

WALMER BAPTIST CHURCH

1908 — 1983

**A history to commemorate
seventy-five years of witness**

by

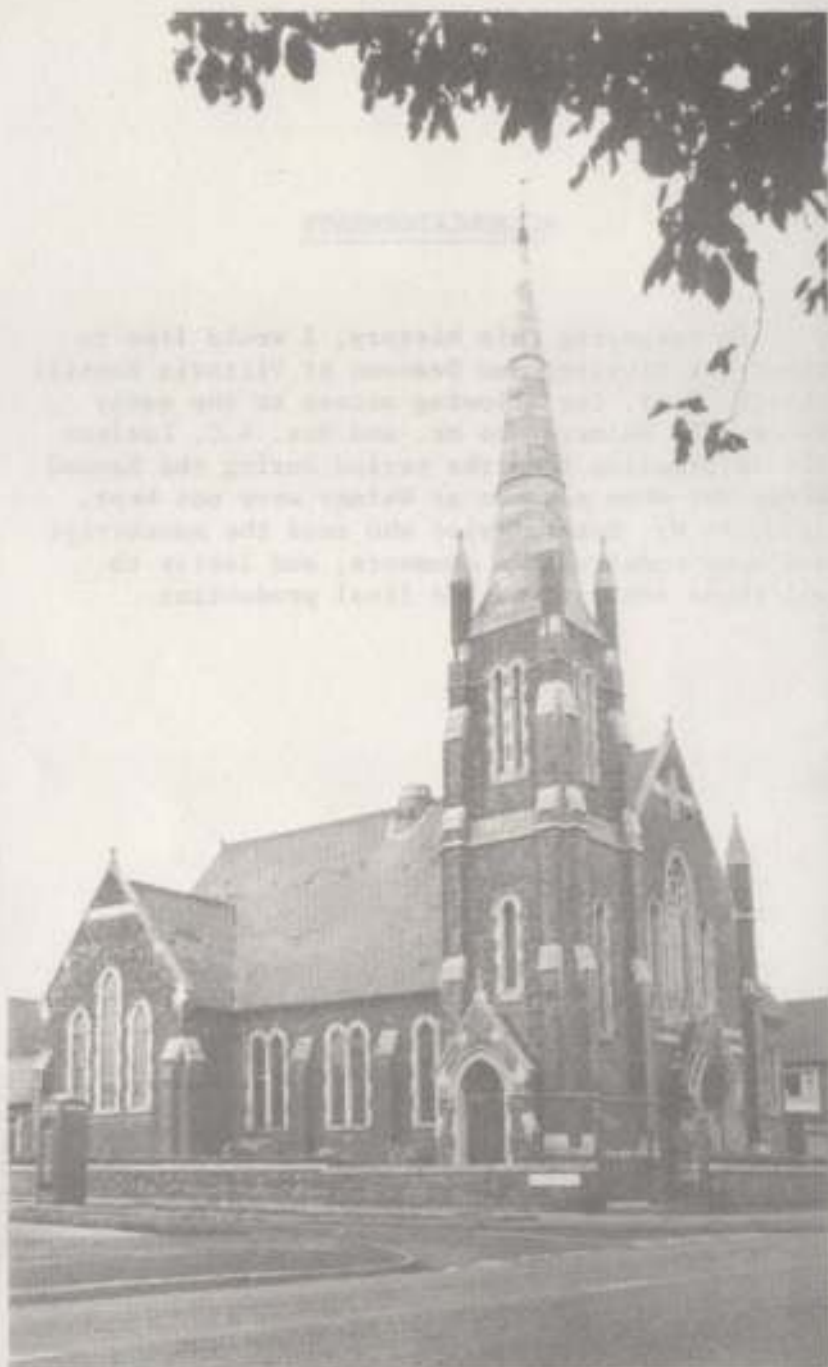
RODNEY PEARCE

THE VICTORIA BAPTIST CHURCH

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by
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THE FOUNDATIONS ARE LAID

Towards the end of the nineteenth century it was expected that the neighbourhood of Deal would expand and that probably the growth area would be towards Walmer. The rail link from London via Dover was completed in 1881 when the line extended to Walmer, and it seemed likely that Deal and Walmer would vie with the larger established seaside resorts. The Dover road towards Upper Walmer still retained a rural aspect and the village itself had the feeling of being quite distinct from Deal town. Then in the 1890s farmland in Walmer began to diminish as meadows were sold for building plots. At this point begins the story of Walmer Baptist Church.

It is to the enterprise of the Victoria Baptist Church, Deal, and in particular to the vision and zeal of its minister, the Rev. N. Dobson, that Walmer Baptist owes its existence. He shared with others in the Baptist Denomination enthusiasm for the "Forward Movement", then still in its infancy, having been spearheaded by the London Baptist Association. It was to be considerably advanced much later by a call from the Baptist Union in 1936. Mr. Dobson found encouragement and support for a Baptist cause within Walmer's future residential area with a Mr. W.C. Parkinson, a London County Councillor who with his wife was involved in the work of the Baptist Missionary Society. They were frequent visitors to Deal and personal friends of the Dobsons.

In 1898 Mr. Parkinson presented to Deal Baptist Church a plot of land he had bought in Walmer (part of what was known as the Great Field) for £220.10s.0d. The local newspaper report on Walmer's Opening mentions that the Free Churches had shown interest in the establishment of a non-conformist work in the area. I am indebted to Mr. A.C. Laslett for the suggestion that this was one reason why Walmer Baptist had an "open" membership - i.e. not restricted to only those adults baptised by immersion. Planning for a new building here began almost immediately with a Church Meeting held at Deal in the November giving unanimous support to the venture. As a result the work was officially launched at a special meeting on Thursday April 20th 1899 when a fund was started. In the following year Deal Baptist was the host Church to the Kent and Sussex Baptist Association Annual Assembly and the opportunity was taken to hold an informal dedication Service on the Walmer site. Prayers were offered, hymns sung and "three or four addresses" given. By the end of 1900 £522 had been donated.

