



Former British Missionaries visiting Newbold Graduation, 1947. Left to right: W. W. Armstrong, Paul Mboya, E. B. Phillips, Len E. A. Lane - founder of the publishing work in East Africa, W. T. Bartlett and E. R. Warland.

Leonard A. D. Lane - Private collection published on <http://www.adventisthistory.org.uk>.

Bartlett, William T. (1870–1947)

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William Thomas Bartlett served the church as a pastor, editor, college principal, superintendent of the East Africa Mission, vice president for the British Union Conference, president of the North England Conference, field secretary of the Northern European Division, and Bible teacher at Newbold College.

Early Life and Career

The son of William John and Sarah Ann Bartlett, William Bartlett was born on February 28, 1870, in Middlesex, England. He became an Adventist¹ after meeting a lady named Roskruge. He was baptized on August 25, 1888, and joined the Chaloners Mission congregation in North London.²

In September 1889 at a “general meeting” of Adventists from churches across the United Kingdom, Bartlett was elected to sit on a “Committee on Resolutions.”³ By 1891, he was working as a colporteur (canvasser) in the south of England in places like Dorchester and Weymouth.⁴ However, he did not just sell the magazines, he also wrote for them. In the December 4, 1890, edition of *The Present Truth*, Bartlett had written an article on the gospel salvation, “The Heathen,”⁵ and in the August 27, 1891, edition of *The Present Truth* an article on “The Judgement.”⁶ They were the first many contributions to various Adventist papers.

A few years later in 1896, Bartlett began working for the International Tract Society (which was later to become the Stanborough Press). Here he began as an assistant editor until he was promoted to editor in 1903.⁷ During his time at the International Tract Society, he also worked as a Bible teacher and principal of the Adventist Missionary College.⁸

In October 1898, Bartlett married Susan Edith Bray (1863-1942). Known as Edith to friends and family, she was born on October 31, 1863,⁹ in Truro, Cornwall, to a working-class family. The Bartletts had no children of their own, but adopted Edith’s niece, Marjorie Edna Bray (1902-2000).¹⁰

Africa

At a meeting of the British Union Conference Committee held at the union office in January 1920, Bartlett was asked if he would accept the call to be superintendent of the East Africa Mission Field.¹¹ Bartlett accepted the assignment, and shortly after the meeting he started to prepare for the journey. Passports were obtained for himself, his wife, and for eleven other missionaries. They also undertook a special medical training course for missionaries in London.¹²

On Friday evening, June 4, 1920, the Missionary College Chapel was filled to capacity with people who wanted to bid farewell to Bartlett, his wife, and the eleven other missionaries. A leather-bound copy of the *Advent Hymnal* was presented to Bartlett on behalf of the students at the college. At the time, this was the largest group of missionaries to have left England under the direction of the British Union Conference.¹³ The following day they boarded the steamship *Nevasa* at Tilbury Docks, sailing towards Port Said in Egypt.¹⁴ From Egypt they continued their journey to Kenya. They were expected to arrive in Mombasa in early June 1920, from which point they would continue to Kisumu.¹⁵

Soon after arriving in Kisumu, Bartlett set out to visit all the mission stations. Though the travels were filled with discomfort, it was a delight for him to meet with the Kenyan people.¹⁶ At every station, Bartlett discovered that

the greatest need was in the area of medical work; therefore, in September that same year, he wrote a request published in *The Missionary Worker* for people to send supplies for dressings and bandages to the Kenya Colony.¹⁷

On January 5, 1921, Bartlett reported that the weekly Sabbath attendance continued to grow.¹⁸ People would walk ten miles to attend the service, and on one occasion there were 230 people in attendance, many of whom were children. Several people requested baptism and Bartlett arranged to have larger Bible study classes. Other positive news included the construction of the first house soon to be completed and that new workers were to shortly arrive. Printing had also started in the Luo language, and the ten commandments had been printed in Ruanda.¹⁹ The mission also faced challenges. Bartlett's report stated that the main problem in the erection of new buildings was obtaining building materials. Materials had to be imported from Europe, which was very costly. Once the materials arrived at a port, it took a long time for them to be transported to their destination. There was also a lack of help when it came to erecting the buildings.²⁰

Bartlett reported in *The Missionary Worker* on November 29, 1922, that he had visited three missions in the district of Mwanza: Kanadi, Itellema, and Magalla.²¹ At each place, he had found a good company of students and promising work in progress. Seventy people were preparing for baptism. To reach Magalla, a night walk was made through a forest in order to avoid being bitten by tsetse flies, which were inactive at night although very active during daylight hours. The Sabbath after these visits, Bartlett was in Ntusu. After the Sabbath, he undertook a four day's walk to Majita to visit missionary H. A. Matthews and his wife, who were working with the people there. After that, he walked for another two days to Busegwe to meet missionary Mr. Phillips and his wife, followed by a visit to Shirati to visit another missionary couple. After many visits and many days of walking, he finally returned to his home in Kenya.²²

