

Article

Lois Chapple (1897–1989): A Life in Service of Christ

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Abstract: This article gives a narrative account of the life of Lois Chapple, a Baptist woman, who served as a deaconess, a missionary in China, and as an evangelist and a secretary for the Baptist Women's League and the Baptist World Alliance. This article offers Chapple as an excellent example of how women within Baptist life found opportunities to serve in the twentieth century.

Keywords: Baptist Missionary Society; deaconess; China; Baptist Union; Baptist Women's League

1. Introduction

I cannot be sure when I first came across the name Lois Chapple, but it might have been in the book *Fire Over the Waters* by Douglas McBain who dedicates it “with grateful thanks to Eunice Lois Chapple, 8 July 1897–27 June 1989” (McBain 1997). In the Preface, McBain describes her as a “truly remarkable woman of God” and goes on to say a few brief words about her life:

Lois was baptised in 1907 in Bessels Green, at the age of 10. In 1923 she went to China as a missionary with the Baptist Missionary Society, working in rural areas and teaching in a girls school. On her return home in 1940 she served the Baptist Union as the secretary for the Women's Department of those days with the Baptist Women's League. It was in 1968 that the Holy Spirit visited her in a renewing way. In all her subsequent years her humble, truthful, astute yet common sense witness, as a member and deacon of an inner-suburban Baptist church in Lewin Road, Streatham, revealed what it means to be really renewed, fully charismatic and truly Christian. May we emulate Lois in our day with the balance of all these characteristics and with many spiritual gifts too. (McBain 1997)

From 1968 to 1982, McBain was the minister of that Baptist church in Lewin Road. It is also the church where I was dedicated as a baby and grew up in, and where my father, Paul Goodliff, was part of the pastoral team from the early 1980s.¹ I do not remember Lois as a child; she died when I was eight years old. My father would pay pastoral visits to her, which he describes as always being more beneficial to him than to her. It was my father who was called to her flat one morning when the care assistant had found her dead in her chair. He was the one to pray over her body before the undertakers arrived. This is all to say there is some personal connection for me to Lois Chapple.²

As McBain's brief tribute suggests, Lois Chapple's life was as one who sought to serve Christ. In this article, I will give an account of that service as a Baptist deaconess, a Baptist missionary in China, a Baptist Union employee with the Baptist Women's League (BWL) overseeing mission and evangelism amongst women, and her involvement in the Baptist World Alliance.³ Lois' involvement in these ministries should be set within the context of other women who also carried similar roles in Baptist life in the twentieth century (see Smith 2005a, 2021; O'Brien 2021), of whom many are still “forgotten sisters” (Smith 2005b).⁴ This article is also a contribution to the growing focus on women in the church and mission (Robert 2002; Dzubinski and Stasson 2021; Maxwell and Scales 2023). The early half of the twentieth century was a changing time for women, and Lois was among a new generation who benefited from new opportunities.⁵ The purpose of this article is to highlight one



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life—Lois Chapple—in the hope that other lives might also be remembered and told. In narrating Lois’ life, I will also reflect on her approach to mission and evangelism.

2. Early Life

Eunice Lois Chapple was born to Stewart (1873–1957) and Amy (1867–1956) on 9th July 1897. Stewart and Amy had married in 1895. Lois, as it seems she was always known, had an older sister Doris, born in 1896.⁶ Lois was born in Bexhill in Sussex, but by 1901 the family had moved and were living in Clapham, South London, and by 1911 had moved again to the bottom of Streatham Common in South London,⁷ about five minutes’ walk from Streatham Baptist Church in Lewin Road. Lois and Doris attended St. Helen’s School for girls, Streatham Common.⁸ The family joined the church in 1904 and Stewart was elected a deacon in 1905, becoming Church Secretary in 1916 until 1953 (Chapple [1919] 1962).⁹ Stewart would become Clerk of the Rules and Orders in the Probate, Divorce, and Admiralty Division at the Royal Courts of Justice, and in 1938 received an M.B.E. from King George VI (Chapple [1919] 1962).

3. Deaconess, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church

Lois trained at St. Mary’s Hospital for Women and Children in Plaistow as a nurse.¹⁰ In 1918 she went to Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church as a deaconess. Deaconess’ did a variety of work. Dorothy Rose records that in 1913, “Sisters were taking services, running Life Brigade companies for the Children, visiting prisons, workhouses and infirmaries, and conducting women’s meetings and anniversary services” (Rose 1954). Lois’ appointment at Bloomsbury came the year before the Baptist Union took responsibility for the running of the Deaconess Order and the establishment of a training college in 1920 (Rose 1954). Lois’ time at Bloomsbury is regrettably vague due to the disappearance of church records in the period she was there (Bowers 1999), but what can be learned is that she was offered the position as a sister working with children on 13 June 1918 on a trial basis. It was noted in the Church minutes “that nothing was known about her yet beyond that she comes from a very good home”.¹¹ It seems there was a delay in her starting because her parents were unwell, but by November 1918, there is mention that she “was doing very well with the children in her trial period”.¹² There then was a brief period of unsettlement because of her father’s concern about remuneration, but by 16th January 1919, it is recorded that “Sister Lois has consented to continue on the terms started last month” and that “she is most willing and helpful”.¹³

