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EDITORIAL

Perhaps denominational identity was more important in the nineteenth century than in the twentieth. Congregationalists in particular had grown in confidence and this affected how they viewed themselves and their polity, however removed they were from their antecedents, the Independents and the Separatists. In the first part of his discussion of Congregational architecture, Clyde Binfield takes us into a world where Congregationalists actively sought to embody their principles and values in physical form in their buildings, how they argued for it, made resources available for it, and how they saw this, in effect, as a coming of age. The discussion will continue in future issues of the *Journal*.

In our other article, John Lander shows us how denominational identity could also result in rivalry and defection. Two, admittedly sectarian rather than mainstream, Methodists, George Smith (who merits a passing reference in the opening article) and John Pyer, “convert” into Congregational ministers. They may have been attracted by the accountability to the congregation rather than any hierarchical office or council, but this did not prevent them from serving Congregationalism as an emerging body of Christians. My thanks go to both contributors.

NONCONFORMIST ARCHITECTURE: A CONGREGATIONAL FOCUS PART I¹

It took the buildings of Dissent three decades to turn into Dissenting architecture, initiating a natural if often awkward and frequently dismissed transition, to ensure a distinctive, visual, nonconformity. Within three generations religious Dissent was becoming institutionalised. This was a nationwide process and it required accommodation, tacit at a local level but statutory nationally. The latter was largely secured by the “Toleration Act” of 1689. At that point, slowly and unevenly confirmed by subsequent legislation, Dissent became an inferior Establishment, second-rate and therefore second-best, deviating from normal national practice, witnessing to differing concepts of authority, consistently discriminated against but legally tolerated and within the pale of the Constitution. Its buildings reflected this. Where they became recognisable, architecture had a foothold; these buildings could now announce purpose and, increasingly, fitness for purpose. They indicated the means of the people for whom they were built, the skills of the artisans and craftsmen who built them and – again increasingly – their architects. Style came into the equation. The constraints of their status came into creative tension with their aspirations, their sense of mission, and the economic opportunities which beckoned for a significant number of them.

The basic requirements were simple: room for people gathered in worship to hear the Word and observe the sacraments of communion and baptism. The nature of the provision varied to suit the requirements of different sorts of Dissenter. Quakers needed separate rooms for men and women when meeting for church affairs as opposed to worship; they did not need provision for communion or baptism, their ministry did not need a pulpit, although it made use of a raised platform or minister’s stand, and music played no part in their meetings. Baptists had to provide for believers’ baptism by immersion. Paedobaptists moving towards Unitarianism placed decreasing emphasis on the sacraments. That was a later development, some generations down the line. Another, later, development was the provision for children which came with the Sunday School revolution. This broke in the 1780s and gathered exponential force for the next century and a quarter.

This is enough to suggest that there was nothing static about Dissenting architecture. It was vulnerable to constraints, including those of fashion, it was open to opportunity, it was flexible, and its buildings had no mystique. For Old Dissent – Baptists, Independents, Presbyterians, Quakers – the common form of building was the Meeting-House, which was exactly what those words suggested. Two surviving and celebrated examples of such gathered domesticity are the Friends’ Meeting-House at Brigflatts, near Sedbergh (1675, steadily improved to

¹ Part of this article was first published as “Nonconformist Architecture: A Representative Focus”, in Robert Pope (ed.), *T & T Clark Companion to Nonconformity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 257-284.

1750),² and the Independent Meeting-House at Walpole, in Suffolk (c. 1689).³ This was the prevailing form from the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century. Two equally celebrated surviving examples, both of them in Norwich, show the sophistication to which Meeting-Houses could attain. The Independent Old Meeting (1693) is elegantly matter-of-fact; it expresses the corporate confidence of merchants who had seen good architecture in Amsterdam.⁴ The Presbyterian, now Unitarian, Octagon Chapel (1754-6), expensively built following a competition to designs by the leading local architect, Thomas Ivory (1709-79), famously impressed John Wesley who visited it a year after completion to find “perhaps the most elegant [meeting-house] in all Europe”, its interior “finished in the highest taste, and ... as clean as any nobleman’s saloon”.⁵

Wesley’s was the response of an educated contemporary gentleman, sympathetic surprise at how cosmopolitan the provincial commercial classes could be. His response also marks a revolution. The Octagon Chapel was a Meeting-House, an effective gathering space for a comfortably settled congregation, but its architect was at the same time designing an Assembly Room for Norwich and Wesley saw how an octagon could accommodate an assorted assembly gathered for a more evangelistic purpose than the committed core of saints in a traditional meeting-house. It was from the mid-eighteenth century that New Dissent, chiefly Methodist, dominated by the Wesleys, and in its own way as unwillingly Dissenting as Old Dissent had been, complicated the ecclesiastical building scene. Its buildings were more preaching boxes than meeting-houses. Their arrangements for communion were significantly different and they frequently provided for travelling preachers, a different order of ministry from that called by Baptists or Independents or appointed by Presbyterians. They introduced a fresh building type, the chapel, a word which by the turn of the eighteenth century was to be found as much among English and Welsh Baptists and Congregationalists (as Independents were increasingly called) as among Methodists.⁶

The chapel prevailed in the nineteenth century, although from the 1840s it ceded place significantly to the church, a change of name that reflected denominational self-confidence, growing architectural sophistication, and changing views of history as well as the human nature demonstrated whenever the Dissenting Joneses set out to keep up with the Anglican Joneses. In the twentieth century churches were in the Nonconformist ascendant while the meeting-house was self-consciously rediscovered as all were subsumed by rising costs and declining membership.

2 D. M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999), II, pp. 787-790.

3 C. Stell, *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Eastern England* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2002), pp. 307-9.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 256-9.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 260-2.

6 In Ireland and Scotland “chapel” tended to be associated with Roman Catholic premises.

I: Congregationalists as Representative Nonconformists. The Force of a Paper Read in Birmingham

If the nineteenth century saw Nonconformity's high noon, it might be argued that the Victorian age saw Congregationalists as England's and especially the political nation's representative Nonconformists. That suggests social and cultural standing and, since England was the driving force of an imperial nation, it also suggests far horizons. The rest of this article focuses on Congregational church building between the 1840s and the 1880s, arguing that there was a Congregational architecture which reflected a Congregational temper and that the organisation of church building played a critical part in shaping and updating a truly national denomination. Similar arguments might be made for Baptists, Methodists, and Unitarians but the relationship between Congregational building, architecture, and polity lends special force to such a focus. It allows for a representative narrative.

A particular date is pivotal to the argument: 24 August 1862, the bicentenary of "Black Bartholomew's Day", 1662, when so many were ejected from their livings that Protestant dissent from the reconstituted national church became a permanently structured part of the national polity. Most of the ejected were not Congregationalists but those who formed the professional backbone of a fluid yet distinctive and persistent religious tradition. That it was more temper than denomination did not detract from its distinctiveness. Indeed, it allowed ample room for creative reflection to those who were beginning to examine the past that had formed them. Consequently that pivotal date, 24 August 1862, is less important than the use that was made of it: it was tailor-made to advance an already evolving strategy.

To explore both use and strategy the focus will be an organisation, some theorists, and a string-puller. The organisation is a chapel-building society. The theorists are a succession of essayists who between 1847 and 1878 expressed the Congregational mind and its culture. The string-puller is an elderly man of antiquarian disposition, a retired barrister who had in fact never practised and who had lived for some years in Tunbridge Wells, enjoying the ill-health for which that resort catered. It was this man who seized the bicentennial moment and made it visibly fit for the purposes of Victorian England in general and its Congregationalism in particular. That brings us back to architecture and finally to a case study which relates organisation, theorists, and string-puller to the people in the pews and the men in the pulpit of a struggling church and congregation whose chapel in 1862 was in urgent need of rebuilding.

In October 1861 a paper was read at the Birmingham Autumnals of the Congregational Union of England and Wales on the approaching bicentenary of the Great Ejectment. Its general drift was "rapturously adopted".⁷ The paper had been prepared by our string-puller, Joshua Wilson, now in his mid-to-late sixties.

7 J. Wilson, "The Second Centenary of the Ejectment of the Nonconformist Ministers from the Established Church", [Hereafter "Second Centenary"], *Congregational Year Book* [Hereafter *CYB*] (1862), p. 72.

but he was not present to deliver it, perhaps because public speaking had never been in his line but just as likely because of his health: Wilson was a martyr to chronic cystitis.⁸ Robert Ashton, the man who read Wilson's paper for him, was not on the face of it a man to provoke rapturous applause, although he and Wilson were kindred spirits.⁹ Ashton was in his earlier sixties and an *alumnus* of Hoxton, the theological college which had been largely founded and maintained by the Wilson family. He too had antiquarian inclinations. In 1851, as secretary of the short-lived Wycliffe Society, he had edited a three-volume edition of the works of John Robinson, pastor to the "Pilgrim Fathers". For the past eleven years he had been out of pastoral charge and into denominational organisation. In 1861 he was Joint Secretary of the Congregational Union, in reality a dogsbody post, picking up pieces mislaid by his better-known colleague, George Smith of Poplar.¹⁰ He also edited the *Congregational Year Book*, which one London preacher, the irrepressibly bombastic John Campbell of Moorfields Tabernacle, had recently praised for its "peculiar achievement in English Ecclesiastical Literature":¹¹

It presents the most thorough analysis of the greatest, the most enlightened, and the most influential Dissenting community in the land, that can be imagined. It is a full and complete development of the ecclesiastical economy of the entire community, and everything appertaining to it ... It is the most magnificent lecture on the power of the Voluntary Principle ever delivered.¹²

That rhetoric and those men, their interests, publications, and connections, set the scene for what follows. Campbell's executive enthusiasm had saved Ashton's edition of Robinson's works from financial ruin. His orthodoxy was unimpeachable and if his style set the teeth of younger men on edge, he remained a famous warhorse. Perhaps Campbell, who had chaired the first annual meeting of the chapel-building society which is to be considered shortly, stoked up the rapture which greeted Ashton's reading of Wilson's paper.

The paper was an *omnium gatherum* of proposals, shrewd, practical, idealistic,

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- 8 For Joshua Wilson (1795-1874), See A. Argent, "Joshua Wilson", in D. M. Lewis (ed.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1841*, 2 vols (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), II, p. 1209; R. Halley, "Recollections of the Old Dissent. No. V", *The Congregationalist* (1875), pp. 93-101; S. S. England, "The Late Joshua Wilson, Esq.", *Evangelical Magazine* (1874), pp. 661-3; Clyde Binfield, "Building Philanthropy: The Example of Joshua Wilson (1795-1874)", in Clyde Binfield, G. M. Ditchfield and David Wykes (eds), *Protestant Dissent and Philanthropy in Britain, 1660-1914* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2020), pp. 113-128. For further information I am indebted to Mr J. Creasey, Miss Alice Ford-Smith, and Mr D. Powell.
- 9 For Robert Ashton (1798-1878), see *CYB* (1879), p. 297.
- 10 For George Smith (1803-1870), see *CYB* (1871), pp. 346-9; R. Balgarnie, *Brief Memoir of the Rev. George Smith, D.D.* (London, 1870).
- 11 For John Campbell (1794-1867), see J. H. Y. Briggs, "John Campbell", in Lewis (ed.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, I, p. 190.
- 12 Quoted in A. Peel, *These Hundred Years: A History of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1831-1931* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1931), p. 197.

and antiquarian in turn, angled at Congregationalism's diverse constituencies, couched in a forcefully contemporary rhetoric, and drawing on up-to-date observation, much of it provoked by the vogue for statistics which publication of the 1851 Religious Census had intensified in chapel circles. None of it was particularly original but the sum of it announced a curiously realistic strategy. Some of the proposals were piously anodyne: the reprinting of old Nonconformist histories, the formation of a Nonconformist history society, the erection of a memorial to the ejected in Bunhill Fields, Nonconformity's *Campo Santo*, and of a Memorial Hall to house Congregationalism's representative communal activities. Specific weeks might be set apart for prayer on set subjects, popular tracts might be printed, and lectures delivered in the Congregational colleges and more generally to propagate the foundational principles of Puritanism and Nonconformity. The rhetoric was uncompromising. The lectures, for example, were to "let the people of England know on what an antichristian and sectarian foundation the Ecclesiastical Establishment in this country was reconstructed in 1661".¹³ A Congregational mind, spiritually forthright and popular, firmly grounded in national tradition, was to be released.

Central to these proposals was to be the construction of one hundred memorial churches. Here strategy replaced rhetoric. None should be built in towns where fewer than 3,000 lived; none should seat fewer than 400 adults. All should accommodate the poor, "especially that most interesting class – the working men and their families", and at least one "plain, simple, commodious building" should be provided in each of the largest cities for their benefit.¹⁴ Nonetheless, it remained "an unquestionable fact that our strength as a denomination lies in the large cities and towns, as our special vocation is to the middle classes of the people, who form the chief portion of their inhabitants ... Our watchword should now be 'London and the large towns'".¹⁵ That secured, Congregationalists could then attend to evangelistic or agricultural out-stations in a programme of mission-planting which would avoid the debilitating multiplication of "small chapels in villages ... as the seats of small churches ... generally ... unable to support their own pastors".¹⁶

To be fit for purpose a building needs an architect. To proclaim its purpose it needs a style. Architecture has entered the equation of denominational principle, temper, and extension.

II: "Some Victorian Chapel-Builders". Proof of the Pudding?

Ninety-four years after Wilson's paper was delivered in Birmingham and published in the *Congregational Year Book*, a Birmingham architect contributed a paper to the *Congregational Quarterly*. The *Quarterly* was a journal after a

13 J. Wilson, "Second Centenary", p. 66.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4. Here he was recalling what Thomas Binney had urged in his Congregational Union address of 1848.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

latter-day Joshua Wilson's heart and this contributor, R. Stanley-Morgan, was a Congregationalist whose minister, Charles Surman, an inveterate compiler of indispensable lists, was a minister after a latter-day Joshua Wilson's heart. His paper was on "Some Victorian Chapel-Builders: An Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Congregational Chapel Architecture in England".¹⁷

"Some Victorian Chapel-Builders" retains more than period or historiographical interest. Its analysis relies on that "peculiar achievement ... in English Ecclesiastical Literature", the *Congregational Year Book*. Its judgements, wholly appropriate to a practitioner writing in the 1950s, are informed and clear-cut. It traces and generally applauds the evolution of plan and style which distinguished Congregational architecture in the 1870s and 1880s, and judges some of it to be outstandingly original. It is much less appreciative of buildings from the 1850s and 1860s, in particular the starved Gothic and square plan favoured by "those insensitive designers, Thomas Oliver of Newcastle and W. F. Poulton of Reading".¹⁸ There were in fact two Thomas Olivers, father and son, whose churches were scattered broadcast, chiefly in the north and midlands, throughout the Victorian years but Stanley-Morgan fixed on the father (1791-1857) as the man credited with developing the cast-iron arcade, that architectural abomination, as purists saw it, of columns and arches surmounted by wooden framing, which gave intermediate support to a wide roof-span and picked up the weight of side galleries. Such convenience lacked integrity and compromised beauty. It encouraged stylistic promiscuity: it was Oliver who in 1856 enticingly advertised "A series of twenty designs for New Chapels in the Gothic, Italian, Byzantine and Norman Styles of Architecture, erected in various counties in England and Scotland and suitable for Towns, Suburbs and Villages".¹⁹ As for Poulton (c. 1820-1900), "at his worst he perpetrated some of the worst efforts of his time", mostly in the south and midlands, and it was a younger man, with a much smaller practice, Joseph James (1828-1875), who secured Stanley-Morgan's approval as "the most sensitive, if not the most inspired" of contemporary practitioners.²⁰

Stanley-Morgan regarded Poulton and the Olivers as minor provincials whose readiness to set their hands to anything and integration into local networks gave them an impact out of all proportion to their abilities. There is much more to be said for such men, their role in the evolution of their profession and of provincial architecture in general, than Stanley-Morgan allowed, but for present purposes (and the younger Thomas Oliver and Joseph James reappear in this account), there are two things to note. The first is that James, the Olivers, and Poulton

17 R. Stanley-Morgan, "Some Victorian Chapel-Builders: An Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Congregational Architecture in England", *Congregational Quarterly*, XXXIII/3 (1955), pp. 233-6. For Charles Edward Surman (1901-1986), see C. Binfield and J. Taylor (eds), *Who They Were in the Reformed Churches of England and Wales, 1901-2000* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), p. 223.

18 Stanley-Morgan, "Some Victorian Chapel-Builders: An Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Congregational Architecture in England", p. 238.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 243.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 242, 241.

were Congregationalists as well as architects of Congregational buildings. The second is the boost given to their practices by the English Congregational Chapel-Building Society.

III: The English Congregational Chapel-Building Society

The English Congregational Chapel-Building Society was formed in 1853. Although it never quite achieved what was hoped for it, it was a milestone in denominational organisation and the development of chapel architecture. It was a crucible for networking, professionalism, and mission.

It was not the first such Congregational society. Lancashire, England's "empire county ... whence issue so many of these mighty impulses which are changing the economical condition of the people, and the legislation of the country and of the world itself", had prepared the ground in 1852, preceded by London, the imperial capital, in 1848.²¹ Lancashire aimed at fifty new chapels in five years but realistically settled for twenty. London, too, aimed at fifty but five years later only eighteen had been aided. The prospect was daunting. Even with fifty new chapels, London would still have under 200 Congregational chapels for a population "which, ten years hence, will be three millions!!!"²²

The London society was the reworking of an earlier Metropolitan Chapel-Building Society which had itself grown from the work of Joshua Wilson's father, Thomas (1764-1843), a retired but far from retiring silk manufacturer who for nearly fifty years had been a one-man chapel-building society, if not a one-man Congregational Union.²³ That evolution explains the care with which the English Society's promoters set about their work and their anxiety "to proceed with that caution which was likely to secure the confidence and co-operation of the entire denomination".²⁴ The day of the representative committee, which had dawned in the 1790s, was now in its morning glory, accelerated and democratized by the railway age.

