“So what was Whittlesey Baptist Church like in 1966 and in the years of your pastorate that followed?

I still get asked this question from time to time. So, while my memory is still quite clear, I thought I would get these … memories down on paper for anyone who is interested.

Alan Taylor. August 2026

1. How the church found me.

In my third and final year at London Bible College I was on the *Preaching List* for preaching appointments in response to churches looking for occasional preachers. The college received a request from Whittlesey Baptist Church for a student preacher in February 1966 and I was assigned the job!

I enjoyed the weekend staying with Mrs Duddington and her daughter, Josephine! The church was being redecorated so the two services were held in the hall at the side. I enjoyed preaching there and went back to London after the evening service.

Two weeks later I received a phone call from one of the deacons at WBC asking if I would come to preach again. After that Sunday evening service the deacons shared with me that they were wanting to appoint a new pastor and would I be interested to talk with them about the possibility that the Lord might be bringing the church and myself together to meet this need!

I agreed to return again In June after completing the final term at LBC, and it was arranged for me to spend two weeks preaching twice each Sunday, leading the Prayer Meeting, etc. It was an enjoyable time and it gave me time to explore the town and to get the feel of the church. It resulted in the church inviting me to become their Pastor and I accepted the invitation.

The Induction Service was held In September 1966 and I moved from South Wales, a month before my 29 birthday and still a bachelor, to live alone in the Manse as it was before alterations in recent decades!

I clearly remember walking towards the corner of Gracious Street and Windmill Street a couple of days after the Induction Service and feeling the loneliness and responsibility of what lay ahead, and thinking to myself ‘*Perhaps after a year or two I could find a church to pastor back in Wales!’.* But I stayed fourteen years in the end!

Then in 1968 I met Sylvia when she came to teach in Peterborough and started to attend WBC. We were married in 1970, and Phil was born in 1977.

2. What the church was like in 1966.

It was very much a traditional church and the majority were middle aged and older people. Around 90% or more of the people were Whittlesey born and bred. Vic and Margaret Carter, who had recently been married, were the only younger couple in the church.

In the town I found the church was known as *Zion chapel*, or ‘*the Zions*’ but not many folk seemed to know it was a Baptist church.

My predecessor had worn a clerical collar and so I followed suit for a short while before abandoning wearing it for ever.

The morning services were numerically quite sparse and the evening service was regarded as 'the main service' with fifty or more attending. People were warm and friendly to me but at the end of a service everyone streamed out quickly, shaking my hand as they passed me standing at the door. No coffee and biscuits after the service!

There were two ***Sunday Schools*** on Sundays, one during the morning service and another in the early afternoon. There were very few children at both times and there was nothing else for children or young people through the week.

Music? In '66 there was one large electrified harmonium for the services, and a piano in the hall. Later an electric organ was installed in the church for the first time. The hymnbook on Sundays was 'Gospel Hymns', a well known hymnbook in Strict Baptist churches. There were many hymns I had never seen or sung before, some deeply experiential and introspective, and a limited number of hymns of praise and worship. But I did discover what is now one of my favourite hymns, "Immortal honours rest on Jesu's head" by William Gadsby (a staunch Strict and Particular Baptist).

Preaching: I was expected to preach twice on Sundays with eight free Sundays per annum including my holidays. The Prayer Meeting was held each *Saturday* evening!

I was paid £12 per week, in cash from the Sunday offerings, out of which I bought my NI stamp and paid two ladies in the congregation to clean the manse, do my laundry, and cook a daily lunch. This had been kindly arranged by the deacons! I was expected to be pastorally a 'good visitor, regularly cold-calling on members of the congregation.

Leadership lay with the Deacons and Pastor as it did in nearly all evangelical churches in those days. The appointment of deacons was tied up with the idea of the "*democratic rights*" of church members to have the final word on church affairs. Any church member, along with two seconders, could nominate a male church member to be a deacon which resulted in an election of deacons by the whole church. In later years we attempted the first revision and update of a tiny and very old booklet of 'Church Rules for Members'.

