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## THOMAS HOWE, BRISTOL MISSIONER

### By Love Serving One Another<sup>1</sup>

Amongst the archives of Tyndale Baptist Church in Bristol are some interesting documents. In six desk diaries for the years 1891-96 is the personal account of his work by Thomas Howe. On 1 June 1891 Thomas Edward Howe took up his appointment as Missioner at the Deanery Road Mission in the St Augustine's parish of Bristol. Remaining in post until 16 March 1896, he maintained a detailed day-to-day diary of his work. In it he recorded his visits, the problems he encountered, the doings of the Mission and, occasionally, his reflections. It provides a unique insight into not only his daily work but also the life of the people of that area of Bristol in the 1890s.

#### BRISTOL IN THE 1890s

According to the census of 1891, the population of Bristol was 221,578. In common with most British cities it had increased dramatically during the nineteenth century, from 61,153 in 1801. Because Bristol had been a major trading centre for centuries, this was a less dramatic increase than in those towns and cities which were almost entirely the result of the Industrial Revolution. Consequently, the working classes were not concentrated into a few large ghettos, as was the case elsewhere. Some such areas were appearing towards the end of the century, but many lived in the remains of the old central residential areas, progressively deserted by the more affluent as suburban development took place.

As elsewhere, poor relief in Bristol was in the hands of Guardians. However, there still existed in Bristol the Corporation of the Poor, dating back to 1696, having survived the changes of the 1834 Act, largely because it already worked there through Guardians, elected locally, and in many ways was like the Unions of parishes created by that Act. Because it was a venerable body, this Corporation was able to recruit notable local citizens. In the end it was dissolved in 1898 because of pressure from the Local Government Board which, as so often with government departments, had difficulty in tolerating an anomaly!<sup>2</sup>

There were two voluntary hospitals in Bristol. The Infirmary, founded in 1737, occupied buildings completed in 1811. The General Hospital, founded in 1832, moved into a more modern building in 1858, and this was extended in 1890. Generally the Infirmary was supported by the Church of England and the General Hospital by the nonconformists.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE DISTRICTS

In the Diary Howe refers to the area around the Mission where he made regular visits as 'Districts'. The whole area was within both the administrative and ecclesiastical parish of St Augustine's. St Augustine's the Less, alongside the Cathedral, served as parish church. In 1823 a new church, St George's, had been

built on the slopes of Brandon Hill, on the Clifton side of the parish, for the benefit of the affluent residents in the new houses being built in that area. In 1832 it became a separate ecclesiastical parish. The area of St Augustine's parish immediately to the west of the Cathedral, where the Tyndale Mission was situated, was on the fringe of the city at the beginning of the nineteenth century, although Hotwells, further west, had been incorporated in the borough for administrative purposes as early as 1776. By the later part of the century, however, it was enveloped by outward expansion and was part of the central area, as Hotwells and Clifton became joined onto Bristol. They were fully incorporated into the borough in 1835. The creation of new roads, notably Victoria Street linking the city centre with Temple Meads Station to the south, had occasioned some slum clearance in parts of Bristol. In the Cathedral area, Deanery Road had similarly been created between 1865 and 1869. However, this was a smaller scale scheme and many of the older houses remained. Because of the topography, the new road was at a higher level than many of the old ones surrounding it. In fact, it was carried over College Street on a bridge, which reduced the number of old properties which had to be demolished. It also enabled the Mission building to have entrances at both levels.

Most of the housing near the Cathedral stood back from the river and was thus protected from the worst effects of the sewage in the floating harbour. Nevertheless, the area shared the benefits of the improvements that were made during the second half of the century to eliminate such problems. By 1890, too, there was a constant water supply to the whole city. Even with these comparative advantages, the area was a slum. 'The hollow between Brandon Hill and College Green had become a sink into which had drained some of the city's dregs. The dignified streets, where notable people like Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Friese-Green had lived, now had their houses let to many tenants and almost all concealed tragedies of poverty and sin'.<sup>4</sup>

