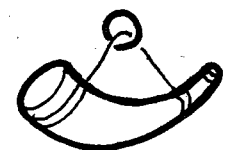
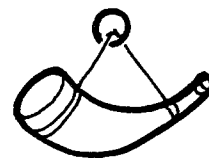
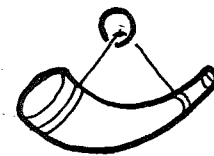
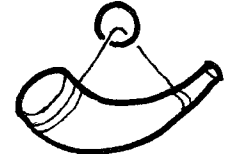
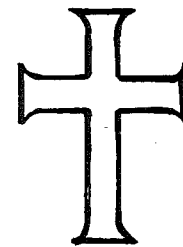
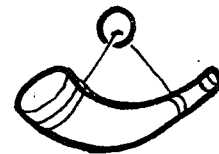


PRENTON CENTENARY



The
United Reformed
Church
Prenton

**A History
of the Church
1887-1987**

Prenton Road West, Birkenhead

PRENTON'S CENTENARY

Way back in Queen Victoria's time
When she was in her regal prime,
Some people lived in Birkenhead
Whose works still live, though they are dead.

They saw a piece of barren ground
With open country all around,
And saw ahead to what might be —
A thriving new community,
And on that plot of barren land
A Church, for all, one day might stand.

It was a dream that God inspired:
For its fulfilment they aspired,
And patiently they worked to see
The dream become reality.

They worshipped in a borrowed hall
And gladly welcomed one and all.
They saved their money, worked and prayed,
And, while fulfilment was delayed,
They kept the vision bright and clear
Until at last the day drew near
When plans were drawn and work began
To really implement the plan.

A Church was built, and many came
To worship God Almighty's Name.
By children it was greatly used,
And never was a child refused,
In Band of Hope or Sunday School,
Through summer's heat or winter's cool.

Of every age the members grew,
Calling for buildings large and new.
The stone was laid in nineteen-eight;
Foundation for a building great —
The Church which now through each decade
Its silent witness still has made.

But housed within its sturdy walls,
And meeting in its various halls,
The Church itself has worked and played,
It's talked and listened, and it's prayed:
It's grown in fellowship and love,
Striving together, hand in glove,
To seek the Kingdom of its Lord
Through loving deed and faithful word.

And here within this hallowed place
Many have found God's saving grace;
Within these walls the seed's been sown;
Within these walls the Church has grown.

Throughout this hundred years now gone
Great things our living Lord has done:
And as we look to years ahead
With Him who's risen from the dead,
We'll trust in His enabling power
For every year, for every hour.
Until He leads us on to where
In His eternal life we'll share.

Donald F. Flawn

Published by Prenton United Reformed Church 1987

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PRENTON CENTENARY

AS you would expect, Prenton a hundred years ago was a strangely different place to what it is today. A sparsely populated suburb of the rapidly growing town of Birkenhead, flourishing in its heyday of shipbuilding and repairing. Transport was by horse or horse drawn vehicle and motor cars were still a figment in the mind of the engineer.

Early in 1887 a circular was distributed to local residents pointing out the distance from a place of worship, especially for elderly persons and very young people. It was emphasised the movement was not to interfere in any way with those who wished to continue to worship as they already were doing but to give opportunity for hearing "The Word", for praise and prayer.

Two years previously the Prenton Bowling Pavilion had been opened, a very comfortable room and very suitable for non-denominational worship. Accordingly, under the leadership of Rev James Wishart MA, who offered to conduct worship on a voluntary basis twice each Sunday, the first services were held on 9th October 1887. The use of the Pavilion was free of charge.

Morning 11.00 a.m.

Evening 6.30 p.m.

Sunday School 3.00 p.m.

