

Early Workers

Funeral Accounts

Early Workers

Revised December 6, 2022

James (Jim) Hodgins – First known Brother Worker in the World to Die

Abbie Barton – First Sister Worker to Die in America

Harry Cross – First Brother Worker to Die in America

Thomas Purves – Brother Worker who died in 1911 in California in unmarked grave

Willie Gill, 1951

Jack Carroll, 1957

Willie Jamieson, 1974

George Walker, 1981

James (Jim) Hodgins FIRST Brother Worker to Die

James (Jim) Hodgins from the UK died May 14, 1907, aged 31 or 32. He was the first known Worker in the world to ever die; the first on the 1905 Workers List to die and the first to die in the Australasia part of the world.

He, his sister Francis, and six other Workers travelled on the SS *Geelong* from the UK to New Zealand. He (age 29) and John Fraser (age 27) arrived in Auckland on the SS *Zealandia* Oct. 18, 1905. Jim Hodgins contracted tuberculosis soon after his arrival in NZ in 1906 and passed away in the Greytown Hospital on May 14, 1907. He was buried in the Greytown Public Cemetery.

He was the brother of Francis and Polly, who were both in the work.

Death of FIRST Sister Worker in US Abbie Barton . By Berlin Raymond

Abbie was born in 1880 and was a native of Massachusetts, living near Springfield. Two Brothers, **Jack Carroll and Hugh Matthews, came from the *old country* in May 1904, and she went to their Meetings and decided later that year.** She went into the Work in October 1907, after the Convention at Pittsburgh, PA., where it was arranged for her to go with Agnes Hutchison to West Virginia. She preached from October 1907 to February 1908, when she was stricken with Typhoid. While ill, she was cared for in the home of people by the name of Hutchison who were not professing. Her death was on, or about, February, 15, 1908.

George [Walker] was in Western Pennsylvania for special meeting when word came of Abbie's illness. On Sunday at noon, he decided to visit her—not because of word she was worse, but for lack of word from her. He took the train to Burnsville, West Virginia. Arriving there in early morning, February 17th, Monday, he inquired of a man nearby where Gim, West Virginia was. The man said, "I am going that way. If you like, you can walk along with me." They visited on the 3 mile journey and the man pointed out Gim. 'Twas then George asked the man if he knew two ladies that were preaching in that part and where the Hutchisons lived. The man pointed out the house and said the younger one was buried yesterday.

George walked on to the home and inquired about the girls. Agnes was in the wash-house washing clothes...the folks went for her and told her a man had come to see her. She came to the house and looked at George and turned and went back to the wash-house—in a shock from the strain she had been through. She had nursed her companion through her illness and made arrangements for her funeral with the help of friends not professing...paid \$75 for the casket—all the money both had. The undertaker demanded his money right then.

Some of the neighbors took a wagon and team and carried the body as far up the hill as possible...then carried the casket the rest of the way. On top of a hill 3/4 mile from where she died, she was laid to rest in a small cemetery. Her tombstone reads: 1880-1908 "*She Hath Done What She Could.*" **She was the first worker to die in America.** She is buried at Right Hand Fork Cemetery in Gem, Braxton County, West Virginia, USA. Arrangements were made for Agnes to join another sister worker at Charleston, West Virginia, where there were a few friends.

[View photo of tombstone in Findagrave.](#)

6704 Leeds Street

Philadelphia, PA.
June 2, 1975

I was not well acquainted with Abbie. I met her at convention in 1907 — the convention she went out from. My first experiences in West Virginia were not so pleasant or encouraging. On my 3rd visit, I got to know some true, worthy and reliable people who became true helpers in the Gospel. I hope you will have this experience. Glad you keep well.

Your Brother,

George Walker

Berlin Raymond, a worker, hand-wrote on the type account above:

"I wrote George Walker for information when I first went to West Virginia, and I visited her grave several times with those who desired to see it.

