

Revd Donald Foster Hudson: Reflections

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We are all here today — from many different places — because in one way or another, we have been touched by Don's life. And we will each have our own special memories. Here we gather together just a few of them.

Donald Foster Hudson was born on 29th April 1916 to John and Kate in Halifax. He attended Battinson Road Council School and later went to Heath Grammar School. He was brought up within Baptist church life and went with his parents to Trinity Road Baptist Church. Here were sown the seeds of his desire to serve God overseas. As a young person in the church, he was part of the Ropeholders, a children's group which supported the work of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS). This was run by Christine Young, sister of Revd George Young who served as a missionary in China for many years.

Following school success, Don was accepted for training as a missionary candidate at Regents Park College, Oxford, where he spent five years in study and preparation for ministry. He was ordained as a Baptist minister on 6 July 1940 and set sail for India on Christmas Eve that year.

Before we consider a little of his work in India, it is right to note here that he first met Miriam Shaw when they were both children in Halifax. Miriam then moved with her family to Canada, returning to Halifax when she was 18 years old. Donald and Miriam met up again and a friendship was established. Once Don left for India, he and Miriam corresponded regularly although, given that it was war-time, their letters often took a long time to arrive; many were censored, others went missing. After about two years, Don wrote a special letter to Miriam asking her to come out to India and marry him! She accepted this written proposal but was unable to travel out to India for another couple of years. Don and Miriam's marriage in March 1945 marked the beginning of a strong and precious marriage partnership of 53 years, until Miriam's death in 1998. Over the next few years, John, Rosemary and Andrew were born.

India was 'on Don's heart' all his life and we hear now from a colleague in Serampore, Revd Edward Williams . . .

Don Hudson in India (Edward Williams)

Ernie Whalley has just told of Don and Miriam's courtship and marriage. There is one story my wife and I heard from both Don and Miriam, so it must be true. When Don left England he had a moustache, but shaved it off in India. When Miriam arrived, he asked if she preferred him clean-shaven, and she replied that she could not remember what he looked like with a moustache. So he grew it again

(while she was staying at a different mission station, as was required in those days before marriage). She took one look and said, ‘Please don’t shave it off again!’

Don’s diary of his departure at Christmas time in 1940 from Liverpool tells of having Christmas dinner and the next three days are best forgotten! We assume that this was the effect of the sea and not the dinner. But the next 27 years are not forgotten. As the BMS has asked me to be their representative today, you may like to know what David Kerrigan, the Director for Mission, wrote to me — he said simply, ‘Don was such a wonderful character and made a great contribution to the Lord’s work in the Indian sub-continent.’

He spent two years in Dhaka as a probationer missionary, learning Bengali, and arrived at Serampore College on the first day of 1943. All who have lived there count it a very great privilege to have done so as this was the scene above all of the work of William Carey, who is often regarded as ‘the Father of modern missions.’ Carey arrived there on the first day of 1800 and, with his colleagues, founded the college in 1818.

At Serampore Don taught New Testament, and especially Greek. The course which he developed was eventually published as part of a famous series under the title of *Teach Yourself New Testament Greek*. When I did my own training the standard textbook for many years had been Nunn’s *Elements of NT Greek* — so there are no prizes for guessing that Don’s book was described as ‘second to None’!

He was a very able teacher, with a real interest and concern for his students. These were primarily the theological students, but there was also the Arts-Science side of the college which had then hundreds of local Bengali students (and now has more than two and a half thousand). Being fluent in Bengali Don was very much involved on this side also, becoming for many years Bursar. Here was discovered his flair for administration. He was someone who could get a lot done, in a short time, with a minimum of fuss.

These same gifts led to his becoming for nearly ten years, during the hot weather vacations, Principal of the Bengali Language School for missionaries, in Darjeeling. One result of this was a second book, *Teach Yourself Bengali*. Miriam was ‘hostess’ of the school, and between them they ran a very effective school, with an excellent atmosphere. We experienced this in our second year (they had been on furlough during our first). Language School was in the grounds of Mount Hermon School, a Christian boarding school, and I have been passed a message (from John Johnston) saying he hoped mention would be made today of the tremendous links between Don and Miriam and the school, and the debt of gratitude that so many owed to them.

One small detail in Don’s teaching, which he repeated year after year, has become a legend among his students. One of the set books was a collection of Bengali short stories which we would work through with Don. We would get to one particular word which none of had come across before, and ask him, ‘What does this mean?’ Don replied, ‘Burriedwith’am’. We looked baffled and he repeated (though I can’t pronounce it as he did), ‘Burriedwith’am’. Then he would explain the Yorkshire phrase, ‘Buried with ham’, describing a sumptuous repast after a funeral! (I hope I am not being tactless in mentioning that on this occasion!)