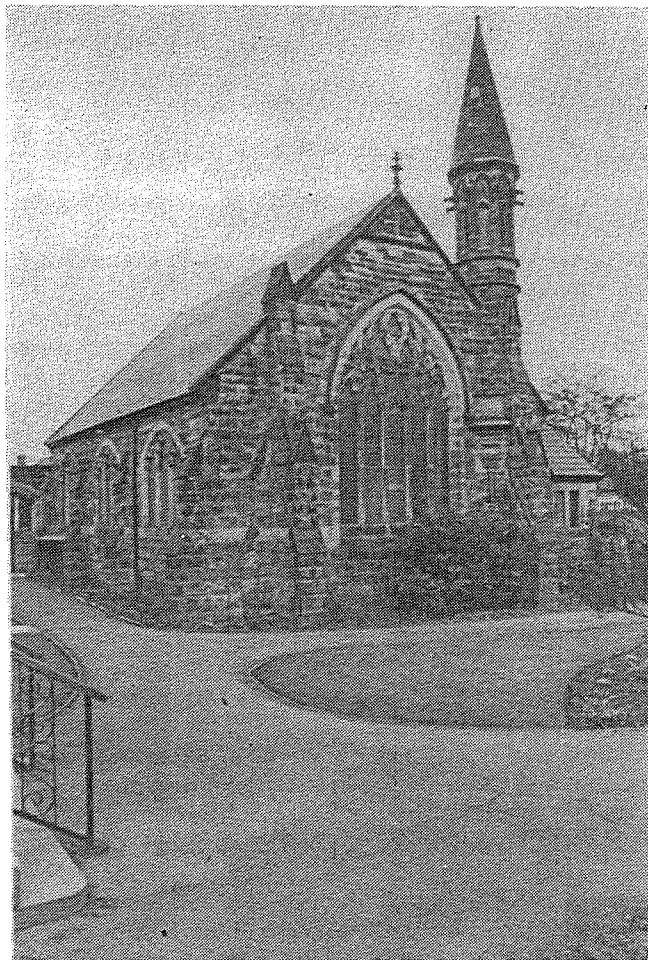
Highfield Church, Rock Ferry, under its Minister, Rev. Mines, from the start formed a close link, making a gift of £10 towards expenses. Fifty chairs were purchased and a harmonium hired. A committee of gentlemen (no ladies, we note) undertook the preliminary management.

Forty people attended the first Morning Service and "rather more" at night. The Sunday School very soon had an average attendance of over fifty scholars.

After six months the situation was reviewed, as at first the movement was nondenominational; but this was very soon found to be unsatisfactory. Having decided that the services be continued, the question arose, and was discussed at some length, "to what denomination should the Church be connected?" The Congregational Church was eventually decided upon for the following reasons: —

- 1 The fellowship differed widely in doctrinal views. (Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, Quakers and Congregationalists). For this reason alone the fellowship they sought must be one whose terms of communion were sufficiently inclusive.
- 2 They had had great pleasure in managing their own affairs hitherto, and they knew the wants of Prenton better than any stranger. For this reason it would be better to choose a denomination which would leave the management where it was.

On 8th April 1888 a meeting chaired by Rev James Wishart decided to associate with the Congregational Church.



The original church, now the church hall

The accommodation so generously provided by the Prenton Bowling Club was soon found to be inadequate and with the help and financial assistance from Highfield Church, and the London Chapel Building Society, the School Chapel (now "the Hall") was built; this was opened on Friday 18th April 1890. Rev James Wishart resigned from the pastorate in 1892 on grounds of ill-health.

Highfield Church, Rock Ferry, under their minister Rev C. A. Mines, undertook the working of the cause at Prenton, with Rev Stanley Lamb as Assistant Minister.

This is what Rev W. Stanley Lamb wrote in the Jubilee Manual in 1937. "I look back very happily on the seven-and-a-half years I spent at Prenton, November 1892 to April 1900. I was ordained there in May 1893. In December of that year, after our marriage in London, Mrs Lamb joined me in service, and came to share in that liking for Liverpool and its neighbourhood, and in those warm and steadfast friendships that have continued through ensuing years. For the first two years I was also assistant minister to the Rev C. Allan Mines BA at Rock Ferry, and we preached alternately morning and evening in both churches. That was an association I prized, and during this period the Highfield ladies joined with Prenton ladies in a bazaar for the reduction of the debt on the Building Fund of the Prenton Church. This took place in Highfield Hall and realised a substantial amount.

Shortly after, and encouraged by the above result, the Prenton Church Committee and congregation added another and larger vestry to the existing buildings in order to provide additional and much needed accommodation for the Sunday School and Young People's work. A Band of Hope that had been formed was often successful in filling all the pews in the church on a winter's evening. Through the kindness of the Oxton Road Church and its Minister, the Rev Matthew Stanley, a sale of work took place in their schoolroom, which gave our church funds much welcome assistance.