The years leading up to the completion of Walmer's building in 1904 were extremely busy for the Deal Baptists. Walmer was to be added to an already existing group of Baptist causes begun by Deal at Ripple and Sholden. While energy and resources were being expended on their most ambitious venture at Walmer, yet another extension of their witness was begun in the nearby village of Great Mongeham. This opened on the 20th November, 1901, with the help and support from friends in the village. In 1902 Deal furthered the Mongeham cause by purchasing a site for a future chapel at a cost of £30, and additional trustees were appointed for this purpose.

The architects for Walmer were Messrs. J. Wills and Son of Derby and London who twenty-two years ago had designed Victoria Baptist Church, Deal. Two plans were submitted, one of which was quite ambitious and finally rejected. In the July of 1903 tenders for the building were opened in the presence of the architect. Of the four submitted (all builders were members at Deal Baptist) the work was awarded to Mr. A.W. Thompson for an estimated cost of £3,379. On 3rd August that same year the Stone Laying Ceremony was held. It was the occasion of Mr. Dobson's birthday and marked also his thirtieth year as Pastor of the Church. Seven Stones were laid including those representing the Deal Church, the Kent and Sussex Baptist Association, the Baptist Missionary Society (laid by Mrs. Parkinson in the absence of her husband), the Baptist Denomination (laid by the Rev. J.R. Wood, President of the Baptist Union in 1902) and the minister, the Rev. Dobson. When he laid his stone Mr. Dobson paid tribute to Mr. Parkinson saying that the largest gift would not be the stones but the site he had so generously given. On the day upwards of £1,000 had been given or promised.

The period up to the Opening in 1904 was filled with planning and preparation. A Trust Deed and Constitution for Walmer were drawn up, and a Clause inserted which would make it possible for Walmer to become independent of Deal if desirable. Apart from the various gifts and planned giving, two major sources of money were secured. From the Baptist Union Twentieth Century Fund came £500; a greater sum came as a loan from the Deal and Walmer Building Society. Deal appointed six additional deacons in order to carry the substantial work load. In any venture

for Christ and His Church, the most valuable resources are His servants.

Walmer was a major enterprise and it was necessary to seek an assistant minister who would share in the work of both churches. In view of this it was decided at the November deacons' meeting to go ahead and contact the Pastor's College (Spurgeon's) for suitable candidates. On June 9th the Church Meeting voted to invite John Bradford as assistant minister, and news of his acceptance was announced at the morning Service on June 26th, 1904.

During this time the building had progressed, adding to the landscape a high steeple and an attractive Early English style brick building, Anglican in layout, consisting of Nave, transepts and chancel with the pulpit on one side and an open baptistry on the other, but, in line with dissenting traditions, no central aisle. The seating capacity including the West End gallery was 450. There were originally no schoolrooms. This was not an oversight but a necessary slimming down of the initial expense. Accordingly, at the February Church Meeting of 1904 it was unanimously agreed to empower the deacons and the Building Committee to plan for a Sunday School. A temporary structure was felt to be the answer for the time being, but this was not possible because of a restriction of land usage adjacent to the church which forbade any erection of this kind.

The organ came from Deal Baptist. It had been placed in the schoolroom when Deal had a new one built by Messrs. F.H. Browne. The removal and renovation of the old organ was borne by the Walmer Building Fund. New copies were ordered of the recent denomination hymnary published in 1900. A

choir was also planned, although the Church Meeting on June 9th, 1904, thought it advisable to avoid taking "boys and others" from the Victoria Baptist Church choir. Five deacons were appointed for special duties at Walmer. All business would be conducted through the diaconate and Church Meetings at Deal.

The opening of the building took place on July 21st, 1904. It was by all accounts a jubilant occasion and magnificently supported. The day began with a Dedicatory Service at noon which commenced with the doxology. The guest preacher was the Rev. Dr. Richard Glover, a prominent figure in the denomination and a past President of the Baptist Union. Following the Opening a luncheon was provided in a marquee lent by Mr. C.J. Burgess on ground in Park Road (now Kelvedon Road). W.C. Parkinson presided. Among the guests were the future minister, John Bradford, and Mr. J. Wills the architect. Mr. Parkinson alluded in his speech to the dual purpose Walmer Church could fulfil, affirming that it was built for "the benefit of the visitors as well as the residents." Mr. Wills paid special tribute to the builders; "Mr. Thompson has not only done his work honestly but has put his heart into it." A great many things had been done "over and above the letter of his contract, and even beyond the spirit of it." The afternoon Service was conducted by Dr. Glover, who preached on "The One Foundation, and building thereon." The informal evening meeting included the Rev. Dr. Carlyle of Folkestone, later editor of the Baptist Times for sixteen years until his death in 1941. The Deal Wesleyan Minister, the Rev. C.L. Tabraham, reflects in his greetings the prevailing unease that existed between

Episcopacy and Free, declaring that the opening of the Church would be followed by great things, and that it would be consecrated "not by a Prelate but by conversions." The day's proceedings ended as they had begun with the singing of the doxology. So a memorable and historic day passed, and a new chapter in local Baptist witness began.

The Recognition Services of Rev. John Bradford took place on the Sunday and Monday, 25th and 26th of September, which also marked the commencement of public worship in the new building. Dr. McCaig, Principal of the Pastor's College, gave the Charge to John Bradford on the Sunday morning at Deal. At the evening Service at Walmer he gave the Charge to the Church. "We shall find in our new Minister one full of fervour and zeal, and one who will speak out of the heart to hearts." One speaker at the more informal Meeting on Monday evening was John Bradford's father, a Baptist Minister from Northampton.

