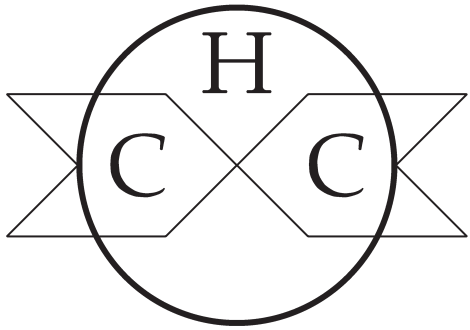
Congregational History Circle *Magazine*



Volume 4 Number 6
Spring 2004

ISSN 0965–6235

THE CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY SOCIETY MAGAZINE

Volume 4 No 6 Spring 2004

Contents

EDITORIAL

This issue of our magazine is distinctly biographical in tone, with Nigel Lemon revisiting Cheshire in his treatment of Joseph Davies of Buckley, Yvonne Evans' transcription of Samuel Newth's own notes, and an account of Viscountess Stansgate's life, giving some weight to her place in the history of twentieth century Congregationalism. Nigel Lemon has made the history of Cheshire Congregationalism his own territory while Yvonne Evans has discovered a rich seam of nineteenth century ministerial ore to mine. The discussion of Margaret Stansgate should place her near to the centre, not only of British political life, but also of church history, and specifically Congregational developments in the second half of the twentieth century. Regrettably it does not add much to our knowledge of her work to advance the ministry of women and that is explained by the inaccessibility of the records of the Society for the Ministry of Women in the Church. These have been deposited in The Women's Library, now part of the London Guildhall University, (a responsible act and, in the long term, beneficial to scholarship) but are unlisted there and remain unavailable to researchers.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Dates for your Diary

The summer event of the Friends of the Congregational Library is being held on Saturday 12 June 2004 in Nottingham. This is the first time the Friends have met outside London. They are visiting the Congregational Centre in Castle Gate at 10.30am to view forty of the Memorial Hall Trust's portraits with short talks on six of the most important. After a light buffet lunch, the afternoon programme consists of a guided tour of the Nottingham Subscription Library, one of the oldest private libraries in the country. The cost of the event is £7.00 per person. If you wish to join the Friends or would like to accompany them on the outing to Nottingham, then contact Ann Davies, Hon Sec of the Friends of the Congregational Library, 38 Lansdowne Rd, Bedford, MK40 2BU.

The Congregational chapel at Horningsham, Wiltshire, claims a foundation date of 1566. It was originally built for Scottish stonemasons, involved in the construction of Longleat House, and is situated on the estate. Proposals have been drawn up for the adjacent schoolroom, formerly the manse, to contain

a display of exhibits illustrating Nonconformist history. In addition, essential repairs are required to the chapel. A working weekend to undertake more minor tasks has been planned for 23–25 July 2004. Volunteers should bring tools for gardening, painting etc. Further details may be obtained from Barbara Bridges on 01285 712204 or e-mail barbarajbridges@aol.com.

The Role of Women

Do we need more investigation of the role and contributions of women to our churches? On recently consulting Albert Peel's useful book *A Hundred Eminent Congregationalists 1530–1924* (1927), in which he provided mini-biographies of his subjects, I noticed, in passing, that it is comprised of ninety-nine men but only one woman, the poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Twenty-one years after this volume appeared Peel incorporated his earlier work in a new publication, *The Congregational Two Hundred 1530–1948* (1948), in which he included Americans for the first time, as well as those Britons whose contributions he had previously not sufficiently recognised, and also those notables who had died since 1927. He realised that some American women demanded to be included, and that his first American draft was "much too ministerial and much too masculine", so he put seven in his final selection. Yet he did not choose to add any other British women, alongside Mrs Browning, although he considered and dismissed the claims of Katherine Chidley. Nowadays we should regard Peel's judgment as seriously flawed in this matter.

Undoubtedly the Congregational churches in recent years have been fortunate in having, amongst their advocates, Elsie Chamberlain and Lady Stansgate. It is to be hoped that the Daughters of Dissent project (see book reviews), which deserves our support, will consider those women who did not join the United Reformed Church, as well as those who did. The editor of this magazine would welcome serious and thoughtful contributions, reflections and memoirs on the work of women in the Congregational churches in any of the former Congregational unions of the United Kingdom.

Back Numbers

Peter Young, who distributes the *CHC Magazine*, says that we have back numbers available for most issues in volume 3 and some in volume 4. Please send your requests to him c/o the Editor, accompanied by a cheque payable to "The Congregational History Circle" for £1 per issue, to cover p&p.

Rev. Geoffrey M Breed of 14 Cleave Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 4AY would like to contact any one who has the following back numbers of the *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*: Vol 4 nos 4, 5, 6 (1910), Vol 5 nos 1, 2 (1911), Vol 6 no 1 (1913), Vol 8 nos 1, 2 (1919, 1920), Vol 13 nos 1, 2, 3 (1937, 1938, 1939). These are all he needs to make up a complete set and

he will pay any expenses involved. He is also interested in back numbers of the *CHC Magazine* of which he has none at all.

Losses

We have lost through death our CHC member, Annette Travell, the wife of Revd Dr John Travell, late of Penge, now of Dorchester. We note also that during the last year Prof Colin Gunton, a distinguished theologian, has died, as has also the minister and hymnwriter, Caryl Micklem, both significant losses to the Congregational family of churches.

Our CHC secretary, Colin Price, has contributed the following.

A Richard Frankland Memorial at Rathmell

Many years ago now, Jim Nelson, bootmaker to the "high and the low" in Settle, Yorkshire, and supporter of all things Congregational, proposed a plaque to commemorate Richard Frankland's academy at nearby Rathmell, the principal centre of his "Christ's College", which opened in March, 1669/70. Although the academy had, under persecution, to move from time to time across county boundaries to Natland, Kendal and Attercliffe, Sheffield, and elsewhere to survive, it returned to Rathmell in 1689.

Frankland was born in 1630 and attended the local school at Giggleswick before going to Cambridge. He was ordained in 1653 and later refused to be episcopally (re)ordained, even with such (or particularly with such) mitigating words as "If thou hast not been ordained, I ordain thee". He was licensed to hold meetings in his house in 1672 for worship, according to the Presbyterian order. He taught over 300 students, comprising many of the next generation of Nonconformists in the northern counties of Lancashire, Westmorland, Cumberland and Yorkshire. The nearby farm of Pasture House was the scene of the first non-episcopal ordination in Yorkshire, in July 1678.

A Congregational line of descent from Rathmell academy (1670–1698) might run: Attercliffe (1689); Heckmondwike (1756–1783); Northowram (1783–1794); Idle (1800–1826); Idle (Airedale) (1826–34); Airedale (Undercliffe) (1834–1876); Airedale (Emm Lane, Bradford); (1876–88) Yorkshire United Independent College (Emm Lane) (1888–1958); Northern College (Whalley Range, Manchester) (1958–1985); and then to Luther King House (Brighton Grove, Manchester) 1986.

Another line would lead to Harris-Manchester College, Oxford. This would preserve the Presbyterian tradition of the 18th century when many Presbyterians turned to Unitarianism.

There is a range of buildings in Rathmell called College Fold. (Compare College Road in Cheshunt, Herts, and in Whalley Range and elsewhere). A

simple plaque, with these words suggested by Dr Geoffrey Nuttall, suitably placed there would suffice.

Richard Frankland MA
1630–1698
Nonconformist Tutor
Opened his Academy here
1670

If you would like to contribute to the cost, Jim Nelson, now elderly, would be pleased as the project lies heavily on his conscience. The estimated cost is £600. Please make cheques payable to *The Richard Frankland Memorial Plaque Account* sort code 77–56–13 acc no 01549460. Or write to me as one of three signatories to the account: *Colin Price, The Congregational Church, Guilden Morden, Royston SG8 0JZ.* Tel 01763 852883, e-mail colprice@cong1.freeserve.co.uk.

A VERY LATE OBITUARY:
THE REVD JOSEPH DAVIES (*c.*1844–1921)

A Congregational Year Book obituary of an ordained minister, normally published within the two years following death, may be seen as a sometimes subjective complement to the more objective record of such a life's work: the latter would be most fully stated in an immediately preceding year's list of pastorates or other ministries. An obituary's potential interplay of training patterns, movements between pastorates or distinctive ministerial manner provides an ever changing context and content for later enthusiasts and historians: on only infrequent occasions might a recognised minister fail to be so included. One such, however, is Joseph Davies who, though traced annually throughout his active ministry, named under "Ministers deceased since last issue" in 1922 and again in the summary list of a quarter-century of deaths four years later, lacks all other mention.[1] Some eighty years on, the varying sources still extant at times provide conflicting detail.[2]

Joseph Davies was born around 1844 at The Farm, Bryn-y-Baal, near the Flintshire town of Buckley, an intensely industrial area notable for its firebricks, pottery and mining: he was among the twelve children of Thomas and Elizabeth Davies. Working first for his father who in 1861 farmed a few miles distant at Hawarden Hayes, he was by 1871 a grocer and provision dealer living at Amies Hill, Buckley Mountain: substantial business success effectively enabled him to retire young and, from 1877, to devote another working lifetime to evangelistic and pastoral activity.[3] His church membership was first with the Primitive

1. The final and most complete *Congregational Year Book* (hereafter *CYB*) entry is in *CYB* (1921) 345, reading: "Davies, Joseph. Mostyn 1877–81; Flint and Bagillt 1885–87; Buckley 1892–95; Rivertown, Flint 1898–1901; Castle Farm and Cromwells Hill, Caergwrle 1901–02; Greenfield, Holywell 1902–12; Garden City, Queen's Ferry, Flint 1913–17. Out of Charge. Address: Buckley, *via* Chester". See also *CYB* (1922) 96 and *CYB* (1926) 585–6: the latter entry lists seventy-five men surnamed Davies.

2. The present paper parallels a fuller, more locally focussed account written for *Buckley History 2004*: the author warmly acknowledges the particular assistance from Buckley of Don Donnell and Brian Hodnett, and also that of Glynne Edwards, Ann Williams (the Union of Welsh Independents), Jean Young (the Congregational Federation), the Flintshire Record Office, Manchester Central Reference Library and Dr Williams's Library (hereafter DWL).

3. *Rivertown Congregational Church Jubilee Book* (1947).

Methodists at adjacent Alltami, the earliest of their societies in north Wales.[4] His initial preaching was also for this denomination,[5] but following a year as a Lay Evangelist and the first pastor at Mostyn on the north Wales coast, Davies was in 1878 ordained there into the Congregational ministry: his lack of prior ministerial training was then by no means unusual.[6] Visiting preacher roles apart, his forty years in the active Congregational ministry until retirement in 1917 were all served in his native county of Flint within fifteen miles of his birthplace: he spoke both Welsh and English. Joseph Davies died in 1921.

Davies was a strong denominationalist. Through his particular penchant for short ministries, many of a pioneering nature, he did much to promote English language Congregationalism in Flintshire: following his second ministry, he served the North Wales English Congregational Union as both Evangelistic Agent [1887] and Financial Secretary [1891]. The Union perhaps gave Davies some sort of roving commission, since he undertook initial or early missionary activity in the five distinct localities of Mostyn; Castle Farm and Cromwell's Hill, Caergwrle; Shotton; Mynydd Isa; and Garden City. Greenfield's new Alpha Chapel was opened during his ten year ministry there. Rivertown, Shotton, exemplifies his energetic evangelism and success. Here, where a new steelworks was submerging a rural environment, his congregation rapidly expanded to around one hundred, almost immediately outgrowing its temporary premises: initial services and an iron church were swiftly followed by a stonelaying and the June 1899 opening services in a new permanent building. Davies was Rivertown's first minister, a position which by mutual agreement included no stipend. It is possible that his personal circumstances enabled him to give much or all of his wider ministerial activity without full charge.

The 1921 Year Book entry, understandably taken as definitive, is sometimes challenged by other denominational records.[7] Apart from minor single-year discrepancies and apparently brief return pastorates, claimed major additions include Connah's Quay [1884–6], seemingly part of a triple or quadruple pastorate, whilst Mostyn [E.] and Bagillt [E.] are taken to denote 'Evangelical' rather than English language churches. A 1913–17 pastorate at Keighley is a case of mistaken identity, confusing both name and date with Joseph Vivian Davies:

4. *Alltami Methodist Church Souvenir of Centenary Celebrations 1936*. See also H B Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (1905) ii 273.

5. *Blwyddiadur* (1922)—the Union of Welsh Independents yearbook (hereafter *UWI*): this yearbook's brief obituary for Davies appears to be unique. I am grateful to UWI Swansea and to Bonnie Lumby for necessary translations here and elsewhere.

6. *CYB* (1879) 263: his Congregational ministry was variously held to have started in 1877 (*UWI* 1922), 1878 (*CYB* (1879) 243) or 1887 (*CYB* (1897) 426).

7. Cf *CYB* (1921) 345 with *CYB* (1881) to (1907) *passim*, Charles Surman Index (both DWL and Nottingham copies) and J Thomas, *Hanes Eglwysi Annibynol Cymru* (Dolgellau, 1891) v 379–81. The NWECU Minutes, which might be additionally helpful, remain yet to be located.

this South Walian had interestingly succeeded Davies of Buckley at Caergwrle in 1902. The suffix usage of both Holywell and Flint also misleads until interpreted in geographical or county terms.

Davies combined his denominationalism with close association with other nonconformists. On the 1881 Census night, he was the guest of a Methodist Local Preacher at Whitford, a village in the hinterland of Mostyn; amongst Buckley's pioneer Rechabites, Davies would there join members from various surrounding chapels; and his influence during the founding years of the once and still nondenominational Village Temple at Mynydd Isa helped steer members away from the specific Methodism favoured by some towards an unaffiliated position. Mynydd Isa nonetheless featured on Congregational Union lists from 1920 until 1970.[8]

Leader of a children's choir at a time of fund raising for Alltami's new 1866 chapel, Davies's musical accomplishments later found wider expression through composition. His hymn tune *Southport* [Short Metre] appears to have been first published in the 1889 *Primitive Methodist Hymnal*, and subsequently in at least seven other denominational collections:[9] the Alltami Methodists themselves maintain a Christmas tradition of singing Davies's 'Jesus, the promised Saviour', this being known locally as 'The Alltami Carol'.

In early 1889, Davies was elected one of Flintshire's first County Councillors. His sense of social fairness successfully persuaded the Council to petition Parliament 'that all Receivers of Ground Rents, Dead Rents and royalties of every description be compelled to contribute to the Local Rates'.[10] A similar concern perhaps prompted his personal purchase in 1890 of land to provide a public, in effect an unconsecrated Nonconformist, cemetery for the people of Buckley, outside the perceived restrictive controls of the then Established Church: both its stonelaying in 1891 and subsequent trusteeship arrangements reflected his cross-denominational aims.

Davies's private means were also used towards the construction of at least three chapels. Earliest among these was the building in Drury Lane, Buckley which from 1881 housed the Pentre Primitive Methodist society; at Rivertown he provided both the land and the initial iron building, then contributing handsomely towards the permanent church; from late 1911 he loaned funds for building Mynydd Isa's Village Temple, this serving the English speaking residents in an area previously missioned only by Welsh Calvinistic Methodists. The last named repaid its monetary debt to Davies by March 1917 and continued to enjoy his honorary pastoral leadership.

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8. *The Village Temple Congregational Church, Mynydd Isa. A Brief History* (2000) which also provides other details in this paper. See also eg *CYB* (1920) 270 and *CYB* (1970–71) 302.

9. eg *Salvation Army Tune Book* (nd but 1931) song 129; *Congregational Praise* (1951) hymn 460.

10. *Minute Book of the County Council of Flint 31 January 1889 to 11 September 1895* particularly p 37.

He was a willing and acceptable preacher in the village churches of south Cheshire: following the opening of the Congregational chapel at Farndon in 1889, he occupied its pulpit for ten Sundays during the ensuing year. This cross-border link particularly involved the chapel builder Thomas Huxley of Malpas:[11] both men were active in founding and substantially financing new causes. Their association, perhaps deriving from common membership in its first years of the North Wales Union, lasted from early in Davies's ministry until Huxley's death in August 1903: Davies was among four ministers sharing in the funeral service. The reciprocal nature of this relationship is evidenced at Rivertown's stonelaying in 1898 where Huxley was a contributor, as to many another Congregational cause, with his 12 year-old grandson, Harry Huxley, amongst those laying memorial stones: almost a decade later but now with changed personnel, it remained when Farndon's then minister conducted a special service at Greenfield following the 1907 opening of their new chapel.

Wherever in the county were his pastorates, Davies had almost continuously after 1885 a Year Book address of 'Buckley, *via* Chester': on only three occasions is he apparently elsewhere, although he resided briefly in Chester in 1882 when out of charge.[12] His interest in other properties was however noteworthy, the Mold and Buckley Rate Books recording at least seven in Buckley which were at various times owned by Davies: the subsequent details of his estate suggest that this was where the greater part of his capital was invested.

