

Script – Season 1 – Project Violet Podcasts

Episode 1 – The story so far

Season Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Centenary Development Enabler for Baptists Together
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we are the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 1 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet is a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. We are trying to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	In this first season, we hope to introduce you to the history of women's ministry in the Baptist movement and look at some of language used to discuss women's experiences.
Jane	We've been working together on Project Violet since May 2021 and have become even more aware of the different layers that make up Baptist life.
Helen	I've learned so much in all the listening we have done to women ministers. I think there are three layers that the project has ended up focusing on: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The everyday language and behaviour we use in church life.2. The accepted ways of doing things.3. What we believe about the church and the role of ministers.
Jane	We hope that listening to these five episodes will prepare you for when the findings of the project are released in May 2024.

Segment 1 – JD/HC the role of history in Project Violet

	Music
Helen	Before we introduce our guests on this episode, we should say something about the part that history that has played in Project Violet. The obvious question is who was Violet, the woman after whom the project is named?
Jane	Violet Hedger was the first woman to study at a college for Baptist ministry, entering Regent's Park College in 1919. The Centenary of her entry to training was celebrated in 2019 which led to my post as Centenary Development Enabler

	being established in 2020. It seemed good to acknowledge that connection in naming the Project.
Helen	<p>And because the Angus Library and Archive is located at Regent's Park College we've been able to collaborate with them and hold three online history events during the project.</p> <p>Revd. Dr Keith Jones has shared his research on Margaret Jarman, Revd. Dr Chris Voke has spoken about his research on Edith Gates, the first woman to train in a pastorate and Revd. Dr Ruth Gouldbourne has looked at the Deaconess movement.</p>
Jane	But we are wanting to add to Baptist history and so all the reports and papers from Project Violet will be added to the Angus archive so future generations of Baptists can learn about women's experience of ministry in the twenty-first century.
Helen	<p>So let's introduce our guests.</p> <p>Simon Woodman is the minister at Bloomsbury Baptist Church in London. In 2011 he wrote a booklet setting out the story of women's ministry. This followed a meeting of the Baptist Council in March 2010 when the full inclusion of women in Baptist ministry was affirmed.</p> <p>Andy Goodliff is the minister at Belle Vue Baptist Church, Southend and also a Lecturer in Baptist History at Regent's Park College and so a colleague. Andy has written about the more recent history of Baptists and noticed the absence of women in that history.</p>
Jane	We've asked them to tell the story so far from their perspectives.

Interview Simon Woodman and Andy Goodliff

	Music
	<p>Helen Cameron Simon, perhaps you could start by telling me how you became interested in this topic.</p> <p>Simon Woodman Thanks so much, Helen. And thanks for inviting me to be on this podcast it is really good to be here. So let me tell you a little bit of my story. I've actually been attending a Baptist church since before I was born. And throughout my childhood, the role models for ministry that I encountered were all men. As someone who sensed a very early call to ministry myself, the examples that</p>

these godly men set for me were an inspiration and an encouragement, I could see something of myself in them. We did sometimes have women preaching, the occasional missionary on furlough, for example. But these were definitely the exception rather than the rule. In our youth group as a teenager, I remember being told once that it was okay before God for a woman to preach, but there has to be a man in overall charge, because that was what was written in the Bible. As I progressed through my teens, I became more and more fascinated by the Bible. I had one of those NIV study Bibles, and I poured over the notes at the bottom of the page and the maps. And I was fortunate enough to be able to do an A' level in RS that focused on the Bible. And all of this paves the way for me to head off to university in Sheffield to do a degree in Biblical Studies. What I found, as so many do, is that the more you study the Bible, the more you realize that it's a complex old document that God has chosen to reveal Jesus to us. And so I started to discover quite a few things that my youth leader had told me, the Bible said, might not actually be sustained in the light of a close reading of the Bible itself. Whilst at university, I also met Liz, who has been my wife now for 29 years, as she told me about her experience of church growing up in the brethren, I started to realize how damaging Christianity can be to women, she was brought up to believe that women must remain silent in church, that they must have their heads covered as a sign of their submission to their husbands, and that they could never be preachers or leaders, all of this because the Bible says so. But I still hadn't experienced any women ministers myself, and I hadn't properly changed my mind from what I've been told as a child. Anyway, fast forward a few years. And I'm at Bristol Baptist College to train for ministry. And I found myself in a class alongside women who were also training. Fairly early on, I remember a conversation with one of them, who is thankfully still one of my best friends. I said to her that I wasn't sure whether women could be ministers because of what the Bible says. And she just replied with a laugh. Oh, Simon, don't be so ridiculous. You've met one now you can't deny what God's doing. And I realized that she was right. Like Peter on the rooftop of Cornelius' house, I realized that I had been calling unacceptable what God had already declared acceptable. And that was the day my journey properly began, I had to go back and reread the scriptures again more carefully and with better guides, and I slowly came to realize that part of my ministry was going to be using my power as a man and a straight white man at that, to amplify the voices of those who are often not heard in our churches. And it all began for me with this change in my convictions about women in ministry. I'm a biblical scholar by discipline, and also a bit of a historian. And so I've written a few things over the years to try and help others understand not only how they might read the Bible in ways that affirm the Ministry of Women, but also to understand our shared history as a Baptist family of both affirming and denying the role of women in our midst.