A national society needed national affirmation. This society was mooted at the Congregational Union's Northampton Autumnals in 1851. A committee was appointed to prepare a constitution at the Union's May Assembly in London, 1852, and at the following Bradford Autumnals the proposed constitution provided for a new committee to get things going. That committee promoted a conference in Derby in March 1853, at which the society was formed, its rules were adopted, and an executive committee was elected. The process, committee on committee advancing, was then described for the benefit of the Union's Manchester Autumnals

21 Lancashire's successive chapel-building campaigns (1852-9, c. 1862, and 1868 onwards) are described in B. Nightingale, *The Story of the Lancashire Congregational Union 1806-1906 Centenary Memorial Volume* (Manchester: John Heywood, n.d. [1906]), pp. 78-80, 94-8.

22 *CYB* (1854), p. 283.

23 For Thomas Wilson see *ODNB*; J. Wilson, *A Memoir of Thomas Wilson Esq.: Treasurer of Highbury College* (London: John Snow & Co., 1846).

24 *CYB* (1854), p. 75.

(October 1853) by the new society's secretary.²⁵ Northampton, London, Bradford, Derby, Manchester: the validation was nationwide.

The new society's aims were clear. It was to serve England outside London and Lancashire. It intended to erect fifty chapels in five years. It epitomised Victorian values: its leading principle was to aid local effort and promote good practice:

This society, by holding out the inducement of a grant, steps in before the land is secured and the building is commenced, and endeavours to supersede the necessity of begging, by preventing unnecessary expenditure, and, if possible, the contraction of debt.²⁶

The meeting of targets is a frustratingly inexact science, fraught with unintended consequences, but the society's achievement was respectable. In its first five years it aided seventy-four chapels, forty of them new causes. That could be translated into 41,271 sittings, provided at a cost of £106,967, of which £21,278 had been met by the society's grants and loans.²⁷ Encouraged by this, the society aimed at an annual income of £5,500, generated by society grants of £33,793 and loans of £47,321.²⁸

The Bicentenary had accounted for much of this. It had encouraged the holding of conferences in July and September 1861, in Manchester and Darlington, and again in November 1861 and January 1862. The Manchester conference had introduced the idea of 100 Memorial Chapels; the Darlington conference determined to raise £40,000 in four years, half of it for a Memorial Fund; and in 1862 itself, 132 applications had been received, fifty-eight had been accepted, so it was decided to double the loan fund, and the society's secretary was justifiably up-beat: "no year has witnessed such progress".²⁹ Looking beyond his society's boundaries, he claimed that the 300 memorial chapels opened, commenced, or projected in 1862 would accommodate 150,000 hearers at a cost of £500,000. No wonder the *Year Book* found that "the subject of Chapel-building is in an unprecedented degree enjoying the attention and stimulating the liberality of our denomination".³⁰

Such growth could not be maintained at a comparable rate. In the decade after 1863 the English society's income ranged from upwards of £8,000 to upwards of £9,000 with a peak of £11,000 in 1869; the London society's income in the same period ranged from £8,000 to £15,000 with its peak year in 1863-1864.³¹ Even so, it was reported at the society's jubilee that in fifty years 800 cases (338 of them for new causes) had been accepted, providing over 300,000 sittings, and upwards

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 75-9.

26 English Congregational Chapel-Building Society, *Report of the Committee to the Members of the Society [hereafter ECBS, Report]* (1854), p. 7.

27 ECBS, *Report* (1858), p. 7.

28 ECBS, *Report* (1859), p. 9; (1863), p. 10.

29 ECBS, *Report* (1862), pp. 2, 12-14.

30 *CYB* (1863), pp. 289-90.

31 *CYB* (1864-1874), *passim*, esp. (1871) p. 345; (1865) p. 314.

of £250,000 had been received and almost £230,000 disbursed. A manse fund had been instituted (and 100 manses aided), and thirty-three grants had been made to causes in Ireland and the Colonies. Jubilee year itself had been the busiest since 1869, with nearly £6,000 disbursed.³²

Taken as a whole, however, the society's significance outweighed its quantifiable achievement. It was certainly a catalyst in denominational credibility. It held firmly to its leading principle: "strictly speaking, this Institution occupies the position simply of an auxiliary to local operations".³³ Fully aware of "the dangers of undue and injurious centralisation, to which such a movement is peculiarly exposed", it went out of its way "to guard against the suspicion of all undue central influence" and to demonstrate "the compatibility of systematic action on a large scale with genuine Independency",³⁴ but its promoters were in no doubt as to the benefits of such action. In 1857, looking back on "the old and vicious" Congregational system "of deputing the Pastor upon errands of itinerant solicitation to gentlemen of well-known benevolence" too distant to investigate the facts, the committee spelt out the advantages of "enlarged experience":

We are willing to counsel you on all points ... at the very *onset* of your undertaking, and having agreed with you as to the site, the plans, the cost, and the trust deed, we are willing to aid you with a pecuniary advance, on the condition that the local contribution be raised to a certain figure, and the system of general promiscuous begging be abandoned.³⁵

At that year's Cheltenham Autumnals, Thomas Aveling, a prominent north London minister, turned his paper on "Chapel Extension" into a carefully angled plea for the English society as a denominational responsibility.³⁶ The society had justified its existence for five years but "[t]hey must now say 'No' to all further applicants, until the churches of the Denomination authorise them to say 'Yes'..."

The Society is the willing servant of the Denomination, and is quite ready to engage in a course of prolonged obedience; but it cannot make bricks without straw, and cannot administer funds till they are entrusted to its care ... Shall the Institution become permanent? Shall it continue for years, to be the condensed judgment and will of our denomination on the all-important point of chapel extension? Is this the pleasure of this Assembly?³⁷

Of course it was, when put like that. The denominational note had been unerringly struck.

32 ECBS, *Report* (1904), p. 9.

33 ECBS, *Report* (1857), p. 5.

34 *CYB* (1854), p.76; ECBS, *Report* (1855), p. 10; (1865), p. 8.

35 ECBS, *Report* (1857), pp. 5, 6.

36 For Thomas William Baxter Aveling (1815-1884), see *CYB* (1885), pp. 176-9.

37 *CYB* (1858), p. 73.

One reason for this had been the extent to which, from the first, the society had exploited Congregationalism's existing networks, its proliferation of like-minded provincials. "faithful stewards of the world's riches", brought ever closer in business, leisure, and public spirit by modern communication. Thus its committee comprised forty-two "well-known and highly-respected individuals", all of course male, most of them laymen, drawn from thirty-one provincial centres; only eight lived in London.³⁸ They met quarterly, twice in different parts of the country and twice concurrently with the Union's May Assembly in London and Autumnal Assembly in the provinces. When meeting outside London – at least by the 1870s – the committee welcomed the pastor and deacons of the host church as *ex-officio* members, and invited those of all other Congregational churches in the town as observers. No business was transacted outside the committee and none was transacted that had not been announced in the papers prepared for each meeting. All was transparent and above board.³⁹ Since the society was a membership organisation, it had an annual meeting and published an annual report. This listed subscribers, donations, committee members, cases considered, and cases aided. The individuals named and celebrated record Congregationalism's movers and makers, as active in chapel extension as in politics, commerce, education, or overseas mission, in one sense the usual suspects but here testifying to the totality of their commitment and, as the Society's promoters so fervently hoped, to the "great practical utility" of the Union in fostering those "words of Christian aggression" which independent-minded Congregationalists could together undertake.⁴⁰

IV: "Practical Hints".

The English Chapel-Building Society and an Architectural Evolution

A professional evolution marched in step with the evolving denominationalism. In taking the stage in the chapel world, chapel architecture assumed a new significance in the architectural world. If the English society succeeded in its aims, the result could be transformative. At the least there would be "increased economy and much practical improvement in our ecclesiastical architecture", but the ambition lay in those last two words: "ecclesiastical architecture".⁴¹

A chapel was "a building adapted to public oral instruction, worship, and fellowship".⁴² The definition was as simple as the purposes were grand. Economy, improvement, and architecture, especially ecclesiastical architecture, demanded expertise. In 1854 the *Civil Engineer's and Architect's Journal*, noting the society's

38 *CYB* (1854), p. 76.

39 *Ibid.*; ECBS, *Report* (1877), p. 12.

40 *CYB* (1854), p. 79.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Practical Hints on Chapel-Building* [Hereafter *Practical Hints*], (London: English Congregational Chapel-Building Society, 1855), p. 8; third ed. issued as *Practical Hints on the Erection of Places of Public Worship* (London: John Snow & Co., 1874).

recent formation, reported that “various” architects (the society itself claimed to have approached over fifty), had been invited to submit model designs, some eighteen had responded, and five had been selected from firms in London, Bristol, Wolverhampton, and Sunderland; the younger Thomas Oliver was one of them.⁴³ A snapshot from the society’s report for 1857 catches the result as it impacted on Norwich: “The local Committee, after advertising for plans, at length selected one in the Norman style, prepared by Joseph James, Esq., of London”. James, too, was one of the five architects. His design for a new cause with an old name – Chapel in the Field – was for a 900-seater, costing (inclusive of site) £2,600. R. Stanley-Morgan admired it nearly a century later.⁴⁴ In such a context the Union’s 1860 *Year Book* could preface its ever-lengthening section of architectural descriptions with considerable confidence:

Sites are no longer chosen because of their obscurity and seclusion; pews are no longer square, high-backed, and perpendicular; pulpits are no longer pitched at an angle to strain the eyes, and stiffen the necks of the worshippers; ventilation and drainage are no longer ignored. School, class, and lecture rooms are now a necessary appendage to the sanctuary; light, air, and comfort are essential to a quiet and healthful worship.⁴⁵

Some matters still called for resolution. The *Year Book* noted the “question of spires and columns, circular pews and pew doors, together with choir and pulpit”. but time and experience would come to the aid of “our chapel architects”, as it would help resolve the question of nomenclature, now that “meeting-house” had all but vanished from our towns and “chapel”, which Methodism had brought into vogue, was found to have popish origins. That left “church”, a word as devoutly grand as it was properly popular, “descriptive at once of the ‘house of the Lord’ and the place where His people meet for worship”. One hears Robert Ashton’s voice in the editorial comment that “Time is a great innovator” in such matters. Only a historian could write such a thing.⁴⁶

The society itself had an invaluable aid in its handbook-cum-manifesto, *Practical Hints on Chapel-Building*, published in 1855, with a second edition in 1862 and a third in 1874. *Practical Hints* was carefully persuasive. Its implicit thesis was fitness for purpose; practice comes before style:

we must growingly escape the trammels of mere precedent; and be prepared to select those sites, and adopt those methods of construction, and that sort of attraction, which modern as well as ancient art may suggest; and which

43 *The Civil Engineer’s and Architect’s Journal*, XVII (1854), p. 117. I am indebted to the Revd Michael Hopkins for this reference.

44 ECBS, *Report* (1857), p. 23; Stanley-Morgan, “Some Victorian Chapel-Builders”, pp. 241-2. The church was demolished in 1972.

45 *CYB* (1860), p. 231.

46 *Ibid.*

will convince the public that we are ourselves fully up to the spirit of the age ... It is not cheapness in giving, but cheapness in using, for which we plead.⁴⁷

Here was a step-by-step guide for the most down-to-earth congregation. There were hints about form, site, and size (allow seven feet of ground for each adult, recall that three adult sittings approximated to five children's sittings, note that galleries might increase space by a quarter to two-thirds).⁴⁸ There was advice about foundations, walls, roofs and roof trusses, windows, towers and spires, heating, lighting (and lightning conductors), ventilation, acoustics, floors, seats, passages, galleries, pulpit, table, font, and insurance. A vital appendix reproduced the society's questionnaire for applicants and its recommended instructions to architects, as well as a model contract and trust deed.⁴⁹ There was even some bracing encouragement for congregations fearful of toppling too far: "stained glass, if the general effect be chaste and quiet, need not be refused as a *free gift*"; "we can see no objection to the introduction of a neat font" (were there fears that baptismal regeneration might lurk there?), finding it "unquestionably preferable to the occasional introduction of a white basin, or one adorned with the willow pattern"; the addition of a "tower or spire gives that publicity to the building which may materially help to carry out some of its main designs, viz:- the attraction and accommodation of the public", not to mention the lobby, stair, and ventilation space thus afforded.⁵⁰

The annual reports stiffened the *Practical Hints*. The society had method, an office, office hours, and a staff. From 1858 until 1875, when the Memorial Hall at last opened its doors in Farringdon Street, the office was two rooms in 1, Moorgate, entered from 118, London Wall. The hours were from 10 am to 4 pm (5 pm by 1863) on weekdays, and 10 am to 1 pm on Saturdays.⁵¹ The staff consisted of the Secretary from 1853, who could call on an elastic array of "examining architects" – Bidlake, Habershon, Poulton, Pritchett, Trimen, as well as James, Oliver, all the usual suspects.⁵² Their advice was largely superseded after 1860 by the appointment of an "Accountant and Assistant" who would be in daily attendance. He was in fact architecturally qualified, capable of examining plans, proffering practical advice, and ensuring that the society stuck to its guns now that its brief covered Anglicised Wales, the Channel Islands and Ireland, as well as

47 *Practical Hints*, p. 6.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

49 *Ibid.*, pp. 49-63.

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7, 34, 28.

51 ECBS, *Report* (1859), p. 14; (1863), p. 10.

52 For George Bidlake (c.1829-1892), Edward Habershon (d. 1901), W. G. Habershon (c. 1818-1891), W. F. Poulton, James Pigott Pritchett, father (1789-1868) and son (1830-1911), Joseph James and Thomas Oliver, see A. Felstead et al., *Directory of British Architects, 1834-1900* (London: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1993), pp. 80, 390, 733, 741, 495, 675. Andrew Trimen was a London architect whose best surviving Congregational (now United Reformed) chapel is in Allen Street, Kensington (1854-5).

England.⁵³ That brief remained straightforward: to aid buildings for new causes, or better buildings for existing causes, in cities and towns, which might “in certain circumstances” include villages; and to ensure that no grants were allocated until plans had been submitted for professional examination, and approved, and that no money was released until the building was covered, vested in trustees (and the deed enrolled), and at least fifty per cent paid for.⁵⁴

At no point, however, was style far from the surface. The society and its well-wishers did their best to rise above the fray. “It is obvious”, noted the *Congregational Year Book* in 1860, “that no uniform style ... has been adopted ... This is perhaps neither desirable nor practicable. The style of the building must be affected in some degree by the position selected, and the buildings in immediate contiguity”.⁵⁵ “Your Committee”, the society’s annual report affirmed in 1859, “altogether repudiate the idea of adhering exclusively to any particular order of architecture or of implicitly following any one prescribed course”.⁵⁶ They assumed a tone of firm humility:

They think that the arts of building and of architecture are open to improvement as well as other arts, especially in their application to modern congregational use; and are willing to receive instruction on this subject from any source, foreign as well as domestic, modern as well as ancient. Guided by these views they have favoured almost every variety of Chapel-building.⁵⁷

In this spirit *Practical Hints* surveyed the styles. Grecian was “probably ... the most expensive”; Roman was Greek with arches.⁵⁸ Byzantine had pitfalls: “The work is rich; the appearance rude and magnificent. The style, strictly speaking, belongs to a semi-barbarous age; and can scarcely be deemed adapted to modern Chapels”.⁵⁹ Lombardic was Byzantine “modified by European refinement ... The general effect, when consistently carried out, is very agreeable” and “peculiarly adapted to structures in brick”.⁶⁰ Norman was fine if consistently carried out “in buildings of great size” but it could prove heavy and dull for a chapel, even if relatively cheap.⁶¹ Italian was a sort of hybrid, allowing for “greater freedom of structure and ornament than was tolerated by architects of ancient Greece”.⁶² All had their drawbacks, even Gothic. *Practical Hints* warmed most to Early English but it took considerable pleasure in comparing Decorated and Perpendicular. Decorated was a difficult style, better suited to a wealthy locality than to a Chapel-

53 ECBS, *Report* (1860), p. 16; (1863), p. 10; (1859), p. 12.

54 *CYB* (1860), p. 264.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 231.

56 ECBS, *Report* (1859), p. 14.

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Practical Hints*, p. 13.

59 *Ibid.*

60 *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

building society, but it was fairly described as “the labour of love”; Perpendicular, by contrast, with its “evident marks of degeneracy”, reflected “the love of labour”.⁶³ Even so, Gothic, especially when tending to Early English, allowed for “lightness, elevation, and flexibility”. It could be inexpensive, thanks to low walls and open roofs: it was healthy – moderate transepts, lateral gables, and clerestories helped light, acoustics, and ventilation; it was also aesthetically satisfying:

The very form and construction of a true Gothic structure are, in themselves, essentially ornamental. It is complete in its own simplicity, and sufficiently attracts the eye and gratifies taste without elaborate tracery, pinnacles, or spires.⁶⁴

The result was hardly in doubt. The annual report for 1858 categorised the styles of the seventy-four churches aided in the society’s first five years: there were one each of Grecian Doric, Lombardic, Decorated Gothic, and Early English; two Grecian; three Norman (and three unspecified); thirteen Italian, thirteen “Modern”; and thirty-six “Gothic”.⁶⁵ Whatever might be read into some of these rather slippery categories, that balance changed little, save in nuance, in the next twenty years.

