

# **Central Baptist Church**

**Charles Street Leicester**

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**The William Carey Museum**

**A brief account of the life of**

**William Carey**

**1761-1834**

**Shoemaker, Missionary to India, Bible Translator,  
Social Reformer, Educationalist, Botanist.**

**Researched by**

**Graham Lee Archivist at Central Baptist Church**

**A more detailed account was written by Graham Lee in a  
book entitled 'Men with a Vision'**

**This includes accounts of William Carey's co-workers  
and other important Baptist pioneers, and preachers  
linked with Leicester and its Baptist Churches**

**It is available at the Church from the current Archivist Keith  
Harrison or Roger Beeby**

## William Carey.

William Carey was born in 1761 in Paulerspury in Northamptonshire. His father was a weaver and the parish Clerk, and later became the village schoolmaster. William loved adventure stories and read all about Christopher Columbus. He was also fascinated by nature and collected plants and small animals so that when he left school at the age of 12 it was natural that he should become a gardener. Unfortunately after 2 years he had to give it up as the sun was affecting his skin.

His father, realising that shoe-making was becoming an important industry in Northamptonshire, apprenticed him to a shoemaker in Piddington, about 8 miles from Paulerspury. Away from home for the first time, Carey mixed with careless companions, and turned away from religion. But his fellow apprentice John Warr came from a family of cobblers who were enthusiastic Christians, although they were dissenters. John lent him books on religion, and they started to attend prayer meetings in the adjoining village of Hackleton, and later Sabbath Evening Conferences where he was able to debate spiritual matters. Two years later he joined with others in forming the Hackleton dissenting church. He started to teach himself Latin and Greek.

In 1781 he married a sister of the wife of his employer. He was 20 years old and now he had a home of his own, with a garden he could cultivate, and a place where he could study.

In 1784 when he was 24 he secured the post of schoolmaster at Moulton, just north of Northampton and became pastor of the Baptist Church there at a stipend of £10 a year. He started to learn Hebrew. He also started to read "Captain Cook's voyages to the South Seas" and began to realise how many people in the world had never heard the gospel, and this troubled him.

In 1789 he was invited to become pastor of the Harvey Lane Church in Leicester, which after much thought and

prayer, he accepted. His stipend was still less than £40 a year. He lived with his family in a small cottage opposite the Church, and continued to run a school in the cottage and continued making and repairing shoes. He also continued talking about missionary work and was persuaded to write a pamphlet on the subject which was printed and published in Leicester in 1792.

His opportunity for a wider audience came at a meeting of delegates from Baptist Churches in the Midlands at Nottingham, where Carey preached on the second morning. His text was from Isaiah "Enlarge the place of thy tent and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations. Spare not. Lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes". The sermon was seen as a burning bush of missionary revelation, and Carey's message included the trumpet call "Expect great things from God: attempt great things for God". Nothing was decided then, but at a meeting of 12 ministers, a few months later at Kettering it was resolved to form the Baptist Missionary Society, and those present contributed £13.2.6d. From such humble beginnings was the Society formed.

Carey was keen to be the first missionary sent out, and had his heart on Tahiti because he had read about it in "Captain Cook's voyages", but early in 1793 he was in contact with Dr. John Thomas, a ship's surgeon, just returned from Bengal. Thomas was a committed Christian but, as they were later to find out, a great unfortunate, and a great blunderer. But he had done some missionary work and could speak Bengali. He said living was cheap in India and a missionary could support himself, though not, of course, at first. The Society decided that Carey should go to Bengal with him.

Carey's wife, Dorothy, was within a few weeks of motherhood so he took her back to Piddington to stay with her sister, promising that he would come back for her in 3 years. They decided that their eldest boy, Felix, 8 years old, would go with his father as a companion.

India was under the control of the East India Company, and permits were required to go to Bengal. Teachers and missionaries were not welcome, and no permits were likely to be issued. Thomas knew a ship's captain who he thought would take them, but there was the added problem that England was at war with France, and shipping had to be in convoy. They waited 6 weeks in the Isle of Wight, but just before they were due to sail the captain was warned that he would lose his command if he conveyed passengers without permits. The ship sailed without them.

Thomas discovered that there was a Danish ship bound for India due off Dover in a few days. By now, Dorothy had had her baby, and they travelled back to Piddington and persuaded her to go with them with the other children. She finally agreed as long as her sister went too, as a companion.