The Districts consisted of some thirty-five or forty streets and courts in which most of the inhabitants were poor. Many of the houses were occupied by more than one family. Typical was 15 Stephens Court, where three families totalling twelve people aged from six to fifty lived in six rooms, or 1 Prospect Place, where two families, each consisting of husband, wife and a child, lived in four rooms.<sup>5</sup> Howe described certain of the streets, of which the principal was St George's Road, as 'more respectable' [Diary, 4 June 1891]. There was always a substantial number of unemployed men, while those in work represented a wide variety of occupations. Ferryman, deal runner, shoemaker, porter and umbrella maker were all to be found in the quite short Partition Street.<sup>6</sup> While some individuals exercised their skills locally, many found work outside the district. The city docks provided employment for some and Howe records some of the problems occasioned by a prolonged strike which began towards the end of 1891. One major local employer was J. Fuller & Co., Carriage Works (originally established 1770) in St George's Road. It was the largest manufacturer of quality carriages in Bristol. The new building had only been

completed in 1891. It was an innovative design with vertical production lines linking stages which began at the top and ended in a completed coach ready to roll out from the ground floor.<sup>7</sup> Here the enlightened management not only encouraged Howe to conduct services during the lunch break, but even provided a harmonium. They also provided a library for the benefit of the workforce.<sup>8</sup>

There was a proliferation of public houses and at a time when the temperance movement was an integral part of any nonconformist church, Howe was constantly preoccupied with the consequent problems. Nevertheless, he was a welcome (non-drinking!) visitor to some of them.

### BRISTOL BAPTISTS

The first Baptists appeared in Bristol during the seventeenth century, when churches were formed at Broadmead and Pithay. Bristol Baptist College also had its origins during that period. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries both the original churches established new ones within Bristol and in the surrounding villages. By the later nineteenth century, the Pithay church had moved to larger premises in Old King Street and Broadmead had enlarged its chapel more than once. In 1881 a Religious Census 'was taken, whereby the congregations in all Bristol churches were counted, both morning and evening, on 30 October.<sup>9</sup> According to this, the largest aggregate attendances were, predictably, at Anglican churches (45,518). The largest nonconformist attendances were at Congregational churches (11,588), followed by the Salvation Army (10,146), and then the Baptists (9,127). The largest Baptist church in Bristol was Broadmead, with an attendance of 2,321; membership was 956 in 1881, increasing to 1,026 by 1891.<sup>10</sup> By 1891 there were seventeen Baptist churches within the city and those areas which would be incorporated in the city by 1897. Some of this expansion had taken place through the work of the Bristol Baptist Itinerant Society from 1825 onwards. A number of these churches were engaged in mission work in the less affluent areas, including one in Hotwells begun in 1865. In addition, many supported the work of the Bristol City Mission which, founded in 1826, was by 1891 working in ten poor districts of the city.

### TYNDALE BAPTIST CHURCH

One of the churches founded to serve the rapidly expanding middle-class suburbs to the north of the city was Tyndale in Whiteladies Road. An original initiative by the Broadmead church was picked up by a more broadly-based committee, chaired by E.S. Robinson, a leading businessman and Mayor of Bristol in 1866. The chapel opened in 1868 and the following year the church was constituted, led by an up-and-coming young minister, Richard Glover.<sup>11</sup> It 'only had a congregation of about 200 members [membership 279 and combined congregations 333 in 1881, membership 322 in 1891],<sup>12</sup> but a high proportion of them were involved in social and philanthropic work in the city ... the close-knit, socially cohesive group ... were

able to pursue socio-religious work with a single-mindedness which brought great influence'.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, Tyndale was active in support of the City Mission, but within little more than two years of the foundation of the church, it had resolved to begin its own mission work in St Augustine's parish.

## THE MISSION

Tyndale's mission work began on 2 July 1871, with a Sunday School in a cottage in Stephen's Court, Lower Lamb Street. Within two months it had moved to new premises in a former Jewish Synagogue in Lower College Green. As the work expanded, so additional premises were rented, including a former public house. Numbers in the Sunday School were more than 300 by the late 1880s, so it was decided to build a mission hall. The site in Deanery Road was purchased for £625 and the building was erected at a cost of £2,600. It was opened on 22 June 1888. Built on three floors, the 300-seat hall was on the top floor; advantage was taken of the elevated position of Deanery Road to provide access also from Lamb Street which was crossed by Deanery Road on a nearby bridge.