V: Medium and Message, Style and Mission

Practical Hints liked the fact that Gothic told its own tale: “places of worship built in that style are never mistaken for Mechanics’ Institutes, Post-offices, or Banks”.⁶⁶ It was, in its way, a manifesto for a missionary society:

As the followers of Christ, we have a mission to *man*. In Chapel-building, we are presenting a permanently visible attitude to the *world* ... in proportion as we thus evince a deference to public taste and convenience, we adapt the means of inducing the *public to attend*; and so turn Chapel-building into a most important instrument of making known the Gospel to all men.⁶⁷

That missionary message was insistent. The “main end of the whole thing is the salvation of man”, said the 1876 report.⁶⁸ A year later the society urged that “Church building in the hands of intelligent Congregationalists ... is a method of teaching that acts upon the whole outlying community ... These buildings are witnesses for Christ, for Protestantism, for willinghood, for liberty, for religious equality”. They were “sermons in stones”,⁶⁹ fit houses for worship and fellowship, fit for Gothic:

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., pp. 14, 16.

65 ECBS, *Report* (1858), p. 7.

66 *Practical Hints*, p. 16.

67 Ibid., p. 9.

68 ECBS, *Report* (1876), p. 14.

69 ECBS, *Report* (1877), p. 10.

Gothic is in itself as free from any vice as any style can be, because its essence, worth and charm lie not in mere detail, but in its truthfulness and inherent adaptability to the end proposed. It arose out of the requirements of Christian life, and was a protest against the stiffness, and unfitness for Christian uses, of the classical orders, which, with all due respect to native genius and refinement, had no higher source than the polytheism of Greece and Rome ... We catch the true genesis of Gothic architecture when, having determined on our own ends, we study medieval and later models only to make them, in all respects, subservient to our own purposes.⁷⁰

There is in such language – Pugin Protestantised, Ruskinised, and up-dated – the assurance that was reflected by the mid-1870s in the work of James Cubitt, Joseph James, H. J. Paull, and John Sulman.⁷¹ That was the fruit of the time and experience which the *Congregational Year Book* had anticipated in 1860 but its boost had been the Bicentenary. The 1863 *Year Book* testified to this; it contained fifty-five pages of architectural descriptions, preceded by a three-page essay on “Chapel Extension”, reflecting on the 300 chapels projected for 1862:

What a demonstration of the vitality of those godly principles for which our forefathers suffered! What a triumph of freedom and Christian willingness! What a voice for equality! And what fountains of good in every appropriate form! New chapels necessitate an earnest evangelical ministry, church organization, schools, Christian visiting, temporal relief, missionary enterprise. All the good works practised by good people have more or less their home and their support in these chapels; so that, in erecting them, we are originating, guiding, and stimulating every form of benevolence in which Christians take delight ... Our fathers had no higher conception of Chapel-building than that of providing an asylum or new covering for an existing Christian community. They gathered to build. We build to gather. We are turning brick and mortar into an important auxiliary in our missionary service to the world at large.⁷²

VI: Patron and Backroom Boys – Crossley, Gallaway, and Conder

Such powerful myth-making needed its myth-makers. Three might be selected at this point, a lay *magnifico* and two officials, as representative of a whole confederacy.

The *magnifico* is John Crossley (1812-1879), most extravagant of the three brothers who stamped their mark on Halifax’s built environment and gave its

70 ECBS, *Report* (1876), p. 14.

71 For James Cubitt (1836-1912), Henry John Paull (d. 1888), and Sir John Sulman (1849-1934) see Felstead et al., *Directory of British Architects, 1834-1900*, pp. 225, 696, 889.

72 *CYB* (1863), p. 290.

carpet-makers an international reputation.⁷³ He overreached himself to the detriment of his health and his business but his political impact was considerable and his Congregational impact ran beyond denominational or regional boundaries. Crossley was larger than life but he stands for a band of autocratic Independents who gloried paradoxically in their Congregationalism, the sort for whom Oliver Cromwell was a role model. The English Congregational Chapel-Building Society depended on such men: John Remington Mills, City figure, silk manufacturer, Norfolk landowner. Liberal MP; Samuel Morley, the City face of a Nottingham hosiery empire. Kentish squire, and Liberal MP; George Hadfield, Manchester solicitor, and Liberal MP (although Lancashire's chapel extension had first claim on him): Titus Salt, the Bradford alpaca king, prototype paternalist, and – briefly – Liberal MP; Henry Wright, never an MP but Salt's son-in-law, who lived benevolently in Kensington on Birmingham money; T. E. Plint, the Leeds stockbroker who invested so heavily in Pre-Raphaelite art that his fortune vanished when he suddenly died; R. S. Hudson, the Chester soapmaker whose well-meaning will proved to be such bad luck for Congregational expectations; W. D. Wills, the Bristol tobacco manufacturer.⁷⁴ All were generous, knowledgeable, credible men but the Crossleys, firm and family (John, his son Louis John, his younger brothers Joseph and Francis, his nephew Edward), outlived them all. John was the Society's single most generous donor.⁷⁵ His judgement may have been increasingly erratic but in his prime it had been bold and shrewd and he had supported the society from the first. Crossley was its committee's first chairman and it was Crossley who answered the service of the society's first secretary, J. C. Gallaway.

James Charles Gallaway (1809-1886) was unusual for a back-room boy, for he had an adventurous and executive streak.⁷⁶ He was also an architect *manqué*. Having toyed with architecture as a profession, he obeyed the call to Congregational ministry. This took him from West Bromwich to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and back to London's Bishopsgate Chapel. In each place he demonstrated pastoral, executive, and administrative flair. He was preacher,

73 For John Crossley, see R. Bretton, "Crossleys of Dean Clough, Part IV, John Crossley M.P.", *Transactions, Halifax Antiquarian Society* (1953), pp. 14-17.

74 For Mills (1797-1879), see J. C. G. Binfield, "John Remington Mills", in J. O. Baylen and N. J. Gossman (eds), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals. Vol. 2: 1830-1870*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984), pp. 352-4; for Morley (1809-1886), see Binfield, "Samuel Morley", in *ibid.*, pp. 360-6; for Hadfield (1787-1879), see R. J. Ridley, "George Hadfield", in *ibid.*, pp. 226-7; for Salt (1803-1876), see Binfield, "Sir Titus Salt, 1st Baronet", in *ibid.*, pp. 446-450; for Wright (1819-1893), see J. Stoughton, MSS history of the Coward Trust (DWL: CT 16, pp. 108-9); for Plint (1823-1861), see D. S. Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 460-1, 173, 179-86, 190, 192, 194; for Robert Spear Hudson (1812-1884), see N. Lemon, "A Congregational Soap: Some Products of a Nineteenth-Century Blackcountry Manse", *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, VII/9 (2006), pp. 546-61; for Wills (1797-1865), see B. W. E. Alford, *W. D. and H. D. Wills and the Development of the UK Tobacco Industry, 1786-1965* (London: Methuen, 1972), esp. pp. 37, 63-118.

75 ECBS, *Report* (1879), pp. 23-4; (1880), p. 15.

76 *CYB* (1887), pp. 197-200.

strategist, and organiser. His credibility with people who counted reflected well on all concerned and brought him back repeatedly to building matters. As a student at Highbury College (Hoxton's successor) he encountered the Wilsons; as a tutor and pastoral assistant in Stroud he met his first wife, whose brother, Samuel Marling, was a local manufacturer bound for a baronetcy, Anglicanism, and an honoured place in Victorian ecclesiastical and architectural patronage.⁷⁷ In Nova Scotia he was all set to develop and build the college planned by a rich and "intelligent Christian lady" when his second wife's health necessitated his return to England. His Canadian adventure had, however, included a trip to the United States where he was struck by "the free, practical way in which Americans treat church architecture".⁷⁸ Galloway's own "first essay in chapel-building" had been his chapel in West Bromwich; in St John, New Brunswick he built a brick 600-seater; and at Bishopsgate he stood in at the London Chapel-Building Society when its secretary succumbed to ill health. It was Galloway who broached the idea of a national chapel-building society at the 1851 Northampton Autumnals and who steered the committee work that led to such a society's formation in 1853.⁷⁹

It was clear where Galloway's life-work now lay but it was John Crossley who brokered the deal that made this possible. In 1854 Crossley invited Galloway to Manor Heath, his house in Halifax: if Galloway were prepared to leave Bishopsgate in order to give all his time to the society, Crossley would guarantee his salary for three years at the Bishopsgate rate; after that Crossley would contribute to a new church in which Galloway would minister. "Mr. Galloway readily complied", and the result was Greville Place Congregational Church, Kilburn.⁸⁰

Galloway served the society for the rest of his life, latterly from West Bromwich, his second wife's home, where he had retired to enjoy heart trouble, bronchitis, and "derangement of the biliary system". Most of this account is drawn from his *Year Book* obituary but that rings true, however conventionally written. Galloway's pastoral gifts were undoubted:

he combined solidarity of judgment with a sincerity and simplicity that discarded all assumption. Clerical and official stiffness were alike foreign to

77 Sir Samuel Marling Bt, (1810-1883), was patron of two livings and builder of Selsley parish church (G. F. Bodley, 1861) with a superb array of Morris & Co. stained glass, their first such commission; from 1831 to the 1850s Marling had been a member and later a deacon of Old Chapel, Stroud, and remained a benefactor thereafter. M. Hoy and A. Hoy, *They Met in a Barn: The Story of Congregationalism in Stroud 1687-1987* (Stroud: Stroud Congregational Church, 1987), *passim*.

78 *CYB* (1887), p.199. Was it in part Galloway's influence which encouraged English Congregationalists to keep a weather eye on transatlantic developments: viz. H. M. Dexter's article in *Congregational Quarterly*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (April 1859), pp. 186-214, partly reproduced as "American Meeting-Houses considered Historically and Suggestively". in *CYB* (1860), pp. 226-231.

79 *CYB* (1887), p. 199; J. C. Galloway, "Congregational Chapel Extension", *CYB* (1852), pp. 83-94.

80 *CYB* (1887), p. 200.

his nature ... He loved to labour among the working classes, cherishing for them a warm and trustful sympathy.⁸¹

His personal credibility was enviable: "His direct influence with some munificent givers, and the confidence with which others were inspired through observing the operations of the society, brought to its funds many large contributions and bequests".⁸² Most impressive of all, however, was Gallaway's architectural empathy: he wrote *Practical Hints* and saw it through two new editions, his hand was surely behind Robert Ashton's generous allocation of space for chapel descriptions in the *Year Book*, he could speak as an equal to the society's examining architects. To give a further instance, it was Gallaway whose good offices did most to set the young John Sulman on his early career as a leading chapel architect.⁸³

In July 1873, 320 subscribers presented Gallaway with an address and a "substantial gift". The presentation was at Manor Heath, home of the society's most munificent giver. Thirteen years later, the *Year Book* summed up his career: "The work of his life has left a broad and lasting mark on the Congregational buildings of the United Kingdom".⁸⁴ Thirteen years before that presentation at Manor Heath it was reported that the society had "secured the services of a gentleman" to act as architectural consultant and to "aid in other office duties".⁸⁵ The new post was almost certainly subsidised from Gallaway's own pocket. In 1863 it was placed on a more satisfactory footing and in 1886 its holder, Charles Edward Conder (c. 1828-1911), a civil engineer, succeeded Gallaway as secretary.⁸⁶

This unflappably retiring fellow was the safest pair of hands imaginable. For forty-three years Conder's practical good sense alerted countless chapel-building committees to pitfalls and elephant traps. At the turn of the twentieth century, when he lived with an invalid sister near the Horniman Museum, in Forest Hill, his salary was £300; three years later he retired on a pension of £129. His "former comrades" (their phrase) on the committee paid tribute to his "cheerfulness and urbanity".⁸⁷

The Conders were one of Congregationalism's more surprising families. They had been Dissenters since the Great Ejectment, farmers, ministers of religion, educationists, tradesmen and mental-art men*, booksellers and engravers, travellers, cartographers, army officers in useful regiments, engineers, and architects. C. E. Conder compounded and internalized their merits.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 200.

83 Z. S. Edwards, "The Life and Work of Sir John Sulman 1849-1934, Vol. I, Sulman in England 1849-1885" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Technology, Sydney (New South Wales), 2006), pp. 73, 121, 150.

84 *CYB* (1887), p. 201.

85 ECBS, *Report* (1860), p. 16.

86 ECBS, *Report* (1863), p.10; (1904), p. 12. Conder described himself in Census returns as a Civil Engineer.

87 ECBS, *Report*: London Congregational Library MSS: Minute Book, Vol. 7, pp. 71-2, 85, 91.

His father was Josiah Conder (1789-1855), bookseller, man of letters, hymn-writer, and editor.⁸⁸ One brother, Eustace Rogers Conder (1820-1892), was the leading Congregational minister in Leeds; another brother, Francis Roubiliac Conder (1815-1889), was a civil engineer and railway pioneer, with a literary bent.⁸⁹ Francis's middle name demonstrates family pride in their descent from Louis Roubiliac, the Huguenot sculptor, and it was that connection which helped to explain the family's aesthetic and architectural interests.⁹⁰ Charles Edward Conder's first cousin, also a Roubiliac descendant and also a Congregationalist, was Thomas Roger Smith (1830-1903), a formative influence in the teaching of architecture and in the evolution of its professional training.⁹¹ Three of C. E. Conder's nephews became architects: Eustace Lauriston Conder (b. 1863) in Buenos Aires, Roger Thomas Conder (1854-1906) in London, and Josiah Conder (1852-1920) in Tokyo.⁹² This Josiah Conder, a pupil of his kinsman T. Roger Smith, was an important figure in the westernization of Japanese architecture and its professional training after the Meiji Restoration. There were even more architectural Condors. Alfred Conder (1845-1931), a deacon at Park Chapel, Hornsey, was C. E. Conder's second cousin-once-removed; a few years after Charles Edward's retirement Alfred became the society's consultant architect.⁹³ He lacked the Roubiliac gene but he benefited from other connections; a Congregational cousin married that architectural grandee, Aston Webb, who was one of Alfred's proposers for FRIBA and with whom Alfred's son Rowland (1880-1955) worked as an assistant before starting practice on his own account in 1907.⁹⁴ Thus, without stirring from his house in Forest Hill or his office in Moorgate (or later in Memorial Hall), Charles Edward Conder had his finger on the pulse of the architectural profession as well as the Congregational denomination.

VII: Proof of the Pudding or Icing on the Cake? Square Chapel, Halifax

The Congregational Union's Assemblies naturally attracted Congregationalism's chapel builders. In May 1858 the Assembly's "Lay Delegates and Visitors" included

88 For Josiah Conder, see *ODNB*.

89 For Eustace Rogers Conder, see *CYB* (1893), pp. 214-7; for Francis Roubiliac Conder, see E. Hampden-Cook, *The Register of Mill Hill School 1807-1926* (London: priv., 1926), p. 40.

90 For Louis François Roubiliac (1695-1762), see *ODNB*.

91 For Thomas Roger Smith, see *ODNB*. Between c. 1861 and c. 1881 the Smiths lived two houses away from C. E. Conder.

92 In 1881 Eustace Lauriston Conder, described in the Census returns as "Architecture Pupil" (of T. Roger Smith's?), with "Art Student" superimposed, was lodging with C. E. Conder; for his cousin, Roger Thomas Conder (who was a pupil of Thomas Roger Smith), see Felstead et al., *Directory of British Architects, 1834-1900*, pp. 198-9; for R. T. Conder's brother, Josiah (1852-1920), another pupil of Smith's, see Catalogue, *Josiah Conder: A Victorian Architect in Japan* (Tokyo: Kenchiku Gahou Inc., 2009).

93 For Alfred Conder, see Felstead, et al., *Directory of British Architects, 1834-1900*, p. 198.

94 For Sir Aston Webb (1849-1930), see *ODNB*; for Rowland Conder, see Hampden-Cook, *The Register of Mill Hill School 1807-1926*, p. 211; I am indebted to Dr Ian Dungavell for confirmation of the Aston Webb link.

Joshua Wilson, his cousin John Remington Mills, Samuel Morley, Edward Baines of Leeds (Eustace Rogers Conder's future father-in-law), Charles Reed (a London brother-in-law of Baines's), W. D. Wills, three paper-making Spicers, and Henry Wright, then still living in Birmingham; there was also T. E. Plint of Leeds.⁹⁵ That Autumn (18-21 October) the attenders included Plint, Morley, Morley's Nottingham cousin Arthur who was one of the society's treasurers, Manchester's George Hadfield, Bradford's William Byles (like Baines, a newspaper proprietor and editor), and a formidable quartet, Titus Salt of Bradford and John, Joseph, and Francis Crossley of Halifax.⁹⁶ Like Samuel Morley and Plint, J. C. Gallaway attended both assemblies. Given that the Autumnals were held in Halifax, the Crossley presence is hardly surprising. Religious revival was palpably in the air and 1858 saw the completion of two of Yorkshire's, indeed England's, most ambitious Congregational churches. Neither needed help from the society but each was a monument to one of the society's largest givers. Titus Salt had provided Lockwood and Mawson's Graeco-Roman temple across the way from his works at Saltaire and the Crossleys had led in the rebuilding of Halifax's Square Congregational Church, where the Congregational Union's Annual Sermon was preached "to a crowded audience" at the close of the Autumnal Meetings.⁹⁷

The new Square expressed all to which Congregationalists might aspire and all that prudent Congregationalists were warned not to emulate. It was an object lesson in pride of place. Its architect, Joseph James, of Furnival's Inn, Holborn, "a man of singularly quiet and unassuming demeanour", was thirty years old.⁹⁸ He could not have had a more auspicious ancestry, short of being a Conder. His father, Thomas James (1789-1873), "of a pious Puritan stock ... staunch Nonconformists for generations", was a Congregational minister who, like Robert Ashton, had left pastoral charge to service a denominational auxiliary.⁹⁹ In Thomas James's case this was the Colonial Missionary Society under whose auspices J. C. Gallaway had gone to Nova Scotia; Thomas would go on to service almost to fruition the slow-moving scheme for London's Memorial Hall.¹⁰⁰ Joseph also had a ministerial uncle, John Angell James, of Carrs Lane, Birmingham, a household name in all evangelical circles.¹⁰¹ Although not perhaps his most influential building, Square

95 These attenders are listed in *CYB* (1859), pp. 4-5. For (Sir) Edward Baines (1800-1890) and (Sir) Charles Reed (1819-1881), see *ODNB*.