4. Carey Hall, Birmingham

On 7 December 1920, Lois was accepted by the BMS Candidate Board for overseas mission. In 1914, the Baptist Zenana Mission had been incorporated within BMS as its Women’s Missionary Association (Stanley 1992). All single women missionaries were part of one department within the BMS. Lois arrived at Carey Hall in September 1921.¹⁴ She was 23.¹⁵ She would study there for two years. Fees were £60 a year in 1919 (Martin 1962). Alongside Lois were seven other women preparing for overseas mission work with the BMS.¹⁶ The Principal while Lois was there was Christina Irvine, who understood the aim of the College to be

to provide such conditions as will conduce to the development of a fully consecrated personality, such as can only be attained in and through Jesus Christ: to help the ordinary girl to become a woman of vision, open-minded, able to take long views, to read the signs of the times in ordinary events, to free her from the hampering fears, pettinesses and unrealities of life, that she may use her powers to the full, to foster in her a self-reliance that is God-reliance and will fit her to meet any situation wisely. (Martin 1962)

The study Lois undertook had an emphasis on the Bible, both Old and New Testament, and with that Christian doctrine and church history. This shows a definite overlap with the content for ministerial training. Additional modules covered missionary methods,

other religions, and foreign languages; practical modules with a focus on nursing, running women's meetings and children's play centres; and finally, modules focusing on hygiene, account keeping, voice production, and other subjects considered necessary for the work of women missionaries.¹⁷ Lois appears to have excelled in her work. In a letter dated 19 April 1923, the following report about Lois was sent to Miss Bowser¹⁸ at the WMA:

Above the average in every way. We feel her health would have been more established if she could have had another year here, she has until she came to us, steadily overworked all her life. She has first rate brains, very thoughtful and conscientious, adaptable. Would do excellent work at the head of a Bible Training Institute, in social work of any kind or special work among education of Hindu or Chinese women.

On Friday 12 October 1923 Lois sailed for China to begin work in Tai-yuan-fu.¹⁹ Among the things that she took with her were some gifts from the Streatham Sisterhood and from the church at Lewin Road.²⁰ At the Sunday evening service before she left, Lois "spoke of her desire to undertake Christian missionary work among the Chinese" and that "it had been her aim for a great many years past".²¹

5. Baptist Missionary in China

In 1912, China had become a republic and this brought new religious freedom for all Chinese citizens (Williamson 1957). New Christian institutions were encouraged, as it was the view that Christianity had "a distinctive contribution" to make in Chinese society (Williamson 1957). The Edwards' Memorial Institute in Tai-yuan-fu was opened in 1923.²² The money to build it had been donated by Miss Emily Kemp in memory of her sister, Mrs E. H. Edwards (O'Brien 2021). It was a "beautiful building in Chinese architectural style" (Williamson 1957) and would become the place where Lois worked. Kemp described it as "a kind of club for ladies and high-school girls" (Kemp 1927). "Activities were conducted on the usual YWCA lines" (Williamson 1957).²³ The Institute was run by a committee of Chinese and foreign women, the majority of the officers being Chinese, and the warden and her assistant supplied by the WMA (Kemp 1927). Lois was the assistant or secretary to the warden. On her arrival, the warden was Miss Ada Sowerby, who had been a missionary since 1910 (Williamson 1957).²⁴

Before reaching Tai-yuan-fu, Lois was in language school for eight months in Peking (Beijing) with another missionary Nora Haslop.²⁵ She would write that she liked language study and her time in the school was "very interesting and happy" and that "China [was] much lovelier even than I expected".²⁶

Lois got involved in the Institute very quickly and by September was writing home about plans "to start a little Baby Health Centre"²⁷ that would "open opportunities for friendship and service". Later the same month, she heard about £29 that the Sunday School at Bloomsbury Central had raised and was asking that it be sent to purchase equipment.²⁸ A first major incident happened in November, when Miss Sowerby had what Lois described as a "breakdown". Lois found herself on her own. Miss Goodchild came to live with her. By then, she was teaching English and running a Bible Study.²⁹ In late December, she would write that

I can't help feeling that while I may hold things together, make friends and keep things going, the side which suffers (though I do my best) is bound to be the individual spiritual work which is so all important and which to a large extent outside help cannot touch.³⁰

By March 1926, Miss Sowerby had returned to the UK, and Lois received news that Mrs Wenham was to take over as Warden.³¹ Before Mrs Wenham arrived in June, an incident of more national significance took place in May. In the "International Settlement at Shanghai, some Chinese were shot dead by British police and military" during student demonstrations. This resulted in "active hostility against foreigners, particularly the British" (Williamson 1957; Stanley 1992). In an August letter to supporters, Lois wrote:

In reference to Shanghai incident—I was ordered to sleep up at the main mission compound as I was living alone. . . The Chinese are people like we are, with about as big a mixture of good and bad, kindness and selfishness, cleverness and foolishness, possibility and failure as we have. Above all they are our brothers and sisters for whom Christ died.³²

In the same letter she would share her aims:

We do want the Chinese mother to have an outlook that is broad enough to help her to bring up her children to be citizens of the world, and to help her to know about and care about putting right the evils of the society in which she lives, but we don't want her to be a restless sort who thinks the only place not worth time and consideration is her own household. The moral of that is that we are not here to westernise.

What is reflected here is the broader understanding of women's work among women, which believed that "women of the world were sisters" and to work among women was about sharing the gospel and latest western methods of "home economics, hygiene, and child nurture" (Robert 2009).

The equipment for the Baby Health Centre had arrived in December 1924 and was up and running in 1925. In her history, Miss Kemp wrote

An Infant Welfare centre, which is a great attraction, has been established by Miss Lois Chapple, and throughout the violent anti-British agitation, when everything else was suspended, mothers brought their babies, and schoolgirls insisted on having baths! (Kemp 1927)

In October 1926, Lois expressed for the first time in a letter, a heart to do more evangelistic work.

