

George Cosens

(1805 – 1881)



**A potted history of the first black
Pastor in the UK and his time in the Black Country**

Robert Higginson & David Watts

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The Authors

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Robert Higginson

Robert is an engineer by background, with a degree in Electrical Engineering from Imperial College, London. After working for British Telecom he gained a theology degree studying at Birmingham Bible Institute. It was through being at BBI that he had contact with Cradley Heath Baptist Church and later heard about George Cosens.

The son of a Methodist Minister, Robert has studied some aspects of Methodist history. Growing up in various parts of England, his special interest is in North Staffordshire where he spent some years as a child, and where several of his ancestors lived. Now that his daughters, and two grandsons, live in Northern Ireland, Robert has a new part of the country to explore and appreciate.

Although he has yet to write a book, Robert has written magazine articles and edited a newsletter for his local “Neighbourhood Forum” community group. As well as preaching in Church, Robert has given several talks including a study of George Cosens the Primitive Methodist.

Robert’s wider interests include music, both singing in choirs since his school days, and more recently as a Church organist. He has also arranged various songs for choirs, and composed some pieces, including a “pop” song as well as several hymns. Adding to his language studies, he started to learn Hebrew after retirement.

David Watts

David is a retired senior local government officer and management consultant.

Having lived in the Black Country for 37 years, he has served local Baptist and Pentecostal churches as preacher and in various leadership roles.

A particular interest is nonconformist history, he has written a history of Black Country Baptists and is currently writing a history of non-conformist churches of the area.



Chapter One
George Cosens Primitive Methodist Years
1805 – 1832
From Jamaica to England
Robert Higginson

Our George Cosens was the son of a planter in Jamaica, also named George Cosens. His mother was one of the African women, originally brought as a slave, but who may have been freed as mother of the heir to the plantation. George Senior was probably a tenant farmer, the common practice for that time.

During his teens young George was sent to London to study. He was probably expected to take over running the plantation, but events in London changed that. One day, he and another student went to a Church to while away some free time. George became a Christian on that day.

Back in Jamaica, at that time Christianity was discouraged. In 1830 a law was passed limiting Christian activities. One Methodist missionary was put in prison for preaching too late in the evening and two Africans had houses demolished and they were imprisoned for their praying.

So, we are not surprised to find that young George was disowned by his family because of his Christian faith. He never returned to Jamaica.

We see the abilities of George Cosens that the Primitive Methodists made him one of their Ministers at the age of only 19. From London he went to the North of England, working mainly just south of the River Tyne.

Who were the Primitive Methodists?

In the 18th century the Church in Britain was very formal and lifeless. Several people, including John Wesley, wanted to revive the Church. Wesley described it as getting back to the “primitive” – original – Christianity of the Book of Acts.

In the 19th century the Wesleyan Methodists were also getting formal. A Methodist preacher named Hugh Bourne wanted to restore the original faith of Wesley. In 1813 his followers took the name “Primitive Methodist” from John Wesley’s words. They were inspiring preachers who saw many people become Christians.

The “Prims” were known for their Camp Meetings. These were big open-air events for prayer and preaching. The Wesleyans thought they were “not respectable”.

The Primitive Methodists also worked for the poorest people. Hugh Bourne wanted to “Educate the poor out of poverty.” He and other Christians started Sunday Schools because Sunday was the only free day when many working people could be taught to read, write, and count.

In the beginnings of trades unions, Methodist preachers would speak for the workers, and even go to prison in their place.

As well as preaching the Bible, a lot of George's work was to visit and comfort people with cholera. Some of his journals were published and often record his visits to hospitals.

In the North of England, George met, married, and lost Mary Burnett.

Mary was born in December 1797, in Birtley, about 10 miles south of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. She had become a Christian in 1816 and was active among the Methodists. She had begun with the Wesleyan Methodists. But in 1824 she attended a Primitive Methodist Camp Meeting and after some thought she joined the "Prims". This was the same year that George was appointed as a Minister.

In 1828, George was sent to Winlaton and met Mary soon after. They married on 24 June 1830 and their daughter was born on 17 July 1831. Mary died on Saturday 27 July 1831, aged 33. The cause of death is not stated, but her health had not been good for several months. After their marriage, George and Mary were sent to Durham. Mary often was not well enough to attend a Church service, which would have been one of her priorities.