96 These attenders are listed in *CYB* (1859), pp. 36-8. William Byles (1807-1891) turned the *Bradford Observer* into an equivalent of Edward Baines's *Leeds Mercury*: see [F. G. Byles], *William Byles by His Youngest Son* (Weymouth: priv. 1932).

97 *CYB* (1859) p. 74. The preacher was Samuel Martin (1817-1878), minister of Westminster Chapel. "who concluded the Meetings ... by fervent prayer and benediction".

98 C. F. Hayward, "The Late Mr. Joseph James", in *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* (1875), p. 221.

99 *CYB* (1874), pp. 335-7.

100 For the building of Memorial Hall, see C. Binfield, "Memory Enstructured. The Case of Memorial Hall", in M. Campbell et al., (eds), *Memory and Memorials 1789-1914: Literary and Cultural Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 160-174.

101 For John Angell James (1785-1859), see *ODNB*.

was Joseph James's most ambitious ecclesiastical commission. Its treatment in the 1858 *Year Book* indicates the scale of that ambition.

The *Year Book's* account is notable for its length, its detachment, and its straining after architectural effect.¹⁰² It is as much assessment as description. Was Gallaway the author? It addressed, if obliquely, many key points made by *Practical Hints*. Was it, perhaps, C. F. Hayward, a fellow architect who was to write James's obituary for the *RIBA Journal* seventeen years later?¹⁰³ Hayward's East Bergholt Congregational Church, built at a fifteenth of the cost of Square, but opened debt-free thanks to its £150 grant from "that invaluable Society, 'The English Congregational Chapel-building Society'", was also featured in the 1858 *Year Book*, where it was praised as an "example of what a little trouble and artistic thought can make out of commonplace materials."¹⁰⁴ Was it indeed primarily written for the *Year Book* or lifted from another source? Whatever the provenance, its author was determined to give "the best idea which pen and ink can give of this unique Congregational church".

James's church was Square only in the sense that it was built on Square Road next to the original Square Chapel, an elegantly confident, red-brick Georgian building which was now to serve as Sunday schools.¹⁰⁵ Square Church was also elegantly confident but there was nothing square about it. It seated 1,040 adults and 200 children. It cost perhaps £15,000, one third of which allowed for the tower, spire, clock, stained glass, oak pews, "and the substitution of Caen stone for ashlar in all the inside stone work", all of it from "various special sources". The Crossleys were by no means Square's only rich family but they and their firm were the prime "special source". Their giving was Square's transformative agent.

The *Year Book* set scene and challenge, style and site. Each was problematic:

The period of architecture selected ... for [the architect's] authorities and details, is that of the fourteenth century, when the decorated style was becoming further developed, though scarcely improved; for in architecture the latest is rarely the best. In adopting this style, however, he has felt himself at liberty not servilely to copy it; and some originality is exhibited in his adaptation of the details to objects for which they were not originally designed.

Hence a *church* – nave, with cloisters on each side, north and south transepts, tower and spire at the junction of the south transept with the nave, a spirelet on the opposite side, and a projection for the organ in the place of the usual choir:

But in speaking of the body of the edifice as a nave, it must not be supposed that this occupies the western end, and the small substitute for the chancel

102 The following account is taken from *CYB* (1858), pp. 264-6.

103 Hayward, "The Late Mr. Joseph James". For Charles Forster Hayward (1830-1905), who practised with T. Roger Smith, see Felstead et al., *Directory of British Architects, 1834-1900*, p. 427.

104 *CYB* (1858), pp. 266-7.

105 For Square Chapel, attributed to Thomas Bradley (1753-1833), see J. Sutcliffe, *The History and Architecture of Square Chapel Halifax* (Hebden Bridge: J. Sutcliffe, 1996).

the eastern end. On the contrary, the site, which has cramped the architect very much, and will never give the building a fair chance of showing all its beauties, has compelled the usual position to be reversed.

Square rears today above the beholder in its ruined state as it did in its blackened prime.¹⁰⁶ and the challenge posed by site and style accentuated the challenge posed by the requirements of Congregational worship. Before confronting this, the *Year Book* concentrated on the building's beauties, its bone structure and detailing, none of it viewable as a totality.

The visitor entered from Square Road, at the church's east end. The entrance was a deeply recessed doorway, flanked each side by a double niche and surmounted by a small gable. Above this rose the east front, seventy-two feet high, first the great seven-light east window, thirty-six feet high, then, in the gable's apex, a four-light window, louvred for ventilation. A broad buttress flanked each side of the gable; in each were inserted doors and steps to the east gallery and above each, rising eighty feet, were perforated turrets topped by crocketed finials. So to the sides, "divided into bays by broad buttresses, within which run the 'cloisters' – rather low-covered passages into the transepts, entered by doors in the first bay, and lighted by broad, flat-arched windows in the other bays". The transepts too were carefully lit. Each had three single-light windows to light the ground floor seats and a generous wheel window for the gallery. James's manipulation of light and ventilation, ingress and egress, demonstrated the flexibility of the Gothic style, however decorated, if more or less correctly handled.

The devil – or rather the divine – lay in the detailing; the crockets, emblematic of the Resurrection (and useful in throwing off the rain), the metal cross with ears of wheat which surmounted the east gable. It was celebrated in the exuberant tracery of the great east window and the nave windows "of almost cathedral size, the head of each being filled-in with varied geometric and flamboyant tracery"; the second window in the nave's north side was singled out as "a beautiful specimen of pure flamboyant". It clustered round the entrance: the polished Purbeck marble pillars of the entrance arcade, the oak door's "richly foliated hinge-irons", and the Caen stone pillars flanking the door – the foliage on their capitals "will attract the admiration of all passers, and speaks highly of the talents of the carver", London's J. W. Searle.

Here was flamboyance by design. The traceried windows were correctly flamboyant, but Square's metaphysical flamboyance lay in the tower and spire, "understood to be from the Messrs. Crossley". Together they rose 235 feet, incorporating on three faces Messrs. Moore of Clerkenwell's "large illuminated clock" and topped by a "lofty vane, with ... conspicuous gilded cock". The tower, surmounted by a pierced battlement was "beautifully proportionate" but the eye-catcher, at least from afar, was the octagonal spire, its springing from the tower

106 *CYB* (1858), p. 265 drew attention to "the adjoining mill, the smoke of whose chimney bids fair speedily to give the new spire one at least of the beauties of the tents of Kedar – to make it 'black, but' *not* 'comely'".

“hidden by crocketed pinnacles at each angle”. It was further “crocketed at the angles, and on the cardinal faces is broken into stages by lucerne lights. The ends of the drip-stones over the windows are adorned with the usual heads of saints, kings, and martyrs; and there are some spirited monsters on gargoyles”. As for points of criticism, the clock faces might have been more useful had they been higher up (which the design hardly allowed) and the bowed spire more impressive had its angle of diminution varied: “though at a distance this peculiarity cannot be observed, the curve, where it can be seen, detracts from the sublime effect produced by a straight, regular, upward-piercing spire”.

Square’s exterior, flamboyant in both senses, more than passed muster. What of the space within?

... the architect has been compelled to consider more closely the requirements of Independent worship than the peculiarities of the Gothic style. These requirements are, of course, that the pulpit should be the main object, subsidiary to nothing, and seen by all; and that the roof should be so constructed as to convey to every corner of the room the inflections of the voice of the preacher.

That voice had to carry across a nave ninety-five feet long, forty-five feet high and forty-five feet broad, and into transepts twenty-eight feet wide; its first major test probably came with the Union’s Annual Sermon in October 1858.¹⁰⁷

It was an unusually well-appointed interior. The nave was served by two stone-flagged aisles, each six feet six inches wide, each carpeted and with provision – an uncharacteristic imprecision here – “for the ventilation and warming of the building”. The walls were wainscotted in oak, “with a small carved moulding”. The windows were quarried glass (from Lavers of Southampton Street, London), “with a judicious but sparing use of deep colours in the traceried heads”. The pews, like the wainscoting, were in oak; each was low-backed, cushioned and carpeted, and furnished with a book-drawer and a book-board. The internal eye-catchers, however, were the pulpit and table, the organ, and the ceiling.

In the space between the transepts, visible to all in the nave, transepts, and galleries, was a raised dais, surrounded – protected? – by a light oak railing and dignified by a kneeling board (surely not for communion; perhaps for weddings?) On the dais stood a “handsome oak communion table”, and behind it an octagonal Caen stone pulpit, reached either side by Caen stone steps with encaustic tiled inserts and balustrades “pierced with circular openings enclosing pierced quatrefoils”. The description takes flight at this point, winging like the Word from Square’s preacher, whose pulpit itself “springs independent of this ascent”. On the eight sides of its base

are sunk medallions charged with the sacred emblems of the Passion in the following order:- 1, the cross; 2, the sacred monogram (I.H.S.): 3, the crown

107 Thursday evening, 21 October 1858, *CYB* (1859), p. 74.

of thorns, the hammer, nails, and pincers; 4, the ladder, the sponge upon a reed, and the spear; 5, an angel; 6, the seamless coat; 7, the scourges and the post; 8, the emblem of the Holy Spirit. The plinth over them is richly carved with vine leaves and corn; and each of the sides of the pulpit itself is a double-arch, richly decorated, a pinnacle from the canopy of the front arch being continued upwards and outwards to hold the book-board. The canopies over these arches are based upon admirably-carved heads, representing a king, a mitred bishop, an armed crusader, a nun, a monk, a Lutheran divine, etc.

Could there have been a more concentrated sermon in stone? The *Year Book* judged Square's pulpit to be "unique, in Yorkshire, for the beauty of its design, and the elaboration of its details".

Square's organ was behind the pulpit, its recess separated from the nave by an arch "equivalent to the chancel arch of an ordinary church". The positioning of an organ was a vexed chapel matter. Practical, acoustic, and aesthetic issues clashed. An organ behind the pulpit was bound to focus attention, perhaps worship. Was that acceptable? The *Year Book* did not address that matter, but its phrase, "an ordinary church", suggested unease:

The front of this organ is as beautifully designed as any other part of the building, with which it is made entirely to harmonise, but the towering pipes of its pedal notes are seen at the back and it would be an improvement if some reversed screen-work could be erected to hide them.

Aesthetic considerations had a practical purpose when harmony was at their root. That was so with the ceiling. This was panelled and five-sided for acoustic purposes. It was also "richly coloured and emblazoned, under the architect's designs" by a Bradford decorator, Haley. In the *Year Book's* words the roof trusses sprang

from carved caps, supported by marble shafts resting upon trusses, each carved with angelic busts nearly the size of human life. These angelic figures have each a flat nimbus, and their wings are folded backwards as if to strengthen the truss, and they are represented in the following acts, beginning on the side nearest the transept:- 1, angel ringing the sacred bells; 2, angel playing the triangle; 3, angel playing the viol; 4, angel playing the taret; 5, angel unrolling a scroll; 6, angel playing the harp; 7, angel playing the cymbals; 8, angel in the attitude of adoration.

What did the Union's Autumnal sermon-tasters, nationally representative of Congregationalism, make of what they shared in Square with musical angels, a nun, a monk, an armed crusader, a mitred bishop, a Lutheran divine, let alone the usual saints, kings, martyrs, and spirited monsters high on the spire, an ecclesiastical tradition annexed in Dissenting stone?

VIII: From Architecture to Ecclesiology – The Shaping of a Distinctive Mindset

Square Church was as grandly revolutionary in its Victorian way as Square Chapel, its neighbour and predecessor, had been. The chapel was remarkable for style (its “slightly gauche Palladian” was “that of the grander country houses of the region”), material (brick, in a stone town), and roof-span (perhaps “the greatest unsupported ... of any building” then in Britain).¹⁰⁸ The church was its match in width and aspiration, its rich detail “freely modelled on Selby Abbey and other medieval precedents but used with complete license”, its Congregational spire inviting comparison with Pugin’s Catholic spire at Cheadle.¹⁰⁹ That was not a fanciful comparison. Stanley-Morgan, for example, discerned Pugin’s influence in Joseph James’s Spring Hill College, the theological college built nobly “on one of the highest points of Moseley Common” which – as the *Congregational Year Book* tantalisingly explained – was to Birmingham’s south what Oscott was to its north.¹¹⁰ Spring Hill’s style was early fifteenth-century, Decorated (as was Pugin’s mature preference) rather than Perpendicular, and its contractor was George Myers, “one of the great master builders of the Victorian age”, the Yorkshireman now based in Lambeth who had been “the rock on which Pugin built his architectural career”.¹¹¹

This is to say no more than that James was alertly established in an increasingly assured profession. His own professional pedigree was as respectable and as artful as it was also evangelically well-connected. His master, Samuel Whitfield Daukes, his fellow pupil and future brother-in-law, Walter Blackett, together with Daukes’s master, James Pigott Pritchett (senior) and Daukes’s partner, James Medland, were successful men with useful chapel links and broadly-based practices.¹¹² Ecclesiastically they swam in an increasingly Gothic stream. In James’s case, at least, there were intellectual and technological implications.¹¹³ For chapel architects wrote about their work and not only for advertisement. They rooted it confidently in history and annexed that boldly to their own tradition. As professional men verging on tradesmen they responded to need and opportunity but their response required justification; it acquired a moral and confessional dimension. The pattern was set by a London Wesleyan, William Fuller Pocock (1779-1849).

108 Thus K. Powell, *The Fall of Zion* (London: Save, 1980), un-paginated. Square Chapel’s architect had designed Titus Salt’s favourite house, Crow Nest.

109 *Ibid.*; St. Giles, the Cheadle church, was completed in 1846.

110 Stanley-Morgan, “Some Victorian Chapel-Builders”, p. 241; *CYB* (1858), p. 263. Oscott was the Catholic seminary.

111 *Ibid.*, pp. 263-4; R. Hill, *God’s Architect. Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), pp. 414, 194.

112 For Daukes (1811-1880), Blackett, Pritchett (1789-1868), and Medland (1809-1884), see Felstead et al., *Directory of British Architects, 1834-1900*, pp. 235, 87, 741, 613.

113 He belonged to the Foreign Architectural Books Society, and had been assistant to (Sir) Horace Jones (1819-1887), from 1864 architect and surveyor to the City of London. See *The Builder*, Vol. 33, (19 June 1875), p. 549.

Pocock had graduated from superior joinery to architecture, making his money as a developer and consolidating his professional reputation with useful surveyorships. He was a safe pair of hands. Conviction and family connection embedded him into the building and Methodist worlds, with a Congregational admixture.¹¹⁴ His own preferences were Classical but he was alert to the drift of fashion and turned his hand with equal dexterity to *cottages ornés* and Commissioners' Gothic. He demonstrated his workmanship versatility in three well-timed pattern books for houses, the finishing of their interiors, and churches, published between 1807 and 1819, each of them twice reprinted before 1837.¹¹⁵ The book on churches and chapels has been fairly described as "the only practical guide to the subject until the wave of Ecclesiologically-inspired publications in the 1840s ... an invaluable summary of current thinking ... on the eve of the biggest church building programme since the Middle Ages".¹¹⁶

The Wesleyan Pocock's first major chapel was an austere respectable Classical essay for Congregationalists just south of Sloane Square.¹¹⁷ His son, William Willmer Pocock (1813-1899), who intensified the family's Methodism, was responsible for that most influential of Victorian Baptist chapels, the Metropolitan Tabernacle at Newington Butts (1861). The Tabernacle's style was a theatrical Grecian – in part, it was said, because Greek was the language of the New Testament – but W. W. Pocock's assistants included James Cubitt (1835-1912), a son of the Baptist manse and most scholarly and inventive of Dissenting Goths, whose *Church Design for Congregations* (1870) and *Popular Handbook of Nonconformist Church Building* (1892) provided – if confirmation were still needed – a lively rationale, at once intellectual and practical, for a truly Dissenting Gothic.¹¹⁸

Cubitt's sources for *Church Design* were comprehensive, indeed catholic, and up-to-date. They included G. E. Street's *Gothic Architecture in Spain* (1865), Viollet-le-Duc's *Dictionnaire Raisoné de l'Architecture Française* (1854-1868), and Britton and Pugin's *Illustrations of Public Buildings of London* (1825-8).¹¹⁹ The Pugin of Britton and Pugin was A. C. Pugin, the famous architect's draughtsman

114 C. Binfield, "Architects in Connexion: Four Methodist Generations", in J. Garnett and C. Matthew (eds), *Revival and Religion Since 1700* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993), pp. 153-165.

115 W. F. Pocock, *Architectural Designs for Rustic Cottages ... Villas etc.* (London: J. Taylor, 1807); idem, *Modern Finishings for Rooms* (London: J. Taylor, 1811); idem, *Designs for Churches and Chapels of Various Dimensions and Styles ...* (London: J. Taylor, 1819).

116 C. Webster, in F. W. Pocock, *Designs for Churches and Chapels* (3rd ed. [1835], reprinted Reading: Spire Books Ltd., 2010), p. 4.

117 Ibid., pp. 18-20, plates 9-12. Ranelagh Chapel opened in 1818; it passed from Congregational to Presbyterian use in 1845; its congregation moved to Halkin Street as Belgrave Presbyterian Church in 1866 and Ranelagh Chapel was demolished c. 1870; what is now the Royal Court Theatre occupies part of its site.

118 Binfield, "Architects in Connexion: Four Methodist Generations", pp. 166-172. For Cubitt see C. Binfield, *The Contexting of a Chapel Architect: James Cubitt 1836-1912* (London: The Chapels Society, 2001), Occasional Publications 2.

119 J. Cubitt, *Church Design for Congregations: Its Developments and Possibilities* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1870), p. 1.

father, but the reference indicates the interconnectedness of the architectural and related worlds. Cubitt's books, moreover, continued and updated the work of Gallaway among Congregationalists and F. J. Jobson among Methodists. Jobson calls for comment at this point.

