

ELSTOW GOSPEL MISSION

Elstow Gospel Mission was formed in 1950 by Rev Sidney Johnson and his wife Vi who had moved back to Bedford from Lancashire in order to look after His mother affectionately known to members of the Mission as "Nan Johnson". The instigation of the Mission came from Pastor Johnson's sister Lucy, who lived in Pilgrims Way, Elstow, who told Mr Johnson that there was no decent Sunday School in the area. Catching the vision for a work, leaflets were designed and dropped around the vicinity, it was not long after that a Bible based Sunday School was born. However, adults were also interested in the work that was taking place, and it was not a quantum leap before a small congregation of adults gathered together and formal Mission style services commenced, and the Mission was born.

The location of the meeting was in the 15th Beds Scout hut, a green corrugated building, situated in a field of allotments, directly opposite the Bunyan Meeting Chapel, in Elstow and about 100 yards behind Bunyan's Cottage and adjacent to the old recreation ground. The use of the scout hut, as a mission church, came about as the result of the friendship between Pastor Johnson and Bob Turner, who was Scout Commissioner for Bedford. Pastor Johnson was also the Scout Master, this was very beneficial as it provided contact with many young people in the area.

Pastor Johnson, affectionately known by the author of this brief history as Sid, came from a Pentecostal tradition, having studied at a Pentecostal Bible College. Although the Mission was Independent, it had a fraternal relationship with Gwyne Street Pentecostal Church, the pastor at the time being Rev. Douglas Quay. The Mission also had a good relationship with the Young Life Campaign, from which many of the leaders gave their support and provided occasional speakers.

The first major event to take place in the newly formed fellowship, was the dedication of Jenny the eldest daughter of Pastor and Mrs Johnson. The service being conducted by Elisha Thompson the Principal of aforementioned Bible College.

The Scout Hut by today's standards was very primitive, the heating was by a coke fired tortoise heater, and the walls were dark brown varnish over pine cladding, and although a roof over people's heads it was far from satisfactory for an act of worship, needing a complete makeover. This work was undertaken by both the scouts and members of the growing congregation. When the author of this article, then 13 years old, was introduced to Pastor Johnson, it was in the middle of the makeover, Pastor Johnson was working up a ladder and was covered in paint. Having been introduced, a paint brush was thrust into my hand and was asked to join in and start painting.

The pulpit was handmade, and designed to fold away, as after services the hall had to be cleared and made ready for the cubs and scouts, Pastor Johnson also being the Scout master. Apart from the Johnsons, other early members were Peter and Audrey Standbridge, Ralph Walker (now deceased) and Mrs Daniels.

Initially music was provided by Pastor Johnson playing an accordion, sometime later a small organ (Harmonium) was donated to the Mission, when Joan McMally joined the fellowship as organist. By this time Pastor Johnson was employed at AMIEE, Cardington Camp, as an

Electrical Engineer. A friendship between Mr Johnson and Mr Bill Thomas, who at the time was unemployed and living in London, was maintained. With work being available at Cardington Camp, Pastor Johnson was able to get him work in the Electrical Engineering Section. This brought Bill, his wife Lillian and their daughter Janet to Bedford. Accommodation was provided by Bob Turner, who lived alone in a large house in Grosvenor Street. Bill was a fine musician, and eventually became the organist.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS OF MISSION DAYS: The services were simple, and comprised of Sunday Morning worship, generally in the form of a Communion Service around the smelly old coke heater. This was followed by afternoon Sunday School and an evening Gospel Service at which the Pastor would preach. There was also a monthly "Squash" this comprised of games and epilogue aimed at young people, it was at one such event that I met (Janet nee Payne) the girl who was to become my future wife. At these outreach meetings young converts to Christ were encouraged to give their testimonies and to pray.

The memories of those, now far off day, were by and large very happy. Pastor Johnson, giving the young people in his charge a good grounding the Bible as well as the art of door to door visitation and open air witness. We were all encouraged to engage in some form of public speaking, even if it was only a few simple words. This was good training and stood many in good stead in later years.

At the very tender age of 20 years, pastor Johnson, for some reason, best known to himself, appointed, your truly, as "Church Leader" a position I was far from equipped to handle. shortly after, Mr Jonson was taken ill and the responsibility of the Mission fell on my shoulders, resulting in it closing three years later.

The evening that the final arrangements were to be made regarding the distribution of the missions finances, the Scout Hut burnt to the ground. The residual money about £170 was sent to Mission for Christ, in East Sussex.



BACK ROW: Peter West - Keith Daniels - Peter Gadsden - Mr Smith
 THIRD FROM FRONT ROW: Bill Thompson - Pastor Johnson - Mona Beadle - Diana Ferguson
 SECOND FROM FRONT: Yvonne Wise - Sheila Cooper - Peter Daniels.
 FRONT ROW : ??? Smith - Bill Thompsons daughter? Two Smith sisters ??



SUNDAY SCHOOL



BACK ROW: Keith Daniels - Peter Gadsden - Peter West
 FRONT ROW: Margaret Stanway - an American visitor - Janet Payne - David Johnson ?