Davies was twice married, in Primitive and Wesleyan Methodist Chapels at Chester and Wrexham respectively. His first wife, Ann Bellis, was a potter's daughter and the widow of Thomas Bellis, farmer: she was born in Buckley on 23 August 1822, married Davies in February 1866 and died aged 81 on 24 June 1904. His second wife of March 1905, who survived him, was Julia Ann Jones: she was niece to his friend Thomas Huxley whose housekeeper she had been, certainly from 1881 until Huxley's death in 1903. The son of this marriage, Joseph Hugh, aged only fourteen years at his father's death, later moved as a salesman to the Nottingham area where he died in 1971: his mother followed him there, dying at Beeston in 1944.

The Revd Joseph Davies died at Buckley on 14 August 1921, aged 77, and was buried in the cemetery he had donated to his home town. He left £4,142. 6s. 7d, a particularly large sum for a nonconformist minister, this bequeathed ultimately to his son. Davies had been an energetic, pioneering, evangelistic, socially involved minister who was apparently never the Secretary or Chairman of a County Union. Unusually, neither local newspaper nor denominational

11. For Huxley, see N Lemon 'Thomas Huxley of Malpas: Contractor and Congregationalist' in *Cheshire History 43* (2003) 133–147.

12. *CYB* (1882) 204 (Chester); *CYB* (1887) 423 and *CYB* (1894) 417 (Flint); *CYB* (1902) 424 (Caergwrle).

publication included any obituary to this Congregational Minister and County Councillor: it cannot now be suggested whether this silence were his own wish, that of his family or of his community.

Nigel Lemon

MARGARET STANSGATE—
RADICAL DISSENTER[13]

Margaret Wedgwood Benn, Viscountess Stansgate, (1897–1991) was a leading figure in the campaign for the ordination of women in the Church throughout the twentieth century; for many years she worked for a closer understanding between Christians and Jews; she played a pivotal role in the formation of the Congregational Federation in the late 1960s and early 1970s; and, as a vital member of a political dynasty, she gave crucial support to both her husband and son, during some of the most significant political changes of modern British history. The two constant themes of her life were religion and politics. Throughout most of the twentieth century, she came to know well many prominent British politicians, from the Liberal, Labour and Conservative parties, and, with an active interest in international affairs, she met several world statesmen, and visited many countries, including the Soviet Union and Israel, during the first years of their existence. However, she was never merely a political wife but had the wholehearted support of her husband for the pursuit of her own interests. For her, theology was a lifelong passion and her commitment to the recognition of women's ministry in the Church was total. Her life was lived therefore, from an early age, at the heart of public affairs, both in this country and on the international scene, and her observations and recollections offer an unique set of insights from a privileged vantage point.

A Mother Remembered

Margaret's son, the Labour party politician and former cabinet minister, Tony Benn, wrote of his parents as belonging to "the radical dissenting tradition". He elaborated that his father, William Wedgwood Benn, the first Viscount Stansgate, had been brought up as a Congregationalist, and always argued that everyone had the right to speak their mind, while his mother, Margaret, had become a Congregationalist "quite late in life". They had conveyed to their children the "roots" of this tradition in their ethical teaching and example, in a strong sense of social justice "and the need to seek out truth, and distinguish right from wrong in political, as well as personal, choices".

Alongside these principles came "a genuine and deeply felt internationalism,

13. I should like to thank the following for help with this article—Tony Benn PC, Yvonne Evans, Jonathan Morgan, Janet Wootton and Peter Young.

which was underpinned" in Margaret Stansgate "by a spiritual conviction" that all are "the children of God". Benn referred to his mother's Christian faith, which she had held since her childhood in Scotland, and to her instructing her sons in "the relevance and importance" of the Old Testament prophets "who preached righteousness against the Kings who exercised power—and regularly abused it". In his diaries, he also refers to her telling his own children, her grandchildren, "Bible stories" at bed time.[14]

Her Home and Upbringing

Margaret Stansgate was the elder of two daughters of Margaret and Daniel Turner Holmes (1863–1955) who sat as the Liberal MP for Govan, in Glasgow 1911–18 and who had achieved a first class honours degree, as an external student of London University, and also studied at the universities of Paris and Geneva. He had married in 1896 Margaret Eadie, the daughter of an engineer who was twice Provost of Paisley. As a teacher, lecturer and man of letters, Daniel Turner Holmes was to publish a number of works including *French Essays on British Poets*, *Greek Lyrics*, *Lectures on Scottish Literature* and *Literary Tours in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*.[15] Both Margaret Stansgate's parents had wanted a daughter but for different reasons: her mother because she was "an ardent feminist" who wanted to bring up a girl who would fight for her rights as a woman; and her father because, as a lover of the Greek classics, he followed Aristotle, in holding that women were the inferior sex and therefore that they should make the home comfortable for male members of the family.[16]

The Religious Beliefs of her Family

Margaret described her parents as "agnostics" while they saw themselves as "puritan agnostic Humanists". However her paternal grandfather was a serious Christian believer. He had been born into a Church of Scotland family but had changed church allegiance several times until, influenced by the American evangelists, Moody and Sankey, he had set up a branch of the Plymouth Brethren called the Irvine Brethren. He became their minister and baptized new members in the river Irvine. Margaret's father recalled his childhood home as oppressive—he had heard more of hell than of the love of God, the family had taken no daily newspapers and had been strict Sabbath observers. Margaret herself found in her grandfather's religion not only severity but also a "deep and abiding joy"; yet both her parents, especially her mother, had turned irrevocably against Christianity.

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14. M Stansgate *My Exit Visa* (1992) 233, A W Benn *Tony Benn Office Without Power Diaries 1968–72* (1988) 99.

15. For Daniel Turner Holmes see *Who Was Who, 1951–1960*.

16. Stansgate *op. cit.*, 3, 6–7.

In stark contrast to her parents, Margaret was almost all her life a faithful believer. She traced the origins of her religious faith to her early childhood in France, when her father was a student at the Sorbonne, and the family were on holiday, staying as guests at a Roman Catholic nunnery. She was in the company of the nuns when they were cleaning the chapel and noticed that they genuflected before the altar. She did the same and discovered a "sense of otherness" which never left her. On return to her home in Scotland, the six or seven years' old Margaret began to attend regularly the local Scottish Episcopal Church. At school her headmistress encouraged her pupils to visit the Holy Land, at some point in the future, while curiously her mother taught Margaret the Lord's Prayer which the girl repeated day and night. Both parents were disappointed at their daughter's burgeoning beliefs and would question her about God's presence during natural disasters, when she was only a teenager.

However, she admitted that as a child "the most important thing" in her life was politics and she and her mother both became followers of Millicent Fawcett (1847–1929), as members of her National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, or the suffragists, as they were known, who pursued lawful and constitutional methods to achieve reform.[17] Opposed to violence, they did not favour the more sensational activities of the Women's Social and Political Union, that is the suffragettes who followed Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter, Christabel. Margaret's father, most reluctantly, but under pressure from his wife, gave his support to the cause of votes for women in 1911 when he was standing for election at Govan.[18] Her home life was therefore cultured, progressive, secular and politicised. Growing up in the Edwardian age when those campaigning for women's rights became more militant, young Margaret was surrounded by advanced and exciting influences, within and without her home.

During the First World War Margaret attended the parish church of St Jude on the Hill, Hampstead where she was confirmed by the Bishop of London, Dr Winnington-Ingram. At that time she developed a great desire to study theology "in order to understand my religion as fully as possible", as she later put it, but was surprised to be rebuked for articulating this apparently subversive desire by the incumbent who asked her, "Can't you trust your church and your vicar to tell what you need to know?" Clearly she could not![19]

Marriage

In 1920 Margaret's father, an independent Liberal, was defeated in a bye-election in North Edinburgh; he never stood for parliament again. She was herself then

17. For Millicent Fawcett see *DNB 1922–1930*.

18. Stansgate *op. cit.*, 17–27.

19. *Ibid.*, 41.

in low spirits because, aged 23 years, she had not found her place in life. She was not attracted to a career of her own in politics: she felt too old to study at university for a degree, and her parents were unwilling for her to take a diploma in theology at St Hugh's College, Oxford, although the course there was open to non-graduates. Margaret even seriously considered becoming a nun, aware of "the sense of a presence" that had been with her since her experience at the French hospice twenty years earlier. However, about this time one of her father's colleague's interest in her grew to be more than mere friendship and in November 1920 she married William Wedgwood Benn (1877–1960), who was twenty years her senior. William was also a Liberal MP, having represented the small east London constituency of St George's-in-the-East and Wapping 1906–14. He had served as a Whip in the Liberal government of 1910. On the outbreak of the First World War, he had resigned his seat and enlisted, distinguishing himself on active service on many fronts.

William was himself "a lifelong radical nonconformist", having accepted the faith of the Congregationalists in which he had been brought up, although not consistently attending Congregational chapels throughout life. During the First World War he had led a colourful but dangerous life, serving in the Gallipoli campaign, bombing the Baghdad railway from the air, being rescued from a sinking aeroplane in the Mediterranean, commanding a party of French guerrillas against the Turks, and fighting as an articled privateer in the Red Sea. After qualifying as a pilot in England, he had worked with the Italians in organizing and taking part in the first parachute landing of a secret agent behind enemy lines. For these varied wartime services, Benn was much decorated by the British (with the DSO and DFC), French and Italians. In 1918 he had returned to the House of Commons as MP for Leith, Edinburgh.

The couple were married at St Margaret's, Westminster by Bishop Winnington-Ingram, with the Liberal leader, H H Asquith, and his wife, Margot, in the seats of honour. The bishop directed his address exclusively to the bride, telling her that from then on her life was to pass into her husband's. Margaret detected in the bishop's puzzling remarks a measure of his fear, with women over 30 years of age then having gained the vote, Nancy Astor's having become an MP only the year before, and even a movement for women's ordination having begun to develop. Perhaps he also saw in this young woman a disturbing desire to explore and learn more than he found acceptable. Although Winnington-Ingram was not noted for having moved with the times, when it came to "Women's Work", he was an early believer in the extension of the vote to women and had even visited Holloway Prison to see for himself what he

described as "the spirit of self-sacrifice, and willingness to suffer for an ideal, of the Suffragettes".[20]

In Rome, during their honeymoon, Margaret wondered whether she might find her "true spiritual home" in the Catholic Church, although she sensed that William was apprehensive about this possibility. However Rome had the opposite effect to that she had expected and, although she appreciated the "beautiful" worship, she discovered that she could not live "with the unrelenting atmosphere of authority" within Catholicism and that she would not become a convert. William retained a lifelong antipathy to the Vatican.[21]

The couple were to have four sons of whom the youngest died at birth. The eldest son, Michael, became an officer in the RAF during the Second World War and was awarded the DFC but died in 1944 of injuries received in a tragic accident. Their second son, Anthony Neil Wedgwood Benn (born 1925), was to become MP for Bristol south-east in 1950, in a by-election occasioned by the resignation of Sir Stafford Cripps. However, on the death of his father in 1960, he wished to remain in the House of Commons and, therefore, sought to renounce the succession to his father's title. After a landmark struggle leading to a change in the law, he finally renounced his peerage in 1963 and again took his seat in the Commons. He remained MP for Bristol south-east until 1983 and subsequently represented Chesterfield 1984–2001.[22] Her third son, David, a Sovietologist, became the head of the BBC's Yugoslav programmes. As the daughter, wife, and mother of MPs and cabinet ministers, (Tony's son, Hilary, became MP for Leeds Central in June 1999, some eight years after his grandmother's death) Margaret was to remain at the centre of a political family all her life.

The Benn Family

In accordance with his late Victorian Congregational upbringing, William Wedgwood Benn had long been a staunch teetotaller and he succeeded in persuading both his wife and children to share his views on this matter. His own father, Sir John Williams Benn, had been a publisher and a politician and was created a baronet in 1914, in recognition of his work as a Liberal MP and as leader of the Progressive party in, and sometime chairman of, the London County Council. Sir John was the eldest son of Julius Benn who had been the Congregational minister of St George's in the East, next to Old Gravel Lane, in east London 1874–83. Tragically in 1883 Julius had been murdered by his third

20. S C Carpenter *Winnington-Ingram The Biography of Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram Bishop of London 1901–1939* (1949) 166–7.

21. Stansgate *op. cit.,* 43–51.

22. For William Wedgwood Benn, first Viscount Stansgate see *DNB 1951–1960.* For Tony Benn see *Who's Who.*

son, William, who had lately been confined in an asylum but, having improved in health, had accompanied his father to Matlock where he had attacked and killed him in a boarding house. At the time it was reported that Julius Benn had "a very nervous and somewhat excitable disposition, which was inherited and intensified in the son".[23] William Wedgwood Benn's father, also Julius's son, John Williams Benn, had married Elizabeth Pickstone who was from a Congregational family in Hyde, Cheshire. Their elder son, the second baronet, Sir Ernest Benn (1875–1954), achieved distinction as a publisher, economist and as an outstanding individualist. Ernest and his wife, Gwendolen, although markedly differing in politics from William and Margaret, were to prove good friends to them both.[24]

William and Margaret's first child, Michael, was born in September 1921 and was "christened" in the crypt chapel of the House of Commons, with among his godparents, John Henry Whitley (1866–1935), the speaker of the house 1921–28, himself a Congregationalist. Interestingly Whitley successfully declined the customary peerage on his retiring from the speakership.[25] Margaret appreciated the friendship and support she received from her husband's family, although his cousin, the distinguished actress Margaret Rutherford (1892–1972), who was created a Dame of the British Empire in 1967, proved as eccentric in real life as she appeared on stage and in film.[26]

In the 1920s, as a young married woman, Margaret, through her husband, was in close touch with the Asquiths, Walter, later Viscount Runciman, Sir John Simon, Sir Oswald and Lady Cynthia Mosley, Ramsay MacDonald, and Waldorf and Nancy Astor (the first sitting woman MP, a conservative, elected in 1919), among others. With William, Margaret visited the Astors at their house, Cliveden, overlooking the River Thames, near Taplow, half way between Oxford and London, and was greatly impressed by the sincerity of Nancy Astor's Christian Science beliefs, which she had held since her conversion in 1914. Waldorf Astor (1879–1952) was MP for the Sutton division of Plymouth from December 1910 to 1919 when on the death of his father, first Viscount Astor, he was obliged to resign his seat, although he endeavoured to remain in the Commons but found this to be legally impossible. His wife, Nancy Astor (1879–1964), who had a powerful and vivid personality, stood for his former seat and was elected, retaining the seat until she stood down in 1945. As an MP she refused to show any reverence for the "ancient and illustrious men's club to

23. *Congregational Year Book* (hereafter *CYB*) (1884) 282, *Nonconformist* 8 and 15 March, 1883.
24. *DNB 1951–1960*, Stansgate *op. cit.,* passim.
25. *DNB 1931–1940*, Stansgate *ibid.,* 57–8.
26. *DNB 1971–1980,* Stansgate *ibid.,* 58.

which she had gained admittance" since she maintained that women were the superior sex. "I married beneath me," she would say, "all women do".[27]

Theology

Margaret's "main interest" was theology. She wanted "to study and learn", and to give her children "a clear idea of what the Christian religion was all about". Her hope was that her teaching, even if inadequate, "would at least give them nothing to unlearn" when they grew up and were able to think for themselves. She set out to teach them of the Old Testament prophets, "with their emphasis on justice, and encouraged them to understand the Jewishness of Jesus". On Sundays she went with the boys to St John's, Smith Square, Westminster, near the family home, to the afternoon children's service.

Margaret became an external student at King's College, London, taking various biblical and theological courses. She was to become close friends with the tutor to women students, Evelyn Hippisley, who accepted Margaret even though she did not intend to sit examinations. She attended the graduate class of Professor William Oesterley (1866–1950), who held the chair of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis at King's 1926–36, even proudly delivering his lecture one day when he was unable to be present. She learned to read the New Testament in Greek and the Old Testament in Hebrew and simply "loved the classes". She described Hebrew as "a lovely language", arguing that one could not "get into the spirit of the Old Testament" without a little Hebrew. She illustrated this, by pointing out that the well known passage about Elijah in the wilderness, translated in the Authorised Version as 'after the fire a still, small voice', in the Hebrew literally reads 'and there came to him the sound of a thin silence'. For her, this added a new dimension and was "a wonderful phrase". In time Margaret would become a member of the Council of the Hebrew University in Israel and a fellow of that same university.[28]

Maude Royden and the Ordination of Women

Margaret became particularly interested in an issue which to many then was "so shocking as to be almost unmentionable", that is the ordination of women to the priesthood of the Church of England. She had first become concerned with this at the time of her confirmation, about 1916 or 1917, and soon after learned of the ordination of Constance Coltman to the Congregational ministry in 1917. Margaret later traced to this ordination the real beginning of the movement for the ordination of women in Britain, although she related to it the appointment, also in 1917, of the Anglican lay woman, Maude Royden, as assistant preacher at

27. For Waldorf Astor see *DNB 1951–1960*. For Nancy Astor see *DNB 1961–1970*. Stansgate *ibid.*, 52–66.

28. A W Benn *Tony Benn Office Without Power Diaries 1968–72* (1988) 479.

The City Temple, Holborn Viaduct, whose minister 1917–19 was the American, Joseph Fort Newton.

