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EDITORIAL

Chapel – and particularly Congregational – cultures are under discussion in this issue of the *Journal*. Despite the protests that they may come and go, and divert attention away from those whose Christian life in a particular place is longer-lasting, ministers inevitably become significant in a tradition which places importance on the preaching of the Word. Roger Ottewill has traced the ministers of Basingstoke's Congregational church over the course of the nineteenth century. Something of each one's character and contribution emerges, but we see this in the wider context of Nonconformist life: lectures, self-improvement, Sunday school and chapel teas. By creating a culture they seem to have spoken to their time. The third and concluding part of Clyde Binfield's analysis of chapel architecture explores Gothic as somehow quintessentially Congregational. If the one article tells us about the local culture, this one tells us about a denominational one, its movers and fixers, ending with a case study which shows mutual dependence in securing and promoting the mission of the Congregational Church at Crediton in Devon. In both pieces we find one of the United Reformed Church's antecedent traditions at its most confident: planning for and experiencing growth, forging an identity and enabling individuals and communities to "walk the way" and to live their discipleship (even if they would not have used such terms). On so many levels it seems worlds away from our day. I am grateful to both authors for their thought-provoking articles.

We welcome John Mansfield as reviewer.

NONCONFORMIST ARCHITECTURE: A CONGREGATIONAL FOCUS PART III[1]

XII: "Not even the cholera is so contagious ... as a style of architecture which we happen to catch"[2]

The Congregationalist was a monthly edited between 1872 and 1878 by R. W. Dale, minister of Carrs Lane, Birmingham, and by then into his prime as a national Congregational voice. Dale, however, "was not born to the chair", or so his son felt; his monthly "was not one to be taken up in an idle hour" any more than it was geared to financial success and it contained little "to attract those who did not care for theology, literature, or politics".[3] From 1879 it was edited by James Guinness Rogers, a less nuanced if hardly less powerful contemporary Congregational voice but in Dale's last editorial year it published two pieces which showed the extent to which Gothic architecture had entered the denominational bloodstream.

In the Autumn of 1877 Dale had been in the United States. There, in the heart of Puritan New England and among "the most interesting and accomplished men that it was my good fortune to meet", he encountered a fellow Congregationalist and editor, Charles Dudley Warner of the *Hartford Republican*.[4] As a result, Dale reprinted an essay by Warner in *The Congregationalist*, ostensibly "for the edification of committees that may be entrusted with the selection of plans for Congregational Churches in this country".[5] Warner's "Gothic Churches in New England" was engagingly shrewd. Here was American East Coast humour at its best, proof of the transatlantic meeting of minds that increasingly marked Victorian Congregationalists. Warner's general focus was the epidemic of thirteenth-century ecclesiastical Gothic which had "attacked the Congregational and the other non-ritual Churches more violently than any others", and his particular focus was his own church, than which there "isn't a finer or purer Church ... anywhere, inside and outside Gothic to the last", with a nave as "high-shouldered" as that of Amiens Cathedral: "I fancy that for genuine high-shoulderness we are not exceeded by any Church in the city", even if the proposed spire as yet hung fire, at least until "[we] see how high the Baptist spire is before we run ours up".[6] The trouble lay in

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1 Parts of this final section have been published in the last section of Clyde Binfield, "Building Philanthropy: The Example of Joshua Wilson (1795-1874)", in Clyde Binfield, G. M. Ditchfield, and David L. Wykes (eds), *Protestant Dissent and Philanthropy in Britain, 1660-1914* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2020), pp. 113-128. It is reproduced by permission of the editors.

2 Charles Dudley Warner, "Gothic Churches in New England", *The Congregationalist*, Vol. VI (1878), p. 100.

3 A. W. W. Dale, *The Life of R. W. Dale of Birmingham* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), pp. 305-7.

4 Editor's Note, *The Congregationalist*, Vol. VI (1878), p. 100.

5 Ibid.

6 Warner, "Gothic Churches in New England", pp. 102-3.

their church's Gothic perfection. Style scored over architecture because the Gothic had been taken as literally "as we took the Greek at one time, or as we should probably have taken the Saracenic, if the Moors had not been coloured".[7] The result conditioned the worship which was now forced on the congregation as they battled with sight-lines, acoustics, and ventilation, adapting ceaselessly to allow for the convenience of organ, choir, pulpit and pew, Word and people, in wry proof that "a Gothic religious life is not an idle one".[8] The parable of the pulpit distilled their New England travails. Warner's fellow worshippers

> devised a sounding-board – a sort of mammoth clam-shell, painted white, and erected it behind the minister. It had a good effect on the minister. It kept him straight to his work. So long as he kept his head exactly in the focus, his voice went out and did not return to him; but if he moved either way he was assailed by a Babel of clamouring echoes. There was no opportunity for him to splurge about from side to side of the pulpit, as some do. And if he raised his voice much, or attempted any extra flights, he was liable to be drowned in a refluent sea of his own eloquence. And he could hear the congregation as well as they could hear him. All the coughs, whispers, noises, were gathered in the wooden tympanum behind him, and poured into his ears.
>
> But the sounding-board was an improvement, and we advanced to bolder measures; having heard a little, we wanted to hear more.[9]

When due allowance is made for the distant enchantment laid by the humourists of Congregational New England, was the experience of Hartford, Connecticut, so different from that of Square, Halifax, or indeed from that of James Cubitt's French-accented Early English Emmanuel Congregational Church, Cambridge, opened in 1874?[10] Emmanuel's fine stone pulpit was given a sounding-board, in part to preserve its minister, P. T. Forsyth (1894-1901), from draughts and perhaps for the better direction of his Scottish inflections. The Dales knew Emmanuel well; Dale's son Alfred was an undergraduate at Trinity College when his father published Warner's piece and he was a member and deacon at Emmanuel during Forsyth's ministry.[11] R. W. Dale himself, like Warner, recognised that the virtue of Gothic lay in the freedom which fidelity to its *spirit* released. Warner admitted as much in his opening sentence, with its deft reference to the organic, natural, deceptively anarchic genius of Gothic.

> I have no doubt that the Gothic, which is capable of infinite modification, so that every house built in that style may be as different from every other house

7 Ibid., p. 108.

8 Ibid., p. 106.

9 Ibid., p. 104.

10 C. Binfield, *The Contexting of a Chapel Architect: James Cubitt 1836-1912* (London: The Chapels Society, 2001), pp. 41-44.

11 For Sir Alfred W. W. Dale (1855-1921), see *Who Was Who, 1916-1928* (London: A. and C. Black, 1929), pp. 258-9.

as one tree is from every other, can be adapted to our modern uses, and will be, when artists catch its spirit instead of merely copying old forms.[12]

Perhaps it was that which prompted J. A. Clapham to contribute "Gothic Congregational Churches" later in 1878.[13] Clapham (b. 1835) was a Congregationalist by heredity and conviction.[14] He became a church member in his late teens and in his late sixties he was a founder member of the Congregational Historical Society and an early contributor to its *Transactions*. His family were entrenched in Leeds mercantile life with Baptist and Congregational ramifications in Bradford and Halifax, Airedale and Wharfedale. There was a cultural dimension to their commercial clout. Clapham's brother-in-law, Frederick Wedmore, was a novelist and art critic already known for his *Studies in English Art* (1876) and increasingly known for his advocacy of French art, especially of the eighteenth century.[15] Clapham's father, J. P. Clapham (1801-1874), wrote verse, edited the *Leeds Sunday School Hymn Book*, and built a Congregational chapel on his Wharfedale estate, Burley Grange, which his son claimed to have been Yorkshire's first Congregational chapel in the Gothic style.[16] No wonder he felt qualified to write on the subject.

Clapham wrote with the brisk authority of a well-travelled, well-read, Yorkshireman of means. He had long been a student of Gothic; he had visited the "main cathedrals" of Great Britain, Ireland, and the Continent; he was as alert to the pitfalls of the style as he remained convinced by its possibilities. His aims were straightforward: "to indicate some of the errors into which the builders of Gothic Congregational churches had fallen" and "to try to assist in the erection of Gothic churches which shall be good to hear and preach in, and shall not be hot in summer and cold and draughty in winter".[17] His thesis was realistic, if daunting: "that the building of a Congregational church, thoroughly adapted for Divine worship, is more difficult to manage than the erection of a sanctuary for almost any other section of the Christian church".[18] His exposition was less daunting. It had struck him that the most suitable Gothic Congregational churches tended to be in the smaller towns, perhaps because their building committees were less likely to "leave all the responsibility of the failure to the architect", perhaps because they were more likely to have had recourse to the disciplined procedures of what he called the English Congregational Church-building Society, now twenty-five years old and with a portfolio of 500 aided causes.[19] There had been a general growth in

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12 Warner, "Gothic Congregational Churches in New England", p. 100: my italics.

13 J. A. Clapham, "Gothic Congregational Churches", *The Congregationalist*, Vol. VII (1878), pp. 202-7.

14 I am indebted to Freda Matthews for much information about the Clapham family.

15 For Sir Frederick Wedmore (1844-1921), see *Who Was Who, 1916-1928*, p. 1105.

16 C. Stell, *Architects of Dissent: Some Nonconformist Patrons and their Architects* (London: Dr Williams's Library, 1976), pp. 20-21.

17 Clapham, "Gothic Congregational Churches in New England", p. 202.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

confidence and aptness for purpose and a salutary refusal merely to copy any style. Just as "we have altered and adapted the heathen temples of Greece and Rome to the purposes of Christian worship" – and he instanced Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle, St Paul's Cathedral, and the Madeleine in Paris, in the same breath as Ryde Congregational Church, recently destroyed by fire, which "approached nearer the ancient heathen temple than any other church that we know of in England" – so he claimed the right to erect Gothic Congregational churches, "easy to preach in, comparatively free from draughts, and well-suited to our method of worship".[20]

Clapham was a pragmatic Goth. Nothing should stand in the way of a building that was properly ventilated, sensibly heated, and acoustically sound. He favoured galleries round three sides and at a manageable height, with shallow transepts and generous side windows. He also favoured an inner roof, coved at the sides but waggon-headed: this would help hearing, warmth, and ventilation.[21] None of this need define the building's style; indeed "if a church be thoroughly adapted for the purpose for which it is designed, it matters very little to us whether it be Gothic, Italian, Byzantine, Moorish, Egyptian, or Elizabethan".[22] There was, however, little doubt as to where Clapham's own preference lay. He described three classical chapels, one of them surely East Parade, Leeds, where he and his family worshipped from the 1850s. In the first,

> we were often obliged to take two great coats, one to wear during the service, and the other to put over our knees. In the second, if we sat in the best corner of the pew to see and hear the minister, we were sure afterwards to have a cold in the head or a stiff neck. In the third one, said to be quite a model classical building, the complaints are bitter about the cold, and our feet are constantly exposed to a draught which no one can tell from whence it comes.[23]

Clapham found five reasons for preferring Gothic. They were at once predictable and questionable; they offered too many hostages to fortune. His first reason was the style's cheapness. Calling J. C. Gallaway to his aid, he insisted that "cheapness is an important item with us, if that be combined with strength and good work".[24] Gothic

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20 Ibid., p. 204. For Ryde Congregational Church, Corinthian-porticoed, with no side windows, built 1854-6, burned 1869-70, and replaced by a Gothic chapel, itself demolished in 1974, see C. Stell, *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in South-West England* (London: HMSO, 1991), pp. 156, 158.

21 Clapham, "Gothic Congregational Churches in New England", pp. 205, 206. Clapham would have found his ideal, enlarged to fit American horizons, in New York's Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church (1873-5), designed by the German-born Carl Pfeiffer (1834-1888). Warner must have known this church, even though it was neither Congregational nor in New England. Internally it most approached and updated an improved version of London's Westminster Chapel (1866) by W. F. Poulton, as the pulpit prince, J. H. Jowett (1863-1928), discovered when he moved to Westminster from Fifth Avenue in 1918.

22 Ibid., p. 207.

23 Ibid., p. 206.

24 Ibid.

best allowed for strength and good work. His second reason was patriotic. "It is our own style, and the noblest architectural monuments left us by our ancestors are the splendid churches, abbeys, and cathedrals scattered throughout our land".[25] There spoke the Cromwellian Independent rather than the Separatist. The third reason was architectural. "As the curved line is more beautiful than the straight line, so is Gothic more beautiful than classical architecture".[26] If that begged the question as to how a Congregationalist might rate the Baroque, Clapham's fourth reason clarified matters, with its forthright if inevitably tendentious view of history:

> Gothic is connected with some of the most memorable incidents in our national history. Classical architecture is closely allied with the tyranny of the Stuarts, the declension of the country to a third-rate power in Europe, and the ignoble reigns of the Georges, which no true patriot can look back upon without feelings of keen anguish at our social and political degradation ... The only bright spot in the period of classical revival is when the nation rose against Charles I, and when Cromwell and Blake and Milton, by their military genius and wisdom, raised the country to a pitch of power which has never been exceeded ... But during that brief period no building of national importance was erected which we can look upon with admiration and veneration.[27]

His fifth reason was as clinching as it was arguable:

> It is important that a place of worship should be stamped unmistakably with the use for which it is employed. We have been stopped in front of one of the largest classical Congregational churches, and been asked the questions, "What is it?" "Is it a town-hall?" "Is it a railway-station?" A Gothic church speaks for itself – that it is a place for Divine worship; so that he who runs may read.[28]

But what, if we believe "that how our sanctuaries are built may often tell for or against our spiritual work and power", did or should a Gothic church in fact say? For Clapham the answer was clear. He annexed the style with a confident and evangelical freedom which could only be painful to the ecclesiologically minded purists who had helped speed him on his way:

> At a time when Ritualism is making such fearful progress around us, it is our duty to open in our large centres places of worship properly designed, where the Gospel in its breadth and fullness may be earnestly preached. The enemies of our liberty and faith are putting forth gigantic efforts to enlist the people on their side. The parish priest and the Episcopalian sisters of mercy

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., pp. 206-7.
28 Ibid., p. 207.

are going from house to house to induce the parents to leave our churches, and the children to forsake our Sunday-schools. If we hold our hands and fold our arms, we may soon find – alas! too late – that our towns, which have hitherto been the centres of light, and truth, and liberty, have become the abodes of darkness, and error, and spiritual slavery! Which may God forbid![29]

XIII: "... if a Moses is taken, a Joshua is left":[30] the Networks of Chapel-building

J. A. Clapham belonged to the same generation and social class as the Religious Republicans of 1869. He was more down-to-earth than they were and his religious views were probably more conservative, but he shared their mind-set as he shared that of Josiah Gilbert from the preceding generation and indeed that of Joshua Wilson (1795-1874) from a yet earlier generation. Wilson was one of Congregationalism's indispensable string-pullers. He was the layman behind the bicentenary commemorations in 1862. A strategist by experience rather than instinct, he played a critical part, barely perceptible save to those who were in a position to know, in shaping Congregationalism into a denomination fit for Victorian purpose. Its traditions, its literature, its public role, its national Union and that Union's agencies, the deployment of its ministers, the well-being of its congregations, and the usefulness of the buildings in which pastors and people lived, learned, worked, and worshipped, concerned him greatly. They came together in his orderly mind. He belonged to one of Congregationalism's most public families but he was the least public of men. It was a suggestive combination, which is why this study closes with him and with one of the causes with which he associated himself.

Wilson inherited and refined a formidable family tradition of Evangelicalism which his immediate family united with Congregational Dissent. His grandfather, Thomas Wilson, senior (1731-1794), had prospered greatly in the ribbon trade, moving to London from Derbyshire by way of Coventry.[31] He has been credited with ensuring that Derbyshire's Congregationalism was placed on a firm footing and his part in forming the Societas Evangelica (1776) which led to the academy at Hoxton, of which he was treasurer, confirmed his prominence in London's Evangelical Dissenting circles.[32] His son, Thomas Wilson, junior (1764-1843), improved on his father's work. This Wilson was an active man of high-handed devotion, with a keen eye for a site and an opportunity. The Hoxton Academy, in all its aspects, became his life-work. He succeeded his father as treasurer, ensured its removal

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29 Ibid.

30 Revd G. Betts to Joshua Wilson, 17 June 1843: London: Congregational Library, Joshua Wilson Correspondence.

31 The Wilsons are most suitably approached in Joshua Wilson, *A Memoir of Thomas Wilson Esq.: Treasurer of Highbury College* (London: John Snow & Co., 1846).

