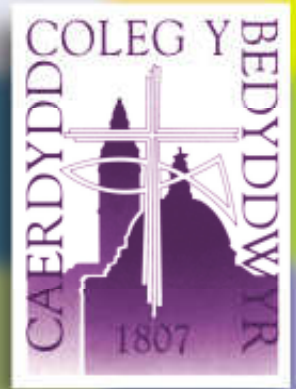


South Wales Baptist College

Summer News 2007



Two Hundred Years Young



To mark the bi-centenary of South Wales Baptist College, John Weaver, Karen Smith, Simon Woodman and Martyn Moss paid a 'pilgrimage' to the two former sites of the College.

The College has occupied its current premises in Richmond Road, Cardiff, since

1893, but the two former homes are still in existence.

The original building in Abergavenny (1807-1836) is, as it always was, a private residence. The current owners have, until recently, been welcoming guests for B&B accommodation, in the tradition of Micah Thomas welcoming students to his home for training.



The building in Pontypool, where the college was based from 1836 to 1893, has for many years been used as a secondary school. Currently it is the home to Trevethin Community School, which is due to close this summer. The

future of the buildings is uncertain, with demolition and residential redevelopment a real possibility.

It was a privilege to be able to visit these two former homes of the College, and the sense of history was palpable. The photographs of the

buildings as they are today, compared with the pictures from the time of the College's occupation, show how much remains of the original buildings. Little imagination is needed to picture students poring over their studies under the wooden ceiling in the library at Pontypool, or peering out of the small



upstairs windows of the house in Abergavenny as the Welsh-speaking students sought to master English.

But while there is a strong sense of continuity, there is also a sense of how much has changed. It is clear from looking back at the past that change has been a constant feature in the College's history - change in buildings, and change in patterns of ministerial formation.

The primary task of shaping people for Christian ministry remains the same, but the form which that training takes needs to be flexible to the needs of the church in each generation.

And so the College looks both back and forwards. We can see clearly where we have come from, but less clearly where we are headed. However, we go into the future certain that the one who is from everlasting to everlasting journeys with us.



Polish Connection

The city of Warsaw is both beautiful and fascinating: Walking down medieval streets, one can hardly believe that this was the city decreed to be 'razed to the ground' in the final months of the second world war.



The only hint that these buildings are re-constructions are the modern dates on the gable ends. Towering over the city is the communist Palace of Science and Culture, a dominating example of socialist realism architecture.



In many ways, the story of the city parallels the story of the Baptist Seminary at Radosc, on the outskirts of Warsaw.

Housed within recently constructed buildings, this thoroughly historic seminary is starting to emerge from the shadow of its long existence under communism.

The friendship between South Wales Baptist College and the Radosc seminary has existed for many years, with the College hosting the 'Friends of Radosc' committee.



The offering from the 2006 Valedictory Service was sent to assist in the ongoing task of completing the buildings, and the student kitchen and television room pictured here were refurbished using the money from South Wales.

In April 2007, Simon Woodman, Tutor in Biblical Studies, went to Radosc at the invitation of the Rector, Revd Michael Bochenski, to deliver a series of lectures on the book of Revelation.

Simon comments that: 'Whilst lecturing through a translator takes some getting used to, the enthusiasm and dedication of the Polish students is excellent. Although the Polish Baptist community is still small, the number of trainee pastors they are raising up is very encouraging.'



Whilst in Warsaw, Simon was able to interview two students with a view to them undertaking postgraduate study at South Wales Baptist College. Hopefully one of these students will also be involved in planting a Polish congregation amongst the immigrant community in Welshpool.

The link which exists between the two Colleges is beneficial to both institutions, and this partnership in the Gospel is one through which the kingdom of God is built on earth.