I do believe that the Institute may do a great work and have a great future, though it be long in coming, but there are times when I envy the folk whose job is evangelistic work out and out.³³

During the autumn in 1926, Lois was unwell. This was described as gastric trouble and being run-down after so much responsibility over the last two years. She requested to come home early for her first furlough, partly because of illness and partly because if she delayed until 1928, the Institute would be left without any WMA staff, as Miss Wenham was due to return to home then too. The plan was to come home in 1927 and to then return early 1928. Lois left China at the end of April and returned to the UK in June 1927. There was some concern by R. Fletcher Moorshead, the BMS Medical Secretary, about Lois' long-term health and whether she was well enough to continue beyond one more term.³⁴ This delayed her return to the field, alongside another reason, being that the situation in China was not felt to be safe.

In April 1928, Lois conducted a service at Lewin Road and spoke about life as a missionary overseas. She used the opportunity not to speak about any stories of success, but instead the challenges of being a missionary. She said the following:

There was a personal kind of difficulty against which the missionary must fight. They went out with tremendous enthusiasm and eagerness; they started with a run, but they found it somewhat harder than they imagined.³⁵

Here, an insight is given into her own feelings about her first years in China. She went on to say that "they might fall into the attitude of being too busy to do the real work". The real work being evangelism, and this was Lois' ongoing frustration about her initial years in China. She wanted to do what she deemed and understood as more missionary work.

While she was home, the results of Lois' Chinese language studies arrived. These were very good and recorded that "I am impressed with the evidence of painstaking work, as in the knowledge of out-of-the-way words and phrases", going on to say that "Miss Chapple is to be very heartily congratulated on the result of her thorough work".³⁶ Similar tributes

were given to her ahead of her return to China. At a valedictory service, the minister at Lewin Road, Rev T. Cynon Jones, said of Lois “she was a woman of keen and strong intellect, with a very deep devotion to her work”. He remarked also that “she was perhaps the first to obtain a hundred percent” in her language examinations. Rev Dr Phillips of Bloomsbury Central referred to her “preeminent qualifications”.³⁷

Lois finally set sail for Tai-yuan-fu on 28 September 1928 and arrived in November. She returned as Warden at the Institute. On her journey back across China to Tai-yuan-fu, news reached her that a fellow WMA worker, Grace Mann, had been killed by robbers as she was travelling to Hsin-Chou (Williamson 1957; Stanley 1992). Lois would write that,

we don’t believe that this life laid down is wasted. We are sure that it is an offering well pleasing to God and that the influence left behind will last and do real service.

In a later letter, Lois complains about Charles Brown (MacDonald 1947), who she had heard wanted “to deny women the right and privilege that they admit for themselves to suffer hardship and to meet danger for Christ’s sake should they be called to”.³⁸ Brown was the minister of Ferme Park Baptist Church, which was Grace Mann’s sending church, which perhaps gives some reason for his apparent comments. For Lois, women had an equal call to the mission field, despite its potential dangers.

By February 1929, in a letter to supporters, Lois was writing about difficult days at the institute, some of this worry was financial, and yet she was also requesting funds to fund a Chinese nurse in a year’s experiment.³⁹ Internally, it appears that there were also tensions about the work of the institute. In a letter to Lois from Miss Bowser it is said,

I quite understand your feeling that you must be allowed a certain amount of freedom. . . I think the Committee realise there are some of your colleagues, as there are some of mine on committees here, who would be somewhat distrustful of the kind of work the Institute seeks to do.⁴⁰

In July 1929, Lois came to an important decision, which she set out in a letter to Miss Bowser:

I believe that God’s call to me is to a different kind of work from that of the Institute, and so I want to ask to be released from the Institute as a soon as it is convenient and to be allowed to ask Conference to appoint me to ordinary evangelistic work. As both you and Mrs Wenham⁴¹ know this is not a sudden idea, but has been working in my mind for several years, but I have not felt clear enough as to what might be personal inclination and what is God’s will. . .

Please don’t misunderstand me, I am not suggesting that the Institute is not a place where one can work for God. It may well be that many people may feel their call to just that kind of work, but I think my own work for him lies elsewhere.⁴²

The frustration she had been feeling earlier here reached a point where she seeks clearly to switch her work to that which reflected her understanding of her call. Lois demonstrates a boldness in her request, highlighting that she felt she had some agency in being able to ask those at home in London. What is reflected in Lois is two views of missionary work, one having a more humanitarian emphasis and the other with a more evangelistic leaning (Stanley 1990); Lois’ clear desire was to engage in more of the latter.

In November, in another letter, she says “I am quite willing to go anywhere that is thought best, even to be transferred to Shensi if it seemed advisable, though of course I prefer to stay in Shansi”.⁴³ In the same letter, she references a letter she had received from Miss Kemp:

I had quite a kind, but slightly exasperating letter from Miss Kemp about my resignation! My reasons for leaving were not the difficulties as such, at all, but rather a real doubt as to the achievability of the whole method (which naturally Miss Kemp couldn’t understand) and a conviction of my own unsuitability for this job and possible suitability for the other kind.