32 Reginald Mansfield, "The History of Congregationalism in Derbyshire from the Methodist Revival to 1850" (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 1958), p. 108; G. F. Nuttall, *The Significance of Trevecca College, 1768-91* (London: Epworth Press, 1969), pp. 11-13.

to Highbury, where the Wilsons had lived since 1777, and there he supervised its construction on a four-acre site which he provided. Hoxton Academy had become Highbury College, opened in September 1826 and commandingly purpose-built. Its architect, John Davies (1796-1865), selected by competition, accumulated an enviable City clientele.[33] Davies was a building professional in a new mould. He was also an accomplished Athenian and his Highbury College serves as a distinguished, if Congregationally short-lived, reminder of the impact of Classical architecture on Dissenting building-types. This study's focus has been Gothic but Dissent's Classical counterpoint, as J. A. Clapham ruefully acknowledged, was convincing and pervasive. In 1827 James Elmes (1782-1862), architect, biographer of Christopher Wren, and father of Harvey Lonsdale Elmes (1814-1847) whose St George's Hall, Liverpool (1841-56), was to be the finest neo-classical building of the age, singled out Highbury for particular praise.[34] He compared it favourably with another Islington building, supported by the Anglican side of the Wilson family, the Church Missionary Society's College. To Elmes's mind, the Church Missionary Society's "plain, substantial, useful building, adapted to a very laudable purpose", looked "more like the boldness of northern Calvinism, than the chaste beauties of the simply decorated church of England". Highbury College, by contrast, was "a building of more pretensions, and of more real architectural beauty".

> It consists of a centre and two very deeply projecting wings. In the middle of the centre building is an hexastyle Ionic portico, of the Ilyssus example, with a pediment above it. The ends of the projecting wings are tetrastyle in antis, and have also pediments and acroteria which conceal chimneys within them ... The portico is raised a few steps above the court yard, which is enclosed from the high road by iron railings raised upon a lofty plinth, and a handsome carriage and two postern entrances. It reflects much credit on the architect for the selection of his materials from the choice storehouse of Ionian antiquities.[35]

Thomas Shepherd, who illustrated the building which Elmes described with such technical detail, dedicated his drawing to Thomas Wilson.[36]

Elmes's description suggests the adaptability of Classical forms to the educational needs of enlightened Evangelicalism. No shame was felt at concealing chimneys within acroteria and there can be little doubt that Highbury's Ionic

33 For Davies, see A. Felstead et al., *Directory of British Architects, 1834-1900* (London: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1993), p. 237; Christopher Wood, *Dictionary of British Art, Volume IV: Victorian Painters, I: The Text* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, rev. and updated, 2008), p. 131.

34 Thomas H. Shepherd and James Elmes, *Metropolitan Improvements; or London in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Jones & Co., 1827; 1829); reprinted as *London in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Mayflower Books, 1978), p. 145. For Elmes, father and son, see Felstead et al., *Directory of British Architects, 1834-1900*, pp. 288-290.

35 Shepherd and Elmes, *Metropolitan Improvements*, p. 145.

36 Ibid., facing p. 144.

stamp announced Wilson's own architectural preference. Most of the chapels in London and the provinces for which he provided funds, established trusts, and supplied ministers, primarily through his influence as Highbury's treasurer, were classically-accented machines for preaching in, strategically sited as spring-boards for mission. His inherited commitment to the college's purpose combined with his business acumen to project him into the growing world of chapel building as well as church planting. These responsibilities were almost inevitably assumed by the younger Thomas's only son Joshua.

Joshua Wilson had been groomed for the role; from the 1820s he worked in tandem with his father and after his father's death he devoted the remaining thirty years of his own life to maintaining his father's legacy. Thanks to the family fortune Joshua Wilson had no need to work for his living. He had, however, been called to the Bar and although he never practised, for he had neither aptitude nor inclination for platform advocacy and his was not really a forensic mind, his strength lay in the gathering and dissemination of information. To that extent his legal training served him well; he would have made the ideal family solicitor. He probably knew more about the people, events, and sources of Congregationalism than any of his contemporaries and he was related by birth and marriage to a wider range of well-placed Congregationalists than most of them. He was, moreover, an instinctive mediator, temperamentally moderate notwithstanding a degree of inherited obstinacy. All this encouraged the development of a nice strategic sense in one who was not a born strategist. He evolved along with contemporary Congregationalism and he contributed signally to its denominational evolution.

Joshua Wilson's family connexions embraced every theological and political nuance in Congregationalism. His own views are harder to make out. His most perceptive obituaryist, Robert Halley, was clearly perplexed by him:

> He felt as little interest in small matters ... the passing events of the hour, as any intelligent man I have ever known. He did, I believe, read the newspapers, but he seemed to care very little about their news, and still less about their opinions. In politics he steadily adhered to great principles, but cared little for the disputes of parties. Lord John Russell was the only political leader of whom I ever heard him speak with much interest; but then Lord John bore a family name which he venerated.[37]

It was the same with theology. On "the abstruse questions of theology, such as the freedom of the will, the grounds of human responsibility, the predestination of all things by God and the liberty left for the voluntary action of men in opposition to His will and purposes ... he never talked freely. When he read about them, as he did frequently, it was to know the opinions and arguments of the writers rather than to form his own opinions or regulate his own judgment ... He knew all about the metaphysicians excepting their metaphysics".[38] That severe judgment

37 Robert Halley, "Recollections of the Old Dissent. No. V", *The Congregationalist* (1875), pp. 95-6.

38 Ibid., p. 96.

was tempered by S. S. England, Wilson's last minister (and, of course, a family connexion), who called him a "firm believer in the science of theology", refusing "to imagine that any discoveries of natural science or generalizations of philosophy could be really antagonistic to the true science of theology based upon Divine revelation".[39] No wonder he turned to history, especially Nonconformist history:

> Of Nonconformist ministers and churches he seemed to me to know all that was worth knowing, and a great deal that many readers would think not worth the time and trouble of learning. His knowledge was as remarkable for its minute accuracy as it was for its wide extent ... He was thoroughly acquainted with the biography of every Nonconformist minister who has been at all distinguished for his preaching, his writings, his labours, his good services of any kind. [40]

In this light one can appreciate his eirenic obstinacy. He served on the first Committee of the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews (1842), and he prayed daily "for the conversion of the Jews and of the heathen, and that the divisions of Christ's Church might be healed".[41] That said, he was "more firm and decided in Dissenting principles than most of the Dissenters of his time. I do not say he never went to church, but I never heard of him going there".[42] In one radical regard, Wilson's logical Dissent confounded Halley:

> To be married in church seemed to him a profession of conformity. To accept on that occasion the blessing of the Church seemed to him a concession of principle. What right had he to claim the services of a clergyman who was acting by the authority of the State, and endowed with especial power of changing the civil condition on men and women?[43]

Wilson's view was that marriage, at least as far as it concerned the State, should be a purely civil and secular matter. He expressed this in a pamphlet, *An Appeal to Dissenters, on their submitting to the Obligation imposed by the Law for the religious celebration of Marriage, according to the form prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer* (1831) and when it came to his own marriage he travelled to Edinburgh where, "without the acknowledgement of any ecclesiastical authority, he consecrated the civil contract by prayer, and found the blessing of God to rest upon it ... He always looked with great satisfaction upon his successful opposition to the old marriage law".[44]

Paradoxically, the fact that Wilson was not to be pigeon-holed made him an admirable link-man. His formative role in establishing the *Congregational*

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39 S. S. England, "The Late Joshua Wilson, Esq.", *Evangelical Magazine* (1874), p. 662.

40 Halley, "Recollections of the Old Dissent. No. V", p. 96.

41 Thus his daughter, Mary E. Wilson, in J. Dunlop (ed), *Memories of Gospel Triumphs among the Jews*, (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1894), p. 182.

42 Halley, "Recollections of the Old Dissent. No. V", p. 99.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

Magazine (1818), the *Patriot* (1831-2), the *Eclectic Review* and, later, in encouraging the *British Quarterly Review*, and his enthusiasm for the Congregational Lecture and the Congregational Library brought him into steady contact with Congregational opinion formers from the 1820s to the 1870s. The critical decade for this was the 1830s, when the Congregational Union of England and Wales came into being. The *Congregational Magazine* and the Congregational Library were among the agencies which prepared the way for the Union and Wilson duly played his part in its formation. His contacts and his secretarial and financial skills compensated for the constraints imposed by his health and temperament.[45]

It was the missionary dimension of this denominational evolution which carried Wilson into the work of the English Congregational Chapel-Building Society and encouraged him to make the most of the bicentennial opportunities of 1862. As with his father, so contrasting in personality, there was bound to be an architectural dimension to his witness.

Almost inevitably Joshua Wilson was the Chapel-Building Society's first treasurer. He was a comfortably circumstanced man who took care to conserve his fortune. In his prime, at 35 Highbury Place, the third generation of his family to have a house there, his household ran to four resident servants, all female. In his last years, at 4 Nevill Park, Tunbridge Wells, which struck a much later visitor as "a fine house with big windows and plenty of light", there were three servants, still female.[46] He was not, however, rich in the way that Yorkshire's Crossleys and Salts or London's Samuel Morley were rich, let alone his first cousin and frequent ally John Remington Mills.[47] Once again Robert Halley comes shrewdly to our aid: "What he gave he gave considerately as well as generously, although his gifts, estimated severally as the recipients estimated them, did not appear so large as they would have done had he given to fewer objects". Even so the Chapel-Building Society's published subscription lists testified to his giving: at the time of his death only six individuals (and one firm) had given more than the £2,623 credited to him.[48]

As to his own architectural preference, there are some clues. In the early 1870s a new and relatively modest church was built in Albion Road, Tunbridge Wells. J. A. Clapham would have approved. Its materials were Kentish Rag with Bath stone dressings, its style was thirteenth-century Gothic, it seated 400, its architect was John Sulman, the most promising of younger Congregational architects, and its cost (£2,600, including the site) was shared between the cousins, John Remington Mills and Joshua Wilson.[49] A second clue is provided by a building in suggestive contrast.

Wilson's bicentennial vision included a "Congregational Hall" in London. This was not to be a Club House, although Congregationalists should find there

45 Wilson's role is assessed 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), pp. 13, 46-49, 63-6.

46 Census Returns, 1841, 1851, 1871; Mrs J. Counihan to author, 10 November, 1981.

47 He left £45,000 (*The Times* [9 October 1874]). For Morley and Mills, see *ODNB*.

48 Halley, "Recollections of the Old Dissent. No. V", pp. 100-101.

49 *Congregational Year Book* [hereafter *CYB*] (1875), p. 441.

"a home and meeting place – a focus and rallying point". Neither was it to be "distinctively a Library", although it should house "a valuable historical library". It was, however, to accommodate "all the secretaries of our various religious societies, and their clerks"; it was to be "a local habitation for the conductors of our denominational business".[50] Wilson announced his scheme in 1861. It was 1875 before Congregationalism's Memorial Hall was opened in Farringdon Street, on the site of the old Fleet Prison; the search for a site and the road to completion had been unusually fraught.[51] The scheme had, however, engaged the consistent attention of many of the protagonists in this study, from J. C. Gallaway to the Crossleys. What was built fulfilled the intention of Joshua Wilson, whose personal library formed the core of the Hall's collection, and the Hall's largest benefactor was Wilson's cousin Remington Mills, who gave £10,000, perhaps £12,000.[52]

And the style and architect? The style was Free Gothic, its carefully asymmetrical Devonshire limestone façade presenting a fireproof rock face to Farringdon Street, its public importance signalled by a large gable flanked by mansard-spired towers, its roof-line rising from north to south. It was a cathedral of a town hall, imposing but not endearing. Its chief internal feature was a hammer-beamed great hall, a Dissenting Westminster Hall, accompanied by a library, for which there were "more than 8,000 volumes ready to be placed on the shelves".[53]

The architect was John Tarring (1806-1875), the "Dissenters' Gilbert Scott", who indeed would claim to be acting in Scott's spirit when his completed plans were criticized by the Hall's building sub-committee.[54] Tarring had been selected in December 1866 after six ballots. He was one of fifteen architects whose names had been actively canvassed, among them Joseph James, whose father was the committee's secretary, and Alfred Waterhouse.[55] Waterhouse was Joshua Wilson's choice. Although he had recently moved to London and was rapidly developing a national practice, Waterhouse was still best known in Lancashire, where his Quaker family connexions had sped him on his way and where he had also prepared plans for five Congregational churches.[56] That Joshua Wilson knew of him in 1866 is a tribute to Wilson's wide contacts and perhaps to his architectural prescience. Tarring, by contrast, was a Congregational veteran. He promised "his

50 J. Wilson, "The Second Centenary of the Ejectment of the Nonconformist Ministers from the Established Church", *CYB* (1862), p. 68.

51 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. 161-174.

52 Ibid., p. 170.

53 *CYB* (1876), p. 474.

54 London: Congregational Library, Congregational Memorial Hall Minute Book, 1871-1881, 20 February 1872.

55 London: Congregational Library, Congregational Memorial Hall Minute Book, 1862-1866, 20 November, 4 December, 1866.

56 For Waterhouse, see Colin Cunningham and Prudence Waterhouse, *Alfred Waterhouse 1830-1905: Biography of a Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). The Congregational Churches were: Ancoats (1861-5), Besses o' th' Barn (1863), Rusholme (1863), Ashton-in-Makerfield (1865-7), Broadheath, Cheshire (1866).

best effort to meet the wishes of the Committee" and he kept his promise for the next six frustrating years.[57]

Wilson was unexpectedly prescient in one other respect. His bicentennial plans included "some monumental erection, such as a Cenotaph or Memorial Pillar in Bunhill Fields".[58] It would be nearly sixty years before the word "Cenotaph" entered the nation's consciousness. The historical sense allied to a Classical education and grounded in evangelical faith – a cenotaph is an empty tomb – can press commemoration forward.

XIV: The Mechanics of Chapel Building: Crediton Congregationalists and the Union

Joshua Wilson's Congregational correspondence extended from the 1820s to the 1870s and it covered most English counties. It ranged from trusteeships to ministerial deployment, from Dissenting history to advice about possible stone-layers. The cause at Crediton, Devon, provides a case in point.

Crediton was the quintessential English market town. In the nineteenth century its population never exceeded 6,000 and its fine Collegiate Church, rebuilt in the mid-fifteenth century, testified to a past prosperity largely based on wool, latterly bolstered by footwear. There had been a Dissenting presence since the seventeenth century, originally Presbyterian and becoming Unitarian, with an eighteenth-century Congregational reaction accompanied by the arrival of Methodism. A Baptist cause, in effect a secession from the Congregationalists, was formed in the early nineteenth century.[59]

The Dissenting presence was persistent. Its evolution was uneven. The Presbyterian congregation was nurtured by the preaching of ejected ministers and confirmed when premises were licensed for worship in 1672. The Presbyterian meeting-house in Broad Street was rebuilt on Bowden Hill (1729-31) where it survived until doomed by a landslip in 1963. Its loss is to be deplored. Its exterior of red cob walls on a sandstone plinth, five bays with round-arched windows and a central pediment, and its barrel-vaulted interior with two galleries and a pulpit with sounding-board, testified to the prosperity of early Georgian Crediton and its Presbyterians as eloquently as its unchanged appearance testified to their relative stagnation. Here was "a building of major importance as an example of a large and early meeting-house of considerable quality and as an outstanding example of cob-construction ... claimed to be the largest in Great Britain".[60]

An Arian minister precipitated an orthodox secession in 1756 and this formed

57 Congregational Memorial Hall Minute Book, 1862-1866, 18 December 1866.

58 Wilson, "Second Centenary", p. 68.

59 This account is drawn from C. White, *A History of the Congregational Church in Crediton, Devon* (Crediton: Colin White, 2003), *passim*; "Religious Intelligence: Statistical View of Dissenters", *Congregational Magazine* (July 1825), pp. 388-9.

60 Stell, *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in South-West England*, pp. 68, 69-71; G. Hague, Judy Hague and H. J. McLachlan, *The Unitarian Heritage* (Sheffield: Unitarian Heritage, 1986), pp. 44, 47.

the bulk of the congregation which moved into a new chapel on the old Broad Street site in 1757.[61] It was not, however, until 1805 that a Congregational church was formed, a development which coincided with the remodelling of the chapel's interior and the building of a gallery. In between there had been short ministries and fluctuating supplies of occasional preachers, sustained by an obstinate continuity: one of the deacons elected in 1805 belonged to the family which had helped build the chapel in 1757, on the site of the original meeting-house which had remained in Dissenting hands since the bulk of Dissenters had moved to Bowden Hill in 1731.[62] Such a history was replicated in countless market towns and it was in such circumstances that Thomas and Joshua Wilson came into their own.

