

From slave to minister

THE remarkable life of a freed slave who became Britain's first black Baptist minister has been made into a short film.

The Revd Peter Thomas Stanford was born on a plantation in Virginia and kidnapped by Native Americans. But from these unpromising beginnings he would go on to become an educated and respected justice campaigner who crossed the Atlantic and thrived in Birmingham as minister of Highgate Baptist Church.

His story, with echoes of the Oscar-winning film *12 Years a Slave*, has now been made into a short film by History West Midlands (HWM), an independent organisation focusing on the history of the people of the area. HWM documented Stanford's life after his name was added to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. The resulting five-minute feature contains a contribution from Stanford's successor and Highgate's current minister the Revd Dr Paul Walker.

'To think that back in the 1890s an African American ex-slave was the minister of a white working class church is quite moving and profound,' said Dr Walker.

Peter Stanford spent the first years of his life on a plantation, but was kidnapped by Native

Americans following the abolition of slavery at the end of the US Civil War. He was subsequently adopted by a Mr Stanford – where he received his name – but ran



away after being mistreated. He met a Presbyterian minister who treated him well and assisted his pursuit of education. This resulted in going to Suffield College where he was converted to Christianity.

He was given work as a missionary to the black community in Hartford, Connecticut and became a Baptist minister before moving to Canada. He came to Britain in 1883 to raise money for his church, but would settle here for the next 12 years.

After moving around England he was attracted to Birmingham, and in 1889 received the call from the Baptist church in Hope Street.

He faced some major obstacles in his ministry, but would become a well-known public figure in the city. His talks at the town hall were always attended by many dignitaries. Under his leadership the church grew, having flourishing schools and organisations. When he retired the church presented him with a valuable gold watch.

Stanford was a well-educated man and wanted his race to benefit from the blessings of education and religion which he had himself received. He resolved to set up an institution to train black men and women to be missionaries in Africa. He returned to the US in 1895, and died of kidney failure there in 1909.

'Stanford crossed boundaries of race and class,' said Dr Walker. 'He crossed the Atlantic. He was a very significant person in terms of bringing disparate people together.'

He added, 'There is a large picture of him at the back of the church. Occasionally I look at it and am stunned to think that guy walked the streets I walk and was committed to the same things. It is a privilege to be the minister of the same church.'

To view the film visit <http://bit.ly/1IWqBKK>

'Unprecedented demand' at church-run winter shelter

A CHURCH-RUN winter shelter saw an 'unprecedented' number of guests this winter.

Hope 4, the charity which operates the Rugby Winter Shelter, said it had been faced with the 'heartbreaking' decision of having to turn away guests on many nights: its local churches can safely cater for 15 people, but it was often processing requests from 20 or more.

There had been similar increases at the drop-in, the Hope Centre, which is open seven days a week. More than 30 guests have been turning up on some days while the Centre has space for only 20. The charity is also experiencing increased demand for food both at Hope 4U in St Andrew's church and at the Rugby Food Bank.

The Revd Dr Michael Bochenski, minister of Rugby Baptist Church, is Hope 4 chairperson. He said a range of factors had contributed to this 'worrying rise'

'Our experience reflects what we are hearing nationally. Among



the factors that help to explain the worrying rise in numbers of those using charities like Hope 4 are benefit delays and refusals, especially for younger people, redundancy, growing rent arrears, the need to escape violence, addictions, family breakdown, and – increasingly – a serious shortage of affordable housing for those on the lower rungs of the ladder.

'There is evidence for all of these factors among those using

Hope 4's services here in Rugby each month.'

Solutions will not be easy to find, he acknowledged, and but they are needed desperately.

'As 2014 unfolds, we find ourselves under unprecedented pressure as a charity as the realities of "Austerity Britain" begin to bite.

'Hope 4 will continue to resist any attempt to be drawn into party political propaganda – especially as the 2015 election draws near. Our task is simply to get on with helping people in Rugby in need. This we try to do. It is the job of politicians, locally, regionally and nationally to come up with longer term solutions. But from our experiences this winter, these are needed desperately.'

Has your night shelter experienced increased demand this winter? What have been the reasons?

Email phobson@baptist.org.uk

'Merge congress and youth conference'

TWO major Baptist World Alliance (BWA) events should be merged because of falling attendances, according to General Secretary the Revd Dr Neville Callam

The Baptist World Congress and the Baptist Youth World Conference are held at five-year intervals, normally two years apart from each other. But while Dr Callam made the proposal amid concerns of declining

attendance at the two global events, he noted that a merger would transform both events and provide 'one vast opportunity for interaction among Baptists'.

'Over the years, attendance at these international events has been less than encouraging,' he told the BWA Executive Committee. 'The relatively small attendance has severely strained BWA financial resources and has had the effect of diverting

attention of BWA staff from other pressing aspects of the BWA mission.'

However, he added, 'It is important to note that what I am asking us to consider is the transformation of both the congress and the youth conference through their integration into one vast opportunity for interaction among Baptists,' he told the Executive Committee.