(signed) Berlin"

Harry Cross FIRST Brother Worker to Die in AMERICA

In 1908, Harry Cross died from a spider bite and was buried at Dayton, Washington. (**From Early Days in California**)

"Willie (Jamieson) went to Dayton, WA to the funeral of Harry Cross, although it was over by the time he got there. Tom Lyness and Harry were having a mission in Dayton; one night no one invited them home so they slept in a haystack. Harry was bitten by a spider and died on July 2, 1908." (From: **"When the Gospel came to Oregon in December, 1907,"** compiled by Ada Park in 1985)

Possibly the FIRST death of a worker on the 1905 list was that of **Jim Hodgins** from tuberculosis in May, 1907, at the age of 22. He was one of the FIRST workers to go to Australia, along with his sister Francis in 1905.

Thomas Purves Died in 1911 in California

Thomas Purves died in 1911 at the age of 24 in Riverside from tuberculosis; he was without a companion or friends. The county buried him at the Evergreen Memorial Cemetery (northeast corner). That little plot of ground was an old, decrepit cemetery for years until sometime during the last 20 years. The city has taken it over, calling it "historical". It now has a fence around it, and grass planted and Thomas Purves' grave is still there. Some years later friends learned of his grave and put a marker on it. Some of the friends in the area take flowers in special memory and thankfulness. He was a brother to Harvey Purves' grandfather; Harvey has been laboring in British Columbia and is now in Manitoba.

Thomas was from Scotland and reportedly a good friend of Willie Jamieson. We've been told that Tom invited Uncle Willie to his first gospel meeting. At the time of Uncle Willie's funeral, someone said friends took flowers from his grave to Tom's grave. He arrived in Montreal, Canada on August 11, 1905 from Liverpool England, age 23, aboard the S. S. Virginian."

Click Here to view grave marker.

Click Here to view his photograph

**Willie Gill
at
West Hanney, England
Tuesday 5th June 1951**

Brother Workers who bore the coffin were: P. Fletcher, J. Pitts, C. Rollings, R. Preece.

J. JACKSON...Hymn 315 ... Sweet, sweet release Sung by Workers

R. MILLER... Prayed.

J. Jackson: Somehow when we speak, we speak about our feelings, and if I would express my feelings now I would say that I feel some other than I could do what I am trying to do, but perhaps there are one or two things, perhaps I had better say thoughts, that came into my mind since Saturday that I might try and pass on to you. Some of us who are here now were on Saturday at Dockray Hall and it was at the beginning of the first meeting when we received the wire of the departure of our brother and I just heard what

the wire said and then some one passed me the paper and I read it and I passed it back to them and when I did that there were a few words of Solomon that immediately came into my mind where he said *"A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth"*. (Ecclesiastes 7:1)

We went on with the meeting, and naturally I did not think any more of those words at the time. Afterwards I found the words coming into my mind again and then later on they returned, especially the latter part of that verse, *"The day of death better than the day of one's birth"*. I found, for some reason or other, the question arise in my mind, Why? and I asked myself the reason. Then my mind went to Moses but before that it occurred to me that there were more reasons than one, there were two reasons; one was something that can happen this side of the grave and the other was something that can happen on the other side of the grave. Then with those thoughts in my mind I thought of Moses. I remembered the choice he made when in Egypt when he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of Egypt for a season. After those thoughts came to my mind I thought, well that was a good day for Moses and a good day for many others that lived in Moses day.

Then my thoughts went to the mountain of Nebo and at the top of Pisgah where Moses died and it occurred to me that what Solomon said was true in Moses' case that that was a better day, that if what happened in Egypt was a good day, what happened at Nebo was a better day and that which happened in Egypt helped to make what happened at Pisgah a better day. The day at Nebo was when Moses – if you will allow me to use an expression or reference to something we heard at the meetings here – when he reached his desired haven and when he stepped out of his little boat and entered into the rest that John speaks of when he said, *"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them ."* He entered into rest, his works followed and his words and influence still live.

Later on I found Paul coming into my mind in the same connection and the thought occurred to me that it was a very good day for Paul and for many others when that day on the road to Damascus he said, *"Lord, what wilt Thou have me do"*, and it was a much better day on that day in Rome years afterwards when in writing to Timothy of his departure he said, *"I am ready to depart and the time of my departure is at hand"* and he went on to say, *"I have fought a good fight"* – that was a better day. Why a better day? Because of what happened, of what he himself had referred to on more than one occasion. Once when writing a letter previously he spoke of *"Absent from the body, present with the Lord"* and on another occasion in writing another letter he said, *"I am in a strait betwixt two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better"*. No, I think this would help us all to understand what Solomon said *"The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth"*.