Helen Cameron

Thank you for that. And thanks for sharing something of your personal story. Andy can I turn to you now and ask how you became interested in the more recent history of the Baptist movement.

Andy Goodliff

Thank you, Helen. And thank you, Simon, for what you've said already. I guess I ended up doing a PhD, which after an attempt to do something else ended up being a study of the Baptist Union, and its period of renewal and change in the 1990s. That story ended up being a very male dominated story, those who were making the decisions. Those were the voices that were heard, were almost entirely men. And unlike Simon, I've never had that moment of shifting from one perspective of could women be ministers or not, I've always accepted it, but like some people I didn't have as much experience of that growing up. But it was also something that I accepted. So I guess I came to the end of the PhD and said, there must be other stories. Well, I knew there were other stories. And I guess part of what I've wanted to do since then is trying to tell some of those stories. And one of those stories is, is how women during that period of the 1990s had to struggle for a voice, which has begun to change since the 2000s.

Helen Cameron

Great, thank you for that background. Andy. I think it's going to be helpful if we now look back and try and take the story from its beginnings. I wonder, Simon, could you start us off on the story?

Simon Woodman

Yeah, I'd love to. So this is drawing on a bit of the research I did for Baptist Union Council. Gosh, I don't know, nearly 15 years ago now, when I was part of Council, and I was asked to produce a paper telling the story of women in Baptist ministry. And I think that's still available to buy as a publication through the Baptist Union. I pick up the story in the early part of the 20th century. And the thing that struck me is that it begins as things so often do in Baptist life with an argument more about money than about theology. In 1926, there was a special committee of the Baptist Union, and it was reported at this committee that three women had been received as accredited Baptist ministers. Their names some of them are familiar to us their names are Mrs. Maria Living-Taylor, Miss Edith Gates and Miss Violet Hedger. The problem was that Miss Gates was receiving a grant from what was then called the Sustentation Fund, to the extent of 33 pounds per year, the notes of the meeting state that a great discussion took place concerning the general question of the admission of women into Baptist ministry. And apparently, many views were expressed. And I've read minutes along those lines over the years in other contexts, too. And it was generally felt that when the Sustentation Fund had been launched to pay stipends to ministers under certain conditions, this is what we now would call the Home Mission fund. The assembly that launched it did not even