It is not clear that either ever visited Crediton. Their interest grew from their trusteeship, exercised from 1806 and reflected in over eighty letters and related papers covering the years from 1821 to 1872, the bulk of them from 1842, addressed to Joshua Wilson.[63] The two letters to Thomas Wilson concern the ministry of William Pollard Davies (1821-1824) who came from Wellingborough and moved on to Plymouth. They illustrate the ebbs and flows of ministerial life and Wilson's role in placing and encouraging journeyman ministers. In the first, the hopeful Davies has been in Crediton for six weeks; he has received a call to its pastorate, which he intends to accept for twelve months, and he has begun to preach in the neighbouring villages. He plans to visit London, prompted by his wife's health; since the visit will include the third Sunday in the month, he asks for a supply and intends to call on Wilson the following day. In the second letter, Davies has decided to resign. He is discouraged by the results of his village preaching and by the coldness of the people and their aversion to Evangelical sentiment; he wishes to consult Wilson.[64]

Thomas Wilson was in constant receipt of such letters. Crediton's circumstances were par for the Congregational course. Its stipend was low, bolstered by an endowment; its membership was modest.[65] Although it sustained a consistent ministry from 1805, most pastorates were short and many were like Davies's. In Joshua Wilson's Crediton correspondence, routine enquiries about the trust deeds and related matters were interwoven with ministerial dramas. James Baker (1843-1848), whose stipend seems not to have exceeded £50, inclusive of a £10 grant

61 "Religious Intelligence: Statistical View of Dissenters", p. 388; White, *A History of the Congregational Church in Crediton*, p. 17. The Presbyterian congregation's most celebrated minister was the diplomatic Micaijah Towgood (1700-1790; Crediton 1737-1749), for whom see *ODNB*.

62 White, *A History of the Congregational Church in Crediton*, pp. 15-20.

63 Joshua Wilson's correspondence is in the Congregational Library, now housed in Dr Williams's Library, London: hereafter CL: JWCorr. The Wilson trusteeship is indicated by Joshua Wilson's notes of Crediton Independent Church deeds, dated 21 June 1806, endorsed 25/26 December 1809, 14 September 1824, 4 November 1842 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/32).

64 Revd W. P. Davies to T. Wilson, 3 September 1821, [January] 1823 (CL: JWCorr Gb8/33, 34). Davies left Crediton for Plymouth and a later letter (1830) to Wilson expresses his wish to move from Plymouth – but not to Matlock (DWL: NCL: 347/18).

65 Eight members when formed in 1805, twenty-seven by October 1806, and never exceeding 100: White, *A History of the Congregational Church in Crediton*, pp. 20, 28. For details of the stipend 1852-1956, see ibid., p. 28.

from the Home Missionary Society but exclusive of the chapel endowment, was a new broom; he "has found it advisable to have the chapel painted repaired and improved". The result was an encouragingly improved attendance and if, over a year later, £30 of the £100 spent on the refurbishment had still to be found, Mrs Baker was proving "an efficient fellow labourer ... the schools are flourishing".[66] Baker's successor, Samuel Phillips Day (1848-9), was dogged by financial problems. A year after Day's delayed arrival, "Greatly distressed for want of means", Wilson received a series of letters in rapid sequence. The first, seeking advice, reported that "Mr. Day is returned to Crediton, the Members of the Church are unanimous never to hear him preach again. I could not inform you on a Sheet of Paper (closely written) one half of what we have seen and heard of him ... we drew up his resignation he signed it ... Thus we have got rid of a Man whose like I never wish to see again". Two weeks later, it appeared that "Day's debts in Crediton exceed One hundred pounds. He owes money to Bakers Butchers Wine Merchants ... His credit at last was so entirely gone that I do not believe any one would have given him credit to the value of 6d ... he contracted debts in Exeter to the amount of several Pounds". Not surprisingly, "Our people are very very sad they have lost all their energy", and Wilson was asked if he knew "a Minister who has a little Property whom you could recommend to Crediton".[67]

Day's successor, Thomas Davies (1849-1854), was young, Welsh, and poor "but of modest demeanor and very frugal habits"; "the people appear attached to him". Davies had come recommended by friends in Bristol (he was known to Nathaniel Haycroft, "the very popular Baptist minister there", whose mother was a "Member of our Chapel") and by the Welsh ministers who had ordained him and who sought to explain why Davies had been only briefly a student at Rotherham College. Wilson's correspondent had written to the Rotherham tutor, whose report "was very unfavourable", but he inclined to think "it possible that Mr. Davies might have been guilty of prevarication to a certain extent while at Rotherham". Certainly, a year and a half later "Mr. Davis [sic] (the little Welshman) is still here. I think he has improved since he came".[68]

Crediton's Congregational ministerial life provides a suggestive counterpoint to the educated optimism of the Religious Republicans but it does not contradict it. In March 1851, a few months before the little Welshman's improvement was reported to Wilson, the Religious Census gave a morning attendance of 105 adults and 140 children, and an evening attendance of 230 adults; there were 160 children at the afternoon Sunday school. This contrasted with 1100 attendances at the Collegiate Church, 500 at its Sunday school.[69] It was the next ministry but one, that of William

66 Josiah Roberts to Joshua Wilson, 23 July 1844 (CL:JWCorr. Gb 8/36); 13 October 1845 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/37).

67 Revd S. P. Day to J. Wilson, 18 June 1849 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/44); George Newman to J. Wilson, 27 June 1849 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/45); 29 June 1849 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/46); 13 July 1849 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/48).

68 Newman to Wilson, 8 January 1850 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/50); 17 January 1850 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/ 53); 16 July 1851 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/54).

69 White, *A History of the Congregational Church in Crediton*, p. 29.

Snell (1856-1869), which cast a new light on the situation and led to the rebuilding of the chapel on a new site.

Snell (*c.*1814-1881) is the unsung hero of the story. He seems to have had no collegiate training, Crediton seems to have been his only full-time pastorate, and although he remained on the denominational roll of ministers and never left Devon, he has no *Year Book* obituary.[70] Like most of his predecessors he first came to Crediton as a supply, in his case "highly esteemed by all the surrounding Ministers".[71]

Their esteem was justified. Moves were soon afoot to improve, perhaps transform, the premises but these required a sight of the Trust Deeds, which Wilson had unaccountably mislaid. In September 1859 a fellow Trustee wrote from Exeter. Thanks to Snell the cause was progressing so favourably that they could no longer afford to ignore the chapel's unprepossessing approach through stables, piggeries and the like: "These it is thought could and most certainly [should] be removed. But they do not like to take action before they know their real position. This can be shown alone by the Trust Deeds". [72]

Between July 1856 and July 1861 there were repeated requests for the Deeds. Had they been mislaid, perhaps on Wilson's removal to Tunbridge Wells? Was Wilson overwhelmed by ill-health, chapel-building Society business, and the mounting campaign to celebrate the Bicentenary? Who knows? Thereafter there was little pressure to see the existing Deeds – indeed they seem to have been located, and the presumption must be that they were safely in Wilson's possession. The focus was now on the host of issues to do with building a new chapel on a fresh site.

The decisive point came in late July 1861. On 27 July John Nicholls, the Exeter-based trustee, wrote that "the once almost deserted Meeting House is filled each Sabbath day by a crowded and attentive audience".[73] The same day Snell also wrote. He stressed the inconvenience caused by horses and pigs, and how, "ignorant of our rights [we] have been unable to take any legal steps".[74] Both asked after the Trust Deeds; one can understand their need of reassurance given the prospect of significant expenditure. Their letters spurred Wilson into action. He asked about the existing chapel. He learned that it was square (31' x 32'), that it held 300 adults "but is become too small to hold the congregation that would willingly assemble", and that the deacons would write further about it.[75]

They duly did so in the shape of Thomas Heathman, one of several local chapel men in the building trade. From him Wilson learned that a congregational meeting had agreed on enlargement, despite an "approach so objectionable as not to justify an outlay" and the near impossibility of buying back the neighbour whose properties flanked that approach. It was at this point that the prospect was raised (by Heathman? by Joshua Wilson?) of building on a new site. Heathman was aware

70 *CYB* (1882), p. 283.
71 William Thomas to J. Wilson, 16 July 1856 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/57).
72 John P. Nicholls to J. Wilson, 6 September 1879 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/61).
73 Nicholls to J. Wilson, 27 July 1861 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/64).
74 Revd W. Snell to J. Wilson, 27 July 1861 (CL; JWCorr. Gb 8/65).
75 Snell to Wilson, 30 August 1861 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/66).

of an excellent one close by: he thought that a building could be erected for £2 a sitting.[76]

Heathman was to prove correct about that, although his excellent site turned out to be unsuitable: another one, also close at hand, had since appeared, offering room for both chapel and manse.[77] By now Wilson's attention was fully engaged. He secured the good offices of John Remington Mills on various issues and had useful advice of his own and he offered to draft an appeal to the Devon churches.[78] Heathman was properly cautious. He reassured Mills as to the new site's value (the church's offer of £450 had been accepted) and Wilson as to the committee's unwillingness to proceed without Wilson's sanction.[79] For his part, Wilson asked J. C. Gallaway to see that his annual contribution of £50 to the Chapel-Building Society should be given to Crediton: "I want to encourage the parties concerned there to get it finished, so as to be opened in the Spring".[80]

That was decidedly optimistic but the chapel-building mills were now grinding and the correspondence sheds light on various aspects of this. Legal complexities developed their own long momentum; world affairs cast their shadow;[81] a London minister, who had worked in Devon and recalled Snell as "an excellent character", wrote helpfully while noting that before the recent encouragement in his ministry Snell's health "had partially failed".[82] Then, early in 1862, the critical matters of style and architect were addressed. In response to a cheque from Mills, Snell expressed his pleasure that Gothic had not been recommended – it is not clear whether that was Mills's view or Wilson's; perhaps it was a joint view and the church agreed with it: "We prefer the Italian – and consider it much more in character with the principles of Nonconformity".[83]

On the face of it this was a surprising judgement, unless Snell had been carried away by an enthusiasm for Garibaldi, but "Italian" was a famously loose description and a letter from Heathman clarified matters. It had been decided to accept a design by the Newcastle architect, Thomas Oliver, on the lines of churches which Oliver had built at Middlesbrough and Sneinton, near Nottingham, and which had been illustrated in the 1857 *Congregational Year Book*. Oliver had already furnished drawings "on liberal terms"; the actual construction would be supervised locally.[84]

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76 Thomas Heathman to J. Wilson, 4 September 1861 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/67).

77 Heathman to Wilson, October 1861 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/88).

78 John Remington Mills to J. Wilson, 7 October 1861 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/69); T. Heathman to J. Wilson, 22 October 1861 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/71).

79 Ibid.

80 Joshua Wilson to Revd J. C. Gallaway, 26 November 1861 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/76).

81 "In consequence of the depressed state of the market it will be a great loss to sell out just now ... there may be an improvement as soon as the American question is settled". T. Heathmam to J. Wilson, 13 December 1861 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/77).

82 Revd Richard Fletcher to J. Wilson [? November 1861] (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/80). This is surely Richard Fletcher (d. 1873), of Hackney, who had ministered at Topsham, Devon, late 1840s and 1850s. His letter was prompted by a report in the *Western Times* (2 November 1861).

83 Revd W. Snell to J. Wilson, 29 January 1862 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/86).

84 T. Heathman to J. Wilson, 10 February 1862 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/87).

Thus the scheme proceeded. The part played by the Chapel-Building Society was distant but consistent and thoroughly useful. The younger Thomas Oliver was one of their recommended architects, with a reliable track record. In mid-June Heathman forwarded two proposed elevations, and plans at ground and gallery level, asking Wilson to pass them on, to Gallaway and commenting that Oliver "has carried out our ideas very successfully".[85] A few days later Heathman replied to various queries that Wilson had raised about the plans and the following month he sent a statement of monies in hand.[86] In August, Snell wrote that they were waiting from the Chapel-Building Society and hoped for assistance from the "Memorial Fund".[87] "Black Bartholomew's" bicentenary fell a fortnight later.

The church learned of the society's decision on 19 August. The news was disappointing. No special case was made; there was to be a grant of £50 (presumably this reflected Wilson's annual subscription) and a loan of £150. This was the usual amount for such cases but Snell told Wilson that it "is not equal to our expectations", when all at Crediton were "straining every nerve".[88]

Even so it had a salutary effect. A printed appeal was issued, dated 5 November 1862, with testimonials and a lithograph view.[89] Three months later tenders had been invited and accepted. The cost was to be £1,221.18.0. Would Wilson be able to lay the foundation stone on Lady Day?[90]

Snell had not exaggerated when he wrote that all were straining every nerve. A special committee had been active since January 1862.[91] At first it concerned itself with the refurbishment of the existing manse but the idea of a completely new chapel quickly took hold and Heathman became its driving force. It was Heathman who contacted Oliver and secured his plans and specifications for £20. In June 1862 the committee was replaced by a larger General Purposes Committee; five of its fifteen members were in the building trades, Heathman among them. There were arrangements for a tea meeting in July and a bazaar was planned for late October but in fact held in early December; it made a profit of £90.7.10.[92]

Of course there were delays, but negotiations seem to have been remarkably trouble free. The invaluable C. E. Conder's report on the plans was considered and acted on. Conder had comments to make about the entrance steps, the seating, the disposition of internal columns, but his phrasing was diplomatic:

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85 Heathman to Wilson, 16 June 1862 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/98).

86 Heathman to Wilson, 20 June 1862 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/99); 15 July 1862 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/100).

87 Revd W. Snell to J. Wilson, 11 August 1862 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/101).

88 Snell to Wilson, 9 September 1862 (CL: JWCorr Gb8/102); White, *A History of the Congregational Church in Crediton*, p. 34. White provides an excellent account of the building project from the church's angle, in part building on an earlier careful account (pp. 31-40).

89 CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/103.

90 Revd W. Snell to J. Wilson, 6 February 1863 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/104).

91 White, *A History of the Congregational Church in Crediton*, p. 31.

92 Ibid., pp. 32-3, 35.

"These points are commended to the consideration of the local friends, as so much must depend on the lie of the ground and all the circumstances of the site".[93] He was equally amenable when it came to the tenders. The church decided to have three contracts (mason's; carpenter's and painter's; glazier's and plumber's) and to seek two tenders for each. Individual tradesmen, all of them members of the congregation, were to be invited to tender. As the committee painstakingly explained to Conder:

> These gentlemen are all of well known responsibility and take a lively interest in the cause and there being a difficulty under the present creed of the committee of their entering into a contract it is proposed that all necessary conditions as to the progress and completion of the works being first added to the specification that each contractor should then sign them. This is a plan often adopted in the neighbourhood and will be satisfactory to the contractors.[94]

Conder proved agreeable; Heathman, a carpenter and ironmonger, was one of the contractors. Neither Wilson nor Mills was able to lay the foundation stone. That honour fell to Plymouth's leading Congregationalist, Alfred Rooker, but Wilson was kept in the picture.[95] In September 1863 Snell reported that the "walls are now nearly up, and we hope very soon to have them covered in". A week later ("By desire of Mr. Snell who is away from home"), Heathman forwarded a few appeals: "We are working the weekly subscriptions and have pledged ourselves to raise £500 at least".[96] That was more easily said than done. By late November £350 had been raised, there was a resolve to seek another £100; and there had been delay over the supply of stone because a quarry had closed when "our job was about half on".[97] By late January 1864 nearly £200 more had been raised, the bulk of the chapel had been covered, its gutters had been fixed and its coping stones were being fixed. There remained, perhaps, £450 to be raised. Would Mills help? And Heathman alerted Wilson to the minister's "general prostration": Snell was "unable to discharge his ministerial duties".[98]

Snell's recovery was slow. In May 1864 he was improving (and Heathman thanked Wilson "for your kind and liberal appropriation of £50 to our chapel fund").[99] In June Snell was "still not able to endure fatigue" (and Heathman assured Wilson that "We are pushing on the chapel as far as practicable", although

93 Quoted in Ibid., pp. 147-8, where "Conder" is misprinted as "Lander".

94 Ibid., p. 37.

95 Alfred Rooker (d. 1875) was a Plymouth solicitor, dominant in local Liberal politics, twice Mayor of Plymouth, and a Parliamentary candidate in 1871. He was descended from five Ejected Ministers and was closely connected by marriage to the Willses of Bristol and the Hopkinsons of Manchester, leading Congregational families.

96 Revd W. Snell to J. Wilson, [9] September [1863] (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/105); T. Heathman to J. Wilson, 17 September 1863 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/106).