Agnes Maude Royden (1876–1956) had devoted much of her time between 1908 to 1914 to the work of women's suffrage, especially through the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, favoured by Margaret and her mother, and she had edited the journal *Common Cause* 1912–14. At The City Temple 1917–20 she proved a great success as a preacher, drawing crowds to Sunday evening services, and during the 1920s she became "the main driving force for the ordination of women" in England. Maude Royden was invited by the rector of St Botolph's, Bishopsgate to conduct the three hours' service there on Good Friday 1919 but she was forbidden by the Bishop of London to do so. Instead she led the service in the parish hall. One observer commented prophetically that "Maude Royden is more than a preacher: she is a portent". In 1920 Maude acquired an inter-denominational pulpit, through the 'Fellowship Services', which started at Kensington Town Hall but soon transferred to the Guildhouse in Eccleston Square, London where she preached for several years, with Margaret often among the congregation. Among the visiting preachers at the Guildhouse were Mahatma Gandhi and Albert Schweitzer for whom Maude herself acted as interpreter. Margaret was delighted when Maude was made a Companion of Honour in 1930, on the recommendation of the Labour prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald.[29]

The two women agreed about the injustice of Maude's being free to preach and to give pastoral counselling while, at the same time, being inhibited from presiding at communion. They understood that the main objection to the ordination of women was that they were regarded as "unclean". Margaret became a member of the, to her mind, unhappily named League of the Church Militant which looked forward to women's ordination. She quickly joined the committee and arranged for its meetings to be held in her own home in Westminster. The membership of the league, to Margaret's mind, was "small but impressive". Maude Royden was the league's president while among the keen supporters were Marston Acres and his wife, both social workers, and Deaconess Belfield, one of the Anglican deaconesses, appointed under the new rules established by the Lambeth Conference of 1920.

In 1925 Margaret attended a dinner at the Astors' home where the guest of honour was Queen Marie of Romania. Among the diners were the Archbishop of Canterbury and Mrs Davidson whom Margaret dared to approach on the question of women's ordination. She was told to speak to the archbishop and soon after the Wedgwood Benns received an invitation to dine at Lambeth Palace. Randall Davidson (1848–1930), then 77 years old, asked Margaret if

29. *DNB 1951–1960*, Stansgate *ibid.*, 70–72.

she wished to be a priest and, hearing her denial, enquired why she supported this movement. She explained that she wanted her sons to grow up in a world in which the church gave equal spiritual status to men and women. Davidson stated that, although he was "a convinced feminist", supported votes for women and believed that the professions should be open to women, ordination to the ministry must be judged differently, for to ordain women was to break "the Catholic tradition of two millennia". Margaret recalled that she had replied, "I can't stop; and I must keep working" for this cause. Far from dissuading her from campaigning for women's ordination, she found that the archbishop's words had exactly the opposite effect and spurred her on. Yet she admitted that on that occasion she was made aware "for the first time" of "the full weight of the opposition ranged against the ordination of women".[30]

The Society for the Ministry of Women in the Church

Lady Stansgate's radicalism showed itself in a number of ways, not only in her support for her husband but also in her advocacy of the rights of women, especially in the churches. Elaine Kaye judged Margaret Stansgate to have been a "key figure" in the movement for the ordination of women in the churches and for the support of those women already ordained, although she herself was never ordained.[31]

In 1928 the franchise was extended to all women over the age of 21 years (putting them on an equal footing with men) and, as the League of the Church Militant had originally been set up as part of the suffrage movement, it was felt that it should be wound up. In 1929 it was replaced by the Society for the Ministry of Women in the Church, an inter-denominational body, again with Maude Royden as its president. As Elaine Kaye has written, Margaret played an important part in this "low key" society which acted as "a support group for those working for the ordination of women" and also for those women already ordained. The Congregational minister, Constance Coltman (already president of the Fellowship of Women Ministers, with some 20 or so members, which met once a year in Oxford) was invited to become a vice-president of the society. In 1942 The Society for the Ministry of Women changed its name to The Society for the Equal Ministry of Men and Women in the Church but this was considered "too provocative" and in 1957 it reverted to its former name. Through her "wide contacts, determination combined with charm, and

30. Stansgate *ibid.,* 72–74. Davidson had voted for votes for women in the House of Lords. G K A Bell *Randall Davidson Archbishop of Canterbury* (1935) I 669.

31. E Kaye "From 'Woman Minister' to 'Minister'?" in *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* vol 6, no 10, July 2002, 771.

enthusiasm for theology", Margaret Stansgate was judged to have supported "scores of other women".[32]

The twice-yearly newsletters of the Society for the Ministry of Women and its regular meetings were the chief means for members to keep in touch. The newsletters reveal the active role played by Margaret Stansgate who was to leave the Church of England in 1948, after attending the inaugural assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam. She realised that there was little hope of the established church being prepared to ordain women in the near future and she became a Congregationalist. At that point she was chosen to serve as the Free Church president of the Society.[33]

In July 1964 Margaret's son, Tony Benn MP, had lunch at the House of Commons with his mother and about twelve others who had gathered for the annual meeting of the Society for the Ministry of Women—not an impressive turn out! The Bishop of Woolwich, John Robinson (1919–83), well known for his paperback best-seller *Honest to God* (1963), was with them. Although sympathetic to their cause, Tony Benn judged the society's members to be "rather an ageing crowd", containing "a feminist element from the past". His immediate response was they needed to find "some fight" if they were "ever going to win".[34]

Joining the Labour Party

In early 1926 William Wedgwood Benn was seriously considering leaving the Liberals and joining the Labour Party. However his brother, Ernest Benn, believed that anyone wishing to join the Labour Party must be ill and he generously sent the pair abroad for a three months' holiday which took them to the Mediterranean, where they visited Egypt, Jerusalem and the Holy Land, Beirut and then went on to Mesopotamia and Baghdad, Constantinople, and to the Soviet Union where they attended the Easter Eve service at St Saviour's Church, Red Square, in Moscow.[35]

Having no love for the unprincipled and unpredictable Lloyd George who became leader of the Liberal party in 1927, after Asquith's resignation in late 1926, and then increasingly voting with the parliamentary Labour party, in 1927 William applied for membership of the Labour party (as also did Margaret) and resigned his seat. At this time the couple came to know the Mosleys better, with Oswald having left the Conservatives and having joined the Labour Party himself in 1924 and becoming MP for Smethwick. Margaret found Oswald (Tom) Mosley "somewhat cold and distant" but she warmed to his wife,

32. Kaye, *ibid.,* 770–1.
33. *Ibid.,*, Stansgate *op. cit.,* 75, 229.
34. A W Benn *Tony Benn Out of the Wilderness Diaries 1963–67* (1987) 129.
35. Stansgate *op. cit.,* 75–111.

Cimmie, to whom he was unfaithful. His eventual resignation from the Labour Party and his founding of the New Party and then the British Union of Fascists, the notorious Blackshirts, only confirmed Margaret in her judgment that Mosley was very ambitious and unstable.[36]

Margaret's next door neighbours in Westminster at this time were the middle class socialists and social reformers, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who were among the founders of the London School of Economics. They proved very friendly once William had joined the Labour Party. In 1927 Beatrice thought William "the last word of respectability", with "a peculiarly pleasant manner and agreeable disposition", while she described Margaret as "a pleasant little woman twenty years younger than" her husband. Two years later Beatrice saw William as appearing like "an insignificant little person" but with "an unusual alertness of manner—an almost brilliant rapidity of response". She continued, "Markedly unpretentious, puritan in habit, but open-minded and tolerant towards other people's self-indulgences and vanities, he is universally liked by the Party he has joined, and respected by the Party he has left".[37]

Beatrice confided in Margaret that she and Sidney were "poles apart", for her husband was "absolutely self-contained and self-sufficient. He doesn't need to think there's a Presence behind him." In contrast, Beatrice stated, "Now, I have to pray. I can't get by without a Presence. I have to be guided by It and acknowledge my accountability". Margaret was unsure whether Beatrice Webb understood this to be the Christian God but, whatever her religious beliefs, they carried her through life.[38]

William was again in the Commons 1928–31 and 1937–42. In 1929 he became the Secretary of State for India, as part of the Labour government, with a seat in the Cabinet, and he became a privy councillor. As the wife of the Secretary of State for India, Margaret was expected to present to the King and Queen all the Indian ladies who had received permission to attend court. In December 1930 the Benns were present at a conference on India at the prime minister's country house, Chequers, but on their way back to London were caught in a heavy snowstorm. At Margaret's suggestion, they stayed for the night at the Quaker guesthouse, Jordans, arriving there about midnight. There they found, in her terms, "that wonderful peace and quiet—refreshing and energising—that Quakers know how to create". William, who arranged for Gandhi to come to London for a conference on the future of India in the autumn of 1931, lost his seat in North Aberdeen in the general election of October that year.

36. *Ibid.,* 114–121.
37. M Cole (ed) *Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1924–1932* (1956) 136, 225–6.
38. Stansgate *op. cit.,* 121–122.

More Travels Abroad

In the summer of 1932 Margaret and William visited Germany and there they met, among others, renowned scholars like the Old Testament specialist, Professor Karl Budde (1850–1935), and Professor Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) who wrote the well known work, *The Idea of the Holy*. His theme that the numinous played a central role in religious consciousness was congenial to Margaret in particular. Although the Benns enjoyed many walks around Marburg with Otto, Margaret found him both lonely and sad. In 1938, after the Munich crisis, the Benns returned to Germany, only to find their Marburg friends in despair, with Hitler and the Nazis in control. In 1933 they visited the United States of America, armed with a letter of introduction to Dr Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), professor of Applied Christianity at the Union Theological Seminary, in New York, who had recently married an English postgraduate student, sixteen years his junior, in Winchester Cathedral. In New York the Niebuhrs proved welcoming and an enduring friendship developed. Reinhold Niebuhr enjoyed great influence across the United States and devoted his life to the attempt to bring in a society that was "just, compassionate and free", because he believed that Christianity should be applied to cultural and political issues.

In 1934 the Benns met Henry Ford, the motor car manufacturer, in Detroit. He explained to Margaret that he believed profoundly in reincarnation and that he had been in the world "millions of times before" and that he would "come back millions of times in the future"! From America's west coast, William and Margaret travelled to Japan and there visited several mission churches of various Christian denominations. Many were designed according to the Japanese pattern, whereby worshippers were required to remove their shoes in the porch, before entering the church proper. From Japan they moved to China, meeting there the Tibetan spiritual teacher, the Panchen Lama, and also the former Chinese emperor, Pu-Yi. Travelling home through the Soviet Union, the couple found Moscow to be "a city of churches" still although only some forty-five were then regularly in use for Christian worship.[39]

In May 1937 Margaret and William, who had recently been returned to parliament as MP for Gorton in Manchester, attended the coronation of the new King George VI at Westminster Abbey. In late 1937 and early 1938 the pair visited the Near East as William was then lecturing for the British Council. In Palestine they met and stayed with Dr Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952), the Zionist leader and later the first president of the State of Israel, travelling with him past the Garden of Gethsemane where he stated, with emotion in his voice, "There are trees there now that saw the destruction of the Temple". A distinguished chemist, Weizmann was the inspiration for the founding of the

39. *Ibid.*, 130–182.

Hebrew University of Jerusalem with which Margaret was later to be closely associated.[40] On her way to Galilee, Margaret was held up by Arab guerrillas who released her, in exchange for several packs of cigarettes, after learning that she was a harmless British tourist who only wished to visit the Christian holy sites.

The Second World War

The outbreak of war in September 1939 resulted in the 18 years old Michael joining the Royal Air Force and William himself, at the advanced age of 63, also volunteering for the RAF. Eventually he was to rise to the rank of Air Commodore. His son, Tony, later explained, "He had rejoined the air force because he felt that during the war you had to fight and not be a parliamentarian—he ended up as an air gunner before they caught up with him, because he had been a pilot in the First World War". His training as an air gunner was carried out surreptitiously and, although officially William was not authorised to take part in flying operations, it is clear that he did so.[41]

Margaret herself worked for the chaplains' department of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, travelling widely to give lectures on the relation between religion and politics. She also sat on a committee for work among women in the forces, on which she met and disagreed with Rosamond Fisher, the wife of Geoffrey Fisher (1887–1972), then the Bishop of London, and later the Archbishop of Canterbury. Mrs Fisher was opposed to any development which could be seen as forwarding the cause of women's ordination and was determined that those women appointed as chaplains' assistants should have no official status, nor wear uniform, but be clearly understood to be lay workers. This matter was to prove the opening salvo in a protracted struggle between these two women and their husbands. In the course of her work for the WAAF chaplains' department, Margaret attended a conference in Cambridge and, to her surprise, found herself energetically defending the Old Testament against criticism, an action which led to further invitations to speak.

In 1942 William Wedgwood Benn was called to the House of Lords as the first Viscount Stansgate, in order to increase Labour representation in the upper chamber. Two years later the death of their son, Michael, in June 1944 was a harsh blow in particular for Margaret who, with William in Italy and Tony, also then in the RAF, in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), was alone at his bedside when he died. Michael had intended at the end of the war to be ordained as a clergyman and to work for "a just and peaceful society". Tony Benn found his mother "quite magnificent" in the manner in which

40. *DNB 1951–1960*.

41. "Churchill Remembered. Recollections" Tony Benn MP, Lord Carrington, Lord Deedes and Mary Soames *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (2001) sixth series, XI, 393–397.

she coped at this time.[42] Undeterred by his son's death, William, at the age of 67, still flew on several bombing missions over occupied Europe, even being mentioned in dispatches. For his part Tony realised that he was now the heir to the viscountcy and, with his parents' support, resolved to do all he could to renounce this unwanted inheritance. Margaret returned to her work, speaking at several conferences, including one organised by the British Council of Churches on 'Home and Family Life', at which she was the 'adopted' representative of the Congregationalists. In 1945 she was asked to chair a Church of England committee to consider the 'Recruiting and Training of Women for Service in the Church'. It was clear that service in this context was not expected to mean ordained ministry and she was led to wonder if her strong views on this subject were either known or understood.[43]

A New Post in the Labour Cabinet

After the Labour Party's landslide victory at the polls in 1945, William was appointed the Secretary of State for Air by the prime minister, Clement Attlee (1883–1967). With William's new post, Margaret saw her chance to promote the ministry of women in the Church. Her work among women in the forces during the war had brought home to her the realisation that an "urgent necessity" existed for women chaplains. The opposition of the Church of England to women priests effectively barred any Anglican appointment but she knew well that "fully trained and ordained women ministers" existed within the Free Churches. As her husband was setting off to answer Attlee's summons at 10 Downing Street, she said to him, "If you are given the Air Ministry would you please appoint the Reverend Elsie Chamberlain a full chaplain to the RAF?" He readily concurred with this request and, as a matter of courtesy, later called upon the Archbishop of Canterbury to inform him of his intentions. William found himself arraigned before both Geoffrey and Rosamond Fisher. Once Elsie's position had been approved by the United Board of Chaplains, William informed King George VI and Queen Elizabeth about his proposal to appoint the first woman chaplain to the armed forces. He was told that their Majesties had no objection and rather thought that this appointment was a good idea![44]

William pressed ahead but the appointment took nine months to be settled because the opposition proved "so intense". Elsie's eventual appointment was widely reported in the press and made her name well known. Margaret dismissed the critics as motivated by pure "Anglican prejudice against women priests, for Elsie was an experienced minister". Elsie Chamberlain (1910–91) had studied theology at King's College, London 1936–39 and had obtained a Bachelor's

42. R Winstone (ed) *Tony Benn Years of Hope Diaries, Letters and Papers 1940–1962* (1994) 53–57.
43. Stansgate *op. cit.*, 183–196.
44. J Williams *First Lady of the Pulpit* (Lewes, Sussex 1993) 29.

degree in Divinity from there. She was among the tiny minority of full-time women students in the theology department and Margaret was then one of twenty occasional women students at the college. After leaving King's, Elsie had trained in Liverpool, under a woman minister, and had been ordained there as a Congregational minister in 1941. From 1941 to 1946 she had been the minister of Christ Church Congregational Church, Friern Barnet, in north London.[45]

Elsie Chamberlain finally left her church in Friern Barnet in March 1946. In June that year an invitation to preach at the church had been sent to Lady Stansgate, no doubt with the encouragement of the previous minister. Still at that time a member of the Church of England, Margaret nevertheless consented to preach at Christ Church and did so at both services on Sunday, 22 September, 1946.[46]

Margaret reasoned in her down-to-earth, common sense way that, if there were "women doctors who were members of the RAF, like male doctors", then there ought also to be women chaplains who were required and permitted to do the same job as male chaplains. Whatever the theological objections and ecclesiastical traditions involved in the argument, the Stansgates were formidable opponents who were sure to win the day. *The Times* caption read "Woman Appointed an RAF Chaplain" and the accompanying article outlined Elsie's tasks. "She will perform the ordinary duties of a Royal Air Force chaplain and be commissioned as a Squadron Officer in the WAAF."