Afterwards my mind turned to the departure of our brother last Saturday, and my mind went **back 53 years and about 8 months**, if I am right in my calculations, when he with some others, shall I say, chose as Moses chose, or shall I say, spoke at least in his heart as Paul spoke when he said, *"Lord what wilt Thou have me do?"* That was in Rathmolyon, as many of you know a good day and a very good day, but it was a better day in Malverley. Why? because it was the day when he left the little boat that he had journeyed in for 80 odd years, when he left the house of clay that was about to dissolve, and what? and went to be with Christ which is far better, or if you wish it, entered into rest. We could say that the same was true in Moses' and Paul's case as in our brother's case, that his works will follow him – the influence will still live. That is a little in connection with the beginning that I would say was a good day, the end, that was a better day,

It is customary I think to refer to some of the things in connection with those days, but I am going to leave that, there are others here that had mingled with him much more during the years than I had the opportunity of doing, but I will say this that perhaps a better way for everyone is saying in life, and if we say it in life it is not necessary when we have left the body of clay for any other to say much. If it is said in life, it is written in a way that is not said today and forgotten tomorrow, or ten years after tomorrow, it is remembered. We are still journeying, we do not know when that better day may come for us, but I will say I would like for myself, and I think I can say for all of us, that God would help us to write a chapter in our little day so that when we step out of our little boat or leave the house of clay that chapter that we are writing today may be worthy of being read as was Moses', as was the chapter Paul wrote, and as the chapter that our brother has written.

W. Reid . I do not know whether I will say very much or little. I would like to read a verse or two. *"Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."* (Romans 8:21-23)

I have taken quite a bit of notice lately of this expression *"the redemption of our body"* and we know what Paul wrote to the Ephesians and said they were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise to the day of redemption, and he spoke again of the *"redemption of the purchased possession"* and then when Jesus was speaking to the disciples and telling them about the things that would come upon the earth, *"When ye see things coming to pass lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh"*. Now that redemption that Jesus spoke to the disciples could not have been the redemption of their souls in the sense of Christ having died to redeem them and all mankind. And this day of redemption that Paul referred to in writing to the Ephesians it could not have been the day of redemption that Christ accomplished in His death for all mankind because those people were already redeemed by the blood of Christ, just the same as we have, and Paul speaking here of the redemption of their bodies it comes under the same heading.

I have been thinking lately and reading for more than a year quite a bit about this thing and looking into it and there is a verse in the book of Hosea where the Lord says *"I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes,"* (Ch.13:14).

I like that latter expression "*repentance shall be hid from mine eyes*". It was just as if the Lord was saying "*I am not going to change my mind and I will never stop ransoming them from the power of the grave and redeeming them from death.*" It is just what the Lord has planned for us all and what I would say of our brother Willie Gill, whose body is present with us today – it is just a matter of him being delivered from the body of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Now there is a deliverance that comes to all of us when we yield our hearts to God and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us.

These people at Rome had that deliverance but still, just like our selves, they had the flesh still with them, and Paul was telling them that they must not walk after the flesh but after the Spirit, and so long as we are in these bodies we shall have this battle to fight not to walk after the flesh but after the Spirit, but the time will come when that battle will be finished when the creature will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. I like to think of that. I referred a little to this at the convention.

One day when I had a wire that a certain brother had passed away and asking me if I would attend the funeral, I said, "*Well, that is one less in God's family here but one more in God's family in Heaven,*" and that is what happens. God brings people into His family here on earth and when the time comes when He sees it good He transfers them from His family on earth to His family in Heaven and then we join up with them on the other side.

When I heard of our brother Willie's death, it flashed into my mind at once, he is no longer with us on earth but he is one with those in God's family on the other side and on the day when we received that wire the thought came into my mind. How was this family in Heaven built up? The first I thought of was Abel when Cain killed him, he was the first, and since that time the family has been getting bigger and it has only got bigger as God has transferred His children on earth, and that is what will happen with all of us.