For all the co-operation we received from friends within the church and without, during those days, we are deeply grateful."

In 1894 the arrangement with Highfield Church, Rock Ferry, was terminated, and the Rev Stanley Lamb was appointed full-time Pastor. The church was at this time being assisted by the County Union. In 1900 the Rev Stanley Lamb accepted a call to Burslem.

In October of that year Rev Robert S. Franks, a student of Mansfield College, Oxford, was appointed minister.



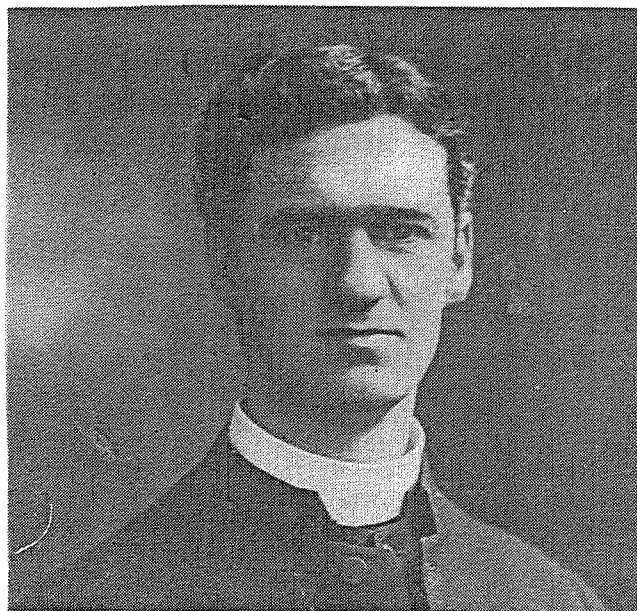
Rev Robert S. Franks

From Rev Robert S. Franks MA, DLitt, LLD (Principal of Western College, Bristol) Jubilee Manual 1937:

"The four years that I spent at Prenton saw the beginning of the twentieth century, the death of Queen Victoria and the accession of King Edward VII, together with the end of the Boer War. It was a time of prosperity when the clouds that now darken the spiritual horizon were no bigger than a man's hand. Prenton was a very agreeable place to live in, and the Congregational Church of those days, though small, was a happy and united community, of which Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and some Anglicans formed about three-quarters, so that those who were Congregationalists by tradition were quite in a minority.

There was a strong Sunday School and a vigorous Band of Hope. In addition to these I formed a small literary circle for young men. During the four years of my ministry, the church succeeded in freeing itself from the necessity of receiving a grant from the Cheshire County Union. In general, these years—if 'a day of small things' compared with the present state of the church—were a time of quiet growth and happy usefulness."

Rev R. S. Franks resigned in August 1904 to take up a post as Theological Lecturer. The church was by now self-supporting. For almost two years the church was without a minister, but in May 1906 Rev John Middleton was ordained and inducted to Prenton. Towards the end of that year there was insufficient accommodation for the growing congregation and the need for suitable premises for the Sunday School brought about the decision to build a new church. What members had in mind was accommodation for 550 at a cost



Rev John A. Middleton

of about £6,000. At the first Annual General Meeting following Rev John Middleton's appointment it was announced that £1,211 'promises' had been received for the proposed new church.

Originally a figure of £7,000 was given. By deferring the building of a spire and vestries a saving of £1,000 could be effected. On the basis of £7,000 it was decided to raise £4,500 before work should start. The Building Scheme was criticized as being too expensive for the seating accommodation. Apart from the economy effected by the reduction in seating capacity, a further economy was effected by substituting 'ordinary' wood for oak in the floors. Mrs W. H. Lever, wife of the famous industrialist, later to become Viscount Leverhulme, laid the foundation stone on 12th June 1908. We in the church today must be thankful that the rather grand design was never completed, and that we have a church very suitable for our needs at the present time.

It was at Prenton that Rev John Middleton met Miss Emily Kirkland and they were married in the Church on 8th June 1910. An extract from the Jubilee Manual 1937 written by Rev John Middleton reads:

"Prenton holds a very select place in my memory and affection. It was the scene of my first pastorate. Well do I remember my first visit while still a student. The present hall was seated with pews; the organ and choir stalls were in the apse, and at one side stood the pulpit. The tiny church seated one hundred and fifty people—it was a church in miniature.