Frederick James Jobson (1812-1881), like Gallaway, was a minister; unlike Gallaway, he had persevered with his architectural training and, once ordained, he became more prominent in his denomination.¹²⁰ It was his *Chapel and School Architecture* (1850), which brought Jobson to wide Wesleyan notice and it had been his training under the Roman Catholic E. J. Willson (1787-1854) which had made a natural Goth of him. In the 1820s Willson had been associated with Britton, that "highest authority among the writers on architectural antiquities", and with A. C. Pugin; in the 1830s he was associated with the younger Pugin.¹²¹ In *Chapel and School Architecture* Jobson, who was the younger Pugin's contemporary, affirmed hardly less dogmatically that Gothic was Christian architecture "as distinctly and emphatically, as the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman, are Pagan". In 1850 that was almost a commonplace but Jobson pressed his point. Gothic architecture was "ENGLISH CHURCH ARCHITECTURE". It was the "natural embodiment of Christian worship in our own land". It was an expression of Truth. Here Jobson confronted his Wesleyan constituency: in "these times of Tractarian heresy" it must be realized that truth in architecture was not "necessarily connected with Error in Religion"; it ministered to evangelical need.¹²²

Architectural truth is a precondition of architectural genius but it can no more guarantee that than it can flourish in a vacuum. What is noteworthy about the interconnected flurry of mid-nineteenth-century chapel building and architectural writing is how close they were to Anglican and Roman Catholic developments. Fashion can be intellectually as well as aesthetically infectious. It is sometimes indistinguishable from emulation. Emulation and fashion coincide with turns of mind. They colour, enlarge, and transform them. Here too Congregationalists are representative. They indicate the networking impact of personalities rather than systems. All these trends collide in one man, John Blackburn (1792-1855).¹²³

120 For Jobson, Connexional Book Steward from 1864 and President of Conference 1869, see J. A. Vickers (ed.), *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000), p. 182.

121 F. J. Jobson, *Chapel and School Architecture, as Appropriate to the Buildings of Nonconformists, particularly to those of the Wesleyan Methodists...* (London: Hamilton, Adams, Co., 1850), pp. vii, 16; for Willson, see Felstead et al., *Directory of British Architects. 1834-1900*, p. 1003. Willson and Britton (1771-1857) are best followed in Rosemary Hill's *God's Architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain*; his collaboration can be charted in A. C. Pugin and J. Britton, *Specimens of the Architectural Antiquities of Normandy* (1828); A. C. Pugin and E. J. Willson (1821-3), *Specimens of Gothic Architecture selected from various antient edifices in England*, 2 vols (1821-3); A. C. Pugin, E. J. Willson and A. W. Pugin, *Examples of Gothic Architecture*, 3 vols (1831-36).

122 Jobson, *Chapel and School Architecture*, pp. 15, 24, 40.

123 For John Blackburn, see *CYB* (1856), pp. 208-10; A. Peel, *The Congregational Two Hundred 1530-1948* (London: Independent Press, 1948), pp. 138-9. The broad context of his interests is indicated by his correspondence held in Dr Williams's Library (NC. L52).

Blackburn was credible on several counts. He was a slightly older contemporary and friend of Robert Ashton, John Campbell, and Joshua Wilson. As the son and brother of London liverymen (the family business was scale making), he was sufficiently respectable. As one of Thomas Wilson's men, an *alumnus* of Hoxton and minister at Clarendon, Pentonville (1822-1855), one of Wilson's most flourishing London chapels, he was ministerially prominent. As editor of the *Congregational Magazine* (1818-1845), the *Congregational Calendar* (1840-1848), and the *Congregational Year Book* (1846-1847), and as Secretary of the national Congregational Union (1834-1847), he was a key figure in a consolidating denomination. Few ecclesiastical or political trends escaped his judiciously conservative gaze. He had facts at his disposal and strategies in his mind with an abiding if not always sufficiently persuasive sense of history to cement them; in the 1840s he originated the ill-fated Wycliffe Society as a Nonconformist variant of the Parker and Camden Societies. He was also architecturally literate.

It ran in the family. Blackburn's younger brother, James (1803-1854), was a London architect and engineer whose transportation to Van Diemen's Land for forgery in 1833 preceded a distinguished career in Hobart and Melbourne where his engineering usefulness with roads, bridges, and water supplies marched with church building in the Greek, Gothic, and Norman styles, and the accumulation of an architectural library.¹²⁴ Back in London John Blackburn utilised what was clearly a shared interest to shrewd effect in 1847 with a carefully seminal *Year Book* essay: "Remarks on Ecclesiastical Architecture as Applied to Nonconformist Chapels".¹²⁵

John Blackburn's "Remarks" struck all the right chords. An artfully shaped historical survey encompassed Herod's Temple ("reared rather for sacerdotal than congregational services and addressing the imagination rather than the judgment") and his people's synagogues (where worship was "an exercise of the understanding rather than of the fancy", its duties "not performed by the priests, but by the intelligence, zeal, and piety of the people").¹²⁶ The Congregational propriety of that comparison was steadily maintained as Blackburn measured one defective style against another (the Grecian "identified with ... all the abominable idolatries of a classical mythology", the Gothic "adapted to ... Popish superstition"), and as he considered the post-Constantinian evolution that encouraged Christians to recycle law courts and mercantile exchanges, basilicas adaptable to the needs of large assemblies.¹²⁷ The long view allowed Blackburn to be even-handed. He criticized the impact of Methodism on preaching-house style, especially in London (Wesley's

124 For James Blackburn, see H. Preston, "James Blackburn (1803-1854)", in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, I (Melbourne University Press, 1966); J. S. Curl, *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture* (2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 90.

That James was not airbrushed from his family is suggested by John's active interest after 1834 in promoting Congregational ministry in Tasmania (Van Diemen's Land) and Victoria.

125 *CYB* (1847), pp. 150-163.

126 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

127 *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 151.

City Road Chapel “scarcely possesses an architectural character”; Whitefield’s Tabernacle “was a mass of architectural deformity”; Rowland Hill’s Surrey Chapel was “little better than an architectural eyesore”; Thomas Wilson’s chapels, “though well adapted to hold large audiences”, were “bare” and “unsightly”.¹²⁸ He alerted his readers to the perilous allure of symbolism: “to take warning ... against being led by the taste and terminology of architects into such mystic follies”. Here he had the Cambridge Camden Society in his sights, with its “monkish efforts to veil again the truth of God in shadows, after we have been permitted, as ‘with open fire’, to gaze upon it”.¹²⁹

Such criticisms were as suggestive as they were predictable. They cleared the air. If symbolism were guarded against, if the architectural proprieties were heeded, if fitness for purpose (he did not use the phrase) were achieved, if “the pulpit, not the altar, the teacher, not the symbol” were indeed conspicuous, and if costs were taken into proper account, then the English style “popularly denominated the Gothic style”, could be considered. He clinched his argument by illustrating six Grecian chapels “of great beauty and excellence” which had nonetheless been forced to sacrifice architectural propriety in order to allow people to hear and see, and then singling out for particular approval three “English” buildings.¹³⁰

The “English” three were not illustrated in Blackburn’s essay, but one had featured in the preceding *Year Book* and two in the *Congregational Calendar*, which Blackburn also edited. One of these was tantalisingly appropriate. For the next seventy years, perhaps longer, Highbury Chapel, Bristol, was to rank among the most influential of English Congregational churches, notable for ministry and membership alike. The *Calendar’s* description was sparing with detail (its “style ... prevailed in England during the fifteenth century”) and made no reference to William Butterfield, the young architect whose church this was.¹³¹ William Butterfield (1814-1890) was new to practice but his hitherto impeccable Evangelical credentials were cemented by his kinship to the Wills family, who were leading Bristol Congregationalists.¹³² At exactly the same time he was encountering the Cambridge Camden Society and entering the world of the Ecclesiologists, interpreting and vigorously developing the Puginian ideal for High-Church Anglicanism. He came to regard his charming essay for his entrepreneurial kinsmen’s co-religionists as an aberration. It was no such thing, even if he undertook no more such work for Dissenters.

128 *Ibid.*, pp. 156-7.

129 *Ibid.*, p. 152. He had particularly in mind two frequently reissued publications, John Mason Neale’s *A Few Words to Church Builders*, and *A Few Words to Church Wardens on Churches ...* (both Cambridge: Camden Society, 1841).

130 *CYB* (1847), pp. 158-161.

131 *The Congregational Calendar and Family Almanac* (1844), p. 121. Stone laid, 3 October 1842; opened 6 July 1843. [C. Stell], *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Central England* (London: HMSO, 1986), p. 64. In 1863, E. W. Godwin added a tower.

132 For Butterfield see *ODNB*; Curl, *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*, pp. 134-5.

What did Blackburn know or suspect of this in 1847? Having avowed his Protestantism he could commend the Cambridge men for their practical advice when it came to honesty of materials, good oak or local stone for preference, although if none could be found and there were relative ease of carriage, then why fear Purbeck marble or Caen stone or Bath stone (“easily worked, and durable when properly selected”)?¹³³ The way was paved for Square.

Like Jobson, perhaps a little ahead of him, Blackburn took his stand for truthfulness in building. He ended on a sermon note, resounding with helpful, indeed liberating, ambiguity:

There is a glory that excelleth all the pomp and beauty of
 – the high embower’d roof,
 With antic pillars massy proof,
 And storied windows richly dight,
 Casting a dim religious light –
 – a glory that is borrowed from spiritual worshippers, scriptural services,
 and an omnipresent Saviour in the midst ... May “the Apostle and High
 Priest of our profession” still preserve to our churches ... LIGHT and
 PERFECTION ...¹³⁴

IX: “We have to build up for ourselves a Life”

John Blackburn’s influence was blunted by the financial difficulties which clouded his last years and hastened his death but the extent to which a cultural mind-set was becoming engrained among Congregationalists is suggested by a cluster of essays published between 1869 and 1878. These were the work of an educated younger generation, out to demonstrate their confessional distinctiveness and their intellectual quality. In 1869 six of them collaborated in *Religious Republics*, a volume of essays by a republic of friends with no apparent editor and with no attribution beyond the table of contents.¹³⁵ Two were ministers, three were barristers, and one was a medical man. All were in their late twenties or early thirties, all belonged to established Baptist or Congregational families, all had useful commercial, industrial, and political connections.

Their aim was to describe “the religious system of Congregationalism, whether Baptist or Independent”, its distinctive forms of character and opinion, and the basis of reason on which it rested.¹³⁶ They modestly thought it “probable that the opinions they have expressed are commonly held by Congregationalists, or at least are prevalent in the younger generation of them”, and they staked their claim to equality with an eirenic epigraph from Baron Bunsen:

133 This was a direct if unattributed quotation from a Cambridge Camden publication. *CYB* (1847), p. 162.

134 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

135 *Religious Republics: Six Essays on Congregationalism* (London: Longman, Green, & Co., 1869).

136 “Preface”, *ibid.*

My general impression, that in the minds of the men of highest intellect a preparation is going forward for a new epoch ... a period of serious and yet free research after the reality of Christianity among the Catholics, and of advancement in the same direction among the learned Protestants, with a quick growth and spread of congregational life.¹³⁷

Architecture was embraced in "Congregationalism and Aesthetics" but each essay coloured the Congregational context for a distinctive approach. The essay on aesthetics was written by Thomas Harwood Pattison (1838-1904), then into his second pastorate as minister of Ryehill Baptist Church, Newcastle-on-Tyne. Pattison was the model of an up-and-coming minister.¹³⁸ In his teens the family church had been Bloomsbury Baptist Church. His father, Samuel Rowles Pattison (1809-1901), was a successful London solicitor by secular profession, a Baptist by religious profession, and a geologist by amateur preference; he was for years prominent in the legal and financial affairs of the Baptist Union until his connection with the Liberator Building Society brought his career and his reputation to a humiliating end.¹³⁹ The son inherited his father's intellectual curiosity; his aesthetic instinct had been developed by four years of architectural study before he turned to ministry.¹⁴⁰ Pattison was thus in the mould of Gallaway and Jobson. It was an apt coincidence (if coincidence plays much part in the rhythm of call and response) that Ryehill, Pattison's second church, was also the young James Cubitt's second church, a bold fusion of the Classical and the Romanesque, an idiosyncratic adaptation and scaling down of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, which had been launched by a sermon from C. H. Spurgeon. Pattison had been called to pull together its new fellowship.¹⁴¹

"Congregationalism and Aesthetics" was clearly driven by *Culture and Anarchy*, Matthew Arnold's latest goad to all thinking Nonconformists. It was a vigorous affirmation of Nonconformity's claim to sweetness and light (qualities which Matthew Arnold had made peculiarly his own) by a man who was advanced yet orthodox and commanded his pulpit. His rhetoric was enjoyably combative. Aesthetics was "the science which concerns itself with the theory and philosophy of taste".¹⁴² This was no doubt bad news for Dissent, that "species of eccentricity"

137 *Ibid.*, and epigraph. Baron Bunsen (1791-1860), diplomatist and (amateur) theologian. was Prussian minister to London, 1841-1854.

138 For information about T. H. Pattison and his family, I am indebted to Mrs Faith Bowers and Mrs Susan Mills.

139 *Baptist Magazine* (1902), pp. 31-2; also (1890), 98-100; see also D. Mckie, *Jabez: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Rogue* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), esp. pp. 21, 191, 203-204.

140 *The Examiner*, 82/11 (17 March 1904), p. 328. The architect's office is not specified; it is likeliest to have been that of John Gibson (1817-92), architect of Bloomsbury Chapel, or C. G. Searle (1816-81), who transferred his membership to Bloomsbury in the year of Pattison's baptism there.

141 For Ryehill, see Binfield, *The Contexting of a Chapel Architect: James Cubitt 1836-1912*, pp. 24-6.

142 T. H. Pattison, "Congregationalism and Aesthetics", in *Religious Republics*, p. 134.

(and the “Englishman has a deep-seated horror of eccentricity”), for was not Dissent “a direct violation of good taste?”¹⁴³ Pattison stirred harder. “Our Nonconformity does affect materially our doctrine, our practice, our worship, our training, our modes of thinking, and indeed our whole life ... Therefore it must be a power telling on taste”: and it was on the increase.¹⁴⁴ He was ready to counter-attack. He put words into the mouth of “a well-educated Nonconformist”:

I demand my share of light and sweetness quite as distinctly as Mr. Matthew Arnold and his school, being assured that it is desirable that I as well as they, without turning traitor to my principles, should “relish my being” and “enjoy ordinary life”. God surely made me a man before circumstances made me a Dissenter. I wish to live a life completer and more melodious than ever the life of the mere agitator and protester can be.¹⁴⁵

Here Pattison left the side of Edward Miall for that of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (“The Nonconformist of the seventeenth century had to use the Sword. The Nonconformist of the nineteenth oftener needs the Trowel. We have to build up for ourselves a life.”),¹⁴⁶ and annexed the New Testament:

The Gospel and Acts of the Apostles are undoubtedly the records of what certain decided nonconformists thought and felt ... said and did ... Christ himself was a dissenter all His life ... No one can read the Great Biography without being conscious of a fine harmony, or exquisite effortless unity, which plays freely through all Christ’s words, thoughts, and actions. He came to bring sweetness and light to man. He was the preacher of the beautiful. By His miracles He restored physical health, by His parables He extolled moral beauty, by His life he exhibited saintly beauty, by His death He restored heavenly beauty.¹⁴⁷

Harmony, unity, leading freely to true beauty and the enjoyment of fulness of life, was the prerogative of all who lived in the spirit of Christ. Pattison directed these key words to worship, education, architecture, amusement and recreation. In worship (“We aim at common worship”) there “is a marked simplicity” arising “from the natural outworking of principle”; “We reckon it to be right ... to appeal through the ear to the reason, the intellect, and the heart”. Any resulting baldness might be “in the most perfect taste. It is true to our belief; it refuses to introduce jarring elements. In this way we do homage to true aesthetic laws”. And as there must be “clear and harmonious connexion between the various parts of the service” (no part running “in its own peculiar groove”), so “in Nonconformist

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid., p. 137.