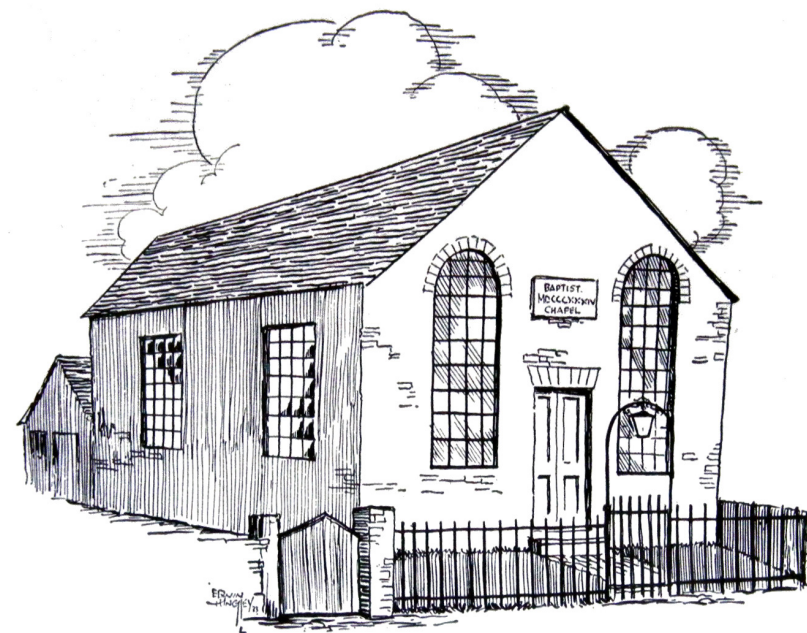
In May 1831, they were asked to move to Sunderland. This followed the death of two preachers in one of the earliest accidents on the railways, known as the 'Hetton Wagonway Disaster'. The birth of their daughter, who is not named in the records, went well. But a few days later Mary's health took a turn for the worse. The daughter also died a month after Mary. Perhaps Mary had been infected following childbirth, as was too common. This was more than three decades before Joseph Lister's research into carbolic antiseptic which saved many lives.

One of the Ministers present when Mary died was John Petty. We shall meet him again in Dudley. George was tasked with writing Mary's obituary, which was published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine in 1832. This gives some detail of George's life after many years when very little is known from the available records.

The "Hetton Wagonway Disaster" of May 1831 took place on a railway built by George Stephenson linking Hetton Colliery with docks on the River Tyne. This involved two Primitive Methodist preachers who were walking along one track and stepped onto the other track to avoid carriages coming towards them. They hadn't seen another train on the other track, which hit them both.

In that obituary, George shares examples of Mary's faith in God. She did not fear death. She prayed and quoted hymns, and she had words of praise on her lips. We read similar things in other Methodist obituaries. Their faith was triumphant.

These days we are more aware of how grief affects people. How much was the tragedy which George had experienced a factor in some of the following events? This may be seen in the following chapter, George's road to Cradley Heath.



THE FIRST CHAPEL, ERECTED 1834, ENLARGED 1850.

Cradley Heath Baptist Church original chapel building, sketched from memory by Mr Fred Southall, etched by Mr E Hingley for the centenary history book of 1933, digitised by Robert Higginson.

Chapter Two
George Cosens Primitive Methodist Years
1832 - 1837
From Sunderland to Cradley Heath

Robert Higginson

After the death of Mary Cosens, we next hear of George Cosens being chosen to be part of a mission to The Norman Isles – now called The Channel Islands. This is how it happened.

The Sunderland Circuit had a mission to Scotland, but this declined. At the same time there was a revival in South Shields. The master of one of the ships which traded between Guernsey and South Shields was converted, along with others from the Norman Isles. They asked for a Primitive Methodist preacher to be sent to Jersey and Guernsey.

The Sunderland and South Shields Circuits shared the cost. George Cosens was chosen, perhaps because “his colour would attract in open air services,” as one account suggested. John Petty wrote that the opportunity to learn French would help to start a Primitive Methodist mission to France. George must have been an able scholar to be chosen for this mission.

The shipmaster provided free travel. George set sail in May 1832. This was 6 weeks before his second wedding anniversary, 10 months after his wife had died, nine months after his daughter had died. The records in the Primitive Methodist magazine are of a good voyage, with opportunities for George to conduct Church services on board the ship.

Extracts from George’s Journal show that things went well at first. Churches grew through George’s preaching. He also spent a lot of time visiting people who were sick with cholera.

Another preacher, John Houghton, arrived on 22 August. His journal records that he “found Bro. Cosens quite worn down with excessive labours.” In the 21st century, we would ask whether this was George’s way of handling his grief, as well as because the needs of his work were more than one man could handle on his own.