It is not surprising that our thoughts soon turned to the building of a new church, and the event that will ever stand out in my mind was the meeting held in the Bowling Green Pavilion on Wednesday 13th February 1907. At that meeting it was decided to build the present church. The church—a very



The new church interior

beautiful church—is now an accomplished fact and is a fine tribute to the faith, devotion and generosity of the splendid body of men and women who worshipped in that little but lovely church. It is fitting that the Jubilee of Prenton Congregational Church should be celebrated. It has maintained a faithful Free Church witness for fifty years, and has done much to foster the ideal of a United Free Church.”

A three-day Bazaar was held at the YMCA in Grange Road towards the Building Fund on 26th, 27th and 28th November 1908. Rev John Middleton closed his ministry at Prenton on 1st July 1914. Prenton Church felt a deep sense of loss at his departure, but thanked God for their minister's faithful preaching, pastoral service and work accomplished during the past eight years of friendship. He continued his ministry at Scarborough.

Rev Harry Bulcock came as minister in 1915 from Droylsden, near Darlington. Being a pacifist this was not without difficulty and criticism, but he expounded the Christian message as he saw it and believed in it. An offer was received from Lord Leverhulme in October 1917 offering £1 for every £3 raised by the Church to clear the outstanding debt. By April 1918 the debt on the church of £1,000 was cleared, £750 by the church, £250 by Lord Leverhulme.

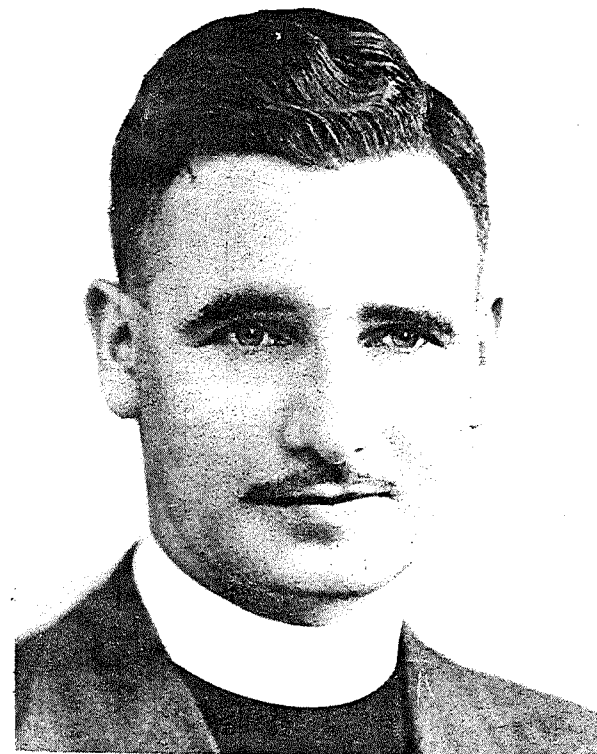
During the war people's minds were distracted and their nerves jaded, and all activities were directed to the great struggle of the nations. We have a brass tablet at the back of the church bearing the names of those lost in the War. It is unfortunate that members of St Pauls Presbyterian Church, North Road, were not able to bring their War Memorial tablet with them.

A church extension joining the church permanently with the hall, a minister's vestry, cloakrooms and a Council vestry to be called the Kinghorn Vestry was opened in 1927 by Mrs Adelaide Kinghorn. Mr Kinghorn, a founder member of the church, had died in 1922. Rev Harry Bulcock died in 1934; in his farewell sermon he referred to the increase in Sunday amusements, and the decline in church attendance. From the Rev Harry Bulcock in the Jubilee Manual, 1937:

“My period at Prenton began during the Great War, and all kinds of new problems and difficulties were to be faced. The young men were in khaki, and the young women were engaged in various kinds of war service at home. Church work was not felt to be of national importance and had to take what secondary place it could. Some Sundays there was not a single teacher in the school. More difficult still was the task of attempting to state the Christian message in a set of circumstances full of moral dilemmas, and in the face of a general mentality which seemed in many respects pagan. The appeal of national war charities competed with the claims of church maintenance and the reduction of a crippling church debt. Nevertheless, that debt was completely cleared; the church was consolidated; the church steadily grew into a happy Christian companionship and gained the respect of its neighbours as a church with serious intellectual interests and a rich and dignified worship.”