145 Ibid., p. 142.

146 Ibid., p. 145. *The Sword and The Trowel* was Spurgeon’s magazine, published monthly from 1865.

147 “Congregationalism and Aesthetics”, pp. 145-6.

meeting-houses there ought to be implicit trust in the power of simplicity from floor to ceiling, from porch to pulpit".¹⁴⁸

Pattison's use of "meeting-house" is suggestive but he did not develop it and perhaps he meant no more by it than a simple village chapel. On the face of it his argument was a reworking of Blackburn's. He dismissed Classical ("what teaching is there for us in classic plans or classic details?") and Gothic alike if it boiled down to fashion overcoming principle.¹⁴⁹ It hurt him that his co-religionists "have been so enamoured of the national style, that they have sown the land over with miserable imitations of Gothic churches", but if principle were recalled:

This abuse will cease. We want neither chancel nor transept, for we have no altars; we want no high-pitched roofs, for we have no incense to wreath up its curling smoke, and no surpliced choristers to pour forth chant and response ... I believe that a refined and well-educated Congregationalist must reject Gothic, just because if it pleases his eye it will violate his convictions; or if ... it satisfies his principles and demands, it must outrage his sense of beauty and harmony ...¹⁵⁰

What, then, was the way ahead? "The Congregationalist is to think for himself, and to speak for himself ... why should he not also design for himself?"¹⁵¹

We cannot indulge in symbolism ... All that is will be seen and understood by all ... We need nothing more than the apostles needed when they first met in the upper chamber ... But ... we are free to employ the ornamental as well as the useful ... We must preserve harmony in proportion; and in colour we may have frescoed walls and painted glass; we may call in the art of the sculptor and the worker in metals ... making God's house a Palace Beautiful for all who enter it.¹⁵²

God's Palace Beautiful, moreover, had a democratic aspect: "The beauty and ease of the theatre are matters of deeper interest to the audience than to the actors: it is just the same in our chapels"; and Pattison sought "that quiet sense of pleasure which contributes much more than is generally supposed to worshipping with profit":

a chapel carefully thought out in design and substantially executed in honest materials is a lasting proof of the Congregationalist system to clothe its principles decorously and in suitable garb. It will even become, if intelligently planned, an invaluable embodiment of the special tenets wherein we differ from the other Churches of Christendom ... [It] would be a constant protest

148 Ibid., pp. 147, 148, 150.

149 Ibid., p. 160.

150 Ibid., pp. 159-160.

151 Ibid., p. 160.

152 Ibid., p. 161.

against an inordinate veneration for tradition. It would be a silent appeal against the sensuous. It would be a plea eloquent and majestic from its very simplicity, against the letter which killeth when the spirit has no longer any life.¹⁵³

Ryehill was in a rapidly growing labourers' suburb. In 1871 Pattison moved to the heart of the Manchester School, a town-centre church in Rochdale, and from 1875, having "resolved to make a dash for freedom", he was in the United States, chiefly at Rochester Theological Seminary (NY) where an early pupil and later colleague was Walter Rauschenbusch, proponent of the Social Gospel.¹⁵⁴ For all the restlessness of his pastoral life, Pattison, friend of John Bright, correspondent of Spurgeon and R. W. Dale, tutor and colleague of Rauschenbusch, exemplified harmony. His emphasis on the spirit rather than the letter, on intelligent planning and honest materials, and on the godly democracy's pleasure principle, in fact precluded neither Gothic nor Classical styles.¹⁵⁵ What he advocated was not so much style-light as style-free; he pointed the way to a free style. He was in all essentials an Arts and Crafts man, a little ahead of his time.

One of T. H. Pattison's first outside engagements as a Baptist minister was to preach at the re-opening of Great Asby, a village cause in Westmorland which had been much helped by William Fawcett (1799-1874), a local minister of independent means.¹⁵⁶ Fawcett was a grandson of John Fawcett (1740-1817), the Yorkshire Baptist pioneer, and he was the father of William Mitchell Fawcett (b. 1839), one of the three barristers who contributed to *Religious Republics*.¹⁵⁷ W. M. Fawcett's essay, "The Congregational Polity", opened the collection.¹⁵⁸ It was written with an advocate's forceful clarity, readable, punchy, engaged, and informative, with data drawn impartially from Baptist and Congregational churches.¹⁵⁹ With its picture of Christians bonded in free and essentially democratic spiritual association, it sets the scene for a visual, mental, and political culture.

Fawcett's Congregational Church was "an association of persons of spiritual character, united by voluntary consent for the accomplishment of spiritual

153 Ibid., pp. 162-3.

154 *Examiner*, 82/11 (17 March 1904), p. 328.

155 That was just as well. West Street, Pattison's church in Rochdale, was a Classical building (1833) enlarged and improved in his time there. His senior deacon, G. T. Kemp (1810-1877), was a leading Rochdale manufacturer who had been a founder member and deacon at Bloomsbury Chapel and was a brother-in-law of Bloomsbury's founder, S. M. Peto (1809-1889).

156 In 1862: A. P. F. Sell, *Church Planting: A Study of Westmorland Nonconformity* (Worthing: H. E. Walter Ltd., 1986), p. 98. The Fawcetts had property at Crosby Garrett and useful mercantile and industrial connections with Hebden Bridge and Hull.

157 In 1861, while Pattison was still a student at Regent's Park College, Fawcett was a law student lodging in St John's Wood. For John Fawcett see *ODNB*.

158 W. M. Fawcett, "The Congregational Polity", in *Religious Republics*, pp. 1-59.

159 Fawcett's own allegiance has yet to be determined. He was the author of *A Compendium of the Law of Landlord and Tenant* (London, 1871; 3rd edn. 1905); by 1891 he was living comfortably in Hampstead Hill Gardens.

objects". Their leading consideration was "not what is expedient, but what saith the Scripture?" Their conviction was that "the New Testament contains all the principles of order and discipline requisite for constituting and governing Christian Societies" and where the Christian's "statute book" was silent, he would be "careful to base his procedure upon some general principle derived from inspired authority". There was thus room for responsible expediency.¹⁶⁰ Fawcett's consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of such scriptural democracy was shrewd. It led him clear-eyed to a civic conclusion; Congregationalists live in the world as it is:

If the lower middle class is saturated with the commercial spirit, its religious institutions are not likely to be free from the same influence. Novelists who hold up to ridicule the Congregational Salem may find similar food for their humour in our town-councils, boards of guardians, and wherever indeed the small shop-keeping classes rule.¹⁶¹

Such a situation was full of hope. Fawcett was writing in the wake of a quietly revolutionary Reform Act:

With the infusion of a larger number of the working classes, may come a more perfect conception of brotherhood; with the addition of a larger proportion of the educated classes, there may be fostered that diffidence of individual opinion, taught by knowledge and intercourse with the world, which is so important to the harmonious working of a democratic society.¹⁶²

Brotherhood and democracy were heady words in 1869. They bred in Fawcett a spirit of judicious optimism: "there must be some national benefit in the existence of a large number of communities, each member of which professes to conform his life to a high moral standard, and is bound under penalty of exclusion to abstain from open sin".¹⁶³ And to any who urged that Congregationalism demanded too much of ordinary human nature he had this clinching response: "It is no discredit to a Christian church that without Christianity it cannot succeed".¹⁶⁴

Spiritual democracy was the *leitmotiv* of the last and longest of the six essays. James Anstie's "The Spirit of Nonconformity".¹⁶⁵ Anstie (1836-1924) was the most solidly successful of the three barrister contributors. He lived comfortably in Kensington, took silk in 1882, became a Bencher of Lincoln's Inn and a Charity Commissioner.¹⁶⁶ In family tradition and in contemporary relevance he expressed

160 Fawcett, "Congregational Polity", pp. 1-5.

161 *Ibid.*, p. 56. Margaret Oliphant's *Salem Chapel* (Edinburgh: Blackwood) was published in 1863.

162 Fawcett, "Congregational Polity", p. 56.

163 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

164 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

165 J. Anstie, "The Spirit of Nonconformity", *Religious Republics*, pp. 202-278.

166 For Anstie, see *Who Was Who 1916-1928* (London: A. and C. Black, 1929), p. 26. I am indebted to Mrs K. Spackman for further information.

the spirit of Nonconformity. His brother-in-law (and fellow barrister), H. S. P. Winterbotham, had been MP for Stroud since 1867 and was regarded as a rising Liberal star, a role model for young political Dissenters.¹⁶⁷ Anstie himself was a fifth-generation Baptist. His family had long been embedded in the commercial, legal, medical, educational, and municipal life of Devizes.¹⁶⁸ By 1865, however, James Anstie had become, as he remained, a Congregationalist, transferring from New Baptist Church, Devizes, where he had been baptised in 1856, to John Stoughton's Kensington Chapel.¹⁶⁹

Anstie's London house was a Gothic villa; his London church was uncompromisingly Classical. It was, perhaps, a quite different church which had furnished a further link of friendship with Fawcett, to be added to law, Lincoln's Inn, and a Baptist heritage. This was Hare Court, a seventeenth-century cause transplanted from Aldersgate to Canonbury where it was housed in a building promoted by the London Congregational Chapel-Building Society. Its style was Early Decorated but its shape was octagonal, providing a grandly gathering space for a spiritual democracy, 1,150 sittings radiating from the pulpit so that all might see and hear.¹⁷⁰ Its architects, the dauntingly prolific Habershon brothers, designed J. C. Galloway's almost contemporary church in Kilburn.¹⁷¹ Its minister, Alexander Raleigh, rapidly attracted a large congregation which realized in worship and activity the harmony celebrated by T. H. Pattison; W. M. Fawcett, used recent statistics from Hare Court to illustrate the vigorous actuality of Congregational polity; and James Anstie became a long-standing friend of Raleigh's.¹⁷²

Anstie took as epigraph a phrase from Ephesians 4:3: "The Unity of the Spirit

167 For H. S. P. Winterbotham (1837-1873), Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office, 1871-1873, see *ODNB*. The Winterbothams replicated the Ansties as a broad-based Dissenting family: originally Baptist, they became increasingly Congregational, Henry among them. He died in Rome, and was buried in the Protestant cemetery, his funeral attended and his tombstone designed by a close friend, the architect Alfred Waterhouse (*Stroud Journal*, undated cutting, [20 December 1873]).

168 See L. Haycock, *John Anstie of Devizes 1743-1830: An Eighteenth-Century Wiltshire Clothier* (Stroud: Wiltshire Archeological and Natural History Society and Alan Sutton, Publishing 1991); J. and B. Hurley, *The New Baptist Church, Devizes: Brief History and Membership Book 1805-1942* (Devizes: New Baptist Church, 1991).

169 I am indebted to Mr J. Hurley for this information.

170 *CYB* (1856), p. 263; P. Temple, *Islington Chapels* (London: R.C.H.M.E., 1992), pp. 129-130. It affords a contrast – and vindicates Blackburn – to Trimen's Kensington Chapel, opened in 1855, seating 1200 and costing three times as much, A. Mearns, *London Congregational Directory and Church Guide* (London: Alexander and Shephard, 1889), p. 56.

171 *CYB* (1860), p. 248. The Habershons were of Rotherham Congregational and manufacturing stock.

172 Fawcett, "Congregational Polity", p. 35; M. Raleigh (ed.), *Alexander Raleigh: Records of His Life* (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1881), p. 210. Raleigh (1817-1880), was Chairman of C.U.E.W. in 1868, the year for which Fawcett extracted his Hare Court statistics. From 1875 he was minister of Kensington Chapel. Several other links suggest themselves, among them Anstie's interest in charity law and charitable activity: in 1901 he gave his house in the New Forest to be a Home of Rest for Congregational Ministers (*CYB* [1902], p. 146).

is the bond of Peace".¹⁷³ His theme was the immediacy of faith, and its creation of "a union and fellowship which is of its own nature free, unforced and spontaneous, determined and characterised by the fact of a spiritual presence and operation".¹⁷⁴ That fellowship was not "The Church", for Nonconformists "know nothing of the corporate entity suspended by theological theorists between heaven and earth".¹⁷⁵ Anstie's forensic mind had no room for such a concept:

... of that metaphysical abstraction which is called by some the Church, of that product of legal reasoning applied to religion, of that citizenship which seems invented only to explain an existing practice, [Nonconformists] find no record in Scripture, nor any evidence of its existence in fact.¹⁷⁶

What was a fact, however, was that the "whole history and structure of Christianity cry out against the alleged authority [of the Church] and summon men to believe in a spiritual creed and a free religion".¹⁷⁷ Thus did spirit inform polity and thus might the spirit of the age come into its own and the local church, the essential Christian unit, be free to evolve as the harmonious expression of the individual and the communal: "with Nonconformists the idea of religion is to this extent individualized, that with them every man's Christianity consists in his own personal relation to Christ", and for Nonconformists the wider unity was that of "man with man in Christ" with Christian love as "the essential and predominating fact and manifestation".¹⁷⁸ There was a Gladstonian ring to Anstie's Congregational conclusion that "no organization can be successful which does not save the right and duty of individual action and popular control".¹⁷⁹

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* mental-men were printers, publishers, draughtsmen, engravers, people on the cusp of more literary professions.

173 Anstie, "The Spirit of Nonconformity", p. 202.

174 *Ibid.*, p. 206.

175 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

176 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

177 *Ibid.*, p. 244.

178 *Ibid.*, pp. 256-7, 263.

179 *Ibid.*, p. 275.

UNUSUAL PATHS TO CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY: THE EXPERIENCE OF GEORGE SMITH (1803-1870) AND JOHN PYER (1790-1859)

The admission of George Smith and John Pyer into the Congregational ministry in 1827 came from unusual training and challenging introductory experiences. Their Christian service began, as teenagers, with different Methodist groups in Bristol. Pyer joined the Wesleyan Methodists in 1803, aged thirteen, and became a class leader and local preacher when he was nineteen. Smith began conducting worship with the Tent Methodist sect in 1820 when he was just seventeen.

The rationale for, and timing of, this article is that 18 April 2020 marked two hundred years since the Tent Methodist sect was established, two societies of which, led by Smith and Pyer, became Congregational churches. Secondly, 13 February 2020 marked one hundred and fifty years since the death of the greatly admired George Smith.

I: Tent Methodism

In 1814 George Pocock, the owner of a successful Bristol boarding school and another Wesleyan Methodist local preacher, designed and constructed a marquee type structure initially large enough to accommodate five hundred people. Together with Pyer and a few others, he took it to villages around Bristol where there were no Methodist chapels. This was the beginning of tent missions and over the next five years one, then a second, tent was transported between April and October each year to over one hundred different places in parts of southern England, from Bristol eastwards as far as Hungerford in west Berkshire, about sixty miles away. Despite success in achieving additional members for local Wesleyan societies, four hundred being the figure claimed in 1819, circuit leaders took exception to such inventiveness by laymen, and sought to curtail it. They failed to do so and after acrimonious written and verbal exchanges in early 1820, Pocock and Pyer were expelled. Immediately following their expulsions, the Tent Methodist sect was established on 18 April 1820 when a society of thirty five members, including four local preachers, was formed in a central Bristol chapel acquired from Baptists who had moved elsewhere. Subsequent progress was encouraging, and outreach extended to parts of south Wales, London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, as well as many other places around Bristol.

From about 1825, however, expansion halted and decline set in. The lack of consistent and continuing leadership support to the people in towns and villages visited, an inability to recruit sufficient numbers of preachers, partly because women were not permitted to hold any meaningful roles, the reduced commitment of Pocock, the principal decision maker, and the defection of three key preachers to other nonconformist denominations, one to the Baptists as well as Smith and Pyer to the Congregationalists, all contributed to the final demise.

That occurred in 1832 with the sale, by auction, of the last two chapels in the Bristol area.¹

II: Early Congregational Influences

While the influence of several notable Congregational ministers serving in Lancashire in the 1820s became a key factor in the ultimate change of allegiance, the seeds were sown much earlier.

Pyer, living and working in Bristol during the second decade of the nineteenth century, had become acquainted with William Thorpe (sometimes spelt without the “e”), a Congregational minister who undertook a “surpassing ministry at Castle Green”² in Bristol between 1806 and 1833. Thorpe provided academic teaching to Pyer and was a much needed sympathetic friend when he encountered a number of distressing domestic events.³ Pyer had married Mary Smith in 1813 and they had two daughters and one son. His wife became mentally ill soon after the birth of their second daughter and went to live permanently with her family in Newbury. Although Pyer believed “his wife’s recovery was almost hopeless”,⁴ she actually lived until 1862, three years after his own death. He brought up the three children, one of whom, Catherine, always known as Kate, wrote a comprehensive biography of her father.

Another significant element was the use of the word “deacon”, a Congregational term, when two sets of *Rules of the Tent-Methodists’ Society* were drawn up in 1820 and 1824. The responsibilities of “deacon” were similar to those associated with Methodist “steward”.⁵ It was also apparent that the governance of the sect’s management and meetings was to be unlike the Wesleyan Methodist structure. The probable reason for this was a determination to adopt different rules from those applied by the Wesleys when they expelled Pocock and Pyer.

Neither set of *Rules*, though, contained any suggestion of what, arguably, was the main element of Congregational organisation. It was not to be the case that “the local congregation expressed fully the priesthood of all believers by appointing church officers from its midst, and by giving each member the privilege and responsibility of church government”.⁶ Pocock was to retain much greater control than such delegation to church members would allow. An element of democracy was one thing, but having been accused by Wesleyan Methodist leaders of “irregularities and eccentricities inconsistent with

1 For a history of the Tent Methodists, see *Tent Methodist Magazine* (Bristol, 1823); Kate P. Russell, *Memoirs of Rev. John Pyer* (London: John Snow, 1865); John K. Lander, *Itinerant Temples* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003).

2 G. H. Wicks, *Free Church Life in Bristol* (Bristol: Taylor Bros., 1910), p. 95.

3 *Congregational Year Book* (1860), pp. 205-206.

4 George Pocock, *Facts without a Veil* (Bristol, 19 May 1820), p. 7.

5 See, for example, *Rules of the Tent-Methodists...* (1820), pp. 3-4, and *Rules of the Tent-Methodists’ Society* (1824), pp. 6, 8, 10.

6 Horton Davies, *The English Free Churches* (London: Independent Press, 1963), p. 50.

Methodist rule”.⁷ Pocock would not risk giving members of Tent Methodist societies opportunities to deviate from how he wished the organisation to be run. Until Pocock was in his fifties, he sought a degree of autonomy that neither the Methodist nor Congregational denominations would countenance.

Pyer and Smith first met in 1817. The son of Thomas Smith, a barrister, George was born at Westbury-on-Trym, four miles north of Bristol city centre, in July 1803.⁸ He “attracted the notice of Rev. John Pyer, who assisted him in his education, and facilitated his entrance into the Congregational ministry”.⁹ At different stages of their lives Smith and Pyer came into close contact and remained friends until Pyer’s death in 1859. Pocock had shrewdly recognised Smith’s potential when, in 1820, he “saw in him a young man of great promise: his mental capacities were superior, his ready and lucid utterance remarkable, his earnest and fervent piety of no common type [and] received a course of theological instruction”,¹⁰ probably from Thorpe. Smith began Tent Methodist preaching under the guidance and supervision of the two Tent Methodist leaders.

III: Contact with Lancashire Congregationalists

Pyer instigated Tent Methodist evangelical work in Manchester from the time a tent was brought the 170 miles from Bristol in August 1821, taking two days to get there. Two years later a society was formed in Liverpool when Smith, aged just twenty, was sent to lead it.