The voyage round the Cape of Good Hope took 5 months, during which time Carey learnt Bengali. They slipped into Calcutta in November 1793 and were loaned a dilapidated house, but within 2 months their money, which was intended to last a year, had run out, and they realised that John Thomas's enthusiasm outstripped his common sense. But he redeemed himself by recommending Carey as manager of an indigo factory with a salary of Rs 200 a month, and Carey wrote home to tell the Missionary Society that he was now self supporting. But the family suffered from ill-health, and his son Peter died. His wife, Dorothy was affected by illness and had a mental breakdown. They had had no letters from home for almost 2 years. Letters had been sent but had miscarried, partly due to the war with France. Even in the most favourable circumstances, a reply to a letter took a minimum of 10 months.

But Carey was not idle. Every Sunday he was out in the surrounding villages preaching, sometimes walking 20 miles a day. He found the people were willing to hear him, but he was distressed that he was not able to make even one convert. His walks gave him the opportunity to study flora and fauna, and he kept detailed records. He also quickly realised that Sanskrit was the key to other Indian languages

and learned that the Brahmins (the Hindu priest class) considered only a book in Sanskrit could be sacred. So he started to study Sanskrit and also Hindustani. By the Spring of 1797 he had completed his translation of the New Testament into Bengali. The problem then was how to print it since there were no printing presses in India.

It was in 1799 that Carey first witnessed the practice of "suttee", where a wife is burned on the funeral pyre of her husband. He was so horrified that he strove with all his might to get the practice forbidden, but it was not until 1829 that the Governor declared suttee illegal.

At the turn of the century he heard the good news that 4 families were on their way from England to join him and he had to try to organise accommodation for them. When the families arrived, the authorities refused to let them stay as missionaries were banned by the East India Company. But the Governor of the Danish settlement of Serampore came to their defence and granted them asylum. Carey had to move his family there to join them. The new arrivals included Marshman and Ward, and Ward was a printer.

The work of evangelism was hard and they were overjoyed when they made their first convert at the end of 1800. Carey had been in India for 7 years and was 39 years old.

A printing press was obtained and the the printing of the Bengali New Testament started. The work of translation continued including a version in Sanskrit.

In 1801 Carey was appointed Professor of Bengali at the East India Company's Fort William College in Calcutta and taught that language, and Sanskrit and Marathi also to the young men who were arriving as administrators for the Company. He thus had the opportunity to help shape their moral characters. He handed over all his income to the Mission keeping only a small amount for personal expenses. He held his teaching post there for nearly 30 years.

In 1807 Carey's wife, Dorothy, died, and although she had been mentally disturbed for some years, he never ceased caring for her.

In 1812 disaster struck the Mission – a fire destroyed the printing works. They lost paper, manuscripts, translations, and of course metal type in local languages. It took some considerable time to get back into production, but some translations were unfortunately lost for ever.

The Mission turned its attention to education and by 1816 had established a number of schools and had 8000 on the school rolls. They had to prepare and print text books in Bengali for the use of the pupils, as none existed.

Carey's thoughts now turned to higher education. He determined to build a college at Serampore which would be for the Indian rank and file, and open to anyone regardless of caste or religion. Most of the graduates would become schoolmasters, writers, doctors or lawyers, but he hoped a few would become preachers and spread the Gospel. He now realised that conversion could only be carried out successfully by native evangelists. The King of Denmark made a gift of a large house and grounds, and by 1821 an imposing new building has been erected. It cost £15000 which was provided by the missionaries from their own earnings. Over the years it has been extended and since 1827 has been able to confer degrees – the first college in India to be able to do so. The Principal of the college came to visit us in 2000.

Carey died in 1834 aged 73, never having returned to England. He and his colleagues translated the whole of the Bible into 8 languages, the New Testament into 27, and portions of the Old Testament into several other. He lived as he had urged his hearers in Nottingham "Expect great things; attempt great things".

Graham Lee  
April 2002.

## CHILDREN OF WILLIAM CAREY

**ANN** born at Hackleton 1782, died 1784

**PETER** born at Moulton 1789, died 1794

**LUCY** born at Leicester 1789, died 1791

**FELIX** born 20.10.1786 at Moulton. Baptised 1800 in the River Ganges along with Krishna Pal. In 1807 he was ordained and went as a missionary to Burma. After the sudden death by drowning of his second wife and two children in 1814, he spent three years roaming between Burma and Assam exploring and studying botany. He returned to Serampore in 1818 and worked as a translator. He died in 1832.

**WILLIAM** born at Moulton in 1788. In 1808 he married Mary Kinsey. He went as a missionary at Katwa. He died in 1853

**JABEZ** born at Piddington 12.5.1793. He was a law student in Calcutta. In 1814 he married Eliza Mills and was ordained in the same year. He went as a missionary to the Moluccan Island of Amboyna. He died in 1862.

**Jonathan** born at Mudnabatiy in 1794. He married Anna Pearce, and after her death, Sarah Butfield. He became a Supreme Court Attorney. He died in 1874.