

**George Ward Ainsworth  
(1882–1938):  
Brethren Evangelist**

Michael Ward Thompson

George Ward Ainsworth was a Brethren preacher active throughout Britain from 1902 to 1938. He was born in early 1882 in Blackburn, the eldest child of George and Mary Jane (née Rostron) Ainsworth. Ainsworth's parents were apparently married in St Alban's Catholic Chapel in Lark Hill, Blackburn in 1881.<sup>1</sup> George Ward's father had been a winding master in a Lancashire cotton mill but in the last decade of the nineteenth century he must have left the Roman Catholic Church and become a Nonconformist preacher.<sup>2</sup> Newspaper adverts from Scotland in 1900 and 1901 indicate that George Ainsworth, a '(Converted Roman Catholic), from England', was speaking of his conversion in Brethren halls around Lanarkshire.<sup>3</sup> In the 1901 census for Blantyre, Lanarkshire, George Ainsworth was boarding in the house of a coal miner and his occupation was recorded as 'Preacher'.<sup>4</sup> He died on 8 June 1902 in Lanark, Scotland, and his occupation then, as noted in the civil registration of his death, was 'Evangelist'.<sup>5</sup>

As a 19-year-old George Ward Ainsworth was working as cotton

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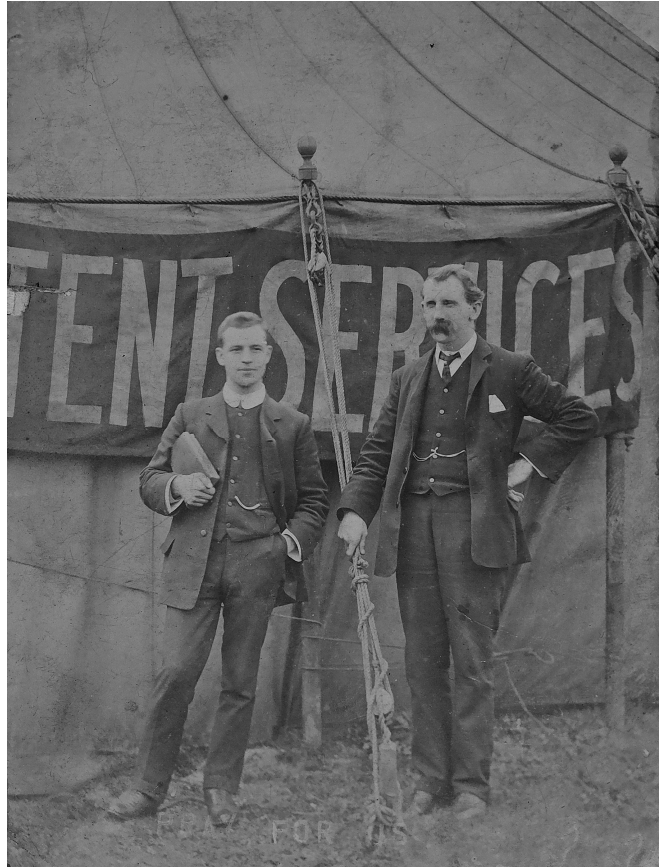
1 Alleged in a number of Ancestry.co.uk family trees. A civil registration record of the marriage exists. It is possible there is an OPR record from St Alban's as well. George Ward Ainsworth's paternal grandmother was a Dorothy Ward.

2 1891 census, where George Ainsworth's occupation is given as 'winding master cotton mill'. In the 1881 census his occupation is given as 'cotton weaver'.

3 *Motherwell Times*, 6 Apr. 1900, 2. See also *ibid.*, 31 May 1901 and 14 June 1901, 2. for Roman Road Hall, Motherwell, and the *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette*, 11 May 1901, 4 for Caledonian Hall, Greenock.

4 1901 Scotland census.

5 1902 Ainsworth, George: Statutory registers deaths, 638/1 101.