97 Heathman to Wilson, 26 November 1863 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/107).

98 Heathman to Wilson, 30 January 1864 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/108).

99 Heathman to Wilson 10 May 1864 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/109).

he feared that they would not be able to have it open by 24 August).[100] A year later, with the chapel opened at last, Snell reported to Wilson that he had sent the Balance Sheet to the Chapel-Building Society, adding that he hoped for latitude in repaying the Society's loan.[101] Wilson remained an invaluable intermediary in such matters – with the Society, with benevolent Congregationalists, and well-disposed Dissenters like Samuel Morley, Mills, and Richard Peek.[102] Even so, as was ever the case, the chapel debt remained obstinately in place: in April 1866, when a printed appeal was reissued, it stood at £499.19.4; in November 1871 another printed appeal showed that it stood at £200.[103] By then Snell had retired to Barnstaple. His health had not fully recovered. As he had written to Joshua Wilson in August 1867, within two years of his retirement, yet again enclosing a statement of his church's financial position and appealing for aid: "More ... would have been raised but for my protracted illness. I have been laid up for more than 9 months and only just resumed duty".[104]

Even so, the new building justified the strenuous efforts of William Snell, Thomas Heathman, and their attendant committees and sub-committees. It was fit for purpose and it survives (2021) as a Congregational Church, reordered in 1999 when, after much debate, the pews were removed from the ground floor and a film screen replaced the pulpit.[105] The run-of-the-mill Victorian rebuilding had in fact been well timed. The convergence of congregational need, ministerial leadership, and commemorative pride coincided with a modest peak for Crediton; the railway had arrived in 1857, the population was steady, the Congregational cause was poised to consolidate rather than stagnate. In March 1866 the new chapel was registered for births, marriages, and deaths. For the next twenty-five years the old chapel was used as the Sunday school until replaced in 1890 by purpose-built premises; in that year, too, a new manse was built.[106]

The last word should lie with the chapel's "Italian style". Thomas Oliver had provided a "Pedimented front with giant order of Ionic pilasters carrying entablature arched over centre bay".[107] The arched entablature introduced a Baroque swagger which enhanced the building's civic dignity without disguising the fact that it was a Nonconformist chapel. Whether or not that reflected Nonconformist principles, it indicated William Snell's architectural preference.

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100 Heathman to Wilson, 30 June 1864 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/110).

101 Revd W. Snell to J. Wilson, 14 August 1865 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/114).

102 Morley and Mills were no strangers to such requests; R. Peek (as he appears in the correspondence: Heathman to Wilson, 30 June 1864, and undated: CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/110,111) is presumably Richard Peek (d. 1867), tea merchant, of Peek Brothers, a past High Sheriff of London and a Dissenter. The next generation moved into biscuit making (Peak, Frean & Co.), the Church of England, and the Tory Party, rediscovering their Devon roots.

103 Printed appeal, 4 April 1866 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/115); Printed appeal, November 1871 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/118).

104 Revd W. Snell to J. Wilson, 13 August 1867 (CL: JWCorr. Gb 8/117).

105 White, *A History of the Congregational Church in Crediton*, pp. 132-7.

106 Ibid., pp. 28, 41, 46.

107 Stell, *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in South-West England*, p. 71.

Thomas Oliver had furnished his designs from a distance, rather as Joshua Wilson had dispensed his advice; it is unlikely that either actually visited the building. Its deference to local need was reflected in its materials: the façade of blue Lias limestone, with Bath stone dressings, the approach of granite steps, and the side and back walls of brown local stone. Its fitness for purpose is attributable to the mingled good sense of the Chapel-Building Society's C. E. Conder, and his interpretation of the Society's regulations, of the local contractors, guided by Thomas Heathman, and of Newcastle's Thomas Oliver, whose plans fitted the Society's preferred stipulations, regardless of stylistic dress, allowing for relative ease of circulation. His chapel seated 650, over half of them on the ground floor, using sloping-backed, open benches. There were "front, side and singing galleries", distinguished by light open ironwork. The woodwork was stained and varnished, the doors covered in red cloth. Star lights and side brackets provided the lighting. Iron columns supported the galleries, carried up to and supporting the roof and a series of plaster arches, above which "springs a handsome cove pierced with ornamental ventilators, a form of construction which, whilst obviating the effects of extreme heat in summer and cold in winter, secures the advantage of space and effect, and is found highly conducive to easy speaking and facility of hearing".[108] What more could have been required for £1,373.0.8?[109]

Crediton's Broad Street is now High Street. Its Congregational Church is more visible from the street than it was when built in 1865. It affords representative testimony to the aims and objectives of the English Congregational Chapel-Building Society, founded (to use its own jubilee words) by "a few earnest, far-sighted men, faithful stewards of their world's riches", to such good effect that

> No longer hid away in back streets, our Churches (as they are now usually called) often stand in prominent positions, and of pleasing architecture, throwing open their doors to all comers. Built by and for our denomination, they proclaim the Gospel not for a sect, but for mankind. Great care is taken to secure within their walls comfort, brightness, a pleasant and healthful atmosphere, and good acoustics; the proper placing of choir and instrument are not lost sight of, while the arrangements for lighting, ventilation, and warming are up to date ...[110]

It was a modest but satisfying – and not self-satisfied – assessment.

CLYDE BINFIELD

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108 *CYB* (1864), p. 293.

109 White, *A History of the Congregational Church in Crediton*, p. 41.

110 English Congregational Chapel-Building Society, *Report of the Committee to the Members of the Society* (1904), pp. 7, 9.

MINISTERS OF LONDON STREET INDEPENDENT/ CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, BASINGSTOKE, IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

During the nineteenth century the most distinguished Independent/ Congregational Church in north-east Hampshire was the one situated in the market town of Basingstoke. Dating its origins to the immediate aftermath of the Great Ejectment of 1662, by the beginning of the nineteenth century it had become a prominent feature of the town's ecclesiastical landscape.[1] Moreover, the congregation was about to move from a meeting house in Cross Street to purpose built premises in London Street. The foundation stone having been laid on 10 May 1800, the new chapel, which could accommodate five hundred worshippers, was opened the following year. Served, in the main, by a succession of capable and committed ministers, over the next hundred years the Church thrived to the extent that these premises had to be enlarged on a number of occasions.

It is with the ministerial leadership of the Church that this article is primarily concerned. Consideration is given to the background, character and contribution of those called to serve in Basingstoke, with the history of the Church being charted through their ministries. Reference is also made to the building projects, which were indicative of London Street's progress as the town's premier Nonconformist place of worship. Evidence is drawn from a variety of sources including newspaper reports, obituaries and a few surviving Church records, including the minutes of Church meetings in to which important letters have been copied.[2] These have facilitated the construction of a narrative which provides many insights into what, for most of the period under review, was a flourishing cause. Indeed as new denominations put down roots in the town, in particular the Primitive Methodists in the 1840s, the Wesleyan Methodists in the 1870s, and the Salvation Army in the 1880s, London Street ministers invariably offered support and encouragement.

I: Joseph Jefferson 1791-1819, "his fidelity was not unrewarded"[3]

The minister at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the Revd Joseph Jefferson. He had been in post since "July 1791, when he received an invitation to supply the Independent Church at Basingstoke, then vacant by the decease of the Rev. J. Ridgway".[4] Basingstoke was Jefferson's first pastorate after leaving

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1 Apart from the Parish Church of St Michael's, there were two other places of worship in Basingstoke at this time, a Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion chapel and a Quaker meeting house.

2 There are two volumes of London Street Church Meeting Minutes (hereafter LSCMM) covering the periods 1721 to 1890 and 1890 to 1904. These are lodged in the London Street United Reformed Church Archive (hereafter LSURCA).

3 The quotations used in the section headings are referenced in the detailed text that follows.

4 "Memoir of the Late Rev. Joseph Jefferson, of Thirsk Yorkshire", *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (January 1825), pp. 1-7 available online at https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi /pt?id=hvd.ah6lsw;view=1up;seq=1 (accessed 2 December 2018).

Homerton Academy, where for two years he "passed with ability and honour through his academical course".[5] There follow some further extracts from a memoir which appeared in the *Evangelical Magazine* relating to his lengthy pastorate in Basingstoke and his character:

> In August 1801 a new and handsome meeting house was opened at Basingstoke, the church and congregation having considerably increased during the ten years of Mr. J[efferson]'s pastorship.
>
> Mr. J[efferson] faithfully discharged the duties of his ministry at Basingstoke, during a period of nearly 28 years, and had the satisfaction of knowing that his fidelity was not unrewarded. The increased prosperity of the church was proof of his success, and notwithstanding many discouragements, which indeed are usually met by conscientious servants of Christ, he had, up to the close of his ministry among this people, continual support and continual pleasure in the assurance that his efforts were attended by the blessing of God. Several villages in the neighbourhood enjoyed the benefit of his disinterested services; and to one [unnamed] village in particular the effects of his ministrations remain to the present day. Many members have joined the church at Basingstoke, whose first religious impressions were received in a licensed house in which Mr. J[efferson] first, and afterwards some friends of his congregation, taught the great truths of the gospel. The majority of the instances of his usefulness came to light after his removal from Basingstoke, and it is hoped, that there be individuals who yet shall bear witness, even after his decease, to the fidelity and affection of his village labours ...

It would seem, however, that notwithstanding the high esteem in which Jefferson was held, something untoward marred the final stages of his ministry in the town and led to his moving to a new pastorate at Thirsk in Yorkshire:

> In the year 1819 [unspecified] circumstances occurred of a nature most painful to the minister, and indicative of no want of feeling on the part of certain of the people. To be repaid with ingratitude has been the lot of benevolence in every age ... We shall not give exposure to incidents it were better to forget. Mr. J[efferson] felt it was his painful duty to resign his charge at Basingstoke ... [which] produced the keenest sensation of regret in the minds of a large body of friends; and called forth an expression, which could not but be most highly gratifying, of unaffected respect, even from very many individuals to whom he was not otherwise known, than as the upright and consistent minister of a dissenting church. He preached a farewell sermon to his beloved people, from 2 Cor. i. 14., and with feelings

5 Surman Index available online at https://surman.english.qmul.ac.uk/ (accessed 1 May 2019). Jefferson had been born in 1766 at Wigton in Cumberland. "Memoir of the Late Rev. Joseph Jefferson".

> of most affectionate sorrow took leave of them for ever. The following week he removed with his family to Thirsk, and on July 4, 1819, entered on his new pastoral charge.

In commenting on Jefferson's overall contribution to the ministry, the writer of the memoir was fulsome in his praise:

> The character of the Rev. Joseph Jefferson, as a man and as a Christian, will long command the grateful remembrance of all who knew him. His family, his friends, and the congregations over which he presided, can testify of his blameless manners and benevolent disposition. He was eminent for humility and integrity. His faults were in great measure the excess of these principles ... As a Christian minister he was well qualified, by accurate learning, and a natural perspicacity of understanding ... His public discourses were distinguished by earnest simplicity, and by a certain trait of logical arrangement, which made them always perspicuous, and which often commanded the admiration of his brethren in the ministry.[6]

Such a view was echoed in an historical note written in 1900 by the then minister, the Revd Capes Tarbolton, on the occasion of an event marking the centenary of the premises in London Street. He described Jefferson "as a poetical and antiquarian writer, as well as an earnest and successful Minister".[7]

A number of Jefferson's sermons were published and various other works, including a history of Basing House. Despite the manner of his departure, he undoubtedly left a considerable legacy in the town, in general, and London Street Independent Church, in particular. He was succeeded by another pastor, the Revd John Wills, who remained in Basingstoke for many years.

II: James Wills 1820-1846, a "faithful and devoted shepherd"

Wills's theological training was undertaken "at Dublin, under the care of the Rev. Thomas Loader and subsequently at Gosport, under the Rev. Dr. Bogue". While at Gosport "he came to the notice of churches in Hampshire" and received a request from London Street to be its pastor.[8] In the letter from London Street offering him the pastorate the assertion was made that "the Lord in his Providence sent you to Basingstoke, that he will make you the honoured instrument for increasing the Congregation, [reviewing?] his work, and enlarging his Kingdom".[9] In his reply Wills commented that since the invitation was unanimous any doubts and fears he might have had had been removed.[10]

6 "Memoir of the Late Rev. Joseph Jefferson".
7 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (20 October 1900), p. 6.
8 *Congregational Year Book* [hereafter, *CYB*] (1846), p. 171.
9 Letter, 27 August 1820, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.
10 Letter, [undated], LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

Notwithstanding the earlier reference to Gosport, intriguingly, there is in the minutes of London Street, a copy of a letter of dismission from the Independent Church in Salisbury, where Wills had clearly been a member for a while, (and from where he presumably had moved to undertake training). In it reference is made to his conduct being "in every respect as becometh the Gospel of Christ". It continued

> His talents as a preacher and his deportment as a Christian fully entitle him to the serious regard of any church that may need a faithful minister ... from our knowledge of his character and disposition we cannot but believe that you will reap much good from his pastoral labours.[11]

Having accepted the call to London Street, Wills was ordained in November 1821. Thereafter, he remained in Basingstoke for the whole of his ministerial career dying "in harness" in 1846. As it was put in his official obituary, "[he] continued their faithful and devoted shepherd for more than twenty-five years, when he was moved to his reward, amidst the lamentations of his affectionate family and attached people ... in the sixty second year of his age".[12]

Further testimony to the effectiveness of his ministry took the form of a "resolution of condolence and sympathy" passed at a meeting of the Hampshire Association of Protestant Dissenting Ministers held in Gosport. This referred to Wills's "piety, amiableness [?] and zeal in his Master's work, by preaching the Gospel in the villages, attending to the business of the Association and the superintendence of his own church".[13]

Apart from these comments, there are few substantive traces of Wills's pastorate but it would seem that he endeared himself to the congregation. Moreover, the fact that the church premises were enlarged during his time as minister indicates that he was successful in attracting new members, both young and old. In late August 1838 a "newly erected spacious School Room" was opened. This was celebrated with a "public tea meeting" which upwards of 200 attended. Wills and other "well known zealous friends of Sabbath school education" delivered "excellent speeches".[14] A year later in December 1839, following its repair and enlargement, the chapel was reopened:

> The chapel was erected in 1801 to seat 500 persons, since which various alterations, including two new galleries for the Sunday School children have been made; and by the recent arrangements, nearly 150 additional sittings are provided. The building has been ornamented with a neat Gothic front of Bath stone, from a design by Mr Clacy of Reading.[15]

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11 Letter, 29 June 1821, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

12 *CYB* (1846), p. 171.

13 Letter, 23 September 1846, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

14 *Hampshire Chronicle* (3 September 1838), p. 1. The first reference in the press to the celebration of a Sunday school anniversary is from 1839, *Reading Mercury* (23 March 1839), p. 3.

15 *Reading Mercury* (28 December 1839), p. 3.

At the Sunday evening service there was "a very large congregation" and the Revd Thomas Adkins from Southampton preached "an eloquent and impressive sermon" from Luke 1:78-9.[16]

The demands made of Wills were such that during his pastorate he was assisted by other ministers. These were the Revd John Curwen; the Revd Henry Mayo Gunn; and the Revd Alfred Johnson, his eventual successor.

III: John Curwen 1838-1841, a "singing mission"

Curwen was born in Heckmondwike, Yorkshire, in 1816. His main claim to fame is that "he was well known as a British Music Educator who developed the [tonic] Sol-Fa system of musical notation. He was the son of a Congregational Minister. He entered the Ministry himself in 1838 serving for a brief period at London Street until 1841 ... his first 'posting'".[17] His interest in music manifested itself at London Street through

> ... an intense interest in the young. He was an enthusiastic friend of Sunday-schools. He earnestly desired to make them attractive and useful to children. He found that the singing was not as bright, as cheerful, as happy as it ought to be and as it might be, and he determined to do what he could to improve it, and began to teach a few of the Sunday-school scholars to sing. Thus his singing mission began at Basingstoke ... [18]

From Basingstoke Curwen moved to Stowmarket in Suffolk where he was co-pastor.[19]

IV: Henry Mayo Gunn 1841-1844, "his preaching ... produced a marked effect"

Although he was not ordained until 1845, by that time Gunn had already served as an assistant minister at Barnstable, at Christchurch, then in Hampshire, where his uncle was minister; and for three years at London Street. As recorded in his official obituary

> ... at Basingstoke ... [he] found full scope for his powers; and having profited by the experience at Christchurch, he carried out many of his uncle's plans in the Sunday-school, which was rapidly increased in numbers. In the church, too, his preaching soon produced a marked effect; and although his

16 Ibid.

17 http://www.basingstokeurc.org.uk/about-us/history/history-9430.php (accessed 17 April 2019).

18 *CYB* (1881), p. 367.

19 Between 1844 and 1867 he was pastor of the church in Plaistow, Essex, when he retired due to ill-health. He died in Manchester in 1880.

