

# Belton, Thomas Greene (1885–1974)

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Thomas Greene Belton was a missionary to Kenya.

## Early Life and Ministry

Thomas Greene Belton was born in Birmingham in 1885. He was raised in the Anglican Church and as a young man, he had visited the slums of Birmingham doing evangelism work among the poor of his community<sup>1</sup>. He continued doing missionary work in the city of Birmingham and while at it, he visited one home to preach and, in the process, met his future wife. In 1908 he attended an evangelistic campaign at Bearwood, Birmingham, conducted by Professor Camden Lacey, president of the Stanborough Park Missionary College (1907-1913) who was a professor there from 1904. Lacey had a sign on his tent "The Second Coming of Jesus" and to this, Belton and his wife were drawn in. Professor Lacey reached out to them and asked them to join his college to train for the gospel work. The Beltons joined Stanborough Park but when WWI began, he enlisted in the Non-Combantant Corps, moving Newtownards in Northern Ireland<sup>2</sup>.

While stationed in Northern Ireland, Belton began to reach out to people, working also as a missionary. His work received the attention of Pastor William T. Bartlett, who suggested to him that after the war his experience as a missionary at home would be valuable in Africa. Belton was a natural missionary, speaking about Christ wherever he went, and speaking with complete strangers.

Accepting the call to go to Africa, Belton and his wife and adopted daughter Doreen sailed with other missionaries to Africa in 1920. He was part of the largest contingent of missionaries to leave England at that



Thomas G. Belton, Missionary at Wire Hill (1920-25)

Photo courtesy of the British Union Conference archives.

time. The team included W.T. Bartlett, W.W. Armstrong, E. A. Beavon, S. G. Maxwell, and W. H. Matthews. In July 1920 they arrived at Gendia, western Kenya, and Belton and his wife were sent to Wire Hill, the second mission station in Luo Nyanza established in January 1909.

## Ministry at Wire Hill

When they arrived at Wire Hill, the Bakers had left in 1918 just after the war ended, having been at the same station continuously since 1909. Belton became the second European missionary at Wire Hill and had lots of reorganizing and rebuilding to do.<sup>3</sup> The people of Wire Hill were very happy to welcome Belton, who was such an energetic evangelist. He profusely used the Picture Roll to teach and encouraged every person he encountered to learn how to read and write. He learned to speak Dholuo and soon became proficient.

## Return to England

In 1925 the Beltons decided to return to England. They left behind their two children, Kenneth and Doreen, at Wire Hill. They returned to England with Geoffrey, who was born in Gendia. When they returned to England, they settled at his native Birmingham and began reaching out to the low-income areas of Birmingham, making a mission among the city slum dwellers with the help of Dame Elizabeth Cadbury, the wife of the wealthy founder of the Cadbury Brothers Chocolate Company.<sup>4</sup> He continued to support his ministry through sales of Adventist literature and held Sunday school for children from less-privileged homes. He then embarked on holding evangelistic campaigns with Pastor H. McCrow with the help of Dr. Huse, who was an elder in the Handsworth Church.<sup>5</sup>

He then embarked on working among immigrants, particularly the Indian immigrants in the Birmingham area. He sold them books and used picture rolls to teach them. He also reached out to the West Indian immigrants also in the Birmingham area. He died on December 2, 1974, and was laid to rest in Birmingham.<sup>6</sup> He was survived by his wife and son Paul who was born in England. Son Geoffrey had predeceased him, having had health problems that were traced back to his childhood in Africa. Prior to leaving Wire Hill, Geoffrey had developed severe dysentery, the same illness that had claimed his two older siblings. Even in England he never fully regained his health and died prematurely.<sup>7</sup>

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### SOURCES

Belton, Paul. "The Story of a Dedicated Personal Evangelist: Thomas G. Belton (1885-1974)." *British Advent Messenger*, January 24, 1975.

Mahon, Jack. "A Century of British Seventh-day Adventist Missions." *A Century of Adventism in the British Isles*.

Robinson, V. E. *Third Angel Over Africa*. Unpublished manuscript, Helderberg College library.

## NOTES

1. Paul Belton, "The Story of a Dedicated Personal Evangelist: Thomas G. Belton (1885-1974)," *British Advent Messenger*, January 24, 1975, 5.
2. Ibid.
3. V. E. Robinson, *Third Angel Over Africa*, unpublished manuscript, Helderberg College library, 106.
4. Belton, 6.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Jack Mahon, "A Century of British Seventh-day Adventist Missions," *A Century of Adventism in the British Isles*, 21.

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