**Figure 1.** Postcard from Todmorden, 1907. George W. Ainsworth at left.

weaver.<sup>6</sup> Like his father, Ainsworth underwent conversion from Roman Catholicism, and it may have been the occasion of his father's death which spurred him to take up his father's evangelical mantle. Ainsworth seems to have begun his evangelism in 1902 when, in Blackburn, he joined the Open Brethren preacher Thomas

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<sup>6</sup> 1901 census.

Holt as part of the so-called 'Holt Party'.<sup>7</sup> For eighteen months, Ainsworth was one of the group's 'business-evangelists' travelling and preaching throughout the north of England and Scotland.<sup>8</sup> In 1904 Ainsworth left the Holt Party and struck out on his own 'to give himself entirely to the work of preaching the Gospel'.<sup>9</sup> In that year he is recorded as having held tent services in Cutsyke in the West Riding of Yorkshire.<sup>10</sup> He first appears in *The Witness* for 1906 in nearby Featherstone, and in that same year he established an assembly at Wyke while part of the Yorkshire Bible Carriage.<sup>11</sup>

In 1907–8 he was active with the No. 1 Yorkshire Bible Carriage in Todmorden and throughout Yorkshire.<sup>12</sup> A history of this Yorkshire movement states that 'George Ainsworth, a young evangelist from Lancashire ... was to become the resident evangelist in Yorkshire, one whose work was abundantly fruitful, not only in Yorkshire but throughout the British Isles'.<sup>13</sup> Here his 'inherent humour and buoyancy of spirit endeared him to all who knew him, rich and poor alike', even if 'he never invited himself to preach and he never sought publicity'.<sup>14</sup> A picture-postcard from the tent

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7 The date of 1902 is derived from the *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 22 Mar. 1937, 1: '...has been an evangelist for 35 years.' This news item contains a photograph of George Ward Ainsworth (see Fig. 2).

8 Places recorded include: 'Oldham, Rochdale, Liverpool, Northwich, Bradford, Halifax, Warrington, Whitehaven, Carlisle, Kilmarnock, etc.' See William Henry Clare, *Pioneer Preaching: Or Work Well Done* (London, [c.1925]), 90–1. This work contains a picture of the young George W. Ainsworth. See plate between 76–7.

9 *Ibid.*, 91.

10 David J. Beattie, *Brethren: The Story of a Great Recovery* (Kilmarnock, 1940?), Chapter 31 'Cutsyke'.

11 *The Witness* (1906); 55, 89. He was also at Bolton-Woods, Bradford (*ibid.*, 121), Wyke (159) and Leeds (167, 201) in that year. In Leeds it was reported that there were 'audiences of 1000 or more'. For Wyke see Horace Beaumont, *Seventy Five years of Telling Yorkshire: A History of the Yorkshire Tent and Bible Carriage Work* (Wyke, Bradford, 1974), 5.

12 See, for example, the *Todmorden & District News*, 26 June 1908, 5 and 8. There are a number of mentions of his services in this newspaper throughout August and September of 1908, although he does not appear in *The Witness* for this year.

13 Beaumont, *Seventy Five Years of Telling Yorkshire*, 4.

14 *Ibid.*

services at Todmorden in 1907 depicts George W. Ainsworth and a colleague, 'Mr Walton' (See Fig. 1).<sup>15</sup> Both of these men are mentioned in a newspaper item from June 1908 which states that, 'Mr. G. W. Ainsworth ... was associated with Mr Walton in the Gospel Tent Mission at Harehill last autumn.'<sup>16</sup>

