

Building for the Future. (I)

KNOwn throughout the world as the home of Morris motor cars the growing industrial community of Cowley, Oxford, is also the home of the young and vigorous John Bunyan Baptist Church. The challenge of Cowley's rapidly expanding housing estates was taken up in 1936 by the Oxfordshire and East Gloucestershire Association, largely owing to the enthusiasm of Rev. H. J. White, Ald. L. H. Alden and Mrs. E. A. Hughes. Difficulties were inevitably encountered but there was also considerable encouragement in the form of generous gifts. A site at Crowell Road having been purchased it was resolved on October 14th, 1938 to begin to build. The church at New Road, Oxford, intimated its readiness to consider financing a Ministry at Cowley.

The stone-laying of a small hall took place on December 8th, 1938, and on April 22nd of the following year it was opened for worship by Mrs. R. Wilson Black. Out of a total cost of £1,768 only £442 remained outstanding. Inspired by a £1,000 gift from Lord Nuffield and £881 received from the sale of St. Thomas's Mission premises, whose members had generously allocated the proceeds of sale to the Cowley cause, the responsible committee decided to press on with their plans and, on June 28th, 1941, the School Hall was opened. By the end of that year the generosity of other churches and private donors had cleared the total cost of nearly £5,000.

The first services for public worship were held on April 23rd, 1939 and the evening attendance was most encouraging. Eight children appeared that afternoon for the opening session of the Sunday School, while the following day a meeting for women was inaugurated. Since that time the story of the church has been one of striking progress. On the fateful September 3rd, 1939, the Rev. D. Rigden Green began his work as assistant minister of New Road with special responsibility for Cowley and served the new church with devoted ability until he left to become a R.A.F. chaplain in 1942. A variety of organisations came into existence, church attendance increased and the Sunday School grew rapidly, having today some 200 scholars and twenty-five teachers. The first church membership roll contained sixteen names; members now number forty-four.

Rev. S. C. Crowe of Blockley, the present minister, was invited to the pastorate in October 1942. Under his leadership

the church continued to thrive undeterred by the difficulties of war-time. He and his people rejoiced together in the first Baptismal service, which took place at New Road on September 8th, 1943. Baptisms each succeeding year emphasised the need of a baptistery at Cowley and, early this year, that need was met by voluntary labour.

Annual Gift Days since 1941 have brought in to the church funds a total of £640 and during the same period £368 has been subscribed to the Baptist Missionary Society. Weekly offerings for 1948 amounted to £245. Further evidence of the vigour and spirit of this young church is seen in the fact that each year it has accepted ever larger responsibilities for its own ministry, that the cleaning of the premises is carried out by a rota of women members and that redecorations and the tending of a colourful church garden are undertaken by the men. The Cowley members, however, are the first to testify to the wonderful help they have received in many ways from the New Road church, but for whose magnanimous friendship the cause at Cowley might never have shown the remarkable promise it now displays.

Here, then, in the midst of a great, new industrial community stands this busy, friendly and forward-looking young church. The main church building has yet to be erected. Meanwhile the progress that has been made and the work that is now being done entitle the John Bunyan Baptist Church, Cowley, to be regarded as one of the most successful projects undertaken by the denomination during the last decade or so. While it still awaits the completion of the building scheme, as its present minister has well said, "The building of the true Church, which is the fellowship of believers, goes forward and does not wait on permits, licences or money. It is the Church of the Living God."¹

G. W. H.

The above is the first of a series of short accounts we hope to give of the origins and prospects of some of our newer churches.

¹ *And They Began to Build. The Story of John Bunyan Baptist Church, Cowley, Oxford, 1939-49.* By S. C. Crowe. Obtainable from the author, 10, Liddell Road, Cowley, Oxford, price 1s. 3d., plus postage.