The Annual Report for 1891,<sup>14</sup> the year in which Howe came to the mission, lists meetings on every day or evening of the week. As well as Sunday services, both in the Mission and in the open air or in cottages according to the time of year, there were a Prayer Meeting, Choir Practice, Mothers' Meeting, Band of Hope, Gospel Total Abstinence Society, Factory Girls' Club, Lads' Institute (which became a Swimming Club in the summer), Men's Night School, Junior Girls' Club and Penny Bank. There was also a Cricket Club (the 1st Eleven had won twelve of its seventeen matches!). It was reported that there were 432 children enrolled in the Sunday School, with an average attendance of 255. In addition, there was an average attendance of forty at the children's services on Sundays. The attendances at the adults' services averaged thirty-five on Sunday mornings and 200 in the evening, as well as forty at a week-night service. In 1880 it was decided to create a separate membership roll for the Mission which, by 1891, listed forty-three names, all local to the Mission. While the management of the Mission remained in the hands of a General Management Committee of eight men or four women (only one of them from the Mission membership), by this date Tyndale had also appointed three of its own members as 'Deacons' of the Mission - two of them also deacons at Tyndale. However, there were many more Tyndale members actively involved in the work of the Mission as leaders of the various organizations. All but four of the forty-one Sunday School teachers were also members of Tyndale. 'There were in such a work inevitable tensions between the helpers and the helped and between fellow workers of varied opinions, but it was a healthy outreach of the church's life and those who took part learned to express their faith and to find treasures of Christ among the poor. Some vignettes come to us out of the misty past: Edward Robinson in white shirt sleeves fighting a gang of roughs who were molesting children coming to Sunday School'.<sup>15</sup>

## THOMAS EDWARD HOWE'S DIARY

Howe, born 30 June 1860 in Hackney, London, became a Christian at the age of twelve under the influence of the Revd William Cuff at Old Providence Chapel, Shoreditch. As a lay preacher, he regularly led worship at Hope Mission, Haggerstone, for several years. He had received no formal ministerial training when, at the age of thirty, he was invited to Bristol as Missioner.

His journal was written in a series of desk diaries - not surprisingly published by E.S. & A. Robinson! During the first few months he put headings in the margin, but these become infrequent by the end of 1891, and had disappeared altogether by the middle of 1892. While his English is quite conventional, his spelling, use of capital letters and punctuation is less so. In the extracts which follow, these features have not been retained. Occasionally he felt the need to write more than the marked space allowed. In these cases the entry for one day spilled over into the next day's space, with the printed date crossed out and written in lower down, to show where the new day's entry began.

Rapidly learning about the nature of his 'parish' did nothing to dim his concern, which sometimes appears to border on despair. Almost two years after he arrived, he describes one especially harrowing day's visiting:

During the seven hours I spent among the people I was greatly distressed. The first house was to give advice to a woman summoned for assault. Second to hear an account of one of our elder girl scholars who stole 13/- from her mother on Saturday. Third, a woman who locked her family in the house the day through while she went out washing - nearly £25 have been got rid of somehow in two months. Fourth a list of twenty houses, each more or less filled with complaints. Fifth a drunken husband and an indolent slovenly wife and five or six children, almost destitute. Sixth a starving woman and a drunken husband (just out of prison). I tried to comfort the poor woman and gave her some counsel. Next follow a series of out of work people in great distress. Seventh a man, whom I have just brought home drunk, is in a dilemma - he is summoned to appear tomorrow for being drunk on licensed premises and desired me to see a lady who will befriend him - to whom I went at Stokes Croft, but only to fail. Eighth a man in here lying in a dying condition and his wife has been brought home, helplessly drunk, with her head cut open. Ninth, a man whom I have asked many times to come to our meetings and give himself to Christ, usually answers: 'I have so little time'.  
[Diary, 9 May 1893]

Howe clearly saw drink as one of the great causes of much of the distress. One of his earliest unpleasant experiences during his visiting, little more than a month after his arrival, was probably caused by drink:

It was our painful duty to separate a man and his wife, who were fighting desperately, but we succeeded in offering a little pacification, which stopped for the time what might have been a most deadly conflict, both being

determined to end the days of the other - and such is the life of many about here. [16 July 1891]

The sanitary provisions of the area were minimal. In the homes of the people, moreover, their own neglect often exacerbated the problems:

One house stank worse than some rubbish heaps. The floor filthy, a cod's head in the saucepan, which had no lid on it, the teapot in the fender. The man scrambled onto the sofa, covered with a Union Jack, and the woman stood, broom in hand, having heard I was coming ... I have tried to lead them to cleanliness and hope, but they seem beyond human skill, and only God can move them. [18 February 1892]

Not surprisingly in such conditions, there was much sickness:

In one house I saw a little boy, who has been in the children's hospital for eight months with a diseased hip through a kick at school. He is now nothing but a skeleton. The bone has come through one knee and altogether he is a pitiable sight. He is sent home incurable of rapid consumption. [16 December 1891]

Frequently sickness was accompanied by unemployment. Many of the men looked for work in the nearby docks; seasonal by nature, work there was often scarce in winter. In November 1891 Howe recorded some visits:

A man out of work we visited and prayed that work might be sent. The next day he had some to do and, although temporary, yet gave relief. Another man, ill for some eight weeks, had been praying all day for help as they had no money and would want for food on the morrow. I, in the meanwhile, had taken an application note to the man's employer for signature and he gave me some money to take to him. [27 November 1891]

In January 1896 things were no better and some employers were less helpful:

In one house I found the man out of work with six children depending on them. No food in the house and the woman pacing the room with a young baby, who was crying for milk, and the woman had not a penny to buy any. I have asked nearly a dozen employers of labour to give the man work, but all reply: 'We do not require labourers'. It is most painful to go from house to house and find so many in a similar condition. [10 January 1896]

Those who were too old to work suffered as well:

Found also one of our church members, an old Welsh woman, having an income of 3/6 per week, of which she pays 1/6 rent, gathers her fuel on the banks and begs, if she has no other means of supply. She was prevented from attending our services on account of her boots requiring mending. This we have agreed to have done. [3 November 1892]

Faced with these appalling conditions, much of Howe's time and energy went into finding ways of relieving the poverty of the people. Indeed, he saw this as an

essential part of his ministry, albeit perhaps a little uncertainly:

Clothes to help a poor man get work and food to the hungry paved the way for more serious matters of the soul, although it is a poor Christianity which does not consider the temporal needs of the people seriously. [10 April 1894]

In this important work he was supported by members of Tyndale, and even their servants, who were certainly better off than the people served by the Mission. So in January 1893 Howe reports:

This afternoon we addressed the Servants' Bible Class at Tyndale. They have kindly sent us a hamper of 100 articles of clothing, made chiefly by themselves for our poor people. [1 January 1893]

At the same time, he learned to be wary of attempts to take advantage of his compassion:

Last evening I was called to see a woman at 10 pm, who was reported to be dying. I have since discovered it to be a fraud - she is in receipt of 7/6 per week, and other gifts. We did not help her and only mention it here to show the brazen deception carried on among the people. [24 February 1892]

Nevertheless, where there was genuine need, which could be helped, he would find the money to help. A month after that incident he recorded:

A poor woman was waiting for me on my return home for dinner in such a distressed state that I scarcely knew what to do. The landlord had put the bailiffs in to distrain for £3.5.0 and costs. I went down, saw the landlord and, by paying an instalment of 14/2 and 7/6 to the bailiffs, gave another day to see what could be done. I have arranged to meet the woman at midday tomorrow. [21 March 1892]

Next day he reported:

The poor woman above mentioned called on a sister-in-law, who is well off, and asked the loan of £1 to meet her debt. But she refused. Such is the kindness of ones own! Such was the treatment of Christ by they of his own family. I, however, went to the landlord and offered 30/- as the settlement of his claim, which, considering all things, he accepted and the woman is free. I collected the money from various friends interested in the case, so that the Mission friends are not burdened. We thus save the stones, and God saves the souls! [22 March 1892]

A more unusual case elicited his help on another occasion:

It was my privilege also to assist a poor fellow who had come to this town to undergo an operation. Failing to get employment, he had spent all (the Infirmary charging him 12/- per week, because he had no note and was a stranger here). His clothes and boots had been stolen at a lodging house and he was wearing the rags left in exchange. I gave him sufficient to get a lodging house and food, a bath etc to fit him for work in the town from which



he came, and to which I was now sending him. I have reason to believe it is a genuine case, having good references from friends who know him. Thus, I trust he is in a good way to succeed and may be saved. [24 July 1893]

On other occasions he used his powers of persuasion to negotiate on behalf of people he felt were being 'ripped off':

I have been today, at the request of a poor woman, to get a reduction in the funeral expenses for her husband's burial. After a somewhat sharp conversation the undertaker agreed to take £3.5.0 instead of £4.12.6. [23 January 1893]

Christmas was a prime occasion for wide distribution of gifts. On his first Christmas at the Mission, Howe recorded:

Tonight the Mission church deacons met and decided to give gifts of 2/6 parcels of grocery etc to the poor of the Mission, some 20 to 25 being selected to receive them. [21 December 1891]

When it came to the actual distribution, however, there could be problems, not only at Christmas, but also at Harvest Festival time: difficulties:

The murmuring of some of the people today brought me much sorrow. Before the Harvest festival is arranged they are threatening what they will do if they receive none of the fruits. Thus will they lose all for if he shall slay the murmurers of Israel in the wilderness, shall he not do so now? [3 September 1891]

In the event they did not 'lose all' and the Harvest Festival went ahead:

At 11 Mr Thomas preached in connection with the Harvest Festival. The fruits of which were very fine and plentiful. [11 October 1891]

and the produce was duly distributed:

We have today been exceptionally busy in dividing into 45 portions the Harvest produce. These portions were carried round to the various poor people who were in need, by willing hands. Although it rained all day in torrents, the workers did not give in until they had finished their labour of love. [14 October 1891]

As well as arranging for gifts in kind or in cash, Howe also spent time interceding with individuals and authorities to secure better situations for people:

We have succeeded in obtaining a situation for one of the boys living here. He is to receive a small wage in a lady's house, where he will act as page. We have given notes of recommendation to some others and so by little we are proving that the Gospel is a blessing to our lives all round and enriches they who trust it. [4 October 1892]

Not that it was always straightforward:

I wrote a letter of introduction for a girl to a lady who wanted a servant. She would have gone to the place, but the lady (a Christian) required an assurance that the girl would give up the Mission services and not sing hymns about the house. Of course, I advised the girl not to go. [3 February 1894]

**Younger children required a different approach and could also pose problems:**

A fruitless effort has been made to get the necessary certificates for two children whom we are trying to get into the orphanage. I now have fuller particulars and must try again tomorrow. [20 April 1893]

**However, the next day:**

I also made a journey to the Superintendent Registrar at Eastville for the certificates mentioned yesterday. He, however, required payment at 3/7 each for the six I wanted. I returned, and waited upon the Guardians at St Peter's Hospital, who generously undertook to provide for them, thus saving the amount. [21 April 1893]

**Other problems required more imaginative solutions:**

We have for nearly a year been collecting a subscription to help a poor man and woman, 70 years of age, to buy a donkey and cart to enable them to carry on their trade - coke and wood. We have succeeded in finding the thing required and have sealed the bargain by paying 10/- deposit. The whole is to cost £3, of which the old man pays £1. [8 November 1892]

**Then, a week later:**

We have completed the purchase of the donkey, cart and scales for the aged couple mentioned last week, and, having found a suitable stable wherein to lodge it, handed it to its future owners and wished them God's speed. [15 November 1892]

**However, six months later, tragedy struck:**

A poor old man, whom, some time ago, we set up with a donkey and cart, has told me that, though giving him too much rope in the stable, the donkey hanged himself. So that too much rope is bad for donkeys as well as people! Two gentlemen have agreed to give 5/- towards the part purchase of another. [17 May 1893]

**Two weeks later, livestock was able to be avoided in helping another sad case:**

One of our church members, a young woman who married a man and, when the first child was born, she found that he was a married man, whereupon he left her, pursued by his lawful wife, and enlisted in the army. She is now out of work and, finding a mangling business for sale, mangle and everything complete. We have advanced her a loan of 20/- and a grant of 10/- from the Poor Fund, which will help her over the difficulty. I have been and secured her two rooms at 3/6 per week, which will be suitable for the business. [31 May, 1 June 1893]

Nor was Howe afraid to roll up his sleeves and give a little practical help. Less than a week after he arrived, he reported:

One case of Mr Rowe, a tailor, was very sad. Out of work, five children and five weeks behind with his rent, and the door of his room off its hinges, to the common danger of his children. We helped him a little and, purchasing a new pair of hinges, managed to hang the door safely and spoke of Christ and his righteousness, as Noah did while he made the ark. [6 June 1891]

On another occasion:

In calling upon two aged people, I found them in some trouble. Having borrowed an easy chair, the man having broken his leg, and in pulling the chair about had broken it. With the aid of a few tools etc, I soon set this to right and, after prayer, left them comforted. [11 May 1894]

Of course, Howe and the Tyndale Mission were not alone in affording help to this deprived community. During one particularly hard winter, when there was widespread unemployment, the Mayor set up a special relief fund. Howe found himself helping in its management. He first mentioned this in February 1895 and his involvement continued for about two months, until just before Easter. There was also the annual Mayor's Tea each new year, for example in 1896:

The greater portion of the day has been spent in taking round invites for the Mayor's Tea to the poor this evening. 250 of the people of St Augustine's have been invited. The tea was well served and the people behaved well. there was ample provision and a good entertainment. [1 January 1896]

Help from other sources was also welcome:

I hear today that the Slum Sisters of the Salvation Army are coming to work in this district. I should say, and a good field they will find! The people are like sponges, absorbing all, and yet, like carnivorous plants they reject all foreign matter. The Gospel is foreign to them! [4 September 1891]

Interestingly, Howe makes no mention of encounters with Roman Catholic priests. Yet there were many families who identified themselves as Catholics, and most seemed ready to receive him:

In one or two Roman Catholic families I was well received and helpful conversation was engaged in, although the reading of the Word of God is not relished, except by their own priests. We often get these people to our meetings and hope to do them good. [7 July 1894]

Generally in Bristol relations within the Free Churches especially and also with the Anglicans were good. Certainly that was true among the more well-to-do people, who together formed an élite group who ran the city. However, relations with the Anglican clergy at the local level could often be a different story:

In visiting a poor woman who was very ill, I found that the curate had been and requested her to burn the tracts I had left with her. He would ask the Bishop to come and confirm her in order that she might receive the Holy Spirit. [14 May 1894]

In the view of many of the local clergy, apparently, people had to choose. If they attended the Mission, they could not expect help from the Anglicans:

In Brandon St is Mrs Baulsh, whom, the last time she visited the Mission, fell down the steps and broke her leg. She now walks with crutches. the Vicar of St George's called, but could not help her, saying she must get help where she broke her leg. she told him: 'Yes sir, and they do. But I do not ask it of you'. [5 June 1891]

From a similar incident we get an idea of the level of concern showed by the clergy, at least as perceived by the parishioners:

In one case the clergy of St George's should have been sent for to bury an old man, said their visitor. And 'it's great neglect', said she. Notwithstanding that they took no heed of him in his sickness and, but for us, he would have perished. I am informed that the Vicar visited his parishioners about once a year, and that just prior to the yearly confirmation. [8 September 1891]

Yet sometimes there does appear to have been co-operation:

One poor crippled woman we are arranging to get out for a ride in a bath chair, kindly lent by the church of St George's, we finding the attendant. [5 April 1892]

In one field of endeavour certainly there had long been co-operation. During the 1880s there was a proliferation of new temperance organizations. These finally came together under the umbrella of the Bristol United Temperance Council in 1897. The Mission had its Band of Hope for the children and Total Abstinence Society for the adults. Disappointment was sometimes expressed at the attendance at their meetings, but both persuaded considerable numbers to sign the pledge:

I sat on an old sofa in one house, on which I saw the woman sitting four years ago in drunken delirium. Now she has a comfortable home and fowls and pigeons. [10 March 1896]

Unfortunately not everybody kept their pledge:

A sad case of drunkenness and indifference came under my notice today. A Mrs Deveral, so addicted to drink that she sold the pail, teapot, lamp and her husband's trousers to satisfy her craving. We have twice got them to sign the pledge, but each time they broke it soon afterward. [21 September 1891]

Howe's diaries are full of such disappointments, and he, probably rightly, attributes many of the unhappy situations to excessive drinking. For him as, for many working in such situations, the temperance message was second only to the

Christian gospel in its importance. But, of course, traditional evangelism had to be the primary concern of the mission and its missionary. There are indications that Howe was not always clear what to make of the spiritual challenge with which he was faced. Shortly after taking up his post he commented:

The very heart of the people is towards themselves and God has but a small proportion of their thought. Such ground will be slow of profit unless in some miraculous exercise of His power the Holy Ghost shall intervene. [17 June 1891]

He might have hoped that physical deprivation would cause the people to seek spiritual consolation but, in the context of an industrial lock-out, he noted:

The state of depression through the lock-out of the deal-runners seems to harden the people against religion rather than, as one might justly suppose, make them desirous of God's friendship and help. [18 May 1893]

Yet already he had come to see that the gospel would not prosper unless its proclamation was accompanied by a care for the material needs of these deprived people:

We work for their salvation, but do not lose sight of the fact that they have bodies as well as souls. Empty cupboards are unfit companions for empty hearts. [4 May 1893]

Very early on he had recognized the value of meeting people in places other than their homes. He frequently records his visits to the public houses, but he was also able sometimes to visit their work places. A notable example of this was the very newly built and industrially innovative Fuller's Coach Factory. In his first week he noted:

I was also privileged to conduct a service for the workmen of Fuller's Coach Factory in St George's Road, in their dinner hour. About twenty men were present and a most profitable season we had. [4 June 1891]

This became a regular event, every Friday.