It is not surprising to learn that the support of two churches soon put a strain on the financial resources of the single membership. Besides the mortgage payable on the building there were other quite hefty liabilities which had to be settled. In 1905 a special appeal was made to offset a debt of £300, and in the March the deacons considered holding a church meeting to review the financial position generally.

Set against this somewhat sombre background of finance we sense the excitement of a new challenge when fresh service is attempted. A day of rejoicing for Walmer was the occasion of its first baptismal Service held on Sunday evening, 23rd April, 1905. Eight candidates were baptised, the first being Miss Florence Jefford. We learn

that the gallery was occupied for the first time, and the minutes of the Service record that "the hallowed joy and manifest presence of the Holy Spirit will long remain in the memory of those who had the privilege to attend."

In the following October Mr. Bradford brought before the deacons a proposal to start a Sunday School in the Walmer Church. A committee from the diaconate was formed to look into the details, and in the November was able to suggest where classes could meet. All corners of the church were used, including the Minister's vestry and the Ladies' Room. The School began its life on the 5th December, 1905 with morning and afternoon sessions. The Superintendent was Mr. A.W. Thompson.

In September, 1905, the Rev. Dobson suffered a breakdown in health and was incapacitated until the end of the year. With the tremendous work load and massive responsibilities which had been his in the last few years, this is not altogether surprising. Throughout this period of illness it was left to Mr. Bradford to shoulder responsibility for both churches. After Mr. Dobson's return in December, relations between the two churches were never the same again and further estrangement led finally to separation. Troubles sprang from divided loyalties between the two churches. The growth in popularity of the younger Minister - Mr. Dobson's ministry at Deal has now extended to thirty-three years - was a probable contributing factor. The issue was discussed at meetings with deacons and members between March 1906 and the following February, both Ministers looking to the Church's wishes to determine the future. It was obvious that as things stood the work could not progress and a temporary coolness between the two

men made united work impossible. A Church Meeting on February 14th, 1907, voted in favour of Mr. Dobson remaining exclusively the Minister of Deal, and ruled that should Mr. Bradford remain, any separation between the two churches must be settled legally. A Separation Committee was formed including the two Ministers to plan for this eventuality.

The Committee reported back to the membership in April, 1908. They suggested that Walmer should separate from Deal and form its own independent membership, and that as from March 31st of the same year each church should bear its own financial responsibilities. This was passed and it was left to the Committee to settle the arrangements concerning the mortgage on the Walmer building, and for the trustees to vest the Walmer property with the Baptist Union Corporation. It was further agreed for Walmer not to commence any Services at Deal, Ripple and Sholden, and Deal was pledged not to start any Services at Walmer and Mongeham. It was this arrangement which put Mongeham Mission under the care of Walmer.

Throughout the active period of the Separation Committee those who felt committed to the work at Walmer supported the business meetings under the chairmanship of the Rev. Bradford. A Walmer diaconate consisting of deacons appointed originally by the membership at Deal met for business from the June of 1907, although Walmer Church meetings were started earlier in March. In May Mr. A. Taylor was appointed as Church Secretary, and Mr. Holtum as Treasurer. The oversight of Mongeham was also taken on in this interim with monthly collections for the work and two deacons arranging pulpit supplies. During this period before final separation the work at Walmer was already bearing

fruit under John Bradford's ministry. No fewer than forty-nine joined the Fellowship between March 1907 and April 1908; twenty-one of them professed baptism. All these people, at first, were enrolled as members of Deal, and all but one are included in the total of 134 who transferred their membership to Walmer at its separation.

That Deal recovered from this considerable loss in its numbers shows both the strengths of the depleted membership and the courageous spirit of its pastor. A resolution expressing high regard for Mr. Dobson was carried unanimously at a Church Meeting in April 1908; it affirmed that

"The happy issue that has resulted in the peaceful separation of the churches of Deal and Walmer is in no small sense due to his wise leadership and careful guidance through a difficult and perplexing situation."

In the June of the year of separation all positions which had been vacated in the Church, School and Missions had been refilled, and finance had shown "very little diminution." Looking back later, at his Farewell in October, 1914, Mr. Dobson regarded the Baptist Church at Walmer as the "best bit of work God ever gave him to do."

THE MINISTRY OF THE REV. JOHN BRADFORD

On Thursday, April 23rd, 1908, a Church Meeting was held for the purpose of "inaugurating a Baptist Church worshipping at Walmer." The meeting was presided over by the Rev. A.W. Leighton Barker of Tenterden at Walmer's invitation. 134 persons came into membership,

and after the names had been read out the 105 who were present linked hands to sing the first verse of the hymn, "Best be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love." This custom has remained with the Church when members are received into Fellowship. The meeting also formally appointed John Bradford as the Minister, and the Service ended with Holy Communion.

The statistics sent to the Kent and Sussex Baptist Association in the May of 1908 were encouraging. There was 120 scholars, twenty-one Sunday School teachers and eight lay preachers. These figures do not include Mongeham; here there were three lay preachers, six Sunday School teachers and sixty-four scholars.

In the following month two important Church Meetings were held to formulate Rules before election of Church Officers could take place. Seven deacons were elected, and from the diaconate Mr. A.S. Taylor was appointed Secretary and Mr. A. Holtum Treasurer. Between April and June a Committee had met pending the election of a diaconate.

Since the Opening of Walmer in 1904 Deal had kindly lent the church their Communion set. In June 1908, Mr. and Mrs. Clifford presented to Walmer a Communion Service consisting of four chalices, four patens and a flagon. As was the custom in those days dated Communion Tickets were issued and given in at Communion, and communicants registered.