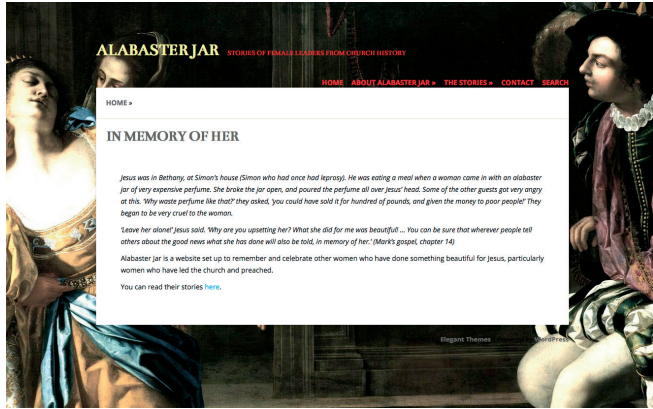
New website highlights the stories of Christian women

A WEBSITE telling the stories of women who have had significant preaching or teaching ministries has been created by a Baptist minister.

The Revd Dr Steve Holmes, a writer and speaker and Senior Lecturer in Theology at the University of St Andrews, chose International Women's Day (8 March) to launch Alabaster Jar – Stories of female leaders from church history.

He explained it began with a conversation with a female pastor of a church and prominent leader in her denomination. She commented in passing that she'd felt God's call when she was young, but didn't know of any role models.

'It's a story I'd heard before, of course,' said Dr Holmes, 'but the story hit me with new force then, and I made a vow that day that I would do whatever I could to make sure that the stories of the great female church leaders of the past were



heard and known by daughters across the world.

'Alabaster Jar is one way of trying to fulfil that vow.'

The site will feature women's stories from across church history, and Dr Holmes welcomes contributions.

'I hope it will grow to include hundreds of stories,' he said.

'I hope that perhaps someday

a young woman sensing God's call in a context that does not encourage her might discover some of these narratives of mothers in the faith and find the courage and faith to follow her vocation as a result.

'That's all.'

Visit www.alabasterjar.org.uk

Women celebrated in Angus exhibition

AN exhibition examining the changing roles of non-conformist women has opened.

Stethoscope and Petticoats is hosted at the Angus Library and Archive in Regent's Park College, Oxford.

To launch the exhibition, on Monday 10 March the Angus hosted a celebration of the role of women in ministry and the wider scene.

The Revd Jenni Entrican, the Vice President of our Baptist

Union of Great Britain, spoke, reflecting on the importance of remembering the stories of those women who have been 'pioneers', paving the way for others.

The event coincided with Regent's Park College hosting the Whitley Lecture: 'Always on the way and in the fray: Reading the Bible as Baptists' with the Revd Dr Helen Dare, followed by a service in the College Chapel.

'It was a truly fantastic event and we appreciate the opportunity to share our collection which shows the amazing contributions that non-conformist women have made to ministry, literature, medicine, education and social reform,' said a statement.

Two talks feature as part of the exhibition. Booking is essential.

For more details visit: theangus.rpc.ox.ac.uk

Navigating the Bible - teenage style

A FREE resource designed to help teenagers explore and engage with the Bible has been launched.

Produced in partnership between the Methodist Church and Bible Society, Navigate is designed for youth leaders to use with 11-15 year-olds as a basic introduction to the Bible.

There are five interactive sessions, which contain discussions, quizzes, creative and reflective activities as well as five short animations following the journey of Bob as he asks questions about the Bible.

'As Christians we take for granted that we should read the Bible, but we often don't ask why or consider the challenges it presents,' said Methodist Youth President Tamara Wray.

'This course is a fantastic introduction for young people to the most world-changing, exciting and significant book the world has ever seen.'

Bible Society recently conducted research which showed that 80 per cent of parents – 'religious' or not – thought it was important for their children to know Bible stories. However, a third of 15 year olds indicated that they have not read, seen or heard the Nativity story. This is why Bible Society has launched the Pass It On campaign to encourage parents and children to engage with Bible stories.

To download, visit <http://www.methodist.org.uk/navigate>

Exploring Assembly theme

A SHORT film of the Revd Dr Chris Ellis unpacking the Higher, Deeper, Wider theme has now appeared on the Baptist Assembly website.

Dr Ellis will become president of our Baptist Union of Great Britain at this year's event, which is being held in West Bromwich (10-11 May). The theme is the same for both his presidential year and Assembly.

'This theme comes from Ephesians, and from Paul's prayer for the church,' explained Dr Ellis.

'It is an encouragement to understand God as bigger than anything we can possibly conceive. There are things we want to say about God, they are all going to be pointing towards God, yet they won't in anyway capture who God is.

'We're going to go deeper, because as we have a vision of

how big God is, we have a sense of how small we are. And yet at the same time this God loves us and cares for us. His grace and forgiveness are important. As life knocks us about we discover the sense of resources of God's strength and his grace. In our weakness we go deeper.

'And we have a vision of this big, great, gloriously great God, who is concerned about the whole world, so we go wider. Not simply because we have a mission to go wider, but because God is already working in his world and calls us to join him and share in that witness.'

To view the film, visit <http://bit.ly/1idxAMr>

For more details about the Assembly and how to book, visit www.baptistassembly.org.uk



JOBS

Children and Youth Worker, Bessels Green Baptist Church
Deputy General Secretary (Administration & Resources), United Reformed Church
Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship), United Reformed Church
Full-time Lecturer, Scottish Baptist College
Full-time Youth Leader, Newbury Baptist Church
Chaplains, RAF

For more details visit: www.baptist.org.uk/jobs

BAPTISMS

Charlton Kings Baptist Church, Cheltenham: Christina Bryant, Laura Brookes 2
Dereham Baptist Church, Norfolk: Joao Ferreira, Vinicius Damasceno, Joel Ferreira, Rafael Martins, Matthew Heslop..... 5

Send notifications of baptisms, ministerial changes, deaths and testimonies to phobson@baptist.org.uk