



This true story takes place in Taranaki, a province on the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand way down in the bottom of the South Pacific. The story is centred on the little town of Eltham, population then of about 2,000 people.

The town nestles under the 8,260 foot dormant volcano named Mount Egmont by Captain Cook but known as Taranaki by Maori.

Eltham, at the time of our story, was a bustling farm services town with two dairy factories, one of which supplied specialist "Galaxy" brand cheeses and rennet, the other processed cheese slices, a meat-works, the headquarters of a power board plus farm supply specialists and a whole range of family owned retail stores and businesses. It was a typical small New Zealand town of the 1970's and early eighties.

Owen Ernest Bailey (known by all as Bill Bailey) was born in Eltham in the 1930's and after being in the peace time army in the 1950's married Frances Seddon from Wanganui. They moved back to Bill's hometown of

Eltham where Bill bought and ran the local Caltex petrol station.

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.

On the other side of the world and back in the late 1940's through to the mid sixties an American evangelist had an incredible ministry. His name was William Branham. Not a denominational man he preached divine healing with stupendous results. Many felt called to follow in a similar vein. In the 1940s and 1950s William Branham was the inspiration for people like AA Allan, Tommy Hicks, Tommy Osborne, and Oral Roberts, to name just a few.

As the years went on, the emphasis in Branham's ministry changed. The messages or sermons that he preached became deeper, though were still completely scriptural. People started calling him a prophet.

A man called Gordon Sprange had come to know a little of the message that Brother Branham preached. Gordon lived over other coast, the East, of the North Island from Eltham. Meanwhile on the West coast in Taranaki a butcher, Don Wickham, had become a Christian and started travelling around New Zealand preaching and living by faith.

While on the East Coast Don ran out of money and, needing food, was fishing on 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 the physical food they needed, but he introduced Don to the messages of William Branham.

Don passed on his newfound knowledge of the Message at Bill and Frances' Bible study group. He introduced the concept that God had sent a prophet for this age. Bill managed to get some old reel-to-reel tapes of "Brother" Branham's preaching and started to hear the message on his old tape recorder.

Around this time Bill felt compelled by God to sell up the petrol station and to purchase the rather rundown Eltham Paint Centre just along High Street. It all happened in a single day, the Caltex station sold and the paint centre was purchased.

Before taking over the paint shop, Bill and Frances attended Faith Bible College in Tauranga.

Suffering from gall stone problems Bill fell 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. Running screaming from the room she fell on her knees and prayed with an earnestness she had never felt before. Bill suddenly 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."

God was confirming His sovereignty and preparing a man for a job.

On return from college Bill renamed his newly purchased 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.

They were really evangelical for those days! Frances, together with Bill's mother, helped show Christian films at the paint shop and Bill would talk to anyone who would listen. They were well known for their pentecostal style Christianity. Even the local Anglican minister would rush into the shop, and then turn and look up and down the street before saying with a grin, "I don't think anyone saw me coming in here!"

Bill and Frances held Bible Studies at their house with a group, some of those who had gone with them to the Faith Bible college. The group grew into a church and Bill 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 than the mainstream Pentecostal messages of the time.

The Pentecostal church in America had rejected William Branham's teaching although they respected his healing ministry. William Branham taught that there was one God in three offices while most Pentecostals seemed to want to stay with the established denominations and preferred the more standard trinity doctrine of God in three persons.

One of Don's bible studies at Bill's home was on the difference between Ishmaelites and Israelites. The next day a carload of men from the Bible study group stopped outside the paint shop and Bill went out to talk with them. They queried Bill about what had been said the night before as they couldn't understand Don's teaching. 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.

That first church, created in part, from the Eltham Paint Centre, died. Bill and Frances were alone with William Branham's tapes for some years. Don would call in from time to time.

I met Don in 1977, just before he died, when Bill invited my family and I to a BBQ at Lake Rotorangi, just out of Eltham. A short time previously, as a representative for a paint and wallpaper wholesaler, I had called on the Eltham Paint Centre as part of my normal call cycle. I found Bill reading his Bible.

Being a Presbyterian elder I thought I could be of some help. (Oh how the proud fall!)

Feeling like Philip, who saw the eunuch in the chariot reading Scriptures, I asked Bill if he understood what he read. Bill said, "I am reading Exodus, and thinking how exactly that whole story is a picture of a Christian's life."

