



The Eltham Paint and Revival Book Centre

Tucked away in the bottom left of the Pacific Ocean, about three hours flight away from any other country, is New Zealand. There are three main islands, North, South and Stewart, with the North Island being the most populated.

Auckland is the largest city in the north of the North Island and Wellington, the nation's capital, is at the bottom of that same island. Ferries carrying trains, trucks, cars and people have a three hour trip from Wellington to the South Island.

The areas in between Auckland and Wellington are not as highly populated. Hastings, Napier and Gisborne are over on the warmer, drier east coast and on the opposite west coast there is a rounded bump sticking out into the Tasman Sea where an 8,260 foot dormant volcano has created a rich fertile semi circular province called Taranaki. Because of the size of the mountain towns have sprung up around it. New Plymouth city, the largest, is in the north of the province. State Highway 3 runs from New Plymouth through Inglewood, Stratford, Eltham and Hawera on the eastern of



the mountain (land side). It then heads south east and out of the province to Wanganui and Palmerston North.

This true story takes place in the province of Taranaki, under the mountain of the same name. It is centred on the little town of Eltham, population of a little over 2,500. The time of our story is between the 1970s to today. There are two specialist dairy factories and a meat works; plus lots of smaller businesses and shops in the town. From its beginnings in the 1870s through until the late 1980's it was a service centre for the factories and the local farming community. It was a typical small New Zealand town.



Eltham, Mt Taranaki

Owen Ernest Bailey (known by all as Bill Bailey) was born in Eltham in the 1930s and after being in the peace time army in the 1950s married Frances from Wanganui.

Soon after they were married Bill and Frances moved back to Bill's hometown of Eltham. Bill went to work for Bert Crockett at the local Caltex petrol station. The agreement was that within a year or so Bill would buy Bert out; and that is what happened.

At this stage Bill and Frances were denominational Christians with an interest in the Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Ghost. They held a Bible study group at their house and both loved the Lord working in their lives.

A man called Gordon Sprange had come to know a little of the message that Brother Branham preached. He lived over on the east

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coast of the North Island. Meanwhile in Taranaki a butcher called Don Wickham had become a Christian and started travelling around New Zealand preaching; living by faith. While on the East Coast he ran out of money and, needing food, fished off the beach. He prayed, of course but nothing seemed to happen. Behind him a man walked up and down the beach. That man was Gordon and eventually he approached Don and said, "I don't know if you'll believe this but God has told me to feed you."

Not only did Gordon feed Don and his wife physical food but he introduced Don to the Message of the Hour.

Don passed on his new found knowledge of the Message at Bill and Frances Bible study group. He introduced the concept that God had sent a prophet for this age. This was in the late 1960s when Bill



Bill Bailey

started to hear the message on old reel to reel tape recorders.

Bill felt compelled by God to sell up the petrol station and to purchase the rather rundown Eltham Paint Centre just along High Street. Before taking over the shop Bill and Frances attended Faith Bible College in Tauranga. Suffering from gall stone problems Bill felt very ill. Frances prayed for him but there seemed to be no answer. Coming into the room again Frances saw how terribly ill Bill was and running screaming from the room she fell on her knees and prayed with an earnestness she had never felt before. Bill felt a cool hand move into his body, close around the source of the pain and draw it out. Immediately Frances was screaming, "You are healed, I know you are healed."

On return from college Bill renamed the shop the Eltham Paint and Revival Book Centre. He enclosed an area at the back of the shop and stocked it with Bibles and Christian literature. The rest of the shop was a standard paint and wallpaper shop of the seventies. Frances and Bill's mother helped show Christian films at the shop. They soon got a reputation as evangelical Christians. Even the Anglican minister would rush in, then turn and look up and down the street before saying, "I don't think anyone saw me coming here!"

Bible Studies at Bill's continues. Bill also bought a house for the group to hold Sunday services in. Whenever Don Wickham was in the area he taught, but he taught different things from the mainstream Pentecostal messages of the time. He talked about the Godhead; of God being one person with three offices, not three persons. He taught the need for a prophet for today and he shared stories of King Saul, and how the people had chosen a king before God's choice, King David, was old enough.

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The people of God thought that what they had was the real thing, and they would run things just like the other denominations, (countries) around them. Ishmaelites were not the true line of God. They were the physical children of Abraham but not of the promise. Always interested in money and they looked spiritual but would pass the offering plate many times.

The next day, after one such meeting, a carload of men from the Bible study group stopped outside the paint shop and queried Bill about the teachings. Bill was about to explain when God spoke to him.

God said, “Shut up!”

Bill was absolutely thrilled. At last he had heard directly from God. And then the meaning of what was said struck him. He stood looking into the car, bemused, not knowing what to do or say. After a few moments the car simply drove away, and that Bible study group never met together again. Bill and Frances were alone for some years.