Trem yn ôl: 5. Colegau'r Bedyddwyr yng Nghymru

Ers agor Academi'r Fenni yn 1807, bu gan y Bedyddwyr dri choleg yng Nghymru – un yn y de-ddwyrain, un yn y de-orllewin ac un yn y gogledd. Mudodd y tri choleg yn y 1890au i fod mewn tref prifysgol: Y Fenni *via* Pont-y-pŵl i Gaerdydd yn 1893, Hwlfordd i Aberystwyth yn 1894 a Llangollen i Fangor yn 1892. Yn 1897 gofynnwyd i'r eglwysi bleidleisio am nifer y colegau y dylid gofyn iddynt gefnogi, a phenderfynwyd ar ddau. Yn 1898 gofynnwyd iddynt ddewis y ddau leoliad, a phenderfynwyd ar Gaerdydd a Bangor. Rhannwyd eiddo a myfyrwyr Athrofa Aberystwyth rhwng Caerdydd a Bangor, ond penderfynodd Pwyllgor Aberystwyth mai trwy uniaethu â'r Coleg yng Nghaerdydd y diogelid "parhad hanesyddol" Athrofa Hwlfordd. I gydnabod hyn, yn 1899 newidiwyd "Coleg Caerdydd" (yr enw a fabwysiadwyd yn 1893) yn "Goleg Bedyddwyr De Cymru" – a dyna'r enw ddefnyddid amdano yn Saesneg yn ystod yr ugeinfed ganrif.

Ar y cyfan bu'r berthynas rhwng Coleg Caerdydd a Choleg Bangor yn un hapus a ffrwythlon ar hyd y blynyddoedd, er ei bod yn anorfod fod elfen o gystadleuaeth iach rhyngddynt ar adegau. Nid yw'r berthynas agos yn syndod chwaith, gan fod y naill goleg ar adegau wedi hyfforddi athrawon a phrifathrawon y llall.

I raddau helaeth, fel y gellid disgwyl, y mae'r ddau goleg wedi bod yn gyfrifol am hyfforddi eu hathrawon a'u prifathrawon eu hunain; ond, yn nyddiau cynnar Coleg y Gogledd edrychwyd i'r De am gymorth i arwain, tra bod Coleg y De wedi edrych i'r Gogledd yn yr ugeinfed ganrif. Academiau'r Fenni a Phont-y-pŵl roddodd hyfforddiant i'r arweinwyr cynnar yn Llangollen a Bangor – dynion fel **John Pritchard**, **Thomas Witton Davies** a **Silas Morris**. Ond pan oedd Coleg Caerdydd yn denu mwy o fyfyrwyr di-Gymraeg, â myfyrwyr Cymraeg eu hiaith yn prinhaus yn ddirfawr yno, talodd Coleg y Gogledd y gymwynas yn ôl, drwy roi **Tom Phillips**, **John Griffiths**, **Dafydd G. Davies** a **Hugh Matthews** i Gaerdydd.

Ar y llaw arall, dros y blynyddoedd ni chyfyngwyd y rhai a glywodd alwad i'r Weinidogaeth i fyfyrion yn y coleg rhanbarthol, na'r rhai a hyfforddwyd i wasanaethu eglwysi yn y rhanbarth y cawsant eu hyfforddiant. Yn hyn o beth gall y ddau goleg ymhyfrydu yn y ffaith iddynt wasanaethu Cymru gyfan.

'What South Wales Baptist College Has Meant For Me...'

To understand how SWBC has influenced me, it is necessary to trace the long journey that my wife Alex and I have taken towards being recognised as mission workers destined for Italy. Our callings had different paths. I felt the rudiments of a call to Italy back in 1990 when I was stirred by the weakness and disunity of the evangelical churches that I encountered there while on a student placement. Alex lived with her first husband for 12 years in Italy but had to return to Wales due to his unfaithfulness. Over the years the Lord guided us to apply to be mission workers with BMS World Mission. The opening was for ministerial couples only and so I willingly went to South Wales Baptist College in order to train for the Baptist ministry. After a nerve-wracking Candidates Board interview in November 2005, Alex & I were accepted into BMS as long-term workers, starting our one year internal training course in September 2006.

My time at SWBC has been a crucial component in this long process towards becoming a recognised mission worker in Italy (17 years and counting!). As well as providing me with



the practical tools to help take responsibility for a local congregation, SWBC has broadened my attitude to Christians of other traditions and theologies. This came about partly through close interaction with

Methodist and Church in Wales students at St. Michael's College (affiliated to Cardiff University, like SWBC) and partly through my detailed analysis of ecumenical-evangelical relations over the last fifty years which formed part of my studies at Masters level. Dr Roy Kearsley, in particular, helped me to analyse the development of theologies and movements in a less partisan way, and his wise guidance helped me to attain a grade of Distinction for this research. BMS World Mission's partner in Italy, The Italian Baptist Union (UCEBI) is more theologically mixed than The Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) but I am now far more prepared to react positively to differences in emphasis than before. Now, not only will I be asking if a proposal is faithful to Scripture, but I will also be asking whether it is mission-centred too. This dual focus should be of great help, fostering my discernment in an Italian theological world which is often characterised by extreme and partisan positions.