Rev Elvet H. Lewis succeeded to the pastorate in 1934; it was his first church, as he came straight from Yorkshire United College, Bradford. He and his young wife Ivy soon settled into the fellowship. Prenton Church's Fiftieth Anniversary was in 1937, and there were two weeks of celebrations:

Sunday 3rd October: both services conducted by Rev Harry Bulcock.



Rev Elvet H. Lewis

Sunday 10th October: Jubilee Sunday: both services conducted by Rev H. Elvet Lewis MA DD (London), an ex-Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. During the morning service this grand old gentleman, famous hymn writer, and blind, baptised Peter, the infant son of Rev and Mrs Elvet Lewis, his own great-nephew.

Monday 11th October: Tea in the Church Hall followed by Jubilee Public Meeting. Those taking part included Rev Stanley Lamb (former minister of the church), Rev E. D. Paterson MA BD (minister of Highfield Congregational Church) and Rev T. L. Turner MA (minister of St Paul's Presbyterian Church).

Sunday 17th October: both services conducted by Rev John Middleton.

By this time the clouds of war were beginning to darken the skies and by 3rd September 1939 Armageddon was again unloosed. In 1940 Rev Elvet Lewis felt the need to volunteer as an Army Chaplain. Part of his service was in the Middle East.

Rev J. E. Stevenson, a retired minister, was appointed temporary Pastor. The church carried on during the war years, changing the time of the evening service because of the blackout. The item of greatest interest is the Canteen run for H.M. Forces in the district; during 1942 35,696 cups of tea and 20,982 subsidiary meals were served. The takings for the year amounted to £354; this was all received in small coins. The Sewing Meeting did excellent work for the Red Cross, and also attended to the Parcels for Men and Women of the Church in the Services.

In 1945 a Scout Troop was started, Rev J. E. Stevenson taking a great interest in this. Unfortunately this only ran for a few years. We have no War Memorial for the Second World War in the church, but several members lost loved ones during the war, at sea, overseas and nearer home in local air raids. There are no details in the Church Minutes of bomb damage to the church, but it is obvious that with all the bombing windows must have been broken and other minor damage sustained. Rev Elvet Lewis came back from the forces early in 1947, and it was on 1st February 1948 after the morning service that he told the church that he had accepted a call to Belmont Congregational Church, Aberdeen, and would be terminating his ministry at Prenton early in April.

The appointment of the Rev Walter Young from Woodbridge, Suffolk, as minister in 1948 was a most invigorating experience. In less than no



Rev Walter Young

time every section of the church's life, spiritual and temporal, was to feel the impact of a fresh and stimulating mind. He was particularly successful in attracting increasing numbers of menfolk to the church and its activities. The Men's Weekends which he organised and directed were a particularly successful feature for several years. The men would give a teaparty to the ladies on the Saturday, and this was followed by an entertainment in the evening. Sunday services were taken by a group of men, with a male choir. A number of new ventures were started during the ministry of the Rev Walter Young. In 1951 Fireside Fellowships were started—in these days of central heating we call them House Groups. "Christianity and Life" by Rev L. J. Tizzard was used as a basis for discussion. In October 1951 there was the first meeting of the "Young Wives' Fellowship"; as the members grew older the title was changed to "The Women's Fellowship".

Also during 1951 the Livingstone Fellowship was formed, for young people between 18 and 30, with an emphasis on missionary interest, and of a more serious nature than the usual Youth Club. After running for 12 months the group had 16 members who said that by studying, working and playing together they had found true Christian fellowship. The "L.F." was so successful, with a waiting list of younger members that the entrance age was lowered to 16. In 1964 the name was changed to Youth Fellowship, which is still used today. Miss Gladys Aylward of China spent a weekend in January 1955 with the church, addressing a large meeting in the hall on Saturday evening and taking part in the services on Sunday.

After the War the Mount Estate had been built, and the afternoon Sunday School had grown to such an extent, over 200 scholars, that more premises were urgently needed. Over 90 children also met on a Sunday morning for Children's Morning Church, joining with the grown-ups for the first part of the service. After much deliberation, the West Room was built, and first used for a meeting of members and friends on 17th December 1958. During the early 1960's it was decided to change to Junior Church on a Sunday morning.

