THE

JOURNAL

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH HISTORY SOCIETY

VOL. 10 No. 5 November 2019

ISSN 0049–5433

THE JOURNAL
of the
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH HISTORY SOCIETY

(incorporating the Congregational Historical Society
founded in 1899, the Presbyterian Historical Society of
England, founded in 1913, and the Churches of Christ
Historical Society, founded in 1979)

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Volume 10 No. 5 November 2019

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EDITORIAL

This issue of the *Journal* is firmly fixed in the nineteenth-century, viewed not so much as Nonconformity's heyday as the herald of leaner times. Mid-century saw the Nonconformists – and Congregationalists in particular – apparently taking things in their stride. Their recently discovered social and political confidence is reflected in Matthew Prevett's article about the Milton Club, a detailed account of perhaps one of the lesser-known aspects of our history. This was Nonconformity at its most strident, its most indulgent, asserting for itself the privileges of other social and religious groups. Michael Powell's extended review of Geoffrey Cantor's *Religion and the Great Exhibition of 1851* (2011) reflects something similar, though any sense that Nonconformity had arrived was to some degree tempered by the reminder of evangelical priorities: science and technology, even architecture, have their place, but gospel demands take precedence. Both articles reflect that Nonconformity was in process of (further) transformation by the mid-nineteenth century. For some this meant providing an alternative to the religious establishment which, they believed, could exist on equal terms, though it soon became clear not only that this was not, but that it could not, be the case. The Milton Club, plagued by the financial difficulties which follow insufficient recruitment, folded fairly quickly, while the evangelistic potential identified in the Great Exhibition did not result in an expansion of Nonconformity. Instead its chapels began to struggle to hold on to those already within their fold. Their social and legal standing, (not to mention the fundamentals of their theology), having been re-modelled, Nonconformists were left looking for direction and, argues Jason Frost, some found it in unexpected places. J. Idrisyn Jones, numbered among the mass of committed but otherwise commonplace Congregational ministers, was one of a small minority of Nonconformists who developed a fixation on British Israelism as a means of identifying new purpose. I am grateful to all three contributors for reminding us of aspects of our past that, while possibly occupying a place in the periphery of the specialist's mind, have certainly slipped from the collective memory.

THE MILTON CLUB: THE NONCONFORMISTS' SHORT-LIVED ADVENTURE INTO MID-VICTORIAN CLUBLAND

In 1855, after the opening day of the Autumn Assembly of the Congregational Union of England and Wales (CUEW), the ministers and laymen present retired for their evening to the newly opened Milton Club, established for the Nonconformist community in London and beyond.[1] Yet by 1860, the wine cellars of the Milton Club were being sold, with the auction lot comprising "about 580 dozen of choice wines".[2] A Club that had a place within the Nonconformist community, furnishing itself with premises and assets of sizable proportions in the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral, lasted for less than a decade before its dissolution.

In his 1907 book *Clubs and Clubmen*, Major Arthur Griffiths remarked that "Clubs may be taken as recording and epitomising the social movements and progress as the centuries pass".[3] The story of the Milton Club, therefore, can be seen as epitomising the social aspirations and status of Victorian Nonconformists during a century in which Nonconformity rose to prominence. An examination of the Milton Club sheds light on the social movement and progress of Nonconformity in the mid-Victorian period, and opens for exploration the actions of Nonconformity in both social and ecclesial spheres.

Although a history of the Milton Club has never been written, a few references can be traced in the writings of scholars concerned with the activities of mid-Victorian Nonconformists. In their *History of the Free Churches of England 1688-1891*, Victorian historians Herbert S. Skeats and Charles S. Miall gave under a page to outline the creation and financing of the Club as well as its personnel.[4] Congregational historians John Waddington (*Congregational History: 1850-1880*) and R. Tudur Jones (*Congregationalism in England: 1662-1962*) both highlight the Milton Club's role as a venue for meetings to resolve the controversy surrounding the publication of Thomas T. Lynch's *The Rivulet* (1855).[5] Yet in all three cases, the details about the Milton Club are sparse and no substantial analysis of its purpose, formation and legacy has been made. In collating materials from contemporary sources relating to the Milton Club, its location and those involved in its life, this article builds on the framework provided by Skeats and Miall to provide a detailed analysis of why the Milton Club came into being, what purpose it fulfilled

1 The *Congregational Year Book* (hereafter *CYB*) was published by the Congregational Union of England and Wales each year containing the minutes of the previous year's meetings of the Union. *CYB* (1856), p. 63.

2 *Athenaeum* (14 April 1860), p. 492.

3 Arthur Griffiths, *Clubs and Clubmen* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1907), p. 1.

4 Herbert S. Skeats and Charles S. Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England: 1688-1891* (London: Alexander and Shepheard, 1891), pp. 546-547.

5 R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England: 1662-1962* (London: Independent Press, 1962), pp. 249-253; John Waddington, *Congregational History: 1850-1880* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1880), pp. 172-176.

and what its short life tells us about the social aspirations of Nonconformists in Victorian London.

An opening word of warning seems necessary regarding the use of the term "Nonconformist". In all the literature concerning the Milton Club, the focus remains on providing a facility for "Nonconformists" and, as discussed later, this brings with it a number of issues. The term Nonconformist did not refer to an explicitly constituted body of individuals around a particular expression of dissent, but was an umbrella term used at the time, and subsequently, to enfold the breadth of dissenting traditions. By following the lead of the contemporary sources in referring to "Nonconformists", this paper seeks not to assume a corporate identity but rather to encapsulate the range and breadth of those who regarded themselves as heirs to the earlier traditions dissenting from the Church of England, and not conforming to the polity and worship prescribed in law.

The article will first outline the place of the Club in Victorian society and, secondly, will explore the ways in which Nonconformist Christians of the mid-nineteenth century increasingly developed the desire for a Club of their own. It will go on to examine the historical evidence relating to the Milton Club, producing a picture of the Club's genesis and life, placing the Club in a physical and social setting in the City of London and in the Nonconformist community. Finally, it will analyse the demise of the Club, examining a number of factors that led to its lack of success and which may have contributed to its short-lived existence. In conclusion, the article will suggest a number of ways in which the Milton Club influenced British Nonconformity and epitomised nineteenth-century Nonconformist life.

I: London Club Culture and Nonconformists

During the eighteenth century, taverns, inns and coffee houses had been centres for the meeting and gathering of like-minded individuals. The rise of the coffee house recognised that congenial gatherings could take place without the consumption of alcohol and could provide pleasant surroundings in which to meet and discuss matters of mutual interest and concern. In a detailed analysis of London's Coffee Houses, Henry Shelley stated that early proponents of such establishments made a good case for them claiming that they were "economical, conduced to sobriety, and provided innocent diversion. When one had to meet a friend, a tavern was an expensive place".[6] Coffee Houses were convivial locations for social networking and business discussions: "here for a penny or two, you may spend two or three hours, have the shelter of a house, the warmth of a fire, the diversion of company … all this without any grumbling or repining".[7]

However, Coffee Houses were seen by some to distract men from their duties to the home, work or study. One seventeenth century essay argued that coffee houses had "done great mischiefs to the nation, and undone many of the King's subjects: for they, being great enemies to diligence and industry, have been the ruin of many

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6 Henry Shelley, *Inns and Taverns of Old London* (London: Pitman and Sons, 1909), p. 169.

7 Ibid.

serious and hopeful young gentlemen and tradesmen, who, before frequenting these places, were diligent students or shopkeepers, extraordinary husbands of their time as well as money".[8] In a pamphlet published in 1674, the *Women's Petition against Coffee* stated that "it made men as unfruitful as the deserts whence that unhappy berry is said to be brought" as a husband on a domestic errand "would stop by the way to drink a couple of cups of coffee" causing, it claimed, any offspring to "dwindle into a succession of apes and pigmies".[9]

One benefit of the coffee house was that it provided not only a location to meet with others but to learn and become more informed. In a time when reliable news was restricted to print media, access to newspapers and journals was an important requirement for knowledge building, but it was costly. In the late seventeenth century it was remarked that "[h]e, that comes often, saves two-pence a week in Gazettes, and has his news and his coffee for the same charge".[10] During the early nineteenth century newspapers remained a luxury. With eighteenth century laws imposing costs on advertising, paper weight, and a stamp duty on page numbers, access to a personal copy of *The Times* in 1815 would cost 7d.[11] Between 1833 and 1836 the halving of advertising and paper duty and the reduction of stamp duty from 4d to a penny made newspapers more affordable, but still an extravagance.[12] The availability of newspapers and journals in coffee houses, and subsequently clubs, gave access to up-to-date news and commentary, both political and religious. This meant that they were not only places of fellowship but also of learning, encouraging and stimulating conversation as well as informed discourse.

Thus, coffee houses across London were an essential part of the social structure providing amenable surroundings for creating partnerships and being a crucible for enlightened discourse. Consequently, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Coffee Houses became a place where clubs and societies were convened. The "Club of Honest Whigs" discussed matters of politics, religion and science and met in St Paul's Coffee House in St Paul's Churchyard. After 1772 it met in the London Coffee House, located at 24-26 Ludgate Hill, and, during his visits to London, regarded Benjamin Franklin as one of its members.[13] Other members were listed including Nonconformist social figures such as Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, John Fothergill and Peter Collinson.[14]

The London Coffee House played its part in the formation of other societies, including some among Dissenters. In April 1829, the prominent Congregationalist Thomas Wilson chaired a preliminary meeting at the London Coffee House to form "The Society for Promoting Ecclesiastical Knowledge" joined by a number

8 Quoted in ibid., p. 143.

9 Ibid., p. 144.

10 Ibid., p. 141.

11 Lucy Brown, "The British Press, 1800-1860", in Dennis Griffiths (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of the British Press, 1422-1992* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 24.

12 Ibid., p. 25.

13 Shelley, *Inns and Taverns of Old London*, p. 160.

14 Charles Tanford, *Ben Franklin Stilled the Waves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 38.

of Nonconformist ministers and laymen,[15] while in November 1832 a meeting took place to form a society for the "Suppression of Sunday Trading".[16] These societies gathered together Nonconformists around a common concern and facilitated the forming of partnerships and networks of similarly minded individuals.

Out of Victorian Coffee House society grew the desire that such mutual intercourse could be more comfortably accommodated in private surroundings rather than within the public sphere. Although private rooms in Taverns and Coffee Houses could be utilised, such facilities seemed to lack some of the convenience of a private establishment. The understanding of club "to cleave" together a community with a common bond[17] led to an accelerated rise of the Club in the nineteenth century as a result of increased numbers of middle class gentlemen. The logical extension of increased social mobility would be to form societies in which men could make associations with like-minded or similar "gentlemen".

Opportunity to gather together ensured that "gentlemen" were able "to enjoy pleasures safely behind closed doors and indulge in mischief among loyal brothers; to seek the male sociability afforded by clubland's culture of networking; and, even in the ostensibly non-political clubs, to engage in the political debates of the day beyond the earshot of women".[18] Venues in "Clubland" were places where boys became men; fraternal companionship and social intercourse gave young men an introduction to High Society, surrounded by the highest pedigree of gentleman where, behind closed doors, various extravagances and mischiefs could be enjoyed.

The extent of the Club culture in London during the mid-nineteenth century reflected the rise in the middle class. While Clubs such as *The Reform* (established in 1836) and *The Athenaeum* (founded in 1824) had been exclusive institutions, prohibitively costly for all but the most affluent, the growth in Clubs during the Victorian period reflected a desire to form affordable but comfortable surroundings in which men could interact and develop business and social contacts. Such clubs were able to draw together those who had similar interests, either in business, leisure, or social matters. In doing so, these Clubs brought social cohesion and provided the facility for men to become established among a social or political community. In the Club, men could make acquaintances and develop their social standing while leaving their business and personal interests at the door.

During the earlier period of industrial development in the nineteenth century, Nonconformist business leaders had been as numerous in the country's foremost industry – cotton – as that of Church of England industrialists.[19] Richard Brown has suggested that the education received by Nonconformists at Scottish universities or Dissenting Academies prioritised the practical application of knowledge and

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15 *Congregational Magazine* (June 1829), p. 340.

16 *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (December 1832), p. 530.

17 Barbara Black, *A Room of His Own* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), p. 15.

18 Ibid., p. 34.

19 David J. Jeremy, "Nonconformist Business Leaders, ca 1880-1940: The Uses and Abuses of Wealth", in Robert Pope (ed.), *T & T Clark Companion to Nonconformity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 415.

thus "entrepreneurial enterprise and technological innovation".[20] Later in the nineteenth century, the place of Nonconformists among the northern industrialists can be seen in significant industrial developments, whether the creation of Saltaire by Congregationalist Sir Titus Salt (1853-1872), Bournville by the Quakers George and Richard Cadbury (1879), or Port Sunlight by Congregationalist William Hesketh Lever (1888).[21] This resulted in a dispersed community of business leaders with Nonconformist backgrounds away from the City of London, with few or no opportunities to join together for networking or establishing rapport.

With the London Clubs providing a base for those close to the metropolis, a significant provision of the Clubs was to provide a location where Country members could come and experience some of the life of the West End. It gave a starting place for young men who had relocated from outside London, (including industrialists from northern towns and cities), as well as established businessmen to develop and nurture a social network and gain necessary social – and commercial – capital.

Alongside enabling the mingling of men from city and country, clubs allowed for the necessary mixing of a gentleman's interests. The divisions between industries and disciplines were slight, and it was not uncommon that "Medical men might do some banking on the side, or might invest in industry and in canals and railways ... Roles were relatively unspecialized, and men could spread themselves over a variety of activities. Even intellectuals and businessmen shared common interests".[22] In Clubland, men of many social and business backgrounds could relate to each other. Churchmanship, however, remained a difficulty.

II: Constituting the Milton Club

In the mid-nineteenth century, the political and social environment for Nonconformists began to change. The Reform Act of 1832 brought about some electoral reform. The repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 opened up the public sphere to Nonconformists. Instead of being political outsiders, Nonconformists were elected Members of Parliament in increasing numbers. The exclusive institutions of Oxford and Cambridge, where subscription to the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles at matriculation (Oxford) and graduation (Oxford and Cambridge), were beginning the glacial process of reforming their statutes and regulations.[23]

With a perceived aim of unifying the Nonconformist community into common action, it was felt that this could be better served by "the erection of a building and the formation of a company for establishing a centre of union and action

20 Richard Brown, *Society and Economy in Modern Britain 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 79-80.

21 Jeremy, "Nonconformist Business Leaders, ca 1880-1940", pp. 416-417.

22 Adam Kuper, *Incest and Influence: The Private Life of Bourgeois England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 9.

23 David L. Wykes, "Legislation", http://www.qmulreligionandliterature.co.uk/research/the-dissenting-academies-project/legislation/ (accessed 12 August 2019).

for the great body of Nonconformists".[24] *The Nonconformist* remarked that, although talk of such a solution had been ongoing for some time, the process was initiated through the work of Henry Bateman who gathered support from leading Nonconformists including Joshua Wilson, Samuel Morley and Edward Miall.[25] At a "large and influential" meeting of laymen at Radley's Hotel, Blackfriars on Monday 8 December 1851, "upwards of eighty of the best known Dissenters of London and its vicinity" were present to discuss the proposed Club. Ministers had been excluded from the gathering as "[i]t was thought better that the initiative should be taken by laymen" and although ministers should be welcomed "as members of the club, it would, perhaps, be better that they should be excluded from its management".[26]

The exclusion of ministers may have been, in part, because clubs already existed to fulfil their needs, namely the *Sub Rosa* and *Eclectic*.[27] The club known as *Sub Rosa* is documented as first meeting in 1781, with a pattern of dining once a month for nine months of the year. In these gatherings, a "*Select Society of Protestant Dissenting Ministers, meeting once a month for friendly and confidential intercourse*" joined for dinner and in doing so provided for themselves the opportunity for mutual support and encouragement.[28] Congregational historian Albert Peel remarked of the *Eclectic* that this was "another Congregational ministers' club in London".[29] The existence of a confidential society for ministers probably fuelled the desire to establish a Club led by lay Nonconformists where such associations could be nurtured and enjoyed.

In the circular inviting attendance at the meeting at the Radley Hotel, three objectives were outlined.[30] These concerned the physical space that was being proposed and its use: the creation of a hall to host functions of the Nonconformist bodies; a clubhouse consisting of a library, reading rooms, drawing rooms, coffee and dining rooms; and the provision of office space for the various Nonconformist societies.

Access to the clubhouse was to be "open to all Orthodox Nonconformists", an expression that was thought restricting by some of those present. Mr A. Pellatt stated that he would "avoid anything in the shape of a test" for membership, hoping "that [the club's] basis would be sufficiently broad" to include those from other backgrounds such as the Free Church of Scotland.[31] *The Nonconformist* stated

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24 *The Nonconformist* (10 December 1851), p. 979.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Albert Peel, "Sub Rosa", in *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, Vol. 12 (1933-1936), pp. 132-141 (p. 139).