The initial encouraging progress in Manchester was facilitated by Pyer’s contact with Congregational ministers who assisted in what became a significant nonconformist ecumenical effort. The missionary work was undertaken in the Ancoats area of Manchester, close to the city centre, where no other nonconformist groups were then active. Cooperation, though, did not extend to the Wesleyan Methodist authorities who objected to the tent’s presence. Nonetheless, congregations of four thousand attended services, comprising “Methodists of the Old and New Connexion, Band Room and Primitive Methodists, Baptists and Independents, and scores of no Society at all”.¹¹

It was during these endeavours that Pyer met a number of Congregational ministers. William Roby, R. Samuel M’All, (later spelt “McAll”) and John Ely, and a prominent lay person, George Hadfield, all influenced the future course of events. There was one major theological difference between most Methodists and Congregationalists, and it was M’All and Roby who persuaded Pyer to change his

7 *Correct Statement of Facts, connected with what Mr. George Pocock has termed...* (Bristol, 1820), p. 9. This document was “published by Order of the Leaders’ Meeting” of the Bristol Wesleyan Methodists, and constituted a response to Pocock’s *Statement of Facts...*

8 Details of George Smith’s parents and siblings are not known but his wives and children are listed at Wikitree – Smith, 182510.

9 *Morning Advertiser* (18 February 1870).

10 *Congregational Year Book* (1871), p. 346.

11 Russell, *Memoirs of Rev. John Pyer*, pp. 110-111.

previously held view. Roby had written *In Defence of Calvinism* and Pyer came to record that “the clearer are my convictions of the truth of what are called sound and moderate Calvinistic sentiments”.¹² Roby was a highly respected minister who served in Manchester from 1795 until his death in 1830. He “had a passion for evangelising – in the country districts by itinerating, in the towns by open-air preaching”.¹³ It was not surprising that Pyer should develop an affinity and admiration for Roby’s ministry.

A Tent Methodist chapel, known as Poor Man’s Chapel, was constructed in Canal Street, Ancoats, in only four months and first used for worship on Christmas Day 1821. When it reopened in June 1826 after being enlarged to accommodate over 1,000 people, it was two Congregational ministers, M’All, reputed to be a “prince of preachers”,¹⁴ and Ely, who conducted the service. In November 1827, after more than two years of reflection by Pyer, his congregation and the ministers with whom he had established good relationships, he sought to join the Congregational denomination. Because the church had decided in February 1825 to leave the Tent Methodist sect and become independent, Roby gained agreement that “an ordination service was all that would be necessary”¹⁵ before the formal transfer of loyalty was achieved.

Tent Methodism’s initial progress in Liverpool followed a similar pattern to that in Manchester. The society built up by Smith over a three year period decided to transfer its allegiance to the Congregational way in January 1827. Smith had moved to the city in September 1823 and “soon gathered around himself a congregation, of which he was requested to take the entire oversight”.¹⁶ The society first met in a room in Heath Street, in the Toxteth area of the city. Soon afterwards there was a move of premises with the announcement that “The Tent Methodists’ Chapel, Cockspur Street will be open for Divine Worship”.¹⁷ Three services were to be held on 5 September 1824, one of which was to be conducted by Smith, referred to as the “Tent Methodist Missionary”.

Given his inexperience, it was fortunate, or providential, that Smith was taken under the wing of Thomas Raffles, a leading Congregational minister. Described as being “if not the greatest figure in Liverpool nonconformity, certainly [he] occupies a conspicuous place in any local Dissenting pantheon”,¹⁸ Raffles became minister of the 2,000 seat Great George Street chapel in 1811. He was also

12 Russell, *Memoirs of Rev. John Pyer*, p. 150. For consideration of the subject, see, for example, Alan P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation* (Worthing: H. E. Walter Ltd., 1982).

13 W. Gordon Robinson, *A History of the Lancashire Congregational Union, 1806-1956* (Manchester: Lancashire Congregational Union, 1955), p. 30.

14 Charles Leach, *Manchester Congregationalism* (London: Woodford Fawcett & Co., 1898), p. 57.

15 Russell, *Memoirs of Rev. John Pyer*, p. 135. —

16 B. Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity* (Manchester: J. Heywood, 1893), VI, p. 170.

17 *Liverpool Mercury* (3 September 1824).

18 Ian Sellers, *Liverpool Nonconformity, 1786-1914* (unpublished PhD thesis, Keele University, 1969) p. 86.

Secretary of the Lancashire Congregational Union for thirty-seven years until 1863 and held the prominent position of Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1839.

Smith, and his congregation, were constituted a Congregational Church in October 1827 at a service attended by forty-two members. Raffles conducted that act of worship, at which Pyer was present, and preached "on the nature of the Christian Church, and gave to the persons there meeting the right hand of fellowship".¹⁹ At a service the following month, Smith was officially ordained as a Congregational minister with Raffles again taking a leading part.

So it was that within a very few months of each other in 1827, Smith and Pyer, together with their respective memberships, became Congregationalists. The extent to which the two men conferred so as to arrive at the same conclusion, at about the same time, is not known, but given their close working relationship for seven years, it is likely that they did. What is clear is that leading local Congregationalists, including George Hadfield, a lawyer who set up practice in Manchester in 1809, later served as Liberal MP for Sheffield, and was a generous contributor to several Congregational bodies, maintained contact with them for the four years before the denominational change took place. These were not rushed decisions, but carefully considered ones. Pyer and Smith led their congregations in Manchester and Liverpool for a further three and six years before they left Lancashire in 1830 and 1833, Pyer to London and Smith to Plymouth, another important seafaring town. They were both destined to provide valuable service to Congregationalism for seventy-five years between them.

IV: John Pyer's Ministerial Appointments, 1827-1859

The change of denomination in Manchester failed to resolve Pyer's bitter dispute with Samuel Stocks, Jr, a local businessman and one time Tent Methodist supporter, that had been on-going intermittently since 1825. The argument concerned the decision-making process relating to additions to the chapel, and whether Stocks had donated monies for the work, or was due for repayment of them, plus interest. The war of words continued in several pamphlets until 1830.²⁰ A solution of sorts was ultimately achieved in 1835 when the chapel, school room, house and four cottages were sold at auction for £3,200 for the future use of the Church of England.²¹

Nearly two years after Pyer and the Ancoats membership became Congregationalists, a tentative indication of the strength of all Christian denominations in Manchester could be gauged as a result of a "return made to the clerk of the peace in the county".²² The figures submitted by Manchester ministers

19 *Congregational Magazine* (1828), p. 390.

20 See S. Stocks, Jr, *Reply to the Rev. John Pyer's "Few Plain and indisputable Testimonies" explanatory of the affairs of Canal Street Chapel* (Manchester, February 1830), and John Pyer, *Six Letters to a Trustee of Canal Street Chapel, Manchester* (London, June 1830).

21 *Blackburn Standard* (4 November 1835).

22 *London Evening Standard* (20 August 1829).

probably referred to attenders at worship, not members, but Pyer reported five hundred "Calvinistic Independents".

Pyer was the first of the two colleagues to accept an appointment away from Lancashire. In 1829 he noticed an advertisement for a City Missionary and General Agent of the London Christian Instruction Society, applied for the post, and was successful. While his eight year association with Manchester had included challenging times, he recorded that "to leave Manchester cost me more uneasiness than perhaps any event of my life. I struggled against it for full three years".²³ The London Christian Instruction Society was a non-denominational body founded in 1825 "to promote the principles of good order among the poor inhabitants".²⁴ Its aim

is the Christian instruction or conversion of the people, and the means employed are, home visitations with religious tracts on the loan system, cottage, prayer and exhortation meetings, and during the summer months, out-of-door Tent-preaching on the Sabbath.²⁵

Pyer took up the appointment in April 1830 with his customary enthusiasm, frequently travelling many miles across London to preach three times each Sunday at different places. After four years the physical and mental strain caused him to take a few weeks off and he visited Smith and his wife who had very recently moved to a Plymouth church. He travelled extensively throughout Devon and Cornwall, and occasionally supported Smith when he conducted worship away from Plymouth. While there, Pyer learned of a vacancy at South Molton where he had preached in the summer of 1833. He received a unanimous invitation to become its minister and, though remaining in London while tents were used during the summer months, he started his ministry in October 1834, hoping for a less hectic schedule.

When Pyer moved to South Molton he discovered that a previous minister, Robert Meek, had discarded his Congregational beliefs and had become a Church of England clergyman. That had caused a degree of disquiet among the Congregational members and, furthermore, to their obvious concern, he returned to the town only two months before Pyer's arrival to deliver a sermon on behalf of the Church Missionary Society.²⁶

Pyer began his ministry at the time when the original seventeenth century Independent chapel that had needed rebuilding was ready for re-opening. That service was held on 22 October and Smith, recently appointed to Plymouth, spoke about the responsibilities members had towards their new pastor. Pyer set about expanding the outreach of the church by establishing prayer meetings, Bible Study groups and preaching stations in nearby villages. During his short three and a

23 Russell, *Memoirs of Rev. John Pyer*, p. 154.

24 *Birmingham Journal* (15 September 1827).

25 Russell, *Memoirs of Rev. John Pyer*, p. 155.

26 *North Devon Journal* (14 August 1834).

half year ministry his daughter, Elizabeth, who had been assisting in a school in Plymouth and living with Smith and his wife, became seriously ill and died, aged twenty, in January 1837. Smith conducted her funeral service and was a great comfort to Pyer, who was devastated by her death. At about the same time, Pyer was invited to go to Cork but deferred his visit to Ireland until May.

It is not known why Pyer was asked to travel to Ireland, but he was there for six weeks until mid-June and was pressed to become minister of George Street Church, Cork. He consulted fellow ministers, considered the matter for several months and eventually accepted the invitation, beginning his ministry in March 1838. It would seem, though, that the appointment represented a mistaken decision as disagreement between Pyer and some church members quickly arose, and he stayed for just over a year. He was succeeded by John Wiseman who went to Cork from Yorkshire.²⁷

Before Pyer's permanent departure from Ireland, he, Smith and eight other passengers, travelled in April 1839 from London to Dublin on a boat named *Shannon Steamer*. Strong winds and high seas sprung up, but the boat eventually arrived at port safely. A letter of thanks, compiled by Pyer on behalf of all the travellers, noted divine providence because another boat in close proximity had sunk drowning all on board, and went on to praise the skill of Captain Pym who, it was claimed, had prevented disaster.²⁸ The purpose of the trip was for Pyer and others to attend a London Missionary Society anniversary meeting. Smith was accompanying Pyer and told him of a vacancy at Mount Street Chapel, Devonport, near Plymouth, whose minister had moved to a Yorkshire pastorate.²⁹ Pyer had previously conducted worship in that chapel while staying with Smith, and it was quickly and mutually agreed that he should become its minister. He began to serve in July 1839, remaining there until his death twenty years later. For the first three of those years Smith was a ministerial colleague at Norley Congregational Church, nearer to the centre of Plymouth.

A constant concern throughout Pyer's time at Devonport was his need to devote huge amounts of time, effort and energy to dealing with financial difficulties associated with chapel buildings. He had expressed the hope that "peace, unanimity and comfort"³⁰ would be evident but those attributes were not to be consistently present. The chapel at Mount Street, even though it had been built twenty years before Pyer's arrival, still had £800 of outstanding debt associated with it. In addition, the running costs, including rent as the church held a leasehold interest, were too great for the congregation to afford. Pyer undertook extensive preaching trips around the country attempting to raise funds to deal with the financial burden and at one stage a reduction in his own stipend to £100 per annum was contemplated. That potential saving measure was not implemented, but eventually

27 *Clare Journal, and Ennis Advertiser* (18 July 1839).

28 Letter to the editor of *The Evening Packet*, from Dublin Bay, 5 April 1839, included in *Leeds Intelligencer* (20 April 1839).

29 Russell, *Memoirs of Rev. John Pyer*, p. 221.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 224.

notice was given to vacate the chapel, and in January 1851 the congregation began to meet in the local Temperance Hall.

Negotiations to buy another chapel took place two years later but after a successful money raising exercise to find the £500 cost, a defective legal title to the building was discovered and the transaction was aborted. However, through the generosity of a donor, another site was identified and the foundation stone of what was later named Wycliffe Chapel was laid in May 1855, and the completed building was opened in June 1856.

In his pastorates Pyer was regularly involved in major as well as relatively trivial controversies. At Devonport it was his support for the Anti-State Church Association that prompted some church members to object. Whether it was the principle of his membership or the time commitment he gave to it is not known, but eight members left and their departure aggravated the already parlous condition of the finances.³¹ The Anti-State Church Association, later known as the Liberation Society, was established in 1844 by Edward Miall, a Leicester Congregational minister, to campaign for the disestablishment of the Church of England and its release, as he saw it, from state control. Pyer was a founder member of the Association. Miall was incensed that a member of his congregation was jailed for non-payment of church rates in 1840.³² Support for the body came mainly from nonconformists and supporters of the Liberal Party, as Pyer was.

Pyer was involved in many organisations, religious, secular and political. He was a regular speaker at Mechanics' Institute monthly meetings at Liskeard in east Cornwall where, apparently displaying knowledge of a wide range of matters, two of his lecture topics for members were the Stuart Dynasty, when he criticised three English monarchs, and "the character and influence of Modern Popular Literature".³³ He became secretary of Western College, the Congregational ministerial training institution built at Plymouth replacing one in Exeter, and was involved with the Religious Tract Society, the Naval and Military Free School, the teetotal movement, and the YMCA, among other bodies. Towards the end of his life he assisted in the compilation of a new Congregational hymn book.

In the light of his dedicated Christian work which lasted well over fifty years, it is not surprising it was said that "his activity, perseverance, and zeal were indomitable".³⁴ That energy began to dissipate as he suffered periods of poor health and physical exhaustion. His death, though, came suddenly and unexpectedly. On the morning of Thursday 7 April 1859 he was his "usual health and cheerfulness at the breakfast table",³⁵ but at midday, when his daughter had completed her morning

31 Ibid., p. 247.

32 For Miall (1809-1881) and the Liberation Society, see William H. Mackintosh, *Disestablishment and Liberation: The Movement for the Separation of the Anglican Church from State Control* (London: Epworth, 1972).

33 *Royal Cornwall Gazette* (2 October 1846), and *Western Courier ... Plymouth and Devonport Advertiser* (17 November 1847).

34 Russell, *Memoirs of Rev. John Pyer*, p. 226.

35 Ibid., p. 286.

teaching duties, she and a servant found him dead in his study sitting in the chair that had been a gift from the ladies of his Cork congregation. The funeral service was held on 12 April and his interment took place at Mannamead Cemetery, Plymouth. A memorial plaque later installed in Wycliffe Chapel described him as "a man of vigorous intellect, extensive knowledge, and stern integrity".³⁶

There was no shortage of adjectives to describe Pyer's contribution to promoting his version of a nonconformist Christian message. He courted controversy at times, but a very large number of people would have testified to his ability to convert people to follow Christ's way. The appendix to his daughter's biography contained many moving letters of sympathy written to her. One, quite understandably, was from George Smith, his long standing friend and ministerial colleague.

V: George Smith's Ministerial Appointments, 1827-1870

Smith had been in Liverpool for four years as a Tent Methodist missionary, from 1823, and he remained, as a Congregationalist, for another six years until 1833 under the guidance of Raffles. During that period Smith married his first wife, Elizabeth, and two of their six children were born there in 1831 and 1832.

Why the congregation moved from Cockspur Street chapel is not known but a new building, known as Hanover Chapel, was constructed nearby in 1829 and opened for worship the following year. It was located on the corner of Mill Street and Warwick Street, Toxteth Park, and comprised a sanctuary capable of accommodating seven hundred people, a vestry and spacious school rooms underneath the chapel. It was a square building measuring 22 yards by 22 yards,³⁷ but was destroyed by fire in June 1855 and rebuilt soon afterwards.

Smith's ministry went beyond the normal responsibilities to his congregation as he became increasingly involved in political matters such as the campaign to abolish slavery. He also took the opportunity to enter into an exchange of correspondence relating to the nature of the Trinity. Samuel Tucker, who described himself as a "Professor of Theology" and a local preacher for "upwards of thirty years",³⁸ challenged Wesleyan Methodist leaders over the issue at the annual Conference being held in Liverpool in 1832. Apparently, the only reply was from Smith, and his response did not satisfy Tucker. Still a young and relatively inexperienced minister, Smith may, in retrospect, have wished that he had left debate on tricky theological questions to others, at least until he was more knowledgeable.

In November 1833 Smith, his wife and their two young children, moved to south Devon where he was "formally recognised and ordained as Pastor of Norley Street Chapel, Plymouth"³⁹ at a service that lasted three and a half hours. The

36 Ibid., p. 294.

37 *Gore's Liverpool General Advertiser* (20 July 1837). Details of the accommodation provided in an advertisement for the sale of the freehold title.

38 Samuel Tucker, *An expostulating Letter, addressed to the President, Secretary and other preachers constituting The Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, (Liverpool, August 1832).

39 *Sherborne Mercury* (18 November 1833).

Congregational chapel, for a short time called New Tabernacle as it replaced an earlier building, had been opened in 1797. Smith had conducted worship there on four Sundays in March 1833 and accepted the unanimous invitation to become minister. To cater for growing congregations, the chapel had been extended to include galleries at the cost of £774, and a year later adjoining land was bought to enable a Sunday School to be built.⁴⁰ Larger congregations continued to be evident long after Smith had been appointed elsewhere, and in 1860 an even larger chapel was constructed nearby which became known as Sherwell Congregational Church, close to Plymouth city centre.