In February 1930, Lois transferred to Sinchow, where she worked in the Women's School alongside Beulah Glasby.⁴⁴ From her letters, the years in Sinchow were Lois' most enjoyable. She would write, "I just love the school every minute of it, every woman in it".⁴⁵ She described a typical day as having multiple bible classes, playing volleyball and finishing with a prayer meeting. Lois wrote an article for the *Missionary Herald* in 1931 which explained that "almost all the pupils are married women, and their ages range from fifteen to forty" (Chapple 1931). These women would stay at the school. Lois concludes by saying

We try to bring each women face to face with that Power beyond herself, which, entering in, may give her an ideal, a hope and life-germ which will continue to develop and to enrich her life, even in the most untoward circumstances. If a healthy body and an awakened mind are filled and controlled by the spiritual power which flows out continually from the life-giving God, our student's belated schooling will not have been in vain. Without this our experiment in adult education will have been a failure'. (Chapple 1931)

Lois was someone who liked to teach about the bible. From the beginning, she was a good student, at school, at Carey Hall, and she clearly enjoyed teaching others.

In 1932, Lois was ill again, and in June, had an operation for her mastoid. She took a long time to recover. Her second furlough was agreed, and she returned home to England in early January 1933. In September, she was on her way back to Sinchow. She would write again, very positively, about her work and the community in Sinchow:

There is a very free and beautiful Christian fellowship here too, such real, practical praying and looking for revival and definite seeking and expecting for conversions too. Oh for a real movement by the living Spirit throughout our Shansi field and among ourselves! We must pray and watch and prepare for it. . .

I do feel that we ought to be able to support our village evangelism far far better and to use suitable Chinese women for that purpose. And I feel too that our women's school is a vital work to provide intelligent Christian women who can read and who can become voluntary workers in their own villages.⁴⁶

This desire for a movement of the Holy Spirit was inspired by a holiday in Shansi Hills, in the one of houses of the China Inland Mission.⁴⁷ Here, Lois had a spiritual experience:

For me, there were fears gently taken away, and the still, small voice of his lovely Presence. There were times of darkness and helplessness, followed by sweet peace and joy, and He talked with me in the silence in a deeper way than ever before, so that I cannot but know Him and love Him better. (Chapple 1934)

The work of the Holy Spirit would become something she experienced again in later life, as is mentioned below.

In 1935, Lois was ill again, and she had to leave Sinchow for Tai-yuan-fu. Miss Bowser would write to her that

You must comfort yourself that nothing is outside of God's plan and tedious and unnecessary as this illness may have seemed, there must be some good He can work out of it.⁴⁸

In December, being no better, Lois began the journey again to the UK. This was very disappointing for her, but she reflected the following:

I don't doubt—I never have doubted—the loving wisdom of God. His Will is 'good and perfect' but I have been finding it hard to say 'acceptable' too. But although I can't quite rejoice in it yet, I do choose His will not just suffer it.⁴⁹

Lois would not begin the journey back to China until August 1937. This was due partly to her long recovery and to the situation in China. In July 1937, the Japanese invaded and occupied Shansi and Shantung (Williamson 1957). Lois began sailing on 13th August 1937, with her three new recruits, two of whom were engaged to be married. In September,

they reached Colombo in Ceylon (Sri Lanka)⁵⁰ and they were ordered to stay there. Two weeks later, they were on their way to Hong Kong and by November they were in Peking (Beijing). Lois finally reached Sinchow in February. She would write that “it was sad to see signs of war”, but “the Japanese soldiers on the train treated us very well, some of them helps us a lot and we had no trouble”.⁵¹ Lois and the other missionaries were in the Japanese Occupied Zone, but it was also under threat from Chinese guerrillas. In early 1938, it had been “prayerfully decided to re-occupy the northern stations”. (Williamson 1957). In March, Lois wrote that “things here were very precarious a fortnight ago”.⁵²

On 4 May 1938, tragedy struck as two BMS missionaries and their Chinese driver were killed by Chinese guerrillas who mistook them to be Japanese (Williamson 1938). One of those murdered was Beulah Glasby, Lois’ friend and co-worker in Sinchow (Williamson 1938, p. 138). Glasby was 43. In a letter dated May 18th, Lois wrote home that “you will be sharing in our sorrow and loss. . . Beulah has been a wonderful friend to me. . . she has been a really great missionary”.⁵³ In a later letter written to supporters at home she reflected the following:

The events in May with all the sorrow and loss, has not made us regret opening these stations. Neither we, nor those two dear friends of ours, ever imagined that the great cause of world redemption that cost God at calvary would be without cost to those who are privileged to share it with Him. We were and are willing to go where we are sent and to do what He appoints not less willingly than soldiers who fight in an earthly cause. It is not Safety First for any of Christ’s folk. They would have had it so, we would not and nor would you. We take no foolish risks, but our job is more, not less, important than the material ones for which people sacrifice so much. Our Master tells us very plainly what His followers would meet in this world in following Him, and we do not complain if his words are fulfilled, do we?⁵⁴

Lois was a woman “obviously courageous and dedicated,” (Robert 2009) like many other women (and men), as a Christian disciple. Her evangelicalism is clearly described here, with an emphasis on the cross, an active faith, and the importance of conversionism, alongside her regard for the Bible (Bebbington 1989).

Williamson records that Lois and Mr and Mrs Hayward, Mrs Lewis and Mr and Mrs J. Henderson-Smith “tried to maintain work in the city and the district”. In Lois’ words, “our plans and hopes to hold on had to be given up. The situation became impossible, and we were a danger, not a help, to our friends”.⁵⁵ They left on the 6th of August. Lois, like other fellow missionaries, found “other spheres of service”. For Lois, this meant a job in Shanghai for the National Christian Council of China (NCCC). Before this started in February 1940, Lois went on a number of visits to projects working with women across northern China, observing their methods (Chapple 1940). The focus of all these projects was building Christian homes. In Lois’ words, “the ultimate strength of a Christian community lies not only in the life of the Church, but also in the life of the Christian homes of which the Church is composed”. This emphasis on Christian homemaking was widely held (Robert 2008). The new job for the NCCC was an office and administrative one, which Lois wrote was something new to the variety of roles she had held since being a nurse and deaconess.