Meanwhile on the other side of the world in England Richard Oliver married Margaret Joyce and they settled down to life in Bedford, attending London Road Methodist Church. In 1972, as per pre-marital agreement, they set out for New Zealand. Arriving in New Plymouth in November, after some 8 weeks at sea, they attended the Whiteley Methodist Church. Across the road was a dynamic pastor, Tom Woods, and the Olivers soon became Presbyterians. By 1976 Richard was working as a representative for a paint and wallpaper wholesaler and he had become an ordained Presbyterian elder with the Pentecostal experience.

One day he called at the Eltham Paint and Revival Book Centre in High Street as part of his normal call cycle. He found the manager, Bill Bailey, reading his Bible. Feeling like Philip, who saw the

eunuch in the chariot reading Scriptures, Richard asked Bill if he understood what he read. Bill said, “I am reading Exodus, and thinking about how Passover is like a person becoming a Christian, accepting the blood of the Lamb of God with the angel of death passing over. This is only the beginning of a Christian’s life, of course. Every thing about the journey to the Promised Land is a type of a Christian’s walk. The Red Sea with, our past life trying to take us back into captivity, is a “Type” of water baptism in Jesus name. Pharaoh and his armies drowned when Israel went under the water and out the other side. And when they received the 10 commandments they were 50 days out from Passover; 50 days after Passover is Pentecost. All Christians must receive, not the law to life the life as Israel did at Sinai but the Holy Spirit to live Christian life just as the original church did in the upper room. And so the talk went on. Some hours later, bemused but thrilled that the Bible had types and patterns, Richard left the paint shop.

This was the first of many hours of discussion, study, and thought. Borrowing the old reel to reel tapes from Bill, he listened to the prophet William Branham. Many, many hours were spent in that High Street shop talking over what Brother Branham said in the sermons.

Thrilled with the way the Bible became a new book Richard passed on many of the simpler message teachings to the Presbyterian Sunday school and the Bible study group he was leading. When “Car less days” were introduced where, due to fuel shortages, everyone in New Zealand had to nominate one day of the week when they were not allowed to use their car. As Richard used a company car the Sunday was the chosen car less day. As a result he and Margaret were unable to attend Saint Andrew’s in New Plymouth and instead walked to the local combined church in

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Oakura. Becoming part of the Taranaki coast circuit Richard was asked to start a youth meeting in Okato. Ross Donald and Paul Moffitt were two of some 20 youths who attended the Okato meetings while the Friday night Oakura Bible Study grew to some thirty or more. Several of these were added to the Oakura church.

Late in 1980 the Eltham Paint and Revival Book Centre had to move from its small High Street shop to a larger Bridge Street shop and in 1981 Bill employed Richard. The Oliver family, then six strong, moved to Eltham.

The shop had a corner at the back where Bibles and Christian books were for sale but much of the “heavier” message material was put on display in a little room behind the main office. Those wanting meatier spiritual food went there.

Bill suggested, as Richard and Margaret had attended the Eltham combined church and found it un-inspirational, that the two start a small Bible study on Wednesday nights. John and Margaret Harvey, then living in the north Taranaki township of Oakura, decided to make the one-hour 15 minute trip each Wednesday to Eltham to be a part of this new group and brought with them several others from Oakura and Okato.

The paint centre attracted all sorts of people. One man from the Salvation Army called in to ask about water baptism. It was suggested that this be explained with his wife present so she wasn't left out. Another couple wanted to come and hear what was being said and so Bruce McKee, now pastor of a message church in Cambridge, and his wife Marlene received the Christian baptism message. Another young man and his wife came into the shop one day believing in a worldwide conspiracy but thinking there must be even more behind it than just man's manipulations. Adrian and

Mary Gray were baptised shortly after. One local farmer used to come in to argue Christian doctrine saying that we were wrong. Eventually in disgust he would walk out of the shop only to return to open the door and shout, “You're wrong!” before striding off up the street. We baptised him, Alan Herbert, his wife, and Alan's brother and many others during those years.

Not all were successes, several people came into the shop, listened to what we had to say and took a copy of the Seven Church Ages never to be seen again. One man woke up in the night and was convinced that God was telling him to take the Seven Church Ages back as it was false doctrine and evil! Others came for a while, soaking up some teachings to head off on missions that they believed were God inspired. Nothing came of any of those.

There were times when several people were baptised at once. On one occasion a woman who had smoked for years and had as many smokers do, lost her sense of smell rose up out of the water and shouted, “I can smell again!” Another person was in the Mormon (Latter Day Saints) church. Bill and Richard baptised him in the Waingongoro (snoring waters) river. It was in flood from the melting snow on the mountain, freezing cold of course, and both Bill and Richard had trouble keeping their feet. When he came up he let go of Bill and Richard as he felt so happy and free. They had to grab him quick before he floated away!