In 1967 there were six ***baptisms*** one Sunday evening. These were the first during my ministry and included Stanley Bedford and his daughter Pamela, Janet Tinkler's sister. At that time the baptistry was a rectangular iron tank barely six feet long under the wooden floor in front of the pulpit. The candidate went into the water by means of wooden steps temporarily fastened to the edge of the tank, and then was required to kneel in the water to be ducked forward and under because of the limited dimensions of the tank. After the service the tank was emptied by hand, bucketing the water into a large funnel inserted into a hole high up in the tank. No one seemed to know where the water went to!!

The ***Women's Fellowship*** was well attended with visiting speakers, and an annual visit from the London City Mission. Mrs Duddington led the WF. Later, after we were married it became Sylvia's responsibility to lead the meetings although she had never been to a WF in any previous church!

3. Early changes introduced.

In my second year (or was it the latter part of my first year?) I made two suggestions to the deacons for changes that found agreement, and then were introduced to the church.

- **The first change** was to end the afternoon Sunday School. A part of the suggestion was linked with a new initiative, to begin an outreach service at the newly opened Aliwal Manor Care Home. Both parts of this proposal were enthusiastically accepted by the church and some of those who had been afternoon SS teachers became part of our first team to Aliwal Manor.

- **The second change** was the introduction of an *After-Church Fellowship* one Sunday evening each month. (*There was a slight uncertainty on the part of one elderly deacon who was unsure if it was appropriate to have teas in church on a Sunday! But with a gentle assurance that it* was *allowed he agreed and became an enthusiastic* After-Church Fellowshipe*r!*) This became a very popular

monthly event, crowded into the old hall with the tea urn boiling away, chairs around the sides or in groups, people talking away with each other, and heartily singing ‘choruses’ that I introduced from my LBC days. It also attracted people from ‘sister churches’, especially from Warboys, who came over in a group after their service. Usually Jo Sayer’s mother was among them along with Jo’s grandparents and uncle Alan (Noble) and his sisters. Sometimes I invited someone from another evangelical church in Peterborough to come and speak about their daily employment (GP, School Teacher, etc) and testimony as a Christian believer.

In those first years it required me to be pro-active in trying to commence some work for children during the week days. It began with the very first **Holiday Bible Club** in the church’s experience. It was a one day event led entirely by myself, in the church building and with refreshments provided by a couple of ladies. I led it from the front and the children (about twenty of them) sitting in one group. It will be difficult to envisage this now but in 1967 there was nobody in the church available to help me at that point. In later years Sylvia and I organised and led several HBCs with nearly 100 children and some helpers.

The spin-off from the first HBC was a weekly after school group called the **Fellowship of Youth** (FOY) which existed by that name in other SB churches. Alan Foster supported and helped me in this and it grew in numbers as children around the town heard about it. When Sylvia came along we worked at this together. She also started a group for older girls called ‘Covenanters’, complete with guitars.





Pastor Alan & FOY!

4, Our relationship with like-minded churches in the area.

When I arrived in WBC in 1966 the church was a part of the Cambs & East Midlands Union of Strict Baptist Churches. The churches geographically near us were March, Ramsey (Salem), Chatteris, Deeping St. James and Warboys. I had not been familiar with any of these churches but found there was a good relationship among the group.

- God had been blessing the preaching of the pastor, Arthur Stone at **Warboys** over a period of a few years with numerous conversions. It was a strong church with a large congregation and a hundred

people (reportedly) attending the Prayer Meeting. Arthur Stone was coming to the end of his pastorate when I began to know the church. He moved to Thornhill in West Yorkshire where the church was small but he believed this was where the Lord was leading him with an evangelistic preaching ministry. Sadly a few years later there was a big split in the church and a large group of members left Warboys and settled at a small chapel in the nearby village of Pidley.

- The few people who formed the Strict Baptist church at Deeping met in a small chapel in **Deeping St. James**, near the old bridge. The building was named '*Cave Adullam*', inspired by 1.Samuel 22: 1. The preaching had been rather 'hyper-Calvinistic' but when I came to Whittlesey in '66 the old pastor had retired and two new Christian families had joined the church. I conducted a baptism and one or two weddings there over the years. Later the present modern premises was built in a new location in Market Deeping, and Cave Adullam was sold to become a private dwelling!