In May 1940, with war having broken out in Europe, Lois received a letter from her father in England⁵⁶ and this led her to what might be best termed as a crisis of conscience: should she return home or stay in China? Lois describes her parents “badly needing me” because “neither of them very well” and without other support.⁵⁷ Writing to Miss Bowser, she said the following:

When I left home nearly 3 years ago I left my parents in very happy circumstances, my sister near, and friends living with them. . . I did not anticipate the unimagined threat of present conditions. They are now quite alone and do not feel they can leave their home. With all my love for China and for the Mission, and my sense of vocation, I still feel that now my duty and God’s will for me may be to return to them [parents] until these serious possibilities are past. . . what I am really asking

for is an indefinite leave without salary. . . if they want me to definitely resign, much as it would grieve me I would have to do so. . . I had not until the last two weeks dreamed of it.⁵⁸

In June, Lois was still not certain what to do. If the doors opened up to return to Sinchow, she was considering staying.⁵⁹ It appears that Lois feels that her present role for NCCC was not something that she felt could keep her in China, especially if there was concern for her parents at home.⁶⁰ On the 13 June, Miss Bowser wrote to Lois:

Your parents seem well and fit, they do not seem unduly apprehensive of present difficulties, nor future possibilities, though none of us know what these may be.

My colleagues and I do not think you should come away. On the other hand, you are grown woman and you must make your own decisions and we feel this decision rests with you, but we quite clear that if you come away it cannot be for leave without pay but that you must withdraw from the Society.⁶¹

On 5 July, Lois had made her mind up: "I have decided in view of all the circumstances (including recent developments out here) that if God opens the way I shall take it as his will that I shall go to my parents".⁶² She left Shanghai on the 14th July and was home by mid-August. As the exchange above demonstrates, Lois wanted BMS to give her leave without salary, but this was refused, and she resigned on the 2nd of September. The Home Committee accepted her resignation but did leave the door open for the possibility of future service back in China.

6. Baptist Union, Baptist Women's League, and the Baptist World Alliance

In September 1940, Lois got a "little teaching job" locally in a school. In October 1941, she got a job for the Postal Censorship Department under the government's Ministry of Information, working in the Chinese section. Lois' "special qualifications and abilities were highly valued and from where she was released [in 1944] with great reluctance". (*Fifty Years 1958*).⁶³ She was released because on 7 June 1944, Lois was appointed Assistant to Doris Rose, the Organising Secretary for the Women's Department in the Baptist Union.⁶⁴ In the Baptist Union report, Lois' role was described as "specially responsible for the BWL's organisation, the Girl's Hostel and the Home for Unmarried Mothers"⁶⁵ The Woman's Department had been established in January 1938, under which umbrella the BWL, the Deaconess Order, and the Hostel were included (*Fifty Years 1958*). The BWL had begun in 1908 as a means of organising women to support the Baptist Union's Home Work Fund (*Fifty Years 1958*) and for most of its early history it was an astonishingly good fundraising organisation, supporting Home Work, but also the work of women, like the deaconesses. However, by 1939, the BWL had 644 local branches and the work was described as women "thinking and planning, praying and evangelizing" (*Fifty Years 1958*).

While her new role involved administration, it also provided her with lots of opportunities to do the kind of work she enjoyed. In her early years in the Baptist Union, she made lots of visits to local BWL branches.⁶⁶ There is a record of the kind of talk Lois gave from an account of an address she made at Perry Rise Baptist Church:

[Lois] wanted them to imagine a little house right in the middle of a field. It had many windows. They had thought a lot about windows lately. This little house represented the house of the soul. It had a skylight which looked right up to God, and let the sunlight into their souls, and sometimes the skylight was blacked out. The upstairs windows looked right out on to the field which was the world, and the need to keep these windows clear and uncovered was very great today. Downstairs windows looked out on to their neighbours. They must keep these wide open because people were trying to depend on themselves instead of on God, and they must try as missionaries here to win these people by friendship and kindness to have faith in God.⁶⁷

Reflected in this talk was Lois' emphasis within the BWL on evangelism. Women should be open to God and open to mission. Her first big project was the Campaign to Women, inaugurated in 1947 and focused on encouraging women to "prepare by prayer and re-dedication for witness and evangelism" (*Fifty Years 1958*). Lois "felt it the time was ripe to appeal to the women of the country to return to God".⁶⁸ In her view "as the international situation has deteriorated and a feeling of pessimism has spread we should have a clear ringing message to the women of this country of which the central theme might be "Christ the answer to the world's need"". ⁶⁹

In 1949, Lois was a key organizer of a rally of Baptist women for the BWL. In her words, it was a "venture of faith" because of the venue's size and she encouraged "earnest prayer... for those who plan, lead, speak and sing, and for those who will form the congregation".⁷⁰ This saw 9500 women gather in Empress Hall, Earls Court, where the general theme was on the Campaign to Women.⁷¹ Following the conference, she wrote a general letter in her capacity as Organising Secretary on "The Next Step in the Campaign to Women". She wrote that "every kind of talent, every part of life, the ordinary tasks of every day must be related practically to Christian faith through Christian Action".⁷² The whole project has some overlap with Lois' time in the BMS, as the purpose is about women reaching other women.