Following this extensive journey, Bartlett was able to travel little. In March 1924, he reported:

For some time I have been confined to Gendia (as no one has yet come to take Marjorie's work)²³ and have seen but little of the field at large. Two baptismal classes, one conducted by Brother Lane, another by a native teacher, will soon have prepared a considerable number for joining the church. During the month of January our schools close for cultivating the soil, so that when the February rains come, all is ready for planting. At Gendia we have restarted work with a goodly number of students. There are six classes, and a seventh will have to be formed soon. The babies have a class to themselves, but the class above them ranges in age from five to fifty. We have an enrollment of about 100 at Gendia; our mission village is a small one, so most of our work is done in out-schools.²⁴

On August 2-7, 1928, at the British Union Conference Session in Birmingham, Bartlett was elected to be vice president of the British Union Conference. The European Division was requested to release him from the East Africa Mission.²⁵ By July 1929, Bartlett had returned to England.²⁶

Back in England and Work Continues

Bartlett was not to spend long as vice president for the British Union Conference. Shortly after commencing the role in 1929, it was recommended to the North England Conference that Bartlett should take up the position of president of the conference, filling a vacancy left by F. A. Spearing who resigned due to illness. The North England Conference committee met at Nottingham later that year, and Bartlett was appointed president.²⁷ Bartlett was re-elected president at the North England Conference session in Leeds on July 31-August 5, 1930.²⁸

During his time at the North England Conference, Bartlett wrote the following, "I feel a great longing that we Seventh-day Adventists should get on with our work and carry to those about us the saving truths of the living word before hearts are shut against the truth through the intoxications and disillusionments of a spurious revivalism."²⁹ Getting on with the work of taking the gospel to people, thereby offering them salvation, was important to Bartlett.

The Missionary Worker of March 25, 1932, reported that the Northern European Division had made an urgent call for Bartlett to serve as a field secretary in the division.³⁰ Among his responsibilities was that of Sabbath School secretary.³¹ Bartlett noticed two problems when it came to the Sabbath School—the lack of attendance and the lack of financial support. For example, in 1933 the division's allocation from the General Conference was £21,704 less than in 1930, in part due to the effects of the Great Depression. Bartlett encouraged members to donate a whole week's wages, where their finances allowed them to do so, during the "Week of Sacrifice."³²

Regarding attendance in the Sabbath schools, Bartlett reported in the *Advent Survey*.

At the end of the third quarter of 1932 there were about two thousand members of our churches who had ceased to be members of the Sabbath-school. It must be that Bible study has ceased to appeal as strongly to their minds as it once did. The fault is not with the lessons. It must be that those who do not come to the Sabbath school are losing the appetite for plain Bible truth. They are drifting away from the Word. Everyone can help to make the study of the lesson an hour of profit and spiritual delight. Is it not worthwhile for every president and leader to make sure that his Sabbath-school teachers appreciate the tremendous importance of their work, and that they are helped in obtaining every possible assistance that can better qualify them for their task?³³

H. W. Lowe, president of the British Union Conference, announced in *The British Advent Messenger* that a special arrangement had been made with the Northern European Division for Bartlett to take the main responsibility for the Bible department at Newbold College. Bartlett would continue his work at the Northern European Division and teach certain days of the week at the College.³⁴

Bartlett's wife passed away on the evening of November 9, 1942.³⁵ Despite this blow, he continued to be actively involved with the church and teaching at the Newbold College.

In 1944, Newbold College collected an Ingathering goal of £500.³⁶ It was later reported:

What an inspiration it was for us all to see our veteran leader Pastor W. T. Bartlett facing up to the toil and heat of the day and a two-mile walk at the end of it, with a vigor and enthusiasm equal to those of the young people he teaches (by the way, he has already claimed his territory for the 1945 campaign). Monday morning found him ready again with all who could be spared from the College to strike the third and final blow for complete victory.³⁷

The End of a Life

Bartlett finally retired from active employment in 1946 and just a year later, on August 19, 1947, at the age of seventy-seven he died peacefully at the Stanboroughs Sanitarium.³⁸ Following a funeral service at the Stanborough Park church, he was buried at the Chingford Mount Cemetery in Essex.³⁹

Legacy

Bartlett left a legacy of dedication for church work and a passion for the mission fields. Shortly after coming to the faith, he dedicated his life to working for the church in order to win souls for God's kingdom. This was a work that he did both in England and in the mission field of Africa.

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19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. W. T. Bartlett, "Among the Mwanza Missions," *The Missionary Worker*, November 29, 1922, 1-2.
22. Ibid.
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