> ministry at Basingstoke lasted only three years, friendships then formed were preserved to the end of his life.[20]

According to this source, his "life's work was done at Warminster", where he served from 1848 to 1870.[21] He died in 1887.

V: Alfred Johnson 1844-1852, long remembered by his many friends "with love and affection"

Unlike most of London Street's ministers Johnson was a native of Hampshire. Born at Upton near Andover, he first preached in the cottages there and subsequently in the chapel at Hurstbourne Tarrant, where "he ministered gratuitously for two years". In 1844 he received a call to assist the Revd James Wills at London Street, whom he replaced as minister in 1846. In was during Johnson's pastorate that the religious census of 1851 was held, and he completed the return for London Street as well as those for the two village causes at Worting and Basing. At London Street, 250 adults and 150 children were recorded as being present at the morning service; 100 in the afternoon; and 330 in the evening. The congregations at both Basing and Worting still met in cottages, with 50 and 26 worshippers respectively attending evening meetings.[22]

In 1850 London Street's rapidly expanding Sunday school received a further mention in the press:

> A public tea meeting of the teachers and friends of the Sunday schools ... was held in the school room on Good Friday; the Rev Alfred Johnson in the chair. A report, which exhibited the school in a very efficient state, was read by the chairman in the absence of the secretary, and the meeting was addressed by ... [various clergymen and lay people], on the subject of Sabbath school education and general intellectual improvement, the advocacy of several of the speakers being remarkable for its eloquence, earnestness and apt illustration. In the morning of the same day, the children of the school – upwards of 200 – partook of an excellent breakfast of tea and cake; and if 200 merry smiling faces be a fair index it was a very happy occasion.[23]

By this stage London Street was clearly ministering to a large number of children.

At the equivalent event in 1851, the Revd John Curwen returned as one of the guest speakers. By now, his "name in connexion with Sabbath-school education ... [was] as familiar through the kingdom as a 'household word'". On the Sunday, he

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20 *CYB* (1887), p. 207.

21 Surman Index. Between 1844 and 1847 he was pastor of the church in Alton.

22 John A. Vickers (ed.), *The Religious Census of Hampshire 1851* (Winchester: Hampshire County Council, 1993), p. 180.

23 *Reading Mercury* (6 April 1850), p. 2.

preached "anniversary sermons in aid of the funds of the school". In the afternoon the London Street scholars were joined by those of the Countess of Huntingdon Connexion's chapel, making a total of 350, to be addressed by Curwen who exhibited "most extraordinary power as an instructor of the young".[24] This was an early example of the cross-denominational cooperation that was to become a prominent feature of Basingstoke's "community of dissent".

Later that year, attention was given to the education of adults with the formation of Basingstoke Mutual Improvement Society/Association. It is noteworthy that Johnson was appointed president. It was promised that "under his fostering guidance, it would exert a powerful influence both in improving the tastes and habits, and developing the mental capacities of its members". In some ways this was seen as an extension of the Sunday school, with "the youths of the senior class ... undertak[ing] to produce an essay ... on various subjects of natural science and philosophy to be read by the president in the interval of the lectures". Fittingly, the very first lecture, on "the history of printing as illustrative of religious and social progress", was given by Johnson.[25] The report of the half-yearly meeting of 1852 provides details of three prize winning essays on "the propriety of disseminating mere knowledge apart from religious truth"; "the best means of promoting the physical and mental improvement of youth"; and "the superiority of man to the lower animals".[26] Such essays, along with lectures and papers, were seen as being the most effective means of pursuing the goal of "mutual improvement".

In 1852 Johnson moved from Basingstoke to Robert Street Congregational Church situated in Grosvenor Square, London.[27] In his letter of resignation Johnson described his ministry as one in which "the Great Head of the Church had condescended to bless ... [his] instrumentality to the Conversion of Sinners and the Edification of Believers". The specific reasons for his resignation are unknown, there simply being a reference to "circumstances which have arisen".[28] Johnson died in 1890. In his official obituary it was recorded:

> There are many friends with whom the memory of .... [Johnson] will long remain in respect and affection and they will not need the aid of a partial pen ... to do justice to his private virtues and his long and generous services with the body of Christians with whom he had cast his lot.[29]

It is to be assumed that some of these friends dated from his time in Basingstoke. Indeed, one of his successors at London Street, the Revd Henry Barron, described him as "wise, witty, well-informed and with a tender and loving spirit".[30]

24 *Reading Mercury* (26 April 1851), p. 3.

25 *Reading Mercury* (26 October 1850), p. 2.

26 *Reading Mercury* (24 April 1852), p. 2. The ages of the prize winners were 16, 16 and 13. The occupations of the first two were "pupil surveyor" and "apprentice printer" respectively.

27 Surman Index.

28 Letter, 2 June 1852, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

29 *CYB* (1891), p. 182.

30 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (20 October 1900), p. 6.

Following Johnson's departure London Street was without a settled minister for three years. During this period the pulpit was supplied and support was received from the ministers of other Congregational churches in Hampshire. For example, at the Sunday school anniversary in 1853 the lead was taken by the Revd William Isaac from Petersfield.[31] In addition, the Mutual Improvement Association appears to have thrived. In 1853 it was reported that it had 143 members, an increase of 23 on the previous year; "15 lectures had been delivered"; and "a Library had been established".[32] The Association continued to be well supported with a meeting in 1854 attracting large numbers "especially of ladies", while "the entertainment ... uniting many new features and exhibiting considerable talent on the part of those who so kindly contributed to it, proved highly interesting and gratifying to all present".[33] In January 1855, the Revd Josiah Miller of New College spoke on "the advantages of knowledge in the formation of Religious Character".[34]

The reasons for the lengthy delay in securing a permanent minister were explained by John Musslewhite, the senior deacon, in a paper read at the ordination of London Street's next minister - of the ministers who supplied the pulpit: "in some cases the Church was not sufficiently unanimous, and ... in other cases the Ministers themselves were not willing to accede to our wishes, had we invited them".[35]

Eventually in 1854, London Street was successful in appointing a new minister. This was Robert Hall a student at New College.

VI: Robert Hall 1855-1857, he "knew so well how to comfort others"

Hall had undoubtedly made a favourable impression in the time he had spent at London Street, since in the letter offering him the pastorate reference was made to "the esteem and affection of this Church and congregation". For his part, in accepting the post, Hall mentioned his "hallowed enjoyment" accompanied by "feelings of fear and trembling" and, by contrast, "of confidence and joy". However, he had to delay taking up his appointment so that he could complete his studies.

Arriving in 1855, Hall was ordained at London Street, but he only remained for two years and from his letter of resignation it is clear that difficulties had arisen. In explaining the circumstances surrounding his acceptance of a unanimous call to the renowned Highbury Chapel in Birmingham, Hall made reference to unspecified "unpleasant things that had recently transpired" at London Street and even suggested that these things had been "sent of God to hasten" his decision.[36]

31 *Reading Mercury* (2 April 1853), p. 3.

32 *Reading Mercury* (16 April 1853), p. 3.

33 *Reading Mercury* (11 March 1854), p. 4.

34 *Reading Mercury* (13 January 1855), p. 4. There is just one further reference to the Association in 1856. *Reading Mercury* (15 March 1856), p. 5.

35 Paper, August 1855, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

36 Letter, 4 December 1857, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

His short pastorate, however, was to be replicated elsewhere[37] and a contributory factor could have been what was described as "enfeebled health" in his official obituary. That said, "he would shrink from entering the pulpit unless he had a message that was both fresh and interesting".[38]

A further consequence of his indifferent health may well have been that, in the words of his obituary, he "knew so well how to comfort others".[39] Presumably this trait was evident while Hall was in Basingstoke, but beyond this and the reference to unpleasantness, little is known about his time as London Street's pastor. This is not the case as far as his successor, the Revd John Mark Wilks, was concerned.

VII: John Mark Wilks 1858-1862, "ministered with much acceptance"

Wilks's studies at New College "were cut short, by a pressing invitation, in 1858, to the pastorate of the Congregational Church, Basingstoke, where he ministered with much acceptance for four years". His official obituary also refers to the admiration he received for "his earnestness of purpose, breadth of view, grasp of mind, inexhaustible freshness, and faculty of giving spiritual significance to all the subjects he handled". It went on to mention that

> It would not be easy to indicate ... [his] theological standpoint ... especially as he never read his sermons, modestly objecting to even his most brilliant discourses being given to the world and had no faith in definite creeds. But he had a fervent and childlike belief in the Founder of Christianity and his teachings as the motive power of spiritual life.[40]

As it was put by one of Wilks's successors, he was a man "of keen intellect, an intellect like a freshly ground blade, a chivalrous soul, dogmatic on the side of anti-dogmatism".[41]

In the circumstances, it is perhaps unsurprising that, alongside his preaching and pastoral responsibilities, Wilks was a founder member and President of the Basingstoke Literary Association,[42] which appears to have been a successor to the Mutual Improvement Association. Its aim was "to provide a reading room, library and lectures &c., at the cheapest possible rate". In November 1859, at the beginning of the Association's first winter session, Wilks gave a lecture on "Ships and Steam Ships" with special reference to the "Great Eastern". The hope was expressed that the Association would "go on and prosper". However, a cautionary

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37 For example, in 1860 he left Birmingham for Cockermouth after only three years. Surman Index.

38 *CYB* (1904), p. 172.

39 Ibid.

40 *CYB* (1895), p. 238.

41 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (20 October 1900), p. 6.

42 For further details of Basingstoke Literary Association, see Diana Macmarill, "A Society of Literature 1859-1864", *Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society Newsletter*, 146 (1999), pp. 7-12.

note was struck since "unfortunately these classes have ... proved in the end to be decided failures everywhere in Basingstoke". This was because "as the members of ... [similar] institutions will readily admit ... that the principal ... method in which real benefit can possibly accrue to members ... must be through the medium of classes for mutual instruction, where each will do his very best to learn from, and teach his neighbour the details of any particular subject of study".[43]

Wilks's commitment to education was also reflected in his interest and support for the Sunday school. This is evidenced by a comment in a report submitted to the Hampshire Congregational Union (HCU) in 1866: "The [London Street] school has the advantage of the vigilant superintendence of our excellent Minister, the Rev J. M. Wilks, who meets the teachers weekly for counsel and instruction".[44]

A further feature of Wilks's ministry was his willingness to participate in events associated with other Nonconformist chapels in the town, as suggested by the following newspaper report from 1859:

> The Anniversary Services at the Primitive Methodist Chapel, took place on Sunday last. The Rev. W. Bone preached in the morning, and the Rev. Mark Wilks in the afternoon. In the evening the Rev. – Brocklehurst preached in the London Street Chapel, which was lent for the occasion. A collection of about 8l was made.[45]

The fact that Wilks preached at this event and that the London Street chapel was made available to the Primitive Methodists, was a further indication of the fraternity and collegiality that was to characterise relations between the principal Nonconformist denominations in the town in the years to come.

Turning to the church premises, it was while Wilks was minister that it acquired a distinctive frontage. In 1860, the chapel, as it was still known, was again enlarged and the distinctive Doric columns, which survive to this day, were added. As reported at the time of the chapel's reopening: "The Independent chapel, London-street, has been recently considerably enlarged, and a very handsome Roman Doric front substituted for the former one".[46] Indeed, it was subsequently described as "one of Basingstoke's outstanding buildings, with its attractive façade complete with pillars of Grecian style".[47] The alterations to the interior involved the addition of "a large number of roomy pews" and the adoption of "a new system of lighting which ... [had] a very beautiful effect".[48] During the dinner to celebrate the chapel's reopening, Wilks received what was described as "such a flattering compliment from those under his ministerial care".[49]

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43 *Reading Mercury* (12 November 1859), p. 5.

44 *Annual Report of the HCU* (1866), HRO 127M94/62/13.

45 *Reading Mercury* (21 May 1859), p. 4.

46 *Reading Mercury* (27 October 1860), p. 5.

47 Arthur Attwood, *The Illustrated History of Basingstoke* (Derby: Breedon Books, 2001), p. 67.

48 *Reading Mercury* (27 October 1860), p. 5.

49 Ibid.

The following year, the back wall of the chapel was "partly removed and an organ placed in a recess, on a platform slightly raised from the floor, with seats for the choir surrounding it". It was hoped that the alteration would "add greatly to the interior appearance of the building, and much improve the singing".[50]

Wilks left Basingstoke in 1862. His second, very long pastorate, was at Camden Road Congregational Church in Holloway, where he died "in harness" in 1894.[51] In a report which appeared in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*, at the time of his death it was noted that he "was celebrated for the breadth of his views and the natural eloquence with which he expounded them".[52] In a letter to the Wilks family, George Gage, the Church Secretary, observed that:

> ... there are still many amongst us, (myself among the number) who remember his wise and faithful teaching which had been to us a continual inspiration; while we shall with the others who did not know him in this capacity, in admiration for the noble work he did for many years in the cause of Education, and in connection with the London School Board, as well as in other public services.[53]

In his reply, Wilks's son mentioned that "his father always retained a great affection for his friends at Basingstoke and very frequently spoke to us of the time when he was resident there".[54]

A year after Wilks's departure, London Street acquired the services of the Revd Norman Glass, who had trained for the ministry at Western College in Plymouth. He moved to Basingstoke from Carlisle Chapel in Kennington, then in the county of Surrey.

VIII: Norman Glass 1863-1869, "remembered ... with gratitude ... [by those], who had enjoyed his friendship and profited by his instruction"

As his official obituary indicates, Glass was more of a scientist, with a particular interest in geology, than a minister. Indeed, for the last 14 years of his career, from 1878 to 1892, he was curator of the Manchester Geological Museum. That said, "he was not without testimony to his character and service as a minister in the more usual sense of the term". Moreover, he was "remembered ... with gratitude ... [by those], who had enjoyed his friendship and profited by his instruction" and, as will be seen, with some qualification this was very much the case with respect to his pastorate at London Street.[55]

50 *Reading Mercury* (11 May 1861), p. 4.

51 Surman Index.

52 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (9 June 1894), p. 5.

53 Letter, 11 June 1894, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

54 Letter, 13 June 1894, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

55 *CYB* (1895), p. 210.

One of the few traces of his ministry in the local press is a report from 1865 of meetings held in connection with "Lady Huntingdon's Society for the spread of the Gospel at home and abroad", where it is recorded that Glass offered prayers and gave an "appropriate" speech along with other ministers.[56] This may be regarded as a further example of the burgeoning ecumenical spirit among the Nonconformist denominations of the town that dated from at least Johnson's pastorate.

At the Sunday school anniversary celebrations in 1868, Glass took a leading role, preaching and chairing meetings. The report of the Sunday School Secretary indicated that it was "in a very prosperous condition, having a staff of forty officers and teachers, and 288 children on the books, there being nearly as many again in attendance as there were 3½ years ago".[57] Moreover, on the afternoon of Easter Sunday 1868 from "the various Dissenting [Sunday] schools in the town, consisting of the Congregational, Countess of Huntingdon's, Primitive Methodist, and Bible Christian, about 500 children, assembled in [London Street] chapel for a united service". Glass was one of those who addressed the children.[58]

Thus it comes as little surprise that the testimonials Glass received at a farewell service prior to his departure from Basingstoke confirmed that he had commended himself to many sections of the church and the wider community. In addition to a "purse" from the congregation at large, there was one from the choir, with the comment being made in an accompanying letter that "few choirs can say that they have worked more harmoniously with their minister than ourselves". A purse was also presented by the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion minister, the Revd John Trotter "as a practical expression of the general sympathy with him existing in the town". Moreover, as a mark of his good relations with the Church of England, the vicar of St Michael's, Basingstoke, the Revd Dr Millard, wrote in a letter accompanying a subscription: "I shall very much regret Mr Glass's removal from the town. It may not be easy to replace him with a man equally intelligent and accomplished, nor with one equally liberal minded and intelligent".[59] As further evidence of the impact Glass had made, on the following Saturday at a meeting of working men held at the Town Hall he was presented with a silver watch "in recognition of his service in the cause of political and social reform". In returning thanks, Glass

> ... said he should always be proud of this present chiefly because it came to him at a time of [unspecified] trouble and trial, and because it was presented to him by the working men whom he considered the most independent class of the community ... [and] having combated the idea of disability to speak on politics because he was a minister of the Gospel, proceeded to give an address on political subjects generally, and in conclusion urged the working

56 *Reading Mercury* (18 March 1865), p. 4.

57 *Reading Mercury* (18 April 1868), p. 5.