28 A history of the *Sub Rosa* written by the Secretary and Treasurer, Thomas James, in 1868 was entitled "A Brief Historical Sketch of a Select Society of Protestant Dissenting Ministers, meeting once a month for friendly and confidential intercourse". This is referenced in Peel, "Sub Rosa", p. 132.

29 Peel, "Sub Rosa", p. 139. Apart from this reference, it has not been possible at this time to locate any further information about the *Eclectic* club, its purpose or membership.

30 These are quoted in the article in *The Nonconformist* (10 December 1851), p. 979.

31 Ibid.

that "there was some discussion as to the use of the term 'Orthodox', and ... the word 'Evangelical' was adopted in preference".[32] Given that the Nonconformist community held to a number of understandings of church governance and the place of ministry and the sacraments, any test of orthodoxy would have generated division within the community and run counter to the aims of the Club. In removing such a test, therefore, there would not be unnecessary division about membership. In replacing this with a test of evangelical Nonconformity, such subjective judgement could be removed and an objective distinction could be put in place. In doing so, the Club's membership could be open to a wider selection of Nonconformists.

Despite this apparent concession, the existence of any form of theological test remained problematic. In one of their few comments on the Milton Club, Skeats and Miall remarked that "[a]t the outset there was considerable difference as to the adoption of an evangelical test of membership, against which Mr. Miall and others strongly protested, but without success".[33] Edward Miall's objection to such a test was further recorded by a correspondent to *The Spectator*[34] and in his own words reported in *The Nonconformist*.[35] In a piece critical of the Milton Club, *The Spectator* believed that the evangelical test not only "excludes all but Trinitarian Dissenters" but also "many Dissenters who hold the doctrine of the Trinity not coming under the designation 'Evangelical'".[36]

While such a test may have affected those unable to associate with an "Evangelical" stance, the greatest restriction this made was to exclude Unitarians from involvement in the Milton Club, much to Edward Miall's discontent. While no direct reason is given for such an exclusion, this suggests a level of doctrinal orthodoxy that was felt necessary for entry into mutual association. Unitarians had gained a stronger standing during the first half of the nineteenth century, with both the Doctrine of the Trinity Act (1813) and the Dissenters' Chapels Act (1844) favouring the Unitarians. Any animosity created in the property disputes which led to the 1844 Act may have contributed to some Congregational and Presbyterian figures further embedding their convictions around Trinitarian orthodoxy and against the Unitarians, and in so doing establish a test which would restrict Unitarians from holding membership of the Club. Such an exclusion was later to be claimed by some Unitarians as the reason for the Club's failure.[37]

The resolution passed by the Radley's meeting set into motion the Milton Club's formation. It read:

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32 Ibid.

33 Skeats and Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England, 1688-1891*, p. 546.

34 *Spectator* (5 March 1853), p. 224 (p. 10 on "The Spectator Archive", http://archive.spectator.co.uk/page/5th-march-1853/10, accessed 15 August 2019).

35 *The Nonconformist* (18 January 1854), p. 53.

36 *Spectator* (26 February 1853), p. 202 (p. 14 on The Spectator Archive, http://archive.spectator.co.uk/page/26th-february-1853/14, accessed 15 August 2019).

37 *Eddowes's Journal [and General Advertiser for Shropshire, and the Principality of Wales]* (12 January 1859), p. 5.

> That it is highly important that the different branches of the great Nonconformist body should be united in harmonious action for strengthening their cause and increasing their influence, and for promoting among themselves a more intimate, social, and friendly intercourse; and that for this purpose it is expedient to found a club for the Evangelical Nonconformist bodies, and to erect in London, in a central spot, a large hall for public meetings, and chambers for the different societies in their connexion.[38]

Through this resolution, the gathered laymen asserted the need and purpose of a club in central London. When the *Prospectus of the Milton Hall and Club* was published in April 1852, the scheme came into being.

After its opening in September 1855, an article in *The Nonconformist* asserted the significance of the "social and political importance of Dissenters in the commonwealth, and of that disposition to union and toleration of differences amongst men possessing common principles" that underlined the formation of the Club.[39] Yet the article went on to highlight the need for the Club's purpose to be more widely accepted:

> We do not conceal from ourselves that though the building itself is completed and open, the Milton Club has *yet to make* its own reputation. It is for Dissenters to decide whether it shall realise all the bright hopes its founders have indulged, and become a reality and a power, or simply occupy the subordinate position of a convenient centre of resort for men who hold many things in common.[40]

The reputation of the Club, therefore, needed to be made and for the Club's life to live up to its proposed function. Such comment in *The Nonconformist* accentuates the difficulties in gaining support from the Nonconformist community in its many forms.

The Milton Club's purpose extended beyond that of providing for Nonconformists in London. The Club's objective was to "gather into a common centre the scattered elements of Nonconformity ... and to afford a recognised place of resort for all those who, holding Evangelical sentiments with Nonconformist principles, can meet on common ground".[41] This aim required the purpose to become apparent for those beyond London, particularly to sell the benefits of the Club's establishment with those greater than "Twenty miles from the Post-office",[42] and the committee, along with other supporters, sought to address this.

In pursuit of wider support, deputations consisting of a number of members of the Committee visited towns and cities beyond London in order to secure

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38 *The Nonconformist* (10 December 1851), p. 979.

39 *The Nonconformist* (26 September 1855), p. 709.

40 Ibid., pp. 709-710 (emphasis original).

41 *Prospectus of the Milton Hall and Club* (London, 1852), p. 2.

42 Ibid. London fees were payable within this distance, while Country were available beyond this.

endorsement of the scheme through the selling of debentures and the setting up of Local Committees.[43] They travelled widely, seeking the backing of Nonconformist communities around the country including Birmingham, Bristol, Bradford, Brighton, Burnley, Colchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Halifax, Huddersfield, Hull, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Norwich, Reading, Rochdale, Scarborough, Sunderland and York. Support had been received from a variety of Nonconformists with Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Quakers all offering financial investment in the project. One member of the deputations, George Wilson, recollected that on their travels "they had experienced nothing but kindness from both ministers and laymen" and that he could not recall encountering "a single objection to the scheme".[44]

It was regrettable, however, that while the benefits of a unified body could be appreciably recognised by those outside London, the Committee struggled to gain support from the comparatively affluent London Nonconformists. The resistance of London Nonconformists was seen as early as November 1852. In a published letter in *The Nonconformist,* Club Secretary John Bennett surmised that the "novelty" of the scheme for the Milton Club had struggled to find initial support but that "the more it has been examined, canvassed, and discussed, the more it is approved".[45] Bennett went on to explain that a reticence among London-based Nonconformists was not helping the cause. A prominent article in the same edition added weight to Bennett's correspondence, supposing "that Mr. Bennett alludes to a sort of cold and passive inaction as having been exhibited by some parties from whom better things might have been expected"[46] while Skeats and Miall recognised that in this "the Nonconformists of London were – as in respect to many other public objects – much behindhand in supporting the scheme".[47]

Although a number of meetings were convened by the Committee with the aim of aiding the popularity of the Club among those most geographically proximate to the Capital, this seems to have remained an issue for the Club's success. It is uncertain whether the Club was perceived to lack any benefit to City Nonconformists. Although the society culture of the mid-Victorian period would not compare with today's London, Nonconformists in London would naturally have been more easily connected with one another than in the country. Links between congregations and links within societies, the Nonconformist press and denominational bodies such as the Congregational Union would have given London-based Nonconformists both the networks and the opportunity to meet with each other for discourse and community building. As London-based Nonconformists may have been able to connect in this way, their reticence to commit to the Club perhaps indicated that the Club's purposes suited Country Nonconformists and, therefore, somewhat ironically, the Club was superfluous to metropolitan needs.

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43 *The Nonconformist* (18 January 1854), p. 53.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., (17 November 1852), p. 901.

46 Ibid., p. 897.

47 Skeats and Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England, 1688-1891*, p. 546.

III: Premises

To understand something of the rationale behind a Ludgate Hill location for the Milton Club, some consideration needs to be given to the place of Nonconformity in London in the mid-nineteenth century. Three factors in the location appear to be of interest. First, as already noted, a number of societies and clubs of Nonconformist interest had been established in the coffee houses of central London. The London Coffee House, located on Ludgate Hill, was known as a location for such meetings. This, along with the proximity to the clerical community associated with the nearby St Paul's Cathedral, would have made it a commendable one for those wishing to maintain connection with institutional and societal forms of Christian expression in the City.

Secondly, the middle of the nineteenth century was an important time for Nonconformist publishing. The pamphlets and newspapers of this period, being published monthly, fortnightly or even weekly, shared with the Nonconformist community a breadth of interests including arts, theology and politics. A Club location that placed leading Nonconformists within reach of publishers of dissenting materials would be seen as being of benefit.

The printer Charles Reed, whose father Andrew Reed had been Congregational minister of Wycliffe Chapel, and his business partner William Tyler had been based in Bolt Court (off Fleet Street), five minutes' walk from the Milton Club's location until their partnership was dissolved in 1849. As a company, Tyler and Reed had been responsible for printing the weekly papers *The British Banner* and *The Patriot*, the monthly *Evangelical Magazine* and the *Monthly Series* of the Religious Tract Society.[48] After the end of their partnership, Tyler continued on the same site, sharing some of the printing jobs of the Religious Tract Society with Reed. It was Tyler, located in Bolt Court, who was responsible for printing the *Prospectus of the Milton Hall and Club* in 1852. Reed joined with Benjamin Pardon of Hatton Garden in 1849 and the firm of Reed and Pardon relocated to Lovell's Court, Paternoster Row.[49] Here they printed materials for the British and Foreign Bible Society through the 1850s. In Paternoster Row they were close to a variety of other publishers including the Religious Tract Society (56 Paternoster Row), John Farquhar Shaw (48 Paternoster Row) and the publisher of *The Homilist*, Ward and Co. (27 Paternoster Row). The offices of *The Nonconformist*, a weekly newspaper founded in 1841 by Edward Miall, were located at 4 Horseshoe Court – an alley immediately opposite the Milton Club on Ludgate Hill – bringing the publishers responsible for a large quantity of Nonconformist literature within a short walk of the Club's premises.

Thirdly, Nonconformist discontent with the Club environment in London's West End may have suggested that an alternative location be appropriate. The mainstay of London's Clubland was located in the West End around Pall Mall and St James's

48 Aileen Fyfe, *Science and Salvation: Evangelical Popular Science Publishing in Victorian Britain* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 171.

49 *DNB 1885-1900*, Vol. 47, p. 389 (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Reed,_Charles_(DNB00)).

with clubs such as *The Reform* on Pall Mall and *The Carlton Club* on Carlton House Terrace (latterly on St James's, having been bombed in 1940).[50]

It is possible that for Nonconformists there were concerns about the culture of the historic Clubland that meant it was best avoided. Barbara Black remarks that "'all sorts of postprandial extravagances' could easily become the target of vice campaigns and the scapegoat for anxiety about leisure and leisure time" with concerns about sexual deviance or immoral or illegal behaviour.[51] Given that "St. James's Park had historically been known as a cruising ground",[52] Black further comments that "when one considers that the coded meaning of the phrase 'confirmed bachelor' was often construed to be 'homosexual,' then men-only clubs (particularly the Bachelors comes to mind) become sites potentially linked to what was at the time considered immoral and illegal behaviour".[53] The scale of such Clubs, and their exclusivity, along with their perceived atmosphere of drinking, debauchery and lax morality, may have been of concern to the Committee seeking a location. Conversely, however, location and single-sex membership did not categorically result in immoral or illegal behaviour with some suggestion that a Club "fosters the manly virtues of reserve and self-control".[54] However, to the Milton Club's Committee, the connotations of an upstanding establishment for Nonconformist gentlemen being in any way implicated in such behaviour may have contributed to their selection of an alternative location.

Furthermore, the practicalities may have been a concern also. Appropriate venues in the West End, both in terms of their accessibility, size and potential, along with the cost, may have restricted the options available to the Milton Club. The cost of the Ludgate Hill property was £30,000 (equivalent to £2 2s per square foot) while a smaller property in the Poultry was sold at a considerably higher price (£14 14s per square foot).[55] Given the challenges in securing Nonconformist support, such cost would have been prohibitively expensive and would have prevented establishment of the Club under the basis outlined in the *Prospectus*.

Thus after due consideration, the premises chosen by the Club's committee were on Ludgate Hill, close to Fleet Street and in the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral. The property was bought from the upholsterer Messrs Wilkinson and Sons (who moved to 8 Old Bond Street, Piccadilly).[56] Wilkinson's had been both an auctioneer and a dealer in curiosities. They made a large quantity of furniture, including that of Philip Hardwick's designs for the Court Room, Dining Room and Drawing

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50 Liza Picard, *Victorian London* (London: Phoenix, 2006), pp. 127-8.

51 Black, *A Room of His Own*, p. 17; See also John Tosh, *A Man's Place* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 126-132.

52 Black, *A Room of His Own*, p. 17.

53 Ibid., p. 243, Note 29.

54 Ibid., p. 17.

55 *The Nonconformist* (18 January 1854), p. 53.

56 A family history of the Wilkinson family has informed this paragraph on Wilkinson and Sons. I am grateful to James Wilkinson and his family for providing clarification of the history available on his website, http://jimandhelen.com/HISTORY_OF_THE_WILKINSONS_June_2015.pdf (accessed 12 August 2019).

Room of the new Goldsmiths' Hall in 1833-4, issuing an invoice for their work to the value of £8,471 14s 7d. As well as unique pieces, Wilkinson's also made and sold facsimile pieces, including one of the table on which Napoleon signed his abdication – a piece which caused some confusion among some collectors in 1854.[57] As an upholsterer and auctioneer, the Ludgate Hill premises consisted of a "large shop-house" with both workshop and storage space, totalling 12,000 square feet.[58] A site of such size, possessed plenty of scope to be furnished and fitted out for use as a Club, although additional property was acquired later to ensure good access to the Club and sufficient area for laying out the amenities. Facing Ludgate Hill, the extended property was bordered by St Martin's Court, Stonecutter Street, Evangelist Court, Crescent Place and Union Street, enlarging the site and making it accessible from all directions.[59]

The *Prospectus* for the Club outlined the expected scale of the buildings and warrants a lengthy quotation. The Milton Hall and Club would consist of:

> A Club-House with Dining, Coffee, and Drawing-Rooms; Library; News and Pamphlet-Rooms; Rooms for Private Parties and occasional Committees; and, generally, all the usual arrangements of a well-appointed Club, adapted, however, to the character and habits of the Nonconformist Body. Also, Sleeping Apartments for Members of the Club ...
>
> A Hall for Public meetings, principally for the use of the various sections of the Evangelical Nonconformist body ... capable of seating 1,500 persons ...
>
> Underneath this room will be a smaller one, constructed to accommodate about 800 persons, with moveable fittings ... Chambers or Offices, intended to attract, as to a centre, the now widely-scattered Offices of our various Literary, Religious, and Benevolent Societies.
>
> Underneath the entire Building would be a Basement Story, well lighted and ventilated, fitted with Strong Rooms for Deeds, Securities, &c., and adapted to many other conveniences and uses.[60]

The aspirations of the scheme, as proposed in the *Prospectus*, demonstrate a significant addition to the public properties available to Nonconformists. No such building existed in London at this time. The Congregational Library on Blomfield Street, Finsbury, was established in 1830 and comprised of a "spacious library, 50 feet by 25 feet; a commodious board-room; offices and committee-rooms; and domestic apartments for the messenger".[61] While the Library was used for the Congregational Lecture and for meetings of the Congregational Board and the General Body of Dissenting Deputies, this space would have restricted large

57 *Notes and Queries* (25 February 1854), p. 183; also (21 January 1854), pp. 54-55.

58 *The Nonconformist* (19 January 1853), p. 56.

59 Ibid., (20 December 1854), p. 1042.

60 *Prospectus*, pp. 3-4.

61 *CYB* (1856), p. 297.

attendances. However, the larger space found at Congregational Memorial Hall, which was designed to cater for up to 1,200 in the Hall and 300 in the Library, was not built until 1872.[62] At the Milton Club, the extended facilities for social intercourse, the large halls, additional office and storage space were conceived to offer a venue that placed Nonconformity on the social and political stage. In addition to providing somewhere for Nonconformists to meet it was to be a showpiece for Nonconformity; it was to offer a location where dinners and events could welcome prominent figures in political and social circles to a venue capable of parity with the other great clubs of the age "adapted ... to the character and habits of the Nonconformist Body".[63]

The choice of architect for such a significant project needed to represent the aspiration of the Nonconformist community. The Congregational Memorial Hall was by the notable architect, John Tarring FRIBA (1806-1876), whose other work included numerous Nonconformist chapels and buildings where his Gothic revival style had led him to being considered "the Gilbert Scott of the Dissenters".[64] Yet while Tarring might have had the requisite expertise and profile for the work on the Milton Club, there is no evidence that he was involved in the project. In a drawing at the London Metropolitan Archives,[65] a sketch of the "Elevation of the front for the intended Milton Club on Ludgate Hill" bears the artist's name W. Wright[66] and depicts a four-storey building, with three windows across the front and a centrally placed entrance. As no pictorial evidence exists of the appearance of the completed Club, it is not possible to confirm whether this sketch reflects the final design and architect. No other suggestions of architect or contractor seem to be available.