We fly out to take pastoral responsibility for the Baptist Church in Siracusa (Syracuse) in Sicily this August, God willing.

Huw & Alexandra Anderson (huw_a@yahoo.com)

PS. Our commissioning service is at 3pm on 07/07/07 at Pantygydr Baptist Church, Uplands, Swansea. All are welcome to attend and tea will be served afterwards.

Principal to be President

College Principal John Weaver has recently been appointed vice-president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and will serve as President 2008-9. Here he speaks in conversation with Ruth Dickinson from the Baptist Times.

'I'm aware of Billy Graham who said, "When it goes well it's all of God and when it goes badly it's all of me." I could understand that.' The Revd Dr John Weaver is talking about preaching, which once upon a time he didn't believe he could do.



These days, the principal of South Wales Baptist College says 'I really enjoy preaching. It's a gift that I believe God has given me - communicating the gospel.' How that change came about is just one of many stories which make up a fascinating Christian walk for the incoming vice-president of the Baptist Union.

John believes the role of president, 'allows someone who is outside of the structures to say something

challenging and positive of what it means to be a Baptist Christian in Britain today. In no way is the president there to undermine the structures, but neither are you there to "toe the party line."

He, somewhat modestly, says: 'I believe I may have something to offer from the thinking that's gone on in my life in the past 25 years'. The insights into why he is the way he is come "thick and fast," as does the acknowledgement of God's leading, and the way in which his experiences have shaped his thinking.

John has Baptist roots, and attended Bethel Baptist Church, Whitchurch, Cardiff with his parents as a child. As a teenager, he says, 'my parents' faith became a personal faith for me, although it would be fair to say that at that time my faith was a Sunday faith.'

After getting a degree and a doctorate in geology from Swansea University, John went to Derby University, at that time known as the Derby College of Higher Education, and lectured in structural geology and geotectonics for seven years. Here, he became a member of Belper Baptist Church, just as the Revd Peter Grange became minister there. His experiences there had a significant impact on his faith.

'Faith became 24/7'

'It was Peter's preaching, his direct challenge about discipleship that I wasn't conscious that I'd heard before,' says John. 'For me, faith became 24/7 [after that]. I began to sense that God wanted a greater part of what was going on in my life.' He was called as deacon and church secretary at Belper, but after three or four years, that same nagging sense of being called was still there.

At that time, John didn't see himself as a preacher, despite his career as a lecturer. 'There's a huge difference between the two, I just couldn't see myself doing it,' he says. God, it seems, had other ideas.

'God in a very real way answered that issue,' John says. 'The very first time I preached in response to what was clearly God's provision and direction, the response of the congregation was just overwhelming. There must have been about 25 or 30 people present, and virtually every single member of that congregation came up to affirm me. I was just so blown away by this, because I had for probably the past three years been saying to people: "No I don't preach." It was almost as if God was saying: "Yes you do."'

That coincided with a sense that he was being called into Christian ministry. John attended Regent's Park College, Oxford in 1978 to study for a degree in theology along with pastoral training. 'I had a most enjoyable time. I looked after a church in Drayton,

just outside Abingdon for three years. It was an enormously supportive little congregation. They put up with my mistakes and I learned an awful lot. I conducted my first baptism, my first wedding, my first infant thanksgiving and my first funeral all at Drayton.'

After Regent's, John became minister of Highfield Baptist Church, Rushden, Northamptonshire.

'The great thing for me was that I had an absolutely positive experience of ministry. I was in a place where God was doing things. I went to a church with an effective membership of about 30 and when I left, it had a real membership of 120 and a Sunday morning congregation of 200. We were really in a place where people were responding to the gospel and that was exciting, although not without its challenges.'

The call to theological education came on a short-term mission trip to Brazil with BMS World Mission, where he taught a couple of classes in a seminary in Campo Grande. 'Something happened during my couple of weeks in that town. When I came away, I remember writing in the journal that I was keeping that I felt that God may be calling me into theological education,' he recalls.

'It was quite against where I thought God was leading me, but there was this sense of call which I couldn't let go of.'

John was at Regent's Park College as director of pastoral training and tutor of practical theology from January 1992 until September 2001 when he came to South Wales Baptist College as principal.