I was dumfounded. I had never heard of Old Testament stories being a parable, or type and pattern, for things Christian. And I must have stood with my mouth open for Bill explained things further. He pointed out that just as the Israelites had to sacrifice a lamb for the family we must accept the sacrifice of Jesus as our lamb. The blood of the lamb painted on the doorpost and lintel

of their homes is the same as Christians proclaiming their faith. The angel of death passing over their homes is the same as God's promise to us of eternal life.

Bill talked about how each stage of the Israelite's journey from Egypt to the Promised Land was exactly like a Christian's journey through life. The Israelites crossing the Red Sea was water baptism, Mount Sinai was their Pentecostal experience. There the Israelites received the law to live the life while Christians receive the power to live the life. And yes, time wise it fits for Moses was up the mountain receiving the law 50 days after leaving Egypt, in other words at Pentecost.

Bill pointed out that Christianity is a journey but too many people stop at some nice spot on the way. Evangelists and the Salvation Army are still in Egypt, preaching acceptance of the Lamb. And someone has to do that, it is a calling, but it isn't all there is. People should move on toward the Promised Land once they have that salvation experience.

Many people are stuck at the Red Sea, their past life is trying to recapture them. But, as with the Jews on the beach, the pillar of cloud holds Pharaoh and his armies back. There is only one way forward, water baptism. Their past life and influences are drowned, they are free.

The Baptists have it partly right, preaching baptism by immersion (though they incorrectly use titles "Father Son and Holy Ghost" and not the name Lord Jesus Christ as Acts 2 verse 38 instructs). But baptism is not a place to stay either. The people are not in the Promised Land yet. There are still more battles and experiences to go through.

Mount Sinai and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is another key point on the journey. Unfortunately too many have circled this mountain too long and made the Pentecostal experience the be all and end all of their Christian life. Mount Sinai is not in the Promised Land, but it is on the route.

We are on a journey, Bill explained. We should not be trying to find a place to settle down in this life, our home is beyond Jordan!

I couldn't believe it! Here was a shopkeeper telling me more about the Bible than anyone else had ever done. And he used Biblical stories to illustrate Christian truths. I had been with some wonderful believing ministers in several churches in my time but here was a deeper truth. I wanted to get to the source of this understanding. I soon found that this was an American named William Branham.

This was the first of many hours of discussion, study, and thought spent in the Eltham Paint Centre. Borrowing the old reel-to-reel tapes from Bill, I listened to Brother Branham's sermons. They came complete with scratchy sound and noisy background. Margaret, my wife, couldn't hear a thing, only a noise.

Thrilled with the way the Bible became a new book I passed on many of the simpler message teachings to the Presbyterian Sunday school and the Bible study group that I was leading at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in New Plymouth at the time.

I didn't realise how far I was moving in my understanding of the Bible until a Monday evening church leaders meeting. I had used the blackboard on Sunday to illustrate the Jewish feasts, and what they represented, to a Sunday school class. The diagrams were still on the board and the Assistant Pastor grinned and said, "Better rub that out. Our elders won't have a clue what it's all about."

Then, in 1979, came "carless" days.

In those times there was a world wide fuel shortage and to reduce petrol consumption the New Zealand government decreed that each car could only be used six days a week. Our car was owned by Taubman's Paints, as I worked for them at that time. They, most selfishly I thought, insisted that the firm's carless days be either a Saturday or a Sunday. Our one day without the car was to be Sunday so we could no longer drive from our beach township of Oakura into New Plymouth for services at Saint Andrew's. We walked instead up to Oakura township's little combined church. And that was the beginning of something rather special for us.

There was only one minister to cover the five Methodist and Church of England churches on that part of the Taranaki coast. He was desperately short of preachers and it wasn't long before I was taking services from Opunake to Oakura. When carless days finished I was also asked to run a Youth Club on Sunday evenings in Okato.

That youth club had two teenage boys and one girl who were particularly "switched on" to what I was able to teach in the short Bible Study times we had amongst the games. Paul Moffitt, Ross Donald and Jan Corbett would have been thirteen or fourteen years old then.

Meanwhile my wife Margaret and I were friendly with the Singfield family and Kathy, in particular became interested in Christian things. She started attending our local church and her three kids came along too.

One Sunday another young family attended church service in that little church in Oakura. The Harveys owned a farm a bit further down Surf Highway 45 at Tataramaika. One of the elders from the church and I decided to call on that couple one Wednesday night as part of our outreach programme. John Harvey was at home, his wife Margaret, a nurse, was out. After the normal uncomfortable small talk I got on to the four spiritual laws. God has a plan and purpose for each life but there is a gap separating us from God. Jesus Christ has bridged that gap by His death on the cross and, if we believe that and ask Him to accept us in prayer then that original God planned life is ours. Without any hesitation John Harvey accepted Gods gift and became a Christian right there and then.