58 Ibid.

59 Quoted in *Reading Mercury* (10 October 1868), p. 2.

> men to unite on political subjects that their power might be felt and respected; and further urged them to support whenever opportunity served the Liberal party as represented by Mr. Gladstone.[60]

This public adulation, however, needs to be contrasted with evidence from the Church minutes which helps to explain the earlier reference to "trouble and trial". In October 1867, Glass felt moved to make a statement from the pulpit, in which he mentioned that he had been "given to understand that ... some members of the congregation ... [were] strongly adverse to the continuance of ... [his] ministry". Since he did not wish to be a source of discord he had tendered his resignation to take effect in twelve months' time or sooner should "another sphere ... [be] opened by Divine Providence".[61] In his sorrowful letter of resignation, Glass acknowledged that "the cause ... [had] not prospered" during his time with them as he "hoped and prayed that" it would and that, following his departure, there would be "enlarged prosperity".[62] In the event, he did remain in post for another twelve months and church members expressed their "prayerful desire for ... [his] future usefulness and welfare in whatever sphere of labour ... [he] might enter upon, at the time of his departure".[63] From Basingstoke Glass moved to Rothwell in Northamptonshire.

In assessing Glass's ministry a mixed picture emerges. Nevertheless, he had clearly endeared himself to many within the community and was still going to be, in the language of today, "a hard act to follow". His immediate successor, however, the Revd George Proctor, was, to serve for an even shorter period than one of his predecessors, the Revd Robert Hall.

IX: George Proctor 1869-1870, "the charm of his preaching lay in the human, Christian character which it revealed"

Proctor trained for the ministry at Hackney Theological Academy and his first pastorate had been at Node Hill Congregational Church in Newport on the Isle of Wight. Basingstoke was his second. In his letter accepting the pastorate, Proctor referred to "the importance of mutual consideration and forbearance". Although "the Sabbath School class & sick chamber" would have "his constant care as occasion might present itself", his primary duty was "to preach the gospel". In so doing, he concluded that he had been offered "much freedom of speech & action" to take account of "the acknowledged differences of opinion on the great themes of sacred truth".[64] There had been a hint of possible discord in the deacons' letter of invitation, for while Proctor's teaching "suited ... [their] convictions of truth" they did not hide from him the fact that "some few in our midst cannot join so

60 *Reading Mercury* (17 October 1868), p. 6.
61 Minute, August 1867, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.
62 Letter, 18 October 1867, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.
63 Letter, 8 October 1868, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.
64 Letter, 3 April 1869, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

heartily with us as we could desire but we believe they may be able to work with us for the general welfare ..."[65]

However, it was to be ill health rather than doctrinal discord that resulted in Proctor only being London Street's minister for a year. This was foreshadowed in a report of the annual New Year's Eve social evening of the London Street young men's bible class. A letter was read in which the minister "regretted being prevented through illness from being present and expressing his deep sympathy with the class ... which numbered 28 regular members".[66]

As recorded in Proctor's official obituary: "After little more than a year's labour he resigned ... at the imperative advice of Dr. Forbes Winslow, who pronounced a long rest essential if he would avoid serious brain disturbance". It went on to record that: "[He] left many friends in the different congregations to which he preached. The charm of his preaching lay in the human, Christian character which it revealed. He was a man to be loved, and he rejoiced in the unstinted affection of many hearts".[67]

In seeking a replacement for Proctor, London Street went for youth rather than experience and selected the Revd James Edward Flower.

X: James Flower 1872-1878, a life characterised by "unselfishness and constant thought for others"

London Street was Flower's first pastorate, having entered New College, London, aged sixteen in 1864. This was followed by four years as "a Dr Williams scholar at Glasgow where he graduated M.A. in 1870" and two years holding "a Dr Williams Divinity Scholarship at New College". Thus, he was well qualified academically when he came to Basingstoke. In his letter of acceptance, Flower observed that

> After many years of Collegiate and University life I enter on the work to which I have devoted myself with sincere self-distrust, but relying calmly and completely on the generous help of Him whom I earnestly desire to serve. I shall come to you with no Priestly pretensions, but simply to be your Pastor, and, so far as powers permit to be a Teacher of Divine truth.[68]

Flower's ordination was held at London Street on Tuesday 16 July 1872, with a large number of ministers in attendance, including the Revd Dr Halley, late principal of New College, and Flower's predecessor, the Revd George Proctor:

> After singing and prayer, Dr Halley spoke with great eloquence on the principles of Nonconformists and the duties of the Christian ministry. Mr

65 Letter, 24 March 1869, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

66 *Reading Mercury* (8 January 1870), p. 3.

67 *CYB* (1882), p. 326. Proctor died in 1881 aged only 46.

68 Letter, 1 May 1872, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

> Kingdon, the deacon, then stated what had led to the choice of the gentleman of that day to be appointed to the pastorate, and Mr Flower, who ... [had] accepted the invitation of the congregation to be their minister, then addressed them, and the ordination prayer was offered by the Rev J. Fletcher. Following this came the charge to the newly ordained minister, which was delivered by his father, the Rev J. Flower, of Beccles, which was full of good Scriptural advice and direction on the duties of the Christian minister.[69]

On the same day as the ordination the "first stone of the new schoolroom" was laid. Indeed, the provision for Sunday school classes was much expanded. The schoolroom was "increased in length by 12 feet" and six new classrooms and an infant schoolroom were added. To meet the cost £100 was subscribed by seven friends "at a distance" and £200 "by the congregation of the adjoining church".[70] Under the foundation stone a bottle, containing "the Times and other papers and coins of the realm" for 1872, was deposited.[71]

A year later, Flower married Miss Lizzie Pamely in Chepstow, the home of his bride.[72] For a wedding gift the couple were presented "with a very handsome dining-room suite, valued at fifty or sixty guineas" by the congregation.[73] Such a valuable gift was undoubtedly indicative of the esteem in which Flower was already held by his congregation, or as it was put in the newspaper report the "kindly feelings" he evinced.

In January 1875, there is a report of Flower presiding at the annual meeting of the parents and scholars attending the Sunday school. About 150 parents were present and "after tea had been partaken ... the evening was devoted to a musical entertainment, interspersed with short and suitable addresses".[74] Presumably some of those attending would not have been church members and this was clearly an opportunity for outreach.

The following year, London Street acquired a new organ. At the service celebrating this event, Flower "gave a short, but very suitable address, on the part which music should take in public worship, reminding his audience that the organ and the choir were not to supplant, but to lead and sustain the singing of the congregation".[75] In addition to the organ, "a handsome new pulpit ... [had] been erected" and various other improvements made. However, this meant that further alterations were required since the pews and galleries were "now sadly out of harmony".[76] These were not undertaken until 1882.

With respect to Congregationalism more broadly, in April 1875 the HCU held its two day spring meeting at London Street. Among the subjects discussed was

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69 *Hampshire Advertiser* (20 July 1872), p. 7.
70 *Reading Mercury* (9 November 1872), p. 5.
71 *Hampshire Advertiser* (20 July 1872), p. 7.
72 The wedding took place on the 20 August 1873. *Berkshire Chronicle* (23 August 1873), p. 8.
73 *Hampshire Advertiser* (20 September 1873), p. 7.
74 *Hampshire Advertiser* (23 January 1875), p. 7.
75 *Reading Mercury* (12 August 1876), p. 6.
76 Ibid. The cost of the organ was £285 and other improvements about £70.

the importance of Sunday school work especially in the context of what was seen as a threat to Protestantism. As explained by Mr W. T. Gunner of Alton

> Sabbath school work was more important now than ever, and Sunday school teachers should be up to the times, and not hastily take the office, and when taken it should be most seriously and assiduously attended to. A work was going on which was intended to undermine the Protestantism of the country, and if they did not look after the children they might depend upon it that there was a power at work that would. As Protestant Nonconformists the efficient teaching of their children was one of the most important matters they could undertake. They believed that High Church doctrine had a tendency towards Rome; therefore they should be earnest in teaching their children the doctrines which came from God's truth.

Later speakers provided statistical information relating to Congregational Sunday schools of which there were 54 in the county with a total of 11,601 scholars; considered "The Probable Effect of the Revival on Sunday School Work"; and elaborated on the theme of "sacerdotalism; what and whence is it?" Flower's contribution to the proceedings was to read the lesson at a service marking their commencement on the second day and to preside at the public dinner.[77]

For the year 1874-75 Flower served as Evangelistic Secretary of the HCU and then from 1875-76 until 1877-78 as General Secretary. In his annual reports, without minimising the challenges, he sought to encourage and inspire. As Evangelistic Secretary he wrote: "while we hear on every hand of difficulty, we nowhere hear of despair – while there is the noise of strife and conflict there is never from our ranks the word of defeat... Your Evangelists are for the most part, men of spiritual nerve and muscle".[78]

Something of the problems faced were spelt out in his first report as General Secretary:

> We are profoundly convinced that in many parishes to "stamp out dissent" means simply to extinguish the light of the gospel for that which would remain is another gospel, and yet not another, but a perversion of the gospel of Christ, while in other parishes, when the truth of Christ is presented to the people, it is so commingled with a mass of human traditions and ecclesiastical rubbish as to be with difficulty separated from them.[79]

Clearly, Flower was not one to mince his words. Less provocatively, in his final report as General Secretary he presented a brief overview of Congregationalism in Hampshire:

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77 *Reading Mercury* (24 April 1875), p. 2.

78 *Annual Report of HCU* (1874), HRO 127M94/62/21, pp. 25-6.

79 *Annual Report of HCU* (1876), HRO 127M94/62/23, p. 15.

> Our work as a Union is ... but small when compared with our work as Independent Churches. It is our joy to know that there are upwards of fifty churches of our order in the several districts of this county, and about eighty Evangelistic and preaching stations beside.[80]

Although unintended, this served to place London Street and its ministry into a broader context.

One of the causes with which Flower was closely identified was that of temperance. Thus, in 1876 he was on the platform at a public meeting held "to celebrate the opening of the British Workman Public-house". This initiative was to provide one, out of sixty public houses in Basingstoke, where "the working man might obtain rest and refreshment without the drink".[81] Along with other clergymen, including the vicar, Flower addressed the meeting and indicated his support.

In the summer of 1878, Flower "received and accepted a unanimous invitation to become the pastor of" Addison Street Congregational Church, "an influential church at Nottingham". The vacancy there had "been created by the acceptance by the minister of the responsible position of editor of the *Christian Signal*".[82] In a report from the *Hants and Berks Gazette* of a Sunday School Festival held a few weeks before he departed the comment was made that: "We could not help thinking it must be highly satisfactory to the pastor ... that he should be able to leave his church and the school in so prosperous a condition, and we think the [Sunday school] treat on Tuesday will be remembered by him as one of the many happy days he has spent with members of his Basingstoke congregation". Indeed, the Sunday school now had 450 scholars and the innovation of the Festival, which included "a scholars' industrial exhibition, bazaar and open air concert", was indicative of the enterprise shown by the officers and teachers.[83]

Although there was a four month delay in making public his move to Nottingham, when giving reasons for this, Flower stressed that "to prevent any possible misapprehension ... there had been almost unbroken harmony between us as Pastor & People ... and no serious or prolonged breach has occurred between myself and any one of you". He also referred to the trust, friendship and material and spiritual help he had enjoyed.[84]

For much of his later career Flower occupied administrative positions, first as Secretary of the Recreative Evening Schools' Association from 1886 to 1895 and then as Secretary of the Congregational Church Aid and Home Missionary Society until retirement in 1928.[85] As recorded in his official obituary, he took up the latter post

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80 *Annual Report of HCU* (1878), HRO 127M94/62/25, p. 12.

81 *Reading Mercury* (8 April 1876), p. 4.

82 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (13 July 1878), unpaginated. There is no indication of this, however, in the Surman Index entry for the Revd James Flower's predecessor at Addison Street.

83 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (27 July 1878), unpaginated.

84 Letter, 7 July 1878, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

85 Surman Index. Flower died in 1932.

> … at a critical period in its history, and he had the joy of seeing many difficulties surmounted and its establishment in the confidence of the County Unions. He proved himself a brother – beloved to ministers who sought his advice and encouragement in the pre-moderatorial period. He had a single-eye to the welfare of the Churches and ministers he lived to serve.

Fittingly, his obituary ends with the observation that "the keynote of Mr Flower's life was his unselfishness and constant thought for others".[86]

Following Flower's departure London Street's pulpit was once again "supplied by different ministers of various towns … [until] with the unanimous approval of the entire church" it obtained the services of the Revd Henry Barron. His appointment was deemed to be "an augury of the future prosperity of London-street Congregational Church".[87]

XI: Henry Barron 1879-1886, a champion of "the right of free speech"

Having trained for five years at New College, Barron's first pastorate was at Buckland Congregational Church in Portsmouth, where he served from 1872 to 1878. London Street was his second pastorate. Having been launched in 1878, the *Hants and Berks Gazette* affords far more information about Barron's and later pastorates than is available for earlier ones. Even before his formal recognition in April 1879, in January of that year Barron attended and spoke at the "social tea" for parents of Sunday school scholars, in whom the teachers "evinced a special interest". Not surprisingly, perhaps, in speaking of "the work connected with Sunday schools … he believed the Basingstoke school was almost the best one among the Congregationalists in the county".[88]

Barron's recognition was fully reported. Two questions were asked, one to be answered by the congregation and the other by the newly appointed minister. The replies indicated "why the Basingstoke Congregational Church had invited Mr Barron to become their pastor, and what induced Mr Barron to accept the invitation". Thomas Kingdon, the senior deacon, on behalf of the Church explained the circumstances leading to the choice of Barron. While in the course of his remarks Barron commented that

> [The church secretary] came to Portsmouth again and asked me whether I would preach … [at London Street] again with a view to the pastorate. I replied that there was nothing unpleasant in my relationship with my people to make my removal desirable, but very much to induce me to remain with them, at the same time, I said, that I was anxious chiefly for domestic reasons to move to another neighbourhood, and would therefore accept the invitation to preach another Sunday at Basingstoke … During my residence

86 *CYB* (1933), p. 230.

87 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (5 April 1879), p. 2.

88 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (25 January 1879), p. 8.

> in Portsmouth I was seldom really well. I found the air too relaxing for my constitution. Severe [unspecified] domestic sorrow and anxiety also did much to render me physically weak. Therefore it seemed to me that life in a small town like Basingstoke, where fewer demands would be made on my strength, would do much to recruit my energies, and would be beneficial to my wife and children.[89]

He went on to mention some of the "able men" who had occupied the London Street pulpit; the large Sunday school; and "the numerous important village stations connected with the church". Moreover, the "large non church-going population of the town presented an ample field in which a pastor, with whom the people would cordially and unitedly work might accomplish great things for God". However, while he appreciated the opportunities, he left Portsmouth with what can only be described as a "heavy heart".[90]

As was usual on these occasions there was a visiting Congregational minister of some repute. In this case, it was the Revd James Baldwin Brown, minister of Brixton Independent Chapel, whose "eloquence ... was listened to with rapt attention". In his address "he endeavoured to show his hearers how Christ might be glorified in their lives and actions".[91]

It also needs to be mentioned that Barron's immediate predecessor contributed to the proceedings by speaking at the request of the new pastor on "the duty of a Christian church to the surrounding population". In so doing, Flower emphasised that "it was more divine life the church wanted before it could manifest Christ to the world". He continued: "What was this divine life then? Was it not that kind of vitality that would show itself in gentleness, meekness and a forgiving spirit? But he would remind them that one unlovely character in their midst had the power to mar many others besides". Appropriately, on resuming his seat, Flower was applauded.[92]

Following his recognition, Barron proved himself to be a conscientious minister, involving himself in many aspects of church life. Two weeks after the recognition, on the occasion of the Sunday school anniversary, he preached special sermons and "addressed a large gathering of children in the afternoon", while on Good Friday, he gave an address at the scholars' breakfast and presided at the meeting following the afternoon tea.[93] He undoubtedly recognised the value of Sunday school work and the need to identify himself closely with the Church's ministry to children and young people.