contemplate the idea that some of the recipients might one day be female ministers. And so they needed to refer to the solicitor of the Union to ask if it was permissible under the Trust Deed for the funds to pay this grant to Miss Gates. And if not, her case might need to be treated in a different way, and maybe a grant made from another fund. So two interesting points I think are worth highlighting from these committee minutes. The first is that by the time the committee met in 1926, there were already three women on the probationers list with two of them already in pastoral charge of churches. That's really significant to hold on to. The second is that the debate, insofar as it's recorded, at least, seems primarily to be concerned with issues regarding whether women in ministry could receive a stipend from the fund. It wasn't a debate about what the Bible says about women in leadership. The wider context here, of course, is a world where women have only just been given the vote in national elections, and also a world where women have until very recently been prohibited from owning property in their own right, for example. So the concern about the money from the funds needs to be heard in that wider social context. It's also worth noting that the Council taking these discussions would have been entirely comprised of men. Naming it for what it was, this was a roomful of men discussing whether a woman could be paid for the work that she's already doing. We need to let that fact sit with us as in our time, we still I think sometimes end up having discussions about people who are not allowed to fully take their seats at the table. The BU Council in February 1926 received a report from the committee regarding the admission of women in the Baptist ministry, which called for Council to regularize the situation of women in terms of privileges and benefits, it did not call Council to have a theological debate. However, the committee report then goes on to make the following statement of its own position. It says the committee is clear that it would be contrary to Baptist belief in practice to make sex a bar to any kind of Christian service. But then the committee report seeks to draw a line between a call to ministry on the one hand and entry onto the accredited list on the other. They're clear that the decision to call a women's ministry rests with the local church, and on the basis of Baptist congregational freedom, the committee are able to affirm that call. However, entry onto the accredited list carries with it a further level of privilege, and it's on this matter that things seem to get stuck. And I do just want to note that we still live with such complexities regarding local church practice and national accreditation. The issue under debate in 1926 was not, it seems, primarily the Ministry of Women. The committee recognized that there are already women in ministry amongst the churches of the Union and it was not seeking to have this reversed. The issue for consideration at Council is whether women should be allowed the benefits of being on the accredited list. In other words, it's a question of money and status. It boils down, of course to a question about whether someone who is a woman in ministry is a second class of minister to her male colleagues. Anyway, fast forward to 1967. And we find a Baptist Union of Great Britain report 'Women in the service of the denomination', offering a stern warning which echoes down the decades to the current debate

on women in ministry. They suggest that, and this is quoting from the report, 'Baptists need to think carefully again about their doctrine of the ministry, and the meaning they ascribe to ordination. lest they be guilty of practical injustice, as well as theological confusion. Many believe the President's objection to women ministers in Baptist circles is based on feeling rather than reason.' So says the BUGB reports in 1967. Fast forward again to 1975 and the next milestone in Baptist Union Council's consideration of the issue of women in Baptist ministry is to be found in the discussions of the ending of the Baptist Deaconess movement. Since 1890, women had served Baptist churches as Deaconesses. This was a role which initially involved social work and visitation and my own church in central London had many deaconesses throughout this period. However, the nature of the role had developed over the decades. And it became increasingly clear that functionally many of these deaconesses were now in effect, functioning as pastors of churches. And as with the initial debate regarding the admission of women to the accredited list, Council, once again, found itself in a situation where it was having to play catch up where women were pastoring Baptist churches, and yet we're unaccredited to do so. And so once again, Council had to regularize a reality that already existed amongst the churches. I really hope we're in a different place today. But honestly, sometimes I'm not so sure. But anyway, I think this brings us to the 1980s. And I think it's time for Andy to pick up the story on the basis of some of his research.

Helen Cameron

That's great, Simon, thank you very much for sketching in those early years in the 20th century for us. Andy, would you like to talk a bit about what you discovered in your research.

Andy Goodliff

So again, the focus of my research was the participation of women in the institutions, things like Simon was talking about, the Council, but also the Baptist Union, its own officers, and personnel. And so I might actually take us back to the beginning of the 20th century again, which is where we see the creation of something called the Baptist Women's League, which was a growing significant movement for most of the 20th century, at least up to the 1980s, in which women were encouraged to join together in prayer, in service and evangelism. And this was a positive thing. But perhaps, the potential thing that came out of it was that actually because women were kind of sidelined into this specific sphere of work, they were operating less in the places of institutions and power. So alongside the Baptist Women's League, you also see the creation of a women's desk or a women's department within the Baptist Union sitting under mission. So it sits in that kind of space, rather than this place in which there might end up being equality emerging. So what begins to happen in the 1980s, is you begin to see a growing number of women Baptist ministers. So Simon talked about the initial three back in the 1920s. There was a demographic, a group of eight in the 1950s. But it's not until the 1980s or late 1970s, that we