Samuel Morton Peto (1809-1889), a civil engineer and Nonconformist Member of Parliament (Norwich 1847-54, Finsbury 1859-65, Bristol 1865-68), had been involved as a founding supporter of the Milton Club and served as a Trustee. In a successful partnership with Thomas Grissell (1801-1874), their firm worked with architect Sir Charles Barry FRS RA (1795-1860) on a number of significant projects in London, including the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament (1834), the Reform Club (1837) and as contractors in building Nelson's Column (1840), part of Barry's work on the Trafalgar Square precinct. Although Barry was involved in such projects, it was his son's firm, Banks and Barry, which produced a design for "[t]he New Hall ... about to be erected on the ground in the rear of the Milton Club".[67] Charles Barry Jr (1823-1900) and Robert Richardson Banks (1812-

62 *British Architect* (29 January 1875), p. 67.

63 *Prospectus* p. 3.

64 *DNB 1885-1900*, Vol 55 (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Tarring,_John_(DNB00)).

65 https://collage.cityoflondon.gov.uk/view-item?i=16727 (accessed 12 August 2019).

66 The catalogue record suggests W. Weight, but this appears to be incorrectly transcribed. William Wright practised 1839-1864, and had been proposed as an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects (ARIBA) by P. F. Robinson, T. Cundy, G. Moore, and C. Barry, retiring in 1855. Alison Felstead, Jonathan Franklin and Leslie Pinfield (eds), *Directory of British Architects 1834-1900* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1993), p. 1025.

67 *Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts*, Vol. 88 (London, 1856), p. 40.

1872) established themselves in 1847 and worked together until Banks's death in 1872. Their partnership included work on Bylaugh Hall, Norfolk (1849-1852), and the forecourt of Burlington House, Piccadilly, home to the Geological Society of London, Linnean Society of London, Royal Astronomical Society, Royal Society of Chemistry, and the Society of Antiquaries of London (1869-73). For the Milton Club, the association with Barry would have demonstrated how Nonconformists could be served by the highest quality professionals, and establishing the Club as comparable to the other great Clubs of the West End. Whether or not Banks and Barry ever broke soil on the Milton Hall project, the links between the Milton Club and the firm suggest something of the aspirations of these Nonconformists, and the prospective reputational benefit a contract for a hall for large public meetings and concerts, in sight of St Paul's Cathedral, might have had for the firm.

In 1859, *The Building News* documented the size of the Club, regarding it as:

> a large block of building, of special construction ... The frontage on Ludgate-hill is only 30 feet, but the whole depth is about 350 feet, covering an area of 29,000 square feet, communicating with a number of back courts. Among the rooms are a library or lecture-room, 52 feet long; drawing-room, 48 feet by 28 feet; smoking-room, breakfast-room, reading-room, dining-room, 65 feet long, and 22 sleeping rooms for members.[68]

The Club was "comfortably furnished"[69] and its scale and finishing would have made it unique among Nonconformist properties at the time, predating other significant Nonconformist buildings such as Congregational Memorial Hall, London (1872), Mansfield College, Oxford (1886), and Westminster College, Cambridge (1899). While extensive, the reported scale of the Club in the *Building News* fails to account fully for the planned scheme. While the details of the rooms indicate what the Club consisted of, there is no mention of the halls that the *Prospectus* proposed. The omission of the halls is substantiated by Skeats and Miall who claim that "the share subscription did not suffice for the erection of a hall, which would have cost £10,000".[70] The lack of such facilities clearly restricted the plans of the Trustees and Committee to establish a venue of considerable size in the centre of London. However, the Club still managed to host large scale events with frequently reported attendances in the hundreds. The scale of such facilities, even without the halls, would have made the Milton Club the largest facility for the social gathering of Nonconformists anywhere in England, and offered a significant focus for Nonconformity in the 1850s.

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68 *Building News* (18 March 1859), p. 25.

69 Skeats and Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England, 1688-1891*, p. 546.

70 Ibid.

IV: The Club and its Use

Beyond the Club's architectural façade, however, lay a body of people involved in its formation and life. With four Trustees, and a much larger committee, the Milton Club involved a number of leading Nonconformists in its establishment.

The revival of the idea of a Club came through the work of the "most 'clubable' [sic] of men",[71] Henry Bateman, who garnered support for the Radley's Hotel meeting in December 1851. Bateman had been trading as a Timber Merchant in Sun Street, Bishopsgate, in the 1850s. He was descended from a Huguenot family and had been in partnership with William Bateman, his silversmith father, and Richard Gray de Vauche "as Merchants for the sale of Bickes Patent Chemical Fertilising Powder" until Richard Gray de Vauche was removed from the partnership in January 1851.[72] In the latter part of the 1850s, Bateman became more widely known as a popular writer of hymns for children. He had been "addicted to the writing of poetry" for most of his life, but his hymns were largely written between 1856 and 1864, finding their way into a number of books published during this period.[73] However, his poems were not regarded highly by contemporary literary critics who disparagingly recorded that "their only success must be sought in the so-called religious world ... To us it is a dreary work".[74]

Whatever Bateman's contacts were with Nonconformity in 1851, they were soon to become considerably more extended. The Milton Hall *Prospectus* lists twenty-eight individuals who made up the Trustees and Committee, most of whom were highly regarded by Nonconformists. To have solicited support from the likes of laymen such as Josiah Conder, Dr Charles Foster, Edward Miall (editor of *The Nonconformist*), Samuel Morley, Samuel Morton Peto MP, Charles Reed (printer), and Joshua Wilson (founder of the Congregational Library), Bateman must have connected with a genuine desire for convivial companionship and opportunities for networking that were perceived as missing from the Nonconformist community.

With the involvement of these men, a great deal of wider influence could be offered. Gladstone's diaries indicate various contact with Miall, Morley and Peto during the 1850s, their contact not being directly linked to their periods as Members of Parliament.[75] Before the Milton Club had come into existence, Samuel Morton Peto met with Gladstone on 12 January 1852.[76] On 18 May 1855, Gladstone met with Edward Miall (while he was Liberal MP for Rochdale), a

71 James Branwhite French, *Walks in Abney Park* (London: J. Clarke, 1883), p. 158.

72 *London Gazette* (24 January 1851), p. 191.

73 John Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (London: J. Murray, 1892), p. 117.

74 *Athenaeum* (7 December 1861), p. 763.

75 Gladstone's diaries are informative but not comprehensive. In the majority of cases it is impossible to tell what the conversations or correspondence addressed. While the editorial footnotes give some indication of the relationship between Gladstone and the correspondent, they may not be pertinent to the correspondence mentioned in the diary.

76 M. R. D. Foot and H. C. G. Matthew (eds), *The Gladstone Diaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), Volume 4, p. 386, (12 January 1852).

"Nonconformist minister and ... leading disestablishmentarian".[77] Exactly three years later, on 18 May 1858, Gladstone wrote to Samuel Morley.[78] The editorial footnote against this diary entry indicates that Morley was not an MP at the time, but that he was an "important link between Gladstone and Nonconformists".[79] Although Gladstone had links with a number of clubs during this time (including *Grillion's* and *The Carlton*), no direct reference to the Milton Club is found in the comprehensive index to his diaries. Yet, while a direct link may never have existed, it is plausible that Gladstone's contact with these notable parties and the plight of Nonconformists associated with the Milton Club might have resulted in knowledge of the Club even if he never visited the premises.

While the nature and vociferousness of the political discourse at the Milton Club cannot be substantiated, that so many politicians and political figures at different times attended the Club suggests that the Ludgate Hill premises held some significance in the life of British politics during the 1850s. With dozens of MPs attending dinners and functions at the Club, the potential of its aim to be a place of networking can be seen. With only formal dinners and events receiving the attention of the press, the informal gatherings in the reading room and the meetings of associates over dinner cannot be underestimated as part of making the Milton Club somewhere that mutual sharing and common action could be furthered.

In addition to parliamentary politics, the Milton Club played an important part in Church life during the 1850s. At the Autumn Meeting of the CUEW in 1855, the Union retired on three of the four evenings to the newly founded Milton Club. The Temporary Hall of the Club was used for a dinner and paper given by Revd John Waddington on Tuesday, 23 October,[80] and for the commemoration of the jubilee of Revd John Angell James at dinner on Wednesday 24 October.[81] At the final night soirée on Friday 25 October, a "large assembly met in the drawing-room and library of the Club" and gave a unanimous and "fervent hope that the Milton Club ... may be liberally supported by the friends of the Congregational Union throughout the United Kingdom".[82]

The welcome afforded members of the CUEW in 1855 demonstrated the benefits of the Club to those attending the Assembly. The enthusiastic and unanimous support from those in attendance at the Club must have been encouraging to the Trustees and Committee who were able to indicate something of the Club's purposes and its surroundings. It is unknown whether this led to increased support in terms of the take up of debentures or membership, but its higher profile among the CUEW might have provided useful patronage.

The CUEW returned to the Milton Club on a number of occasions in May, September and October 1856 amid the doctrinal controversy that raged within the

77 *The Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. 5, p. 57, (18 May 1855).

78 Ibid., p. 208, (18 May 1858).

79 Ibid., fn. 10.

80 *CYB* (1856), p. 63.

81 Ibid., p. 79.

82 Ibid., p.102.

CUEW surrounding Thomas Toke Lynch's publication of the hymn collection, *The Rivulet*.[83] A meeting on 23 September 1856, including 68 gentlemen "from town and country", lasted for 12 hours and sought "that the present unhappy controversy between beloved brethren connected with the Union should be brought to an end, and that without delay".[84] With the Rivulet Controversy featuring as an important matter within the CUEW during the 1850s, the Milton Club would have become better known among Nonconformists. Whether it was regarded favourably or negatively as a result of its involvement in the controversy is unclear. However, it would certainly have increased its profile among members of the CUEW and the wider Nonconformist community. Its significant use by the CUEW ensured that it could be regarded as a legitimate location with which Nonconformist institutions could be associated.

One of the recognised purposes of a club was in the commercial and professional benefits that could come from a member's club acquaintances. Although many clubs regarded the transacting of business a taboo on club premises, the nature of networking between businessmen inevitably improved commercial relationships and the possibility of stronger business prospects. Contacts made among the business community in and around the Milton Club would have been part of the Club's life. The proximity to various publishers and printers and the involvement of the editor of *The Nonconformist* gave the Club a strong networking purpose. The railway and civil engineering entrepreneur, Samuel Morton Peto, had been involved in the Milton Club since its early days, and although his business dealings during the 1850s were largely overseas, his business contacts in London and further afield would undoubtedly have been of interest to those who met together at the Milton Club.

The American litterateur, Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his *English Notebooks* refers to a dining occasion at the Milton Club when he was a guest of Francis Bennoch. Bennoch, himself a "patron of poets and artists",[85] hosted a dinner at the Milton Club on Tuesday 1 April 1856 in honour of Hawthorne.[86] In hosting this dinner, Bennoch brought together sixteen guests with a wide range of expertise and interest. A number of representatives of the press were there, including Charles Mackay (editor of the *London Illustrated News*), S. C. Hall (editor of *Art Union Journal*) and William Howitt (editor of *Howitt's Journal*), while they were joined by newspaperman and playwright, Tom Taylor. Other guests included Herbert Ingram, the "newly elected" Member of Parliament for Boston, and Lieutenant Shaw whom Hawthorne had previously met at Aldershot. While being a long way

83 Ibid. (1857), pp.46-49. A summary of the doctrinal controversy can be found in Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England, 1662-1962*, pp. 249-253.

84 *CYB* (1857), p. 47.

85 Ramona E. Hull, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The English Experience 1853-1864* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 1980), p. 43.

86 Hawthorne documents this experience at great length in his *English Notebooks* for 4 April 1856. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1891), Vol. 8, pp. 225-227. Further details about the attendees at this dinner are collated in Hull, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The English Experience 1853-1864*, pp. 81-82.

from the centre of the arts and literary society of mid-Victorian London, the Club was able to host such events to appeal to men from the literary and artistic spheres, and allowed both religious and secular press the opportunity to experience first-hand the Club's hospitality, notably for Hawthorne, the Club's "abundance of wine".[87] Hawthorne believed his guests "represented a great deal of the working intellect of London at this present day and moment, – the men whose plays, whose songs, whose articles, are just now in vogue".[88] If such gentlemen were aware of the Club, then it is possible that a vast number of those prolific in music, theatre and literature in London and further afield also had opportunity to encounter the Milton Club and its members.

In December 1856, a programme of events were organised to mark the return of explorer and missionary, Dr David Livingstone, from Africa. After a "grand welcome" from the Royal Geographical Society on 15 December, and a public reception held at Freemasons' Hall on 16 December, the London Missionary Society hosted a dinner that same evening at the Milton Club.[89] At this dinner, a number of ministers and laymen – about one hundred gentlemen – associated with various Missionary Societies and denominations convened "by way of testifying their respect and regard for him, and according to him a welcome on his return to his native land".[90] Mr Alderman Challis MP (former Lord Mayor of London, 1852-1853) was in the Chair, while a number of other political figures and Members of Parliament, including Mr A. Pellatt MP, Mr T. Chambers MP and Mr Alderman Wire (later Lord Mayor of London, 1858-1859), were also present. Likewise, Milton Club Trustees, Samuel Morley and Henry Bateman were in attendance.[91] After Dr Livingstone had shared some "information about the mission, and the difficulties it had to contend with in a new country", toasts were raised to the London Missionary Society (Mr A. Pellatt MP), the Baptist, Wesleyan, and other missionary societies (Mr H. Bateman), and to Mrs Livingstone, (Mr Alderman Challis MP), "who had shortly before entered the room, and amid hearty greetings from all present, taken her seat by the side of her husband".[92]

V: Demise and legacy

The Milton Club sought to unify the various aspects of Nonconformity in the 1850s by providing a venue in London where Nonconformists could associate more easily and convivially. Although its aims, examined above, focused on these aspirations, the Milton Club was not immune from criticism in the press. Such criticisms ranged from the associations with John Milton and the "insufferable impertinence of its name" through to describing an institution where "the

87 Hawthorne, *The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Vol. 8, p. 226.
88 Ibid.
89 *The Nonconformist* (17 December 1856), p. 962.
90 Ibid., p. 961.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.

magnates of the Milton Club are the most tyrannical set of oligarchs that ever lived".[93] Either way, such comment was centred largely on the perceptions of the individuals involved to "mimic the clubbism of the superiors".[94] The suggestion appeared to be that by seeking establishment status, the Milton Club laid itself open to the accusation that Nonconformity had given up on its ideals.

The difficulties surrounding the "evangelical test of membership" remained an issue throughout the life of the Club.[95] As noted previously, Unitarians who had been excluded from the venture put on record their view that exclusion had led to the failure of the venture, reportedly justifying this by claiming that "Milton ... was an Unitarian".[96] In a letter to the editor of *The Nonconformist*, one debenture holder gave an analysis of the Club's benefits and failings:

> There is a desire on the part of many Nonconformists for *something* in the nature of the institution on Ludgate Hill. But these do not appear to be numerous enough, or wealthy enough, or spirited enough, to support a Club, in the strict sense of that term.[97]

It seems that convincing Nonconformists in London held the key to their success, or otherwise, as a venture. The wealth and size of the membership of the Club would appear to be a significant factor. The Club had clearly struggled to gain support from the outset, and although the take up of debentures had enabled the committee to secure property after a short period, the project was not supported by a large number of the Nonconformists of London. Similarly, the debenture cost of £50 (equivalent to £5,336 in 2019[98]) would have been a significant expense for all but the most wealthy or committed, while the London Membership fees, (£8.8s in the first year, £3.3s annually thereafter), would have been equivalent to an annual cost of approximately £900 today.[99] Participation, either as a debenture holder or as a member, would have been a costly commitment and one many Nonconformists would not have felt able to justify.

In the original *Prospectus* the number of members "may be assumed to be 1500".[100] The total membership of the Club is unknown, but given the difficulties in achieving sufficient debenture sales (originally expected to be 1,000 for the full Club and Hall), it seems likely that the entire project was under-financed from the beginning. Only 600 debentures of the required 1,000 had been sold, representing an income of £30,000. As a result, the purchase of the original site costing £40,000

93 *Westmoreland Gazette and Kendal Advertiser* (4 December 1858), p. 6.

94 Ibid.

95 Skeats and Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England, 1688-1891*, p. 546.

96 *Eddowes's Journal* (12 January 1859), p. 5.