Margaret and I held Bible Studies on Friday night in our home on Victoria Road and those studies grew, both in people attending and the message understanding of the Bible. Kathy, John, his wife Margaret plus one of the first friends we had as new immigrants to New Zealand, Kate Moir were frequent attendees. There were often between twenty and thirty people at each meeting and, if I remember right, we once had over sixty.

One of the issues I had at that time with William Branham's teaching was water baptism. Not only did he agree with the Baptists that it had to be full immersion, a burial and rising up to a new life (Romans 6), but, unlike the Baptists, he taught it had to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Father Son and Holy Ghost were titles Branham claimed. The name revealed to Christians of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is Jesus.

Well I couldn't see it. I had been baptised by sprinkling as a baby in a Methodist church and I had been confirmed as a teenager in one too. All was done in the name of the Father Son and Holy Ghost. What was the fuss about?

Bill at the paint shop said, "You will go no further until you have been baptised right!"

I laughed. I was able to catch biblical and message concepts quickly, I could explain things so others understood, and our local group was growing. Why did I need to get baptised again?

I spent a whole year going nowhere! Nothing new was revealed to me in that time and, although I was reading my Bible, listening to those reel-to-reel tapes and talking with Bill on most visits to the Eltham Paint Centre I was not moving forward.

After a year I admitted defeat and agreed that baptism by immersion in Jesus name was the right way to go. So, in 1980 Geoff Goldup and Bill Bailey baptised me in the Waingongoro (snoring) River in name of our Lord Jesus Christ as in Acts 2 v38. It felt as if a warm comfortable but restrictive blanket had been lifted off me so I that could run free in the summer sunshine again. Immediately new understandings came, not least about water baptism and the vital role it plays.

A series of water baptisms followed including our friends from the Friday night group, but Margaret, my wife, wasn't interested. Then one Saturday she said, "I think I had better get baptised." She told me later that she had seen a change in me, and the longer she watched the further away I seemed to be getting. She didn't want to be left out and rather than lose me she decided that she too must be baptised. However there must be no delay or she might change her mind.

We grabbed a couple of towels crossed over Surf Highway 45 to the banks of the Oakura River just before it met the sea, I baptised my wife by immersion in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Margaret described how a wall of bricks inside her came crumbling down and she was free.

That night when I put on a reel-to-reel tape of Brother Branham's she could hear every word. It was no longer just a noise. Whatever had stopped her from hearing the message had been, like Pharaoh's armies, drowned in the waters of baptism. She had risen to a new life of freedom.

Then in 1981 I was sacked from Taubman's. Our new Sales Manager, who himself was fired a few weeks after he fired me, had decided I wasn't the sort of salesman he needed and that was that.

As soon as he heard the news Bill phoned and offered me a job. Initially I declined. It would mean moving from warm seaside Oakura to the cooler small industrial service town of Eltham some half an hour from a decent beach.

By this stage the Eltham Paint and Revival Book Centre had moved from its original small site on High Street into what was then the main shopping area of Eltham, Bridge Street. Bill and his builder friend Geoff Goldup were still finishing the shelving and counter arrangement when I rang Bill to tell him I had bad news, I was coming to work for him.

And so for a short while there were three "Message Believers" working at the paint shop though Geoff left, once all the building work was completed, to run his own business.

The Olivers moved to their present 1920's wooden villa in Eltham in 1981. John and Margaret Harvey helped us shift. But that South Taranaki winter was hard. We still owned our small place in Oakura but eventually decided to sell that and re model and insulate our larger but cold and draughty house on Tayler Street.

The Eltham Paint Centre had a corner at the back of the shop where Bibles and Christian books were displayed for sale. 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. At least that was the idea. Having arrived in Eltham Margaret and I wanted to get into the local scene. We, and our four kids, attended the Eltham combined church and found it totally un-inspirational. Nothing else looked interesting so I started to attend an evening Bible study at the local Open Brethren Gospel Hall. Margaret stayed at home as baby sitters were scarce and she was pregnant again.