We ourselves arrived at Serampore in 1960 and Don and Miriam were our next door neighbours and our children played with their children, who were of course older. Someone has already asked me, thinking perhaps of missionaries in the African bush, 'How near was next door?' There was in fact only a party wall between us, although that was about two feet thick (they built well in those days) — this was the original house of Carey and his colleagues, now divided into two flats upstairs and two down.

Don and Miriam were good neighbours, good friends — and so practical. We remember when our eldest daughter had a temperature of 105° or 106° and was becoming delirious — we went next door, and Miriam told us how to bring the temperature down; if I remember rightly it was only a case of putting her in a cool bath, but we would not have dared to, do that unless she had first told us! And we never forget the time when that same daughter, aged about three, climbed the iron spiral staircase at the side of the house, up on to the roof about 25 feet above the ground, which had a parapet only a few inches high — and we only realised where she was when she peered down over the edge! But fortunately Don happened to be nearby, so no panic — he simply suggested to her to count the steps, and at once down she came, carefully counting!

Another memory is of Don the stubborn non-conformist. All week long in lectures or in the Bursar's office, he would wear the standard outfit of cotton drill trousers and bush shirt. On Sundays for church, when the rest of us dressed up a little and some missionaries (even occasionally one or two of the Baptists) would put on white cotton cassocks, Don wore — shorts! He was indeed a doughty and good nonconformist — and a good Christian, and a good missionary. Many folk, both Indian and European, have much cause to be grateful to God for him.

But how to describe him? He could be gruff, bluff and off-putting at first. He could growl! But get past that and you found a warm humanity. He had a great appreciation of people, of their qualities and of what they did. In my mind I can hear him describing some student or other (or in later years some colleague here in Bradford), and speaking so warmly of them. He knew them, and they mattered to him. I remember him telling of a former Arts-Science student who went on to become manager of a tea plantation. He was a Hindu, trying to treat his employees according to principles which he had learned at his Christian college, Serampore — and Don was so thankful and proud. Former students kept in touch with him, and would try to visit him if they came to this country. One of his last letters to us was to tell of distinctions gained by some former theological students, including one who had received one of India's highest awards for his services to scouting.

I could go on, but I must stop — only mentioning a final two years in Calcutta as Secretary to the Board of Theological Education in India. Don and Miriam, and my wife Rosemary and I, returned to this country in 1968, and our friendship continued to the end. Rosemary and I thank God — for Miriam, and for Don.

Don was quite a scholar and had three major books published:

1. *Teach yourself New Testament Greek*

For those of you with any knowledge of Greek, Don proposed NOT using the usual accents on the Greek letters. This caused quite a stir in its day in academic circles but actually led to a significant change in the next major textbook. Some of us here learnt Greek through a book written by J.W. Wenham. This became a widely used text and in his introduction, Wenham notes that he does not use the accents on letters either: ‘We are indebted to D.F. Hudson’s *Teach Yourself Greek* for pioneering this revolution.’

2. *Teach Yourself Bengali*

Regarding this book, a critic paid tribute ‘to the author’s grasp of the people, whose language he has interpreted in this book.’

3. *The Life and Letters of St Paul*

Anyone hearing Don’s teaching and preaching would soon discover his enthusiasm for the writings of Paul. Speaking as one of Don’s colleagues, I know I speak for many in expressing deep gratitude for the way he helped us gain fresh insights into the meaning of Greek words.

Don was also a consultant for the Apocrypha section of the publication of the Good News Bible in 1977. Throughout his life, he helped check proofs of Bible translations.

He was a man of the highest intelligence. Mary and I recall organising a team party one Christmas when we were in Bradford. Mary had spent the best part of a day searching for the most obscure words possible and creating plausible but false definitions to sit alongside the accurate definition in a game of ‘Call My Bluff.’ Don knew EVERY one of these words — but did not spoil the fun by letting on too early in the game!!

Indeed, although no mean scholar, Don did not parade his scholarship. There was a genuine modesty about him. Just recently, I was shown a very moving article from *The Statesman* in which a former student recalls his time at Serampore College 30 years earlier. He describes his ‘shock’ at seeing his professor, Donald Hudson, in shorts with his hands dirty digging in the garden in the early morning. ‘My Unforgettable Saint’ is his description of Donald.

Back to England

When Don and Miriam returned to England in 1967 he was able to develop his gifts. After staying briefly in a BMS house in Leeds, they moved to Bradford where Don worked in one of the earliest ‘Immigrant Centres’ (as they were then called!) in the city. Then he began teaching RE in Wyke and later in Garforth.