97 *The Nonconformist* (5 January 1859), p. 5.

98 Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present". https://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/ (accessed 12 August 2019).

99 Ibid.

100 *Prospectus*, p. 2.

required a mortgage to be taken at £10,000 reflecting a quarter of its value.[101] With an additional £10,000 needed to build the hall, and with a lack of subscriptions, the finances of the Club seem to have been perilously tight throughout its life.

The lack of a hall probably caused further difficulties for the Club. While it was able to host events for the CUEW in 1855 and on behalf of the London Missionary Society in December 1856, there was no large space available to meet and to share in worship. The scheme lacked "an immense and richly-decorated hall for public meetings ... [with] a magnificent organ ... dedicated to great public occasions, whether festive or of a more serious character".[102] Instead, the CUEW meetings in 1855 utilised a "temporary hall".[103] Even if the firm of Banks and Barry had prepared drawings for the Milton Hall as suggested, the lack of the Hall's completion would have left the Club without part of its purpose. Skeats and Miall suggest that "[i]f this part of the scheme had been carried out, it would probably have prolonged the existence of the Club".[104]

It is not clear when the Club ceased to be an active concern, but by early 1859 the letter from a debenture holder in *The Nonconformist* suggests it was beginning to be recognised. Upon the Club's closure, therefore, its assets were put up for auction. The property was sold first. The freehold property was sold by Messrs Norton, Hoggart & Trist on 2 March 1860, along with the Cock Public House and two houses and shops in St Martin's Court, for £8,000.[105]

The wine cellar was sold at auction on the 17 April 1860 by Messrs Foster. The advertisement for the sale gives some indication of the size of the cellar at the Club:

> The Wines will be found good and much that is curious, particularly some small bins of 1820, 1834, and 1840 Ports, Malmsey, Madeira 32 years in bottle, Martell's 1834 Liqueur Brandy, White Hermitage 38 years in bottle, Montilla, Amontillado, and Old Solera Sheries; in all there will be 330 Light Wines, including Perrier Jouet's, Möet's, Mumm's, and Cliquot's Champagne, a small part in magnums, also Claret, Hock and Moselle.[106]

Following the sale of the premises on Ludgate Hill, and the disposal of the cellar, the Milton Club disappeared from view. With its many benefits and purposes outlined for the Nonconformist community in mid-Victorian London, the Club had taken a bold step in seeking to create something that might galvanise the community. While its influence is not insignificant, the existence of a custom built hub for Nonconformists that existed physically for little more than five years

101 Skeats and Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England, 1688-1891*, p. 546.

102 *Express* (27 October 1855).

103 *CYB* (1856), p. 63.

104 Skeats and Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England, 1688-1891*, pp. 546-547.

105 *Morning Advertiser* (3 March 1860), p. 6. It is not documented, but we may presume that the sale of the property covered outstanding debts linked to a mortgage with any remaining funds returned to debenture holders.

106 *Athenaeum* (14 March 1860), p. 492.

does suggest that the Milton Club's aims and aspirations were not in line with the needs of the Nonconformist community of the time.

The exclusion of Unitarians by management of the Club is well-documented, while the continued exclusion of women from such ventures is not unexpected for the mid-nineteenth century. *The Express* indicated that Henry Bateman assured the women of the CUEW "that the club would have no injurious effects in permanently attracting the members from the domestic circle, and ... how valuable it would be as a place of recreation for their sons, who might come up to seek their fortunes in town".[107] The promotion of the Milton Club among women suggests that support from women was being encouraged to further publicise the benefits of the Club among Nonconformist gentlemen. It is unknown whether such appeals resulted in an increased participation, but it is clear that the Trustees felt this a necessary step in their attempts to secure sufficient support for the Club.

While exclusions clearly limited those who could join, the greatest difficulty appears to be apathy towards the project from a number of Nonconformists. It could be that this was because the Milton Club had ambitions which many Nonconformists could neither aspire to, nor afford. Of those in the rising social classes in the mid-nineteenth century, Adam Kuper suggests that a disproportionate number "came from Nonconformist or Quaker families, although they tended to defect to the Church of England as they rose in the world".[108] Such a situation would lead to a mismatch between those who had the means to be fully paid up members and debenture holders, and those who had the ideological desire to be associated with the Club. Perhaps the Club facilities – its fine dining, lounges and libraries – were too rich for the average Nonconformist gentleman, but not exclusive enough for the aspiring businessman who would perhaps prefer to be at *The Reform* or *The Carlton*.

This article has outlined the Milton Club's place in social history as an influence on the spheres of politics, art, church and culture. Without personal testimony, or a significant archive of material relating to the Club itself, insight into the Club remains partial. However, what can be said is that the Milton Club sought to unite and inspire the Nonconformists of mid-Victorian Britain, and in so doing gave opportunity for networking and mutual encouragement between gentlemen associated through their Nonconformist backgrounds. Although the doctrinal and financial barriers placed by the Trustees and Committee alienated a number of Nonconformists, the aspirations of the Milton Club were focused on promoting a closer unity between Nonconformist gentlemen in pursuit of "strengthening their cause and increasing their influence".[109] While the Milton Club will never be regarded as a significant part of nineteenth-century Nonconformist witness, its short life and formation provides testimony to the aspirations which abounded in Victorian Nonconformity.

MATTHEW PREVETT

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107 *Express* (27 October 1855).

108 Kuper, *Incest and Influence: The Private Life of Bourgeois England*, p. 12.

109 *The Nonconformist* (10 December 1851), p. 979.

A CURIOUS CONGREGATIONALIST: THE REVD J. IDRISYN JONES AND BRITISH ISRAELISM[1]

> ... the Revd. J. Idrisyn Jones ... has just passed away at the age of 81. The death occurred at Kenilworth. The deceased gentleman had been in the Congregational ministry for 55 years ... He was a strong temperance advocate and a "Good Templar."[2]

At first glance this unremarkable obituary, recording the death of a Congregational minister, published in a provincial newspaper in the midst of the Great War, does not excite much interest. Indeed, it suggests that J. Idrisyn Jones led a relatively uneventful life in which the pursuit of his vocation formed the dominant part. In fact, what is most interesting about the obituary is what is omitted. It is true that Jones had taken for his vocation the Congregational ministry, but for the last twenty-six years of his life he had also taken on the mantle of principal evangelist for the cause of British Israelism. And it was in discharging this duty that he would journey around the British Isles, to the far-flung corners of the British Empire and across the Atlantic to America. This article seeks to shine a light on the reasons why an apparently conscientious Congregational minister and temperance advocate should quite suddenly be at the head of a movement which sought to propagate a novel interpretation of biblical material that, in many ways, undermined the relevance of his own denomination.

Since its emergence as an organised movement in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, there have been only a handful of serious studies into British Israelism as a socio-religious phenomenon: little more than an article, a chapter in a collected edition and an unpublished PhD thesis. This makes analysis of those like Jones who had taken a leading position in the movement during what might be called its heyday an important contribution towards forming a better understanding of this most peculiar of movements. A focus on Jones has an additional layer of interest. The work that has been done on the subject suggests that British Israelism was far more appealing to Anglicans than to Nonconformists. What was happening within Nonconformity that could have driven an able pastor to embrace the message of British Israelism?

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1 I would like to thank Professors Binfield, Bebbington and Catterall for their invaluable insights and assistance during the course of researching this paper.

2 "The Revd. J. Idrisyn Jones, Death of an aged Minister", *The Brecon and Radnor Express* (28 December 1916). The International Order of the Good Templars was a society which advocated complete abstinence from alcohol, and later evolved into a pressure group campaigning for the restriction in the traffic of alcohol and the shortening of licensing hours. Originally founded in America around 1851, the first British fraternity was established in Birmingham in 1873. D. Harrison and F. Lomax, *Freemasonry and Fraternal Societies* (Addlestone: Lewis Masonic, 2015), pp. 11-12.

I: Early Life

John Idrisyn Jones was born to John Jones (formerly Humffrey) (1804-1887) and his wife Elizabeth at Llanidloes in 1835, the eldest of five sons.[3] Jones's later penchant for advocacy and public ministry was inherited from a father who enjoyed an eclectic career. The elder Jones began his working life as an apprentice to Richard Jones (whose name he adopted), the printer and publisher of the Welsh Wesleyan journal *Yr Eurgrawn*. He went on to establish his own printing and publishing operation, again where he managed all of the output of literature for the Welsh Wesleyans. He was a town councillor and Mayor of Llanidloes (1847-48), as well as a local preacher. However, it would appear that, like his son after him, John Jones was unsettled in his theological disposition. In 1853, he sloughed off his Wesleyan allegiance and defected to Anglicanism. Ordained to the diaconate in September of the same year, he was appointed to the parish of Llandysiliogogo, in Ceredigion, in 1858. He continued to publish pamphlets and sermons, but "his chief work ... and [the] best known to the public at large [was] ... the popular *Welsh Commentary on the Bible* in five volumes, which [at the time of his death in 1887] was in its eighth edition. Over 80,000 copies of this publication [had been] sold in Britain and America – a scale unprecedented, perhaps, in the history of Welsh books".[4] In 1881, in recognition of his services to Welsh literature (which included a Welsh translation of Queen Victoria's *Journal of Our Life in the Highlands*), Jones was awarded a Civil List pension of £50 per annum on the recommendation of William Gladstone. He also obtained the bardic name Idrisyn; the diminutive form of Idris, the legendary Welsh giant.[5]

From what little information there is on his formative years, it is tempting to speculate that the younger Jones felt ill at ease, maybe even actively hostile, to his father's decision to abandon Wesleyanism for the emoluments and status of the Established Church. An indication of this is the twenty-two-year-old Jones's decision to enter the dissenting ministry, being accepted at Hackney Academy (also known as Hackney Theological College) in 1855. His decision to follow a Congregational, rather than Wesleyan, call to ministry may reflect a sense that his father's change of allegiance might have affected his own Methodist calling; he felt more at ease in choosing the Congregational ministry and the relative strength of Congregationalism within central Wales, (close to where he was brought up), may have helped to convince him that this offered a more promising path to ministry. This can only be hypothesis but it suggests that the child was father of the man – as well as his father's son.

Completing his instruction at Hackney in 1858, Jones began full-time ministry in Brecon (where he served as an assistant) before serving in pastorates in Everton

3 D. L. Thomas, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-15045 (accessed 23 June, 2018).

4 "The Death of the Rev. J. Jones (Idrisyn)", *The South Wales Daily News* (19 August 1887).

5 This title would be handed down to the younger Jones, in keeping with the bardic tradition.

(1861-1874), Pentonville (1875-1876), Newport (1883-1886), Birkenhead (1887-1888),* Rodborough (1888-1890),* Crouch Hill (1890-1892),* Muswell Hill (1892-1893),* Welshpool (1893-1900),* Northampton (1901)* and Kenilworth (1905-1909).*[6] After Kenilworth, Jones is recorded as having moved to Cardiff where he remained out of charge between 1910 and 1914, the year in which he formally retired. During the course of his fifty-five years in ministry Jones was supported by his wife Annie Sophia, with whom he had at least four children (two sons and two daughters).

In addition to his ministry, Jones was variously described as an author (he wrote at least two biographies of minor figures within Nonconformity and published pamphlets on the Nonconformist tradition, on baptism and on Spiritualism), biblical expositor and a ready advocate for the principal causes associated with Nonconformity: temperance (he was a member of the International Order of the Good Templars), the expansion of non-denominational education and disestablishment, (certainly in his native Wales). Given the number of different communities he served throughout his ministry, many of them in a non-stipendiary capacity, it is likely that Jones was already a man of some private means (there is no evidence to suggest that he was disinherited by his father) and he therefore possessed a degree of independence to pursue other interests. This would explain how Jones was able to dedicate much of his adult life to the Anglo (and later British) Israel Association.[7] From at least 1889,[8] Jones published articles and delivered lectures up and down the country to the provincial branches of this relatively young organisation. This would take him to Ireland, and then, after 1899, to church halls and assembly rooms across Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States and the West Indies. With a preaching style described as of "the sweetest, most winning manner ... with a highly cultivated voice",[9] Jones propagated British Israel with the passion of the convert. As Vice-President and Ambassador-at-Large of the Association, Jones saw no conflict of principle in combining Congregational ministry with an unorthodox understanding of certain biblical texts. Moreover, for twenty-six years Jones reconciled these two callings.

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6 * Indicates that Jones served as an Assistant Pastor, likely non-stipendiary as only larger Congregational churches could afford to maintain more than one full-time minister.

7 Originally founded as the Anglo-Israel Association in 1874, it would later merge with another Israelist organisation to form the British-Israel Association in 1889. Under the direction of former imperial civil servant, Edward Wheeler Bird, the organisation maintained an affiliated branch structure which was loosely grouped under a central committee based in London (the Metropolitan British-Israel Association). From 1880, the Association appointed the Viscount Folkstone MP (Jacob Pleydell-Bouverie, son of the Earl of Radnor) as President, and a number of high-profile Vice-Presidents including Jonathan Titcombe, Lord Bishop of Rangoon.

8 *The Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazetteer* (24 January 1889) advertising a lecture by Jones on the Abrahamic Covenant. This is the earliest reference that I can find linking Jones and British Israelism.

9 Mary J. Anderson (ed.), *The Life Writings of Mary Baker McQuesten: Victorian Matriarch* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), p. 85.

II: British Israelism

British Israelism is a form of biblical revisionism which emphasises the literal interpretation of the Abrahamic (or Old) Covenant from whence the evidential narrative of a chosen people would begin. This deviated significantly from accepted biblical scholarship in attempting to prove the direct and physical manifestation of the Old Covenant in the reality of the nineteenth century. Yet, from the time of the theory's modern inception in 1840, it was an

> ... *a priori* identification in that the end result was ordained from the start ... British Israelism exerted relatively little effort in tracing this descent step by step ... rather it began with the confirmed view that the British were racial Israelites and thus concentrated on finding every piece of evidence which might substantiate this supposition.[10]

Much of the evidence supporting this theory was highly speculative, since, even from the starting point of a literal interpretation of the biblical narrative, the fate of the northern tribes of Israel after the Assyrian invasion and their being taken into captivity (as recorded in Chronicles 5:26) is "lost to recorded history".[11] Yet, for British Israelists, this "gap in historical knowledge is regarded as of crucial importance".[12] It is cited as evidence that the promises made by God to Abraham remain unfulfilled. And, the historical void allowed theorists to construct a narrative from scratch. Through a combination of philological studies and the piecing together of fragmentary references to the lost tribes found in the apocryphal Book of Esdras[13] and in Herodotus, British Israelists proved to their own satisfaction that the captive Israelites left Assyrian lands, moved north into what is now southern Russia before migrating westwards to become the progenitors of the modern British people. It was the British who were the heirs to the Abrahamic Covenant and would see the world brought under the reign of God. His chosen instrument was Britain. Her Empire was the proof that the prophecy was coming to fruition.

British Israelism seldom features in the history of Nonconformity. What evidence there is suggests that its chief appeal was to Anglicans. It is possible that an apparent lack of interest in such theological speculations reflects Nonconformity's greater cultural and theological cohesiveness during the period. This was in contrast to an Established Church which was in retreat in many areas

10 Eric M. Reisenauer, *British-Israel: Racial Identity in Imperial Britain, 1870-1920* (unpublished PhD Thesis, Loyola University, Chicago, 1997), p. 95.

11 J. Wilson, "British Israelism: The Ideological Restraints on Sect Organisation", Bryan. R. Wilson, et al (eds), *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organisation and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements* (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 346.

12 Ibid., p. 347.

13 An alternative version of 2 Chronicles, 35:1-36:23, all of Ezra and Nehemiah, 7:38-8:12. Not included in the Vulgate or later Protestant editions of the Bible but acknowledged as a canonical book by the Greek Orthodox Church. Source: M. A. Powell (ed.), *Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), p. 256.

and corporately plagued by division (often manifesting itself as a battle between the Evangelical and the Anglo-Catholic wings of the Church). British Israelism typically spoke to those who sought to recover their self-confidence and the reassurance of their place in the world; it spoke to those in society whose once unassailable position, socially and morally, seemed under threat from economic changes and the imperial reverses of the 1850s onwards. For Nonconformists, this sense of being an embattled minority was nothing new. Indeed, it was from such a mind-set that those outside the Anglican Church had drawn strength and security and, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the confidence to challenge the established hegemony.