George’s journal includes in the entry for 27 August 1832, “For several weeks the inhabitants of Jersey have been visited with that severe epidemic, the Cholera. Since its commencement I have scarce had time either to eat or

Methodist Circuits

This was an idea of John Wesley.

He appointed preachers to travel round an area to preach.

Starting with a whole county, these became a more practical group of 10 to 20 Methodist societies.

sleep, nearly the whole of my time having been engaged in visiting the sick and the dying.”

He writes of more than 300 deaths in 6 weeks. But he also writes of the meeting room being too small to hold the congregation attending Methodist services.

John Houghton wrote, “The labours of Br. Cosens have been made an abundant blessing, particularly in visiting persons sick and dying of cholera, The fearless and assiduous spirit which he manifested, was noticed by all ranks at St. Heliers, and has been the means of bringing our cause into general repute.”

Unfortunately, George was sent home in disgrace a few months later. In March 1833, at a meeting in St. Peter’s Port, Guernsey, some young people were misbehaving. In the process of telling them to behave, George used “an imprudent expression” which was not acceptable on Guernsey. He was taken to court for this and fined heavily.

An exaggerated report of the incident was widely circulated in The Gazette. This damaged the reputation of the work. George was sent back to Sunderland and in April he was replaced by John Petty.

We note in passing that John Petty soon became fluent in French. But the expected mission to France did not happen. Petty was sent to Cwm in 1835, and to Dudley in 1836 where he again met George Cosens.

The Sunderland Circuit then planned a mission in another part of England, this time in Dorset where Primitive Methodism was not widely established. Since George Cosens was one of their most able preachers, he was sent, with John Nelson as the senior Minister.

When they started to preach in Dorchester, the County Town, they faced a lot

What might George Cosens have meant by “Become a Christian”?

For George Cosens, becoming a Christian was more than just a name, it was a definite commitment to Christian faith as described in various statements explaining the Bible. Some people call themselves “cultural Christians” while even claiming to be atheists and speaking against Christian teachings. Others think of themselves as “Christian” because they were brought up by Christian parents.

For George, this also involved a change of life, which is part of the Methodism which he preached. As a Baptist, George would also have seen Baptism as a public declaration of Christian commitment.

of hostility. To drown out the preaching, guns were fired, the theatre sounded artificial thunder, and other noises were made to prevent people hearing. George had a bucket of water poured on him and was pelted with cabbages and other missiles. However, they persisted, and the opposition died down.

In Weymouth there was no such opposition. People listened peacefully, and in May 1834, George and John Nelson rented a large room for meetings of the new society. At that time everything seemed to be going well. But a difference of opinion arose between them, which would end by dividing their efforts. We may guess that George was still grieving for his wife, or that his colour was a factor. Perhaps he was already attracted towards the Baptists, whom he later joined.

George would not have been christened as a baby In Jamaica. The Primitive Methodists would not have baptised him as a new convert. But the idea of baptism may have come to George from his Bible study. Whether before or after the disagreement with Nelson, in 1836, he was baptised by immersion by Weymouth Baptist Church. This would have been a public event, perhaps in the sea or else inside their Church building.

Whatever the cause, the difference of opinion between the two leaders was so sharp it ended with both of them leaving the Prims and working with other Churches. John Nelson went to Manchester, but something about the argument with Cosens affected his relationship with Hugh Bourne, leader of the Prims. So in 1837 he joined another branch of the Methodists, the Methodist New Connexion.

Meanwhile George Cosens no longer felt at home amongst the Prims. He had been with them all his life since becoming a Christian. He had found his wife through them. He had given 12 years of his life working with them. But now he had to consider his future.

Who were the Baptists?

Christians in general have two different approaches to the practice of Baptism. One group baptises – christens – babies and expects them to make their own commitment when they grow up. Others say that only those who have already made a commitment should be baptised, and that Baptism is a public declaration of Christian faith. Methodists inherited christening from the Anglicans. Baptists began as one of the groups which started during the Reformation.

He joined the General Baptists, and from 1837 he was one of their Ministers until he died. After a few months as an assistant at Aylesbury, George Cosens came to Cradley Heath (Four Ways) Baptist Church in 1837.

According to an eyewitness, the arrival of George Cosens in Cradley Heath caused quite a stir. The whole town turned out to see him arrive by coach. Perhaps the “black minister” was a novelty. But he was a popular preacher and invitations to preach in other Churches soon came. The minutes book records a request being discussed in November 1837 for George to preach in Stourbridge.