About this time Richard started to write Christian articles in the Stratford Press. As agents for the Press the shop had some free advertising space. Bill encouraged Richard to write each week and to avoid possible problems the articles were termed advertisements and finished with “Published By Arrangement.” This took up some

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space so the articles soon finished up “Richard Oliver PBA.” Quite a few people came to believe that those three letters were a university degree and Richard was highly qualified!

The impact the shop and the adverts was having was quite significant. The Local Salvation Army closed down; most of their key people having come into the message. The Stratford Press came under fire for allowing the publication of Richard’s Christian messages, not from atheists or agnostics but from the combined ministers of orthodox churches. The Press refused to back down but then some business advertisers approached the Press demanding the articles cease. The Press editor rang Richard to explain what had happened and that although he was not a Christian he had checked all the articles with the Bible references given and could find no fault with them. Rather than cause trouble for the Press Richard offered to stop producing them. A local printer was resurrecting the Eltham newsheet at the time as a monthly free paper and Richard has continued writing Christian articles in the “Not the Eltham Argus” under the heading BBC (Bible Bashers Corner). The articles are still published today. Interestingly some ten years ago the Eltham Ministers Meeting tried exactly the same pressure to stop the message articles being written but no commercial pressure was applied.

The Eltham Paint and Revival Book Centre expanded. A similar shop was opened in Manaia and the shop staff increased from two to five.

The Bible study group expanded and also went through some splits. Many left, never to be seen again, some became super spiritual wandering off to seclusion, rather like monks, but many still believe today. Fewer new people called at the shop with spiritual questions.

By 1986 times had changed, Richard started his own business and Paul Moffitt became manager of the paint centre before moving on. Bill and Frances sold their business in 1989 and about that time Brother Ed Byskal, from Canada, came to New Zealand and preached a change of dispensation. Richard and Bill started Sunday services in Richard's home.

By 1992 the group had grown to 60 and a new meeting place was needed, so the school hall in Eltham was hired. It was felt by the group a full-time pastor was needed and Paul Moffitt was elected.



Brother Paul Moffitt

Meanwhile the new owners of the paint centre changed the name and later took the business to New Plymouth.

It seems very difficult for an ex leader and a new leader not to butt heads occasionally and in spite of the best intentions on both sides in 1994 it seemed best to Richard to simply back away from what was now very much Paul's church. This church moved to their own building in Stratford and became the Rapturing Grace Tabernacle. They have continued to thrive.

After a short time in the doldrums and holding small family service with Bill and Frances a few souls were added and the new church in

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Eltham was born. Growth was slow with Judith Bunyan and her family joining years before Tony Watts and Emmerson Bourne came along and were baptised in the late 90s. We have continued to be able to preach the gospel and spread the message. The Eltham Message Church now numbers a little over 20 souls.

Bill died in February 2006. The crematorium in New Plymouth was packed, both the Eltham Message Church and Rapturing Grace Tabernacle attended as well as friends, relatives and past customers of the Paint Centre. Richard asked those who were directly brought to Christ by Bill to stand. Some 30 people stood. The effectiveness of conversion is not necessarily in the number of people converted but how many people those people then bring to Christ. So then Richard asked for all those who were brought to Christ by any of those standing to stand. Some extra 60 to 70 people then stood. He then asked for anyone brought to Christ by any of the new ones standing to stand and another 30 to 40 stood.

A true seed planted will always re-produce after its kind.

The legacy of some men is in lands and buildings, for others it may be in silver and gold, but the legacy of Bill Bailey and his Eltham Paint and Revival Book Centre is in changed lives for Christ, changed lives that have continued to change other lives. And that legacy has reached out to serve others. Bruce McKee is now pastor of a message church in Cambridge, New Zealand. Paul Moffitt is Pastor of the Rapturing Grace Tabernacle and goes on missionary trips regularly world wide as does Adrian Grey.

Our web site has brought us into contact with the rural Message Churches in Uganda so while Paul and Adrian minister in very many countries we, different as always, concentrate on the



Richard and Margaret Oliver

Ugandan church principally through Pastor Charles Basalirwa in Kamuli.

The Rapturing Grace Tabernacle and the Eltham Message Church now work in close harmony on several projects such as the annual New Zealand Message Ministers Meetings, missions and other support as well as the occasional pulpit swap.

God's love is growing throughout the Message world wide. It has brought the Taranaki churches together and many other New

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Zealand message churches into a more caring and loving relationship. But, for quite a few in our small corner of the world, it all started in a paint, wallpaper and Christian bookshop in the small country town of Eltham.

The Eltham Message Church just after Easter 2007