In the 1911 Census, George Ward Ainsworth appears in Worcester as a visitor in the house of an Alfred Gardner and his occupation is recorded as 'evangelist'.<sup>17</sup> He next appears in *The Witness* for 1912 at Redcar in North Yorkshire.<sup>18</sup> In 1913 he had 'a little interest' in Snaith; 'some good times' in Rawcliffe; conducted a special Gospel tent campaign in Bargoed; 'had a good start' in Bubwith; before finally finishing off the year back at Rawcliffe Bridge.<sup>19</sup> *The Witness* of that year also noted that one of Ainsworth's sisters, Mrs Alexander Lauriston, 'bore a good testimony' on 9 November.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The text of the reverse places this event at Todmorden and the card is postmarked Sept. 1907. The text also states, 'P P C of two evangelists Geo Ainsworth the younger and Mr Walton the Elder'. This postcard is in the possession of the author. In Horace Beaumont's 1974 pamphlet, *Seventy Five Years of Telling Yorkshire*, 5, the gentleman on the right of the image is given as a 'Fred J. Chalker', but contemporary evidence suggests this is a mistaken attribution. Rather, it is likely the man depicted was a Robert Knox Walton whose occupation in the 1901 census is recorded as 'Evangelist—Preach'. Walton (1863–?1948) had a difficult early life—in 1871 he was with his siblings in the Elswick, Northumberland, Union Workhouse. He seems to have learned the trade of baker and by 1889 had moved to Glasgow where he married. This is very near the time Ainsworth's father was preaching in the area, and they may have known each other in the late 1890s. He was not anywhere nearly as prolific as G. W. Ainsworth as a preacher, and there is little evidence of his activities outside of 1907–8.

<sup>16</sup> *Todmorden & District News*, 26 June 1908, 5. The principal organisers of a conference held on 21 Sept. 1907 in Todmorden, and which included 'several Russian Brethren', were 'R. K. Walton & G. W. Ainsworth', see the *Todmorden & District News*, 20 Sept. 1907), 4. 'Expected' speakers for this event were 'Mr. W. H. Hunter, Mr. R. C. McMurdo, [and] Mr. H. Broadbent.'

<sup>17</sup> 1911 Census.

<sup>18</sup> *The Witness*, 42 (1912), 85.

<sup>19</sup> *The Witness*, 43 (1913), 85, 113, 141, 196, 281 respectively.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

George Ward Ainsworth's activities during the war years of 1914–18 are not as well documented as his pre- and post-war career, but it seems he did preach 'nightly ... to large crowds' at an army training camp near Ripon.<sup>21</sup> Shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, Ainsworth had moved to Harrogate.<sup>22</sup> The newly constructed Ripon Camp, a mere eleven miles north of the city, would become home to over 100,000 recruits, a fertile ground for the evangelist. Ainsworth's father, who had preached in Scotland, might have been especially proud that 'thousands of soldiers, particularly the Scots, heard the voice of God through [George Ward Ainsworth's] lips ere they left these shores, many for the last time.'<sup>23</sup> In addition to serving as an unofficial Chaplain at the camp, Ainsworth preached at the YMCA (possibly in Harrogate) and at 'Open Air Mission Huts' in the region.<sup>24</sup> During the years 1917–9 he held 'further tent campaigns in Rawcliffe and Rawcliffe Bridge...with particularly fruitful results'.<sup>25</sup>

How Ainsworth was able to avoid military service during the First World War is largely a matter of speculation. Although 32-years-of-age at the start of the conflict, Ainsworth was well within the military service age range proscribed by the Military Service Acts of 1916.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, given the Brethren's lack of formal organisational structure and anything approaching unequivocal written declarations of the movement's opposition to military service, evidence for exemption which would satisfy the Military Service Boards' tribunals

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<sup>21</sup> He does not appear in *The Witness* for 1914–17 or *The Believer's Magazine* for 1914–18, nor does he seem to appear in any newspaper reports during that time. The author has not had an opportunity to consult *The Witness* for 1918. For the quotation see Tim Grass, *Gathering to His Name: The Story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Troon, 2012), 331.

<sup>22</sup> Beaumont, *Seventy Five Years of Telling Yorkshire*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Under the first Military Service Act of 1916 all unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 41 were eligible for service. This was later extended in the second Act to include married men.

was difficult if not impossible to produce. In fact, it was known to these very authorities that Brethren were serving in both combatant and, more usually, non-combatant roles and with the support of important figures within the community. Conscientious objection on the basis of religious grounds was never a given for the Brethren nor was there ever an even unofficially unanimous position within the community regarding the moral rectitude or scriptural authority against military service.<sup>27</sup> It is known, however, that lists of accredited Brethren evangelists and full-time workers were supplied to the authorities, and those on them were given exemption as being religious ministers.