The thrust of what John believes he would bring to the vice-presidency reflects his thinking and experiences from the last 25 years. He boils it down to two ideas.

'First to help Christians connect their faith with the rest of their life, in other words, leading them through what I went through when I was at Derby, away from a Sunday faith to a 24/7 discipleship. The second is the importance of being able to communicate the gospel in a way that is relevant to people outside the church.'

'In a church setting, I always wanted to make sure that people understood the gospel,' John continues. 'I wanted to communicate with people where they were. I tried to avoid jargon and religious language. I was on a council estate and these were ordinary people. My first question about any Bible passage was always: "What is the good news?" And my

second question would be: "So what? What does this mean for us?" You think of the people who are going to be sitting there Sunday after Sunday and try to work out: How does this hit their lives? Where does it relate to them? I think that becomes very important.'

The other area which really developed for John while he was teaching at Regent's was in the dialogue between science and faith. 'The relevance of that one came over the four years that I was involved in running Agnostics Anonymous at Spring Harvest. It was for non-Christians who'd been dragged along as part of some sort of group, and didn't want to go to whatever was going on in the big top. It ran every morning and every evening for two to three hours. I just sat in the middle of a circle and tried to answer their questions. Their two main groups of questions were around suffering and science. I started to think quite hard about the questions people were asking.'

'God uses every experience you have'

There is a real sense when you talk to John about his life of the way in which different experiences have come together and impacted on the next stage. There are all kinds of examples - next year's Baptist Assembly for example, the year of John's presidency, is themed on the environment, an area which, as a scientist, is of particular interest to John.

'I believe that God uses every experience you have,' he says. 'I've found it amazing that having come back to South Wales that the last piece of my experience has actually slotted into place [ie his early experience of growing up within Welsh Baptist life]. This has joined together with my church experience, my university experience, and my science experience.'

'I feel that I'm able to pull those together in my teaching and work with the churches. Ever since I first put my trust in Christ, life has been an adventure, which I have tried to encourage people to follow. I say: "Put your life in God's hand, it's an adventure." That doesn't mean it hasn't been without its pain. Like any family, we've experienced various deaths and illnesses, but that's part of everybody's experience. Nevertheless I believe that life has been an adventure which God has taken us on.'

John has been married to Sheila for nearly 38 years and they have three grown up children, Elizabeth, Richard and Joanna, and five grandchildren.



Baptist Union
of Great Britain

www.baptist.org.uk

'What South Wales Baptist College has meant for me...'

My name is Andrew, aged 36. My wife, Sharon, and I have two daughters, Johanna (4) and Abianne (2). I began college here in Cardiff three years ago after working as a Maths teacher for 7 years in Port Talbot.

There is a long list of the good things that that have come out of my college experience, but briefly, I'll share just one or two here. Firstly, I have really appreciated the Wednesday 'college lectures,' where we have been introduced to a wide variety of excellent speakers from diverse ministries who shared insights into youth ministry, domestic violence, racism, ministerial burnout and 'how to do a tidy funeral,' to name a few. Often the speakers were from non-Baptist traditions, and I appreciate the College's openness to the wider body of Christ, and the richness which comes from listening to others. I have made some great relationships with the other students, and lecturers. I feel sure that some of these friendships will be life-long, and, upon one them being appointed as General Secretary in years to come, I will be able to boast eloquently how I was at college with him/her and used to help them with their essays.

The staff at the college have been a source of great encouragement. I feel they have trained me to 'really think' theologically about absolutely everything. They have been approachable and down to earth when I have struggled with difficult decisions, and been tough with me when I needed to hear things I did not want to hear. (Thanks, by the way!)

As part of my training, the college placed me at Llanishen Baptist Church, and this has undoubtedly been one of the highlights of my college experience. During this time I was given opportunity to preach regularly, lead homegroups,



youth groups, and even conducted my first wedding, all of which I thoroughly enjoyed. But what I've really learned on placement, behind the scenes, is the amount of thought, hard work and wisdom that is necessary for a good church leader to be an outstanding and effective one, and this has been modelled

consistently by the Senior minister, who has been a great mentor, and I trust, a friend for years to come.

I'm due to be 'valedicted' (sounds painful) this summer, and my family and I are joining an exceptional fellowship in Welling, Kent, who have called me to join them as their pastor. We are thrilled and excited about this prospect. Thank you to the many who have prayed consistently and faithfully for my family and me during the last three years, and thank you for promises of continuing prayer support as we move to London. We serve a brilliant God, and it's a privilege to be part of his college, and his incredible family.