III: British Israelism and Nonconformity

However, this fails to take into account the ways in which Nonconformity itself was being undermined from within as a reformist agenda challenged some of its fundamental tenets after 1880. There was a "counter-revolution of values" arising from dissatisfaction with simplistic notions of progress. As noted in John Waddington's contemporary history of Congregationalism, "outside the circle of the churches comprehended in the Congregational Union, a number of gifted men had for some time ... advocated Congregational Reform".[14] Waddington cites Edward Miall as one of those men, pointing to a passage in his *British Churches in Relation to the British People*:

> Had the churches generally, by preaching and by practice, addressed the message of God by His Son more to the moral sympathies of men, and less to their sense of personal interest – had the tastes quickened and fostered in them been those conversant with, and terminating upon, rightness rather than advantage – had the paramount idea they brought to bear upon the world been that of the transcendently glorious character of God as imaged in Jesus Christ – instead of the benefit accruing to men from the mediatorial work – they would have diffused around them an atmosphere of thought and sentiment which instead of hardening the unsubdued into indifference and recklessness would have progressively mellowed them into susceptibility of impression.[15]

I would suggest that it was this reconfiguration of values among leading figures across the denominations that provided an explanation for why J. Idrisyn Jones, until 1889-90, a solid defender of Congregational values, was converted to the message of British Israel. Jones was one of a handful of Nonconformists who were declared supporters of the movement. E. M. Reisenauer, in his thesis on British Israel, lists the following as known members of the cause: the Revd Henry Roe (1842-1920), the Revd Mark Guy Pearse (1842-1930) and the Revd Dinsdale T.

14 John Waddington, *Congregational History, 1850-1880* (London: Longmans, 1880), p. 134.
15 Edward Miall, *The British Churches in Relation to the British People* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue and Company, 1849), p. 154.

Young (1861-1938). All were Methodists. Reisenauer recorded only one other Congregational minister to have committed himself to the cause: Joseph T. Wild (1834-1908). Moving young from Lancashire to Canada, Wild would go on to preach in New York as well as across his vast adopted homeland. Indeed, according to the Canadian newspaper *The Daily Mail*, Wild was considered to be "the most popular preacher in Toronto [in 1891] ... often attracting more than 3,000 people to hear his Identity [British Israel] sermons".[16] Putting aside their denominational differences, it is possible to argue that all shared a critical attitude to the reformist agenda that was beginning to take hold, hence their attraction to British Israel.

Its attractiveness appears to have been its ability to provide a radical alternative vision of human and divine society, while also reinforcing traditional Nonconformist doctrine. British Israelism offered the believer a chance to be part of an "elect" once again. But it did this in such a way as to negate many of the alterations wrought by the changing socio-economic environment of the late nineteenth century. This can be shown by Jones's first recorded publication on the subject in 1890 when he contributed a chapter to *British Israel Truth*, the handbook of the movement, in which he attempted to rebut a number of theological objections to the theory.[17] The apparent ease with which Jones was able to make this journey might be explained by reference to his own reflections on the advantages for the believer in British Israelism, expressed in his *Anglo-Israelism in Australasia*.[18] Faith in the British Israel message:

> ... brings God to the front. The people who have accepted this Truth ever remember Him as the source of all their blessings ... That is the condition in which nations thrive and prosper. In our creed we have the safeguard against those perils which make a godless community.[19]
>
> It results in the study of the Bible ... Scripture and history make the two poles of our system, and must be studied together, for prophecy is but history in anticipation ... We have the joy of sending people back to their Bibles.[20]
>
> It removes the burden of national anxiety. To many of the nations today, the outlook is most unpromising ... the hand-writing is seen upon the wall speaking of ruin and decay. But none of these tragic voices speak to an Anglo-Israel nation.[21]

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16 "Long Ministry Ended: Dr. Joseph Wild is Dead", *The Evening Telegraph (Toronto)* (19 August 1908).

17 Denis Hanan and H. Aldersmith (eds), *British-Israel Truth 14th Edition* (London: Covenant Publishing Co, 1932), p. 148.

18 Published in the guise of a report on his mission there, on behalf of the Anglo-Israel Association.

19 The Revd J. Idrisyn Jones, *Anglo-Israelism in Australasia in 1899* (London: Robert Banks and Son, 1899), pp. 22-23.

20 Ibid., p. 23.

21 Ibid.

> It destroys the sense of isolation. An Anglo-Israel nation never can be left severely alone. Sister-nations beckon her to their sympathy and love, to make one great and united family.[22]

One can use these quotations to identify how British Israelism appeared to answer the controversies within Nonconformity which had apparently alienated Jones. The claim of "bringing God to the front" and of "sending people back to their Bibles" can be read as a criticism of the interest which some leading Nonconformist figures took in incarnational and contextual theology from the 1870s. For most of the nineteenth century Nonconformity held to an Evangelicalism which was optimistic in its emphasis on the human ability to achieve success in this life and salvation in the next: the only condition was "conversion", that "moment of change when the light flooded the empty vessel and regeneration occurred".[23] It was the point where one moved from darkness to light, from sin to glory. However, from the late 1870s this spirit of optimism gave way to a more serious consideration of those who seemed to form the perpetually damned in society. Led by a number of senior Nonconformists, many of whom had been influenced by Romanticism, there was a re-examination of orthodox views on damnation promoting a more contextual understanding of God's plan. This changing interpretation of the theology of grace was associated with a renewed emphasis on the "Fatherhood of God". "God as a slightly indulgent Father began to replace God the judge who demanded the atonement of Christ and required faith and moral effort on the part of man".[24] As a sermon topic the "Fatherhood of God" became popular because it permitted preachers to speak about the brotherhood of man.

In other words, the spirit of enterprise, technological advancement, and economic development, the Protestant-tinged *zeitgeist* of the nineteenth century, was now to be seen as the idol whose veneration had led to the sacrifice of the aesthetic and the humane. Industrial success "had been purchased at too great a price".[25] The extent of the shift by the late 1880s was such that W. R. Nicoll, editor of *The British Weekly*, posited that the "increasing rejection of the doctrine of eternal punishment was the most significant development in the theology of contemporary Nonconformity".[26] Christ the Incarnate Man came to replace Christ the Saviour (that is one who suffers a propitiatory sacrifice) as the model of atonement.

For Jones this interest in Incarnation Theology seemed to strike at the heart of his faith. Jones defined his faith, and Nonconformity in general, quite clearly in his pamphlet *Why are we Nonconformists?* (1881):

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22 Ibid.

23 Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England: 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 176.

24 Gerald Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, IV: Interpretations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1988), p. 84.

25 D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Oxford: Routledge: 2002), pp. 166-167.

26 W. B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Independent Press, 1954), p. 92.

> [Nonconformity] ... is not founded on a question of a mere difference of taste, but on conscience ... It is the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ which separates us from Churchmen. It is this fact which led the earlier Nonconformists to endure their terrible persecutions and sufferings, and which leads modern Nonconformists to incur the loss of social prestige ... they [the past generation] ... are yet speaking, bidding us to be valiant for the truth; to suffer, if needs be for righteousness.[27]

This belief in the need for sacrifice and struggle was reinforced by Jones's strong adherence to pre-millennialism.[28] A year before the publication of *Why are we Nonconformists?* Jones set out his arguments in favour of this position in *A Catechism on the Second Advent; and the Revealed Future of the Church and the World.* In the dedicatory note, addressed to Capt. The Hon. R. Moreton, the convenor of the Second Advent Conferences at Mildmay Park Hall, "I am glad to know that we are identical in our opinions, as to the Advent of the Lord being *pre-millennial*, and that He will not long delay His coming".[29] Jones considered the pre-millennial position to be the doctrine most closely aligned to that held by the primitive church, but, obscured by the Catholic Church, it was not rediscovered until the Reformation. However, "since it was thus revived again ... how has it become so widely ignored at the present day?"[30] The answer: "the notion of a speedy advent is not welcome to an age so absorbed by worldly pleasures and pursuits, which embraces therefore, the more popular view [of post-millennialism]".[31] But, asking why it was important to believe in the pre-millennial Advent, Jones made the case that "it is calculated to exert a most salutary influence upon our character, rendering it more earnest and consecrated, and producing in us that constant watchfulness so emphatically enjoined by the Saviour".[32] Thus the doctrine could be justified on the basis of its effective application to humanity, as well as in a purer theological sense. To the pre-millennialist, the pursuit of earthly pleasures was slowly drowning the world in "wickedness and chaos, like Babylon or Sodom and Gomorrah"[33] but this was necessary so that the full transformative power of the Second Advent could be brought to bear on humankind and "'the light of a morning which is to know no night breaks gloriously forth'".[34] Those who stood to reap the greatest reward from this transforming power were those few who

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27 J. Idrisyn Jones, *Why are we Nonconformists?* (Newport: W. Jones, 1881), p. 6.

28 Pre-millennialists believed that only with the Second Coming will the Kingdom of Heaven be established on earth (Christ must come first, hence "pre"). The opposing view is that of Post-millennialism which envisages Christ returning to an earth as the culmination of human success in building the new Jerusalem.

29 J. Idrisyn Jones, *A Catechism on the Second Advent; and the Revealed Future of the Church and the World* (London: S. W. Partridge and Co., 1880), p. 1.

30 Ibid., p. 6.

31 Ibid., p. 7.

32 Ibid.

33 Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?*, p. 401.

34 Ibid.

actively sought to transcend the pleasures of this world in favour of a life of order and piety. Nonconformists believed themselves to represent this "Godly minority". They became associated with the virtues of strength, high moral discipline and optimism and with the promotion of equality of opportunity. These were the values most strongly associated with the entrepreneurial and aspirational new men, men who were outside the pale of respectable (Anglican) English society, represented most prominently among the professionals, the small businessmen and the skilled working class. Those like the metal broker and Quaker Albert Fox, memorialised by Jones in 1867 in *The Devout Merchant*, who succeeded in combining "a life of personal holiness beyond the common stamp"[35] with that of hard work.

The reorientation of the Evangelical tradition undermined the foundations of this individual and corporate identity. Adherents to the Dissenting denominations were historically a persecuted minority. This mentality was fundamental to the creation of a Nonconformist sense of identity; to be a Nonconformist was to share in the suffering of faith. For some, this gave the doctrine of the "elect" fresh relevance, in it was to be found the persecuted Nonconformists' consolation, the principal justification for their sacrifice on earth. Nonconformists had foregone the rewards of the earth and been set apart as true adherents of the Gospel. Their sacrifice placed them among God's chosen people. They were a superior community. It was their duty to demonstrate to the world the transformative power of faith. It was this which provided the comprehensive experience of faith, satisfying the need for a complete physical and psychological sense of self and purpose. An end to Nonconformity's "elect" status and a new emphasis on incarnationalism brought about the abandonment of this element of Nonconformist identity. The "Downgrade" controversy among the Baptists represents the most significant example of the "orthodox" reaction to changes within the Evangelical tradition. Failing similar fractures in Methodism or Congregationalism it may be possible that Jones and others looked to British Israelism as a means to defend "true religion" from within their existing denominational structures. Indeed, a powerful case for the apparently positive impact that British Israelism might have had in restoring the transformative power of Nonconformity was recounted by Henry Roe, a Primitive Methodist minister, who was appointed as superintendent to the St Ives Circuit in 1883. Since the closure of the tin mines, many families had left the area in search of work elsewhere. Of those who remained, mostly fishermen and labourers, many were only just surviving. The circuit was in severe financial difficulties due to the dearth of those attending chapel, and the poverty of the few who did seek religious consolation. It was to turn this situation around that Roe was appointed to St Ives:

> Night by night I walked alone on the Portminster beach to meditate and form my plans, and there I believe my Sunday morning plan was born. Though I had never ventured the like before, and had but little preparation, I publicly announced that I would explain a Scripture lesson on the British Race,

35 J. Idrisyn Jones, *Albert Fox, The Devout Merchant: A Memoir* (Liverpool: Edward Howell, 1867), p. vii.

> Colonies and Empire, as Israel, to the St. Ives congregation every Sabbath morning as long as I remained in the town ...[36]

The result was gratifying:

> Fishermen, sea captains, and working men attended in numbers not seen for quite some time. And so, instead of a nearly empty church, was a good-sized congregation, composed chiefly of men, looking like one vast Bible class. Thus, were spent forty-two out of fifty-two Sunday mornings of my first year at Cornwall.[37]

What British Israelism offered, at least for some, was a medium through which to address this breach within Nonconformity and the nation at large. The loss of faith in the ability of self-help and free enterprise to deliver positive change within society was met by British Israel's riposte that the overwhelming majority of socio-economic problems confronting British society were in fact the sole product of an externalised agent – often defined as "foreign" – which had been introduced into society through the changes wrought by modernity, those "perils which make a godless community". The real antidote to the many issues confronting the nation lay in the need to "bring God to the front"; that is to bring the truth of the British Israel racial identity to wider knowledge. For in this was the means to preserve Nonconformity's historical attachment to individual moral responsibility by casting individuals as innocent victims of alien influences which sought intentionally to compromise their moral character by nefarious means. At the same time, it advocated an alternative remedy which allowed for the avoidance of contentious fault lines (for example, the burgeoning capital versus labour argument which incarnational theology tended to magnify) and presented a new focus for loyalty: common identity as Israel.

But this common identity did more than address the need for a new focus of unity in Nonconformity. It went some way towards soothing the developing "national anxiety". A series of British military reverses which had been inflicted by supposedly inferior forces (the Crimea, the Indian Mutiny, the First Anglo-Boer War, the Zulu War), combined with the growing economic powers of Germany and America, had started to fracture Britain's sense of supremacy on the world stage. The cumulative effect of this led commentators and policy-makers into a bout of critical introspection, as they tried to identify the causes of such reverses. Greater attention began to be paid to the moral and physical condition (to a certain extent these were considered indivisible), of the urban masses. A particular focus of these investigations was the failure of self-help and voluntarism to alter the life-chances of the city-dwelling poor. Here, British Israelism offered a way of explaining a number of social realities. It did not dismiss the possibility that it was the poor

36 Henry Roe, "Ministry and Identity", in "Philo-Israel" (ed.), *Anglo-Israel Almanack for the Year 1886* (London, 1887), p. 46.

37 Ibid., p. 47.

physical and moral condition of British men which explained why Britain had met with defeat abroad, but cited the root cause as "foreign" corrupting influences eroding the traditional British fighting spirit. Interestingly this analysis did not extend to the most damaging of contemporary social evils: alcoholism.

IV: Temperance

A commitment to temperance had developed as a part of Nonconformity's social programme from the mid-century. This commitment was shared by Jones who was an active figure within several temperance organisations (the UK Alliance and the International Order of the Good Templars in particular) and the author of a grim statistical analysis of the impact of alcoholism in Liverpool. *The Slain in Liverpool by Drink*, detailed those who had died in Liverpool in the course of a year, (published intermittently in 1863, 1864, 1866 and 1869 during Jones's time as a minister in the city), whose deaths were somehow attributable to alcohol. This must have had an impact on the broader temperance movement within the city as its historians make particular note of this work:

> During the months of February and March, 1867, *The Liverpool Mercury* contained a series of articles by the Revd. John I Jones, of Kirkdale, on The Slain in Liverpool by Drink, in which he gave some harrowing details of the doings of the drinking system in Liverpool during the year 1866. These articles were afterwards published in pamphlet form.[38]

Horrified by what he had witnessed among the poor in Liverpool, Jones remained an advocate of the temperance movement throughout his life, but what makes this interesting in the context of his later role within British Israel was the fact that opposition to widespread drunkenness did not quite fit British Israel's narrative. This was acknowledged by the early leader of the Anglo-Israel Association, Edward Hine, who wrote that "Britain is a stronghold of drunkenness and calls forth the indignation of the Almighty" and "It is the curse of England – few crimes have so impoverished our country".[39] To concede this flaw in the national character was to undermine the claim of the divinely appointed moral and racial superiority of the British people. So, in order to protect their arguments, British Israelism cited biblical evidence that drunkenness was in fact just another sign of Britain's "elect" status. Hine again: "[God said] 'Woe unto the drunkards of Ephraim' ... The drunkards of Ephraim are the drunkards of Israel and we are identical with that people ... [therefore] God himself recognises that among the people of

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38 P. T. Winskill and Joseph Thomas, *History of the Temperance Movement in Liverpool and District* (Liverpool: Joseph Thomas, 1887), p. 71. Founded in 1811, *The Liverpool Mercury* was, from 1858, a Liberal/reformist leaning daily with a circulation that included large parts of Lancashire, Cheshire, Wales, the Isle of Man and London. Kirkdale was later associated with a strong Conservative "Orange Vote".

39 Edward Hine, "The Sin of Drunkenness", in *The Banner of Israel* (1876), p. 6.

Israel there are many drunkards".[40] It would seem that this attempt to reconcile an awkward social reality with the British Israel narrative was good enough to keep the arch-teetotaller Jones on side, as evidenced in a report in the *Montgomeryshire Echo*: "On Thurs week in the Congregational Church (Welshpool), the Revd J Idrisyn Jones ... lectured on *Are the British People Descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel* ... certain characteristics were to mark the people ... they were to be a drunken nation".[41] It was clear that the failure of traditional Evangelical efforts in promoting moral reform through the encouragement of individual responsibility was not due to any inherent failings in the principle of self-help, but made necessary, at least in terms of drunkenness, by the will of God. Jones felt that the Biblical justification did not however negate the need to encourage those who were "the drunken nation" to give up the drink.