During the ministry of Rev Walter Young Cubs and Scouts re-opened and Brownies and Guides were started. Prior to this there had been a Boys' Club and a Girls' Club. 1966 saw the opening of Friday Morning Crèche, the start of Play Groups as they are known today. Rev Walter Young was very interested in drama, and produced plays on many occasions. His interests also included Choral Speaking, and he trained the Livingstone Fellowship on several occasions. He also acted as Choir Master for a number of years. He retired through ill health on 31st March 1967. He went to live in Chester where he died later the same year.

Rev Donald Flawn was inducted on 27th September 1967, coming from St James Congregational Church, Newcastle upon Tyne. He was the last Congregational minister to be installed in Prenton Church, for in October 1972 the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches united to form the United Reformed Church.

The first meeting of the Monday Group was held in September 1967. It was a meeting for women under 50. This rule has since been changed as the original members grew older. This group is as strong as ever. During 1968 a visitation was undertaken in the new housing estate being built in Oxtan, and services were held at 10a.m. in the Old Parkonian Rugby Pavilion each Sun-

day, but in September 1969 these stopped owing to lack of response. In 1968 the Pilot Company re-opened after being closed for a number of years.



Rev Donald F. Flawn

October 1968 saw the opening of a Wednesday Club for older men and women, and it is good to see it still flourishing.

During the early hours of Monday 5th January 1970 a fire completely destroyed the stage in the hall. The rest of the premises suffered considerable damage by smoke and heat, the church and the West Room being the least affected. This gave an opportunity for modernising the hall, kitchen and toilets. The hall was rededicated on 5th September 1971.

On 6th October 1971 the Luncheon Club was started and in a very short time had 24 members. It continues to provide a valuable service to elderly persons living alone. Under the careful guidance of Rev Donald Flawn, the closure of the North Road URC, formerly St Paul's Presbyterian Church, took place in October 1974. A number of their members had joined Prenton and they were quickly interwoven into the life of the church. June 1978 saw the departure of Rev Donald and Mrs Freda Flawn to enjoy their retirement in Keighley.

The Rev Donald Flawn was asked how he felt about his time at Prenton. He wrote:

"It was a great joy to be part of the church at Prenton. It was my final pastorate before so-called retirement, and although I had been blessed with rich fellowship and many friends in the churches where I had previously ministered, this was the happiest of them all.

I came to a church which had a warmth of friendship and caring, and a real sense of concern for the community in which it was set. Through the deep Christian devotion of so many this characteristic was maintained. New members were drawn in through the various activities of the church and through the personal caring of the members. Those who joined brought great enrichment to the fellowship, particularly those who came from St Paul's, and have both received and given blessing.

It is indeed good to know that that spirit lives on. It is indeed a continuing witness to the reality of the Spirit of God himself, at work inspiring and using his people. To him be the glory now, and in all the years to come."

In April 1979 Rev Richard Hambly was inducted, coming to Prenton after serving for six years in Samoa with CWM. Under his guidance the church has continued to grow.

A number of members took part in the Billy Graham 'Mission England' Crusade. Every Tuesday evening throughout the year 'Time to Pray' meets for prayer and Bible study, a great source of strength to the church.

The church continues to have a very capable choir who are always ready to help the worship with their singing, especially at Easter, Harvest and Christmas. Over the years members have taken part in drama productions in the church hall in many forms: secular plays, pantomimes, musicals etc., also religious plays and dramatic presentations in the church.

Prenton URC should be proud of those who have gone into the ministry either directly or partly as a consequence of being in membership: Bernard Collins, Janet Flawn, Philip Eaglesfield, Murdoch MacKenzie and Brenda Willis.

The church is grateful for all the gifts it has received over the years to make the church improved and more beautiful, and so often given in memory of loved ones.

On 9th October 1986 the Prenton Bowling Club had a fire in their pavilion which put it out of use for some months. This gave the church the opportunity to repay the Bowling Club for their help in the past by the use of church premises for the meetings and whist drives. The Prenton Literary Society also met in the West Room while the Bowling Pavilion was out of commission.