Following the war, Ainsworth next appears in December 1918 where he spoke to what must have been a substantial gathering at the Palais de Luxe Cinema at Lime Street in Liverpool.<sup>28</sup> The advertisement for that event gives him the epithet ‘of Harrogate’, which is often used to describe him in the following years, and it is possible that he was active in the Brethren assembly at Elim Hall on King’s Road of that city.

During the two decades from 1918–38, George W. Ainsworth was an incredibly energetic evangelist. His peripatetic meanderings are well documented in *The Believer’s Magazine* from 1921. Although many of the places where he spoke or held tent services were in the north, especially in Yorkshire, he travelled extensively throughout Britain from Scotland to the south of England.<sup>29</sup> For example, advertisements from 1928 indicate that he was speaking of his ‘life and conversion’ at the Woodcroft Hall in London, the home assembly of the builder, (later Sir) John Laing.<sup>30</sup> Two years later he

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<sup>27</sup> Elisabeth Wilson, “‘The Eyes of the Authorities are Upon Us’: The Brethren and World War I”, *BAHNR* 3: 2–17. For the views of Scottish Brethren regarding military service see Neil Dickson, *Brethren in Scotland 1838–2000: A Social Study of an Evangelical Movement* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 220–7.

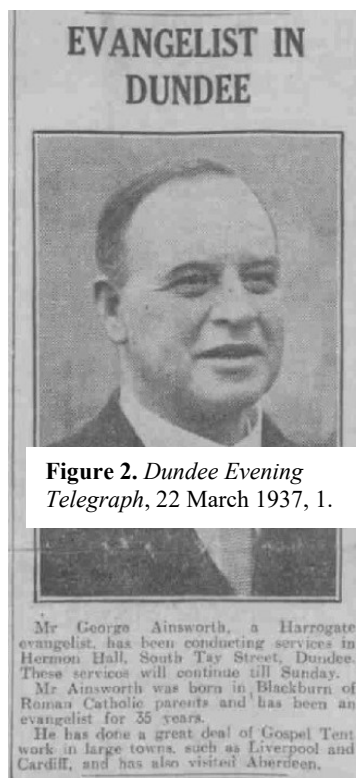
<sup>28</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 20 Dec. 1918, 5.

<sup>29</sup> It would be possible to reconstruct detailed itineraries from the reports in *The Believer’s Magazine* but no attempt has been made to do that here. In addition the author has not examined issues of *The Witness* from 1918 onwards where doubtless George W. Ainsworth is mentioned.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. *Hendon & Finchley Times*, 23 Nov. 1928, 8.

was speaking in a tent at the Hull Fair Ground where ‘old and new friends [were] cordially invited’.<sup>31</sup> In 1935 Ainsworth returned to his native Lancashire where ‘The well-known Teacher and Evangelist’ spoke at the Brookhouse Hall on Eldon Street, Preston.<sup>32</sup> A late example of his work in Scotland is contained in a news item from Dundee only a year before his death (Fig. 2).<sup>33</sup>

In April 1938 Ainsworth was speaking at Clumber Hall in Nottingham before moving to Wylam near Newcastle in August of that year.<sup>34</sup> By September he was in Cinderford, Gloucestershire where he attended an ‘annual conference’.<sup>35</sup> *The Believer’s Magazine* then indicates that Ainsworth was scheduled to speak at Doncaster on 19 November but he became ill on



**Figure 2.** *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 22 March 1937, 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 20 June 1930, 3. The other mentioned speaker in this advert is given as ‘Mr R. Scamwell’ which is a typographical error for the evangelist Reuben Scammell (1888–1960), who is attested in *The Believer’s Magazine* of 1925 as working with Ainsworth in Liverpool. See *The Believer’s Magazine*, 35 June, 1925, iii.

<sup>32</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, 24 May 1935, 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 22 Mar. 1937, 1.