While it was possible to find biblical sanction (and absolution) for the evil wrought on society by drink, this did not mean that British Israelists were entirely at ease with the more general socio-cultural direction of society during the final decades of the nineteenth century. As well as confronting a changing international balance of power, Jones describes British Israelism as having the power to overcome the feelings of "ruin and decay". In this there is perhaps a reference to the movement's hostility to the rapidly increasing pace of economic and industrial development, and with it the promotion of consumerism and secularised leisure pursuits. Jones held fast to a Romantic idealisation of social and economic structures which were being rapidly undermined by the pace of modernity. For example, the liberalisation of Sabbatarian attitudes, (and the failure of the Government to intervene to halt this change), which facilitated the operation of the postal service, the railways and the drinks traffic, pushed the working and lower-middle classes to exhaustion and ill-health, (which could lead to the degeneration of the race), and compelled them to neglect their religious duties so as to cater to the desires of a wealthier, urban capitalist class, elements of which were deliberately pursuing the Sabbath-breaking agenda in favour of more materialist pursuits. British Israelism lamented the shift in how society determined status from a system which celebrated the traditional, non-tangible, often religiously based virtues (honour, piety, respectability and fidelity) to one in which status was conferred by the weight of one's purse. By such arguments British Israelists were setting up a grievance in which a respectable, hard-working and aspirational upper-working class and lower middle-class – the fastest growing economic class of the late nineteenth century and one which had a disproportionately high representation among regular church-goers – allied with an agricultural, military and imperial aristocracy, were portrayed as the victims of a capitalist dominated economy which drove out competition from the smaller producers and suppliers by rigging the system against these classes. British Israelists sought a return to an economic model based on

40 Ibid.

41 "The Lost Tribes of Israel", *The Montgomeryshire Echo* (9 December 1893).

> … the closest possible relationship between producers and product and buyer and seller whereby exchange proceeds from community and is immediately both intelligible and personal … they seek a return to those conditions in which economic and moral precepts of inter-personal relations can be sustained and ideas of economic individualism and personal accountability revived.[42]

Like the Evangelical reformers at the beginning of the century and at its end, British Israelists "welcomed any practices that might stay the pace of what was perceived to be a hectic economic growth".[43] In a world where many were left behind by the economic and social implications of modernity, British Israel offered an alternative vision in which individual economic independence could be reasserted against a growing tide of dependency.

This rejection of dependency at an individual level was extrapolated internationally by Jones in his final point. He asserted that the mutual recognition of a shared divine heritage prevented nations from feeling isolated or threatened. Sympathy and love would reign among kindred peoples based on their being one great and united family. However, in asserting the desire for friendship and co-operation between nations, it can be argued that Jones was attempting to negate the growing loss of Britain's industrial supremacy to powers like America and Germany through a continued rejection of economic competition between nations. In what could be regarded as providing a religious underpinning to the currently emerging idea of Imperial Federation, British Israelism would be the spirit to ensure the continued dominance of Britain by acting as a brake on the development of colonial nationalism, on the one hand, and of international rivalry on the other.

This helps to explain the movement's rejection of usury and abhorrence of debt. Addressing an Anglo-Israel Association meeting in Leamington Spa in 1880, the Revd J. Billington[44] reminded his audience that "Israel was … to be wealthy, should lend unto many nations, but shall borrow of none".[45] This was underlined more vividly by Hine when he cited the 1875 purchase of shares in the Suez Canal at a meeting of the Colchester branch in 1881:

> Israel was to lend, but never to borrow. They had heard a good deal of nonsense said about a certain Beaconsfield having borrowed £4,000,000 from a certain Rothschild. This particular monetary transaction was merely a stock exchange accommodation – allowing the account to stand over until the next Parliament met; but even if it were a borrowing, then

42 J. Wilson, "British Israelism: A Revitalisation Movement in Contemporary Culture", *Archives de sociologie des religions*, No. 26 (1968), p. 75.

43 Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 208.

44 Chair of the National Committee of the British-Israel Association from 1880.

45 "The Anglo-Israel Association", *The Leamington Spa Courier* (8 May 1880).

> they only borrowed from their own people. There was now something like £787,000,000 owing to this country by virtue of foreign loans, of which there was very little probability of the interest alone being paid back.[46]

Like the issue of drunkenness, this was another example of the movement trying to explain away apparent contradictions between their own narrative and contemporary reality. For British Israelists, Britain, like its people, was to be economically beholden to no other save God.

V: Conclusions

Conscientious and principled, yet restless and uncertain, Jones encapsulates many of the characteristics of his age. Full of energy, but plagued by doubt and confusion, this was a time when the historical socio-cultural values system was coming under assault by economic and industrial innovation and by a new generation of artists, philosophers, scientists and theologians. It seemed as though, quite suddenly, the old sharply defined certainties were giving way to modernity's blur. For Jones, and many of his age and background, this changing world before them, a world they had once be-straddled with an impenetrable air of confident surety, now plunged them into a profound trauma. Unable to make peace, or even to compromise, with this new reality, Jones sought some new panacea which would restore the certainties of the past while locating the cause of the socio-cultural upheaval in an externalised agent of change. To Jones, and hundreds like him, British Israelism offered that panacea. Arguing that the British people were possessed of a divinely ordained superiority and that all those forces which opposed this will of God were at best ignorant, or at worst the instrument of evil, was just the kind of consolation that men like Jones so painfully desired. As the son of a man of some literary distinction, but of unsettled religious convictions, Jones probably felt the impact of moral and spiritual disruption more keenly than most; hence his decision to remain within the Nonconformist fold rather than follow his father's example. This reflected the fact that he himself looked to Nonconformity as a bastion against the shallow spiritual relativism that some accused the Established Church of representing. However, when the Nonconformist tradition became similarly influenced by materialist considerations, Jones found the basis of his identity compromised. British Israelism, for him at least, represented the last defence of religious (and socio-cultural) orthodoxy. As Jones wrote in a letter published in the *Mail* newspaper (and republished in the *Leamington Spa Courier*) in January 1907 in opposition to R. J. Campbell's "New Theology":

> One of the most disastrous effects of this New Theology is to upset the minds of a multitude of Christians who are unable themselves to settle the difficulties raised ... The majority of ministers still believe in ... the divine

46 "The Anglo-Israel Association", *The Essex Standard* (12 November 1881).

> authority of the Bible ... Let them also be reassured that no single man can overthrow Christianity, and that there will always be the seven thousand who will not bow the knee to any Baal.[47]

Jones, and the British Israelists, considered themselves to be among that seven thousand.

JASON FROST

47 "The New Theology", *The Leamington Spa Courier* (27 January 1907).

REVIEW ARTICLE

SOME CONTRASTING CONGREGATIONALIST VIEWS ON THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF 1851 AND THE CRYSTAL PALACE BUILDING

Sometimes a building is designed and constructed for a unique purpose and in due course becomes the symbol or icon for that purpose. Such is the case with the Crystal Palace, first built in Hyde Park, London, to accommodate the Great Exhibition of 1851, and subsequently relocated at Sydenham.

In *Religion and the Great Exhibition of 1851,*[1] Geoffrey Cantor gives a wide-ranging, professional historian's view of the relationship between the Exhibition, the Palace and religious viewpoints. Reading Cantor with great interest, it seemed to me there was a broad spectrum of religious attitudes to the Exhibition itself and to the Crystal Palace. I was particularly struck by the number of quotations from, and references to, Congregationalists, their close Nonconformist associates and the organisations and publications to which they contributed, or which reported upon their views and activities. Here, for me, was a case study of Congregationalists and a particular and very significant building. Both the Exhibition and the building were secular in the sense of being non-ecclesiastical, but they were also profoundly religious in that they expressed and revealed what many people thought, felt, believed and could learn about a Christian Great Britain and its leading place in the world.

In this review, I will first draw out from Cantor, and the primary sources that he quotes,[2] a range of views expressed by Congregationalists and closely associated individuals and publications. I have placed these in four groups, two groups being welcoming and theologically affirmative about the Exhibition and the Crystal Palace, and two groups being more interested in the evangelistic opportunities afforded by Exhibition and Palace and eschatological nuances implicit in them. The four groups are fairly clear-cut but are not absolutely separate from each other.

Secondly, I will make some observations and attempt to discern some meaning and contemporary relevance from the study.

I: Welcome for the Exhibition and Praise for the Crystal Palace

Cantor draws attention to various aspects of welcome and support for the Exhibition and praise for the Crystal Palace by Congregationalists and close associates, and in various publications.

Periodicals and publications indicated that Congregationalists particularly "were highly enthusiastic about the Exhibition and understood it in the context of

1 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

2 In this paper, unless a primary source used by Cantor is acknowledged, quotations are from Cantor. All page numbers are from Cantor.

their own views of prophetic history" (p. 14). *The Nonconformist*, edited by the Congregationalist Edward Miall, "proclaimed the proposed exhibition 'a sign of the times, and a pleasing one'" (p. 44). In the manufacturing districts Dissenters were prominent among exhibitors and supporters (p. 45). There were three hundred provincial committees promoting the Exhibition, of which twenty-one were chaired by ministers or clergymen, including two Congregationalists (p. 49). Baptist and builder, Samuel Morton Peto, was one of the five businessmen "in whose names the Exhibition's account was opened at the Bank of England" (p. 45).

Congregationalists, like Unitarians and Quakers, were notable for their "high regard for science, technology and manufacturing" their memberships including "significant proportions of manufacturers, skilled artisans, and contributors to scientific knowledge" (p. 199). At various times *The Nonconformist* carried reports and articles on "the large machines, including railway locomotives, carding machines, Jacquard looms, water turbines and steam printing presses ... the India court, [Prince] Albert's model cottage dwellings, hardware (including stoves), cutlery from Sheffield, musical instruments". Overall readers of the *Nonconformist* "would have obtained a fairly good appreciation of the contents of the Crystal Palace, especially those exhibits that the reporter considered particularly noteworthy" (p. 110-111).

In welcoming the building "Many religious periodicals applauded the size and magnificence of the Crystal Palace". A Unitarian monthly declared it "the wonder of the century for size, for design, for rapidity of construction, [and] for effect", while a Congregational minister, Edward A. Higginson in *Christian Reformer*, proclaimed it "one of the most extraordinary specimens of modern ingenuity and skill, an eighth wonder of the world" (p. 104).

A more aesthetic affirmation comes from the Quaker Mary Howitt who tells how she and her husband "were walking down the fields from Hampstead, with all London lying before us [and] suddenly saw a wonderful something shining out in the distance like a huge diamond, the true 'mountain of light'" (pp. 102-104). Other Londoners watching "in wonder as the building took shape with surprising rapidity, commented excitedly as the iron columns, glass-clad walls and roofs emerged from the park's flat greenery and created a new skyline" (p. 102).

Somewhat more limited praise came from the traditionally inclined editors of the *Ecclesiologist* (a far from Congregational publication, but irresistible) who "started by praising the functionality of the building, especially the vast space it covered, the speed of construction". "Then", Cantor notes, "they let rip: 'it is not architecture; it is engineering of the highest merit and excellence – but not architecture. *Form* is wholly wanting and the idea of stability, or solidity, is wanting'". Moreover, the *Ecclesiologist* concluded, "Whereas Paxton's overgrown greenhouse would be short-lived, the medieval cathedrals lovingly constructed by devout Christians had lasted for many centuries and would last for many more" (p. 109).

Retrospectively, Nick Fisher noted that "...among Dissenters, Congregationalists wrote a high proportion of the published sermons and tracts in support of the Exhibition" and that "Congregational periodicals were also uniformly enthusiastic about the Exhibition and its broader religious significance". Furthermore "*the*

Congregationalist [sic] *Year Book for 1852* proclaimed the Exhibition to have been the 'most memorable event of the previous year'" (p. 200).

II: Affirmative Theology

Theological affirmation of the Exhibition, and by implication the Crystal Palace, is strongly in evidence.

Even before the Exhibition opened George Clayton, Congregational minister at York Street Chapel, Walworth wrote that God is "the AUTHOR of all those gifts and qualifications by which men become skilled in the Arts and Sciences, and experts in the productions of industry". He continued, "When you gaze with admiration and delight upon the rare productions [in the Crystal Palace], you will naturally rise higher than ... the axe, the saw, and the chisel; you will think of mind, the skill and ingenuity of the workman". Visitors "will rise higher still and devoutly acknowledge the hand of God in all these things. Without Him, believe me, not a single specimen could have had being, or beauty, or brilliancy" (p. 134).

In 1851, the Religious Tract Society published Congregational minister Thomas Binney's 176-page book entitled *The Royal Exchange and the Palace of Industry; or, The Possible Future of Europe and the World*, which sold for two shillings, Binney receiving 50 guineas (p. 84). Binney reflected on Psalm 24, especially its opening verse, ("The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it"), which had been widely used to provide "a religious legitimation for the Exhibition" (p. 133).

The Religious Tract Society also received a manuscript from Congregational minister, John Stoughton of Kensington, *The Palace of Glass and the Gathering of the People*. Besides taking a positive stance towards the Exhibition, he saw it as bringing "the nations closer together in a spirit of peace" and emphasised "the need to strive constantly for salvation" (p. 84). Stoughton also wrote *To a Stranger in the Park* which sold at three shillings a hundred. As well as urging visitors "to relish the Crystal Palace and its exhibits", Stoughton urged them "not to ignore spiritual matters but to follow the teachings of the Bible" (p. 86). In his autobiography, Stoughton, reminisced: "There was a moral atmosphere created by [the building of the Crystal Palace], which those who do not recollect it are unable to appreciate. It inspired thousands of people with expressions of charity and goodwill" (p. 169).

From a somewhat different spiritual perspective, at the Broomgate United Presbyterian Church in Lanark, the minister (P. McFarlane) "considered that every leaf of the stately elm tree that stood within the Crystal Palace is 'a greater mystery than any work of man in that building'" (p. 135). James Hamilton, the minister at Regent Square Presbyterian Church and a Fellow of the Linnaean Society, pointed out that a reasoning craftsman potter throwing a pot is as much under God's control as is a bee instinctively collecting nectar . Human "talent, genius [and] dexterity are gifts of God" and we should recognize the goodness and wisdom of God in the making of artefacts (pp. 135-6).

Congregationalist Alexander Pearce saw in the Exhibition "evidence of God's plan to provide humankind not only with the natural substances but also with the

skills and intelligence to use [them] for human improvement". "This millennium period", he predicted, "will be brought about, not by *miraculous* interference of the Divine Being, but by the joint diffusion of the light of science and of revelation, and the practical application of the powers and principles of both". He believed that the Exhibition "provided definitive evidence of design in history, and, ultimately, of God's existence and his beneficent care for humankind" (p. 136).

Under the editorship of Congregational minister Samuel Martin, the YMCA published *The Useful Art* aimed at "rendering the Exhibition interesting and useful, especially to young men". Martin stressed that the Exhibition's aim was improvement "to stimulate industrial progress, to elevate the position and to increase the perfection of the useful arts" and "to celebrate the value of labour and to locate scientific and technological progress within a Christian framework" (p. 194).

On the Sunday following the close of the Exhibition, at the Congregational Church in Kentish Town, William Forster argued that "the country's religious freedoms had encouraged the exercise of reason and thus enabled advances in science and technology" (pp. 125-6). For him, "Protestantism was responsible for England's moral superiority and its supremacy in science, technology and manufacturing". He conceived England to be a "prophet-nation". "We are called", he said, "by the King of all the earth to fulfil a great and beneficent purpose. We are to take a leading part in bringing about the world's regeneration" (p. 171).

III: Evangelistic Opportunities

For people of an evangelistic cast of mind, the Great Exhibition brought to London visitors from many places at home and abroad and provided an unequalled opportunity for evangelisation both through ancillary activities and through the content of the Exhibition itself. Congregationalists having been among its founders in 1846, the Evangelical Alliance was concerned with making converts, including targeting visitors to the Exhibition of other religions or none (p. 76). Recognising that the Exhibition would "open a new and important field for Christian operation" it formed the high-profile Foreign Conference and Evangelisation Committee (FCEC) for 1851 to facilitate liaison, organise services and lectures, and provide a reading room (p. 77).

Exeter Hall in the Strand was chosen as the venue for evangelical services on Sunday mornings and evenings. Congregational ministers were among those who filled the slots for the 22 weeks when the Exhibition was open. "The intended audience was ... 'the British visitor who was far from home on the Sabbath (when the Exhibition was closed) and probably a stranger to London'". On many occasions "hundreds of people" had to be turned away (p. 79). Typical sermon subjects included "Looking to Christ", "Salvation" and "The Power of Faith and Prayer". These did not engage directly with aspects of the Exhibition (p. 80).