Finally, our minister, Rev Richard Hambly, will tell us how he has found Prenton Church, and what he sees for the future:

"When the founders were planning the establishment of a church in this part of Birkenhead they were very divided in their opinion as to whether it should be built in Borough Road, which was already a well established area, or on the corner of Prenton Road West and Storeton Road, which was then on the very edge of the Borough boundary and with very little housing in the immediate vicinity. The conclusion they came to is obvious in the fact that we are the church in Prenton Road West, at the traffic lights, in a built up area of residential properties. Today we can be grateful to those men and women of faith who had a sense of adventure and an eye to the future.



Rev. Richard Hambly

We inherit their faith and I am sure we have a vision for the future. Building on the firm foundation they laid, we can see the church continue to pioneer new approaches in worship, spiritual life and service. In the years that I have served as minister the Prenton Church has maintained its membership in spite of the natural moving away from the locality of most of the young people in search of employment. The quality of our devotion has deepened by a willingness to share our different experiences of God. The number of our members who give valuable voluntary as well as professional caring service continues to surprise many in the Wirral who, having met one such helper from Prenton URC seemed to go on meeting more and more of them.

As we celebrate this milestone in our local church's life, we do so with humility that we have been called into the heritage of the Apostles of ancient and more recent days. Let us also have pride that God has entrusted to us, along with other Christians in Prenton, the faith for future generations. Let us pray that we shall always be faithful in things small and large, experiences new and familiar, and times present and future."

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

When the services commenced in the Bowling Club Pavilion a hundred years ago 50 children attended on Sunday afternoons, starting a tradition which continued for more than eighty years. Several of our older members say that there were over 100 children in the church hall each Sunday afternoon during the years before the 1914-18 War, and that the classes sat in groups around the hall, with the Superintendent in the centre, and this built up to even greater numbers after the War. It became a tradition (happily still in being now) to have children from the Charles Thompson's Mission in Birkenhead on one Sunday each winter. They came in much greater numbers, and in much more need than today, but they are still trained to sing and recite; they are entertained to a meal after the service, and to a New Year Party.

As the Sunday School grew it was divided into Beginners, Primary, Junior and Senior Departments, usually following a lesson series based on the same theme, suitable to each age group. Teachers and Superintendents were recruited from among the church members, but apart from the annual Anniversary Service the children were not often seen in the church before the Second World War. A popular event was the 'Sunday School Picnic', in the early years by horse wagonette to Raby Mere on a summer Saturday afternoon, in later years to West Kirby, with sports on the sands, and tea at 'Banks & Cookes' in the Crescent. Other venues were Hoylake, Helsby and Frodsham.

In the late 1930's a pre-church service for children was held in the Kinghorn Vestry, this consisted mostly of singing choruses.

Sunday School continued during the War, largely staffed by ladies, and the numbers built up again afterwards. Gradually, as more families had transport and enjoyed outings, it seemed sensible to restart the morning Sunday School. Both morning and afternoon services continued until the late 1960's, when it was decided to include the 'Junior Church' in the morning service, with the children coming into church for the first part of the service, and to discontinue the afternoon Sunday School.

In 1980 a crèche was provided for the youngest children, staffed by church members, with the rest of the children joining the adults for the closing part of the service. All benefit from hearing about what each other has learned that morning, and sharing their experience. The Cradle Roll Secretary welcomes parents who bring their children for baptism, and introduces the babies to the Beginners before they come into church for the baptism, a service which emphasises the responsibility of all present for the Christian upbringing of the newest one. The annual Cradle Roll Service is now held on Mothering Sunday, when certificates are presented to the parents of children baptised during the year, and flower posies are given to all the mothers present. A Nativity mime takes place on the Sunday morning before Christmas, when even the very youngest children can be angels, bringing the old story to life.

Those who have given service over the years as leaders, teachers or pianists are too many to be recorded by name, but their efforts have made a most valuable contribution to the church's life.

PILOTS

Pilots were re-opened on 3rd October 1968 after a closure of over 30 years, for boys only, as the Cubs and Scouts had closed down. Girls were being catered for with Brownies and Guides. They have continued to meet on a weekly basis ever since.

Pilots celebrated their 50th Anniversary in June 1986 and several Prenton Pilots were able to take part in the celebration in London.

