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## GPH: An History

In which we trace the ministries of the GPH Society Limited from the late 1800's through to the twenty-first century:

- Early beginnings;
- The Treasury magazine;
- New ownership and funds for missionaries;
- Formation of the Society;
- Expansion, development and rationalisation;
- The ongoing ministry.

### EARLY BEGINNINGS

In May 1900, Edward Whitehead opened his BIBLE AND TRACT DEPOT at 484 Queen Street Palmerston North. Within a year, newly imported machinery in the printery behind the retail shop was being powered by a windmill on a forty-foot tower at the back of the property. But this was not actually the beginning of the literature ministries that developed over the next hundred years and on into this 21<sup>st</sup> century. For that we must go back further, into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Edward had immigrated to New Zealand in 1872 from Kent, England where generations of his family had lived, many of them employed in the paper-making trade that had developed in the mills dotted alongside the rivers of the Derwent Valley. Arriving in Wellington he established a wood and coal business, married and began his own family. At some point in the next twenty years, he was encouraged by his unmarried sister Annie, who was living with the family at the time, to purchase a small hand printing press to produce tracts and leaflets for the growing number of Open Brethren assemblies with which he had become associated, as well as for their itinerant evangelists and preachers. Annie had learned the type-setting trade and played a major part in the new ministry.

The family moved to a farm near Feilding in 1893, but Edward still found time for his printing work which continued to grow to such an extent that he replaced the hand press with a treadle operated one, which he installed in his barn. The early editions of "The New Zealand Treasury" magazine, printed in 1899, contain full-page advertisements for "Gospel & Believers Tracts & Leaflets to be obtained of E Whitehead Printer Feilding." The fifty or sixty titles listed are offered at prices varying from sixpence (five cents or \$8.50 today) up to two shillings (twenty cents or \$33.35 today) per hundred copies.

### THE TREASURY MAGAZINE

One year before Edward's move to the city, Charles Hinman a 39 year old itinerant evangelist and Bible teacher, began publishing a monthly magazine for the growing number of Brethren assemblies. The twenty page magazine was initially called "The New Zealand Treasury" with Hinman named as both its publisher and editor and for the first two and a half years it was printed by the Manawatu Daily Times. The cost was two shillings per copy (\$33.35 today) or one shilling ninepence (\$28.35 today) for four copies or more posted together.

The first edition was dated January 1899 and Hinman launched it with an editorial entitled "Let us exalt His Name Together" which appears to encapsulate much of his philosophy for establishing the publication.

"This verse seems to express what I have before me in sending forth this little messenger amongst the Christians of New Zealand. Many doubtless, as individuals, and many individual assemblies, have tasted much of the goodness, grace and faithfulness of the Lord; but it is hoped that this little magazine may, in some small measure, enable us to exalt His Name *together*...

There may be those who will say 'Are there not enough periodicals already in the field?' and to such we might have to reply in the affirmative; yet, at the same time, while there may be numerically more than sufficient, none of them really meet our need in this corner of the vineyard.

We hope this littler paper will cause us to become better acquainted with each other; draw us closer together as individuals and assemblies; and deepen and widen our fellowship in the things of God.

...We earnestly desire that the paper may be well-balanced in the truth that is needed – not giving undue prominence to any particular line – and that its pages may help to draw out gifts that hitherto have been very imperfectly developed. In this way we hope truth in season may be ministered and real and abiding help to the redeemed of the Lord may be communicated.

...We now commit our little effort to the Lord of the harvest, who in the past has so patiently and faithfully watched over us; also to the sympathy, fellowship and prayers of His people. May His blessing rest upon it from the first number; and may He graciously sustain it in health, strength and vigour, until its special end and object is accomplished."

Today over one hundred years later, these words still resonate as a vision and mission statement for the magazine, whose "special end and object" is not yet accomplished as it continues into its second century.

After two years, Hinman returned to his itinerant preaching ministry, having handed over editorial responsibilities to Franklin Ferguson and publishing and printing responsibilities to Edward Whitehead who was now operating from his Main Street premises.

So it was that at the commencement of the twentieth century, a 53 year old former wood and coal merchant turned farmer, became the proprietor of one of the first Christian Bookshops to be established in New Zealand as well as a printing factory to produce some of the literature to sell through it.

## **NEW OWNERSHIP AND FUNDS FOR MISSIONARIES**

In 1911 Edward sold the business, by that time called the GOSPEL PUBLISHING HOUSE, to James Harvey, a printer who had previously been employed by him. Over the next four decades James developed the business with the help of a small staff, many of whom were family members. He spent much of his personal time in the ministry aspects of the TREASURY magazine and the growing ministry of forwarding funds to and keeping contact with, missionaries who had gone out from New Zealand.

The first of these, James Kirk had climbed onto his bicycle on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 1896 and pedaled into the history of New Zealand Brethren assemblies. That day, the 22 year-old became the first person from those churches to leave home and country, to serve his Saviour and Lord on the mission field of Argentina.

At the end of the following year Franklin Ferguson, a 31 year-old clerk with the Hawke's Bay Education Board and County Council, resigned his position of thirteen years to begin what was to become sixty years of full-time Christian ministry within New Zealand. Even before he was asked to become editor of the TREASURY, he had been very pro-active in the promotion of overseas mission.