Inside the Exhibition, the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) "exhibit was considered by many visitors, especially evangelicals, to be by far the most important in the whole Exhibition", one monthly saying "Not all the proudest works of art to the astonishment of gazing millions can be compared with that

blessed Bible". In Stepney a Congregationalist delivered a lecture to children with the title "The Bible, the Greatest Wonder in the Exhibition" (p. 116). It was reported that "The attendant who manned the BFBS exhibit" had recounted that "many of the visitors, and some of the poorest, possessing but little of this world's goods, on seeing the display of Bibles exalted: 'This is the glory of the whole Exhibition, and shame it is to being in so bad a position'" (p. 117).

Of interest to practical and poorer visitors were "Prince Albert's modern working class homes erected outside the Crystal Palace to attract public attention, especially from working people". To evangelical minds physical, "social, moral and ultimately religious improvements" were inseparable (p. 119).

Samuel Morley, businessman and Congregationalist, presided at the concluding service held at Exeter Hall on 6 November 1851. This, it was recorded, had provided an occasion for "mainly moderate evangelicals 'gratefully to recognise the Divine hand in the various circumstances that led to the Great Exhibition; in the auspicious manner in which it was terminated; and in the success of the Sabbath services held' in Exeter Hall during the time of the Exhibition" (p. 190).

IV: Eschatological Nuances

Closely allied to the evangelical approach discussed above is the practice of some Congregationalist commentators to view the Great Exhibition and its home and symbol, the Crystal Palace, in an eschatological or end-of-the-age way. For example, Congregationalist William Leask, in a sermon at Kennington a fortnight before the opening, foresaw scrutiny and judgement of the Exhibition and sensed "the Archangel's voice ushering in Christ's return and the new universal order of righteousness that would ensue" (pp. 172-3). Similarly, an unnamed contributor to the *Christian Witness,* possibly Congregationalist, John Campbell, the minister of the Finsbury Tabernacle, while describing the Crystal Palace as the "sublimest spectacle on earth at this moment", was also "inclined to view it as the foreshadowing of another and mightier event in which ... it is reserved for England to take the lead" (p. 173).

Thomas Binney also had a vision, though not explicitly of Christ's return. He viewed the gathering of the nations as highly significant: "For the first time in the history of the world there is to be flowing of the peoples of all lands to London in order to compete with one another in a spirit of friendly rivalry", predicting that this would lead to a profound change in the world. In such "a new world everyone would benefit from trade and commerce" and "everyone would subscribe to a pure, Bible-based Christianity" (pp. 171-2).

At the beginning of the Exhibition, in relation to the Crystal Palace, "the Congregationalist George Clayton quoted at length from Revelation 21:10-27, to adduce similarities between the Crystal Palace and the New Jerusalem, with its light 'like that unto a stone most precious, even like jasper stone, clear as crystal'" (p. 174). With the approach of the Exhibition's close, Theophilus Flower recounted before meetings of Congregationalists in Wimborne and Bournemouth, "that although he had admired the many grand and valuable exhibits he had

seen during his visit to the Crystal Palace, he had been prompted by an inner voice whispering, 'the things which are seen are temporal'". Compared with the mundane and ephemeral nature of the Exhibition and its contents, the Christian message possessed inestimable value and dealt with eternal verities (p. 140).

Other Congregational ministers, despite their enthusiasm for the Exhibition, warned against arrogance and pride and counselled humility when visiting the Exhibition. "We are entering upon a new era", *The Nonconformist* said soon after the Exhibition opened, "let us guard against an over-estimate of its glory" (pp. 202-3). Perhaps they said the same thing at the end.

V: Discussion

The first set of comments on Welcome for the Exhibition and Praise for the Crystal Palace building combine to express a great Congregationalist "Yes" to both, individually and as inseparable parts of each other. "Yes" to science and technology, to manufacture and trade, to design, to labour and work, to the fundamental idea of advance, to an international assembly and to the understandings that can lead to peace.

The Affirmative Theology comments are in essence a "Yes" to God: "Yes" to the God of creation and design, to the God of intelligence, reason and plan, to the God who inspires human activity and so does not need to interfere, to the Protestantism that provides a fresh space for such a God. Yet McFarlane did not overlook what we might think of as a Catholic sense of mystery which he sees in the tree within the building.

From within the great "Yes" of welcome, praise and affirmation, Stoughton particularly reminds us of matters of spirituality and salvation. He is the link to the comments on Evangelical opportunity. The Evangelical Alliance and the British and Foreign Bible Society jump over the specifics of the Exhibition and the Crystal Palace to opportunities for evangelical preaching and the promotion of the Bible. The eschatologically oriented comments of Leask, Campbell, Clayton and Flower point clearly to an end-of-the-age time, while *The Nonconformist* is concerned with humility in the time of the Exhibition.

Today we can react to this story in at least two ways. One is simply to say that two kinds of Congregationalist voice spoke, placing fundamentally contrasting emphases on the Great Exhibition and the Crystal Palace building.

A variant on that would be to see the two voices as major and minor keys in a single musical work. The major key was Victorian optimism and a widespread sense of religion as an integral aspect of life, with positive Congregationalist outlooks well to the fore. If this was a major key, a minor key was the modification of that position, and sometimes almost its rejection, in the face of a spiritual life, a salvation and an eternity which to some people were more real and more important. Congregationalism, as a denomination, appears to have at least permitted, and possibly welcomed, the combination of the major and minor voices.

MICHAEL POWELL

REVIEWS

***The United Church of Canada: A History*. Edited by Don Schweitzer. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012. (Available in the UK from Gazelle Book Service Ltd, Lancaster). Pp. xxi + 306. £33.50. ISBN 978-1-55458-331-7.**

This welcome and readable account of the history of the United Church of Canada is particularly relevant reading for members of the United Reformed Church at the present time. The United Church of Canada, inaugurated in 1925, preceded the Lausanne Faith and Order Conference of 1927, and its formation was essentially driven by internal Canadian needs, rather than external influences. Previous studies have focused on the non-theological factors: the earliest study I possess is Claris Edwin Silcox's study of *Church Union in Canada* (Institute of Social and Religious Research, New York, 1933), published so that those concerned with church union in the USA might learn appropriate lessons from the Canadian example. It was essentially an institutional study, with relatively little attention paid to theological concerns. The United Church was also used as the first example in the Faith and Order Study Commission on Institutionalism, *Institutionalism and Church Unity* (ed. N. Ehrenstrom and W. G. Muelder, London, 1963); this reflected more the sociology of religion of the 1960s than the earlier study, and similar ones. What is refreshing about Schweitzer's collection of authors is that they do take theology seriously, as well as noting the driving power of the needs of the western prairie lands of Canada from the late nineteenth century that no single church had the resources to supply. Even before formal union was achieved, "union churches" were springing up in Alberta and Saskatchewan. A basic similarity in church structure between Methodists and Presbyterians was successfully "sold" to former Congregationalists; and because of the extent to which the Canadian churches involved were essentially self-sufficient in ministerial recruitment (and not dependent on the UK or the USA), the United Church could, and did, claim to be the first "national church" in Canada. Its numbers alone exceeded those of either the Roman Catholic Church or the Anglican Church of Canada. It did suffer the loss of what became a separate Presbyterian Church (influenced by Scottish and Irish examples of standing firm when theological positions seemed threatened); but eventually this was not so large as initially seemed likely. Notwithstanding the development of industrial mergers in the west, which some have seen as a model for church union, there were more powerful common theological factors in a Protestant suspicion of Catholics and an episcopal Anglican Church still seen as dependent on the Church of England. Moreover the uniting churches shared a broad teetotalism, which although not strictly theological, was an important common social position. Up to the Second World War and just after, the United Church went from strength to strength; but from the 1960s its membership began to decline. It faced issues concerning sexual orientation earlier than the UK churches; and it also suffered because of discoveries of sexual misconduct in residential schools for children, which were an early feature of settler life, especially for First Nation

peoples. When I visited Canada as Moderator in 1996, I was more struck by the similarity between the problems faced by the United Church and the Presbyterian Church than the differences; although that has led to co-operation rather than further union. This is a very well balanced guide to these subtle nuances in the United Church's history.

DAVID M. THOMPSON

Padre W. J. Coates: Letters from the Front. Edited by Nicola Sherhood and Neil E. Allison. King's Lynn: Shore Books and Design, 2016. Pp. 126. £9.99. ISBN 978-0-99321-152-9.

These letters were found by chance in the Bedford Bunyan Meeting archive. They convey the simple matter-of-fact patriotism of most Nonconformists at the start of the First World War and the sense of duty which carried young ministers like Coates, married and with three young children, into life-threatening danger to provide religious succour to young men of Kitchener's Army, civilians in khaki and volunteers like himself.

Coates, a Congregationalist in his second pastorate, served as a United Board chaplain at the front near Ypres for twelve months in 1915-16. He was attached initially to a Field Ambulance unit which meant he was from the beginning working among the wounded, and the dying. He shared burial duty with an Anglican chaplain. Later, after his first leave, he was posted away from the medics but was still with fighting units at the front. He had no experience of the easier life at Base.

The monthly letters are a form of pastoral narrative to church members at home, who flocked to hear him on two short home leaves. The congregation constantly supplied him with comforts to give to the men, as well as running a canteen for troops billeted in Bedford and sending food parcels to Bunyan men in the Forces. One gets a clear impression from the book of a church and minister engaged in different spheres, but in a joint ministry attuned to war-time. The letters carry no glorification of the war. The shock and surprise at the declaration of war is clear in Coates's early letters before he leaves for France. As he sees it, Militarism is the enemy, and he mentions the Belgian refugees pouring into southern England. With God's help Militarism will be defeated. He tells his congregation that the war can be endured by increased religious devotion and practice, so that their faith will be stronger for the unknown challenges of life afterwards. Later, after conscription is introduced, Coates says he is not a conscientious objector but those who are should be respected.

Although Coates wished to extend his year's contract in 1916, his deacons called him home. They said the Bedford church needed him, but they may also have had his young family in mind. He thus missed the start of the Somme (by a fortnight), although the censors seem to have allowed him to describe frankly the slaughter, mayhem and destruction of two earlier set battles, each identified by the editors using regimental records which give their high casualty numbers. The first of

these would involve the men with whom Coates trained. His particular duties here included short services for each battalion as they moved forward to the front line knowing what was before them – one man cries out to him "pray for us tonight". Afterwards, after burial duties, when the survivors are relieved, withdrawn and at rest, he organises a canteen and football, services of a different kind.

The letters give a good account of standard religious life at the front. An important part of it was simple daily human contact, passing down a trench or visiting a battery, "having a word with the men", daily sharing the dangers from shells and mortar attacks. Religious services on Sundays, other than the formal Parade Service at Base, were voluntary and informal: prayer, readings and hymn singing, usually unaccompanied, a message of reassurance however brief; and held wherever there was somewhere reasonably safe to hold them. Coates as a Nonconformist covered a wide geographical area so he conducted several such services each Sunday, moving on foot between them.

Evangelicals at home hoped the war would bring religious revival. This was only ten years after the still unaccountable but well-remembered Welsh Revival. Coates found not this, but a readiness to attend. The men he served were not for the most part regular army, but young men enlisted from a civilian society familiar with religion whether practised or not – a contrast to today. He himself learnt how the men valued Communion. At home it was then often an add-on service with time given for people to leave. Here the simple ritual mattered. He carried a War Office communion set and a white cloth which if need be could be laid on the ground. He was not phased when some, straying perhaps, crossed themselves or asked him to hear confession. He seems to have been particularly moved by shell-damaged crucifixes. It was a learning time for him too and unsurprisingly he expresses support for the Baptist J. H. Shakespeare's proposals for Free Church union as what the men at the front would think right.

Chaplains were officer class, and that separation from the men was not easily overcome. But chaplains won respect if they shared the soldiers' hardship to the extent allowed. Coates's account of training before France shows he was young and fit enough to undertake the same training as the men and alongside them, and it was with these men that he initially served in France. He would not have been allowed in the front line – that was changed in 1916 after his day – but his first posting meant he worked among the wounded, took last messages from the dying and wrote to parents of the dead, itself a hard but treasured act of mission. He recalls the mates of the dead watching as he stands with an officer in a muddy burial trench under fire reciting the funeral service from memory and stumbling over the words.

The letters may not be literature and Coates is not a remembered minister. He died in 1947 so his experiences would guide him and his congregation through a second war, which incidentally took his son, killed in the RAF. An editorial note shows him favouring five-year pastorates and he moved from Bedford in 1917. It is in a way the uncomplicated conventionality of the man, matched with his brave sense of Christian duty, as many of his generation saw it, which makes this such a worthwhile record. And it could be read in an evening.

Among the editorial contributions are a brief history of Bunyan Meeting by Nicola Sherhold, who runs the Bunyan Museum, and a short clear account of the United Board's formation and service in the First World War. The latter is by Neil Allison, himself a serving chaplain in more recent wars, and now the United Board's official historian.

JOHN HANDBY THOMPSON

***The Last Puritans: Mainline Protestants and the Power of the Past.* By Margaret Bendroth. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. Pp. xii + 246. £25.95 . ISBN 978-1-46962-400-6. Illustrated.**

On one level, this book records the history of Congregationalism in the United States of America in the nineteenth and twentieth century up to, and immediately following, the union of most of the Congregational Christian churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church in 1957 to form the United Church of Christ (UCC). In itself this is an intriguing tale. Many, though not all, of the names mentioned will be unfamiliar to a British readership. The location of churches cited might challenge those generally unaware of the geographical complexities of American Congregationalism. But the issues discussed, perhaps surprisingly, are quite familiar.

On another level, the book raises penetrating questions about our use of history. The narrative comes to life through the author's use of a particular analytical framework in order to recount Congregational history. Margaret Bendroth is interested in how nineteenth and twentieth century Congregationalists (and their successors) appropriated their past, especially the landing of the "Pilgrims" in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620 and the initial development of Congregationalism in New England. Her treatment of this issue is informed, critical and significant: it raises questions we might well ask, and seek to answer, on this side of the Atlantic. What power does our past hold over the present? Or, more importantly, how do we appropriate the past in the present in order to claim that our beliefs and practices are legitimate because they are historically valid? As we do so, are we legitimately employing a historical narrative or merely using it, and reinterpreting it, for our own ends? This book alerts us to all these questions and, appropriately, does not seek to answer any of them conclusively. Instead it points to how American Congregationalists appealed to and employed their past but remained blissfully unaware of the methodological quandaries raised by their discovery of history.

In the book's introduction, Bendroth outlines the situation which gave rise to the study. What she terms "mainline Protestantism" (understood in an American context), in fact defined as "moderate to liberal denominations", received no sustained academic analysis during the twentieth century, largely because of the dominance of the polarising rhetoric of the religious right. The drawing of battle lines by Conservative Christians over what can and what cannot be validly believed – the emergence of Christian fundamentalism and its impact on US politics in the

late twentieth century – has dominated academic discussion. And yet, Bendroth asserts, until the late twentieth century, it was these "mainline" Christians, rather than the "fundamentalist" churches, which dominated American life. It was the former who appeared to be "least bound by historic Christianity" and showed a willingness to reinterpret belief and behaviour according to modern sensibilities, and while their influence in society might appear to have been eclipsed by the latter, in fact their legacy of "tolerance", "freedom of thought" and "respect for difference" is far more deeply rooted in contemporary American culture than anything contributed by the fundamentalists (with the possible exception of the nature and significance of the modern State of Israel). All this leads the author to conclude that these "mainline Protestants" are not "failed evangelicals" but those possessed of a "particular historical burden". The UCC occupies a particularly "liberal" position in American Christianity. Bendroth's argument is that this is not an accident, but a position arrived at for reasons – historical and theological – which ought to be rehearsed. This, in itself, might be enough to appeal to readers of this *Journal*, as might the fact that British Congregationalism is inextricably linked with that of the United States (the 1620 flight of the "Pilgrims", the importance of the "New England System" back in the homeland and so forth). But Bendroth's exploration of this "historical burden" is perhaps even more significant. Much of what she says, *mutatis mutandis*, can be applied to our history too.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, American Congregationalists gradually reclaimed their Puritan past and celebrated it because they discovered in it a cultural and theological identity. But context is important. Can an authentic understanding of Puritan Christianity (specifically that of the "Pilgrims") be recovered by subsequent generations striving to express their faith in a vastly different intellectual, social, political and economic climate? What authority would such a rediscovery possess? What authority *should* it possess?

By the nineteenth century, American Congregationalists were in a different position to that of their seventeenth century progenitors. The scattered groups of independent congregations were gradually uniting for mutual support, while theological differences had emerged from the eighteenth century (a not unfamiliar tale for British Congregationalists). They splintered into Trinitarian and Unitarian groups, both of which appealed to the past in order to authenticate their claims for credibility and indeed authority in the present. The former appealed to the Puritans' commitment to doctrinal orthodoxy; the latter appealed to the Pilgrims' quest for a "new world" in which freedom of religious expression would be possible (in contrast to the intolerance and persecution they had suffered, particularly in England). The orthodox appealed to the Westminster standards (not Savoy, which is in itself interesting). The Unitarians appealed to the quotation attributed to Pastor John Robinson that "the Lord has more truth and light to break out of his holy word". For both, history had a power, and the appeal to the past was significant. The claims of both sides suggested that there was a point, in the past, during which authentic Christianity had been expressed. It was necessary, then, to discover that authenticity. While seeking different results, it is worth recording that both groups understood history in static terms. There was a past golden age

to which we must return. What if history itself should be understood differently? In presenting this conundrum, the author demonstrates effectively that most, if not all, *theological* controversies are in essence a difference of opinion over history and how it should be understood. How is the past to be related to the present? As Bendroth demonstrates, this is not an esoteric question to be debated by church leaders and academics; it is a very real question which affects very real lives.