began to see another significant group, which has begun to grow of women in ministry. And these women in ministry began as they became a more sizable group and began to kind of, I guess, talk to one another, engage together, began to advocate for more change. And so what we see is when we get to the 1990s the conversation obviously is about women in ministry, and that's a significant one, but it's also about the place of women in Baptist Union Council, in college staff, within the associations in those positions and within the Baptist Union itself. And so we see I think, through that decade, a conscious attempt to increase the number of women in all those different spheres And that that was about women. But it was also about men taking that decision to lead as well. So David Coffey and Keith Jones for their listening days as General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary, listened to the Union. And listen, I guess to that voice of women that summons to be heard, and began to advocate that actually, the Council needed to change what we see for the 1990s as the stubbornness, perhaps of Council to change, and the several attempts to increase the number of women within the Council hits against the buffers and didn't increase. And so it's not actually until a report in 2002, that there was a conscious decision made to increase the number of women from the Associations, but also the number of women coopted on increase. And so we see a significant change by the 2000s. And then I think it's about the increasing number of women in ministry. But it's also about where we are at the end of the 20th century. And so what we also see, again, is the beginnings, small as they were of women, becoming staff members within the colleges, the first one in 1985. And then by 1993, each one of the Baptist colleges has a woman on staff. We also see it within the Baptist Union itself and its officers so that by the beginning of the 1990s, we see a woman holding a brief around social affairs, where women had perhaps more ministerial roles within the Union here we had someone in a conscious way. We also see it's not just the number of women participating within Council, but it's also the positions that they take, moderating the Ministerial Recognition Committee, moderating Faith and Unity, moderating Church Relations, moderating Mission Executive, those kinds of places, and so we begin to see the significance. One thing I should mention, actually, another thing I think that's crucial to this story changing is Margaret Jarman, becoming president of the Union in 1987. There was a woman president before that, in 1978, who whose name was Mrs. Alexander, but she was a lay woman, very involved in the Baptist Women's League. But it's actually Margaret Jarman, I think her profile, and those gathering around her begin to see this change. It was slow because the next woman President isn't till 2006 and Kate Coleman. So we've got another 20 years, but we are beginning to see some change. So that by the time I get to the end of my research, which is around 2019, when we were celebrating 100 years of Violet Hedger things were in a slightly different place. I end my article saying there's still much progress to be made, but we are in a better place. And actually, even since I finished that article, we have seen a large increase of women becoming Regional Ministers, which I think is an encouraging sign.

Helen Cameron

Thank you, Andy, for bringing that to that story up to date. Simon, you've described yourself as a historian, and I know Andy's very committed to history as well. And I guess one of the things we notice in the way we tell our history are the voices that are absent, the voices that we're not hearing, have you got any reflections on that in relation to what we've just been discussing?

Simon Woodman

Yeah, I think those who study the role of women in society more generally, including institutions, such as churches, would want to draw our attention to what is often called the question of intersectionality. This is a word used to describe those who inhabit multiple places of exclusion and oppression. And, you know, whilst we've made great progress through the last 100 years in having women take more of an active role in it alongside men, on an equal basis within the denomination; most of those women have been women who have certain other characteristics that are powerful. So for example, most of them will be white women. And I think we do need to hear more from black women. And I want to make particular mention here of my friend, Gale Richards, who is emerging in our midst as a significant voice, both as a scholar and a national leader. And there are others who are also beginning to emerge. And we need to make sure their voices are heard and amplified and not squashed. So I think we need to pay particularly careful attention to female voices, where women are still being excluded because of their diversity of essential characteristics. So this includes not only black women, but I also think those who live with disability and other areas of identity. So I think that's the caveat I'd want to put on future conversations just to make sure we remain alert that we don't end up reproducing the errors of the past. But rather that we can learn from them and do things differently.

Helen Cameron

Thank you.