Our part is not to worry how, where or when we would be transferred. I do not worry about that any more. What I worry about, and what we all need to worry about is how we live when here and it is God's business to transfer us when He sees good. I believe more than ever God knows best because He is building up a great family on the other side. I believe we shall see it when we get over there; that the object of God was that He could build up a family and through whom He could show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us.

That has been on my mind lately, "*That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us*". That was what those people in Ephesus were quickened for and was why they were found sitting in heavenly places. It was that later on in the ages to come God might shew His kindness to them and to us. God knows best when to transfer us, whether to let us remain here or to take us. We should be satisfied with what God chooses for us.

Before I finish I would like to say a little about this redemption of the body. You know how redemption takes place. When Christ redeemed us, He redeemed us by putting Himself in our room and stead. He suffered Himself a sacrifice which was accepted by God for all mankind. It has always taken the better to redeem the worst, it has always taken the good to redeem the bad, and Christ was the Good to redeem us that were bad.

There was a little in the Old Testament I enjoyed in connection with this redemption then the Lord told the children of Israel that the firstling of all animals was to be offered. This was an easy thing when it was a clean animal but when it was an unclean animal like the ass, it had to be redeemed by a lamb and if not to break its neck. This is just like us. We were like the unclean ass redeemed by Jesus, the Clean and Spotless Lamb of God. When our bodies are redeemed, you know how they are redeemed, by a new and better body being put in the place of the old one. This old corruptible one can never be made incorruptible, never pass on to be with God. That is the summing up of 1 Corinthians 15:50 when Paul said "*Now this I say brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.*" And God's plan is that the dust shall return to dust again.

"*Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward*" (Ecc. 3:20-21) the spirit to return to God that it would be clothed some day with a new and incorruptible body, and that is how the old corruptible body is redeemed. When God's time comes He will give to us this incorruptible body if we continue to live for the Lord. I often wish I could make it clear to these people that these bodies are to be redeemed, and then we will be able to live forever with the Lord. Paul in writing to Timothy says "*...according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Jesus Christ... who hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel*", (II Tim 1:9-10) and that is what you and I can pass on to.

Before I stop I would say that it was in this part of England that I first got to know **Willie Gill** intimately. In 190?, in the North of Ireland when I went into that Convention I saw three men sitting in the front just as we three are sitting here today and **Willie** was one on the left-hand side as I looked up. I never spoke to him but that day we met, some of us, face to face, and he and another man shook hands, but that was just about all I got to know of him at that Convention.

Then I was sent to this part with Andy Robb in 1904. He was staying with Charlie Lowe. Andy had gone over to another part and he had sent for me. When I got there Charlie and another man were digging and Willie came in and he asked me how I was getting on. He knew I was a stranger and I told him what I had been doing and I never forget how glad he was that I had gone out and gathered the potatoes instead of sitting in the house. He told me that he was glad I did not sit in the house and had gone out to do a little and it was an encouragement to me. Then I remember how he came along to get us at Atworth where we were preaching and we had some walks and talks together in that village, and from that [time?] on I got to know him better.

In 1913 I came back from Africa. I was going to America and Willie stopped me and asked me to go to Scotland and all these years I have known him pretty well, and I am glad to be here, not to see his dead body, but to be here at his funeral and to say that I could

claim that he is one of the best friends that I have had in life and I hope we will all have grace to live and finish in the right way as he has done.

Jack Forbes: It is not often one is called upon to take part in a service like this, although the passing of workers gets more frequent as the years go by and no doubt will in the coming years. Some of us here some years ago had the privilege of attending the funeral of **Jennie Gill**, several of us also attended that of **Emma Gill**, and I do not think any funeral we have attended has ever meant so much to us as this funeral today,

It won't be necessary for me to add anything much to what has been said, but I always feel that a service like this is largely conducted by the testimony of the one who has departed. We cannot add anything to it or take anything from it because it was very effective in his day, as those words that we have often heard *"He being dead yet speaketh"*, and his voice is the loudest in this meeting this afternoon.