But it was in his door-to-door visitation that most of Howe's evangelistic work took place. Even if he was not always warmly welcomed, he was usually at least given a hearing. He was an opportunist and would frequently seize upon a comment or a situation to make a point:

The sudden death of one of the women in this street gave me opportunity to press home the solemnity of death and the need for seeking the Saviour. [1 May 1895]

Other opportunities arose from less solemn situations:

A poor man in great distress of mind could think of nothing but his old friend the clock, which had stopped. Being too poor to have it cleaned, it was the work of but a little time to get it down and severely apply an oiled feather,

to the old man's delight. While doing so we spoke of the clean heart which our Lord would create - lives, like clocks, get choked with the dust of time, and this the old man saw, and an impression was made. [25 August 1892]

His sense of humour also enabled him to seize an opportunity to put across his message. He recounted one of his early encounters:

An old fish woman of about 70 years, in a jocular manner asked me to recommend her a nice young man. Instantly prompted by the Spirit, I said I could! 'He is the Rose of Sharon, the Lily of the Valley and the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely'. She did not speak. 'Did you never learn of Him in class years ago?' She left me with tears in her eyes, and, I trust, with a soul searching blessing. [19 June 1891]

As we might expect, he took a leading part, along with members of Tyndale, in the worship and preaching at the services. Some of the local converts were also given an opportunity to speak:

In the open-air service many people gave attention and two of our young men, one lately converted, gave helpful addresses. So we grow our own workers in the soil that God has prepared. [21 August 1892]

There were clearly some 'home-grown workers' among the men at Fuller's factory:

The Total Abstinence Society was, considering the very snowy night, well attended (50). Revd W.H. Skinner took the Chair and a few of the men from Fuller's Carriage Works gave testimony, read and sang. [15 February 1892]<sup>16</sup>

It was an uphill task, but one which bore fruit. Less than three months after his arrival he noted:

This morning called on Revd R Glover with the names of two of our young women, just lately converted, who will be baptized this evening. Many of the Mission friends were present. [2 September 1891]

It seems that baptisms took place at Tyndale, and normally on a Wednesday evening:

Tonight nine of our people were baptized at Tyndale, one of whom until a year or 18 months ago was a very bad character! [15 March 1893]

At the end of 1892, just eighteen months after his arrival, Howe makes some general comments, including:

Souls have been converted, and very many have been added to the church, while the attendance has doubled in numbers and the collections have equally improved. [31 December 1892]

Howe's years in Bristol certainly witnessed growth. The Annual Report to Tyndale in 1892 listed fifty-one members and reported 436 Sunday School scholars.

In May 1895 Howe records in his diary the statistics being reported to the Association: there were now 100 members and 479 scholars. During the past year there had been seventeen baptisms.

The last entry in the diary is for 16 March 1896. Howe made no reference to any 'Farewell' function, but the *Freeman*, 27 March 1896, reported that there were special services and a tea, at which he was presented with a purse containing £38.2.6 and an illuminated address. From Bristol Howe returned to London, becoming the first pastor of the new Ilderton Road Baptist Church in Bermondsey. There he had a successful ministry, seeing the membership increase from 62 to 350 in twenty-two years. In 1918 he went to Hornchurch in Essex, where he ministered for twelve years, retiring to Wickford, also in Essex, in 1930. It was there that he died on 27 November 1936, aged seventy-six. His obituary notice in the *Baptist Handbook*<sup>17</sup> refers to him as 'a sympathetic and indefatigable visitor among the sick and poor, and was therefore trusted by the well-to-do to be their almoner'.

During the period of almost five years that Howe served as Missioner, the membership at the Mission increased to 120. He was succeeded by the Revd G.W. Robert, who served for nineteen years, leaving to become an Army Chaplain in 1915. He was in turn succeeded for six years by a deaconess, Emma Clapson (Sister Emmie). 'There were many difficulties and for a time part of the building was occupied by troops. In 1916 it was decided that the members at Tyndale and the Mission should become one church ... the office of Deacon at the Mission church was abolished'.<sup>18</sup> By the time Miss Clapson left in 1921, the emphasis of the work had shifted from mission to education. In 1919 the list of activities shows this narrower focus. While the Sunday services and Sunday School continued, there was also a Men's and Women's Adult School which, together with the St George's Road Men's Club and Lad's Institute, were listed as 'Auxiliary Institutions' of Tyndale.<sup>19</sup> From these activities there evolved the Folk House, an independent adult education institution, to which the Mission building was leased in 1926 for a nominal one shilling a year. For the next forty years this continued to be the arrangement. Then in 1966 the building was compulsorily purchased to enable the Central Library, which by then stood next to it, to be extended. When the Folk House moved into new premises, the final chapter in the history of the Tyndale Mission closed. The £13,000 compulsory purchase money was used to create the Richard Glover Trust Fund, which continues to support Tyndale's very different work and witness today.