- One of the traditions of the churches, including WBC, was to hold an annual **Church Anniversary** and also a **Pastor's Anniversary.** The services were usually mid-week, with an afternoon and evening service and an elaborate tea between times! Pastors of the churches were expected to attend and in Warboys there was a special *Top Table* at the tea for pastors and wives. I sat at the top table on these occasions chatting with well-known 'special' speakers such as Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Rev. Ian Murray (Banner of Truth) and others. At the Pastor's Anniversary the offering, or collection, was a personal gift for the pastor! It had been referred to at one time as *'the Pastor's Purse*'.

- One Church Anniversary that sticks in my memory was at the quite small **Tipps End chapel**. Tipps End (also known as *Tips End*) is a small hamlet on the Cambridgeshire and Norfolk border, between Christchurch and Welney. A very few people attended on Sundays and it had connections with both March and Wisbech SB churches. The whole district was a strawberry growing area and the Church Anniversary in well known for its *Strawberry Tea* between the services! Probably churches with small congregations looked forward to these occasions when their chapels were crowded.

5. The church grows.

My predecessors as pastors/preachers hadn't seemed to preach through a series of sermons week by week, but rather would find a different isolated text each Sunday. (Spurgeon and other preachers used this same pattern). My own appreciation had grown before and during the LBC years towards exposition of a whole bible book, or chapter of a book, continued Sunday by Sunday. So I gently began to follow that preaching pattern both in the morning and in the evening services. People whose views and opinions I had learned to trust expressed encouragement for me to carry on in this way.

So the congregations began to grow in numbers, especially on Sunday mornings until gradually both services filled up.

Another factor in numerical growth came through the development of Peterborough as a city with the Peterborough Development Corporation. Several recently married Christian couples came to live in or near Whittlesey. Roger and Gwen Brand were among those who came and settled (1973/74) as also did Derek and Angela Griffin. John King already lived in Peterborough and came to the services at the church with Josephine. John was converted and baptised, and I married Jo and John in 1971. In a similar way Janet met and married Geoff Tinkler. Geoff was converted to Christ and baptised here. Other married couples arrived in the surrounding villages and came into membership with us, such as David and Jenny Rayner (Yaxley), Trevor and Ann Haigh (Farcet) and Ken and Myrtle Richards (Werrington). Nigel and Anne Barber moved here from Rugby and in 1979 Graham and Kathleen Abblitt came and settled with us.

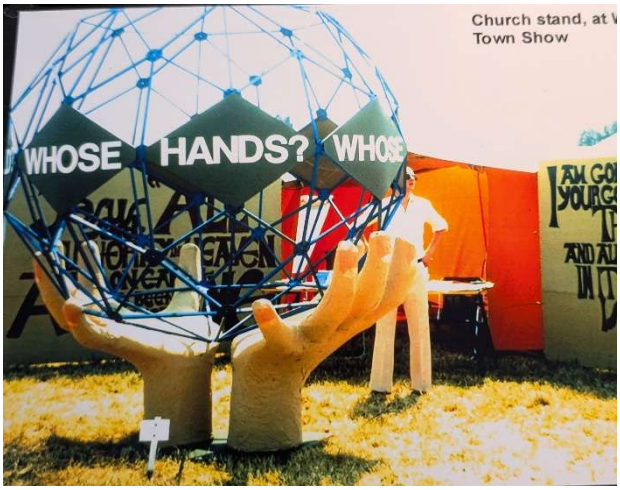
There were other names and personal stories, conversions to Christ and baptisms, that are not forgotten about and brought glory to the Lord.

Let me insert a necessary reminder here, from 1.Corinthians 3: 5-7:

" *What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered*

it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, ***but only God, who makes things grow."***

There were also the opportunities to show our presence as a church in town events, and especially at the annual **Whittlesey Show** which was held at the old Show Ground at the edge of the town on the Thorney road. One year stands out in my memory when we stood alongside a huge display structure of the global world held in a pair of hands. It asked the question, "*Whose Hands*?". John King and David Rayner constructed the fantastic display and after the Show it stood in the entrance to the church for a few days. Evangelistic leaflets were made available on the church gates.





