# Early Days of the Two-by-Twos

Faith Mission: John George Govan founds the interdenominational Faith Mission outreach organization in Scotland.

### 1886
- **January 8th:** William Irvine professes through Presbyterian evangelist John McNeill.
- Irvine begins studying 2 years at the Bible Institute in Glasgow, Scotland.

### 1889
- **June 14th:** William Irvine joins the Faith Mission in Scotland.
- **November:** William Irvine sent to the north of Ireland by Faith Mission. He quickly becomes dissatisfied with Faith Mission and that converts became “lost amongst the clergy” (i.e., joined other churches).

### 1896
- **February:** First Faith Mission workers venture into southern Ireland (Irvine & Deathe);
- **March:** Irvine meets John Long (a Methodist colporteur);
- **March:** First convert in southern Ireland (Dora Holland, who later became a worker).

### 1897
- **August:** John Long obtains a church in Ennagh for a revival mission by Irvine. Over 30 profess; many become workers (including Jack & May Carroll). Identified as the start of the independent movement; ¹
- **October:** Irvine holds an independent mission in Rathmolyon. 40 profess & many become workers, including Gills, Carrolls, Hughes, etc. Converts attend church of their choice;
- **August–December:** Irvine holds missions in Tarbert, Roscrea, Cloughjordan.

### 1898
- Irvine holds missions in Borrisokane, Finnow, Templederry. Large numbers profess, including Corcorans, Falkiners, Hodgens & Tom Turner;
- **February:** Irvine holds Borrisokane mission. Cooney meets Wm. Irvine for the first time;
- **March:** George Walker meets Irvine;
- **July:** Irvine & Long study Matthew 10; the possibility of preaching without clerical salary or support is raised;
- **August:** Faith Mission appoints Irvine as its Superintendent for Southern Ireland;
- **November:** John Long resigns from his Methodist colporteurs; preaches with Irvine and on his own.

### 1899
- **January:** John Long begins preaching along “faith lines” (i.e., with no fixed financial support);
- George Walker (a sales clerk in Cooney’s clothing store), Irvine Weir, Alex Givan, Tom Turner join as workers;
- **July:** The first annual convention is held at Portadown, Ireland;
- **September:** Irvine is “put out” of Faith Mission, though his name appears on their roster through Dec. 1900;
- **October:** The first outreach beyond Ireland is made with Irvine leading a group of 8–9 young men on a bicycle mission through Scotland on the basis of Matthew 10;
- **December 26:** St. Stephen’s Day Special Meeting, which some have viewed as the movement’s beginning.

### 1900
- **July:** First southern Ireland convention held at Rathmolyon on Willie Gill’s farm at Ashmount; the event lasts 3 weeks with 40 attendees, and some going on to become workers;
- 9 males enter the work, and the first 3 females enter the work: Sara Rogers, Jennie Gill and Emma Gill (for a total of 18 workers in the new movement).

### 1901
- **January:** Irvine’s name no longer appears on Faith Mission’s roster;
- John Kelly leaves Faith Mission and joins Wm. Irvine. Over the next 4 years, 5 additional Faith Mission workers join Irvine;
- **June:** Edward Cooney sells all, donates the considerable proceeds and joins as a worker; ²
- 10 new workers join during this year, for a total of 28 workers.

### 1902
- Separation from other denominations and exclusivity begins to be noted;
- Convention held at Enniscorthy;
- Cooney begins experimenting with Sunday home meetings; Irvine “shrank” from this development;
- 23 enter the work, for a total of 51 workers.

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¹ Presbyterian, Wesleyan (“Holiness”) and other Protestant traditions

² The Todds leave Faith Mission; start an independent mission with its headquarters at Enniscorthy in southern Ireland.

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2. **December:** Last reference to Irvine as Faith Mission’s Superintendent for southern Ireland.

3. FM issues statements dissociating from Irvine and his followers. Six Faith Mission workers resign to join Irvine.
## Early Days of the Two-by-Twos (continued)