The study at the Brethren Church was on the early chapters of the Book of Acts. Having had the Pentecostal baptism of the Spirit with speaking in tongues and having been involved in some really heavy spiritual warfare I found the leaders explanations that the Baptism of the Holy Ghost was only for the first few years after Christ's death to help set up the church rather sad. The sincerity of that church was great but being sincere was not the same as being sincere and right. I wanted truth, not doctrines of why this or that part of the Bible didn't apply to today.

It was frustration at my activities with the combined and Brethren churches that prompted Bill to suggest that the two of us start a small Bible study on Wednesday nights at our house. We started with just Bill and Frances and us two adult Olivers. Geoff and one or two others met with us on a couple of occasions, but it was pretty obvious that they were far more spiritual than us at that time. Margaret and I were more of a hindrance to their freedom of worship and so they held their own meetings while Bill and the Olivers met on Wednesday night on our own.

It wasn't long though before John and Margaret Harvey decided to make the one and a quarter hour trip each Wednesday to Eltham to be a part of this new group. Then they brought with them several others from the Oakura area. And that was the beginning of the first Message church in Taranaki.

Meanwhile the paint centre attracted all sorts of people. "Bugs" Bunyan was part owner of the Stratford Press, the local weekly newspaper. As their agent he would call each week to collect adverts and we would hold discussions on anything remotely Biblical. As a result he agreed that we could have a small column in his paper, however we had to agree that we would always include the term "Published by Arrangement" so it was absolutely clear our writings were not by the Stratford Press.

So I wrote slightly provocative Christian articles and I always added my name at the end with the "Published By Arrangement" statement. Space got tight and that statement got shortened to PBA so my articles finished, "Richard Oliver PBA." One reader was overheard to say one day, "I don't care if he's got qualifications with letters after his name, he's wrong!"

Another person who was convinced we were wrong was a local farmer. He used to come into the shop, not to buy anything particularly but to argue. He and Bill had a really heavy "discussion" one day and he stormed out of the shop. A few moments later he slid the door open again and shouted, "You're wrong!" slammed the door shut and stormed out. He came back twice more over the next ten minutes, shouting, "You're wrong," before storming off again. We baptised Alan Herbert, this red headed farmer, his wife Sue, Alan's brother and his wife not long after that stormy start. He joined Geoff and his group a little while later.

One day I found a local meat worker from the factory, and Salvation Army member, was standing at the Bible area in the corner of the shop. He asked about water baptism. As Dave Brogden explained, the Salvation Army, officially, do not believe that water baptism, or communion, is necessary. The church point to the thief on the cross who accepted Christ as he was dying. Jesus told the thief that today he would be with Him in paradise. Their argument was that if the thief can make it to heaven without communion or water baptism then there can be no need for anyone else to do those things.

The fact that the thief couldn't do either, that Christ hadn't yet died for our sins is overlooked. Also overlooked is that Jesus had given the keys to the kingdom to Peter and Peter had not yet used them to allow people in. (This was first done in Acts 2 v38 some fifty days after the crucifixion.) But

the Bible clearly states water baptism by immersion in Jesus name and Communion are both are necessary.

Dave knew the Salvation Army teaching but God had placed in his heart a belief that baptism was necessary. We talked for a few moments but it was pretty clear that a fuller in depth Bible study was necessary so I offered to visit him at home and go over this. I also suggested that his wife be present. Already we had seen too often where a wife or a husband gets interested while the partner often gets left behind. Then all sorts of problems start. Dave popped back later to check if it was Ok for another couple to come and hear what was being said and so Bruce McKee and his wife Marlene received the Christian baptism message along with Dave and Judith Brogden. All were baptised and for a while came along to the Wednesday evening meetings. Dave and Judith leaving to attend a Whanganui Church and Bruce and Marlene staying until the late eighties. By now Paul and Ross, the two young teenagers from Okato, were leaving school to start university study or work. (The New Zealand school year finishes in December for the summer holidays.) The Okato Bible Study group I had been involved in starting during our Oakura days was holding a Christmas farewell to those members now moving away and old leaders of the group were invited, including me. There came a time in the evening when previous leaders could say a little something.

When my turn came around I gave a succinct version of four thoughts from some of Brother Branham's Christmas messages, Why Shepherds, Why Bethlehem, Why the Wise Men, and Why a Stable.

The name Bethlehem means the House of God's Bread, and Jesus was the Bread of Life. Where else could He be born?

