

SHANKLIN GOSPEL HALL

We investigate cases of injustice perpetrated upon Christians, but we do not interview the alleged wronged party but only collect from them any letters, other documents and recordings which we study independently. Neither do we take instructions from the wronged party because we insist on being impartial.

Shanklin is a seaside resort on the Isle of Wight.

The brethren assembly is the Gospel Hall in Languard Road.

In May 1986 after the death of the secretary / corresponding brother, four new elders were appointed to the oversight. These were SH who became the secretary, JB who became the Treasurer, DW and PA.

The assembly grew from a membership of eleven in 1985 to about thirty six by 1990. At least, twelve of them were introduced to the assembly by DW.

From 1990 to around 1995, things went well but then things changed. PA arranged to baptise a man, EC, from another assembly which had no baptistry, but PA did not mention it to any of the other Shanklin elders or at an elder's meetings. EC was sometimes violent to his wife and had a serious drink problem.

Knowing that some young people in the Shanklin assembly wanted to start a young peoples meeting in Ryde a few miles away, where many of them lived, PA stopped this and started a young peoples meeting at the Shanklin meeting.

HB, who was also an elder, had the sad experience of his wife dying and later wanted to marry a fellow Christian in another meeting who was divorced from a Pentecostal pastor who was very cruel to her. PA said that this must not happen as remarriage to a divorcee was not allowed for Christians.

PA also tried to stop the marriage of a brother in a nearby meeting, in Ventnor, who was a widower, because his intended new wife was divorced.

PA and his wife EA arranged a party at the Shanklin Hall for two members of the nearby meeting in Ventnor who were celebrating an important wedding anniversary. They did not want a party and the remaining elders at Shanklin knew nothing of this and it was not mentioned at any elder's meetings. PA was making decisions and arrangements on his own without reference to his fellow elders. He was running the assembly his way.

Before he joined the Shanklin meeting, he went to the meeting at Ventnor. One Sunday, there was a notice given out for an elder's meeting and PA went to it although he was not an elder. This caused difficulties and so he joined the Shanklin meeting.

A young man, JL, in the Shanklin meeting asked to be baptised. The elders all met together, agreed a date for this event and all the elders promised to attend. JL had been staying with PA and EA in their Guest House/Hotel.

The next step was an interview with JL about the arrangements for the baptism in a forthcoming Gospel meeting and SH and DW took this interview. JL said that he wanted DW to perform the baptism. DW was reluctant, but JL insisted. When this news was circulated, PA and EA were furious and boycotted the baptism service, which they had promised to attend, and, instead, and went to another assembly, an act of gross disloyalty and arrogance. EA said that her husband should have performed the baptism.

At a young peoples meeting in June 1990, DW gave a talk on the Trinity which was recorded and copies of the cassette were circulated. PA was present at this meeting and said that the subject must be discussed again. In a ministry meeting a few weeks later, DW referred to this subject, defined the Trinity and at the end of the meeting, SA, the most experienced elder, stood up and thanked DW for a very helpful, accurate and clear address. These comments are on the end of the tape, copies of which were supplied by members of the Shanklin meeting.

Several well known brethren heard this recording and spoke highly of it and actually used it in their own ministry.

A Catholic couple, friends of DW, had been converted at a Dick Saunders Crusade in 1987 and came into the Shanklin meeting asking DW to baptise them, which he did. DW graciously asked PA to speak at the meeting but it was clear that PA and EA did not appreciate this event as they did not contribute to these conversions. It is clear that PA and his wife were becoming jealous of DW and this is evidenced by a recorded phone between DW and PA when PA says, "When you preach or minister the Word, it makes me to become a minnow".

That speaks for itself. That tape also contains PA's insults which are not Christian and untrue as well as being cruel. He called DW pig-headed which really translates as DW did not agree with PA but no such disagreements were made known.

The usual procedure at the morning breaking of bread meeting was that ministry took place later in the meeting usually after the breaking of bread. One Sunday soon after DW's exposition of the Trinity, PA got up and the very commencement of the meeting at 11am and said, "There is a brother in this meeting who is in serious error on the subject of the Trinity" and proceeded to give a long talk on the Trinity from prepared notes in his Bible. Again the usual procedure at a morning meeting is that any ministry is not prepared but a response to the hymns and prayers which proceeds it. This was unkind as it was a deliberate and calculated attack on DW.

DW asked to stand down temporarily as an elder before this attack. He explained that this was for personal reasons and not spiritual ones, that he had no complaints about the assembly and was not guilty of any misdemeanour. He had an official reply saying that the elders understood, wished him well and if he needed any help they would willingly give it if he so requested. That should have been the end of the matter.