The minutes of a meeting on 27 December 1837 record that a baptistry was to be built in the new church building, and that the rules drawn up by George Cosens were to be printed.

There are two minutes books which date from this time. It appears that one is the original book, started by Jabez Tunncliffe. The other may be a copy started by George Cosens, who copied out the original rules for the society. Just as the original 36 members had signed the book in December 1833, so the remaining 33 members signed the new book in 1837. The Church had been without a minister for 2 or 3 years, so George may have thought it better to start again. The rules were unchanged.

New people were added to Cradley Heath Baptist Church. Twice in 1838, an

How did Cradley Heath Baptist Church (Four-Ways Baptist Church) begin?

This started with Jabez Tunncliffe, who had been the Minister at Cradley Baptist Church. This is a Particular Baptist Church. Particular Baptists follow the teaching of John Calvin that Christ died only for a particular group of people known as “the elect”. The General Baptists believe that Christ died to save all, but only those who choose to believe are saved.

One Sunday in February 1833, Tunncliffe was challenged by something he read in the Bible to question Calvin's

ideas. The result was that he left Cradley Baptist Church and in December 1833 he and more than 30 others began what became Cradley Heath Baptist Church.

In 1834 they bought some land and built the first Church building in Cradley Heath.

However, in 1834 Jabez Tunncliffe was invited to pastor another Church and left Cradley Heath. Several years later he began a temperance society, the Band Of Hope .

elder, Joseph Billingham baptised people. In February 1839 the new baptistry was available and George Cosens conducted the baptisms.

Unfortunately for Cradley Heath Baptist Church, their very popular new Minister was invited to Brierley Hill Baptist Church, where he served from 1839 to 1842. During that time he married Betsy Dancer. But that's another story.

The opinion of the people at Cradley Heath was that George Cosens was very successful in building up the Church. There was a long-term relationship, and George returned towards the end of his life for 10 years.

This was longer than he had been in any single place since leaving Jamaica. His success in building up the Church created a problem. His declining health in old age led to calls for him to leave Cradley Heath for less arduous conditions at the smaller Brierley Hill Church.

We said that we would hear again about John Petty. At the time when George Cosens first came to Cradley Heath, Petty was the Primitive Methodist Minister at Dudley. His circuit extended to Halesowen. John had been with George when his first wife, Mary, had died.

Here was an opportunity for old friends to renew their friendship. The sympathy with which Petty writes about Cosens in his history books suggests a strong and lasting friendship.



Significant places on the Rev. George Cosens' travels. (Robert Higginson)

Chapter Three
George Cosens in the Baptist Ministry
1837 - 1881
David Watts

It is possible that George Cosens was baptised in the then well-established Baptist Church. Given his great gifts and personal call to preach the Gospel, he set out to pursue his calling. He moved to London and for a short time as minister of a struggling Baptist congregation in Aylesbury. Then in 1837, George moved to the Black Country and was preaching in the developing Baptist Church at Stourbridge working with its pastor Mr Savage. (1)

Ministry in Cradley Heath 1837-1839

Cradley Heath in the 1830s was a rapidly growing industrial community based on the manufacture of chains, nails and all kinds of iron products. It was a rough and tough industrial community where the Christian Churches were struggling to make an impact.

In 1834, a new Baptist church was started and built a chapel at Fourways in the heart of the village, the first church to be built in the growing community. By 1836, had 38 members in November 1837, the Church appointed George Cosens as minister commended to the Church by the Stourbridge Baptist Congregation (2)