During 1908 the work expanded to include a Band of Hope meeting in the Walmer Co-operative Hall, a Ladies Meeting, a Young Mens gathering in the week-day and a Young People's Service on the second Sunday of each month. As a separate Church,

Walmer sent its own representatives to the Free Church Council. Other matters had to be dealt with. One was the drawing up of a fresh Trust Deed which included in it that three fourths of the deacons must have been baptised by total immersion, whereas in the former Trust Deed under Deal the stipulation was that all members of the diaconate must be baptised. Another concerned the debt on the building. The first Annual Report given by the Secretary in June 1909 was heartening. Since the Church's inception in 1908, membership in December of the same year stood at 155. Open air work had taken place in the Summer months on the sea front and a mission was planned for the coming year.

The first few months of 1909 were taken up with preparation. In March, the mission, conducted by a visiting evangelist, the Rev. S.A. McKraken, drew large congregations and the response was sufficiently encouraging for a final special tea for the converts to be laid on. Open-air meetings took place yearly on the beach near the Lifeboat. In the following year Walmer took part with other free churches at a united mission held at Sandwich. Walmer's membership was gradually increasing and by the end of May 1909 twenty-five candidates had been baptised helping to bring the total membership to 161.

The general finance of the Church was less promising. Often funds were reported as short, though commitments were always met when occasions demanded. The debt on the building was helped by securing two interest-free loans from the Baptist Fund and the Pastor's College Building Fund. With over 190 children now in the Sunday School there was an urgent need for schoolrooms to be built. An all-out effort was made to reduce the debt in order to hasten this on. The ladies of the Church

heroically covenanted to clear the building debt by organising sales of work.

Another important step was to buy the land at Mongeham. The Church at Deal was anxious to dispose of the land and Walmer purchased it with the help of two interest-free loans. It was not until 1911 that building was started at Mongeham. At this time friends there were still meeting in a converted room of a house in the village, rented by Walmer. Two deacons, Mr. C.J. Burgess and Mr. P.H. Clark, took a vital interest in the building of the Mongeham chapel, and Mr. Clark became its first Superintendent. Plans for the building were drawn up by Mr. Jefford and work supervised by Mr. J. Atkins and Mr. R. Cory. Labour was given freely by members and friends (forty-eight names are mentioned in the Walmer Minutes) and the only cost to the church came from the materials used. At the October Church Meeting in 1911 Mr. Burgess was able to report that the building was free of debt.

The faith and enterprise of the members were such that in 1911 plans were already being made to raise funds for the Sunday School buildings. At the Annual General Meeting in January 1912 the secretary reported that "we may reasonably hope to have £100 in the near future." This reflects the generosity of the membership at Walmer.

These plans were overshadowed by the news given at the Church Meeting in July 1912 of the Rev. Bradford's resignation. He had received a unanimous invitation to succeed his father as Minister of the Baptist Church in Northampton. John Bradford's last Service at Walmer was taken on Sunday September 29th, followed by a Valedictory Service on the Monday.

He had no official communication with the Church until 1954 when on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Walmer's inception he was invited to write a letter from his home in Ottawa, Canada. The letter testifies to his faith :

"I had a message to deliver, and by His grace, I delivered it, looking to the Lord to bring it home to the hearts of my hearers. There was, therefore, no question as to the results."

Despite the strained relations between Deal and Walmer in the early years he acknowledges that Deal and Walmer were to him "one sphere of work, and indelibly united."

The appointment of a successor to John Bradford was sought through the Association. (Area Superintendents were not created until 1915). As things turned out, the Minister approached was one who had taken Services at Walmer several times before and was already well known to the members. Before taking up names offered by the Association, the Church asked him to preach with a view to the pastorate. He felt led to do this and at a November Church Meeting a call was issued by the Church to the Rev. Champness at West Kilburn. He accepted and begun his ministry at Walmer in the early months of 1913.

THE REV. HARRY CHAMPNESS AND THE EARLY YEARS OF THE WAR.

Harry Champness became Minister to a membership numbering 175, with a thriving young people's work. Although his ministry at Walmer extended to just over four years, he worthily

built on the foundation left by the previous pastor, and immediately set about forming a prayer union, as it was named, "that the means might be found to build the much needed Sunday Schools." At the Annual General Meeting held in January 1914 it was reported that £193 had been collected, and that a legacy of £500 had been left by a past member. There and then it was decided to proceed. Messrs. J. Wills were invited back to draw up plans and the work was entrusted to G.B. Cottew for the sum of £1,537. The Stone Laying ceremony was performed in June and the Opening took place in November 1914. In a tribute given to Harry Champness in 1917 it was said that "The building of our Sunday Schools will remain as a lasting testimony of his zeal, and the devoted work he has done for our Church."

The new minister showed the same evangelical zeal as his predecessor, and in the February of 1914 special circulars were printed inviting non-attenders to special Sunday evening Services. By the end of 1914 the membership had risen to 192. Needless to report, the open air beach services continued in the Summer months. The same year saw other changes. Monthly business meetings were changed to Quarterly, the first of these being held in April, and the suggestion was put forward by Mr. P.H. Clark for a Workers Meeting where a Paper would be read by a member and then discussed "thinking it would help to cement our helpers together in sympathy for each other's work." The first of these meetings was held in the July. In November a Mission for Mongeham was planned later in the month. 1914 also saw the purchase of the Church Safe! This was bought to house the Marriage Records which begin at this date. Previous to this, no marriage could take place in the Church without the presence of a Registrar.

Walmer, like all other churches in the land, felt the effects of the Great War on the life of the Fellowship. The Annual Report looking back to the opening year of the War mentions "the removal of our young people for Military Service." In the June deacons' meeting of 1915 the idea of establishing a Soldiers Institute was raised, but this never got under way. In the church records we read of a musical programme given at the Wounded Soldiers Meeting, and in 1916 of the School Hall being commandeered for afternoon lectures to the troops, the army paying two shillings and sixpence for the use of the gaslight. There was considerable expense to be faced by the church in providing blinds for the large windows. To avoid meeting this high cost, evening Services were conducted in the School Hall. However, "darkened streets were having an adverse effect on evening Services."