Of course, there are other ways to look at the Puritan experiment. It might be easy to appeal to the Pilgrims as those seeking freedom of religious expression, but as American ecclesiastical historians were pointing out by the end of the nineteenth century, they had sought freedom for themselves; anything else was nothing more than an unintended consequence. It might be equally easy to appeal to the Westminster standards as a pristine expression of Christianity adopted by the Puritans. But, as the author points out, during the nineteenth century "Puritan" signified something simple and natural. By the 1920s it was synonymous with intolerance and religious bigotry. Categories and understanding change over time. To some degree, Congregationalism is what it was thought to be by those who pioneered the Congregational way. To some degree it is what current Congregationalists think it is. Which one is correct? And what if both are? Interestingly, these issues were played out in debates during the 1930s which echoed developments in English Congregationalism. In England, too, Congregationalists were disagreeing with each other over how best to understand themselves. There were those, such as the historian Albert Peel, who interpreted Congregationalism as a tolerant decentralised pattern of Christianity and saw this as the future for the church, while others, such as Nathaniel Micklem, saw Congregationalism grounded in covenant, the ethic of liberty, order and discipline, and seeing the need to fight for the survival of these principles. These were very different Congregationalisms which the contemporary United Reformed Church knows only too well (as do continuing Congregationalists). But can there be a single understanding of Congregationalism? Or would such a claim betray a fundamental Congregational principle? And does all this, in any case, fail to acknowledge the passage of time?

Bendroth demonstrates effectively that the concerns of Congregationalists changed over time. At one point, they had been concerned about the independence of the local church and how its interdependence on other churches should be understood. By the mid-twentieth century, this was a thing of the past. Social and economic changes had led some, such as Douglas Horton, to acknowledge that the anti-Christian forces in society were organised, and that therefore the Christian forces in society also had to organise. Different contexts called for different ecclesiological approaches, and for Congregationalists this meant closer union and even some form of centralization. The precise reason for closer union might be different, but much of this also lay behind the arguments to transform the Congregational Union of England and Wales into the Congregational Church in England and Wales in 1966.

This is a lively, well-written and intriguing book. It offers an account of American Congregationalism, but also raises questions about the forces of history themselves and how we might respond to them. It raises questions about how

we rightly appeal to the past and appropriate it in the present. It also poses the question whether or not an appeal to the past enables us to identify what is good, what is true and what is authentic. For these reasons, as well as the narrative about American Congregationalism itself, this is a book well-worth reading.

ROBERT POPE

***Challenge and Change: English Baptist Life in the Eighteenth Century*. Edited by Stephen Copson and Peter J Morden. Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2017. Pp. 304. £25.00. ISBN 978-0-90316-645-4.**

This multi-author volume issued by the Baptist Historical Society is intended as a replacement for Raymond Brown's *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, which appeared in 1989, taking account of recent developments in historical scholarship. Almost twice the size of Brown's 1989 volume, the book begins with three essays dealing with the different Baptist denominations, after which the contributors examine different facets of Baptist life. The chapters are well written and scholarly, without being inaccessible, touching on the Baptists at home, Baptist laity, and the Baptist contribution to national life, in addition to considerations of theology and ministerial training.

Dealing with the first three chapters, it is impossible not to discern the impact which the Evangelical Awakening of the early eighteenth century had on the Baptists. The Particular Baptists gained the adherence of men such as John Fawcett and Robert Robinson, while the General Baptists were reborn under the influence of the Countess of Huntingdon's preacher David Taylor, and Dan Taylor (no relation) of Calderdale, a development which, certainly in West Yorkshire, was paralleled among the Congregationalists. The movement of the Old General Baptists towards Unitarianism is sympathetically outlined by Stephen Copson, a chapter which highlights how little work has been done on that part of the Baptist family. Peter Morden, and later J. H. Y. Briggs, are clear in their presentation of the civil disabilities which Dissenters still laboured under during this period, despite the measure of toleration which came with the accession of William and Mary.

Timothy Whelan's chapter on Baptists and culture "No sanctuary for Philistines" challenges Matthew Arnold's assertions regarding Dissenters' supposed disdain for culture, and produces a good volume of evidence to suggest that Baptists were by no means as opposed to the arts as is usually supposed. Especially fascinating is the role of Eleanor Coade, the Baptist entrepreneur and promoter of Coade Stone, who appears in no fewer than three chapters as an example of a prominent non-ministerial Baptist, in addition to the better-known Anne Dutton and Anne Steele. Business people and civic leaders rub shoulders with theologians and framework knitters (some of whom were also ministers), reminding the reader that there is more to the church than ministers and meeting houses. A number of authors mention the London General Baptists' establishment of a sort of labour exchange, to match those in their denomination looking for work with employers.

James Bradley's chapter on Baptists and politics shows the wide variety of Baptist responses to the political changes in Britain, from Robert Robinson and Robert Hall's defences of the American and French Revolutions to Samuel Medley's adoption of a "no politics" rule. Hall's clash with John Clayton of the King's Weigh House is alluded to, in terms of Hall, the moderate Calvinist, defending the reputation of Priestley, the Unitarian – politics, then as now, makes for strange bedfellows!

A chapter by David Thompson on the relations between eighteenth century Baptists and other Christians alludes to the paucity of local records, although the observation that, in Cambridgeshire, one rarely finds different strands of Dissent in the same parish during this period seems to point to a greater level of inter-communion than the general observer would be tempted to consider (the same point was often the case in Norfolk and Suffolk, except where the Baptists observed Strict Communion).

Shot through this book is the influence of Evangelicalism – an influence by no means restricted to the Baptists, given the role played by men such as Titus Knight and Edward Williams in the Congregational tradition. Jonathan Edwards's theology is frequently referred to as the starting point for Fuller's recasting of the Calvinism of the Particular Baptists, a reminder that transatlantic links played their part in the revival of Nonconformist life during this period.

In any work of this size, there are likely to be some errors and omissions – a couple of errors are made regarding personnel, with Rippon said to succeed Abraham Booth at Carter Lane (p. 279), rather than John Gill (correctly stated p. 25). More worthy of comment is the omission of any serious consideration of those Calvinistic Baptists who did not adopt the theology of Andrew Fuller. Morden adopts the common position that hyper-Calvinism doomed them to decline, referencing the work of Joseph Hussey, another influential Congregationalist. However, there is little engagement with the thought of John Gill, or the men who followed. Where William Gadsby differentiated between invitations and offers, there is little indication that Morden is aware of this, for he simply takes the polemic of Fuller as representing the practices of high Calvinism. Given the presence of a chapter on the Old General Baptists, who moved to a Unitarian position in the nineteenth century, the failure to include a chapter on the not insignificant number of churches which retained a high Calvinist theology has the effect of skewing the denominational picture. In fact, this book gives less consideration to the continuing importance of high Calvinism among the eighteenth century Baptists than Brown's 1989 study.

On the whole, however, this book is an excellent addition to the literature on this crucial century in the formation of Dissent in England and Wales. The questions which it raises are by no means confined to the Baptist denomination, but some of the insights, especially in those chapters which are not simply denominational history, but touch on the life and witness of Nonconformists and Nonconformity will be of value and interest to all students of church history.

GERARD CHARMLEY

***The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume II: The Long Eighteenth Century, c.1689-c.1828.* Edited by Andrew C. Thompson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. £95.00. Pp. xxii + 464. ISBN 978-0-19-870224-5. Illustrated.**

This is the second volume to appear in Oxford University Press's five-volume series outlining and evaluating the history of Protestant dissenting traditions. As the volume confirms, the eighteenth century, for dissenters in England, was undoubtedly "long", topped possibly by the Glorious Revolution and the so-called "Toleration Act" of 1689 and tailed by the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828. As is patently clear in this book, "Concerns about whether the improvement to Dissenters' position and status would be permanent remained long after 1688" (p. 2), while the parliamentary repeals of 1828 did not remove all the disabilities suffered by religious dissenters, even those otherwise considered to be orthodox. Nevertheless, 1689 is a significant watershed: it marks the end of one era when civil authority sought to impose uniform religious belief and practice on its citizens and the beginning of a new one when the authorities at least acknowledged that religious dissent was not going away. It is more than appropriate that these dates constitute the parameters for this volume.

Divided into five sections, the volume begins by discussing Traditions Within England (dealing not with "-isms" but with Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Quakers and Methodists; the "-isms" undoubtedly belong to a later age of denominationalism). It then moves to discuss Traditions Outside England (including Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the American Colonies and Atlantic World). There follow sections on Awakening (a short section on Revival and Missionary Societies); Context (again a short section dealing with crucial issues of toleration, dissent and the state, abolition of slavery and the growing social conscience); and on Congregations and Living (discussing dissent and the Bible, sermons, hymnody, education, and concluding with material and print cultures).

The book confirms existing knowledge and understanding while also offering its own insights. English Presbyterians, perhaps, saw the greatest transformation during this period, at least theologically. While, in 1689, the boundaries between them and Independents were blurred, by 1828, influenced by the learning available in the best of the Dissenting Academies, younger Presbyterians were choosing non-subscription to human creeds, confessions, catechisms and doctrines. Some were motivated by the Bible while others were inspired by rational enquiry. By the end of the period here discussed, many had opted for Unitarianism.

Independents, on the other hand, looked to the Savoy Conference of 1658 as providing their defining document. Unlike the Presbyterians, they had rejected Erastianism, but they were not necessarily Separatist. The local church meeting was to make decisions on matters of order and doctrine. During the eighteenth century, divines such as Watts and Doddridge enabled the Independents to develop a Trinitarian spirituality, while Edward Williams, and others, provided a moderate Calvinism which responded to the Evangelical Revival, all of which helped them

to avoid the doctrinal transformation (some might say corruption) occurring among Presbyterians.

Baptists saw significant development during this period. Fullerism (a version of moderate Calvinism) came to the fore during the English Evangelical Revival, while the inauguration of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792, helped draw them into a worldwide movement. As a result, evangelism gradually became more significant than ecclesiology and joining together in a covenanted fellowship.

The inclusion of a chapter on Quakers reminds us that the toleration of religious dissent after 1689 was restricted. Furthermore, the Friends saw their life transformed over the course of the long eighteenth century as "the radicalism of the past" gradually dissipated, to be replaced with "an internal framework which regulated the behaviour of members" (p. 82). The "Friends" became a kind of denomination during this period, a fact which demanded that their approach to public life would be transformed.

The "New Dissent" placed the emphasis firmly on religion as "living" rather than "believing". The "mission, theology and structure" of the Methodists, despite their professed loyalty to the Church of England, led the bishops to brand them "a separate body characterized by Dissent", a fact made manifest, they believed, in the advocacy of lay preaching across parish boundaries, separate doctrinal standards and worship materials, and in networks of societies held together in an annual conference (p. 102). Though intended to be a renewal movement within the Church of England, the people called Methodists were forced into separation from the ecclesiastical establishment. It would be nearer the end of the nineteenth century that they allied themselves with the Old Dissent, but by 1828 they were, even if unwittingly, on the road to such an end.

Moving to religious dissent outside England, the book tells us that, in Ireland, it was not indigenous. It came as a result of the influx of Scottish Presbyterians in the north-east. In Scotland, the Stuart monarchs had attempted to suppress Presbyterian tendencies and uphold the episcopal polity of the national Church. It was the Scottish bishops' allegiance to what they perceived to be the rightful, but deposed, king which led the joint monarchs William and Mary to endorse a Presbyterian settlement in 1690. Patronage, secession and revival all played a part in bringing dissent to light but, significantly, from 1690 the Episcopalians were the dissenters. In Wales Nonconformity developed in particular ways as a result of the Welsh language and by the mid-nineteenth century Nonconformists believed Wales to be "a nation of Nonconformists" (p. 160). What Catherine A. Brekus tells us about North America – that "no one in early America, including Dissenters, portrayed religious pluralism as a positive good" (p. 192) – seems equally true of England. Instead, all Protestants, at least initially – and because of their belief in their own interpretation – wanted some form of uniformity. Revivalism "criss-crossed the ecclesiastical divide" (p. 225), while Fuller's importance – again – is seen in the influence of his *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785) which "channelled into English Dissent the evangelical moral philosophy of Jonathan Edwards and hence subverted the hyper-Calvinist position that human depravity made it pointless to appeal to the unconverted to repent and believe" (p. 247). The

editor's chapter helps the reader to see that "it was the sense of political exclusion, rather than particular theological positions, that mattered when it came to thinking about the validity of establishment" (p. 266), while toleration was considered a vice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with "moderation" advocated as a *via media* between "tyrannical persecution and sinful toleration" (p. 268). Gradually, enforcing religion on tender consciences came to be seen as worse than false belief (p. 269). Nevertheless, as David M. Thompson shows, "it was still rare to find a theologian writing with any acknowledgement of the *legitimacy* of alternative points of view" (p. 208).

Opposition to the slave trade is seen as part of the development of a dissenting social conscience, though this was shared among "evangelicals" across denominational boundaries. Nevertheless, dissenting religion centred on preaching as demonstrated in the internal furnishing of their meeting houses. Sermons began to be published, more by London preachers than anywhere else. Unlike the Established Church, published sermons preached on the day of "Charles the Martyr" (30 January) were rare, while preaching was doctrinally focused rather than based on natural religion.

These are some of the points made in a rich and varied volume. It is clear that "dissent" is a difficult term to define, especially when it is applied to the religious situation in different contexts. The editor draws particular attention to the inclusion of the Presbyterians who, in England, were unwilling dissenters, forced into nonconformity by Acts of Parliament. The inclusion of the Methodists exacerbates the issue though, as the volume demonstrates, they were grouped with the dissenters by the bishops who bewailed their disobedience. Interestingly, while a picture of Whitefield adorns the dust-jacket, the chapter inside the book concentrates on the Wesleys.

What is overwhelmingly clear is that context is important: in Scotland the Episcopalians were the dissenters after 1690, while in New England Congregationalists occupied a position at least analogous to a state church (until 1834), and they certainly acted intolerantly towards those whose consciences led them in different theological and ecclesiological directions. The irony is clear: the historical point is that it is those who were excluded who advocated toleration (where comprehension failed); those occupying places of power and influence tended more towards uniformity.

There is much of value in this volume and it is likely long to remain the standard text for an overview of dissenting traditions in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, there are a small number of statements which this reviewer found jarring. One author makes the comment "The Welsh sense of isolation was further heightened by their linguistic difference from England and Scotland" (p. 236). The question is, in whose view was this isolation felt? It seems highly unlikely that Welsh-speaking labourers in rural Cardiganshire, for example, had much of an idea of any different way of life emerging in the growing towns of England. They were served by Griffith Jones's circulating schools which, while admittedly Anglican in ethos, had secured a relatively literate populace by mid-to-late century, while the London Welsh had supported the publication of religious

literature in the Welsh language from the seventeenth century. Where would any sense of isolation emerge if their day to day spiritual needs were met in this way in a language which *they* understood? Another author refers to the "restoration of the Church of England" (p. 24). Such language suggests that, in 1660, the Church was "restored" to its pristine pre-Commonwealth state. In fact the post-Restoration Church by law established *reconstituted* itself in a way that expected uniformity and therefore deliberately excluded those within it who sought a comprehensive settlement of ecclesiastical life. During the Republic, those groups had been part of the Church of England. The fact was that, from 1645, the Church of England was not (officially) Episcopalian.

These issues aside, this is an honest and fair account of Protestant Dissent which enables some myths to be dispelled; the teleological approach which sees Protestant Dissent as the means which would eventually establish full religious freedom is rejected. Perry Miller is quoted with approval: "By and large Protestants did not contribute to religious liberty. They stumbled into it, they were compelled into it, many accepted it at last because they had to, or because they saw its strategic value" (p. 183). Alongside this, the book makes clear that "toleration" is not the same as religious freedom (p. 197), or the free practice of faith. Nevertheless, the idea that religious faith is seen to be in any sense a matter of conscience, beyond the interference of civic or political officials, owes more to the persistence, obduracy and continued witness of religious dissenters than to the existence of official, national churches. The dissenters' history is worth recounting. It is well-served in this book.

ROBERT POPE

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Printed by Joshua Horgan Print & Design,
Unit 2, Glenmore Business Centre, Range Road, Witney OX29 0AA
and published by the URC History Society