But two elders, SH and PA, went to see him and demanded to know why DW had stood down and they became cross with him. Then speculation spread that he was in serious trouble or having an affair with his secretary, Sue. Such gossip spread like wildfire and it emanated from the Guest House run by PA and his wife. In addition, DW had given a talk elsewhere on witchcraft and the cassettes of this address were distributed and DW was having death threats and had to consult the police who monitored all his phone calls.

DW was summoned to meet the elders on 17 August despite the fact that his mother was seriously ill in hospital. He was sacked as an elder and the only reason given was that he was out of step with the brethren. No other explanation was given and, to this day, DW does not know what that means and neither do we.

The reason DW did not disclose his reason for standing down was that he was having heart trouble and wanted to conceal it from everybody including his wife and family.

The behaviour of the two elders, and PA in particular, was disgraceful, unkind and certainly not Christian. DW resigned from the assembly in a gracious letter.

A month later on 26 September 1900, the Shanklin week night meeting was cancelled and a meeting was held about DW to which he was not invited. A long report was read out which said:

1. DW was in very serious trouble and his name was all across the Island. This was completely untrue and all the people we have interviewed have said so.
2. DW had applied to be the pastor of two nearby churches. We interviewed the officers and members of these churches and found that this was also untrue.
3. He had prevented any members getting near to the Irish couple whom he had baptised.

This is also a pack of lies. The Irish family went to meetings when DW was out preaching elsewhere. In fact, for three months in one year, DW took responsibility for another meeting and was absent from his own assembly for 27 weeks with the elders full knowledge and approval. The Irish family still went to Shanklin.

4. He was a heretic. Titus 3. 10 was quoted. This was and is a libellous accusation. Most of his addresses were recorded and we have heard them as have many well-known brethren. They could find no heresy. Neither could

we. It is true that DW had a meeting in his own home since 1968 and some may regard this as forming a clique and being divisive and disloyal to the assembly, but PA had regular meetings in his home when he spoke, and SH had home meetings.

5. DW was said to be idle. All the evidence disproves this absolutely. In fact, the evidence is that DW worked as hard as anyone for the assembly increasing its membership as we have seen.
6. DW was said to be a busybody. All our evidence disproves this also, although it has been pointed out to us that another elder and his wife come into that category.
7. DW was pushy wanting to run the assembly his way. This is totally untrue. On the contrary DW was the exact opposite; he never wanted the limelight and this is born out by all we have spoken to. Many said that he was too reticent.
8. He was in gross doctrinal error on the subject of the Trinity. This is all lies as we have shown earlier.
9. He discussed assembly matters with people not in the assembly. We found no evidence of this but, immediately after this report meeting on 26th September 1990, several people on the Island knew all about it who were not in the Shanklin meeting and should not have been privy to this information. Gossip was obviously a problem in the Shanklin meeting.

The assembly said that DW could not attend any meetings at Shanklin but his wife and children could. How divisive and insensitive was that!

DW then sought the advice of many brethren. Those who replied stated that he had been a victim of elders who were obviously not spiritual men.

The three senior Island brethren from other assemblies investigated this matter on their own initiative without any input from DW and at the end of their separate investigations found in DW's favour and all three refused to speak at the Shanklin assembly again.

DW has followed Scripture and requested reconciliation many times. The assembly took him to law to have his name removed from being a Trustee of the Hall. Christians taking a fellow Christian to law is forbidden by Scripture.

As a result of Shanklin's perfidy, DW's marriage broke up but this is not a matter in our remit.

After we had concluded our investigations, we visited DW and he admitted that this ill treatment had caused him anguish and for a few years after leaving Shanklin he was 'all over the place and that he had been indiscreet and often foolish'. He showed us his heart medication which was somewhat strong and he was clearly ill. His wife wanted a divorce because of the Shanklin debacle and insisted that he institute the proceedings. His mother in law was a friend of the mother of EA which further complicated the matter. To DW's credit he did not abuse or condemn any of the people involved.

EA had thrown a temper at her father for inviting DW to speak at his Ventnor meeting. She, at one time, rang DW, a recording which we have heard, and was grossly offensive. Years before, she had apologised to DW, with her husband present, about false statements she had made about him but immediately afterwards called him weird and eccentric.

Several people left the assembly because of this injustice and some having lost faith in the brethren at Shanklin and have turned their backs on Christianity altogether.

RESPONSES TO SHANKLIN GOSPEL HALL

This is so sad to read.

I know the people concerned and it is true that DW was very badly treated. He was an academic and had a very deep understanding of the Scriptures which, it was said, diminished the rest of the meeting. He wrote and had excellent articles published of his ministry which only served to make other members feel jealous. He was a painfully humble and self-effacing man always putting others first and never wanting to be a leader.

I did not like DW. He was not true brethren. He did not use brethren terminology. He was not brought up as one of us. Whenever he preached or ministered he always took some remote passage of Scripture and we thought that he felt he was above us. But many people liked him. His style was different, always serious.

That he was well-liked by many caused some problems as he was falsely accused of starting a clique.