As the War lengthened we read of further depletions in the Fellowship. A report on the year 1916 finds "a further removal of our young members for Military Service including one of our esteemed deacons Mr. H. Cavell, and Mr. W.L. Piper our organist and Sunday School secretary, making it difficult to sustain our work." The position of organist was filled in by Mr. Cook and later by Mr. Shackleford. The normal programme of the Church was adhered to as far as possible, and it is interesting to note that in 1915 the pastor gave a series of talks at the Wednesday Evening Services on "the fulfilment of prophecy in relation to the War." The War brought the inevitable decline, among other things, in the general finances of the Church and the solvency enjoyed at the commencement of Mr. Champness' ministry began to corrode. The treasurer's report in January 1916 announced a deficit of £25, and immediate steps were taken to cut unnecessary

expense; one item to go in the interests of the economy was the organ tuning contract. By the January of the following year there was still a deficit of £20, which "a few friends" had promised to pay off. However, by the end of 1917 a balance in hand was reported. Things were not altogether gloomy. It was with a sense of thanksgiving that the debt on the Church building was cleared in September 1917. This debt had been erased solely by the women of the Church who in eight years had managed, by sales of work, to raise the sum of £500. In January, 1918, the Treasurer was to appeal to them to make a further effort to raise "about £100 which will free us from all outstanding liability."

Although the membership had risen to 192, the war took from the Fellowship those who deemed it wiser to remove from the district, and there were the few destined never to return from active service. A number of erasures were made over the years for non-attendance, bringing the Church Roll to 167 at the end of 1917. Even this figure included "names of some who have left Walmer for the time being and who we hope will return after the War."

The year 1917 ushered in the final weeks of Rev. Champness' ministry at Walmer. He announced on 7th January his call to the Pastorate at Surbiton, Surrey.

THE MINISTRY OF THE REV. JOHN DANIEL.

The ministry of John Daniel was both happy and fruitful. Having previously held the pastorate at Cheriton he was no stranger to Walmer. Generous remarks were expressed by members at the June Church Meeting of 1917. "To know him was to love him" was

one testimony.

The first months of his ministry saw the conclusion of the war. Nine members had lost their lives and for those who returned a special Service of Thanksgiving was arranged on April 3rd, 1919, to welcome "the brethren from active Service." In August of that year the Memorial Plaque in the Church was unveiled. Walmer also contributed towards the erection of the War Memorial Hospital in Deal.

Membership began to increase. In 1919 twenty-seven members were welcomed into membership; thirteen of these had been baptised by Mr. Daniel, most of the baptismal candidates being young people from Mongeham Mission. There were 236 scholars and of this number sixty-two were in the Sunday School at Mongeham. As the work there was so encouraging, Mr. P.H. Clark asked for the diaconate to be increased from seven to nine in order to assist Mongeham. The two deacons appointed had already worked there with Mr. Clark over the years.

In step with other Free Churches, Walmer went over to the use of individual cups at the Communion Service. This came about principally through the generosity of Mr. & Mrs. Fletcher who presented this gift at the Annual General Meeting in January, 1919. Mongeham followed in March when Mr. & Mrs. Hollamby donated a Communion Service in memory of their son Lt. Reginald Hollamby.

Additional land was purchased by the Church at Walmer and Mongeham. At a deacons meeting on the 9th February, 1920, it was decided to bring before the church the opportunity to buy a plot of ground adjoining the Schoolrooms (where the

present manse is situated). The Church agreed in the March meeting to purchase the ground for £110, with the deacons as Trustees. More land came on the market in 1924. This fronted the Dover Road. Sixty-six feet was bought with the intention of erecting a manse in the future. More ground at Mongeham was purchased in 1922 for £30. An extension for the youth work was planned. At a deacons meeting on December 4th, 1922, it was decided to open a bank account under "The Mongeham Baptist Mission Extension Fund."

As the years of John Daniel's ministry progressed so the work at Walmer increased. At the close of 1922 membership stood at 189. The Church was assiduous in revising the membership roll, and this led to a number each year being erased. New work had begun in 1921; a Troop of Scouts and Cubs, a fortnightly Women's Prayer Meeting, a Girls Meeting every Friday, and a Children's Hour. The last had started through the impetus of a Mission held earlier in the year. All these activities were in addition to the existing meetings of the Band of Hope, Mothers Meeting and usual week day meetings of Prayer and Bible Study.

An assistant secretary was appointed in April, 1922, to help Mr. A. Taylor.

The morale of the Church was high, and one indication of this is the generous giving of the members. Not only had the debt of the school buildings been cleared, but contributions to other causes were encouraging. One liberal response worthy of mention was Walmer's contribution to the Baptist Union Central Fund. Letters had gone out to churches in October, 1920, asking for a total of £200,000. Walmer's target was set at £200. In fact £253 was given, and of that total £45 had come from Mongeham.

An expensive item presented itself in 1922. The organ, which had originally come from Deal Baptist, was showing signs of wear. After hearing a report from the organist, Mr. L. Piper, the September Church Meeting decided to start an Organ Fund to have prior claim over collections for the building of a Manse. A recent sale of work organised by the women was devoted in part to launch the Fund with a pledge that the next sale of work would go exclusively towards the organ. By the following September, £180 had been collected. The Choir also gave concerts in aid of the Fund. A Committee was set up to purchase an organ, and in April, 1924, a recommendation was put to the church to buy an instrument recently purchased by S.F. Dallady of Hastings, and originally built by them. The cost of the organ as it stood was £770. The cost of removal and erection, together with the removal of Walmer's old organ to Mongeham, brought the total to £1,070. Money was raised by gifts and the promise of interest-free loans. The opening took place on June 26th that same year. Happily, the whole of the organ debt was wiped out by 1926. The expense incurred gave adequate reason in the early days for guarding against any would-be-players. It was agreed that those wishing to practise were expected to pay for the use of the electric light (battery powered), and for the first three practices to be supervised by the organist!

