging and life transforming message any one will ever hear. Come and join us you will be made very welcome.



The Church Fellowship, 2006.

## **IMPORTANT DATES IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

- 1804** The early beginnings of Primitive Methodism.
- 1880** The hire of the upstairs room in Summerseat Co-op.
- 1892** The opening of the Primitive Methodist church, Railway Street.
- 1955** Closure of the Primitive Methodist church.
- 1956/7** Summerseat Gospel mission, Robin Road.
- 1959/60** Liberal club
- 1962** Church began to meet in the Co-op building.
- 1963** February 1<sup>st</sup> Church affiliated to the F.I.E.C.
- 1968** Change of Pastors.
- 1972** Loss of Church premises. (Co-op building)
- 1973** Loss of Pastor. (Robert McDonald)
- 1975** Help from Raymond Gregory.
- 1977** Purchase of No. 9 Bridge Street, Ramsbottom.
- 1981** Purchase of No. 7
- 1984** Raymond as full time Pastor.
- 1997** Oliver Allmand-Smith as full time Pastor
- 2000** Purchase of No. 5 and further extensions.
- 2006** To be continued.