As the church grew over the years the biblical concept of **Eldership** was brought to our attention around 1978. 'Eden' Baptist Church in Cambridge had introduced elders in the church leadership and I invited the then pastor, David Smith, to come and speak to us on 'Eldership'. We followed this in our Pastor & Deacons meetings and quite quickly came to the decision to adopt Eldership as a vital part of the leadership of the church. We proposed this to the Church Members along with the name of **Stanley Bedford** to be our first Elder. It was unanimously carried by the church.

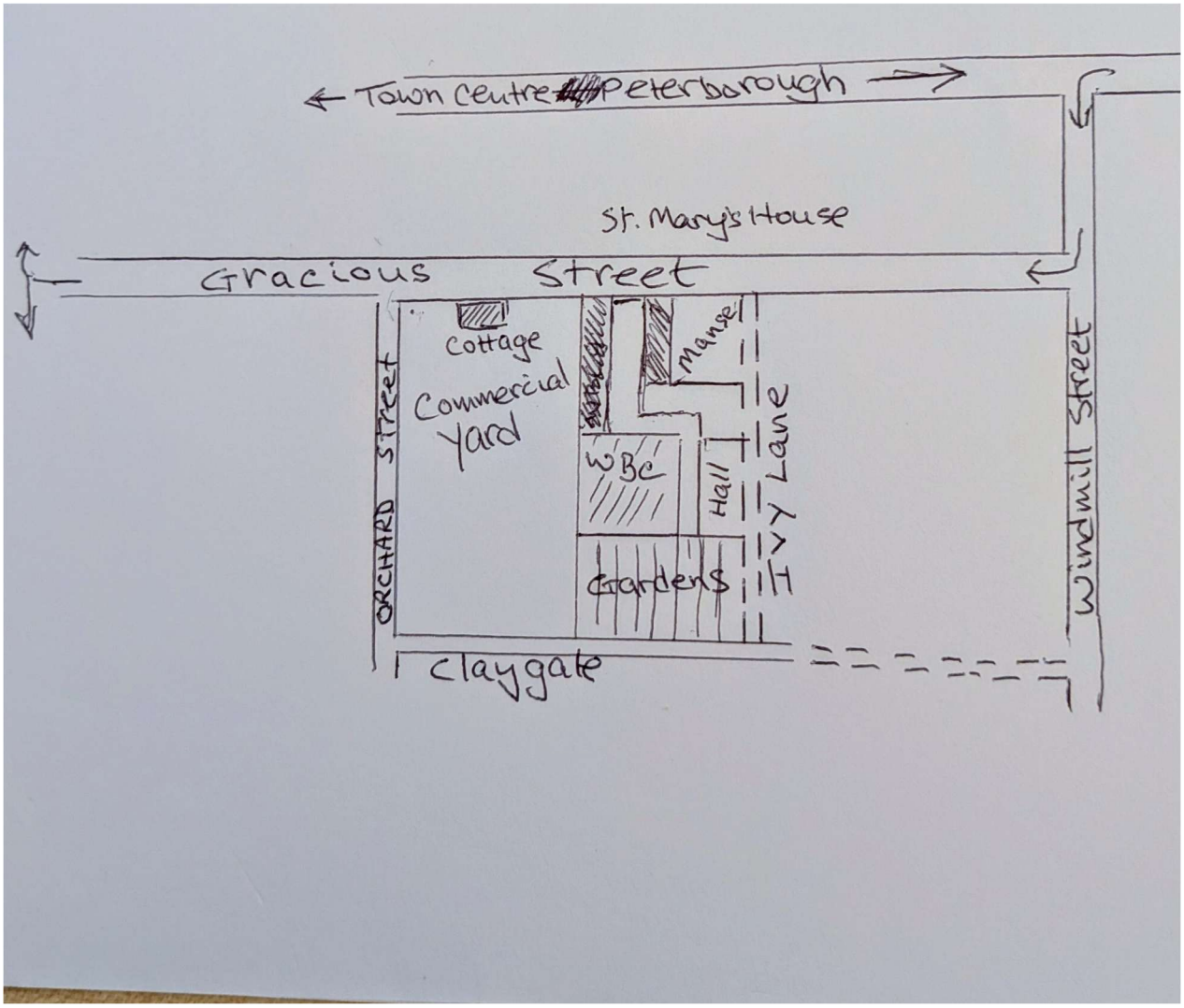
6. Two things some people will not realise about the church premises.