Two administrative changes came about in Mr. Daniel's ministry. The first concerned the appointment of deacons. The existing system introduced in 1908 was for a printed list of suitable nominees selected by the Pastor and passed by the diaconate to be supplied to members entitled to vote (those over eighteen and in membership for over six months). In April, 1923,

the Church Rules were revised and the membership given the power to nominate whom they wished to stand as deacons. Names of nominees were not disclosed until the actual meeting when a ballot was taken. The second originated from a notice of a motion given at a church meeting in February, 1925, that the diaconate be increased from eight to twelve in order for younger men to serve. The deacons put forward a plan from their meeting in April, of creating four Edlers (appointed from the diaconate with full deacon's rights) thereby creating four extra places. This was passed at the April Church Meeting when the four Elders were created and four extra deacons nominated and voted in. One of the four was Mr. George Wellden whose grandfather had been a founder member of Deal Baptist when it met in Nelson Street.

In 1925 a Christian Endeavour Society was formed with Senior and Junior sections. At the Annual report of that year the secretary reported that "never in our church history has the work been so progressive as the present time." This did not lead to any self-satisfaction, however. Concern was expressed by the Pastor for those not being reached by the gospel in the North Barracks road area of the town, and in 1924 enquiries were already being made to hire a Hall in the vicinity for this purpose. There was also the expectation that Walmer might one day be called upon to minister to the needs of the miners in the nearby coalfields. According to the Annual report in 1929 the membership was down slightly to 180 members, but more significantly, numbers in the Sunday School were on the decline. The two main reasons for this were that very few members now had children of Sunday School age, and the senior young people were having to move away to gain employment. However, towards the end of 1930 attendances began to increase again.

The work at Mongeham was being well maintained and the members there were eagerly seeking an extension to their building for youth work. The estimated cost was put between £800 and £900. It was felt that no definite plans could be advanced until the Extension Fund reached £500. By January, 1931, the total had risen to £245. The Church also felt that all debt from the purchase of ground should be cleared, and other domestic matters came to the forefront. These were the electrification of the Church which up to this time had been lit by gas, and the installation of a Deaf Aid system. All this work was undertaken in 1931, including the electrification of the organ which had been hand-blown. Mr. A. Taylor gave the lighting of the Schoolrooms in memory of his wife. A special Service of Thanksgiving was held in August of that year when the lights were ceremoniously switched on.

Towards the end of his ministry at Walmer John Daniel was elected to serve as Moderator of the Kent and Sussex Baptist Association at their Annual Meeting in May, 1931. It was his preaching in the capacity of Moderator in the December of that year at St. Leonards, Sussex, that led the fellowship there to offer him a preaching engagement in the following February with a view to the pastorate. He afterwards accepted the unanimous invitation to St. Leonards in the clear conviction that this was the call of God. His last sermon was preached at Walmer on April 17th, 1932.

There was also a change of Church Secretary at this period. After twenty-six years, Albert Taylor relinquished this post. He had first served as acting secretary during the throes of separation from Victoria Baptist. His

successor was Mr. John Baker who took up his duties in 1931.

Walmer Baptist was now established both locally and within the wider sphere of the denomination. In 1923 the church was able to send the Pastor, two deacons and a lady member as delegates to the Baptist World Congress at Stockholm. Later, in 1927, the Pastor was given leave of seven weeks to be present at the World Baptist Conference in Toronto. Within the local life of the community also Walmer played its part. At one period the school premises were used for an infant clinic - The Lady Beauchamp Infant Clinic - and the minutes record the occasional use of the Hall by outside organisations. In 1930, the Walmer Cricket Club held a Whit Monday Luncheon and Tea there. For many years the Walmer Urban Council was invited to the Harvest Festival Service. Mention must be made of the treasurer of the Church at this time, Mr. C.J. Burgess. He was a "local worthy," a J.P. and a County Councillor who farmed at Walmer Court. His help was a tremendous asset at the inception of the Church in 1908, and the Church Minutes witness to his generosity and wise counsel.

Reference should also be made to the Church Choir formed in 1908. Soon after the arrival of Rev. Daniel in 1917 a Choir Committee was formed which helped enormously to organise not only the Sunday by Sunday arrangements (anthems morning and evening) but the giving of an annual Cantata at Easter, provision of special music at Christmas, and a musical ministry in local churches. The church was indebted to the devotion and gifts of its organist and choirmaster Mr. L. Piper.

THE MINISTRY OF THE REV. E.R. FOWLES.

The Rev. E.R. Fowles commenced his ministry at Walmer on Sunday, 4th December, 1932. For a number of reasons the Recognition Service did not take place until 2nd February. The guest preacher on this occasion was Mr. Alfred Ellis, Present of the Baptist Union, Altrincham, Cheshire, had been Mr. Fowles' previous Church and he came to Walmer through the recommendation of the Area Superintendent, the Rev. Sydney Morris. In the letter of commendation from Altrincham the Secretary testifies to Mr. Fowles' value as "a faithful Ministry of the Word of God; a leader in Spiritual things whom it will be difficult to replace." His time at Walmer provides ample evidence of this. In the period 1933 to 1940 the Minutes record that 81 were welcomed into the Fellowship of the Church, and towards the end of his ministry the overall membership had increased by 36.

Until the 1930s the Minister had to be accommodated in rented housing; Walmer Baptist was fortunate in having amongst its members those who could offer this. In October, 1932, just before the unanimous call went out to Mr. Fowles, the Church was presented with a gift of £500, with a further £700 as a loan which could be paid back after two years. This generous gift came from a Church member, Mr. Davis, for the purpose of erecting two semi-detached houses. The members were delighted that at long last a Manse could be built and no time was lost in putting forward plans and inviting tenders for the houses to be built on land in Park Road (now Kelvedon Road). By May, 1933, the Manse was occupied and the adjoining house rented out.