PA wanted DW out of the meeting so that he could take over, which he has done. The methods he used are certainly not Christian but he has got his own way and runs the meetings his own way. He is in charge and everybody knows it!

It was cruel the way DW was treated. His mother was in hospital with a serious heart complaint at the time but Shanklin showed DW no consideration whatsoever. He himself had a heart condition and was receiving death threats because he spoke out about the evils of spiritualism and the occult. The Shanklin meeting stabbed him in the back and they had a clandestine meeting about him behind closed doors not allowing him to attend or speak for himself. The meeting is guilty of libel and slander.

It is because DW challenged some traditional 'brethren' views that PA and SH wanted him out. DW showed that no one could be a type of Christ and that the Calvinistic and brethren teaching on typology was erroneous. He challenged a brother who ministered on Solomon receiving worship and DW also said that David was not always a man after God's own heart. He also queried that God was three persons pointing out that a person is someone with a human body and that the Father and the Spirit were invisible and Spirit Beings and therefore did not have a human body and, therefore, could not be persons.

He also disliked it when some brethren referring to the loaf rather than bread in the breaking of bread service. He said, Did Jesus call Himself the Loaf of Life?

What he said on all these matters was absolutely right but it would have been wise if he had not said them.

That PA and his wife boycotted a baptism of one of their members because PA was not asked to perform the baptism speaks volumes and tells us about PA and his wife and their wanting superiority and to be in charge.

Whoever was in the wrong initially the most damning matter is that the Shanklin assembly will not affect a reconciliation or follow the Lord's teaching in Matthew 18. It is this that makes them the guilty party!

I stayed at PA's guest house and he and his wife took every opportunity to slate DW. He was evil, deceptive, a crook, an idle busybody, troublemaker gossip, pushy, arrogant and hateful. When we met him he was gentle, humble, kind and completely genuine and sincere. And his preaching was very sound.

I have many cassettes of DW's ministry. He usually took unfamiliar passages of Scripture

and made those Scriptures live. He was brilliant on Jeremiah and the prophets and in his ministry he always extolled the Lord Jesus.

He was a very caring man. His prayers for others were always very real and poignant.

He was a practical man. Someone in the assembly fell on hard times and DW gave them money to extricate themselves from this dilemma. DW never mentioned it. The couple he helped did, eventually.

What I find grievous and unforgivable is that all the friends he had at Shanklin have deserted him and refuse to speak to him apparently in accordance with PA's instructions. They treat him as a leper or a carrier of some dangerous disease.

This is an assembly that believes in autonomy that means to say self-governing and the dismissal of the help or assistance of any other assembly. This also means that if the elders make a decision it stands even if it is wrong as it evidently was in this case. The fact that the four leading brethren in assemblies in nearby areas refused to speak at Shanklin again because they knew that this assembly was and remains in the wrong is highly significant.

DW was sacked as an elder when he was no longer an elder.

He asked what his offence was. PA answered, "You are out of step!".

DW asked, "What does that mean?".

The only answer he had was silence.

I have heard the tape.

How can anyone stay in that assembly when it has behaved so very badly?

Let us assume that DW was wrong about something and needed discipline.

That offence had to be made clear and precise to DW and to the whole assembly all gathered together and when DW could respond to the accusations.

This was not done.

The offence was not told to him.

The whole assembly did not attend any meeting in which the offence was made known to them.

The assembly were only invited to a meeting when the matter was over.

What is even more disgusting is that the Shanklin meeting instructed solicitors to write to DW in which they claimed that they would enter a defence for the Shanklin assembly if any action was taken. DW was not to take action but for the Shanklin meeting to instruct solicitors and take the matter to law is against Scripture.

The assembly said that DW was not welcome at the assembly but his wife and children were.

That is divisive and abhorrent.

DW's wife vowed to have nothing to do with brethren again and we can understand this. The pressure put on the family by Shanklin's lies and evil intent has dire consequences for the innocent parties.

It is understandable that DW wrote to the assembly requesting reconciliation and to be informed of his 'error'. It is unforgivable that his letters were not answered. That DW wrote some angry letters is also understandable and would not have been necessary if he had been treated correctly.

Of all the other brethren DW wrote to at other locations who investigated the matter and actually visited the Shanklin meeting they found that the people at Shanklin were not spiritual and were hateful to DW setting him at nought which is contrary to Scripture.

One wrote, 'The brethren are fussy who they break bread with, but not fussy whose hearts they break'.

As a result of this injustice, eleven adults and 7 children left this assembly making up 39% of those breaking bread and 77 % of children.

The fact that Shanklin will not put the matters right is an atrocious violation of Scripture

What they di in the first place was an atrocious violation of Scripture.

To have a meeting about someone no longer in the meeting, which they did, is a violation of Scripture.

That they set this brother at nought is a violation of Scripture.
