

EDGEWELL GOSPEL HALL - HISTORY

Edgewell's story begins in 1928, when a few Prudhoe locals began their 'Cottage Meetings' in each other's homes. Three years later, Edgewell Gospel Hall is built, providing a venue for meetings to be held and also for weddings, wedding receptions and community events for those who lived nearby.

Throughout the 1970s, Edgewell went through a period of decline, with many members moving to nearby Wylam, depleting the numbers at the gospel hall significantly.

That proved not to be the end of the story as in 2009, Edgewell Christian Centre was re-established, and the hall reopens. As with many fresh starts, it was soon a case of 'out with the old, and in with the new' - the hall was demolished in 2011 and reconstruction began.

In early 2012, Edgewell Christian Centre's new building opened, and is used for meetings, outreach, and local community events.

A DETAILED HISTORY OF EDGEWELL ASSEMBLY 1929-2003

by Joe Hardy (with additions by David Gray)

The urban district of Prudhoe, of which Edgewell is a part, consists of a number of small communities. These were from East to West:

West Wylam, Oaklands, Moor Road, Prudhoe, Edgewell, Eltringham, Low Prudhoe, Mickley.

The majority of residents were pit people with large families. The place where people lived depended on the pit they were employed. The districts listed above, each had a chapel (usually primitive Methodist), and the centre of Prudhoe, as well as having a Methodist church, also had an Anglican church.

The exception was Edgewell which had no meeting place for believers. It was in Edgewell that God began a work born out of the prayers of three men, burdened about this.

Mr James Wallace was a company secretary. Mr Albert Shilling was a local businessman and Mr Joe Heron was a miner. They had a common faith and a common burden for Edgewell. They were people who obeyed the authority of the Word of God and were led by the Holy Spirit.

Three men with different backgrounds and personalities were united by their desire to be led by the Lord in establishing a Christian assembly where people could meet together in grace and truth, love, and obedience; where the Lord would lead His people and the Gospel would be proclaimed.

These simple gatherings at Edgewell began in 1928 in people's houses in what were known as 'cottage meetings'. They were marked out by much prayer and dependence on the Lord and the proclamation of repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Helped by another brother, Stanley Heron, a butcher's shop was used in 1929 after hours for meetings. The lectern was the shop counter.

During this period, many souls were saved, baptised, and added to the assembly. People's homes and the shop were too small for the number that now met and in fact some people stood out in the streets of Edgewell to hear both the Gospel and the ministry of the Word. As a result of this, plans were drawn up for the erection of a hall where the people could meet together.

This was much prayed about, this and the determination that the Lord would lead, guide, and provide. There was a simple dependence on Him and an obedience to His Word. The believers in the assembly used what resources the Lord gave them and worked together with the builders to build their hall; and eventually in 1931 the hall was complete. This was solely by the grace of God and His enablement.

The Holy Spirit was moving amongst both the tightly knit assembly and the community of Edgewell. There was power, freshness and liberty at the gatherings, and a large number of teenagers as well as older people were saved.

Prominent names were:

Lesley Johnson, Enid Charlton, May Haylton, Betty Boon, Ellie Tulip, Elsie Barron, Helen Tulip, Mr and Mrs Lowdon and their entire family, and many more people. All these were baptised in the River Tyne at Bywell. There was much joy, happiness and praise as the Lord was obeyed and followed.

During this time, Christians from other churches in the area were drawn to the simple gatherings to the Lord Jesus. There was amazement at how we were dependent on the Lord Jesus, the authority of the Bible, and the doctrines of believer's baptism, autonomy, headship, unity, etc.

The breaking of bread meetings were especially significant as in deep reverence, silence, prayer, meditation, hymns, and Scripture readings, young and old remembered together the Saviour who had died for them. There was reality, tears, and joy as, very simply, we gathered around the common elements to remember our Lord.

Others saved during this time were:

Old Mrs Coulson, Young Mrs Coulson, Mr and Mrs Barron, Mr and Mrs Shepherd, Mr and Mrs Hamilton, Mrs Dorothy Newburn, Stan Bell, and many others.

Joe Heron was responsible for organising the teacher and Albert Shilling the Gospel witness with William Wallace responsible for the administration of the assembly.

Other leading brethren were:

Charley and Andy Thompson, William Sloan (a great Bible teacher), Frank Sloan, John Elliot, Leslie Batler, Matthew Gascoigne, and Tom Carr.

There was also a deep spiritual affinity between the assembly at Haltwhistle and ourselves at that time.