Only minor changes occurred during this

Ministry. In 1933 the Church Rules were revised with an additional exhortation to the membership regarding attendance at the Communion Service. Later on, in 1936, it was decided to hold a morning Communion Service monthly on the third Sunday instead of only Quarterly, thereby creating the pattern of a morning and evening Communion each month. In this same year the Minister introduced a Thank Offering Day to replace the Sale of Work. A pastoral innovation was introduced at the end of a Church meeting when the names of sick members were read out, and a personal letter "of affectionate regard" sent from the Meeting.

The work at Mongeham was being faithfully maintained by its leader, Mr. Percy Clark, and his willing helpers. In November, 1934, electricity was installed for just over £9. A report in 1935 gives the average numbers in the congregation as thirty, with about fourteen Communicants. The Sunday School averaged about thirty children. It came as a sad blow when in the April of that year, Mr. Clark tendered his resignation after a period of over thirty-three and a half years at Mongeham. "With a growing neighbourhood it seems to require more energy than I have." Mr. Hollamby who had worked with Mr. Clark at Mongeham for twenty years was unanimously appointed as successor.

In 1935 the Church had been in contact with the Rev. Stapley, Minister of Wellington Square Baptist Church, Hastings, with a view to his conducting a Mission in the following March. A week of preparatory prayer was planned. From 1932, the Secretary's Yearly Report was not recorded in the Minute Book of the Church. It was noted merely that the Report as printed in the Year Book was agreed by the Annual Meeting. This means that vital information is missing from the Church records,

and nothing more is mentioned about the Mission or its results. There is mention, however, of the Sunday School in 1936 which had a membership of 134 scholars and twenty-two teachers. Mongeham School had improved greatly during the year with forty-six scholars.

From 1936 the Church began to enter the uncertain period before the outbreak of the second World War. Already the Sunday School premises were being used for Defence purposes, and correspondence between the Church and officials occurred concerning the possibility of making permanent structures in the School Hall for A.R.P. purposes. At the onset of Mr. Fowles' ministry there was an agreement between the Minister and the Church that his ministry would extend over a period of five years. In 1937 the deacons gave their unanimous recommendation to the Church "that we extend the period of the Pastor's Services which expires at the end of November until such time as he receives a suitable call." He felt, however, that it was right he should move on, and in 1938 asked permission from the deacons to use his holiday Sundays preaching with a view. Gradually Church life became disrupted. In July, 1939, the deacons were looking into suitable material for blinds for the black-out. From March 3rd, 1940, the evening Services were to be at 5.30, though later were adapted to the extending daylight.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

During the war, Walmer, with other coastal resorts, suffered heavy enemy action. This resulted in large-scale evacuation. National call-up further depleted congregations. At times,

when there were so few worshippers at Walmer Baptist, services were held in the Primary Room of the Sunday School. The Church building, seldom used, escaped bombing; although minor damages were sustained when on one occasion a bomb, dropped between the Parish Hall and the Church, shattered the windows. By 1940 the Rev. Fowles had moved to another pastorate. Other ministers among the Free Churches were also departing. Only Deal Baptist retained their pastor throughout the war.

Deacons and members would meet for business when necessary, but most of the Church's work was suspended. The secretary, Mr. Charles Harris, left Walmer for a while, and his place was filled by Mr. C.E. Reed. Other members during this time gave invaluable service. Walmer was not left without leadership in these difficult days, however. In 1941, Mr. Tom Cooper, in full-time employment, agreed to become Lay Pastor. His ministry extended to the end of the War. Sunday-by-Sunday he would journey from Worth village to conduct the services. In 1942, evacuee children were recalled, and this led Walmer to restart the Sunday School with 80 scholars.

THE POST WAR YEARS.

The first two years after the war were not easy for Walmer. Mr. Cooper had left, later to become pastor at Eythorne in 1946. It was not until April the following year that Walmer had its own minister again. Demobilisation was slow and the return to normal church life was gradual. However, by 1947 things began to pick up. The Rev. R.F. Gascoyne, whose previous pastorate was at Haddenham, near Ely, became minister over a

membership of 78. By 1950 the church numbered 117. But the chief success in the years immediately following the war was the youth work. The secretary's Annual Report for 1948 pointed out that the Sunday School had become "the envy of the other churches." The children totalled 104. A Junior Christian Endeavour Society had started followed by a Senior Young People's Meeting run on similar lines. A Young People's Fellowship had also begun. With the return of Mr. Piper, the organist, the choir was reformed and in 1948 was the only Free Church choir in the area to sing an anthem every Sunday.

1949 saw a change in the Superintendency of Mongeham. Mr. Harry Powell took over the work following the death of Mr. Hollamby. Walmer, too, saw a change in the secretaryship when the Rev. F. Neil, a retired minister who had also acted as moderator in the interregnum, resigned on health grounds. Mr. George Attwood succeeded him.

A Church Meeting held in July, 1949, agreed that the Baptist Union Corporation should be sole trustees for the Walmer Manse, the land surrounding the Church, and also of the Mongeham Mission. It was a peculiar position as the only trustee to be a Church member was at Mongeham. The other legal owners were not in membership at Walmer. As it happened, all those concerned were happy for the trusteeship to be transferred. It was also provided for the Mission to become independent of Walmer should this be desirable.

Towards the end of 1949 a monthly newsletter was issued called the "Walmer Witness." It has remained ever since as the church magazine. The previous one had been discontinued at the

beginning of the Second World War. Brief references to its finances were made, and one Deacons' Minute reads that the editor was asked "to curb his humour."

The minister did not enjoy good health. In June, 1948, he was seriously ill in a Cambridge hospital and did not return to full time pastoral duties until November. Another serious bout of illness overtook him in April, 1951, which forced him to resign. He retired from the Ministry; he and his wife made their home in Walmer where he died in 1955.