(i) The location of WBC in 1966

The church was tucked away in a back street, out of sight of people driving through the town. It was also land-locked – Ivy Lane on one side, a cottage and large commercial yard on the other side, and the gardens of cottages in Claygate coming right up to the rear of the premises.

There was no room for the expansion of the premises! We tried to purchase a strip of land at the rear of the building from the owners of the old cottage in Claygate, but they were unwilling to sell at that point in time. This was still the same situation when we moved away at the end of 1980. Later, during Brian Keen's pastorate and with the architectural insight of John King, land was purchased and the large hall was built, followed at some point with the purchase of the commercial yard. And so now the Whittlesey Baptist Church is on the corner of Gracious Street and in full sight of drivers on the busy Thorney road. Do we think this just happened to work out like this? Rather, it was God's purposes being worked out for his church for future generations.

When I first saw where our church was located the road layout looked like this:



(ii). ***The great Renovation Project of the 1970s!***

In 1975 John King brought a challenging proposal to the church to carry out a full internal renovation of the church building. It was to be a DIY project as far as possible! The proposal was accepted and the work began in August 1975. All the pews were removed and stored in a small chapel in Turves. The building was then completely gutted and the timber flooring replaced with concrete. A new baptistry was built. The work continued evening by evening along with Saturdays and it was a great experience of shared manual labour by a great crowd of people. John is still around to tell you all about it in detail.

It was completed in the early months of 1976 and reopened with a service of thanksgiving to God.

7. How we came to move away from Whittlesey.

From time to time over the years Sylvia and I used to ask the question between ourselves *'How will we know when the Lord may want us to move on from WBC?'*. We would review what was on our minds to see if there were any indications of conviction that our ministries at WBC were coming to an end. We felt very strongly that if I was ever 'head-hunted' by another church to become their pastor I would definitely not enter into secret talks without WBC knowing about it. This was the way that many churches, large or small, went about calling a new pastor, and it still happens.

At some point around 1978 or 1979 I reached a point of feeling unsettled and feeling like a fish in a glass bowl watching other fish outside swimming in wider waters! Sylvia was experiencing similar feelings and thoughts and we began seriously to pray and search our hearts to seek the Lord's will.

It was true that around that time I had taken a stand on the issue of 'unequally yoked marriages' (2. Corinthians 6:14) and had declined to conduct one such marriage. But we had worked through that in the church and I believe the Spirit of God had kept us as a church from harmful dissensions. Importantly, it was not a factor however in our decision later to draw our time at the church to a close.

So eventually we made the decision to share with the church that we would bring my ministry as the Pastor of WBC to a close in six months' time. We would then be free and open in seeking further where the Lord was leading us to.

I first shared our decision with Stanley as a fellow elder, then next day with the deacons, and the following day sent a letter to each church member explaining our decision. It took everyone by surprise and although we assured the church that there were no hidden or undisclosed reasons inevitably some in the congregation still wondered if '*there was something more we were not telling them'*.

In the six months that followed we held a pre-planned Missionary Sunday with Ernest Oliver as the speaker. Mr Oliver had been among the first Protestant Christian missionaries allowed back into Nepal in 1952 after 200 years. He later became the Director of the Evangelical Missionary Alliance. His visit brought a fresh understanding of cross-cultural world mission to my heart. The Lord suddenly opened a ministry to me with Africa Inland Mission, as Extension Secretary, based in North London but preaching *the Gospel and World Mission* in Evangelical churches in England and Wales.

Meanwhile, back in WBC, the Lord was to bring Brian Keen, and his wife Hazel, to pastor His church.

And so the story continues.

Alan Taylor

August 2026

If you are interested in the beginnings of WBC there might still be some copies around the premises of a little book I wrote and was published for the bi-centenary of the church in 1969. It's called "Remember and Give Thanks".