In 1960, on her retirement as Organising Secretary and her appointment as President of the BWL for 1960–61, Lois reflected on the last fifteen years. Having listed the various works that she was responsible for, she wrote, "one heartening sign has been the quickened sense of our evangelistic opportunities and the challenge they present to us as individuals and groups".⁷³ Although she adds, "yet we would all agree, I am sure, that we fall very far short of what we long to be and do in witnessing and winning women for our Lord and Saviour". Lois wrote a small booklet as part of Baptist Union's Ter-Jubilee Celebrations. For Lois, all the various women's meetings and groupings should be understood as related to the centre, which is the church. Each meeting is a "bridgehead" for the "church as a whole in its task for evangelism". (*Chapple 1960*). Lois' BWL presidential address was entitled "The Great Company and their Task".⁷⁴ The *Baptist Times* reported that "it was an encouragement to those listening to understand themselves as part of Christ's great company as light-bearers, heralds, priests, gift-bearers, peace-makers and choristers".⁷⁵ Whether overseas or in England, Lois saw it as imperative that women played their part.

In the Baptist Union Council report for the year ending in 1950, the following was claimed:

The League sent its organising secretary, Miss E. L. Chapple, to America and Canada to attend the BWA World Congress and make contacts with leaders of Baptist Women's work on that side of the Atlantic. So greatly impressed were the women who received her with great kindness by her capacity and personality that they gave her no rest until she had consented to become the honorary secretary of the Women's Committee of the BWA, which promised to find all necessary help. Our Women's Committee, while anxious that no intolerable burden should be laid on her, feel that they are themselves honoured by the choice and gladly assented to her acceptance of the post. We cordially offer her our good wishes.

A new global sphere was opened to Lois. As a secretary to this new BWA women's work (*Patterson and Pierard 2005*), she travelled to various countries,⁷⁶ for example, in 1958 to India at the launch of the Asian Baptist Women's Union.⁷⁷ In 1950, she attended a pre-congress conference on Baptist World Missions (*Patterson and Pierard 2005*), and at the Congress in Cleveland, Ohio, Lois spoke on the subject "Is Christ the Answer?" At the ninth BWA World Congress in 1955 in London, she was a member of the organising committee and was appointed in the same year to BWA Executive Committee representing the BWA Women's Department. At the tenth BWA World Congress in 1960 in Rio, Brazil, she retired from BWA Women's Department,⁷⁸ but was co-opted (and so remained) on to BWA Executive for a further five years.

Lois retired from active work at the end of 1959.⁷⁹ In the Baptist Union Council Report for 1959, the following was recorded:

Miss Chapple was appointed to the staff of the BU in 1944. She has proved herself an excellent colleague, a gifted administrator, a wise counsellor and friend, and will be much missed at the Church House. She has been notably successful in holding together the many different interests and enterprises of her department. The warmest gratitude and good wishes will follow her on her retirement and as she undertakes the Presidency of the BWL for the year 1960–61.

7. Deacon, Streatham Baptist Church

Lois was a member of Streatham Baptist Church, popularly known as “Lewin Road”. Her membership stretched back probably throughout her time in China, and certainly when she returned to England permanently in 1940. During her missionary years, when she returned on furlough, she was living at the family home in Kempshott Road in Streatham.⁸⁰

Lois was the first woman at Lewin Road to be appointed a deacon. In the history of the church, she records in understated words, “In 1958, we made history in a quiet way by electing a woman to the diaconate for the first time!” (Chapple [1919] 1962). Her appointment came in March 1958, when Rev Angus McMillan was minister (Chapple [1919] 1962). For a lengthy period—as deacon—she would be the only woman serving during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. She would remain a deacon until 1977, when the church meeting appointed her as a life deacon, an honorary role, demonstrating how well-respected she was by all. When Angus retired as church minister, it was Lois who spoke at his farewell on behalf of the church. She was close to both Angus and to his wife Margaret⁸¹, and she wrote a short tribute when Margaret died in 1978.⁸² Lois organised the arrangements for the induction of Rev Douglas McBain. When McBain introduced an eldership into the church structures in the mid-1970s, there was discussion of whether women could become elders. The answer at that point was no, but on her appointment as a life deacon, the minutes of the deacons record that “her name be kept in mind as a possible Elder if and when the matter of women elders was considered”.⁸³

Lois was among many Christians in Britain who were influenced by Charismatic renewal.⁸⁴ In 1972, she records, in a letter in the *Baptist Times*, receiving “a deeper experience of His Holy Spirit’s infilling” which included the gift of tongues.⁸⁵ In the church newsletter in November 1974, Lois described a day of prayer and fasting held in the church in which a visiting minister spoke about revival and visions were shared. She concluded,

Our Fast Day was a joyful time of rich fellowship together, but truly ‘our fellowship was with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ’. Now refreshed, united, rejoicing and filled with His Spirit may we go forward to that great work He has called us to do together.⁸⁶

After she retired from her role at the Baptist Union, it appears she became even more involved in her local church. She offered hospitality and support to others,⁸⁷ hosted meetings, and for six years edited the monthly church newsletter.