Once Elsie's appointment was formally announced in *The Times*, in a matter only of hours a special messenger brought a letter to William, from Archbishop Fisher, in which he asked for assurances that Elsie would not be allowed to administer the sacraments to members of the Church of England, nor to give orders about their conduct of services to Church of England chaplains. He also praised the Army's markedly different attitude to that of the RAF, implying a severe criticism of the minister for air, Lord Stansgate. He maintained that the army provided an "admirable example" for, in the army, Elsie could have been appointed to act "as a Chaplain's Assistant", far more satisfactory to the archbishop and to the Church of England at that time.[47]

A further difficulty arose when the editor of the Royal Air Force annual described Elsie as "a welfare worker". William overrode the editor's perfunctory explanation and insisted that the annual be pulped and reprinted, with Elsie's name entered correctly among the chaplains. In addition, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Jowitt, arranged for Elsie's fiancé, John Garrington, who, as an Anglican priest, had been refused preferment within the Church for his love of a

45. *CYB* (1941) 269.

46. Christ Church Friern Barnet ministerial committee minute book (still held at the church)—12 June, 19 July, 22 August 1946.

47. Stansgate *op. cit.,* Williams *op. cit.*

Congregational minister, to be given his own parish and, consequently, the two were able to marry. Although Elsie was, in Margaret's estimation, "a very great success as an RAF chaplain", the opposition to women chaplains remained fierce and, at the time of Elsie's death in 1991, no other woman had held that post.

The veteran campaigner, Maude Royden, took an interest in the matter and remarked, to her sister, that Fisher and Bishop Wand of London were "both anti-feminist to an astonishing degree".[48] Margaret was similarly outraged by the "Anglican prejudice", as she understood it, evident in the case of Deaconess Litimoi Tsi (Florence Li) who had been ordained during the Second World War by Bishop Ronald Hall of Hong Kong in 1942, in order that the Christians in Macao might receive the sacraments during the Japanese occupation. She thus became the first ordained female Anglican priest but, after the war, Hall was placed under such pressure that, to spare him, Tsi agreed to stand down and in 1946 resumed her former duties as a deaconess. Soon after this, on a visit to London, "a very indignant Bishop Hall" spoke at a meeting at the Benn's home of "the enormous pressure" brought to bear upon him at this time. In China in the 1950s Margaret learned, as she put it, that "all the Chinese Christians had supported" Sister Tsi. Many years later her orders were recognized by the diocese of Hong Kong in 1970 when she was at last able to function again as a priest.[49]

International Affairs

In the autumn of 1946 Attlee indicated that he wished to reorganise the defence services and therefore asked William to resign from ministerial office. He did so and, devoting himself to the House of Lords, and less to party matters, he began to relish his increasing independence. However in 1947 William accepted the invitation to become the World President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (or IPU) which held its conference in a different country each year. William and Margaret hoped that the IPU might counter the division of the world into two armed camps, East and West, just as they entertained the notion that the new World Council of Churches would act in a similar fashion for the churches.

The WCC held its inaugural assembly in 1948 in Amsterdam, although sadly the Roman Catholics and several eastern churches declined to take part. The WCC's Dutch Reformed general secretary 1948–66, Willem Visser't Hooft, asked Margaret to join the Study Commission and to sit on the committee considering the Nature of the Church in God's Design. She was also a consultant on the Place of Women in the Church and so was present for the

48. S Fletcher *Maude Royden: A Life* (Oxford 1989) 282.

49. E Carpenter *Archbishop Fisher—His Life and Times* (1991) 649, 653, 659–663, M Stansgate *op. cit.*, 197–200. See also the article headed 'Women, ordination of' in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford 1997).

full month in which the WCC assembly took place. When Archbishop Fisher learned of Margaret's involvement, he wrote to Visser't Hooft to warn him that her views on women's ministry were not at one with those of the Church of England. For Margaret this was "the final straw". She finally realised that she was not "a welcome member of the Church of England" and that she could expect "no progress in the near future" on the ordination of women. She also took exception to "the limitation of the Anglican communion service", thus excluding other Christians, and to Archbishop Fisher's refusal to allow Anglicans to participate at the WCC in the communion service, which was administered according to the Reformed rite. She decided that, on her return home from the WCC assembly, she would become a Congregationalist.[50] As good as her word, in September 1948 she was received into membership of the Vineyard Congregational Church, Richmond-upon-Thames, where her friend, Elsie Chamberlain, who had also been at the WCC assembly in Amsterdam, was the minister.[51] Later Margaret was to become a member of the Whitefield Memorial Church in Tottenham Court Road.

Despite the archbishop's barbed comments, Margaret enjoyed her time at this assembly. Among those she met at Amsterdam, she recalled especially the heroic German pastor, Martin Niemoller (1892–1984), who had survived eight years in Nazi prisons, the leading Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) whom she found awkward, and his fellow Swiss but frequent disputant Emil Brunner (1889–1966) whom she befriended, as well as her old friend from the United States, Reinhold Niebuhr.[52]

With the benefit of hindsight we may judge Margaret's leaving the Church of England as predictable, although we should consider that she had not worked long and hard for change within that Church, just so that she should leave it. She had not sought reasons to leave but, rather as she saw it, she had endeavoured to change for the better the Church she had loved and served faithfully. However, given that Margaret's commitment to Christ, and to justice and equity for all God's people, necessarily implied for her equal treatment for men and women in the Church, then the cause of women's ordination to the ministry clearly took priority over the claims of the Church of England. Natural justice, no less, demanded this development of the Church's tradition. She had been a loyal Anglican for many years, never being merely a nominal member of the Church of England, but she found that the attitudes of successive archbishops and bishops, insisting that she and her fellow campaigners should be content to adhere to an ecclesiastical tradition which perpetuated the privileged position

50. *CYB* (1992–1993) 38.

51. Vineyard Congregational Church—church meeting minutes 8, 29 September, 17 October 1948, held at the church.

52. Stansgate *op. cit.,* 203–205.

of men, while it simultaneously frustrated those women with a vocation to Christian ministry, made it impossible for her any longer to remain within this Church.

Jerusalem 1951

In 1948 the modern state of Israel was brought into being and in 1951 the Benns accepted an invitation to visit it as guests of the government. There they visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and renewed old friendships. Margaret felt a unique affection for the city which, she found, spoke "in a wordless intimacy to those who have ears to hear". She wrote, "Time stands still in its streets as nowhere else on earth. It seems as though one might at any turning see all those who have ever walked there in the past".

They shared in the Sabbath meal—the Kiddush—at the home of the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Dr Herzog, and met his son, Chaim, who later became the country's President. Dr Herzog asked Margaret if she ever preached any sermons. Wondering what might be coming next, she replied shyly that she had done so in the past. He then decided to offer a text for her next sermon, reciting verses about the rebuilding of the Temple. When the stones were placed in order next to each other there was no grating noise, for they had all been moulded by the influence of the family, "so that when they attended synagogue they fitted to perfection".

The Benns also had an audience with, David Ben Gurion (1886–1973), the first prime minister of Israel, who had on his desk a large Hebrew Bible. Ben Gurion summarized his own faith as, 'We have preserved the Book, and the Book has preserved us'.[53] At one point during their meeting, having learned of Margaret's interest in Hebrew, Ben Gurion pushed the Bible towards her and demanded that she read aloud from it. She had been recently studying Genesis and began to read some verses with all the confidence she could muster, although inside she was all aquiver. He seized the book from her and shut it with a bang, announcing as he did so that she would "never make a Zionist", for she knew too much Hebrew! He later invited her to attend a meeting of the weekly Bible class which gathered at his official residence, with politicians, working men and scholars all present. At that class she felt that she had discovered "the living heart and soul of Israel, the very reason for its unconquerable existence down the long millennia of time".

On the following day the pair had lunch with members of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, and then interestingly Margaret was asked to address the assembly. She recalled the words of John Robinson, the English Separatist of the early seventeenth century, who had preached to his parting friends just prior to

53. J Bowker (ed) *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford 1997).

their crossing the Atlantic in 'The Mayflower' to the New World—"There is yet more light and truth to break forth from the Holy Word", she stated, adding "and here in Jerusalem we have seen it happen!" Her enthusiasm was transparent and her address was well received.[54]

Further Travels

In 1953 the couple paid their third visit to the Soviet Union, accompanied by their son, David, who was fluent in Russian. Margaret noticed that the religious situation there seemed easier than in Stalin's day but she noted the shortages of prayer books and other items. On this visit both William and Margaret were asked to give addresses in Baptist chapels. At one such service the final hymn was "God be with you till we meet again", after which everyone waved white handkerchiefs to send them off in a most moving way.

During this visit they flew to Yerevan, in the then Soviet Armenia where they were taken to a church (probably at Etchmiadzin, the principal see), from which they had "a wonderful view of Mount Ararat". They also attended the service at which the new primate of the Armenian Church—the Catholicos—was elected and were seated among the bishops by the altar. Margaret recalled the singing of the young priests on this occasion as "very beautiful".

In 1956 they were in Egypt as guests of President Nasser and his wife both of whom treated them with respect and warmth. They chanced to meet in Egypt the writer, Somerset Maugham. From there they journeyed to the Sudan and then to Israel where they spoke again to David Ben Gurion. As a keen advocate of Jewish-Christian understanding, Margaret felt privileged to meet the influential Jewish scholar, Martin Buber (1878–1965), who from 1938 had been professor of sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and discuss especially with him his approach to Jesus, whom he described as "a great son of Israel who cannot be put into any hitherto known category". As she parted from Buber, he cheered her by his affectionate farewell, "You permit me to say it? I like you English Christian lady and I like your ideas".

In 1956 Lord and Lady Stansgate returned to China and there in particular sought out the Christians to see how they fared under the new Communist regime. In Peking they were told that some sixty churches were regularly open for worship and, as it was nearly Christmas, they found that carol singers were a familiar sight. Many denominations were at work, including the Salvation Army, with whom they stayed for "an enjoyable hour or two", while Margaret also addressed hundreds of workers at the YMCA's Christmas Eve party. The two attended a packed service at the "principal Congregational church" in Peking on the first Sunday of 1957. There again the hymns were sung to familiar

54. Stansgate, 209–212.

tunes, although William and Margaret sang in English while all around them used Chinese. They were treated to a whispered translation of the sermon and "felt completely at home". One young Chinese minister seemed to sum up the situation in his new year sermon. He was grateful for all the recent material improvements in his country but stated that these alone were not enough. "We Christians are called to be Light and Salt in the New China". On their visit to the university of Peking they were pleased to find a Bible, displayed on every desk in the students' rooms, and learned that, although the students were not necessarily Christians, they were studying English and the Bible was essential for an understanding of English history and literature.[55]

Developments at Home

In the years after the Second World War, as the Cold War grew to its height, William unfashionably resisted those who called for discrimination against Communists. One episode at this time combined both his feel for religion and his politics, and curiously involved a defence of the Church of England. In 1950 Lord Vansittart (1881–1957), former permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office, claimed that the civil service and the Church of England had both been infiltrated by Communists. William responded by proposing a motion of censure against him but found that no other member of the House of Lords would support his motion. Thereupon Vansittart rounded upon Wedgwood Benn, accusing him of "having taken his ticket and labelled himself as a fellow-passenger of fellow-travellers" with the Communists. As an experienced parliamentarian, William took such comments in his stride and answered his accuser proudly, "My Lords, we Nonconformists have a hymn: 'Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone'. That is what I propose to do".

Also in 1950 their son, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, as he then was, was returned to parliament as MP for Bristol South-East, becoming the youngest member, a distinction which his father had held some fifty years earlier. In 1958 the return of his passport (which had been confiscated for so called un-American activities) enabled the American entertainer Paul Robeson to visit London and he accepted the Benns' invitation to attend a tea party at the House of Lords. Discovering there that the party was to celebrate a friend's birthday he began to sing 'Ol' Man River' to her in his distinctive deep tones.

Elsie Chamberlain, then working for the BBC's religious broadcasting department, asked Margaret to contribute a week of talks to the programme 'Lift Up Your Hearts'. Under the overall title of 'Divine Challenge', Margaret characteristically decided to consider six questions put to leading persons in the Old Testament. In particular she examined Elijah's defence of Israel's religion,

55. *Ibid.*, 214–223.

against the heathen Queen Jezebel, and the prophet's flight into the desert, from where God urged him to return and work harder for his cause. Margaret discovered that she had a talent for explaining such matters and derived great satisfaction in planning and delivering the talks. As ever, William took pleasure in his wife's achievements.

William's Death

Sadly in November 1960, one month after Margaret's broadcasts, William suffered a heart attack in the House of Lords and died the following day in Westminster Hospital, on the fortieth anniversary of their marriage. Naturally Margaret was hit hard by this loss but was determined to "look outwards" and "in the most positive manner to turn away from any morbid concerns". She counted her family a "great blessing" and saw her future role toward all its members to be effecting a "ministry of reinforcement", which entailed her not proffering advice "unless it was asked for—which was unlikely", in her opinion. Beyond her family she also still had "the many causes" which she "cared deeply for and had already sought to serve as well as might be".[56]

In her grief she found particular comfort in "the kindness of friends" and valued the letters she received at that time, particularly cherishing that from the former secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, Sidney Berry (1881–1961). He advised her to go through the duties of the days, immediately after William's death, with "uplifted heart" and he gave the address at William's memorial service in St Margaret's, Westminster. The patrician Berry, whom Margaret accurately described as a "shrewd, lovable and humorous saint", gave "a wonderful address which captured" William "immediately". He said, "Our beloved Independent has gone, and let us be thankful that he has been spared any time of debility and handicap because he would have been an intolerant and intolerable invalid"! Margaret recognized that this verdict was "perfectly true", knowing that Berry, himself an old Nonconformist Liberal, had often teased William about his politics. In contrast to the harsh comments of Vansittart, Berry had once said to William, "I'll believe anything you tell me except that you are a socialist. You are a Gladstonian Liberal". If his father was not a regular worshipper at any Congregational chapel, Tony Benn recalls him as having in him "the spirit of Congregationalism".

Lord Attlee spoke of William Wedgwood Benn as always retaining "the heart of a boy". He continued, "He had an extraordinary zest for life and he was always a knight errant, ready at all times to take up a cause for anything or any person in the world whom he thought to be suffering injustice". Renowned for his sincerity, freedom from malice, buoyant spirits and natural modesty,

56. *Ibid.*, 223–227.

Benn seemed, even to his parliamentary opponents, "the happy warrior, a man of profound ethical conviction, with a great love for his fellow men". Rarely among politicians, he had "many admirers and no enemies".[57]

William's death provided the occasion for Tony Benn's long but ultimately victorious campaign to renounce his hereditary peerage. Margaret's support for her son in this "battle" on the peerage issue, in his view, "really kept her going" after her husband's death.[58] In addition she continued her work in the Congregational Union, in the Society for the Ministry of Women in the Church, and also for greater understanding between Christians and Jews. After William's death, with Elsie Chamberlain's encouragement, Margaret also seriously considered entering the Congregational ministry herself.[59]

Margaret and Congregationalism

In May 1957 Margaret and William attended the annual May meetings of the Congregational Union at Westminster Chapel. There Margaret was one of three speakers who addressed the assembly on the laity and the ministry. Her son, Tony, who was present to hear his mother, considered it "an extremely well-thought-out, well-delivered speech". He noted that "the 2,000 odd delegates were more than delighted by her vivid imagery and the authentic, perceptive and encouraging report she was able to bring back from China" which the Stansgates had recently visited.