A number of us who are present here have often heard Willie speak and give his testimony, and the other day when I heard of his death or rather since then, that verse our brother spoke of has been on my mind continually, where Paul in writing to Timothy, referred to his departure, which was nigh at hand, and how he was then to be offered up and he said *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, and henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away"*.

It seems too wonderful, really, to read the words of such a faithful servant of God and it should apply so truthfully and so fittingly to our brother who has now departed from us. We refer to him as our brother, but to many of us he was a father, and I must say this, I count it a great privilege that for over forty years it has been my lot to be associated with him – many of us also in the preaching of the Gospel, I must say that I value very highly his sacrifice – that life of self denial, and the Godly counsel and the example he was to us as a servant of God. I do not think those words have ever been brought home to me with such force as they have these days *"I have fought a good fight"*.

When we think of what our brother referred to those days in Rathmolyon and as we often heard him speak of that battle – the battle when he first heard the Gospel, turning from all this world offers. Practically all of you have heard him speak of that, but there are a few of us that come from that neighbourhood and country and have a more intimate knowledge of what that meant for him. Not only that, but you have heard him speak of those days when he attended that Convention and got so very little from it, but in his bedroom when he thought of Elisha taking those oxen and sacrificing them, and he asked himself the question would he be willing to do that. I often marvel when I think of his sacrifice in turning away from every earthly prospect, when the future was assured, and starting forth to give his life for others. That day he fought a good fight. It is often said *"A battle well begun is half won"* but there are not so many of you standing here that know the struggle, the conflict, and the strivings that it has meant for him to keep up that fight to keep his life on the altar, I can look back on some days when in the agony of his soul he strove to preserve that sacrifice on God's altar, and even his tears.

We do not speak this to merely eulogize the dead, we think of it and speak of it as a great victory the grace of God and power of God in our day that has enabled him and others to sacrifice, and those words Paul used long ago are so fitting here today. *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course"*. I think I am expressing the feelings of my fellow labourers that are present here, as well as those that are not present, when I say we feel deeply grateful for the testimony of our brother, or should say our father, in that he began, continued and finished and left us, as it were, an inspiration to follow in his footsteps. *"I have kept the faith, I have fought a good fight, and henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life that fadeth not away,"* One can not help but think of how different the scene would be had our brother continued to live for this world and had never forsaken his home, his kindred and everything to devote his life for the extension of the kingdom of God. How different it would have been but whatever it might have been it would have faded away, but today he has a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven, and not only for him but for all that live righteously.

I do not want to prolong this service, but would like to say that in all my associations with our brother during the past 44 years there is not another person on this earth whom I would prefer if I could choose to live those years over again – there is not another person I have met on this earth that I would prefer to work and to cooperate with, and it has meant more to me, and I realise the debt of gratitude I owe today.

If you will pardon me prolonging this for just a moment or two, there is a portion of that 25th Matthew that to me this service would be incomplete if we did not refer to it. In that 25th chapter it says *"Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungry and fed thee? Or thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger and took thee in? or naked and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick or in prison and came unto thee? And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."*

We were hearing only yesterday that it is 47 years since Willie entered this village homeless and poor, as a messenger of the Gospel, and I think it is only fitting for us that we feel deeply grateful today for those that have ministered to his needs all those years. Whilst we rejoice in the fact that we live in days when God has been able to raise up such men and days when there have been those like our brother, that have sacrificed everything, we also rejoice and are glad that there are those who gladly opened their homes and ministered to the needs of those that give their lives, and I think that is what makes up the Gospel, the homeless preacher and those that with homes and substance minister, and their reward is sure.

One feels grateful to be here today and it seems necessary for us to gather on occasions like this to remind us of the reality of eternity. I think it was at the last meeting here at Christmas time I heard of our brother speaking those words of *"binding the sacrifice with cords to the altar"*, and I hope that today it will mean that for us that the life and testimony of our brother will speak and cause us to bind more closely our sacrifice on God's altar.

At the grave Hymn 335 "Called home to rest"

P. Fletcher prayed.