Howe's diaries provide evidence of how one fairly affluent Baptist congregation sought to fulfil the dominical command to care for the poor and destitute, and in so doing provides the social historian with a series of intimate examples of what poverty could mean in late nineteenth-century Bristol - and the Diary contains many more than those selected here. Nonconformist attitudes, and behind them middle-class attitudes, to the causes of poverty shine through in terms of the very real menace of too ready a resort to the demon drink. While Edward Robinson, who introduced paid holidays in 1889 and a pension fund in 1901 for his large

workforce,<sup>20</sup> illustrates an enlightened attitude, nevertheless, some would argue that the Victorian generations posed too few questions about the structure of society - in relation to the terms of employment, housing conditions, lack of health care, or provision for old age - all of which drove so many to find solace in the bottle. It is equally clear that the drunkard's wife and dependants could only be grateful for all the efforts of the many temperance workers who like Howe sought to create an alternative culture to that of the public house. His diaries also show the problems of female alcoholic addiction which clearly was bad news for husbands and children.

The diaries also spell out how Howe, like most of his fellow Baptists, wrestled with prioritizing the care of immortal souls both in this world and the next: 'Empty cupboards are unfit companions for empty hearts'. Clearly Tyndale did not put Howe into the Deanery Road Mission as their surrogate devoid of support; rather they rallied around him in considerable numbers to support and aid all his many endeavours. This, though, seems to have led them into an irregular ecclesiology, with Deanery Road becoming a separate church but with some deacons provided by Tyndale where they continued to hold their membership, a clear indication that the standard Baptist doctrine of the independence of the local church did not work in all situations: indeed, many missions did not get even as far as Deanery Road in forming a separate church roll, rather running the 'mission' on a non-participatory managerial basis. Certainly Howe's work at Bristol prepared him well for his next assignment, which surely offered no easier ministry: the pastorate of a new church in docklands Bermondsey.

## NOTES

- 1 This is based on a paper given by the author at a 'Saturday Learning Opportunity' at Bristol Baptist College on 14 November 1998, under the general title 'Continuity and Change: Baptist History in a Bristol Context'. 'By Love Serving One Another' was Howe's chosen motto for the Mission in 1892.
- 2 See E.E. Butcher, *Bristol Corporation of the Poor 1696-1898*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1972.
- 3 See C.B. Perry, *The Voluntary Medical Institutions of Bristol*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1984.
- 4 From an unsigned and undated MS in Tyndale Baptist Church archives. It probably dates from the late 1950s and is supplemented by a note by Miss Dorothy Glover (1875-1961), daughter of the Revd Richard Glover: 'this very admirable description of the early years of Tyndale Mission'. William Friese-Green (1855-1921), pioneer of cinematography, was born in Bristol, the son of a wrought-iron worker. He moved to London in 1880 (*DNB*).
- 5 Taken from the Census returns, 5 April 1891.
- 6 *ibid*.
- 7 See A. Gomme, M. Jenner and B. Little, *Bristol: An Architectural History*, 1971, p.406.
- 8 See R.A. Buchanan and N. Cossons, *The Industrial Archaeology of the Bristol Region*, Newton Abbot, 1969, pp.196-7.
- 9 The results are tabulated in J.F. Nicholls and J. Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, Bristol 1881, Vol.II, Appendix, pp.305-8.
- 10 Bristol Association of Baptist Churches, *Annual Reports* 1881 and 1891.
- 11 See D.T. Roberts, 'Mission, Home and Overseas: Richard Glover of Bristol', *BQ* XXXV, no.3, July 1993, pp.108-20.
- 12 See Nicholls and Taylor, *op.cit.*, and *Annual Report, op.cit.*, 1881, 1891.
- 13 H.E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914*, 1976, p.881.
- 14 *Tyndale Chapel Handbook*, June 1892, pp.40-61.
- 15 Undated MS, *op.cit.* Edward Robinson (d.1935),



- Lord Mayor of Bristol 1908, Treasurer of the Baptist Missionary Society and head of E.S. & A. Robinson, one of Bristol's largest employers in the late nineteenth century (see H.L. Taylor, *Edward Robinson, JP of Bristol*, 1942).
- 16 The Revd W.H. Skinner was minister of a Congregational (formerly Countess of Huntingdon Connexion) church in Lodge Street and its Mission in Orchard Street, St Augustine's. He was also Joint Secretary of the Bristol Temperance Society and Gospel Temperance Union.
- 17 *Baptist Handbook* 1938, p.343.
- 18 See undated MS, *op.cit.*
- 19 *Tyndale Baptist Church Jubilee Handbook*, 1919, pp.10f, 51-4.
- 20 H.L. Taylor, *op.cit.*

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