Among Margaret's work for the Congregational Union of England and Wales, she was a member of the council of Mansfield College, Oxford, 1955–62. Her son, Tony, reckoned that at the college she was considered "a great nob" and was normally "introduced to everybody". However, on 2 July 1962, the Queen Mother came to the college "to open a new wing" and the principal introduced her to almost all present, with the notable exception of Margaret. Tony explained this by wondering whether "some disapproval" might be attached at that time to the name Stansgate which he was busily preparing to relinquish.[60]

At the May meetings of the CUEW in 1965, Margaret met John Wilcox and responded positively to his views about the future of Congregationalism. He explained that in the previous year he, Reginald Cleaves, the minister of Clarendon Park Congregational Church, Leicester, and others had come together to form the Congregational Association as a means of preserving English Congregationalism, which they saw as under threat from those schemes of unity, then favoured by the CUEW officers, which required the

57. *DNB 1951–1960*, Stansgate, *ibid.*, 233.
58. R Winstone (ed) *Tony Benn Years of Hope Diaries, Letters and Papers 1940–1962* (1994) 357–8.
59. *The Times*—October 23, 1991.
60. Stansgate *op. cit.*, 235, 417.

Congregational churches to surrender their autonomy under God. Within a matter of months, she became actively involved in the association and arranged for its committee meetings to be held in her London flat. For the next six years the committee met regularly at her home. She spoke at rallies organised by the Congregational Association, wrote and shared in writing letters to the press, and wrote a pamphlet on Christian unity.[61]

Margaret later wrote that Congregationalism was attractive to her, not merely because it has women ministers, but also because it is "a very democratic movement" and builds upon the Pauline concept of the priesthood of all believers. She wrote that this had great appeal for her because she did not believe that "the Almighty wants us to accept dictatorship and have our minds made up for us by bishops". She was adamant that people "should arrive at their own beliefs in the light of biblical religion".

Therefore, believing in "the importance of independence" she confessed to becoming "unhappy" when it was suggested in the 1960s that the Congregational Union should merge with the Presbyterians to form what was to become the United Reformed Church. She maintained that she was "ecumenically minded", and could work happily with those of other denominations, but she felt that "the fundamental principles of Congregationalism would be submerged", if the Congregationalists were to join the more authoritarian Presbyterians". We should recall that she was by birth a Scot, that her father had been the MP for Govan, and her husband had represented two Scottish constituencies, Leith and North Aberdeen, and that therefore she was acquainted with Presbyterianism, at least in Scotland. With other like-minded Congregationalists opposed to this move, she became a founder of what she termed the "independent Congregational Federation".[62]

Each local Congregational church was required to vote on whether it wished to join the proposed United Reformed Church and Whitefield Memorial Church was no exception. There the discussions grew heated with an impassioned Margaret who, in truth, was not always a keen attender of church meetings, leading the fight to retain its Congregational identity. Her foremost opponent there was another formidable woman, Eva Dykes Spicer MBE, who 1923–51 had served the London Missionary Society in Nanking, China, and 1952–59 had been seconded to the Church Missionary Society as principal of a women's training college in Nigeria. Like Margaret, Eva Spicer was the daughter of a Liberal MP, the leading Congregationalist, Albert Spicer (1847–1934), and she was also a keen member of the Society for the Ministry of Women. At Whitefield's, she was a deacon and led those who taught the 'juniors'.

61. *CYB* (1992–1993) 38–9.

62. Stansgate *op. cit.*, 227–230.

Significantly in 1972 she was the last chairman of the London Congregational Union and was a fervent advocate of the proposed new church.[63]

In 1972 Whitefield's had 85 church members and two ministers, Harry Jacquet and Roger Tomes. On the first vote the church members returned an insufficient majority to join the URC. A second vote was held, after it was known that the new Church would come into being, and this time Whitefield's decided to join. The URC *Year Book* for 1973–74 showed only one minister there, Harry Jacquet, and 83 members. However by 1978 the membership had nosedived to 56 and the minister was now G Pera. This was the last year of the church's existence and in the following year Whitefield's ceased to be.[64] It would seem that the coming of the United Reformed Church did not bring new heart and life to this historic, central London fellowship, although many might have felt that 56 members was far from a hopeless number.

The Coming of the United Reformed Church

On 17 May 1971, seventeen months before the United Reformed Church formally came into being, Margaret Stansgate had a letter published in *The Times*, arguing in favour of "federal unity instead of uniformity" in the matter of ecclesiastical ecumenism. She stated that what was needed was "a mosaic and not a monolith", implying that the architects of the proposed URC preferred the monolithic model. Taking a close interest in this affair, Tony Benn found his mother's letter "most encouraging".[65]

On 21 June 1972, the United Reformed Church Bill was debated in the House of Commons. The bill provided for certain financial arrangements, following the "merger between the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians". John Huxtable, the leading proponent of the URC and the secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales 1964–66, and of its successor body, the Congregational Church in England and Wales since 1966, had succeeded in steering this private bill through examination by a committee of the House of Commons and it had earlier been passed through the House of Lords. The bill included, in Benn's terms, "a provision under which all the Congregational Church property" would accrue to the new URC, in the face of protests from its opponents who argued that a church, wishing to secede from the URC, should be allowed to do so with its property.

Tony Benn had previously discussed the bill with his Labour Party colleague, Nigel Spearing, the MP for Acton, whose Congregational father shared all

63. N Goodall *A History of the London Missionary Society 1895–1945* (Oxford 1954) 619, A Peel *The Congregational Two Hundred* (1948) 240–1, *The London Congregational Union Ninety-ninth Annual Report and Year Book* (1972) 8.

64. *CYB* (1972) 146, *URCYB* (1973–74) 135, (1978) 126.

65. A W Benn *Tony Benn Office Without Power Diaries 1968–72* (1988) 344.

Margaret Stansgate's suspicions of the URC and who had also been active in opposing it. Benn and Spearing agreed that they would both speak in the debate, although they were slightly embarrassed that their ally, in supporting their amendment, was to be the strict Ulster Presbyterian minister, Ian Paisley.

Alex Lyon, the Methodist MP for York, who introduced the URC bill in the Commons and refused to make the concession, required by Benn and Spearing, stated that those Congregationalists who joined the new church "had agreed to give up their rights of independency". Curiously Lyon justified this refusal by claiming that, if the amendment were passed, it "would completely undermine the governmental structure of the new church and wreck" the scheme of union. Spearing replied that he had no wish to prevent the URC coming into being but, nevertheless, believed that it was the duty of parliament to ensure that church unions should have a "solid legal foundation" and, he stated, the uniting Congregational churches were contemplating "a wholesale reversion of charitable trusts" about which some Congregationalists were "deeply anxious". Paisley also expressed his concern about the property rights of those who might dissent and he proposed that the words from the bill's preamble, stating that both the Congregational and Presbyterian assemblies "were convinced that the union was the will of God", should be deleted, because those words implied that those who dissented from the union had not correctly discerned the will of God. Benn too defended the rights of those who wished to remain Congregationalists.[66]

Lady Stansgate and other advocates of continuing Congregationalism watched the proceedings from the gallery. Tony Benn later stressed that, while making his speech, he had "never felt such absolute hostility in the House". The English ecclesiastical establishment had mustered its forces to ensure the passage of the Bill. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, had written to all the Anglican MPs and asked them to attend in support of the Bill. The Roman Catholics were also present and Norman St John Stevas, an outspoken Catholic MP, spoke in the debate. To Benn it was clear that "the whole Establishment" had "gathered together against dissent" and he quickly realised that there was simply "no support" for the amendment. Paisley, Spearing and Benn decided not to push for a division and so the debate ended.

Reflecting on this later, Benn wrote that the URC was merely a "managerial solution" somewhat akin to the nation's "entry into the Common Market". He continued, "the extent to which managerial solutions to all our problems have become accepted … is rather frightening. It's a winding up of the Reformation, a winding up of British political traditions." Then prophetically he stated, "These are battles that have got to be fought and won all over again".[67]

66. D Cornick *Under God's Good Hand* (1998) 176–9.

67. A W Benn *Tony Benn Office Without Power Diaries 1968–72* (1988) 433–434.

The Congregational Federation

Margaret Stansgate's early involvement with those who were suspicious of the proposals to form a united denomination with the Presbyterians stood in stark contrast to that of her friend Elsie Chamberlain, whose name was to become closely associated with the cause of Congregationalism after 1972 but who aligned herself with these 'anxious Congregationalists' only somewhat late in the day. Margaret was fully committed to the continuing Congregational cause almost from the outset and she should be understood as having successfully influenced Elsie toward joining that group which founded the Congregational Federation, rather than the other way round. When in 1971 the majority of churches, then affiliated to the Congregational Church in England and Wales, voted to join the proposed United Reformed Church, Margaret took the initiative in approaching and persuading Elsie Chamberlain to join the association which proved to be the backbone of what became, in the following year, the Congregational Federation.

In January 1972 Margaret Stansgate arranged for a meeting in Church House, Westminster of those who had already committed themselves to work for continuing Congregationalism and representatives of non-uniting churches. At this meeting, she suggested that the new grouping of churches should be called the Congregational Federation and she was elected to serve on the provisional committee charged with bringing into being this body.[68] In April 1972 Margaret took the chair at a meeting of continuing Congregational churches at East Ham where it was decided to form an area association of the CF. In May 1972 she played a leading role at a conference of Congregational churches which gathered at Lyndhurst Road Congregational Church, Hampstead. There she proposed a call to prayer at the coming inauguration of the United Reformed Church, that is a request for God's blessing on all at this parting of the ways. She stated that the objective of those Congregationalists who joined the CF was "to work deeper and wider for Christian unity: to remind our fellow-Christians that there are many roads to God and they are all open".[69]

In the morning of October 14, 1972 a small company met in the library of Memorial Hall, London and were welcomed there by Margaret Stansgate. They re-affirmed their faith in 'the Congregational way' and pledged themselves to continue their Christian witness in "the fellowship of independent churches" which was to be known as the Congregational Federation. All present then signed a scroll, on which was set out this declaration of Congregational principles. Later that day Margaret presided over the first assembly of the CF at Westminster Chapel.[70]

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68. *Congregational News* (February 1972) 2–3.

69. *Ibid.,* (June 1972) 5, *Conference of Continuing Congregationalists Record of Proceedings 13 May 1972* 17.

70. *Congregational News* (Nov 1972) 3–5.

At that assembly Margaret Stansgate, in her presidential address, while wishing "old friends" who had entered the URC "God speed", gave thanks that the Congregational way had not "perished" with them. She saw that the churches of the CF had been called to "show that true value did not lie with size or numbers". Rather Christianity should, in her view, be understood as the "grain of mustard seed", acting as "the leaven" in society, and should not seek to present itself as "a rigidly-organised monolithic Church".[71] Her election to become the CF president, at the age of 75 years, had been unanimous and, after serving her year of office, she accepted the honour of becoming the president emeritus of the CF.

Work within the Congregational Federation

In the CF's first years of life, Margaret Stansgate regularly attended its council meetings and, "while never being dominant", she significantly contributed to discussions. She also attended the meetings of that committee dealing with issues of pastoral care. She brought to the meetings not only her own "gracious" personality, but also her keen common sense and sound judgment, at a time when "strong passions" often were evident.[72]

In January 1973 Lady Stansgate had another letter published in *The Times* in which she commented on certain false assumptions made, in her view, by many, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. She saw the blurring of ecclesiastical differences, in the desired one great Church, as likely to impoverish the world and praised the term 'federation' as a means of pointing the way forward. She stressed that this term had theological dimensions, referring to "a common faith" and "fidelity" and she looked for "Unity in the richest diversity".[73]

In August that year a letter from Margaret was published in *The Catholic Herald*. It was concerned with the invitation, then issued by the United Reformed Church to other English denominations, to take part in the so-called 'talks about talks' which were hoped might lead to one united Christian organization. Again she expressed the view that the "sacrifices and compromises" required were neither "desirable" nor "acceptable" and put forward, as an alternative, the concept of a federal union of churches, in which a church might participate fully and yet retain the name, autonomy, liturgies and traditions it has always held dear.[74]

In early 1975 Margaret Stansgate joined ten other prominent figures in the CF in signing a document, explaining why the CF was among those

71. *Congregational Federation 141st Congregational Assembly 14 October 1972 Record of Proceedings* 31.
72. *CYB* (1992–1993) 38–9.
73. *Congregational News* (March-April 1973) 13.
74. *Ibid.,* (Nov-Dec 1973) 8–9.

denominations prepared to participate in the Churches Unity Commission, which body had emerged from the earlier 'talks about talks'. These signatories wished to assert the broad unity which already existed between all Christians rather than seek an organic union of the churches. They claimed that the "task of trying to impose uniformity" would only "hinder spiritual vitality" and that "To contrive mergers while deep differences of interpretation remain unresolved is to sow the seeds for future unease".[75]

In May 1975 Margaret Stansgate was among those representing the CF at a gathering at Chislehurst in Kent where they met Congregationalists from the United States, Australia, Hong Kong, Greece and Wales. From this meeting the International Congregational Fellowship emerged and an assembly was planned to be held in London two years later.[76] In July 1977 Margaret Stansgate and Elsie Chamberlain were both busily engaged with the activities of the inaugural ICF conference in the William Booth Memorial College, in south London that month, and also attended the conference service at Westminster Abbey. At the college Margaret was introduced to the assembled delegates as "a gentle lady" and a "warm" friend and then she herself introduced the guest speaker, Lady (Mary) Wilson, who formally pronounced the opening of the conference. Lady Wilson spoke of her fondness for Margaret Stansgate and later Elsie Chamberlain publicly described her friend as having been "an inspiration for many years".[77]

Tony Benn observed his mother, then aged 80 years, and concluded that she was "blossoming". He wrote that he had "never seen her so well and happy and amusing" and that it was "lovely" to see her at such an age "coming into her own". He remarked, "I hope I live to that age and enjoy life as much as she does". Two years later Tony took his mother to lunch at the House of Commons and then escorted her to the gallery. She had seen every one of the parliaments since Edward VII's last in 1910 and he wrote admiringly, "She is such fun to be with".

Tony's delight in his mother never waned. In December 1979 she was with the family over the Christmas holiday and, after the evening meal, she "sat and talked". Recalling that she had known Asquith, Lloyd George, Ramsay MacDonald, Arthur Henderson and so many other British political greats of the twentieth century, he found her just "fascinating". Of course, she had also known Eisenhower, Nehru, Archbishop Makarios, Ho Chi Minh and Chou En-lai, among other world leaders. He marvelled too at her "wide theological knowledge" and found it "so interesting" to hear her talk of "the various

75. *Ibid.,* (Jan-Feb 1975) 3–4.

76. *Ibid.,* (July-August 1975) 5.

77. *International Congregational Fellowship Record of Proceedings* (Los Angeles 1977) 12, 13, 18.

meanings of the immaculate conception, the physical ascension of Jesus" and other doctrines.[78]

Other Interests

As a politician's wife, Margaret had gained considerable knowledge and wisdom over the years and clearly William had sought and taken his wife's advice on occasions. When the Labour government in 1977 entered into a pact with the Liberal party, their son Tony was anxious, as an MP of left wing views, about whether to oppose it or not. He rang his mother and she suggested that he should not resign from office, as the pact would not be "a coalition" but "a way through". He took "a lot of notice of her advice as she had been through it so many times" with his father.[79]

In early November 1979 Margaret Stansgate accompanied her son, Tony, to Mansfield College, Oxford where she had for some years previously been a member of the college council. Tony gave the sermon in the chapel, dismissing the notion of the Kingdom of God" but warming to the "Republic of God". He spoke for about twenty minutes, and then the two joined members of the college in the senior common room for discussion. On this occasion Tony found his mother "marvellous".

He answered questions about his religious beliefs and whether he regarded himself as a Christian. His reply was that the older he grew the less he found "the mysteries of Christianity"—"the Virgin Birth, the Assumption, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Resurrection, the Trinity"—interesting. As a result Tony described himself as "no more than a student of the teachings of the historical Jesus Christ". At this the college chaplain, Charles Brock, piped up that on this basis Tony might even qualify for the URC ministry because the URC had "no creed. All you have to say is you are a follower of Christ our Lord". Tony found this "interesting" because it had always been on his conscience that he "didn't feel a Christian" but was more "interested in Christian ideas". Later Margaret wrote to Brock, pointing out that she was "slipping Anthony some notes on the Kingdom of God"![80]

Margaret Stansgate and Elsie Chamberlain

These two formidable women played significant roles, in twentieth century Congregationalism and in the advancement of women's ministry within the Church, and their long friendship proved beneficial to both these movements. Both Margaret and Elsie were strong characters, so that neither dominated

78. R Winstone (ed) *Tony Benn Conflicts of Interest Diaries 1977–80* (1990) 195–6, 451–2, 569, *The Times op. cit.*

79. R Winstone (ed) *Tony Benn Conflicts of Interest Diaries 1977–80* (1990) 91.

80. Winstone *ibid.,* 555, information supplied by the librarian of Mansfield College, Oxford.

the other. Their enduring friendship was marked by mutual respect and by shared, long held concerns. Elsie's mind was the more practical, the less happy with ideas for their own sake, and she could display impatience with thinkers, while Margaret deliberately sought the company of academics and scholars. In addition, for all Elsie's natural authority, easy grace and confidence, Margaret was more at home among the movers and shakers. After all, she had spent her life mixing with those who wielded power at the highest levels and she was not easily impressed nor disconcerted. Crucially she was, of course, Elsie's senior in age by some 12 or 13 years and, at the time of their first meeting, she was already the wife of a senior politician. Indeed Elsie, as an up and coming, young Congregational minister, had been given a significant position through the intervention of that politician, and his wife, and became in the process something of a cause célèbre. Elsie's name became much better known because of Margaret and William, and their talent spotting patronage of her. At this time in her life, Elsie was their protégée, in truth more Margaret's than William's, and she owed much to her older friend.