GUIDES, CUBS AND SCOUTS

The 67th Birkenhead Scout Troop was formed in 1945 and ran for a few years, re-opening in 1953 as the 61st Birkenhead, followed by a Cub Pack later that year. Annual and weekend camps were held each year, and the Troop won the District Camping Competition five times. There was an average of twenty boys in the Troop, which was fed by a flourishing Cub Pack. A Senior Scout Troop of boys aged 16 and over was later formed, which took part in District activities with other similar troops. The Group attended Church Parades each month, with the Guides and Brownies: this was an essential part of their "Duty to God" which all undertook in their Promise. The Group Committee, consisting of parents and church members, gave good support to the boys. Unfortunately the Troop closed down in 1967, and the Pack in 1968, due to the decline in the number of boys of suitable age attending Junior Church. Those still in the Group at that time were assimilated into adjacent Groups.

The 3rd Prenton Brownie Pack opened early in 1953, followed later that year by the Guide Company. The Brownies frequently had a waiting list for membership, and in 1957 another Pack, the 5th Prenton, was formed to cater for the many girls in Junior Church. This remained open for several years, until the 'bulge' had passed through. Both Packs and Company pursued an active programme, taking part in District, Division and County events, especially in 1985, the 75th Anniversary of the Guide Movement.

A 30th Birthday Reunion was held in 1984, attended by former members and Guiders from all parts of the country, including those who had formed the Units. Guides have camped almost every year, and Brownies have started going on Pack Holiday.

All the leaders have given devoted service, well over the 'Hour-and-a-Half' each week which they might have expected to have given. Several have undertaken other positions in the wider world of Scouting and Guiding, as Commissioners, Trainers, Group Scout Leaders and secretaries.

WOMEN'S MEETINGS

The Ladies' Sewing Society came into being shortly after the formation of the church, each week ladies gathering to sew, knit and crochet to meet each other and to raise funds. During both wars they sent parcels to the Red Cross, and to church members serving in H.M. Forces, and many helped at the Forces' Canteen which was run in the church hall in the early 1940's. The Ladies' Stall at the Annual Bazaar or Christmas Fair always raised a lot of money, and this was missed when the Society closed for a time in the 1970's, due to dwindling numbers. However, it was revived by Mrs Mary Hambly shortly after she came to Prenton with her husband when he became minister. A small but very active group meets each week for most of the year, supplying goods to order and building a large stock for their stall. The church is indebted to them for their splendid financial help.

In 1951 a 'Young Wives' meeting was started for ladies who wished for a different type of gathering, and many of whom had pre-school age children who were looked after in a crèche, often staffed by Mrs Rosa Young, wife of the then minister. There was always a devotional opening to the meeting, followed by a speaker (on a wide variety of topics), a film or demonstration. The title was changed to 'Women's Fellowship' a few years later, to include more women, and a very happy 21st Birthday was celebrated with a dinner in 1976. When numbers dropped a few years later the Fellowship closed, some of the members transferred to the Wednesday Club, a mixed group meeting after the Lunch Club, and a few stalwarts continued with a walking group covering all parts of Wirral.

The 'Monday Group' started in 1968 to meet the needs of younger women, the majority with children, but who were themselves working, either full or part time. It met monthly, on Monday evenings, and was an instant success. This coincided with the start of Rev Donald Flawn's ministry, and Mrs Freda Flawn was the first President of the Group. Her experience with women's meetings was invaluable. The following year it changed to meeting each fortnight, and this has continued with a programme of wide interest to all, arranged by an active committee. Since its inception the Group has supported the Wirral Branch for the Mentally Handicapped and arranged an annual 'Charity Night' for their benefit; it has also contributed to the many other charities who have supplied speakers, and has built up a tradition of service to the church. An outstanding achievement was the purchase of curtains for the church hall which added very considerably to the comfort of everyone using it. PURL (Prenton United Reformed Ladies) were a popular singing and dancing team who entertained many other groups, and were always members of the highly successful musical productions at Prenton.

Church membership at Prenton has increased through the Group, which continues to flourish.

MEN'S ASSOCIATION

Meetings for men commenced on 26th October 1970, meeting fortnightly with a varied programme. The membership is not confined to the URC, but has several members from our neighbouring churches, and the meetings are open to all who care to attend.

WEDNESDAY CLUB

October 1968 saw the formation of the Wednesday Club, a meeting on a Wednesday afternoon for older men and women who prefer to meet during the daytime. A varied programme is arranged each week, the meeting starts with a short reading or hymn. There is always time for a chat, either before the meeting or over a cup of tea, and many lonely people have found help and comfort in the warm fellowship of the Club.