

***Open to God, Open for All: The History of Tyndale Baptist Church, Bristol 1868-2018.* John Briggs (Ed). Tyndale Baptist Church and The Baptist Historical Society, 2018. 428 pp, numerous b & w ill, five colour plates. £12-00 plus postage from Tyndale Baptist Church, Whiteladies Road, Bristol BS8 2QG. ISBN 978-0-903166-47-8.**

Bristol has few modern church histories of note, especially of Nonconformist churches. Baptist histories are particularly rare: Counterslip, Kensington and Old King's Street have left nothing behind them. To these may be added Cairns Road, the successor to Old King's Street; Broadmead has a number of histories but no coherent whole; Buckingham Chapel's histories were constrained by space and by the money available for their publication; and Horfield Baptist Church's history, whilst excellent, is more of a pamphlet.

We live in a secular age and religious history is deeply unfashionable. Present congregations are busy managing decline and fulfilling their mission as best they can, and have little time for their history or for those who shaped it.

It is with pleasure therefore that this reviewer turns to this magisterial and monumental history of Tyndale Baptist Chapel, Whiteladies Road and its congregation, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which it rightly celebrates, which constitutes a collection of well-written, informative articles.

The book contains important insights into the lives of some of the leading Bristol Nonconformist business leaders and philanthropists in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, the paper manufacturer, Elisha Smith Robinson (1817-1885), initially a member of Highbury Congregational Chapel, became a member soon after the church opened in 1868. A Liberal Councillor, J.P. and Mayor (1866-7), his attempt to become an M.P. in 1870 was declared invalid due to bribery by some of his agents. His second wife, Louisa, daughter of the Revd. David Thomas, Minister of Highbury Chapel, linked him to one of the most influential Congregational families in the city. Two of his sons by his first wife, Kossuth Robinson, J.P. (1851-1935) and Edward S. Robinson, J.P. (1859-1935), the latter the Treasurer of the Baptist College for 50 years, played an important role in the life of the city and of the church. The family connection with the Chapel was continued through Edward Robinson's musical granddaughter, Miss Kathleen Gotch Robinson, an active member until her death in 1985.

Other notable members of the congregation included Charles Townsend (1832-1908), Sir Charles Wathen (1833-1893), Sir Herbert Ashman, Bart., (1854-1914), and James William Arrowsmith (1839-1913). Townsend, a life deacon, was a J.P., a prominent Liberal Councillor and sometime Chairman of the Council's Docks Committee; he advocated Irish Home Rule, the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales and various other radical causes. Wathen, a member of Tyndale for a decade, was a wholesale retail clothier, Mayor on six occasions and a generous benefactor to the mission field; his niece, who was also his step-daughter, married Kossuth Robinson. Ashman, a leather factor, was Liberal Mayor of Bristol in 1898 before becoming the city's first Lord Mayor. Arrowsmith, the printer, took a leading part in founding the University of Bristol and also played a significant role in its governance, as he had in that of its predecessor, University College, Bristol.

Tyndale Church played a prominent part in the bringing of Christianity to the slums, courts and purlieus of the parish of St. Augustine the Less, below Brandon Hill, through the opening of a mission with an educational as well as a religious element (and which was transformed into the Folk House in the 1920s). It had a highly successful Sunday School and later a deaconess who helped to focus and extend the mission's outreach.

In Tyndale the dominant figure was the first Pastor, the Revd., later Dr., Richard Glover (1837-1919), President of the Baptist Union in 1884-5. He rejected Spurgeon's Calvinism and the doctrine of Pre-Destination, and accepted Biblical Criticism. He was Secretary of the Baptist College from 1873 until his death and was an active supporter of the church's missionary endeavours, particularly in China which he visited on behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1890-1. Much of his six months there was spent in Shensi province. Upon his return he spoke of the Chinese as "the uppermost of all heathen people" and was impressed by their morality and their Confucianism. He became a friend and admirer of the Chinese missionary Dr. Timothy Richard (1845-1919) and wanted to encourage Chinese Christians to undertake missionary work. Some eight Tyndale missionaries went to China. He wrote: "We [the British] have injured them as probably no nation ever injured another, by the opium traffic." He helped to raise huge sums for the work of the British Missionary Society in China, and encouraged a member of his congregation to financially support 14 missionaries there. He brought back many Chinese curios for the museum at the Baptist College: early editions of the Bible, printed on grass paper, Christian literature, wooden printing blocks, etc., all of which were sold by the College in the 1980s to the great loss of all who are interested in the 19<sup>th</sup> century links between China and Bristol. Appropriately, Tyndale is the current home of the Bristol Chinese Church.

In 1889-90, Dr. Glover found himself involved in the industrial unrest which stemmed from the Great Western Cotton Works in Barton Hill, where the workers demanded improvements in their pay and working conditions. After reviewing the company's accounts, Glover decided that the strikers' demands could not be met. His considered opinion should be compared to that of All Saints', Clifton where the strikers were ignored by the Minister and congregation alike. Glover's active ministry ended with his retirement in 1911, but he continued as a member of Tyndale until his death. Dr. Forrest Brown, the Bishop of Bristol, paid tribute to Dr. Glover and his work on his retirement from the church.

Tyndale was a church which in its first half century played an influential part in the life of the city far which far exceeded its numbers. Attracting industrialists and leaders from Bristol's municipal and civic life, it probably could be said to contain more influential men and women in its congregation than Redland Park and Highbury Congregational chapels, Victoria and Portland Methodist chapels, and Buckingham and Broadmead Baptist chapels.

During the Great War, Tyndale offered a home and support to many Belgian refugees who had been forced to flee their homeland following the violation of their country's neutrality and the German invasion of 1914.

From the 1940s onwards it was a pioneer of ecumenism. Bishop Frederick Cockin and Archdeacon Percy Reddick were sympathetic to having closer fraternal links with their Nonconformist brethren. Gone were the bitter divisions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tyndale played a vital role in the links between Tyndale, Redland Park United Reformed Church and Victoria Methodist church. In the post-war period, music flourished under the direction of Reginald Flew, a deacon of Buckingham Chapel, who was organist between 1954 and 1989.

This history also records the links between the Chapel and the University in the post-war period, including the much loved and respected Dr. Derek Parsons (1933-2013) of the Department of Physics, Dr. Michael Whitfield of Community Medicine and Dr. Adrian Beaumont of Music, but not the equally prominent Miss Margaret Carolina James, a secretary in Physics and daughter of a Baptist pastor in South Wales, who sang in the choir. The church was the home of the Bristol Bach Choir at its inception and also of a number of other community projects of importance.

The new church, designed after destruction in the Second World War by Eustace Button, is undistinguished. Its most important architectural features are the windows which replaced those destroyed in the war. These were designed by Arnold Wathen Robinson (1888-1953), who was a member of the church for almost 50 years. His other notable commissions include the Cathedral, the University of Bristol, the Bristol Baptist College and the replacement windows of Christ Church with St. Ewen, Broad Street.

The authors place the church in its context and write with authority about the Gospel of Christ crucified and its importance in contemporary society. The Gospel and its outreach are interpreted in every age for all sections of society. The history is comprehensive and authoritative and should be on the bookshelves of all Bristol historians and those who seek a wider understanding of Christian outreach in China, the Congo and India. The authors should be commended for showing that Matthew Arnold's pessimistic view of the Christian Church, expressed in his poem *Dover Beach*, does not relate to Tyndale and its congregation, which remain determined to ensure that its practical and missionary gifts are put to full use.

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*Bristol*