However the influences were not all one way. Elsie's keen advocacy of Congregationalism was clearly a key factor in Margaret's conversion from the Church of England in 1948 although, even with regard to this matter, we should not discount the fact that, throughout their marriage, William had considered himself to be a Congregationalist in spirit. Clearly he would not have been unhappy that his wife chose to move her allegiance from the established Church to his own favoured denomination.

In the 1970s, with Whitefield Memorial Church having joined the United Reformed Church, Margaret resigned her membership there and promptly became a personal member of the Congregational Federation—a practical, if not strictly traditional way of maintaining one's denominational allegiance. She was to remain a personal member of the CF until her death. However in February 1984, at the first church meeting of the newly formed church, at the Congregational Centre, in Castle Gate, Nottingham, where her friend, Elsie Chamberlain, had become the minister, Margaret Stansgate's request to become an associate member of the fellowship was approved.[81]

The Council of Christians and Jews

One of the causes most dear to Margaret's heart was the promotion of understanding between Christians and Jews. She hated the misunderstanding and hostility which had existed for so long between the two faiths. As a result she joined the Council for Christians and Jews which had been founded in 1942

81. Nottingham Centre church meeting minutes book—19 February 1984. The book is retained at the church.

to combat discrimination, amid the horror of the Nazi atrocities. During the Second World War the council encouraged the British government to allow more Jewish refugees to enter Palestine. She was to become a Vice-President of the council. After the war the council was re-launched, with Reinhold Niebuhr among those attending the large meeting. In later years, the council has worked principally through education, with its supporters giving talks to schools and interested societies.

Margaret Stansgate's keen and enduring interest in the Holy Land brought her to the notice of many Jewish scholars and politicians over the years. She had taken an interest in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, since its beginning in 1925, and she took the view that, when the foundation stone of the university was laid on Mount Scopus in 1918, the foundation stone of the state of Israel which followed some thirty years later, was laid as well. After the Second World War the Stansgates attended several fund-raising dinners and balls to support the Hebrew University and Margaret, in particular, devoted considerable time to work with the women's group of the British Friends of the Hebrew University. In 1975 the library on Mount Scopus was named the Margaret Stansgate Library in her honour. She was delighted that it formed part of the Martin Buber Institute of Adult Education which specialised in providing education for the disadvantaged, especially as she herself had had so little formal education when young. Margaret went to Jerusalem for the opening ceremony of the library where she found her name written in Hebrew.[82]

In November 1978 Margaret Stansgate found herself sharing a taxi with "an old gentleman", on her way to a meeting of the Council of Christians and Jews. He was simply going in the same general direction but, as they talked, he explained that he was a former army officer who had spent two years in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) advising Ian Smith, the white political leader there. He was in London to try to stop the economic sanctions then being enforced against Smith's regime. He had spoken to several Conservative MPs and confessed to a great admiration for the then Mrs Thatcher, although he thought that her predecessor, Edward Heath, was "no use at all". He left the taxi at The Army and Navy Club where Margaret felt she must own up to being Tony Benn's mother. "Well!", he said, "He is lucky to have such a nice relation".[83]

In July 1982 Margaret, at the age of 85 years, received the honorary fellowship of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem at a private lunch in Hampstead. She was accompanied by her grand-daughter who proudly stated that Margaret had made "a marvellous speech". Margaret also received a "beautiful framed plaque" which she had placed on the wall of her flat. Reflecting on this achievement of

82. Stansgate, *op. cit.,* 230–1.

83. R Winstone (ed), *Tony Benn Conflicts of Interest Diaries 1977–80* (1990) 385.

his mother, Tony Benn remarked that her last twenty years, since his father's death, had been "tremendously creative and constructive".[84]

Birthday Celebrations and Later Years

In June 1977 Margaret celebrated her 80th birthday with a party at the House of Commons. About 180 people attended, although it was very cold and pouring with rain, so heaters in the marquee on the terrace were turned on. Elsie Chamberlain, the Chief Rabbi, the Lord Chancellor, friends from the Council of Christians and Jews, the Council for the Ministry of Women and also from the Congregational Federation were present. Tony Benn thought it all "so friendly" and felt that his mother was "marvellous".

In March 1981 Margaret was not physically as well as she had been. By then she had acquired arthritis, heart trouble, a hernia, poor eyesight, occasional migraines, a new knee and a bad hip. Tony Benn understood that she needed "watching" but decided that her mind remained "as clear as a bell". She commented on Pope John Paul II who visited Canterbury in May 1982, and who celebrated mass with 100,000 people gathered at Wembley Stadium, noting wisely that the pontiff was "a very attractive character" but remained "a good man giving bad advice". In July that year she read the lesson "most beautifully" from the pulpit in Ealing Abbey at her grand-son's wedding. In March 1983 Margaret turned up to support her son, Tony, who delivered the lunchtime lecture, on the disestablishment of the Church of England, at St James's, Piccadilly. Five years later, at the wedding of another grand-son, she came on crutches and slumped behind the reading desk in the crypt of the House of Commons. Yet at the appropriate moment she stood up and "delivered a marvellous sermon about the Corinthians". On this occasion Tony Benn found her "splendid". However, by mid-1989 her health had deteriorated to the extent that she was forced to use a wheel chair, although she still attended family gatherings. In July that year she suffered a fall and was admitted to St Thomas's Hospital. At first she was in low spirits and spoke of dying but began to perk up, when she was reminded that she had a book to finish writing and a new great grand-child was expected soon.[85]

In 1990 Margaret paid what was to be her last visit to the House of Commons and once more had tea on the terrace, just eighty years after her introduction to the building. On that first occasion in Westminster, as a young girl, she had taken her seat in the Ladies' Gallery, only after promising not to

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84. Stansgate, *op. cit.,* 230–1, R Winstone (ed) *Tony Benn The End of an Era Diaries 1980–90* (1992) 238.

85. R Winstone (ed), *Tony Benn Conflicts of Interest Diaries 1977–80* (1990) 167–8, R Winstone (ed), *Tony Benn The End of an Era Diaries 1980–90* (1992) 113, 225, 237, 277, 551–2, 571, 572–3.

make "any unseemly suffragette noises". Later from that gallery she had first caught sight of her future husband.[86]

Margaret's Last Illness

Margaret continued to live in her flat in North Court, Great Peter Street, Westminster until the last year or two of her life. In her widowhood and despite increasing infirmity, her life remained as normal as possible. During the 1970s she would sometimes have afternoon tea in the restaurant of the Army and Navy Stores in Victoria Street. She found it more difficult when it became self-service. In May 1991 Tony was pleased to find his mother "in good form" but, visiting her in September that year, he realised that she had become "very confused". She had suffered a series of strokes and was taken ill with stomach pains on 15 October 1991 in the Goldsborough Home where she was then living, close to her son's home in Notting Hill Gate. She was admitted to St Thomas's Hospital but aged 94 was very frail. There she slipped into a coma, reviving sufficiently to speak to nurses and members of her family, but dying on 21 October.

Her family took comfort from the fact that her autobiography, *My Exit Visa,* was due to be published in 1992. Tony felt that hers had been "a useful life" and that, especially seeing that her parents had not educated her to any standard, she had really become quite a scholar. Lord Hailsham was pleased that Tony had "carefully kept" the tribute he had paid to his father on his death in 1960 and, after Margaret's death, said with feeling, "Life is never the same when your parents have gone".

The funeral service was held at Golders Green Crematorium and was led by Janet Wootton, the Congregational minister of Union Chapel, Islington. The mourners sang the Old Hundredth 'All people that on earth do dwell' and 'How bright these glorious spirits shine' and readings, from Augustine of Hippo and from interviews Margaret had given in 1990, were included. The memorial service was held on 17 December 1991 at St Margaret's Westminster, where Margaret and William had married some seventy-one years before, and over 300 people were present. Janet Wootton gave "a passionate address", in Tony Benn's opinion, and Rabbi Jackie Tabick read a lesson and said the grace in Hebrew. Margaret's grand-son, Stephen, played the organ and Canon Donald Gray was "graceful" throughout. Tony Benn found the occasion "just overwhelming" and noted that more people attended than had been present for the memorial service for his father. This he explained by referring to "the tremendous links she had with so many people". He realised that she would have been "terribly

86. *The Times*—October 23, 1991, *The Daily Telegraph*—October 22, 1991.

pleased about a woman rabbi and a woman minister in the parliamentary church, absolutely delighted".[87]

A Useful Life

None could truthfully claim that Margaret Stansgate's life of 94 years was not a full life. Of course, she had derived great satisfaction from her husband's love, which she had freely returned, and from the opportunities which his long parliamentary career had afforded her. Yet she had also delighted in her wider family and, especially during her widowhood of thirty years, had derived great comfort from the presence of these loved ones and their activities. She had six grand-children and six great grand-children. Her two surviving sons, Tony and David, had both achieved distinction in their own fields and she was rightly proud of them. Yet in some ways Tony was right to wonder at his mother's blossoming, after his father's death. Without question she had given constant support to William throughout his distinguished political career yet she had also maintained and developed specific interests of her own—feminism, the serious study of theology, especially of the Old Testament, the ordination of women, Jewish/Christian understanding, the survival of Congregationalism in a world of ecclesiastical mergers, amongst others. She had an independence of thought and sufficient courage and commitment to put into practice the results of that independent thinking. She would not, nor could not be cowed into submission by archbishop, bishop or denominational official. Having exchanged, under extreme pressure, a hierarchical and restrictive church system, in the Church of England, for the heady freedom of Congregationalism, she saw no good reason for stepping backwards into hierarchy and authoritarianism, as she saw it, in the United Reformed Church.

Brought up in the radical world of Edwardian England, in which the formality of the Victorian era was increasingly challenged and overthrown; becoming a Christian in defiance of her parents' express wishes and, from a young age resisting their concerted attacks on her faith; marrying, as a young woman, a man twenty years her senior and making a success of it; mixing socially with so many of the political and social leaders in Britain and throughout the world; Margaret Wedgwood Benn, Viscountess Stansgate, was a considerable person in her own right. Although she was mostly known as the "immensely supportive" wife of a successful politician and the mother of another, she was always her own person and should be judged a friendly and sensitive interpreter of individuals and events.[88] Evidently she was a tough, resourceful, thoughtful, wise and principled woman.

87. R Winstone (ed), *Tony Benn Free at Last! Diaries 1991–2000* (2002), 20, 40, 50–2, 53, 66–7.
88. *The Daily Telegraph*—October 22, 1991.

She was undoubtedly a blessing to the churches and to the causes she served so devotedly, and the infant Congregational Federation, in particular, was extremely fortunate to have her backing. Indeed it may be asked if her backing made that crucial difference to the Congregational Federation which enabled it to survive the huge shock suffered by steadfast Congregationalists, following the disintegration of the former denomination in the early 1970s. Without her, and without the experience and confidence of Elsie Chamberlain whom Margaret recruited, would the Congregational Federation not have been merely at best a small group of enthusiastic but awkward and relatively obscure layfolk and ministers? She and Elsie gave the CF a recognisable public face, without which arguably few would have given it a second thought, and perhaps few outside the inner circle would have wanted to join. We should also remember that both Margaret and Elsie had for long been highly committed members of the apparently insignificant Society for the Ministry of Women in the Church and, therefore, were used to being supporters of what appeared to the majority to be a lost cause. Such women were not easily intimidated. They had a strong inner dynamic and resolve. Her son's modest verdict that she was a radical dissenter whose life of public service was "useful" is entirely vindicated.

Alan Argent

SAMUEL NEWTH'S MS AUTOBIOGRAPHY AT DR WILLIAMS'S LIBRARY[89]

In the 2003 issue of the *CHC Magazine*[90] I referred to G F Nuttall's[91] explanation of why 72 manuscripts from nonconformist ministers came to be collected in the 1870s, by the librarian of Dr Williams's Library, the Unitarian minister, Thomas Hunter.[92] Having published a transcription of John Stoughton's manuscript,[93] after a brief summary of his life, I offer here a transcription of the manuscript of Samuel Newth MA DD (1821–1898), sometime principal of New College, London.

Newth's Life and Background

Samuel Newth was born on February 15th 1821, in Southwark, then in Surrey, the seventh of nine children and youngest son. Both his parents came from Protestant backgrounds. His mother was proud of being a direct descendant of the martyr, Thomas Garret, who was burnt at Oxford for distributing unauthorised books including William Tyndale's first translation of the New Testament into English. His grandfather, Adrian Newth (d.1820), whose portrait hung in the drawing room,[94] was not only a deacon of Dursley Tabernacle, Gloucestershire,[95] but had, with Rowland Hill (1744–1833)[96] and William King, (1726–1803), been the last trustees of the old Dursley Tabernacle.[97] King

89. For access to ms 38.64, here described, and for permission to publish, thanks are due to David Wykes and the staff of Dr Williams's Library (hereafter DWL).

90. *CHC Magazine* vol 4 no 5 (Spring 2003) 374.

91. G F Nuttall "MS Autobiographies at Dr. Williams's Library" *TCHS* XVI (1949–1951) 108–112 .

92. *Inquirer* December 12th 1874.

93. Nuttall loc cit.

94. A Newth *Chambers of Imagery and other Sermons* (1876). Samuel Newth, in the introduction to this, writes of the portrait in the house.

95. George Whitefield (1714–70) preached in Dursley in 1749 and opened there a "Calvinistic meeting place & in accordance with the doctrines of the Church of England" in 1764. In 1809 at the opening of the New Tabernacle, Rowland Hill preached at the morning, afternoon and evening services. W Bennett (ed) *Another Milestone. A Souvenir of Dursley Tabernacle Centenary* (1908).

96. For Rowland Hill of Surrey Chapel see *DNB*.

97. Hill was, with Newth and King, one of the last trustees of the old Tabernacle. G F Nuttall "The Dursley Sunday Schools Established in 1784" *TCHS* x 1927–1929. Also G F Nuttall "George Whitefield's 'Curate': Gloucestershire Dissent and the Revival" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* vol 27 no 4 October 1976.

was a card-maker and sometime bailiff of Dursley. Adrian Newth was King's foreman[98] and together they started in 1778 a Sunday school, firstly at the factory and then at the Tabernacle,[99] therefore opening 'the earliest "if not the very first" Sunday-school in England'.[100] It is thought that King suggested the idea of opening Sunday-schools, to his friend, Robert Raikes (1736–1811).[101] Raikes' publicity stimulated the rapid expansion of the Sunday school movement.[102]

Samuel's father, Elisha Newth (1775–1858), a convert of Rowland Hill, was an educated man who taught his children Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French and Italian. In a memoir of Samuel's brother, Alfred (1811–1876), prefaced to a selection of his brother's sermons, entitled *Chambers of Imagery* (1876), he writes of their father teaching his children every day, except half-day holidays, from 6 am until 5 pm. They also learnt geography, history and scientific facts and principles![103] Both Samuel and Alfred had academic careers. Indeed Alfred, at his death, was teaching Philosophy, Hebrew and Church History at Lancashire Independent College. However Alfred's book of sermons was suppressed on publication. A hand-written note on the title page reads:[104] "Alas! Poor human nature! These sermons eg the first (and several others) are plagiarised from Ephraim Peabody's life and sermons".[105]

How could this happen? Elaine Kaye writes of Alfred as a modest and scholarly man who taught at Lancashire Independent College for 21 years until his death.[106] Roger Tomes quotes G S Barrett who describes him as being 'very busy in a variety of subjects.'[107] Perhaps, writing sermons under the pressure of a busy life, he forgot the source of his material. It is uncharacteristic behaviour, according to Alfred Newth's contemporaries. A contemporary of Samuel Newth

98. Bennett *op. cit.* Perhaps, as the booklet states, Adrian Newth was the first unpaid Sunday school teacher in England.

99. A Newth *op. cit.*

100. *CYB* (1899) 195–7. Samuel Newth cites the recollections of an aged relative, asserting that the first Sunday school, before Raikes, 'assembled in his grandfather's house'. A Newth *op. cit.,* xi.

101. "Sunday Schools" in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (1997). Raikes and the local vicar engaged four women to instruct the children of the parish in reading and the Church Catechism on Sundays.