<sup>34</sup> *The Believer’s Magazine*, 48 (1938), 82 and 193.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

the way and died at Bromley, Kent, on 18 November.<sup>36</sup> It has been said with regard to his relatively short preaching life that ‘the fragrant testimony he left behind was a fitting conclusion to a life which followed so closely the one who came to preach the Gospel to the poor.’<sup>37</sup> George Ward Ainsworth was buried on 23 November in the old Cemetery at Whalley New Road in Blackburn, the city of his birth.<sup>38</sup>

In 1911, at the age of 29, George Ward Ainsworth had married Mary Eleanor Jarvis in Blackburn. They do not appear to have had any children. In 1939 a year after her husband’s death Mary Eleanor was living at 50 King’s Road, Harrogate, very near to Elim Hall on that same street.<sup>39</sup> She died on 15 January 1947 and her passing was marked at Elim Hall.<sup>40</sup>

**Acknowledgements:** I thank Dr Neil Dickson for forwarding helpful comments from Dr Tim Grass and Dr Timothy Stunt as well as pointing out Ainsworth’s early connection with The Holt Party. Dr Grass’s suggestion that Ainsworth might be mentioned in Horace Beaumont’s *Seventy Five Years of Telling Yorkshire* was prescient as Beaumont’s work seems to contain the most substantial account of Ainsworth’s early career and character. I thank Ms Jessica Smith at the Christian Brethren Archive at the University of Manchester for sending copies of the relevant passages in Beaumont’s rare work. Finally, I thank Dr Stunt for helpful comments regarding Ainsworth’s father and early life.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 305 see the ‘Forthcoming’ entry for ‘Doncaster—Gospel Hall’. The civil registration of the death was recorded at Bromley. The National Probate Calendar states that George Ward Ainsworth passed away at the ‘Gretna Nursing Home, Blyth Road, Bromley, Kent’ although his place of residence is given as ‘Greenheys 50 Dragon-view, Harrogate’. The latter address is confirmed in two newspaper reports of his estate. ‘50, Dragon View, Harrogate’, in the *Leeds Mercury* (13 Feb. 1939), 7 and ‘Dragon View, Harrogate’, in the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* (13 Feb. 1939), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Beaumont, *Seventy Five Years of Telling Yorkshire*, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Register of Burials in the Burial Ground of Blackburn; Episcopalian Division, Section G/E/4557.

<sup>39</sup> 1939 census.

<sup>40</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 17 Jan. 1947, 3.



## REVIEWS

### **The Lausanne Legacy: Landmarks in Global Mission**

**Julia E. M. Cameron (ed.)**

**Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers; Edinburgh: Alban Books**

**200pp. ISBN 978-161970-830-3 \$12.95**

Arguably, the World Evangelical Alliance and the Lausanne Movement have been the two global bodies that have given a shared voice and a shared platform to evangelicals across the world and from many different streams during the past momentous forty years or so.

Momentous, because for the first time since Pentecost, and primarily in the last forty years, the Church has become truly global, and on a breathtaking scale. This is a sovereign work of God in his grace, but humanly speaking is the harvest of generations of faithful men and women sowing the seeds of the gospel. We are deeply privileged to see in our generation that harvest which those who sowed could only sow in faith. They did not see what we see, but they believed the day would come.

This recent story is mirrored in the Lausanne Movement story, and is illustrated through the documents and reflections brought together in this 200-page volume. Most of the material has been published elsewhere, and is also available online ([www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org)), but *The Lausanne Legacy: Landmarks in Global Mission* brings it together helpfully.

It begins with a brief history of the Movement, from its origins in 1974 through to the very recent past. It then gives us the three major documents that were birthed in turn at the three major Congresses held so far (there have been many smaller gatherings as well, but they have not been documented here): *The Lausanne Covenant* (1974), *The Manila Manifesto* (1989), and *the Cape Town Commitment* (2010). After each one is also included the closing address from that particular Congress. Interspersed between the paragraphs of *The Covenant*, is a study guide and commentary prepared by John Stott; and *The Commitment* includes a handful of