Don has made a significant impact on the life of the city here in Bradford. He worked in translating local authority documents into Bengali; he also helped to establish the Agreed Syllabus in Religious Education; he assisted in the Census work for the Bengali community and was an early member of the Community Relations Council where a Muslim leader showed his respect for Don describing him as a ‘father figure whose wisdom and counsel were very highly valued by those of other faith communities.’

Both Don and Miriam soon became immersed in church life here in Bradford when Revd David Milner was based as minister at Tetley Street. They became members and that particular

What kind of person was Don?

church community was very special to them (and I know Tetley Street felt the same mutual respect).

Don would get involved in all kinds of activities in church life, including the Church School Club (now the 'Adventure Centre') where he became Life Governor. He was called to serve the Ministry Team of the West Bradford Baptist Fellowship and, in 1975, the Central Bradford Baptist Fellowship. That is when I first got to know Don well as a colleague and friend. He actively served the Team until just a few months ago. Whether it was in preparing preaching plans; special series for preaching or helping us to develop the Asian Project in the 1970s, no job was too small or too big! As Revd Tony Peck has written: 'Don was the 'steady point' of the CBBF for nearly 30 years.'

In March 1997, in recognition of Don's contribution to the life of the city and the churches in Bradford, he was one of two Baptists (Melba Goodwin was the other — she may be here today!!) to receive the Maundy Money from HM Queen Elizabeth at a special service at Bradford Cathedral.

His gifts were also affirmed by the wider Baptist community. He actively supported the Baptist Men's Movement and became its national president in 1979. He attended annual conferences regularly until this year. He served our Yorkshire Baptist Association in many capacities, including its Council and Ministerial Recognition Committee, and was honoured as president in 1984. The Ministers meet annually at Cober Hill, near Scarborough and — apart from the time spent in India — Don attended each year from the 1930s until this year. Don also served the General Committee of BMS until quite recently. When the Baptist Assembly was held in Bradford in 1986, Don took responsibility for collecting money from the delegates and arranging accommodation. Apparently, for the FIRST time in living memory, all the delegates had paid up by the end of Assembly!!!

What kind of person was Don?

On first meeting him, I can recall being a little 'intimidated' by Don's moustache and stern countenance! But — I soon discovered the kind heart and dry sense of humour. There was a tenderness to Don's personality and he became a firm friend. He wrote poetry — including love poetry to Miriam during the early years in India. We are going to hear another kind of Don's poems in a moment or two.

In meetings — and in phone calls! — Don was legendary for being brief and to the point. He would speak his mind — and sometimes in meetings we could see Miriam giving him a gentle nudge if he was in danger of over-stepping the mark! BUT he had the gift of allowing you to disagree with him — and would never 'take his bat home' as they say here in Yorkshire. He would work wholeheartedly with a team decision.

Don lived a very ordered life. He was reliable and delivered on time (if not before!). He was punctual — indeed he was usually early for meetings. At a break, he would disappear and we would find him outside having a quick cigarette!

He commanded respect — by the sort of person he was; and that explains why so many former students kept in touch with him.

And in the midst of this full life, Don was a family man. And we now hear some family reminiscences from his daughter, Rosemary, followed by a poem written by Don and read by his granddaughter, Catherine:

Reflections (Rosemary Fletcher)

It was a fascinating 72 hours of discovery last week when I got to my father's house. First and foremost I had to find the instructions for his funeral — for which it seemed that we had to be content with a one liner — No flowers, gifts to the BMS. I continued to search for the elusive order of service, which surely must be somewhere, but to no avail. I found meticulously recorded dates and locations of every service he had ever taken — together with the fees received — dating back to 1936. I found folders full of all the sermons — 848 (?) at the last count, which does not include 'special occasions' and children's addresses.

In a phone call to my Aunt Mary, his sister, she passed on a tale that my Granny told. One day when my Dad was about five, he was standing at the sink when he announced 'I am going to be a missionary when I grow up' to which his mother replied 'Yes alright Donald, but get your hands washed; your tea is on the table.'

So it is perhaps not surprising then to find a Certificate of Honour showing that in 1926, when he was ten, Donald F. Hudson collected the sum of £2 for the Baptist Missionary Society's annual offering for Native Preachers. It was in that year that he also joined the League of Rope holders, which was 'to encourage study, prayer, service and gifts on behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society.'

In an envelope addressed to Mr J.E. Hudson, his father, there are school reports. Sadly in the Autumn term when he was 11, his Divinity teacher said that he was, 'Intelligent, but apt to be indolent.' He obviously improved over the years, as he did manage a couple of 'very goods' later on.