Barron's involvement in one of the most notorious incidents in the ecclesiastical history of the town must be mentioned, namely the unrest and riots that accompanied the arrival of the Salvation Army in 1881-2. As recorded in his

89 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (5 April 1879), p. 2.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (19 April 1879), p. 5.

official obituary, while at Basingstoke "he championed the right of free speech with success when the mayor of the borough was seeking to suppress the open-air work of the Salvation Army".[94] Barron's position was clearly stated in March 1881 at an evening service to which members of the Salvation Army had been invited:

> We give them a welcome because we believe them to be God's people. They are here by my invitation and I wish them to feel that we regard them as our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. I have said before and I repeat it now, that I disapprove of some of their methods of procedure, but as we are, so are they, seeking to serve God in the light of His word and that of their own conscience; and they may see in our methods that of which they disapprove.[95]

In other words, notwithstanding any differences, they were all on the same side when it came to proclaiming the Gospel. Moreover, as Barron indicated in a series of sermons he preached in the autumn of 1882 on the principles of Nonconformity, when it came to the defence of religious liberty "Congregational churches had always been in the van[guard]".[96] In giving practical expression to this principle, Barron, along with other supporters of the Salvation Army, suffered the indignity of being jostled in the street accompanied by verbal threats; lampooned; and having a window of his house broken.[97]

More prosaically, during Barron's pastorate the London Street premises underwent further renovation and improvement. This occurred in 1882 and the work took four months to complete, with services being held in the Town Hall during this period. As reported at the time

> The improvements consist[ed] mainly of the introduction of ... new galleries, the re-seating of the galleries and the ground floor area, and the erection of a pulpit and Communion railing in harmony with the building. The most striking feature is the gallery with its cast-iron front, divided into bays by richly carved trusses and supported on light columns. In place of the old fashioned high backed pews, low, comfortable benches have been provided, those under the galley radiating so as to obtain a good view of the preacher ... The joinery generally is pitch pine, varnished. The ceiling is divided into panels by plaster ribs, and the walls are covered [with] a soft vellum tint, the mouldings being left white. The panels of the gallery front are of French grey, relieved by gilding, while the columns are of the same tint as the walls, the caps being picked out in white, and with the lower parts painted a terra cotta red.[98]

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94 *CYB* (1903), pp. 166-7. He died in 1902 "after a painful illness".

95 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (2 April 1881), p. 2.

96 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (14 October 1882), p. 7.

97 For full details of Barron's involvement, see Bob Clarke, *The Basingstoke Riots: Massagainians v the Salvation Army 1880-1883* (Basingstoke: Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society, 2010).

98 *Reading Mercury* (16 December 1882), p. 4.

Attention was also given to the lighting, heating and ventilation. The total cost was between £1,200 and £1,300, of which £400 still had to be raised when the church was reopened for services.

Given these building projects, an ongoing preoccupation of London Street during Barron's pastorate, if not earlier, was the need to "balance the books". Thus, the capital costs associated with enlarging and improving the church premises generally involved appeals to the wider public through fund raising initiatives of various kinds. One example was an "Industrial and Loan Exhibition" held in January 1883. This comprised a wide variety of objects of interest and curiosities loaned by members of the community, including specimens of Japanese weapons; an Indian opera cloak and Chinese silk shawls; "interesting pencil and other sketches of Old Basingstoke"; New Zealand ferns; and "a wedding dress of 1708 and silver shoe buckles".[99]

As a demonstration of his wider interests, in May 1885 Barron stood successfully in the first elections for the town's newly established School Board. However, due to his removal from the town he did not serve for very long.

Alongside his responsibilities in Basingstoke, like his predecessor, between 1878 and 1884 Barron also found time to serve as Evangelistic Secretary of the HCU, and when that post was merged with that of General Secretary in a combined capacity, until 1886. In 1883 he was also President. In his report as Evangelistic Secretary for the year ending 31 December 1880 he explained that "The aim of our Evangelistic Society is to ensure that provision is made for the preaching of the Gospel in every part of the county, and until this is done our work cannot be complete".[100] While recognising their limitations, Barron was keen to use statistical data to monitor the work of the Society through its support for preaching stations in mainly rural parts of the county and included these in his four reports. In 1879, attendances at services on the Lord's Day numbered 1,499 and by 1882 had increased to 2,388. Similarly, the number of Sunday scholars grew from 758 to 1,415 and teachers from 81 to 153.

With respect to Barron's religious sensibilities, these were also very much to the fore as the following extracts from his reports for 1883 and 1884 illustrate:

> Let us, members of the Congregational Churches of Hampshire strive to be simply worthy of our Master, believing with all our souls in His truth, and then our special power among men will be wide and deep, reaching infinitely beyond the mere proportion of our numbers.[101]

> A wider sympathy with the "common people", and a more profound annihilation of self, were, never more required among us now.[102]

99 For a full list see *Reading Mercury* (3 February 1883), p. 4.
100 *Annual Report of HCU* (1880), HRO 127M94/62/27.
101 *Annual Report of HCU* (1883), HRO 127M94/62/30, p. 22.
102 *Annual Report of HCU* (1884), HRO 127M94/62/31, p. 22.

Likewise in a talk on the "Inner Life of Congregationalism" given at the end of his term as President, while reviewing the changes in religious thought he stressed that "A religion without God manifest in the flesh, without the cross and Saviour and without an indwelling spirit of God was not the religion in all ages by which men had been turned from dead works to serve the living God nor was it the religion of Congregationalists".[103]

Given Barron's contribution to Congregationalism in Hampshire, when the time came for him to leave the county for a post in Batley in Yorkshire this was reflected in press reports, as the following remarks made in the *Southampton Times*, which the *Hants and Berks Gazette* quoted, indicate:

> Mr Barron has won the esteem and regard of all the churches in the Hants Congregational Union during his ministerial connection with the county, and the admiration of all, for his untiring zeal and the eminent ability he has displayed in discharging the secretarial duties. The invitation to Batley, where he will have an enlarged sphere of labour, came to him quite unexpectedly and altogether unsolicited. Mr Barron has the satisfaction of knowing that the Church at Basingstoke and all its agencies are in a most prosperous condition, and he will carry with him to the north not only the recollections of useful labours and valued friendships in this county, but the hearty good wishes of all who have been associated with him in any kind of Christian work. We understand that it is intended to present Mr Barron with some suitable token of the high estimation in which his valued services to the cause of Congregationalism in this county are held.[104]

At London Street, having preached his farewell sermons on the last Sunday of 1885, Barron departed for Batley at the beginning of 1886.

This was clearly a very emotional time for Barron and his family. As he explained, having received the call from Batley "he had spent many anxious hours in prayer for Divine guidance as to the step he ought to take, and he felt that in the call ... there was the voice of God calling him ... and however bitter the parting with them might be he felt that it was a thing that must be faced and that he must go and work where he felt the Master had called him to work".[105] As a leaving present he and his wife were presented with a "real bronze and marble clock with two ornaments to match". In his comments, the senior deacon, Thomas Kingdon, praised his ministry as being one "which had been blessed in the conversion and building up of many souls, and in affording comfort and consolation in times of trouble and affliction to others". Moreover, "as a man and a citizen, he had commanded the respect and esteem of those with whom he had come into contact".[106]

In many respects, it was a case of gone but not forgotten, since at the time of

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103 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (3 November 1883), p. 5.

104 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (2 January 1886), p. 8.

105 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (26 December 1885), p. 7.

106 Ibid.

Barron's death in 1902, these sentiments were echoed in a letter from London Street to his widow concerning his ministry at Basingstoke:

> Many of us remember with gratitude your late husband's earnest Christian work in connection with this Church, and for the good of this Town and neighbourhood. They have not forgotten his noble stand for Liberty & Freedom for all to worship and serve Our Lord & Master according to leadings of conscience, & God's Holy Spirit ...[107]

Following Barron's departure, London Street was without a minister for approximately twelve months. In December 1887, however, it was announced that "with the exception of one vote" the Revd Alfred Capes Tarbolton had been "unanimously invited to accept the pastorate". Indeed, the Church was fortunate in securing the services of someone for whom "the testimonies of Dr Newth of New College, of Dr Awbrey (Croydon) ... and of other leading ministers of the denomination, were of the most flattering kind".[108]

XII: Alfred Capes Tarbolton 1887-1907, "a faithful pastor, a loyal friend, a clear thinker, active in all social and educational work"[109]

Capes Tarbolton was born in Limerick in 1853 and studied for the ministry at New College. Like Barron, London Street was his second pastorate. Unlike Barron, however, he was to be one of Basingstoke's longest serving Congregational ministers, with his pastorate lasting well into the first decade of the twentieth century.

Tarbolton came to Basingstoke from West Dulwich, then in Surrey, with the deacons of his previous Church speaking highly of his time there:

> We shall long & gratefully remember the consecration of our late Pastor to the highest interests of the Church, his faithful ministry, his affectionate interest in the Sunday School & in the children of the congregation, his ready sympathy in times of affliction & his ceaseless efforts to advance the moral & intellectual culture of our young men.[110]

He was clearly a worthy successor to Barron.

Commencing his ministry at London Street on Sunday 16 January 1887,[111] Tarbolton was publicly recognised as minister on Tuesday 22 February 1887

107 Letter, 3 September 1902, LSCMM (1890-1904), LSURCA.

108 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (18 December 1886), p. 8. As recorded in the minutes 93 voted in favour of the resolution "That the Rev Capes Tarbolton of West Dulwich be invited to become the future Pastor of the Church", with 1 against and 7 blank papers. LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

109 *CYB* (1926), p. 183.

110 Letter, 1 January 1887, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

111 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (22 January 1887), p. 5.

"under circumstances that augur[ed] well for the future success of that gentleman's ministry". Contributions to the proceedings were made by the senior deacon, Thomas Kingdon; Mr R. H. Clarke senior deacon and Mr W. K. Littlewood secretary of the Church at West Dulwich; the Revd George Albert Brock, minister of Selhurst Road Congregational Church in Norwood; the Revd William Houghton of Christchurch, the General Secretary of the HCU; the Revd William Glyde Tarbolton of Harpenden, the new minister's brother; as well as the ladies of the church who provided the tea. Moreover, in keeping with the ecumenical spirit of the occasion, the ministers of the three other principal Nonconformist churches in Basingstoke were present. These were the Revd Thomas Whitehead, the Primitive Methodist minister, who offered prayer; the Revd Benjamin Adams, pastor of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion Church; and the Revd J. Robinson Cleminson, the Wesleyan Methodist minister, both of whom spoke. In his remarks Tarbolton referred to "a kindly letter" he had received from his predecessor and made clear "that he should aim first at being Christ's minister and secondly at being theirs (hear hear)". In his contribution the Wesleyan Methodist minister commented

> ... that he had never known a town where there was more vital godliness manifested in commercial, social and church life than in this town of Basingstoke, and he believed this was owing in some measure if not to a large extent to the life of this Church. The believers here were real believers, spiritual workers, desiring to see God's cause in real prosperity. He hoped that under the new pastor this Church would enjoy all the blessings that the most large-hearted prayers could invoke ... [112]

Undoubtedly this was a considerable tribute to the standing of London Street within the community at large and, indeed under Tarbolton's leadership, it prospered both as a place of lively worship and as a spiritual home for some of the town's leading citizens.

This was reflected in the ongoing need to enlarge the premises of the Church at frequent intervals as well as to sustain and diversify its activities. Thus, further schoolrooms were added in 1888 in response to "the steady and very encouraging growth of the Sunday school and Bible classes attached to the chapel". As a result, there was overcrowding which made the conditions "very trying for the teachers, and uncomfortable, if not unhealthy ... [for] the scholars".[113] The schools were reopened in September following "extensive alterations ... including the erection of new class-rooms and ... [the] re-modelling [of] the schoolroom". At a meeting following a public tea the Treasurer of the building committee explained that "the total liability, including a balance due on the renovation of the church" was £950, towards which £800 had already been raised.[114]

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112 Ibid.

113 *Reading Mercury* (14 April 1888), p. 4.

114 *Reading Mercury* (29 September 1888), p. 5.

Then in 1894 the Church was refurbished again. On this occasion

> The walls ... [were] re-coloured and decorated, the wood-work painted and varnished, and the ironwork of the barricade in the gallery re-coloured and gilded, the gas standards re-lacquered, and sundry other repairs executed ... on the wall over the recess for the organ ... [were] painted in bright letters "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness".[115]

The cost of this work was £182 10s.

As before, such improvements involved the organising of fund raising events. One, from Tarbolton's early days as minister was a Bazaar and Fancy Fair held in April 1888 at the Drill Hall, which was "transformed into a very pretty and attractive Puritan village, representing old English houses". In addition to the stalls "laden with useful and ornamental articles", there was "a museum, containing items of archaeological and general interest". Each evening "an excellent selection of vocal and instrumental music" was provided,[116] while at intervals, during the afternoon and evening, on the stage at the end of the Hall there was an exhibition of "old masters" in the form of tableaux.[117] By all accounts the Bazaar, (held on Wednesday and Thursday of two successive weeks), was a great success with the *Hants and Berks Gazette* commenting that

> Starting with a novel idea, and making the bazaar widely known, the [organising] committee succeeded in attracting to the Old English Village visitors of all denominations in the town and surrounding villages, and in such large numbers that at one time during the evening there threatened to be a block in the hall.[118]

Although Tarbolton's exact role in this initiative is not known, it is clear that he was fully in sympathy with it and may even have suggested the theme. He was a member of the organising committee and played a full part in the proceedings. For example, acting as lecturer "he explained the tableaux in an interesting manner",[119] and at the opening ceremony for the second week pointed out that "the object of the bazaar was to enable them to give their Sunday school teachers and scholars, and ... he might say, the whole town, increased accommodation for their work".[120] The total sum raised was approximately £450 with expenses of £100. The *Hants and Berks Gazette* concluding comment on, what could be termed, an extravaganza

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115 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (9 June 1894), p. 5.

116 *Reading Mercury* (14 April 1888), p. 4.

117 "Among the pictures presented was that in which Piety, Prudence and Charity ... [were] represented as arming Christian for his journey. Another was a group representing Faith, Hope and Charity". *Hants and Berks Gazette* (14 April 1888), p. 8.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.

120 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (21 April 1888), p. 5.

was: "This we believe to be the grandest achievement in the way of bazaars that Basingstoke has ever seen".[121]

Turning to church life more generally, in a similar manner to his predecessors, Tarbolton placed considerable emphasis on the importance of preaching. He introduced monthly evangelistic services and used the sermon to address contemporary concerns, for example, gambling;[122] as well as more explicitly religious themes, such as, in 1895, "Christ as a Companion" and "The Gospel for Middle Aged People".[123] On occasions, to add variety, there were visiting preachers. These services proved to be very popular due, in part, "to their bright and attractive features, prominent among which" was the contribution of a string band.[124]

Tarbolton also identified himself closely with many of the activities associated with the Church. Concerning its work with children and young people, he was an assiduous contributor to Sunday school anniversary events. In 1887 he "strongly urged the necessity of sturdy religious instruction" to offset secular influences in society more generally;[125] in 1890 he "had something to say to parents on the subject of co-operation with the teachers";[126] and in 1898 he "had the privilege of preaching the sermons morning and evening and of addressing the scholars in the afternoon".[127]

Having been established in 1893, presumably with Tarbolton's support, he spoke words of encouragement at the first anniversary of London Street's Young People's Society of Christian Endeavour in November 1894.[128] Designed to foster discipleship and Christian service, this was undoubtedly a cause with which he was much in sympathy.

Tarbolton also gave his wholehearted backing to the Mutual Improvement Society. As well as presiding at meetings he sometimes gave lectures, such as one on William Makepiece Thackeray.[129] This reflected the fact that Tarbolton was a talented poet, with his poems being published in the *Pall Mall Gazette.* In addition, he wrote a more substantial work "Joseph the Dreamer", which led to his being invited to become a member of the Society of Poets. In keeping with his natural modesty and reticence, he declined the invitation.

When London Street's Pleasant Sunday Afternoon or Men's Own Brotherhood Society was started in May 1899, Tarbolton was appointed President. He was very much in sympathy with an initiative which was designed to reach out to working

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121 Ibid.

122 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (27 January 1894), p. 5.

123 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (20 April 1895), p. 5; (16 November 1895), p. 5.

124 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (27 January 1894), p. 5.

125 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (16 April 1887), p. 5.

126 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (12 April 1890), p. 8.

127 However, he did so "with his arm in a sling" and the report continued, "that, we believe, is the tale of a Dog and a bicycle". *Hants and Berks Gazette* (9 April 1898), p. 5.

128 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (17 November 1894), p. 4.