After many years of service in the local church and in the wider denomination, by the late 1970s, it seems that Lois was beginning to slow down. In an article from 1978 called “Growing Old”, she wrote that growing old means “we have to lay down the things we love; there is an inevitable slowing down in many ways”, but she wrote also of the “wonderful compensations too” which are being met “with so much kindness from younger people, such a warmth of loving consideration, such generous helpfulness, so many greetings and messages”. At the end of December 1981, it is reported in the Lewin church newsletter that Lois was home from a stay in hospital and a nursing home after a “nasty fall” and had “a substantial way to go before she returned to normal health”.⁸⁸ Lois died on 27 June 1989.⁸⁹

8. Conclusions

Lois Chapple lived a remarkable life stretching across much of the twentieth century. She was involved in several areas of service then available to women—deaconess, missionary, and the BWL—and she therefore offers an example of what ministry looked like in these roles. Her life was one in which she faced several different health challenges, but she chose not to let this hinder her. It was one committed to sharing and serving the gospel, sometimes to her own physical exhaustion. There is a sense that Lois knew her own mind and made decisions as she felt led by God, seen in particular in her choice to come back to England in 1940. While that decision closed the door to further overseas missionary work, it led to a new door being opened to evangelistic work in England. Lois held an evangelical commitment to evangelism and to the importance of women's participation in the evangelistic task in the home and the community. She was very respected by all those who knew her well. Lois sought to seize and expand every opportunity she was presented with to serve Christ. She deserves to be a remembered sister.⁹⁰

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Notes

- ¹ He was appointed as "Pastoral Elder" in 1982, from 1984 he was training for ministry at Spurgeon's College, London, and was ordained in 1988.
- ² Throughout this article I will refer to her as Lois, but to many she was known as Miss Chapple.
- ³ There was no obituary for Lois in either the *Baptist Union Directory*, the *Baptist Times*, or the *Missionary Herald*. In wider Baptist history, a few references to Lois can be found in (Williamson 1957; Payne 1959; Randall 2005).
- ⁴ Although see the recent collection of essays Maxwell and Scales, 2023.
- ⁵ In 1918, John Howard Shakespeare, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, wrote "I regard the liberation of women from the bonds of prejudice, the growth of the power to serve at the call of new responsibilities, and the gift of her intellect, intuition and moral earnestness as the most hopeful features of our time" (Shakespeare 1918, p. 10).
- ⁶ Doris married Henry Knight in September 1922 (*Streatham News*, 8 September 1922, p. 3) and died 30 October 1944 (*Streatham News*, 3 November 1944, p. 8).
- ⁷ 1911 Census. The Chapple family were a South London family; Stewart was born in Lambeth and was living there until at least 1891. In 1911, the Chapple home consisted of the four members of the family, but also by then Amy's mother, and a servant.
- ⁸ *Streatham News*, 31 July 1909, p. 4.
- ⁹ This does struggle to make sense of McBain's claim that Lois was baptised in Bessels Green (Sevenoaks, Kent) in 1907, but I infer that he must have got that information from Lois herself.
- ¹⁰ I have not been able to confirm this, but this seems likely, on the basis that the training was in a hospital and the expectation that "each deaconess was required to take a three to six months' nursing course" (Rose 1954, p. 10).
- ¹¹ *Bloomsbury Central Church Committee Minute Book*, May 1912 to July 1919.
- ¹² See Note 11.
- ¹³ See Note 11.
- ¹⁴ The College had opened in 1912—made possible by a gift from the Baptist Emily Kemp—as the United Missionary College for Women, with room for twenty women. For a history of the Carey Hall (see Martin 1962).
- ¹⁵ The Carey Hall College Register said she had two years' nursing experience and three years as a deaconess.
- ¹⁶ There were other women training to serve with other missionary agencies.
- ¹⁷ The breadth of this training was a response to a criticism at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 (see Seton 2013, pp. 46–47).

- 18 Miss (Eleanor) Bowser was the secretary of the WMA within BMS. In 1946, she would become BMS India Secretary, after the structures of the BMS changed and the WMA, and with it the Medical Mission Auxiliary, no longer existed (see [Stanley 1992](#), p. 389). For more on Bowser, see 'Mary Eleanor Bowser' in ([Clement 1955](#), pp. 109–16).
- 19 Tai-yuan-fi is a large town located in the province of Shansi in North China.
- 20 These were as follows: a picture of an English garden scene, a travelling picnic basket, a Schofield's Bible, two books (*Democracy and Education* by John Dewey and *Social Psychology* by William McDougall), and an Underwood portable typewriter, *Streatham News*, 12 October 1923, p. 6. Before returning back to China in 1928, she was presented with a folding chair and portable folding table and stools, *Streatham News*, 7 September 1928, p. 4.
- 21 *Streatham News*, 12 October 1923, 6.
- 22 Ta-yuan-fi was a key Baptist mission centre, with BMS also running schools and a hospital.
- 23 YWCA, meaning Young Women's Christian Association, had been founded in 1855. For a history of the YMCA in China (see [Littell-Lamb 2023](#)). Littell-Lamb argues that "one of the association's earliest emphases was in providing places for community and fellowship "where women may meet and make friends with one another, drink tea together, play games, listen to music and touch other women's lives." Bringing these women together provided YWCA secretaries with the opportunity to introduce new ideas into the lives of their members and visitors. A primary goal for work with "women of leisure" was to involve them in social service as a way to introduce them to the fundamental precept of Christianity, since to association women, "social service" and "Christian service" were one and the same" ([Littell-Lamb 2023](#), pp. 28–29).
- 24 Both Ada's parents had been missionaries in China too.
- 25 Haslop worked in Shensi. She married the Rev George A. Young in 1927 and retired from service in 1952 ([Williamson 1957](#), p. 369).
- 26 Letter 17 June 1924 to Miss Lockhart.
- 27 Letter 5 September 1924.
- 28 Letter 24 September 1924.
- 29 Letter 17 November 1924.
- 30 Letter 28 December 1924.
- 31 Letter to Lois, 20 March 1925. Mrs H. V. Wenham before she was married was Miss Margaret Angus, daughter of Joseph Angus, who had been Principal of Regent's Park College, London, and after which the Angus Library at Regent's Park College, Oxford is named.
- 32 Letter 30 August 1925.
- 33 Letter 1 October 1926.
- 34 A medical examination, back in London, stated that she was experiencing "nervous exhaustion and brain-fag". While in the UK, Lois underwent treatment in Brighton and was fitted with a surgical belt, which suggests a problem with a hernia.
- 35 *Streatham News*, 20 April 1928, p. 8.
- 36 Report of Language Examinations, attached to letter to Lois, 1 June 1927.
- 37 *Norwood News*, 7 September 1928, p. 4.
- 38 Letter 13 March 1930 to Miss Bowser.
- 39 Letter 8 February 1929.
- 40 Letter 5 April 1929.
- 41 Mrs Wenham was back in England, and had retired from overseas service in 1928, but still obviously involved in some way with the WMA.
- 42 Letter 15 July 1929.
- 43 Letter 23 November 1929.
- 44 Glasby had been in China since 1924.
- 45 Letter 4 December 1930 to Miss Bowser.
- 46 Letter 25 July 1934 to Miss Bowser.
- 47 For links between Keswick and the holiness movement with the China Inland Mission (see [Price and Randall 2000](#), pp. 105–19).
- 48 Letter 17 May 1935 to Lois.
- 49 Letter 1 December 1935 to Miss Bowser.
- 50 Modern day Sri Lanka.
- 51 Letter 3 February 1928 to Miss Bowser.
- 52 Letter 18 March 1938 to Miss Bowser.
- 53 Letter 18 May 1938 to Miss Bowser.
- 54 Letter 12 January 1939 to friends.
- 55 Letter 20 November 1939 to Miss Bowser from Peking.
- 56 This letter is not in the collection of correspondence held by the Angus Library.