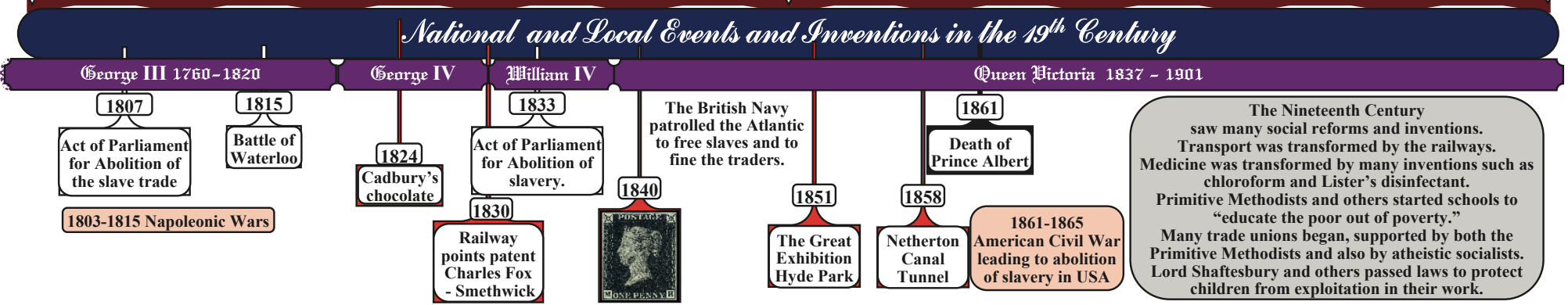
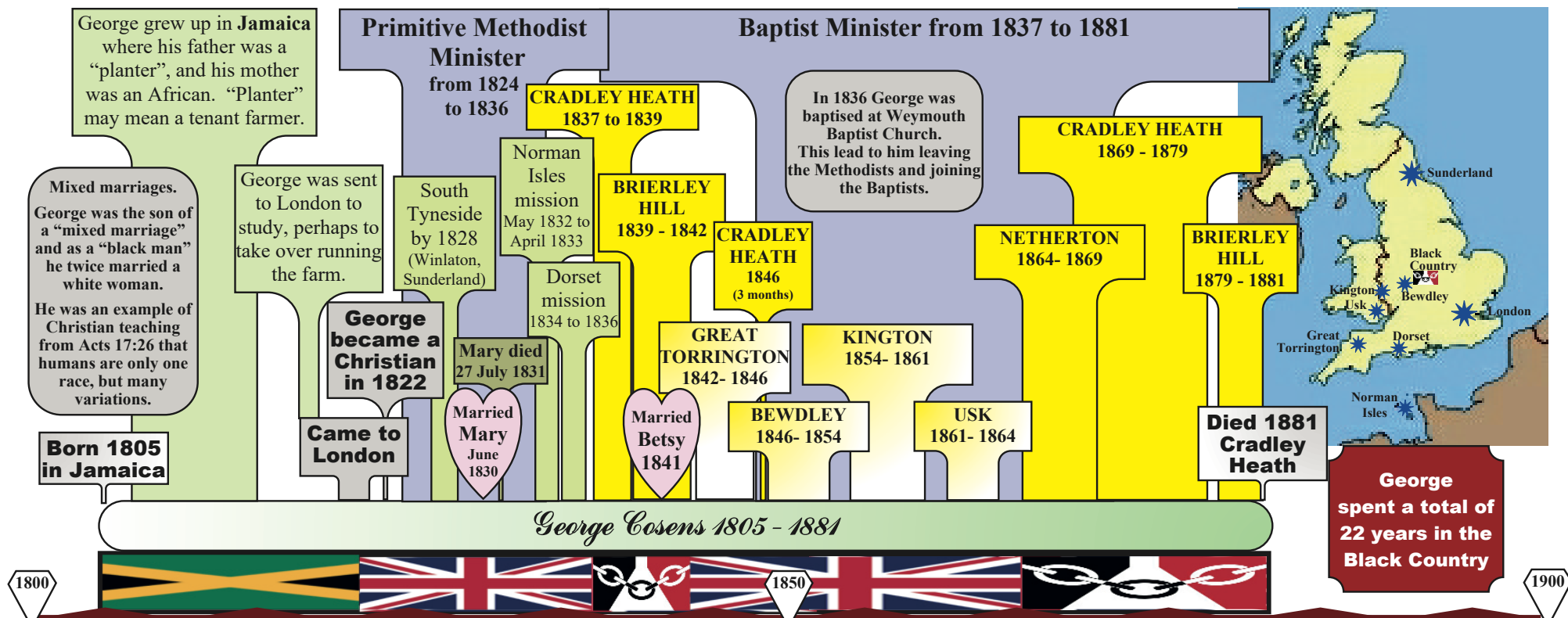
George's arrival in Cradley Heath created quite a sensation when he came riding into Cradley Heath by coach, The whole populace turned out to see him!

He soon gained acceptance with the people and speedily drew new people in to the Congregation.

The popularity of the "black minister" was shown in frequent requests the Church received to conduct special services, such as Sunday School anniversaries. Examples were visits to preach at Methodist Churches at Tipton and Cradley Forge and the Baptist chapel at Darkhouse Coseley. He is described as "a preacher of strong emotions of great eloquence and a man of generous disposition". (3)

During his time, a Baptistery was installed in the new Church building and George Cosens made good use of it Baptising 15 new believers but evidently led many others to Christ. His character and energy evidently meant that he made quite an impact in a short time. However, the Church book notes also that some left the Church on account of the fact "that they did not care for a black man as minister".