God could have revealed the birth of Jesus to the political leaders or to the priests, but they expected a King of the Jews to set up His kingdom here on earth. It wouldn't look right having the new King of the Jews being a baby lying in a manger in a building built only for animals. But the Messiah was not coming to set His kingdom up on earth at this time; He was coming as the sacrifice. And anyway, who were the experts in selecting and recognising the sacrificial lamb? Shepherds! So Jesus' birth was revealed to shepherds, not church leaders.

And then there were the wise men. They had seen the signs in the stars while others missed them completely. Unlike so many, they were wise enough to act on those signs. Logically they knew that the King of the Jews would be born in the Palace. They also knew that this new King would be the new religious leader. This meant that He would be born in, or near the Temple. Both the temple and palace were in Jerusalem, so that is where they went. But the palace and the temple didn't know of this new King. The birth place was not to be found by logic. King Herod, the then current ruler in the palace, asked the priests from the temple where this King would be born. The priests quoted God's word, (Micah 5 v2) in Bethlehem of Judea. The wise men then made their wisest decision. They would ignore their logic and follow God's Word instead. Then, and only then did the star move! It showed them the place where Jesus was. If anyone accepts, and acts, on God's Word then a heavenly light will guide them as well.

And why was Christ born in a smelly fly ridden animal barn? Because no matter how dirty and filthy your heart is, Jesus wants to be born there.

As a result of this short talk Ross, Jan and Paul wanted to know where such teachings came from, so I told them that God had sent a prophet. They still follow Christ's leadership today.

Another young man and his wife came into the shop one day. They were of a political bent and were certain that there was a worldwide conspiracy. Another, who had discussed political things with us, had sent them to us. The shop office had a settee, and in winter an open wood fire burned in the grate. It was a cosy spot, the desk was in the corner out of the way. Bill led the couple to the settee and, with warm drinks in front of a nice fire, they talked. Bill tended to agree, there was a conspiracy but not of man's making. There was more behind it than just man's manipulations. Bill discussed with Adrian and Mary Gray the Bible teachings about this world and all the systems and organisations behind the scenes. It all belonged to Satan! Satan even offered all the kingdoms of this world, past, present and future, to Jesus. Jesus never disputed that they were Satan's, but He wouldn't worship Satan to gain them. Brother Branham's quotes were used and shortly after Adrian and Mary were baptised.

Not all visits were successes. Several people came into the shop, listened to what we had to say or simply argued or walked away. Many took a copy of the Seven Church Ages book 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. He did so, right in the middle of a busy late shopping night with lots of people clustered around the counter! Being called a purveyor of satanic literature while trying to serve customers can be embarrassing!

Others came for a while, soaking up some teachings only to head out on missions that they believed were God inspired. Nothing came of any of those. I have noticed again and again people who want to be someone special, who want to be a leader, will find a bit of truth then major on it, turning it into a doctrine. They may be popular for a while and gain following. Most survive less than a year; and generally they and their followers forget Jesus. The few who do survive tend to finish as pastors running inward looking churches convinced they are the only real believers, isolating themselves from others.

There were times when several people were all baptised at a time and we had queues formed. 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 I baptised him in the Waingongoro River. It was in flood from the melting snow on the mountain, freezing cold of course, and both Bill and I had trouble keeping our feet. When he came up he let go of Bill and I. He felt so happy and free. We had to hurry downstream to grab him quickly before he floated away completely!

Around 1982 the Eltham Paint and Revival Book Centre expanded. A similar shop was opened in Manaia and the shop staff increased from two to three and eventually to five. We each took turns to work in Manaia; about 20 minutes drive away. I balanced the firm's books there but that was only once a month. The other days, in between serving customers, were taken up studying or listening to Brother Branham sermons. By now many of these sermon tapes had been cleaned up and were in cassette form from Voice of God in Jeffersonville, Indiana.

Two people came into the message through the Manaia Paint Centre, Robynne Andrews and Stephen Barrett. Robynne was into spiritual things and automatic writing was her thing then. However when spiritual Christian things were discussed she latched on quickly and soon saw that writing for what it really was. Stephen was working as a house painter. He had a BSc in Economics but, always the unorthodox, he was painting houses for a living. His wife Claire was, and still is, a nurse.

The Wednesday night Bible study group expanded. The evening started with songs from Scripture in Song books plus a few other favourites. Then, from around 9PM we did Bible study. These studies were based on what I had heard in Brother Branham tapes or on a sermon of his I had read.