102. Bennett *op. cit.*

103. A Newth *op. cit.,* x.

104. I thank the archivist of the Congregational Library, David Powell, for help with the handwriting.

105. E Peabody *Life and Sermons* (Boston, Mass. 1876). Peabody was an American Unitarian. Sermon xxi has been slightly modified to form Sermon 1 by Alfred Newth—both sermons have the same title.

106. E Kaye *For the Work of Ministry* (Edinburgh 1999) 80.

107. R Tomes *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* v 411, G S Barrett in *Reminiscences of Lancashire Independent College Jubilee* (1893) 54–5.

at Coward College, Henry Griffith 1815–85,[108] when asked why he had not preached in chapel recently, replied that he didn't have a sermon, and when made to preach, he read from *The Pulpit*[109] the same sermon that he had used previously![110]

As Newth writes in his biographical sketch, the students at Coward College of his generation were aware of the 'unusual advantage … [they had] … from first rate teachers' in the newly founded University of London (later University College, London) being available to them.[111] One lecturer at the university was Augustus de Morgan (1806–1871), 'a Christian unattached' with Unitarian leanings, who in 1828 was elected Professor of Mathematics. Many of his students subsequently had distinguished mathematical careers.[112] Samuel Newth was proud that he was the first MA in Mathematics at University College, London.

Newth found the theological teaching at Coward College less than satisfactory. The students went to London University for all non-theological studies—mathematics, science, literature, Latin, Greek and Hebrew while Thomas Morell,[113] the president and sole Coward College tutor, taught theology, "a more onerous task than at Wymondley, as he was responsible for the exegesis of Old and New Testaments."[114]

Thomas Morell had previously been divinity tutor at Wymondley College where he had taken a failing institution and, as R W Dale noted, changed the situation within eighteen months.[115] Morell had subsequently been ill for some years, so it must have been hard for him to use his failing energy to contain the students in London. At the outset at Coward College, absences from lectures and family prayers had been commonplace. Morell particularly conveyed "a Melancholy impression" to the trustees. In November 1836, he had written to James Gibson,[116] treasurer of the trustees, (who was to interview Samuel Newth in 1837) about the conduct of three students, Isaac Mummery,[117] John Curwen

108. For Griffith see *CYB* (1886) 173.

109. *The Pulpit* was published weekly 1823–76.

110. New College ms L53/5/24.

111. DWL ms 38.64 Samuel Newth.

112. For de Morgan see *DNB*. See also H R Reynolds *CYB* (1897) 213–5. Also in *DNB* John Hoppus (1787–1875), a Congregational minister, was first holder of the chair of Mind and Logic in 1829 at UCL.

113. For Morell see A Peel *The Throckmorton Trotman Trust 1664–1941* (1942).

114. J H Thompson *The History of the Coward Trust* (1997) 58–9.

115. R W Dale *History of English Congregationalism* (1907) 597–8.

116. James Gibson (d1843) was made treasurer of the Coward Trust in 1810. Thompson *op. cit.,* 49.

117. *CYB* (1892) 234f.

and William H Griffith.[118] Added to his failing health, Morell's son James Daniel Morell had died aged 23 in December 1837, only four months after Newth's entrance to the college.[119] Two years later Morell died at the college.

Newth was critical of Thomas Jenkyn (1796–1858), who succeeded Morell as president of Coward College. He remained in that post until the coming together of Homerton, Hoxton and Coward colleges, as New College, in May 1850. Jenkyn, formerly a Welsh collier, learnt English at a Wesleyan Sunday School. On leaving Homerton College, he served at Wem, in Shropshire, then at Oswestry, where his lectures on the atonement, published as *The Extent of the Atonement,* later proved influential in his becoming principal of Coward College. In 1834 he became pastor at Stafford, where he wrote *On the Union of the Holy spirit and the Church in the Conversion of the World*. Ill health led him to resign this pastorate in 1837. He went to Germany to recuperate and there studied German theology, attending Hallé University.[120] Certainly, Jenkyn had not been taught Greek or Hebrew, as intensively as Newth and other students like H R Reynolds,[121] and he lacked the power to teach students, excited by London and the lectures at University College. James Ewing Ritchie also found Jenkyn's lectures tedious, and his advice on preaching risible.[122]

Newth described his amazement when he was sent by the president of Coward College to his first pastorate at Broseley, in the Black Country and saw for the first time an open furnace. He also noted the unexpected vicissitudes of being a new pastor in a parochial environment. Newth, after this foray into pastoral work, spent most of his life teaching, although at Western College, he had a pastorate 1846–8 at the Congregational church at Stonehouse, Devon. In his obituary we read that, although "a scholar of the first order" … (he was) also "a clear-headed and a shrewd businessman". He had left his father's school at 15 for a business life but, after a year, was drawn to a pastoral calling and theology.[123] Samuel Newth in his sketch gives insights into the life of Western College, on its move from Exeter to Plymouth. He remained at that college for ten years. Newth was one of fifteen London ministers who signed the *Protest*, in defence of the 'Rivulet' in the controversy of 1856, all of whom gave "an impression, they were mildly favourable to the theology of the poems", as Tudur Jones laconically remarked.[124]

118. New College ms L53/5/24.

119. Thompson *op. cit.,* 61.

120. For T W Jenkyn see G F Nuttall "New College, London and its Library" in his *Studies in English Dissent* (2002) 323; Thompson *op. cit.,* 61, 63–4, 66; *CYB* (1859); *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*.

121. See DWL ms 68.34 H R Reynolds.

122. For Jenkyn's advice on preaching, see J Ewing Ritchie *Christopher Crayon's Reflections* (1898).

123. *CYB* (1899).

124. R T Jones *Congregationalism in England 1662–1962* (1962) 250.

In 1875, a year after writing the sketch, Newth gained a DD from the University of Glasgow for his contribution to the revision of the Bible[125] and for work for Congregationalism. In 1878 he brought out a new and enlarged edition of his book *Natural Philosophy*. In 1880, he was elected chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. When chairman of the London Congregational board he organised and catalogued the Congregational Library at Memorial Hall, London. Albert Peel, writing 70 years later, commented on Newth's 'splendid work' in 'caring for the library', often 'a dirty' and 'unrewarded task'. He produced in 1895, volume I of the catalogue, containing 8,000 titles. In 1910 T G Crippen brought out volume II, containing 11,000 titles.[126]

Newth was a polymath. Peel noted in "Sub Rosa"[127] on 'the curious mixture' of subjects he taught at New College, ie Mathematics and Church History. He was, as his obituary observes, 'an indefatigable worker; idleness was absolutely foreign to his nature'. He died after a short illness on January 29th 1898, aged 77, in Acton where he had lived for the last eight years of his life.[128]

The Newth manuscript consists of eight pages of clear handwriting. Interlinear insertions are here given in bold type. Letters which have been crossed out in the original have been included. One idiosyncrasy is the use of "and" written as "&", and the joining of this and other short words in a sentence. He does not always cross his "t"s and there is often little difference between commas and full stops.

The Manuscript

Samuel Newth

M.A. F.R.A.S. Fellow of Univ^{y} Coll London (Congregational)

Born February 15th 1821 in the parish of Christ church in the county of Surrey.

My Father was the Rev^{d} Elisha Newth, whose father Adrian Newth was a deacon of the church assembling in the Tabernacle at Dursley, Gloucestershire.

My mother, whose maiden name was Ann Rebecca Killick, was on her mother's side ofthe family of Garrett's of Bocking, a family which claimed as one of its members the Thomas Garrett, curate of Honey Lane, whose labours

125. Kaye *op. cit.,* 149.

126. A Peel "Sub Rosa", *TCHS* xiii 1933–36. Peel in *The Congregational Two Hundred* (1948) writes that Newth was one of the few Congregational ministers who made a contribution to science and his scientific textbooks were standard until the 1900s.

127. *TCHS ibid.*

128. *CYB* (1899) 195–7, DNB.

& perils in circulating thebible in 1528 are graphically related by Foxe,[129] &who suffered martyrdom for his protestant opinions July30th 1540. (See Froude's Hist. of Eng.[130] Chapter vi & xvii)

At the time of mybirth, my father was assistant minister to Rowland Hill at Surrey Chapel an office which he filled for nearly thirty years. His labours in connection therewith, were very abundant. It was a frequent practice with him, after conducting the devotional service at the Chapel (the liturgy of the Church of England being used) to leave & conduct another Service in the open air or in some room in oneorother of the wretched courts which at that time existed in the near neighbourhood of the Chapel. It was no uncommon thing for him to conduct three such services, in addition to two liturgical services in the Chapel.

Along with my brothers &sisters (there were nine of us)[131] I was educated at home. My father kept a school (his income from the chapel being only £50 a year) & tohim I &my brothers before me were indebted for the best fortune he could give us a thoroughly sound education & and habits of diligent application.

In my sixteenth year, my early religious training bore fruit in a personal consecration to God &my desire to enter the Christian ministry was encouraged by father, &by my brother Alfred who was at that time a student at Homerton College. By my fathers advice I applied tothe Trustees ofCoward college for admission intothat institution & my application being favourably received, I was invited to a personal interview with the Trustees. These were Dr Collyer,[132] Mr Russell,[133] MrWalford[134] &MrGibson. I have no recollection of the questions they put to me, I only remember the terrible awe they inspired & I suppose that I must have turned very pale

My paleness which probably seemed the greater from, the fact that the Candidate who immediately preceded me was a ruddy countryman, led the Trustees to doubt whether I was strong enough for College work, &in consequence they declined to receive me. They intimated, I believe tomy father, that they hesitated only on account of my health. This led to a correspondence

129. J Foxe *Acts and Monuments* ed by Pratt and Stoughton, V 421–429, 438 etc. Thomas Garrett, curate and rector of All Hallows, Honey Lane, London, was burnt at the same time as Barnes and Jerome for distributing the first translation of Tyndale's New Testament in English, in Oxford.

130. Froude *History of England* (1893) 528, 543.

131. For Alfred Newth see *CYB* (1876) 355–8. He was the second son of Elisha Newth and a grantee of the Throckmorton Trotman Trust.

132. William Collyer (1783–1855) *CYB* (1855) 210–3, *DNB*. He was born at Blackheath, educated at Homerton College, and was minister of Hanover Chapel, Peckham. The Dukes of Kent and Sussex, the sons of Queen Victoria, often attended his chapel.

133. William Russell (1781–1846) was educated at Hoxton Academy. *CYB* (1847), *DNB*. Not a good preacher, he was an efficient administrator. Both his sons are in *DNB*.

134. William Walford (1773–1850) was sometime classics tutor at Homerton College. *CYB* (1850) 109.

with him & as the result of this, I was three weeks afterwards received intothe College on the usual probation.

I entered the college in September 1837. The College was at that time in Byng Place, Torrington Square, whither it had been removed about five years previously from Wymondley, in order that the students might have the advantage of attending classes in University College. The president of Coward College was at that time the Rev^{d} Thomas Morell.[135] Mr Morell died in the third year of my course, & after an interval of some months theRev^{d} Thomas Jenkyn DD was appointed to succeed him. In consequence ofthese changes my strictly theological course of study was very imperfect. With Mr Morell we had only taken some ofthe more elementary topics, &Dr Jenkyn was too new tothe work to take us through any well-matured course. Unfortunately also, he failed from various causes, to gain our respect &so had no power to guide us in theological studies.

In other branches ofStudy we had however unusual advantages, we had first rate teachers &the stimulus of a large body of Students, & when in 1838 the newly founded University of London commenced its operation, &opened the way whereby Dissenters could attain to University degrees, we had the additional stimulus to effort in our studies in Literature &Science.

In October 1839 I passed the Matriculation Examination, in the First Class, & also took Honours in Mathematics &Natural Philosophy. In June 1841 I passed the examination for B.A. in the first class, &was alone in Honours in Mathematics &Natural philosophy. The following week I was successful in obtaining Dr Williams Divinity Scholarship which was founded in that year &thrown open to a competitive examination. In May 1842, I passed the examination for the degree of M A, thus obtaining this degree within thirty months from the date of matriculation & earlier by five years than any of my competitors at that examination.

I completed my College Course in June 1842 & in the following December was sent by Dr Jenkyn to supply at the town of Broseley in Shropshire. I journeyed by rail to Wolverhampton &thence by an omnibus through Madely to Ironbridge. On descending the hill to the last mentioned place a strange &somewhat terrific scene presented *itself*. It was a dark misty night & *we* were rushing down the steep hill at a rapid pace when huge flames seemed ready to engulf us, &the gates ofthe world of fire to open to receive us.[136] These were

135. Thomas Morell (1781–1840) was born in Maldon, Essex. After studying at Homerton College, he lectured at Wymondley College and, after the college moved to Byng Place, London, was president of Coward College 1833–40. *TCHS* iv 358, D Johnson *The Changing Shape of Nonconformity* (Oxford 1999) 140.

136. The 'gates of the world of fire' refers to the Spartans at the battle of Thermopylae which is Greek for 'the gates of fire'.

the iron furnaces which at that time were in full operation on the side of the hill down which we were going. I was met at the Iron bridge by one ofthe deacons, with a large lantern in his hand. He led me across the bridge, & then intothe darkness; we began to mount a rugged foot path, &it seemed as if we were going up intothe skies. I thought I had come tothe strangest place in the whole earth. At length however we reached some level ground, &shortly after arrived at an old fashioned house, standing alone in a garden where the good deacon lived. The first piece of information he gave me was not very encouraging, it was that two members of the church, brother & sister, had been before the Magistrates that day on a charge of stabbing one another &on further inquiry I found that matters at the chapel where in a very disorderly &depressed condition. A preacher had been sent down some year or two previously by Mr Sherman of Reading, a man of little education, but of some fluency of utterance & of great apparent earnestness. He had excited considerable attention &had hastily *gathered* a meeting of young people, his preferred converts &with the sanction ofthe leading ministers of the county had formed them into a church. Soon however suspicions respecting his character had arisen; more I think from a foolish &boastful way of talking on his part than from any thing else, &this finally grew into a feud, one party violently condemning him, and the other as strongly supporting him. This of course soon lead tohis leaving, & it was into the midst ofthis turmoil that I was sent.

I preached my first sermons at Broseley on Dec 4th 1842 having engaged tosupply for two months. During this period, on becoming more fully acquainted with the utterly disordered state of the church, I ventured to recommend tothe deacons, that the church should be dissolved. They asked me first to submit the matter to theleading Minister of the county, the Rev Thomas Weaver of Shrewsbury.[137] He however objected tothe proposal, on the ground that he could find no precedent in the New Testament for the dissolution ofthe Church. As Mr Weaver declined to interfere, the other ministers also refused to take any steps in a matter. I consequently with the concurrence of the deacons called the Church together &putting before them the unsatisfactory state of things, advised them to dissolve in order to a future re-constitution. Conscious as they were of the discord & confusion into which they had fallen, they at once agreed to this. The happened tobe five persons who had been members of other churches, & whose dismissals from these churches were in the hands ofthe two deacons. These five having full confidence in each other, &having also the confidence of all the former members as consistent &tried Christians, then united formally together in fellowship as a Church, &so formed a nucleus

137. For Thomas Weaver (1775–1852) see *CYB* (1853) 235. He was minister of Swan Hill Chapel, Shrewsbury 1798–1852.

to which others could be joined. These measures seemedtome necessary tosave them from extinction, it was also needful that they shouldnot be left in this emergency, &consequently when at the end ofthetwomonths they invited me tothepastorate I felt it incumbent upon me to accept the invitation. though the salary was only 80 £ a year.

I preached my first sermon as pastor Mar.12th 1843 I married my dear wife, Elizabeth Aldridge at Christchurch Hants, on May 18th 1843 the day of the disruption of the Scotch Church. My work at Broseley was very trying, there was much to give me anxiety, & I had very few helpers. I preached commonly three times on Sunday &besides our prayer meeting had two services in different places during the week. The cases ofthe former members of the church, were considered from time to time as they made application for membership. Those whose unfitness had become obvious did not apply, &the church was thus freed from this discordant element. In June 1845 my health utterly broke down under the combined influence of anxiety &work. I had a distressing pain in the spine &was carried fainting out of the pulpit. I did not enter it again until October.

In the beginning of the following month I received a communication from the Secretary of the Western College, then about tobe removed toPlymouth virtually inviting me to the office ofResident Tutor. After an interview with the Committee in the beginning of December, I accepted their invitation, &as it was needful that I should be in Plymouth at an early date, to superintend the settlement ofthe College in its new premises. I left Broseley with my wife, two children &a nursery maid in the evening of Dec 25th & reached Plymouth about eight o clock on following evening.