Today is June 5th and in 1936 Donald Hudson was summonsed to appear at the Magistrate's Court in Oxford on June 5th to answer a charge of riding a bicycle in Mansfield Road without carrying a white front light, at 10.30 in the afternoon (no 24 hour clocks then). There is no record of how he pleaded, but he did send a letter to the Court which was to be presented to the Bench — so we can only assume he pleaded guilty.

In his last year at Oxford, many of his fellow students did not come back to University. Others were conscientious objectors, and there were decisions to be made by others. However the Government decided that theological students and ministers were classified as a Reserved occupation as it was felt that they would be able to contribute to the restructuring of society after the war. However, they were evacuated to outside Oxford, where my father joined the ARP and was involved in driving for the Ambulance service.

When he went to India he was sent to Dhaka to be under the supervision of a Senior Missionary (with capital letters, he writes in a journal) in what is now Bangladesh. It was 1941 and he joined the ARP there, and again it was the Ambulance service for which he worked. It seems to have been a most challenging time. He recalls in some papers I have found that string and wire went a long way towards supporting the old Chevviys, Wolseleys and Fiats which they acquired.

My Granddad, according to my father's birth certificate, was a motor waggon driver — probably quite an unusual occupation in 1916 — and the young Donald had

'Little Ones' — read by Catherine Fletcher

watched his father drive large vehicles some equipped with trailers. He knew the theory although his practical experience was limited. However that was enough for him to be put in charge of training the Ambulance drivers in the art of fixing tow bars, and reversing trailers. It wasn't all hard work however, as a note from a superior states: 'I have great pleasure in certifying that he has an amazing capacity for co-operation, especially as regards tea parties, dinner parties and general social service.'

This aspect of his life may well surprise many of you who have only known him during the second half of his life — after he returned from India.

He had a great enthusiasm for socials and similar entertainment. He has regaled countless people from across the world with his recitations of Albert and the Lion in that famous seaside place called Blackpool.

At Serampore my parents organised Christmas and New Year parties for the Christian students — to help keep them awake for the Watchnight services. I have got a folder full of proof of this — itemised lists of games for every single party they held ... and of course my mother provided the cakes and biscuits!

So — a multi-faceted person with hidden depths — some of them unknown to me until this last fortnight. The last one I want to share with you is his poetry. When he came out of hospital in April, he showed me an album of love poems which he had written when he was courting my mother. These are too personal to share with you, but at the end of the album is one which illustrates his humour and his love of written and spoken words. This was a warning to my mother before she made the journey to India as his fiancée.

Catherine his eldest grandchild is going to read it for you.

'Little Ones' — read by Catherine Fletcher

When you think of India's ravaging beast
You must beware of errors,
For though the large ones may be fierce
Its 'little ones' are terrors.

You hear of tigers roaring round
And jackals howl at night,
But they're no more than noises off
It's 'little ones' that bite.

An elephant may not forget
And cherish grudges long
But 'little ones' are always here
To terrify the strong.

A python's gentle fond embrace
May sometimes be too cordial,
But far more fearsome beasts than snakes
Crept out from slime primordial.

A jaguar or mountain cat
Makes quite a charming pet
Compared with all the myriad hosts
Of 'little ones' I've met.

The big ones you can see at least
Avoid them if you're able
But the little ways of 'little ones'
Are quite incalculable.

If only they would settle down
You'd have a chance to swat 'em,
But when they bite and buzz around
You don't know that you've got 'em.

Abandon hope — you might as well,
Their bites you'll have to stand
There's no escape from 'little ones'
On India's coral strand.

Today we celebrate the life of one who was committed to the service of God. We neglect scholarship at our peril. Indeed, we need those who can dig into the original Biblical language and open up for us new challenges to the mind and to our thinking.

Don was a true disciple of Jesus Christ — with genuine servant heart. Serving overseas involved sacrifice — at times separation from partner and family. We know too that this included sacrifice on the part of the children — with enforced absences from parents. Our love and prayers are with all the family today: Don's children — John, Rosemary and Andrew; daughter-in-law Valerie and grandchildren — Joanne, Catherine, David, Rebecca and Emily; Don's sisters — Mary and Nancy; and the whole family circle.

Don would not want a lot of fuss today about him and his achievements. And THAT is the genuine mark of a disciple. When Don was informed of the seriousness of his medical condition just a short time ago, he told the medical staff he was ready to go and meet his Maker! Now he has passed through death (which he once said he found 'intriguing') and has penetrated the mystery of the fullness of eternal life. He is reunited with his beloved Miriam and has joined the glorious cloud of witnesses. As they surround us, as in a great stadium, they encourage those of us still in the field to keep on the same road and to follow the One who still leads the way to Life in all its fullness.

Don — Missionary, Teacher, Scholar and Friend — we give thanks to God for you and honour you best as we take a step closer in following your Master, our Lord Jesus Christ. .

Amen.