There was plenty of time for discussion, questions and we often didn't finish until about midnight. Paul and Ross had come along, travelling in John Harvey's minibus on one particular evening and the talk that evening had been on water baptism. On the trip home John asked the boys, "Well. What about it?" So, at something like 1.30 in the morning, lit only by the headlights of the van, John baptised Paul and Ross in the Oakura River.

The impact the shop and the articles were unintentionally 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 our Christian messages. Opposition came, 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 publication of the articles cease. The Press Editor rang me to explain what had happened. 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 I offered to stop producing them.

It was at this time around 1985 or 86 that a local printer resurrected the Eltham news as a monthly free paper so I continued writing Christian articles in the "Not the Eltham Argus" under the heading BBC (Bible Basher's Corner). Interestingly, in the mid 1990's, the then Eltham Combined Ministers Meeting tried exactly the same pressure to stop the message articles being published but this time no commercial pressure was applied. These BBC articles are still published today but in the Opunake and Coastal News. Our Eltham printer friends have retired and shut up shop.

Paul Moffitt came to work for the shop, as did Kathy Singfield. John Harvey and his wife Margaret moved from Tataramaika, to a farm near a place called Te Wera, inland from nearby Stratford

while Paul and his wife Sylvia moved to Eltham, and Kathy and Peter Singfield moved to a lifestyle block just outside Eltham.

We produced a newsletter called Axehead, which we mailed around New Zealand. (It was named after the axe head that fell off the axe into a river. Elijah raised that axe head to the surface again.) As each member of the group grew spiritually they wanted to do their own thing. Adrian and Bruce both started their own groups.

Another message church preacher from outside Taranaki hired a hall in Eltham and preached that Bill and I were no more than modern day Korah and Dathan's, trying to take the place of the prophet.

Just to keep the pressure up we also had husbands accusing us of brain-washing their wives and wives accusing us of breaking their marriages because we had taught their husbands lies. Parents and grandparents rang us, upset because their child was proposing to marry a weird Christian girl from our church and we were to stop it. And so it went on.

By 1986 times were changing. Few new people called at the shop with spiritual questions. The big barn retailers were influencing the paint retail business, the dairy industry in our province of Taranaki centralised in Hawera; sales and profit margins were falling.

In 1987 things were tightening financially and Bill asked me if I could find some other work. I started my own business, and Paul Moffitt became manager of the paint centre before moving on. Bill and Frances sold the Eltham Paint Centre in 1989 and Bill retired from business.

The Bible Study group went through several splits. Many left, never to be seen again, some became super spiritual wandering off to seclusion, rather like monks, but many of that early group, and their children, still believe today. We are not all in one local church now but we are in harmony again.

Bill remained a great friend and elder, especially my elder, until his death in February 2006. The crematorium in New Plymouth was packed for Bills funeral. Both the Eltham Message Church, which I pastor and Rapturing Grace Tabernacle in Stratford that Paul Moffitt then pastored, attended as well as friends, such as Geoff Goldup, relatives and past customers of the Eltham Paint Centre. At the funeral service I asked those who were directly brought to Christ by Bill to stand. Some 30 people stood. I added that the effectiveness of conversion is not necessarily in the number of people converted but rather how many people those converted people then brought to Christ. I then asked for all those who were brought to Christ by any of those standing to stand. Some extra 60 to 70 people then stood. I then asked for anyone brought to Christ by any of the new ones standing to stand and another 30 to 40 stood. Three generations of Christians have been born through the witness and life of a shopkeeper in a small rural New Zealand town.

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 since reached across the world.

Where are the key players now?

Paul Moffitt worships with us in Eltham, Ross lives in Rotorua, but several of those early believers worship at the Rapturing Grace Tabernacle in nearby Stratford. John Harvey is deacon at that church, as is Bruce, Kate Moir's husband. Kathy Singfield and Robynne Andrews are members of that same church. Bruce McKee is an occasional preacher at Malcolm Wano's message church up north in Moerewa in the Bay of Islands. Jan Corbett teaches message ideals with her husband in Tolaga Bay on the East Coast. Dave Brogden is a member of a message church in Wanganui. Adrian Grey, is missions focussed and, operating from Rapturing Grace Tabernacle. He, like Paul Moffitt, has covered a good part of the world preaching the message.

For every day there is a night, and for a few years after 1989 there was a night time, a breaking up and moving apart. But after night comes another day, a day of new churches, and new ventures. But that is another story.

For quite a few people in our small corner of the world, our real Christian walk all started in a paint, wallpaper and Christian bookshop in the small county town of Eltham; the Eltham Paint & Revival Book Centre.