Andy Goodliff

I wonder if I could make an extra comment on that. And I think, you know, I just said that Margaret Jarman was president in 1997. The second president in 2006, was Kate Coleman. I didn't mention that Kate Coleman is a black minister. And the reflections that she had on what it was to be a woman in that role, but also a black woman within that role. And she had some hard things to say to the Union and to the Council at the end of her term, that continue to need to be heard. I guess the other thing is there, are there other intersections, which I've become much more aware of, as well. So, you know, I have a colleague, Leigh Greenwood, who's been reflecting on not just being a woman in ministry but being a mother in ministry as well. And so actually, there's a lot more going on

in terms of women who might be single or married. And whether they're mothers or not mothers, grandmothers, all those different kinds of roles in a way that I guess doesn't, isn't so much a reflection for those who are male in ministry. And I think there are extra things going on often for women in ministry, and women in life in general, that perhaps we need to pay more attention or be more aware of. And I think often it's it is that it is the women saying actually, we need to be heard, our experience needs to be registered, which I think is why Project Violet is such an important project to be taking place at this time.

Helen Cameron

You will be hearing more from these voices as we release the findings of Project Violet.

Simon Woodman

I'm just very conscious that we've had a podcast chaired by a woman but featuring two white men. So just want to note the incongruity of that. And I think we've made a valuable contribution but recognizing that there are limitations built into systems and podcasts such as this as well, which needs, you know, further consideration.

Helen Cameron

Thank you for that. Now, if people's appetite about Baptists history has been wetted by listening into this conversation, I think Andy, you just happen to be running a course on Baptist history. Would you like to tell us a little bit about it?

Andy Goodliff

Yes, thank you for the opportunity, Helen. So I've been appointed as a lecturer in Baptist history at Regent's Park College to develop some new courses in Baptist history and theology, online courses at Master's level, and we have a module, we're running a pilot at the moment, but we hope to run it again as a full course next year in 2024. And I think it's a great opportunity, one to get to grips with our story and our history, including the history of women. And we have a particular unit and module which looks in a lot more detail about the role in place of women in Baptist history and Baptist life, as well as our broader story. Both our story as we tell it in in England and the UK, but also our world story about being Baptist. And if you're interested in that, do check out the Regent's Park College website, in particular, the Centre for Baptist Studies, to find out more.

Helen Cameron

It wouldn't be a podcast without a plug in it. Thank you for contributing that. I just want to thank you both for helping us understand the history that's gone before Project Violet started in 2021. I've put a link to the booklet that Simon referenced and Andy's article and the link to the course in the Episode Notes.

	But these resources are also available online through the Project Violet website, which is www.projectviolet.org.uk . Thank you for taking part in this episode.
Notes	<p>File.aspx (baptist.org.uk)</p> <p>Bible Studies book – link into the episode notes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'The Lydia Question - A fresh look at God's calling', (Didcot: BUGB Publications, 2014). <p>The Baptist Union of Great Britain : The Lydia Question</p> <p>Issue 1 Journal of Baptist Theology in Context (jbtc.org.uk)</p>

Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast. We invite you to reflect on this episode. Did you learn anything new or surprising? How were you left feeling?
Jane	The episode notes contain questions you could use in a small group to get a discussion going.
Helen	We invite you to subscribe to this podcast on the platform you are using, so you don't miss out on future episodes.
Jane	And don't forget to tell others about the Project Violet podcast. You can follow us on Facebook and X formerly Twitter and find out more on our website www.projectviolet.org.uk
	Music

Episode notes

Links to

['A Woman Shall Do It': Edith Gates, Neglected Pioneer: Amazon.co.uk: Voke, Chris: 9798387144516: Books](#)

[File.aspx \(baptist.org.uk\)](#) The Story of Women's Ministry – Simon Woodman

[The Baptist Union of Great Britain : The Lydia Question](#)

[Issue 1 | Journal of Baptist Theology in Context \(jbtc.org.uk\)](#)

Online course

[Baptist Stories: Short Course Module - Regent's Park College \(ox.ac.uk\)](https://www.regentsparkcollege.ox.ac.uk/courses/baptist-stories-short-course-module)

Questions for discussion

Is there anything in this history that surprised you?

What do you know about the history of women's ministry in the church you attend?

Simon spoke about the understanding of women's ministry he gained from attending a Baptist church as a child – what do you think the young people in your church or family would say about women being Baptist ministers?

Is there any response you wish to make as a group after listening to this episode?