Andrew Turner

As I moved back into student accommodation nearly three years ago, I was looking forward to a good deal of reading, stretching my intellectual ability and acquiring new practical skills. I knew that students would worship and study together, be involved in the



life of a local church and that Sunday by Sunday we would travel to various churches in the area in order to lead worship and preach.

All of those things have featured over the last three years and have been an important part of my training. In all of these areas, however, the characteristic feature of my time at college has been conversa-

tion, whether that has taken place in a seminar, the kitchen at my placement church, following a Sunday service or walking between college and the University. Naturally, as students, and those training for ministry, we have consumed quite large quantities of tea and coffee with each other and with the staff, together with others who have been 'passing through' the college reception area. In these times we have continued our thinking on theology, church life, and preaching as well as personal matters; our joys as well as our fears and frustrations.

In such an environment there is rarely the danger of us studying in individual 'bubbles', cut off from the outside world. Often one person's academic study has been found to be relevant to another's practical experience and vice versa, with the exchange of ideas creating opportunities to learn from each other. It is in these conversations, even when opinions have frequently differed, that I have been challenged to do some of my deepest thinking as I have reflected on what I believe and who I am being called to become.

South Wales Baptist College has been home for me during the last three years. It has been the place where I live and study. Yet it has also been more than just the place to which I return after lectures, for it is a place where our community meets together and friends share their experiences and thoughts together. I have no doubt as I leave that some of these friendships will last a lifetime, whilst others will probably become more distant. However I am grateful for all of them, for the way in which they have shaped me and will continue to do so in the future.

Helen Reynolds

The story so far...

D. Hugh Matthews, *From Abergavenny to Cardiff: History of the South Wales Baptist College (1806-2006)*, Gwasg Ilston, Abertawe, pp. 105, ISBN 1 85994 580 5, £6.99.

There is also a Welsh edition of the history, entitled *O'r Fenni i Gaerdydd: Hanes Coleg y Bedyddwyr, Caerdydd 1806-2006*. Both volumes contain a number of photographs.

The author explains: 'The book is an attempt at writing a brief, "popular", readable history of the College.' It follows the story from 1806 (when accommodation for Micah Thomas and his students was secured in Abergavenny) through to the purchase of 52 Richmond Road in 2006.

By way of introduction there is a reminder of how things were in 1807 when, in January, Micah Thomas opened his home in Abergavenny to the first student. It also highlights some of the social changes that have come about since then and the way the College has been affected by them. Short chapters follow, outlining the story of the College in Abergavenny, Pontypool and Cardiff, seen mainly from the perspective of the Principals. Student life in the College has changed much over the years, and there is a section devoted to some of the more notable of those changes. The final section of the book gives a brief account of some of the students whose story after leaving the College differs from that of the majority.



The books will be on sale at the Bi-centenary Celebration Day in Ararat,Whitchurch, on 23 June 2007 and also at the B.U.W. (Welsh) Assembly in Cwm Gwaun and the B.U.W. English Assembly in Trosnant, Pontypool.

The books can be obtained by post from the Baptist Union of Wales, 94 Mansel Street, Swansea SA1 5TZ for £6.00 (including p.& p.). Remember to state the language required when ordering!

**Valedictory
Service
21st June 2008**

Guest Preacher:
Revd Keith Jones
Rector of
The International Baptist
Theological Seminary in
Prague

3.30pm College Forum
4.30pm Tea
6.00pm Celebration
Venue to be confirmed

**Edwin Stephen
Griffiths
Lectures**

Wednesday
5th March 2008

1.30pm and 3.30pm
At South Wales
Baptist College

With
Revd Dr James Gordon
Principal of the
Scottish Baptist College
Paisley

Theme:
"Evangelical Spirituality"

Your support is vital

South Wales Baptist College is an independently funded College, and receives no statutory support. To enable us to provide the level of training and ministerial formation that we do. The College relies on gifts from private individuals, churches and grant-making bodies. Regular support makes a huge difference to our work.

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Address

Return to: **South Wales Baptist College**, 54 Richmond Road, Cardiff CF24 3UR. Tel: 029 2025 6066 Fax: 029 2041 1566.

Please note that the college email address is admin@swbc.org.uk and the website is www.swbc.org.uk