In 1839, he moved on leaving a Church with a membership of 37 with a



Cholera was very common in the first half of the 19th century. As a Minister, George Cosens often went to visit cholera patients.

It was found that contaminated water spread cholera and other diseases.

During the last half of the 19th century, towns and cities built clean water supplies and efficient sewers. This made cholera and similar diseases less common.

Time-line of the life of George Cosens showing key events and his travels. Some history is also shown for context.

Sunday school of 130 children. The newly formed Church with the debt of a new building and a small working-class membership could not afford to pay him. A request for funds from the General Baptist denomination was turned down. The call came from the neighbouring Brierley Hill Baptist Church, and he went there as minister.

Ministry in Brierley Hill Baptist Church 1839-1842 and marriage

Brierley Hill Baptist Church had formed from a group previously worshipping at Darkhouse Baptist Church at Coseley. It started in 1776 at a house in Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill. By 1806, they had built a chapel at Meeting Street and had a membership of 40. In 1820, a group left to form the Baptist Church at Stourbridge, and the Church subsequently struggled.

On the 6 August 1839, George Cosens was invited to become their pastor on a 6 month probationary period. This was not a promising situation for their previous pastor Mr Nicholas had been removed “for gross immoralities in his conduct” and previous pastors had not lasted very long.

On 12 January 1840, George had become established and effective enough for the Church to call him unanimously as pastor. On 4 March 1840, a formal recognition service was held presided over by local ministers including the pastors of West Bromwich and Sweet Turf Netherton. (4)

George’s ministry had an immediate impact.

As soon as he was appointed on probation, the Church asked him to organise the repair of the building and improvement of lighting. The work was completed in September 1840. Over the period of his ministry until September 1842, he baptised 32 people. George’s influence had spread beyond his own congregation as four of those baptised were local Methodists two of which were the local Methodist minister Mr Williams and his wife!

This was a major period of growth for the Church which had been struggling for many years. In just 3 years, he had turned the Church around so much that following his successor (Mr Norgrove), the Church had the resources and vision to build a new chapel altogether in 1854 seating 400 people on the current site at South Street Brierley Hill. This move was made possible by the purchase of the Meeting Street site by the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway for a station. (6)

In 1841, George Cosens married Betsy Dancer a Church member who had been baptised in 1830 and whose father was a glass maker. She came from Stourbridge (born in 1813 and christened in the Independent Church). She is described by Williams as a teacher and at different times she supported her husband financially through keeping a private school.

The ministry did not last. In December 1840, George had offered the Church three months notice and his wife was excluded from membership for non-attendance. This conflict was resolved but George was on the move again and this time left the area initially to pastor the Baptist Church at Great Torrington, Devon, Kington, Herefordshire, Usk in South Wales and Bewdley in Worcestershire, before returning to the Black Country in 1864.

Messiah and Ebenezer Baptist Churches, Netherton 1864 - 1866

In 1865, we find George returning to the Black Country as minister in charge of the General Baptist New Connexion Congregation at Cinderbank, Netherton. (8) This was known as the Messiah Baptist Church which was formed in 1820 – a Church with origins back to the 17th century (as early as 1654 and built a building in 1746 but closed in 1798. For a time it was used by the Unitarians and then the new Particular Baptist Church formed in 1810 which moved out to its own building in 1820 when the General Baptists of the New Connexion revived it). This was a small Church with only 39 members in 1865. (9)

He was shortly afterwards recorded as pastor of the new Ebenezer Baptist Church which was formed in 1864 as a second General Baptist Church in Netherton about 1 ½ miles away from its parent. Very much more in the heart of a growing industrial community. (10) This Church immediately built a chapel by their own efforts with the building opened in June 1864.

In the New Connexion, General Baptist Church of the time ministerial oversight of more than one Church was normal. In this case, because of the poverty of the area and small membership of baptised believers, a joint pastorate was sensible because of the lack of money of the congregations to pay their minister.

There is no evidence of the impact of the ministry as records are not available. Membership figures for Messiah in the Baptist Directory record a decline in that period. (11) Messiah had only 14 members by the time the new minister, Mr

Skidmore came in 1867. This may reflect the transfer of members to Ebenezer of which we have no record.