After a ministry lasting almost nine years, Smith, “after considerable deliberation, resolved to accept the pressing invitation”⁴¹ to the pastorate at Trinity Church, Poplar, in the east end of London. This was Smith’s third Congregational pastorate, each of which involved newly constructed chapels or other substantial building projects. The situation at Poplar was by far the largest and most ambitious one. His Christian work in London was to result in him becoming a leading figure in Congregationalism. This progression justified and confirmed the astute prediction twenty-five years earlier by the two Bristol Wesleyan Methodist local preachers who spotted the potential and provided initial encouragement to a seventeen year old boy. They had sent him to Liverpool in 1823 to undertake a challenging apprenticeship in the short lived Tent Methodist sect, and it was there that he began to develop outstanding talent and commitment.

Raffles, Smith’s experienced mentor in Liverpool, preached the opening service in the partially built Trinity Chapel in August 1841. It was around nine months later that Smith moved to London with his family consisting of his wife and three sons and three daughters to begin his ministry on 29 May 1842.

Trinity Chapel had been built at the instigation of George Green, a leading and wealthy local Congregationalist and shipbuilder, who intended its use to be for sailors and his shipwright employees. It was an architecturally distinctive building designed by William Hosking in 1840, and built by Thomas Rider and Son. Green met the entire cost of the land for the chapel and adjoining burial ground, and for the construction; the cumulative total being £7,300, a great deal of money in the mid nineteenth century. The chapel’s external dimensions were 80 feet by 55 feet, excluding an impressive portico and two vestries, so it was a prominent building located on the corner of East India Dock Road and Augusta Street. It could accommodate over 1,000 worshippers at the outset and capacity was increased in 1846 to seat 1,500 people by the addition of a gallery.⁴²

At the time of Smith’s appointment there was an initial membership of fifty which grew substantially in the following years. In December 1842 there was a service to recognise Smith’s ministry when “the spacious edifice was crowded in every

40 Information about Norley Congregational Chapel can be found at www.oldplymouth.uk.

41 *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (September 1842), p. 440.

42 Admin section of Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives – “Records of Places of Worship” – entry for Trinity United Reformed (formerly Congregational) Church, Poplar, 1825-1975; W/TUC; also accessed at www.thcatalogue.org.uk.

part long before six o'clock, the hour when the service began, while many persons retired, unable to obtain admission".⁴³ By 1846 there were 250 "communicants" and "pleasing proof of the ability and diligence of the respected pastor, who, in the short space of four years, has gathered together so goodly a flock".⁴⁴

In addition to Smith's devoted attention to his growing congregation, a "Branch Church at Bow owes its origin to his exertions".⁴⁵ He also published a number of religious works including *Life Spiritual*, based on a series of lectures, and two sermons under the heading *Pastoral Exhortations*.⁴⁶ He was called upon to undertake many preaching appointments elsewhere in the country, including the opening services at more than two hundred chapels. A visit to address YMCA members on the Isle of Wight gave him the opportunity to express his convinced Biblicism by telling a large audience that "the whole [Bible] was the pure unadulterated Word of God".⁴⁷

Smith became Secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1852 and those responsibilities continued for the rest of his life. His service was greatly appreciated as evidenced by a presentation made to him in 1861 which was

a testimonial, expressive of esteem, confidence and gratitude for public services rendered to the cause of religion and humanity. In this difficult and delicate office he displayed singular judgment and tact, and the harmonious operation of the union, its rapid growth, and its influence was very largely due to the assiduity, urbanity, thoughtful preparation.⁴⁸

That wording comprehensively demonstrated the valued contribution Smith was making to Congregationalism in a variety of roles. Apart from his two main appointments, he was a director of the London Missionary Society, Secretary of the Christian Witness Fund which was set up to ease the lot of the poor, and even became Secretary of the Irish Evangelical Society⁴⁹ for a short time. His academic and ministerial qualities were recognised when he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the University of Glasgow in 1864.⁵⁰

During his twenty-eight year ministry at Trinity Chapel, Smith suffered a number of distressing family events. His wife, Elizabeth, died in 1844, soon after he began his time at Poplar. Five years later he married Mary Elizabeth Morley who gave birth to three children but two of them died aged four and one, in October 1855 and March 1858. Of lesser significance, but important enough to be reported in the press, Smith "met with a severe accident, by falling through a

43 *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (February 1843), p. 88.

44 *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (December 1846), p. 694.

45 *Congregational Year Book* (1871), p. 347.

46 George Smith, *Life Spiritual* (London: John Snow, 1855); *Pastoral Exhortations* (London: John Snow, 1846).

47 *Isle of Wight Times* (25 February 1864).

48 *East London Observer* (26 January 1861).

49 *Congregational Year Book* (1871), pp. 346-349.

50 *Cambridge Independent Press* (3 May 1864).

trap-door, whilst walking in the street".⁵¹ The injury, in 1864, curtailed his ability to work for several weeks.

Smith's second wife, who had herself been widowed, was born in September 1814 and was a daughter of Richard Morley, a prominent Congregationalist closely associated with Castle Green Congregational Church in Nottingham. At the time that George and Mary were married, Samuel M'All, whom Smith knew from his years in Lancashire in the 1820s, was the minister, having been appointed in 1843.⁵² Richard Morley was a Justice of the Peace, had twice been mayor of Nottingham, and was one of two brothers who founded the hosiery business of I. & R. Morley in 1797. That developed into a substantial enterprise during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Very early in 1870, approaching the age of sixty-seven, Smith travelled to the Isle of Wight in the hope that his health would improve in a warmer winter climate. He had been "in feeble health for a considerable time",⁵³ but soon after his return he died at his home on 13 February. On the day of his funeral "the crowds of people who thronged the thorough-fare, the suspension of business, the long streets of blinded windows, the flags half-mast on the public buildings, all touchingly testified that the community had lost a great benefactor".⁵⁴ Robert W. Dale, Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales that year, conducted the funeral service and began his address by saying, "Few men will be held in more grateful memory by those who were privileged to know him well", and went on to record that "the brain and the heart of Dr Smith were incessantly active in the highest and most honourable service".⁵⁵

VI: Conclusion

Familiar words from St John's Gospel (4:37), "one sows, and another reaps", could succinctly summarise the contributions that George Smith and John Pyer made to the Christian Church for more than half the nineteenth century. Pyer was intimately connected with the Tent missionary movement for eleven years and Smith for a slightly shorter time. Those periods constitute the beginning of their journeys, the "sowing" time. Then, the mature and effective ministries serving Christ in increasingly important ways in Congregational churches were the "reaping" years.

If their entry into the Congregational ministry was an "Unusual Path", as the title to this article indicates, what was the normal way by which men were prepared for the substantial responsibilities of bible teaching and pastoral work?

51 *London City Press* (2 April 1864).

52 Information regarding Richard Morley can be found at *Wikitree*: Richard Morley (c.1775-1855) – 2405. For Castle Gate Independent, later Congregational and United Reformed Church, see <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk>.

53 *East London Observer* (19 February 1870).

54 *Congregational Year Book* (1871), p. 349.

55 *East London Observer* (30 April 1870).

There is no straightforward answer to that question. Unlike the ministers who were most involved in overseeing them in Lancashire, Smith and Pyer had no college preparation for their ministerial service. Raffles was trained at Homerton College between 1805 and 1809. Ely was a student at Hoxton Independent Academy for four years from 1810.⁵⁶ M'All received tuition at Rotherham Independent College, and Roby was at Trevecca College for just six weeks. As far as is known Thorpe, the Bristol minister, had no formal ministerial college education. In the main Smith and Pyer had to learn "on the job", guided and instructed by these five experienced men on very much a part-time basis. The establishment of most ministerial training institutions began at the end of the eighteenth century but grew in size, effectiveness and influence from the middle of the 1820s.⁵⁷

There were differences between the two men. Pyer, while hard working and deeply concerned for the betterment of secular as well as spiritual lives was, it seems, an abrasive character at times, who was certainly capable of provoking and experiencing dissension among his congregations. On the other hand, Smith, at the age of seventeen, identified as having huge potential, manifestly fulfilled it. He became a dedicated pastor ministering tirelessly for fifty years and developed widely appreciated organisational talent and a fine grasp of the theological issues of his time.

Neither George Smith nor John Pyer has been recognised in the annals of nonconformist history as being of major significance, but it is hoped that this article will, to an extent, provide a narrative. The two men committed themselves to serving Christ among challenging social communities, mostly in urban settings and they appear to have had a beneficial impact on many thousands of lives. The Tent Methodists, a short-lived, comparatively unimportant group, one of several to emerge from Wesleyan Methodism between 1797 and 1850, produced not one, but two, dedicated Congregational ministers. George Smith particularly became an outstanding servant of the Church, a fine example to three congregations in different parts of the country, and an inspiration to countless other people. As his obituary put it "his labours were abundantly prospered by the Great Head of the Church".⁵⁸ There could be no greater accolade.

JOHN LANDER

REVIEWS

The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions Volume V: The Twentieth Century: Themes and Variations in a Global Context. Edited by Mark P. Hutchinson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xx + 543. £95.00. ISBN 978-0-19870-225-2.

The final volume in Oxford University Press's history of Protestant Dissenting Traditions series (though the third to be published) was also, possibly, the most difficult to bring to birth and not simply because, as the editor admits, participating authors "dropped out" and "rather more of this volume was written by the editor than was originally intended". This amounts to four of fifteen chapters, as well as a jointly-written introduction. The fact is that "dissent", as a category describing Protestant Christians, virtually disappeared in the twentieth century. Its continued use, then, is a matter of imposition by others, somewhat ironically mirroring its origins in the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, just how it is used in this volume discussing Christian traditions emanating from the "Majority World" is both fascinating and challenging for "Minority World" readers, perhaps especially for those who remain in the denominations descended from Puritan dissent, however far removed from it they now may be.

For the English and Welsh Free Churches, the twentieth century was nothing short of tragic. The volume confirms what others have said, in that "it might appear that the twentieth century opened with the victory of Dissent/dissent and closed with its irrelevance". But the thesis is argued by the contributors to this book that the meaning of "dissent" was reframed as a result, and that much of this reframing occurred in "regions of plural settlement" (p. 1) by which is intended those parts of the world formerly under colonial rule or targeted by the various missionary agencies. While on the surface church life appeared similar, in fact, in those places, it developed differently to that of the sending churches in Britain. The introduction to the volume sets the scene: "The question for Western citizens of the early twentieth century was 'what did dissent mean when there was no formal establishment?' By the end of the century, it had become 'what did dissent mean when there was no "establishment" except bureaucratized secular rationalism?" (p. 3). As a result, "Dissent", "(D)issent" and "dissent", are all used in this volume to denote different things ("one of the formal Old or New Dissent to emerge from Europe", "an organised successor or innovative alternative not necessarily directly attached to these predecessor movements", and "a globalized popular movement or tendency which may or may not have a formal organisational identity" respectively). But the primary interest is in divergence from a "norm", be that the apparent religio-political *status quo* or the inherited form of belief and practice. That being said, the view that "As the century dawned, nonconformists and dissenters/Dissenters in former established church settings saw their primary claims for freedom shifting from the centuries long fight for freedom from establishment privileges and exclusions to freedom of conscience in a variety of settings" (p. 16) is slightly misleading. The *freedom from establishment privilege*

was in itself dictated by theological principles about the relationship between church and state and, perhaps more significantly, about the relationship between human beings and God.

Some themes are repeated throughout the collection. The “Majority world” is not subject to secularization in the way that Europe and North America have been and still are. As a result, the encounter between Christianity and Modernity in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania is one between the gospel and local spiritualities and traditions. Consequently, the “Majority world” remains “enchanted” and open to the claims of the gospel about divine healing and deliverance, for example. As a result, Pentecostalism has resonated particularly and occupies a dissenting position within Christianity because it challenges the reading of the Bible which is rooted in liberal scholarship and the method of demythologising the text. This is not dissent against the State, but against “the World as it is made out to be” (p. 119). Its appeal might in part be in its experiential aspects, though it is rooted in claims to restore the Church to its original, intended and charismatic form (p. 42).

Given that around 60 per cent of the world’s Christians now live in the “Majority World”, churches located there are “providing much of the energy for Christianity’s global future” (p. 224). Africa, Latin America and especially South Korea figure prominently in the text. Having indicated that all traditional churches in the United Kingdom have suffered the effects of secularisation, the book points to the fact that “dissenting forms of the Church have proliferated within, as well as outside, the existing denominations” (p. 235). It concludes that “Theological dissent from within and outside currently dominant Christian churches will no doubt reshape Christian faith and practice in the coming century” (p. 238). But in essence, the volume’s authors argue that Christianity in the “Majority World” is inevitably dissenting and its voice should be heard in the “Minority World” where its understanding of Christian beliefs and practices needs to be taken more seriously than it has been. One author characterises this as renewal of Christianity as a “non-western Religion” (p. 282).

As a result, “The term ‘dissent’ needs to be revalued to include growth, reinterpretation, resilience, redefinition, and revitalization. This keeps it true to the *semper reformanda* principle of Reformed Dissent, as it confronts, challenges, subverts, and becomes an agent of change and transformation, renewal and even conflict” (p. 274). All this makes for fascinating, if challenging, reading. Those who have inherited the traditions of historical, religious dissent, are deemed to have lost any claim to the term. If this book is correct, any re-appropriation of it – even if desirable – will require an engagement with the Christian traditions of the Global South. It may be that the English Dissenting traditions have no interest in reclaiming the term. It is at least possible, however, that some renewal might follow were they to take seriously the voices emanating from the “Majority World”.

ROBERT POPE

***Crucicentric, Congregational and Catholic: the Generous Orthodoxy of Alan P. F. Sell.* By David R. Peel. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019. Pp. xvi + 298. £24.99. ISBN 978-1-5326-4076-6.**

Although we are a small denomination we have a lot of big people, capable of thinking big thoughts about the world Church and our participation as Reformed theologians. We have something distinctive to offer. Who better to tell us what this is than the late Professor Alan Philip Frederick Sell (1935-2016) and his brilliant biographer and former Assembly Moderator, and Principal of Sell's own Northern College, Manchester, David Peel?

Sell was still alive and well when Peel began this study. He would know he could not be better served. I may have suggested the project but could never do justice to Sell's wide-ranging erudition. Peel can and does. Sell's learning covers philosophy of religion, Christian doctrine, Church history, especially of English Dissent, worship, music and ecumenism. Peel and Sell have read a lot but Sell has written more: 34 books, 170 articles and over 200 book reviews. Sell is also the acknowledged authority on Fairbairn, Huxtable, Lovell Cocks, Robinson and Whale *et al.* in his pieces for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Sell admires P. T. Forsyth but, much to my regret, dismisses Karl Barth. He gives the impression he writes about everything he reads. Such a *corpus* is an enormous challenge to his biographer. Peel responds. He challenges almost everything in Sell he disagrees with or is not so sure about, so we are led to be self-critical of our own way of doing theology, our own beliefs and how we offer a reasonable account of the hope that is in us. Between them, Peel and Sell help answer most of our questions, resolve our doubts and give us more to think about.

The book has a clear structure. First a short thirty-page biography of an ambitious pastor and teacher who quite often did not succeed in the posts he applied for, but whose obvious scholarship was recognised in the various doctorates he accumulated. Then follow chapter headings echoing creeds and confessions, when we think about their basis and the faith they proclaim in God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Church and Sacraments. I might have opted for a different plan with main chapters on Sell as Philosopher, Theologian, Church Historian and Ecumenist but my mistake would have been to concentrate on Sell when he, as he made clear for his own funeral, wants us to think about the Gospel: "A Service of Thanksgiving for the Gospel on the occasion of the death of Alan Philip Frederick Sell, Minister of the Gospel", not even a photo, such as adorns this book, appeared on our service papers at Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes.

Two tips before you read this book. Prepare to read it twice. First, quickly, to survey the task. Then more slowly with time to explore such enormous subjects as God, Creation, Atonement that Sell and Peel can help you explore. Secondly, do not get annoyed with references to COS, CTF and even DAD but make a copy of the Abbreviations of Sell's books provided on pages xv-xvi so that you know to what his numerous footnotes refer. Each chapter is closely documented, so that we are urged to check out all his quotations from Forsyth and Co. and Sell's own books. For those less familiar with Forsyth than Peel is, having, as he told

me, often lectured on all Forsyth's main works, it would help to have references to Forsyth's books wherever Sell refers to them. As always in books about the books they wrote, there is no substitute for reading the original texts. Peel like any biographer, has his own prejudices. He does not like Barth, nor is he as committed to Forsyth, and he is not, in my view, as ecumenical as Sell claims to be. On the other hand, Peel is much more progressive than Sell, much more aware that care for all creation must be an urgent priority and that we cannot dismiss feminism in the way that Forsyth could and did a century ago. Peel is much more in tune with Liberation Theology and the need, as Niebuhr saw, to challenge structural sin.

Because Sell is so dependent on Forsyth, Peel often digresses to put Forsyth right. You cannot do this in three or four pages. Nor should one suggest that Forsyth and Sell, or Peel, are in the same league. Scholars still read and study Forsyth a century after his last book. Like it or not, younger students at the Society for the Study of Theology, of which Sell was the longest serving and most faithful member, still offer more papers on Barth than any other theologian. But what is really distinctive and worth more attention is Sell's "congregational way" of doing theology. What he writes about predestination or the Cross of Christ reads like verbatim accounts of thirty or forty learned theologians, including himself and some of his books, at a Synod or Church Meeting. Sell would appreciate this comment because even after the formation of the United Reformed Church he was still commending congregational ways and urging our respect for the catholic wisdom given to all the saints in the local congregation (see *Saints, Visible, Orderly and Catholic, the Congregational Idea of the Church*, published by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1986). Such was the "generous orthodoxy" that David Peel so faithfully explores and so obviously enjoys. But finally a lovely comment that made Sell laugh. He tells us that Gypsy Smith's "singing prowess prompted the awe-filled compliment, 'That man has swallowed a brass band'". Alan and his musical wife Karen must have chuckled at that. Read more in *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel* (2005), but only after you have read Peel's introduction.

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