129 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (21 March 1891), p. 8.

men who would not normally attend a church service.[130] Presiding at its first anniversary celebrations in 1900, Tarbolton must have felt some satisfaction in the reports of its officers which showed that it was in a "flourishing condition" with 205 members. These having been read, he "addressed the members, and, in his usual racy and felicitous style winged wise words of counsel and encouragement with telling anecdote and humour".[131]

Like his predecessor, Tarbolton found the time and energy to serve on the Basingstoke School Board, being elected first in May 1897 and subsequently re-elected in May 1900, remaining a member until the Board's demise in 1903. In his address for re-election in 1900 he felt obliged to balance the needs of the children with the financial demands placed on the ratepayers: "During my term of office I have endeavoured to serve you faithfully, to the best of my ability, and to study the interests both of the Children and the Ratepayers".[132] He was also a member of the Board of Guardians. In 1898, when there were twelve candidates for the ten Basingstoke seats on the Board, Tarbolton along with fellow guardians who were seeking re-election published an election notice in which they

> ... were able to report with satisfaction that while there ... [had] been a marked decline in the number of able-bodied paupers in the [work]House, many solid improvements ... [had] been secured during the past three years, including a much improved dietary [regime], while there ... [had] been no corresponding increase in the rates. If ... [re-elected they promised to] endeavour in the future, as in the past, to see that the Poor Law ... [was] administered in our Union in a kindly and intelligent spirit, with a genuine regard to the welfare of the poor both in and out of the House, and especially of the children, the aged and the infirm.[133]

They also felt that it was necessary "to bear in mind the interests of the ratepayers" and well as "the recipients of relief".[134] Through his membership of the School Board and Board of Guardians, Tarbolton personified a Christian commitment to public service and a concern for the welfare of others. By implication he was able to strengthen further the relationship between London Street and the wider community.

In the circumstances, it perhaps understandable to learn that Tarbolton's ministry was interrupted by periods of illness and, indeed, his wife's poor health. On these occasions, such was the high esteem in which he was held that he received the full

130 For a more detailed discussion of the Men's Own Brotherhood Movement, see Roger Ottewill, "'Brief, bright and brotherly': Assessing the Relationship Between the Men's Own Brotherhood Movement and Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire", *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 10/3 (November 2018), pp. 158-71.

131 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (20 October 1900), p. 6.

132 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (28 April 1900), p. 4.

133 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (26 March 1898), p. 5.

134 Ibid.

support of the Church. As he wrote in 1897, "the knowledge of your loving thought and of your prayers for us is a great and constant comfort".[135]

Undoubtedly one of the most notable events during Tarbolton's ministry were the celebrations held in October 1900 to mark the centenary of the London Street premises. Reflecting on the previous hundred years Tarbolton ended his contribution to the proceedings with the words

> May God help us to keep true to ... two traditions, - to keep in mind, the culture, the learning, and the thought of older days, and to open our arms wide to all the people who surge up and down our streets, and say to them "Come in with us and we will do you good".[136]

Put a little differently, past traditions and pre-occupations needed to be adapted to meet the evangelistic needs of the present day.[137]

Although Tarbolton remained at London Street until 1907, the centenary celebrations serve as an appropriate end point for the purposes of this article. From London Street, he moved to Crowborough, where he remained until 1919, with the last three years of his ministerial career being spent at Warwick. In an obituary published in the *Hants and Berks Gazette* at the time of his death in February 1925, it was recorded that for twenty years Tarbolton had served as London Street's minister

> ... with uncommon distinction. As a preacher he had few peers in the ranks of Nonconformist ministers outside the big centres. His sermons were characterised by freshness and originality and always gave evidence of deep study and clearness of view. As a public speaker taking part in the affairs of the town or as a debater in the old Mutual Improvement Association at London Street ... [his] ready grasp of the subject, keen sense of humour, genial wit and polished literary style always impressed and fascinated his listeners. While staunch and fearless in the advocacy of his principles he was utterly devoid of bitterness and consequently his relations with all sections of the community ... were of the most friendly nature. The active part he took in the public and social life of Basingstoke was highly appreciated by the townsfolk generally.[138]

Such attributes were also reflected in his *Congregational Year Book* obituary, with references to his ministry being of "a strong virile type" and to his being "a faithful pastor, a loyal friend, a clear thinker [and] active in all social and

135 Letter, 31 August 1897, LSCMM (1710-1890), LSURCA.

136 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (20 October 1900), p. 6.

137 For full details of this event, see https://hampshirearchivestrust.co.uk/archive/introduction-to-archives/the-importance-of-archives-case-studies/london-street-congregational-church-centenary-meetings/ (accessed 2 March 2021).

138 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (14 February 1925), p. 6.

educational work". Like many of his predecessors, he was undoubtedly a man of many talents. Consequently he was "a minister of whom any church might be proud".[139]

XIII: Conclusion

Throughout the nineteenth century London Street was, in the main, served by a succession of long-serving, hardworking and enterprising ministers. The only two exceptions were plagued by ill health and might have contributed more if they had been able to do so. In playing their part in the life of the church through, for example, supporting the Sunday school and adult education initiatives, and securing improvements to the London Street premises, ministers left a legacy on which their successors could build and from which they could benefit. Many also facilitated the close collaboration which existed within Basingstoke's "community of dissent" and with Congregational churches elsewhere in the county through active participation in the work of the HCU. That London Street could attract such high calibre ministers is testimony to its standing within both the town and Congregationalism more broadly. As it was put by the Chairman of the HCU, Mr J. A. Hunt, at the centenary celebrations, "they had heard what a power and influence this Church had been in Basingstoke and round about this neighbourhood" and went on "to suggest to their young friends that the future of this Church would very much depend upon them". To which the audience responded with a heartfelt "hear, hear".[140]

London Street continued to prosper during the twentieth century, with its highest number of members, 351, being recorded in 1968. In 1972 it voted to join the United Reformed Church. Today the Church remains a distinctive landmark in London Street and as its website indicates it continues to serve as a spiritual home for Basingstoke's Nonconformists and as a social centre for members of the wider community.[141]

ROGER OTTEWILL

139 *CYB* (1926), p. 183.

140 *Hants and Berks Gazette* (20 October 1900), p. 6.

141 For further details, see church website http://www.basingstokeurc.org.uk/ (accessed 15 July 2019).

REVIEWS

Looking for a Voice: A Hymnological Autobiography. **By Caryl Micklem and Alison Micklem. York: Alison Micklem, 2017. Pp. 196. £12.00. ISBN 978-1-32696-818-2. Illustrated.**
(Obtainable online from http://www/lulu.com/shop/caryl-micklem/looking-for-a-voice/paperback/product-23075071.html, or by post from the Revd Alison Micklem, 38 Horsfield Way, Dunnington, York, YO19 5RH).

The Revd Thomas Caryl Micklem was a minister in the Congregational Church and the United Reformed Church. Born in Oxford, England, in 1925, he distinguished himself as a hymn writer, composing tunes and writing words. He served as Chairman of the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland from 1993 to 1999.

At the time of his death in June 2003, Micklem "was working on a book which he termed 'a hymnological autobiography'. The whole family knew about it, as it would occasionally be referred to in conversations. There was no sense of urgency about it, but when he was not doing anything else (which was not very often) and the mood took him, he would settle down to the next chunk. He said he thought it might be of some interest and entertainment value to a few people". (The quotation is from the introduction written by Micklem's youngest daughter Alison, who has brought the book to publication).

Readers will be grateful to Alison not only for transcribing her father's sometimes scrappy manuscript but also for collating it with the musical examples and other documents. However, the manuscript comes to an abrupt end roughly in the middle of 1988, with fifteen years of work to be recorded with very little help other than the rough table of contents he had drafted. In bringing the story up to date Alison has made a key contribution to the book which certainly justifies her being credited as a co-author.

In the late 1940s Erik Routley invited Micklem to consider whether he might like to write tunes for a couple of hymns under consideration for the new hymn book, *Congregational Praise*. It was not a commission, but the two tunes, "Corrour Bothy" and "Sandwith", duly appeared in the book. It has to be said that he had a great deal of help and constructive criticism from Routley, who allowed him to incorporate his improvements and still claim the finished result as his own – a pattern repeated throughout his life. In the book Micklem acknowledges the generous help he has received from other friends in a similar way.

It was not until a decade later that he turned his hand to writing the words of hymns. It seems that the first book to contain his verse was the *University Carol Book* of 1961 which carries two translations of his; one was considered by the editor to be a little too free and instead of being described as a translation appears in the book as "An English carol on the same theme".

But Micklem is mostly known as a result of his contributions to *New Church Praise* (1975) and *Rejoice and Sing* (1991) and the book explains their genesis. There are some surprises: the tune "Gatescarth", surely one of his most memorable,

was originally written for a hymn of Fred Pratt Green (a prayer for nurses) which was intended for *New Church Praise*, but omitted from that book for reasons of space. The tune, however, would not leave his mind until he wrote some new words for it, and that is how "Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart" came to be written. So if *New Church Praise* had been a little longer we would have been deprived of one of Micklem's most inspired hymns.

From 1986 Micklem was very much involved in the preparation of *Rejoice and Sing*. His wife Ruth reckoned that he was doing about eighty hours a week on the book (counting travel, and residential meetings) in addition to his church work. He used to go up to London from Oxford for the one-day meetings with Ruth's shopping trolley full of other hymn books and files: down the steps to the underground at Paddington, up the steps at King's Cross. Sometimes people helped him up, as one would a mother with a push chair. Like other members of the committee who were writers or composers, he submitted his own material which was of course judged, with the originator out of the room, by criteria no less rigorous than those applied to other submissions or discoveries.

What drove Micklem to write those hymns and tunes? After his first efforts he received some commissions, and found it useful to write material (words, music or both) for special services in churches of which he was the minister. Then there were several competitions he entered, although there was only one occasion when his entry won. Ruth was a constant source of encouragement, and only she would have been able to say how much she helped in all his work. Several times in the book he mentioned that this tune or those words would not go quietly, but rattled about in his mind so insistently that in the end he had to write words for the tune or a tune for the words. There were other important collaborations, notably with Sydney Carter, Peter Cutts, Alan Gaunt, Brian Wren and others, and, most significantly Bernard Massey, Erik Routley and John Wilson.

Bringing the book to publication was to be Alison's occupation during a three-month sabbatical (it will come as no surprise to hear that it actually took more than three years). Alison's Synod Training Officer made it quite clear that Alison's own hymnological journey should be described and her material included. There are contributions from other family members also, including delightful illustrations by Alison's sister Judith; and, this being an autobiography, there are nine pages of family photographs. Thought has obviously been given to the format of the book: it is A4 size and coil-bound for easy use at a piano desk.

As with any writer or composer, by far the greatest part of Micklem's output remains invisible, or at least unpublished, and included here are fascinating glimpses of hymns and tunes which did not quite make it into permanent printed publications.

To sum up, the book is a very useful compendium of the works of Caryl Micklem: it gives insight into the creative process, but above all, hymns and tunes being such an important part of our corporate life, it is an important contribution to United Reformed Church history.

JOHN MANSFIELD

The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume I: The Post-Reformation Era, c.1559-c.1689. **Edited by John Coffey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. £110.00. Pp. xxii + 519. ISBN 978-0-19870-223-8.**

Though the final volume of the five-volume series to be published, this is, chronologically, the first and in some ways the most crucial. It is for this volume, the one which deals with the emergence of Protestant Dissent in England, to set the tone for the rest of the series. It does so not least in the masterly, extensive introduction written by the editor. He begins with the assertion that Dissent "was not an inevitable by-product of Puritanism, but the unintended outcome of a protracted struggle to define and control the Church of England" (p. 3). It is clear from this account that seventeenth-century Christian identity was fluid. Dissent has to be understood synchronically in its context rather than in a teleological way, the approach found in many denominational histories and, to some degree, in Michael Watts's *magnum opus* in three volumes, *The Dissenters*. The model followed in this book – and indeed in the series as a whole – is not one of rise and fall but of "diffusion" and "migration" (p. 34). The book's twenty-one chapters are divided into four parts which follow this model. More significantly, perhaps, this explanation makes it far less surprising that later volumes in the series move way beyond the idea of Dissent as it arose in the English context to explore what it means in global, Protestant and even post-Christendom terms.

Section I begins with Dissenting "Traditions within England". Presbyterianism, defined as belief in a "national church of England teaching Reformed doctrine and purged of the remaining elements of medieval Catholic worship" (p. 56) receives treatment in three chapters: Presbyterianism "in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England", in "the English Revolution", and in the Restoration period. Undoubtedly, Presbyterians formed the largest group of those who would eventually become, but were not initially, Dissenters, though the claim here is that Watts's estimate that they were three times the size of the next group (the Independents) is considered to be an "underestimate of their total strength". Nevertheless, theirs is a tragic tale: Presbyterianism "had been a driving force behind the Restoration; it had been involved in discussion concerning the religious settlement in which the prospect of comprehension had seemed real; and it had obtained nothing" (p. 77). The fourth chapter acknowledges that the relationship between the early Separatists and later Congregationalists is disputed, though it is retained in the argument here. The importance of developments in New England as well as the Westminster Assembly is mentioned. What is most significant, perhaps, is the exposition of identities: those labelled "Dissenters" did not self-identify as such. Instead "they argued that the latest iteration of the Church of England, shaped according to the wishes of a particular and narrow group of bishops, was in itself a dissent from its own traditions" (p. 107). Chapters on Separatists and Baptists, and Early Quakerism follow.

Section II looks at "Traditions outside England". It begins with the "Dutch Republic", such an important place for early Separatists. The chapter on "Scotland" reminds us forcefully that the story there does not concern the *spread* of Dissent,

but the emergence of a particular form of it in a story which has its own trajectory where, finally, Presbyterian means establishment and Episcopalian means dissent. The chapter on "Ireland" similarly shows a church by law established which was quite accommodating of its Puritan faction perhaps because of the dominance of Catholicism in the land. The chapter records that "the state was less systematically persecutory than elsewhere in the Stuart kingdoms" (p. 223) and provocatively, though persuasively, insists that it was the Declaration of Indulgence by the king, James II, in 1687 rather than the so-called Toleration Act of 1689 that "marked the end of large-scale religious persecution" in England and Ireland. The chapter on "Wales" opens with a warning about the historiography that came to associate religious Nonconformity with Welsh identity and nationalism, but it demonstrates too that Dissent in Wales had a life of its own and quickly associated itself with the language. Chapters on "New England" and "Colonial Quakerism" follow, explaining developments which saw a form of Congregationalism become the established religion in some parts and Quakers with political power in New Jersey and Pennsylvania underlining that Dissent is as much, if not more, a matter of context as it is of religious conviction.

Section III considers "Dissent and the World". "Dissent in the Parishes" begins in the reign of Queen Elizabeth when "the boundary between dissent and conformity was often a porous one" (p. 295) but ends in the 1650s when Episcopalians were "*de facto* parochial dissenters" acknowledging that "The usefulness of dissent as a descriptive term at the parochial level in these decades is ... limited" (p. 303). "Dissent and the State" looks at policies of persecution and toleration and concludes that "Early modern England was neither a persecuting society nor a tolerant state, but a patchwork of them both" (p. 320). "Dissent Empowered" describes the "Puritan Revolution" when "The Civil Wars transformed Puritans into the new 'establishment', the dominant strand in a purged and radically reformed national Church" (p. 334). But here, too, divisions in Dissent emerged when Independents acknowledged their differences with the Westminster Divines. "The Print Culture of Early Nonconformity" surveys dissenting literature revealing nonconformity to be concerned with piety as well as theology, and with these two perhaps more than polemic and controversy.

The final section, "Congregations and Living" begins with a chapter on "The Bible and Theology" which discusses orthodox and heterodox Dissenting groups. Although worship was often the focus, questions of ecclesiology and order were to the fore among Puritans, while the scholastic theological systems were gradually left behind in favour of "a Pietism that emphasized experience over dogma" or "a 'reasonable' Enlightenment Christianity that sought to strip doctrine down to its bare essentials" (p. 407). "Worship and Sacraments" is a chapter set in the well-known first question and answer to the Westminster Shorter Catechism ("What is the chief end of man?"; "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever"). It also uses John Bunyan's allegorical work *The Holy War* in order to analyse how the senses remained important in Dissenting worship, partly causing the opposition to the Prayer Book. An analysis of the *Directory for the Publique Worship of God* is also given. "Sermons and Preaching" asks the question whether

Dissenters were preaching to everyone or just to the Elect. It traces the importance of the "Prophesyings" and the dramatic changes which occurred as a result of the Civil Wars when episcopal authority was broken and there was a growth in lay preaching. "Women and Gender" looks not just at the women involved in the radical parts of the dissenting movements but to the role of the moderate dissenters. There were women preachers in the 1640s and 1650s but their enforced silence after 1660 brought about their turn to print (p. 455). The final chapter, "Being a Dissenter" tries to reconstruct the lay experience in the gathered churches by looking at early modern piety but also at the exercise of discipline.

This is an important collection of essays which highlights the fluidity of religious conviction and practice in post-Reformation Britain and beyond. It will certainly remain authoritative for some time to come. Moreover, with the publication of this volume the series is now complete. It is a remarkable achievement on so many counts, not least the willingness of Oxford University Press to publish it.

ROBERT POPE

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