Ministry at Fourways Baptist Church Cradley Heath 1866 - 1879

In the period since Cosens had last been pastor, this Church had gone through a very lean time. It is recorded in September 1865 that a group of 14 members left to join a new Church led by Rev FWJ Bruce who had been supplying the pulpit for two years since 1863. (12) The Church went to meet 200 yards away at a house in Spinners End and had grown to some size not least because some others joined from the local Methodists.

This split was healed with the reuniting of the Church in 1869 and we can only assume that this was the achievement of George Cosens who is recorded in the Church minute books as presiding over the service of reconciliation on 26 September 1869 (13) Fourways Church took over the property that the other Church had been using and also agreed to repay its debts (totalling £7.5 shillings) 18 of the Spinners End members joined Fourways at that time.

George and Betsy lived in the local area. Their address according to the Censuses in April 1871 and April 1881 was 30 King Street, Rowley Regis which is a side street off the main street of the town of Old Hill. (14)

In 1870 he took a long break, he returned the following year, and a period of growth and development took place in the life of the Church. In 1872, 30 additions were made to the membership roll of the Church which in the previous year was 46. An additional 12 were added in 1873.

In two years therefore, this new ministry had nearly doubled the Church membership.

By 1874, member ship was 79. At this time, quite a number of improvements were made to the Church buildings with renovations of the interior, the addition of a harmonium for the music to replace the string band and the installation of a heating system. The Church minute books record a financial picture vastly improved, and the Church felt able to give generous offerings to the local hospital. In 1876, 10 baptisms were recorded.

After this time, however, the Church became static most likely because Cosens was now ageing (he was after all 72 years old and subject to bouts of illness). No new members were drawn in to help with finance. The economic situation in the locality had deteriorated and people in the congregation less

well off. The cost of all the improvements made to their buildings also meant that the Church was struggling.

One measure taken was raising the price of pew rents in August 1877 (from nine pence to a shilling) but this was not entirely successful. The result was that the Church fell into arrears in the payment of the pastor's salary and reduced it in 1878. (14)

In June 1879, the inevitable happened and the Church deacons asked for George Cosens to retire which he duly did. At this point, he and his wife transferred their membership to Brierley Hill Baptist Church where he was made a trustee of the Church and continued his preaching ministry. (15) He was in the pulpit the Sunday before his death taking two services! (16)

George Cosens died on 16 August 1881.

His funeral took place at Cradley Heath Baptist Church, the preacher being Rev L Thomas of the Messiah Baptist Church of Netherton. He was buried on 19 August in the cemetery at the front of Brierley Hill Baptist Church. His obituary states that this was "in the presence of a large number of persons" and remarking that "he was well known throughout the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire district". (16)

Betsy Cozens died on October 17 1895, in Brierley Hill and was buried beside her husband. (17)

Chapter Four
George Cosens character and ministry
David Watts

George Cosens was a strong warm character and a minister who was loved and who made an impact “Mr Cosens was a mulatto of strong emotion, generous and could preach with eloquence.” (18) “A preacher of strong emotions ,of great eloquence and a man of generous disposition” (19)

A story in the Hereford Times of 1855 gives some insight to support this description. A child of 2 had died and was being taken to the burial ground in Kington when the vicar discovered that it had not been baptised so he refused to conduct the burial service. George was there too and obviously appalled by this bigotry’ intervened and conducted the service in his place from outside the burial ground! (20)

The overall impression is of a man with a passion to preach the Gospel and build up the Church and one who was very successful judging by the numbers he baptised. He was clearly a good preacher and popular as a speaker well outside the Churches he served. “As a speaker he was apt and often manifested much readiness and humour.” (20)

Most Churches he served obviously thought highly of his ministry. Many hundreds came to follow Christ because of his preaching and discipling. At his funeral, clearly he was known widely attracting a large crowd from a wide area who was known and widely respected. (21)

George became a traditional Bible believing Baptist minister whose theology was Arminian hence his original involvement with the Primitive Methodists and New Connection Baptists. He was obviously not too dogmatic about this as he was pastor of several Particular Baptist Churches from 1840 onwards. These were not of a Strict and Particular stance though and were at a time when the theological distinctions between the two main Baptist denominations were crumbling. Cosens switching between the two is evidence of this coming together.

He believed firmly in the high importance of believer’s baptism. He is also seen as firmly enforcing Church discipline amongst the members of his Churches.

The relatively short period of ministries seemed to relate to the poverty of the churches he served which were small but there may have been restlessness about his personality that meant that he had to keep moving on once he had got a Church revived and moving forward. At Usk Baptist Church, he clearly had not related well to the congregation most likely due to its conservatism.