- 57 Letter 17 My 1940 to Miss Bowser.
- 58 Letter 22 May 1940 to Miss Bowser.
- 59 Letter 13 June 1940 to Miss Bowser.
- 60 Letter 24 June 1940 to Miss Bowser.
- 61 Letter 13 June 1940 from Miss Bowser to Lois.
- 62 Letter 5 July 1940 to Miss Bowser. In a letter written in England explaining her decision, she highlights the fall of Paris and the belief that “it would be very soon almost impossible to enter England”, 24 August 1940 letter to Miss Bowser.
- 63 This history of the BWL was possibly written or at least edited by Lois in her role as Secretary.
- 64 Doris Rose had been appointed in 1933.
- 65 Baptist Union Council report for year ended 1945. The Girls’ Hostel opened in 1912 and the home for unmarried mothers was suggested in the early 1940s, opening in 1945.
- 66 Baptist Union Council Reports years ending 1946 and 1947.
- 67 *Lewisham Borough News*, 4 April 1945, p. 4.
- 68 Minutes of the General Purposes Committee of the Women’s Department, 16 September 1946.
- 69 Minutes of the General Committee of the Women’s Department, 18 September 1946.
- 70 *Baptist Times*, 20 January 1949, p. 3.
- 71 See *Baptist Times*, 5 May 1949, pp. 4, 7.
- 72 “The Next Step in the Campaign to Women”, letter dated September 1949.
- 73 Baptist Women’s Department: Miss Lois Chapple, National President Baptist Women’s League 1960–61, p. 2.
- 74 Based on Psalm 68.11, “The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it” (KJV). Interestingly more recent bible translations translated “company” as “women”.
- 75 *Baptist Times*, 12 May 1960, p. 7.
- 76 In his Foreword to the history of Lewin Road Baptist Church, Angus Macmillian writes, “Space forbids telling of her visits overseas in connection with the Baptist World Alliance”, p. 6.
- 77 Reported in *Streatham News*, 31 October 1958.
- 78 On her retirement, she was given a letter of thanks and a handbag!
- 79 On her retirement, she was presented with a handbag and a cheque! “*The Wind of Change*”. *Report of the Women’s Department for the year ended 31 December 1960*, 3.
- 80 Lois inherited the home after her parents died and she lived there with the family’s housekeeper, Nellie, and also her nephew Victor. [Lois had two other nieces.] When Nellie and Victor died, and the house became too big for Lois on her own, she had a bungalow built in the garden and this became her new home, now in Buckleigh Road.
- 81 Margaret was a President of the BWL in 1948.
- 82 *Lewin News* (November 1978).
- 83 Deacons Minutes, 15 March 1977, p. 3. My father remembers McBain saying that “Lois was the best Elder Lewin never had”.
- 84 McBain was one of the charismatic movement’s leading figures, especially among Baptists.
- 85 *Baptist Times*, 25 May 1972, p. 3. Mentioned by (Randall 2005, pp. 397–98).
- 86 *Lewin News*, November 1974.
- 87 One former church member, whose family had been introduced to Christianity and to the church by Victor and then Lois, remembers how generous and caring Lois was. As a child, both she and her brother received great help and hospitality from Lois, after their mother died and their father wasn’t able to cope, Maxine Hooper in personal conversation Monday 25 March 2024.
- 88 *Lewin News* (December/January 1981/82).
- 89 The funeral was almost certainly led by Douglas McBain, who by then was Baptist General Superintendent of the Metropolitan Area.
- 90 The phrase “remembered sister” is a nod to the work of Karen Smith, in particular, her essay “Forgotten Sisters”.

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