



Pastor's Page

"Swift to Bless"

It was a beautiful day as we headed off for the Devonshire town of Exeter. The purpose of the journey was to attend the memorial service of Mrs Margaret Swift. Though I never met this lady I felt that it was right for me to be at this service as she holds a vital place in Selly Park Baptist church history. Margaret Swift, who was Margaret Fasham at the time (sister of Bill Fasham Edwin's father), was the first person to go out from Selly Park Baptist church as a missionary over seas with the Baptist Missionary Society.

Margaret who grew up in Bourneville, Birmingham was a teacher and following a broken engagement (in 1933) decided to go on a year's exchange to Canada where she taught at a School near Niagara Falls. Sailing out from Southampton on board the "Empress of Britain" she was looked after by a handsome steward called Bill Swift. She had a wonderful time during her year in Canada but at the end of her exchange was looking forward to returning home. As she boarded the "Empress of Britain" once again she was surprised to be met by a certain Bill Swift who she'd met on the voyage out 12 months earlier. She was not booked into his section of cabins but Bill had managed a swap with another officer on board!! He looked after her wonderfully again and by the time they arrived back at Southampton he had proposed to her. She turned him down on the basis that he was too old for her! (She was 26 and he was 40) He pursued her with gifts but she resisted his charms! She went back to teaching in Dudley! Then in September 1935 (a month later) she attended a BMS meeting at Selly Park Baptist church (her home church) where a young missionary from China named Bill Upchurch was preaching. She felt that the message was just for her (Isaiah 6 "here am I send me") After the meeting Bill Upchurch grabbed her by the lapels of her coat (not a method that BMS use these days!!) and said "You're a teacher aren't you? That's just what the Baptist Missionary Society need". And so although quite fearful of the implications of 'Missionary work' and still being pursued by Bill Swift to marry her, she obeyed God's call and signed up with BMS. She trained for just 3 months at Carey Hall and then on 2 June 1936 had her valedictory service at Selly Park Baptist church before leaving for the upper Congo.

She served God for 22 years in Africa and was due to return from furlough to the Congo in 1958 when she suddenly went down with pneumonia. The illness was so severe that she went into a coma and ended-up in what was known at that time as a mental hospital for 10 days. Following this she suffered for about 18 months with chronic depression. However Bill Swift (remember him?) had always kept in touch with Margaret even though he married another lady. In 1964 Bill's wife died and later on a Selly Park Baptist church holiday in the Isle of Wight Bill (now aged 73) proposed again to Margaret who this time (30 years after the initial proposal) accepted! They married in November 1969 and enjoyed 21 years together before the Lord called Bill home in 1990. Margaret lived for another 20 years serving the Lord in her local church until God called her home just 3 weeks ago. And as she herself said in later life "One thing of which I am sure is that God has had His hand on my life, over all these years" What a testimony – what a lady!

11th October 2009