In November, 1951, a Church Meeting agreed to invite for a second time the Rev. Edward Tribe with a view to the pastorate. Following this visit an invitation was extended to him, and Mr. Tribe was inducted on May 8th, 1952.

FROM THE 1950s ONWARDS.

Mr. Tribe's ministry at Walmer was accompanied by times of expansion and blessing. Towards the end of his ministry the membership had risen to 170, and work among young people had gone forward considerably. Monthly Guest Night Services were quickly introduced. The first, in November 1952, was a baptismal service when six young people testified. The following year saw further baptisms, and continuing success with the Guest Services.

1954 was an historic year marking the Jubilee of the Church. Special services were conducted on July 8th. The preacher was the Rev. H. Bonser, a former President of the Baptist Union, and others invited included two past ministers, the Rev. E.R. Fowles, and Pastor Tom Cooper. Of the founder

members in 1908, nine still remained on the register. The following Sunday Services were conducted by the Area Superintendent, the Rev. W.D. Jackson. A Jubilee Fund had been launched which reached its target of £400 by the end of the year. This sum went towards the installation of heating in the school premises. It was a heartening year with an additional twenty-five received into membership, twenty-one baptisms and a good proportion of young people.

In 1955 a Church Parlour was opened on July 7th by Mrs. Gascoyne in memory of her husband. The room had previously been used as a classroom and a bequest from the late Rev. Gascoyne had helped in its transformation.

Throughout the years other changes and additions took place. In 1957 a new oil-fired boiler was installed adding much needed warmth to the church, and an Amplification System was added in 1959 in memory of two past members, Mr. George Attwood, until 1958, church secretary, and Mr. Charles Harris, a former treasurer. Then in 1959 it was proposed to convert the room previously used as a clinic by the County Council into a much needed larger kitchen. Two further decisions were made about this time. The first was to sell the property adjoining the manse, and to invest the proceeds. Then, in 1960, plans were passed for a garage to be used by the minister.

Throughout the years, work at Mongeham had steadily increased, and it was decided to go ahead with the first stage of the extension. The kitchen and toilets were completed in 1960.

The latter years of Mr. Tribe's ministry

brought an increase in membership. Morning congregations were reported good "due to the increased numbers of Royal Marines" in attendance. In 1959 another twenty-two members had joined the church. The year also made history for Walmer Baptist when the first lady deacon was elected. Sadly, for the church, the final month of the year brought the news of Mr. Tribe's resignation; he had accepted a call to the pastorate at Dereham Road Baptist Church, Norwich. His last Sunday at Walmer was on February 28th, 1960.

In September, the Church invited the Rev. L.J. Wisewell to become Pastor, and he began his ministry in December. During his pastorate Mongeham extension was completed. Plans were draughted in 1961, and the Opening took place on August 13th, 1963. It was also agreed in 1961 to sell part of the Walmer ground fronting the Dover Road as a single building plot. Proceeds of the sale were invested.

Churches had been approached by the Denomination to make a special contribution to mark the Ter-Jubilee celebration of the founding of the Baptist Union. They were asked to raise the total sum of £300,000, and each church was encouraged to participate in local evangelism. A special meeting was called at Walmer in November, 1961, to launch its campaign.

The following year saw the formation of a Girls' Brigade Company. A little later, in 1963, a Boys' Brigade was also started. Unfortunately, this was disbanded in 1967.

In the early years of the 1960s it became evident that the organ was in need of major attention. Trouble had been reported just prior

to Mr. Wisewell's ministry, and an organ fund was started. Lengthy discussions protracted the issue, and at one point it seemed that the pipe organ would be replaced by an electronic instrument. Finally, in May 1965, it was agreed to go ahead with renovation.

By this time Mr. Wisewell had concluded his ministry at Walmer, taking a post with the Mission to Lepers in 1964. The man to succeed him was the Rev. Frank Copley. He was inducted to the pastorate in September, 1965.

During the ministries of the Rev. Frank Copley, concluded in 1973, and the Rev. Cyril Austen, from 1974 to 1979, the Church has endeavoured to maintain its evangelical witness, and its work among young people. Cooperation with the local Anglican Church has grown. Starting in the late 1960s there are now two United Services a year, and a joint Parish Christmas Card is produced announcing the special services.

An innovation has been the Flower Festival in 1976. The Church is blessed with those gifted in floral art, and such was the success of the three day festival that two more have taken place.

In recent years further material improvements have included the installation of an Audio System and a thorough renovation and refurnishing of the Church Parlour.

In April 1980 the Rev. Cyril Austen retired from the ministry. He had first served with the Baptist Missionary Society for twenty-two years before entering the home ministry. After an interregnum of almost eighteen months, the Church extended an invitation to the Rev. Eric Skinner,

who began his ministry on 17th October, 1981.

Four past members of Walmer are in full-time service with the denomination. In 1963 Mr. Geoffrey Locks was appointed assistant editor of the Baptist Times, and later went on to become the editor. Mr. Arthur Glinn, after training at Spurgeon's College, was ordained to the ministry in 1966, and Mr. David Goodbourne has been a member of the Faculty at the Northern Baptist College since 1973. In 1977 Mr. Bruce Stokes, in fellowship at Mongeham, entered Spurgeon's College. His Ordination took place at Mongeham in July 1981.

Under the present minister, Walmer Baptist Church and the Mission at Mongeham together look towards the future work and witness. All owe a great deal to those in the past who have laboured for the furtherance of Christ's Kingdom. The challenge remains. "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."



THE OPENING OF MONGEHAM MISSION, 1911



MONGEHAM MISSION TODAY



A GROUP PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN AT THE OPENING - JULY 21st, 1904
(WALMER BAPTIST CHURCH)



JUBILEE YEAR, JULY 1954
(WALMER BAPTIST CHURCH)