"Feeling that God had others besides Mr Kirk who would respond to the Divine call and wondering what could be done in the matter, I was constrained to write to Dr JN Case of China, Mr W MacDonald of the Straits Settlements, and Mr G Humphreys of India. I desired to know definite particulars of their respective fields, and what was the existing need for new workers, also suggesting the paying of a visit when able to leave on furlough."

The very first edition of the magazine gave details of the safe arrival in Penang Malaya of five missionaries who had been commended to work there following the visit of William MacDonald. Over the next few years others sailed for China following Dr

Norman Case's visit and then India, as a result of George Humphrey's three month visit.

That first edition of TREASURY also included a statement of receipts (from twenty-seven gifts) and the payment for five fares from Wellington to Penang, with the balance being shared among the outgoing missionaries. Subsequent editions offered the services of those responsible for the magazine to forward funds to those on the mission field. By 1907 there were regularly twenty or more monthly gifts acknowledged in the magazine. In October of that year the names Franklin Ferguson and Edward Whitehead were appended to the statement for the first time designated as "Treasurers." Before he sold the business, Edward made two visits to the mission field. In 1904 he accompanied the first group to India as part of a business trip to the UK. The second visit begun in June 1908 was a fifteen month trip that included Australia, Ceylon, India, the Malay States and part of China.

By the time of the 1916 Census, the Brethren throughout New Zealand were numbered at 9758, representing 0.89% of the population. There were around 110 assemblies from which some fifty-one workers had been commended for overseas service, with half of these having gone to India. It is interesting to ponder on how many of the total number serving overseas, were doing so as a direct or indirect result of the three letters Franklin Ferguson wrote.

When James Harvey bought the business in 1911 he replaced Edward as a treasurer and from then on other suitable trustees were added as required.

### **FORMATION OF THE SOCIETY**

James Harvey continued the business of the Gospel Publishing House, the publication of the TREASURY magazine and the distribution of missionary funds for almost forty years. By the late 1940s his health was deteriorating and he invited a group of family and friends to join in forming a non-profit company with the object of perpetuating the business. The Gospel Publishing House Society Limited was incorporated in February 1949 and James gifted the business to it. While the TREASURY magazine remained under the ownership of the Society, the Trustees for the missionary funds set up their own office and subsequently in 1975 Missionary Funds (NZ) Incorporated was constituted as a charitable trust. A change of name to Missionary Services New Zealand was registered in 1991 and following an amalgamation with GLO (Gospel Literature Outreach) Ministries (NZ) in 2000, the new organization was named Global Connections in Mission.

Meanwhile the work of the GPH Society Ltd (the name was shortened in the 70s) consolidated over the next few years and then began to expand under the guidance of the Chairman Wes Corpe and the Manager Les Marsh. A new building was opened in King Street Palmerston North in 1963 and at the same time old printing plant was replaced, resulting in a marked improvement in production.

### **EXPANSION, DEVELOPMENT AND RATIONALISATION**

During the 1960s the Society was offered bookshops in Dunedin, Auckland and Whangarei. Adding these to the Palmerston North and Wanganui shops, it operated this chain of five retail outlets for around three years. Over time this was reduced to the stores in Auckland and Palmerston North.

A wholesale division was formed early in the 70s, to market product produced in the printing factory to all the Christian bookshops throughout the country. After Campbell Fountain, the General Manager visited the USA and UK in 1974 the Society began representing and distributing for overseas publishers as well. Ten years later this division expanded into the Australian market and grew steadily, resulting in a warehouse being established in Brisbane in 1989, with Gordon Cowell as Australian Manager.

By this time printing technology had developed to such an extent that the factory could not meet the Society's varied requirements and specialist printers were used so that the different products could be printed more economically. This led to the factory being sold in 1990, which then allowed for a concentration of resources and expertise to be made in the marketing and distribution of Christian literature.

Throughout the 90s the two retail shops were associated under a franchise agreement with the bookshops owned by the Scripture Union Movement. When this arrangement ceased, the Society decided to rebrand its shops choosing the name OASIS CHRISTIAN STORE. However economic pressures made it necessary to close the Auckland store in 2002 and to sell the Palmerston North store to the CLC chain in 2007.

## **THE ONGOING MINISTRY**

Today the wholesale divisions, GPH Wholesale in New Zealand and HARVEST CHRISTIAN PRODUCTS in Australia, bring an even wider perspective to the distribution of Christian literature, which is the prime purpose for the Society's existence. The directors, under the subsequent Chairmanship of Cecil Grant, David Bay, Doug Hewlett, Murray McNae and Peter Lemmon, have steered the Society not only through these commercial activities, but also other aspects of the Society's ministry such as the TREASURY magazine, Calendars for Prisoners, Friendship Calendars and various literature projects which they have either instigated or given assistance to.

The GPH Society Ltd while serving all the Christian community through its commercial arms recognizes its specific and historic ministry as a service provider to the Christian Brethren churches. The TREASURY magazine under the subsequent editorship of Charles Hewlett, Gordon Junck, Harry Erlam, Doug Hewlett, Rex Dearlove and currently Ken Edgcombe continues to be the Society's main contribution to these churches.

Alongside this, the Society continues to seek the Lord to provide openings for new ways to support its main mission and goals and to remain a partner in what has become a vast area of opportunity for Christian service.

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