An intriguing comment made in his obituary was that he was known as a “staunch political dissenter.” (22) With George’s racial background and his long ministry amongst working class people in the Black Country, we might not expect him to be politically conservative, but this comment suggests some political activity beyond just expression of opinion, but tantalisingly we know no more.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

David Watts

The story of George Cosens is incomplete because we have no biography written close to when he lived, and we have necessarily put together a wide range of sources.

He came from a very dysfunctional family and because of his conversion led a life that could not have been more different from that envisaged by his Father in Jamaica.

His life is very important in the story of the contribution of Black people to the life of Britain because we have here a man who was distinctive in his appearance, character and style from the average minister and yet one who gave probably 49 years' service first to the Primitive Methodist Church then the Baptist Church as a preacher, evangelist and pastor. He served seven Baptist congregations. He baptised over 176 believers.

Here was a man with energy, passion and determination and one who had his ups and downs of ministry in Churches who for a period loved him and then as Churches soften do rejected him .It is significant that when he needed to move on ,he found another Church quite quickly

His racial background as a Black pastor albeit mixed race does not seem to have been a problem except for a few at Cradley Heath Baptist Church when he arrived there first. (51). This was, of course, a time when black people were few in the UK and especially in the Black Country and country towns in the Midlands where he mainly served. It was also before the time in the later part of the century when racial theories were beginning to change white people's opinions and develop prejudice and discrimination.

His marriage to Betsy Dancer provided George with roots as he had lost his Jamaican family. Her Black Country family connection. After his marriage and ministry at Brierley Hill, despite working elsewhere he returned to his adopted Black Country for his final years reflecting his adopted family.

We can say with good evidence that George Cosens was one who truly bridged cultures by being a Black pastor who passionately served his Lord, his adopted Church and the people of the Black Country.

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27. Baptist Directory 1863
28. Census of Population 1861 courtesy of Worcestershire Archives
29. Rev Nigel D Burge The History of Usk Baptist Church Cwmbran 1995 Pp19-20
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42. Obituary of George Cosens: The Dudley Herald August 1881
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46. Hereford Times June 1855
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49. We have a detailed statement of faith he wrote for Cradley Heath Baptist Church that sets out a clearly written Arminian Orthodoxy in the first sections of its Minute Books of 1837
50. Obituary The Dudley and District News op cit
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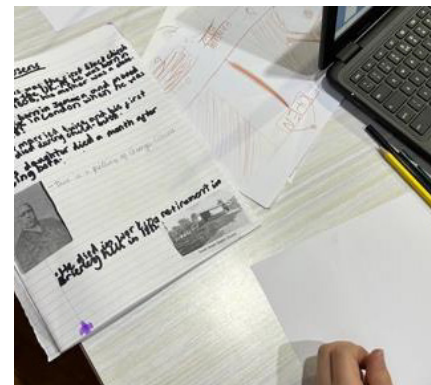
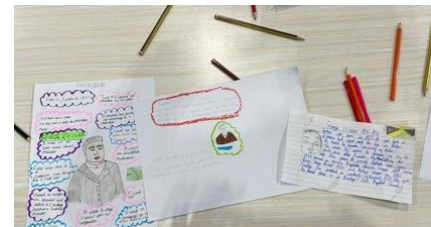
Rev Dr Gerald Hume, Pastor, Cradley Heath Baptist Church.

Stuart Hall, Secretary, Hanbury Hill Baptist Church, Stourbridge.

Appendix
The contribution to the project
by the year 6 students of
Brierley Hill and Brockmore
primary schools.

During Black History Month in October 2024, the year 6 children of Brierley Hill and Brockmore primary schools in Dudley took part in a lesson to learn about local and national black people who had made a significant contribution to society through their 'firsts'. The children were introduced to George Cosens as the first black pastor in the UK.

In a subsequent follow up session, the three classes of children from both schools came together to produce some written work and artwork for use in future resources for subsequent Black History lessons in schools across Dudley.



Rev. George Cosens (1805–1881) is the first reported West Indian minister to hold a pastorate in Britain.

He was born in Jamaica to a white plantation farmer father and a black enslaved woman. He travelled to London to study at 18, and after a chance visit to a Christian church, he joined the Primitive Methodists and became a passionate and charismatic preacher.

In 1837, he joined the Baptists and served as a minister in various Baptist churches, including Cradley Heath (Four Ways) church, and South Street, Brierley Hill church, where he was buried following his death in working retirement in 1881.



South Street Baptist Church in the 1800s as the Rev. George Cosens would have known it

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