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
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| 1903 | • Inaugural 3-week convention at Rathmolyon: workers take vows of celibacy, poverty & obedience; disavow doctrines of other churches. 70 attend;  
• First Sunday home church meeting held at Weir's apartment in Dublin;  
• Practice of rebaptism is noted;  
• Wm. Irvine, Irvine Weir & George Walker sail to USA — first workers in N. America;  
• 34 enter the work, for a total of 85 active workers. |
| 1904 | • September–October: First large-scale convention held at Crocknacrieve (John West estate); lasts 4 weeks; 100s attend from England, Scotland and Ireland;  
• Worldwide outreach begins: workers sent to English-speaking nations: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, S. Africa, USA;  
• Enniskillen newspaper covers conventions & workers with 20 articles during this year;  
• 42 enter the work for a total of 127 workers. |
| 1905 | • July: List of First Workers is created, showing 201 workers, the date they joined and using the same format as used by the Faith Mission;  
• 74 enter the work (including 4 married couples). |
| 1906 | • Wilson McClung states in a newspaper interview that William Irvine started the movement “seven or eight years ago”;  
• Tramps accused of luring women into white slave traffic; Cooney files successful libel suit against an angry father who had 2 daughters and son disappear into the work. |
| 1907 | • “Living Witness Doctrine” is refined to denote only Two-by-Two ministers as acceptable “living witnesses”, becomes a mandatory belief;  
• July: John Long expelled for refusing to condemn all Christians outside the new movement as being unsaved. |
| 1908 | • Regular home-based meetings become the norm. |
| 1909 | • Convention at Crocknacrieve is mentioned in newspapers around the world; the prominent apocalyptic theme at this event is noted by most. |
| 1910–1912 | • Rapid expansion occurs in North America and Australia. |
| 1913 | • First edition of Hymns Old and New is published;  
• Last of the large, month-long conventions is held at Crocknacrieve;  
• Cooney gives sworn testimony that the movement started “about 16 years ago.” |
| 1914 | • Irvine begins preaching a new revelation of a final period that will close the age of “Grace” and render the worker hierarchy superfluous;  
• Overseers begin expelling Irvine and his followers. Irvine is quietly excluded & the church is split;  
• August: the First World War begins. |
| 1914–1918 | • The first official registered name is taken in the U.K (“The Testimony of Jesus,” often abbreviated as “The Testimony” among older members) in order to obtain military exemptions. |
| 1919 | • Princess Victoria hears Cooney preach in London, and supposedly professes secretly.  
• Irvine is shunned & isolated; more of his followers are expelled. |
| 1920 | • Last convention at Crocknacrieve.  
• Irvine moves to Jerusalem. |

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**Faith Mission** (continues to present)

**Long returns to distributing literature & preaching, becoming influential in the beginnings of the British Pentecostal movement**

**Elim**

**Evangelistic Band**

**Pentecostalism**
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<th>Details</th>
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<td>1921</td>
<td>Worldwide workers convention is held in Staffordshire, England (see photo following page).</td>
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<td>1928</td>
<td><strong>October:</strong> Edward Cooney is excommunicated for refusing to submit to restrictions on his preaching. His followers, and those refusing to cut off all contact with him, are expelled. William Irvine continues writing volumes of letters to his followers, who continue to support him financially. Early workers who leave or are expelled with Cooney include Mr. &amp; Mrs. Tom Elliot, John Kelly, Joe Burns.</td>
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<td>1939–1941</td>
<td><strong>The Second World War begins;</strong> Harry McLeary. Those expelled for keeping in contact with Cooney include Irvine Weir. Cooneyite movement dispenses with the offices of overseer and worker. March 3rd: William Irvine dies at age 84, in Jerusalem and is buried in Mt. Zion Protestant Cemetery. His last will leaves some £2200 (equivalent to over $100k in 2013 US$) in cash bequests to family, friends and charities. His followers continue to the present day, though in reduced numbers.</td>
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<td>1947</td>
<td>June 20th: Edward Cooney dies at age 93 in Mildura, Victoria Australia. His followers continue in scattered groups until the present day.</td>
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<td>1960</td>
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Notes:

1. It is sometimes unclear as to when a particular practice or belief was adopted by the new movement, as the first participants only observed what they personally experienced. In an age without telephones or email, and because of their itinerant lifestyle, individual workers did not necessarily pick up new developments, even for many months after they had been adopted. Thus, John Long did not note the practice of rebaptizing new converts for some 2 years after it had begun. Others seem not to have noticed the exclusivity until well after it had been widely preached. Early workers were not mind-readers, and they only wrote and told what they personally experienced, which in many cases reveals much about their inner thinking, and only a framework for what was occurring in Irvine's new movement as a whole. The chart above contains pivotal points attested to by multiple sources.

2. There is no record of any group closely resembling the Two-by-Twoos prior to this date, nor any person who has been shown to have been a member of the Two-by-Two Fellowship before this event. On closer examination, every group purported to have been a previous embodiment of the Two-by-Two church has proved to have major differences in doctrine and/or practice of such a serious nature that they would be excluded from today's Two-by-Two fellowship (church buildings, salaried ministers, infant baptism or baptism other than by immersion, political involvement, etc.). Although many have attempted to produce a narrative that supports the Two-by-Two fellowship as continuing from the time of Christ, not a single reliable instance has been produced that bears witness to any of the following being in existence prior to 1897: a hymn written by a friend or worker; a printed hymnbook containing such hymns; a photograph of a person who was a worker or friend at that time; a workers' list; a letter written by a worker or friend; a list of convention dates or speakers; notes of any convention, funeral or meeting; a family member or acquaintance who professed through a worker prior to 1897; or an account mentioning Two-by-Two workers preaching prior to 1897.

3. Most references only say that Cooney gave his money to "the poor" although one prominent early source stipulated that it was given to Irvine for the work. As charities at this time were tied to religious groups, Cooney would have either contributed his small fortune to another church, spent significant effort identifying and disbursing to needy individuals, or directed the money to be used to support the workers ("those that have made themselves poor, homeless, and strangers for the Gospel's sake"). The latter alternative helps explain the notable ability of the workers immediately afterward to engage in activities which required considerable funds: travel, construction of chapels and portable halls, conventions, etc. Donating to the overseer the proceeds of "selling all" also became the norm thereafter. Acknowledging that the money went to either another church or to Irvine would have become an embarrassment to Cooney later on and may explain the lack of detail in subsequent accounts.
1921 International Workers Meeting
Staffordshire, England