At this time, 1931, as a lad of 18 I came into church fellowship.

I was saved while attending the Methodist church at Mickley when I was 15. Just an ordinary pit lad, working in the local mine. As well as attending Sunday services, I was a member of the Bible class and the Christian Endeavour. Soon I felt God calling me to preach and I began to seriously study the Word of God. I became a preacher as a young teenager in the Methodist church.

I then heard of the meetings at Edgewell. Meetings there didn't begin until 8pm, both because of miners' shifts and the desire not to interfere with the services at other churches. There was such a desire for the Word of God that these meetings went on late into the night, even though the next shift would begin in the early hours. People in the area were walking quite a distance to the meetings at Edgewell as it was felt the Lord was present there.

I enjoyed the meetings and discovered the truth of assembly fellowship and witness. I was particularly helped in my studies by Mr Wallace. I became aware of my need to be baptised and of fellowship in a church that met according to New Testament principles. This was not easy for me as I had many Christian friends and a ministry at Mickley.

After much prayer I left the Methodists and was warmly accepted into fellowship at Edgewell on June 13th 1931. I look back with much gratitude unto the Lord leading me to the saints at Edgewell and the richness of fellowship there.

Tuesday nights became well-known in the area as a time of Bible teaching and there was much rich ministry given that was a great help to many.

What was important to us to proclaim:

- The Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Christian doctrine and truth
- The truth of believer's baptism
- The responsibilities of church fellowship
- The Christian life
- The Deity and humanity of our Lord
- Prayer
- Salvation only through the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus
- Loving Christian fellowship with other believers in the Lord Jesus
- The absolute acceptance of the Bible as THE and only Word of God
- Faith in a True God

The Gospel was preached in houses and in the open air both at Edgewell and Prudhoe blacksmith's yard (now the locomotive bus stop). Edgewell became well-known as a place of love and fellowship where the broken-hearted were healed, the lost found, folk welcomed, and where Christians found support and encouragement in each other as they followed their Lord.

It was fundamental to us to be a blessing and encouragement to each other; to be united in purpose as well as life; to appreciate our different gifts and be a help especially in times of trouble; to love and serve each other. As there was much opposition and criticism outside, we felt we needed to always look to our Lord. We held conferences in the Methodist church (kindly loaned) in Prudhoe.

We would walk together singing hymns of ascent to the conference held by the assemblies at Wylam and Consett. We'd borrow lorries to go to the convention at Keswick. Young and old sitting in the open air on top of their tents and provisions enjoying the beautiful scenery of the Alston Moors and fellowship together, to be built up by the ministry at Keswick and return spiritually refreshed. These were precious times.

Yet during these times there were difficulties both from the unsaved who mocked us and sought to disrupt the work, and even other churches who criticised us. These were difficult times, yet the Lord was with us and blessed us. As time went on, some were called home and others were moved out of the area by the coal board.

In the 1970s, some from the community at Edgewell were moved to West Wylam by the council so that new families from elsewhere could move into our houses at Edgewell. This had a devastating effect on the assembly, as in those days, few had cars or were too old to walk as buses were rare.

Numbers became few. We were greatly helped, though, by:

John Hood, Leslie Waite, Harry Bell, Norman Robinson, Jim Hedley, Alec McClennen, William Archibold, Jim Warne, and Ernie Sayers.

But in the early 1980s a children's work was established by a young couple with often 50 children attending the Gospel club. During this period, the women's meetings, children's meetings, young people's meetings, and ministry meetings were established once again. The young people's meeting attracted over 30 teenagers, and this led to Alec McClennen from Chowdene to come and help with the work. The women's meeting was especially well attended with the hall full most of the time, and it was well known throughout the area for its hospitality, faithfulness, and food.

Around this time, we began one of the first services in the country designed specifically for those with learning disabilities, enabling them to understand and participate, and as a result, we advised other churches how they too could do this.

Folk in the community were visited regularly, and people were helped. There was much prayer and souls were saved. There is a deepness and a richness of love and fellowship which we enjoy to this day.

The testimony kept going and the hall never closed. Rather, the Gospel work (helped by Norman Robinson, and Gospel campaigns led by Jim McMaster and Ian Campbell), the women's work, and the work amongst the disabled continued until 2009, when others joined the Assembly, and the building was renamed Edgewell Christian Centre.

I pray the Lord will bless the work at Edgewell and that the community will respond to the call of the Gospel and be won for our Lord Jesus Christ, added to the number, and be built up in our most holy faith.

Written by Joe Hardy