The Western College, originally founded in 1752, had since the year 1828 been located at Exeter, under the presidency of Dr George Payne.[138] From a variety of untoward circumstances, it had fallen into a low condition, the Exeter committee became quite disheartened, &the college would have been given up had not the Ministers &churches ofPlymouth &its neighbourhood came tothe rescue, expressed their willingness to receive the College, &to do their best to revive it. At the time of my joining it, there where but three students, &the Committee did not seem tothink it possible to attempt more than to make the College an institution for training village preachers. All that was required from me was to give an ordinary English Education. Unless something higher than this had been attempted, the College would I am persuaded have soonn come to nought. Happily I was able to do more than theCommittee had bargained for, though for a time I had to do it quietly, lest I should be thought tobe doing too much. I had prepared three men for Matriculation &passedthem in the first

138. For Payne (1781–1848) see *CYB* (1848) 235. J Stoughton, *Reminiscences of Congregationalism Fifty Years Ago* (1891) 13, wrote that Payne 'had a great turn for metaphysical theology, and we used one of his volumes as a Highbury text-book'.

class, & at last the leading men on the Committee began to take heart, & at my suggestion the College was affiliated to the University of London. Dr. Payne died suddenly in June 1848, & during the session 1848–9 I had to bear the sole charge of the College. In 1849 a successor tothe vacant office was obtained in the Rev Richard Alliot LLD[139] who also consented (at my request made to him through the Committee) to become the Resident Tutor. I passed five happy years with Dr Alliott as my colleague. He entered very heartily intomy views for the improvement of the College. The number of our *students*, steadily increased, & several ofthem are now occupying positions of eminence. Measures were also set on foot for the erection of suitable college buildings & a considerable sum was collected towardsit.

In March 1854 I received unexpectedly a letter from the Revd John Harris DD[140] communicating a resolution ofthe Council of New College, in which they invited me to the chair ofMathematics, together with that of Church History. After due deliberation I felt it right to accept this invitation, & commenced my work at New College in the following Septr by delivering the opening lecture.

In 1863 Professor Godwin[141] resigned the chair of N.T. Exegesis. At the request of the Council, the duties ofthis chair was undertaken by a Dr Halley[142] &myself jointly, the Doctor taking the Epistles & I the historical books. This arrangement continued during four sessions untill June 1867, when the Council invited me to take the duties ofthe Classical Chair. Having accepted this invitation, the exegesis of the historical books of the N.T was undertaken by Professor Godwin.

On May 28 1872 I was invited through theBishop of Gloucester &Bristol tobecome a member ofthe New Testament Revision Company. Our first meeting was held in thefollowing month.

In May 1872 I was invited by the Council to the Principalship ofNew College,

139. Richard Alliott (1804–1863) *CYB* (1865) 217–8. He was President of Western College, Plymouth 1849–57, Cheshunt College 1857–60, and Spring Hill College 1860–63 where he was also pastor of Acock Green, Birmingham.

140. John Harris (1802–1856) *CYB* (1858) 207–9. In 1837 he was appointed to the theological chair at Cheshunt college. In 1850, when New College, London was founded, Harris became the principal.

141. John Hensley Godwin (1809–1889) *CYB* (1890) 143–5. Resident and philosophical tutor at Highbury College until 1850 on the union of Homerton, Coward, and Highbury Colleges when he became professor of NT exegesis, mental and moral philosophy and English at New College, London.

142. Robert Halley DD (Princeton) (1796–1876) *CYB* (1877) 367–371. In 1826, Halley became resident and classical tutor at Highbury College. In 1839 he moved to Manchester as minister of Old Moseley Street Chapel. In 1857 he succeeded Harris at New College. Resigning from New College in 1872, Halley spent some time at Spring Hill College, Birmingham deputizing for D W Simon, who was often ill.

taking in addition tothe chairs ofthe Ecclesiastical History &ofMathematics that also of New Testament Exegesis.

επινουριας ουν τυχων της απο του Θεου αχρι της ημερας ταυτης εστηνα

Samuel Newth Dec 24th
1874

Transcribed by Yvonne Evans

REVIEWS

***Early Quaker Studies and the Divine Presence*. By G F Nuttall. Pp xiv, 279. Quinta Press, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire, England SY10 7RN, 2003. £30.00. ISBN 1 897856 22 9**

Here we have, from the nonagenarian Geoffrey Nuttall, a selection of essays and sermons on devotional themes, published in various journals over the last thirty-five years. They reveal his mastery of topics beyond the strictly Puritan and Congregational. Twelve of these papers are included under the title 'Early Quaker Studies' and eight under 'The Divine Presence'. Four of the former are principally concerned with George Fox and four with James Nayler. The remaining four in this section deal with 'The First Quakers', early Friends and the Bible, the early Quaker programme, and early Quakerism in the Netherlands. He opens with 'The First Quakers' and sets the scene in easy language for the general reader before moving into the appeal of the Bible for early Quakers. These early Quakers were Christians who read the Bible and, led by the Spirit, sought to bring men and women closer to Christ.

Nuttall's own encounters with Fox and with Nayler reveal something of his own faith and devotion, as well as theirs. He tells of his friendship, when young, with the Quaker historian, Neave Brayshaw, and of Brayshaw's close acquaintance with George Fox's works and sayings. Indeed he quoted Fox so easily, writes Nuttall, that "He might have met Fox the day before". Brayshaw, the faithful Friend, also challenged the youthful Nuttall. "I would go to the stake for the free and open meeting", he announced. "What is there in Congregationalism that you would go to the stake for?" This, Nuttall affirms, "was a key to Fox. It was also a key to life."

The second category of papers, 'The Divine Presence', brings together a wide variety of subjects from Cassandra and the language of prophecy, and Erasmus and Spain, to the formation of Rainer Maria Rilke. Also included are Nuttall's 1972 and 1980 sermons to the university of Oxford, an unpublished sermon on Revelation 3:7–8, entitled 'Christ the Opener', a treatment of the Biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit (a favourite Nuttall subject), and his 1978 Ethel M Wood lecture for the University of London 'The Moment of Recognition: Luke as Story-Teller'.

Clearly we are not in territory familiar to those who read Nuttall exclusively on the 'visible saints' of the Congregational churches 1640–60, or on Richard Baxter, or Philip Doddridge. This collection of papers reminds us that Nuttall

is also an accomplished historian of the Society of Friends and that he has a mystical side to his personality. Should we really be surprised to learn that he cultivates the presence of God and that he prays and preaches too? But, you say, who wants to read sermons these days? Well, you could do a lot worse with your time than read these—and you probably do! In his previously unpublished sermon, we read "that Christ is he that opens: that in Christ God has opened, and still opens, to us a new world both of realities and possibilities". And he closes this sermon, "In the difficulties of life and discipleship, in the hardness of our own hearts, in Christian worship, in the glory of his resurrection, our Jesus has the key. He opens and no man may shut." The whole collection here may be understood as setting out Nuttall's desire, following George Fox, to bring men and women to know and live "nearer to the Lord".

If in these papers we have a less familiar Nuttall, we have perhaps a more personal, intimate insight to the writer as well as to his subjects. In these essays and sermons we come closer to him and also to the God he has tried to serve and proclaim. Those who know his writings will need little recommendation to seek out this book. Those who are new to his work will find this collection a good place to begin.

Alan Argent

***Major General Sir Edward Massie A Cavalier among the Roundheads*? By R J Massie Collins. Pp 200 + bibliography and index. 2002. Available from the author, Ridgeway House, Broadway, Worcestershire, WR12 7DE. £9.99. ISBN 0 9540557.**

Sir Edward Massie (1619?–1674?) came from a Royalist family but, during the English Civil War, he and his elder brother, George, fought for the Parliamentary cause. He became commander of the forces defending Gloucester in 1643 and played an important role in the war in the west, repelling Royalist attacks on the city, and using it as a base from which to conquer the surrounding country. He gained some fame for his success in holding out for a month with a garrison of 1500 against a besieging army of 30,000. After several brushes with Prince Rupert's army and other Royalist commanders, Massie in 1645 became the general of the Western Association, that is the troops raised for Parliament by the five counties of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire.

After campaigns in Somerset and Devon in the winter of 1645–6, Massie attended parliament as MP for Gloucester. He sided with the conservative group opposed to the radicals of the new model army and spent some time in Holland. In 1648 he suffered exclusion from the House of Commons with those Presbyterians, expelled by the purge of Colonel Pride and, after a short time of confinement, escaped again to Holland. At this stage he entered

the king's service and attended on the young Charles II. He fought against Cromwell outside Stirling in 1651 and against the forces of General Lambert but was injured and, therefore, did not fight at Worcester. He fled with the king after the battle but, falling behind, was captured. Imprisoned in the Tower of London, he escaped and once again took ship to Holland. Massie worked for some years for the king's return but was distrusted by many Royalists, although he returned to England during the 1650s on three occasions and was recaptured in Gloucestershire in 1659. Yet again he managed to escape and, on Charles II's restoration in 1660, he was knighted and once more sat as MP for Gloucester, which post he held until his death at the end of 1674 or the beginning of 1675.

Massie was a Presbyterian in religion and opposed the Independents. He was considered by some contemporaries to be vain and he had his portrait painted several times, notably by Peter Lely, the pupil of Van Dyck. Undoubtedly he was brave, a quality which he displayed repeatedly.

Richard Collins is a minister in the United Reformed Church and a descendant of Massie on his mother's side and his book, therefore, represents an act of familial duty, but is also an exploration of a fascinating character who survived both the war and the king's restoration in 1660. The story is told well, never drags and is a good read. The author provides a full index, a bibliography, and includes five portraits of his subject and three maps.

Thomas Lloyd

***Philosophy, Dissent and Nonconformity*. By Alan P F Sell. Pp 300. James Clarke & Co, Cambridge, 2004. £50.00. ISBN 0 227 67977 6.**

In this volume Alan Sell has combined two of his principal interests, that is philosophy and the history of religious dissent. He has set out to examine the place of philosophy in the teaching of the dissenting academies from the Toleration Act of 1689 to 1920, that is just after the First World War, and to scan the writings on philosophy which emerged from the academies in that period. The two centuries covered thus generously are those in which nonconformity outgrew repression to become a power in the land, although by 1920 a declining presence, and it is fair to state that the academies played a significant part in that development. Philosophy was merely one of the subjects taught at the academies where many of the most able tutors proved to be polymaths, by force of circumstance masters of several disciplines—logic, metaphysics, ethics, theology, the ancient languages and more.

Philosophy was generally understood to be essential to an educated person's intellectual armoury and the academies of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, with their interest in enlarging the traditional curriculum and in teaching new subjects like modern languages, science, mathematics and

history, would not choose to neglect this discipline. Sell treats his subject by examining the teaching of philosophy in the eighteenth century academies, and then concentrates on moral philosophy in that century. He considers how philosophy fared in the nonconformist colleges 1800–1920 and, again, casts the spotlight on moral philosophy and apologetics in that period. He also assesses the varying contributions of tutors and alumni of the academies and colleges, noting those of value as well as those of little worth.

In his pages we meet Isaac Watts, whose *Logick* held sway well into the nineteenth century, and Richard Price, Henry Grove, John Gill, George Payne, Richard Alliott, James Martineau, Robert Mackintosh, and Edward Caird, among others. Sell notes that few of the divines whose work he examines are included in the general histories of ethics. A M Fairbairn and A E Garvie do just bring the reader into the twentieth century, justifying the dates in the book's title.

With over 100 academies to cover during his chosen period, Sell has set himself a demanding, if not impossible task, especially as he admits that a paucity of information survives for many colleges. The academies were, as he states, not "identical in type, longevity or ethos", with some offering a general higher education and others catering strictly for ministerial training. Again some were evangelical while others were decidedly liberal. To make matters more complicated, in the nineteenth century, the Methodist bodies began opening their own colleges, the turn to inwardness brought human experience to the fore, and the increasing reception of modern biblical criticism and evolutionary theory affected the teaching of the nonconformists. Sell deals with the nineteenth century colleges in denominational order, giving those serving Congregationalists more space than those of other bodies. Was philosophy of more importance to the Congregationalists than to other nonconformists?

This is a serious work and deserves to be read carefully. The author offers a survey of a rarely considered but rewarding subject. Clearly the study of nonconformity 1689 to 1920, and the place of philosophy within it, is unlikely to be taken up by a vast number of younger scholars but this is no reason for modern nonconformists to neglect it and Sell has attempted to fill this breach. He has provided full end-notes, a detailed bibliography and indices of academies/colleges, persons and subjects. In such a work a few errors creep in. The spelling of Watts' work is variously given as *Logic* and *Logick*. For a fairly expensive book the binding is weak and the absence of end papers limits the scholar's space to insert his or her own notes, cross references etc. The publishers might have done better.

Robert Whittier

***Early Congregational Independency in the Highlands and Islands and the North-East of Scotland*. By W D McNaughton. Pp xxx, 659. The Trustees of Ruaig Congregational Church, Tiree, 2003. Available from Rev Alan Gibbon MTh, 61 Fifth Avenue, Glasgow G12 OAR. £20.00 + £5.00 p&p. ISBN 0 900304 98 7.**

The Congregational churches in Scotland have undoubtedly made a major contribution to the history of the nation. In particular the impact of their missions was felt in the rural areas in the Highlands, Aberdeenshire and in the Inner Hebrides before 1870. Yet historians have paid little attention to these churches, and their rural evangelism, mainly because by the late nineteenth century Scottish missionary enterprise became increasingly concentrated on the rapidly growing cities. At this time the country churches began to suffer from depopulation and, as a result, several village chapels, which had been raised through great sacrifice, fell into decay, with some eventually being used as houses and only a small number being rescued from extinction. In parts of Perthshire where Congregationalists and Baptists had both been very active, even as late as the early 1900s, some today still fiercely deny that such missions ever occurred!

William McNaughton, who ten years ago published the standard work on *The Scottish Congregational Ministry 1794–1993*, has researched in meticulous detail the history of these neglected Congregational churches. In his earlier volume he provided mini-biographies of all the ministers who have served the Scottish churches. In this second work he tells the stories of the ministers and the itinerant missionaries in north-east Scotland in a series of regional studies. Here are portraits of rural preachers and their flocks, witnessing to their vital faith, whilst their way of life was being steadily eroded.

The stories are both inspiring and humbling. Kintyre Congregational Church, in Argyllshire, was constituted in 1802 but it met severe disapproval from local landowners, one of whom insisted that his tenant farmers should relinquish all connections with the pastor, Archibald McCallum, by Whit Sunday 1803 or be dispossessed of their farms. They stayed loyal to the pastor but one member, Duncan Ferguson, when removing his belongings in a boat, was drowned, leaving a widow and several children. After pastoral training at Glasgow, Archibald Farquharson (to whose memory this book is dedicated) arrived on Tiree to find that he had no place of worship and was prohibited from using the schoolhouse. With characteristic fortitude, he simply set out to build a meeting house himself and thus shamed the locals who then came to help. Alexander Dewar, having finished his studies at Robert Haldane's Theological Seminary in Edinburgh, was sent to serve the cause in Inverness. He was given £5 on which he would have to live for some time to come so, as there were no coaches, he walked the 150 miles. Such stories testify to the selfless commitment of McNaughton's heroes. Each fellowship and each pastor

experienced a measure of difficulty. Yet their vibrant worship and lively faith sustained their witness and McNaughton tells these stories with obvious pleasure and admiration.

In this work the author has consulted a variety of sources—the official records of the Congregational Union of Scotland, newspaper reports, the private papers and diaries of the preachers, local church books and other original material—as his bibliography and end-notes make clear. Where possible, he includes portraits of the ministers and illustrations of the chapels and meeting houses. His rigour, thoroughness and dedication to his task is such that this work is unlikely to be surpassed. Dr McNaughton is to be congratulated for his tireless commitment to salvaging the history of the Scottish Congregational churches.

Alan Argent

***Canal Boatmen's Missions*. By Wendy Freer and Gill Foster. Pp 72. Railway and Canal Historical Society, 3 West Court, West Street, Oxford OX2 0NP, 2004. £12.50. ISBN 0 901461 53 9.**

This book chronicles and assesses the usefulness of a specific area of home missions to the poor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But why should canal boat people require special missions? Because, as the Revd John Davies told a Parliamentary select committee in 1841, they were "quite *sui generis*"—a race apart. With increasing industrialisation a community of people arose on the canal network of England who had no other homes but their boats, where the cabin was often little larger than a double bed, as the only indoor living space for husband, wife and children. Most were illiterate, drunkenness was common, and washing was a difficulty. They were looked down on and even persecuted. The missions, in addition to evangelising, provided services to alleviate some of the hardships of canal boat life, with education for all ages, recreation and refreshments (an alternative to the pub), washing facilities and free letter writing (the man in the pub charged 3d). Of course, the meetings and facilities were attended by many others, in addition to the boat people.

Freer and Foster describe the many missions to canal folk from 1827 to the end of freight traffic on the canals in 1970, although by the later date much work was with pensioners then living on land. The story involves no less than three George Smiths (even though one was a relatively minor figure)! Those involved included Baptists, Independents (the term Congregational is never used in the text) and Anglicans. There were some individual missions set up by local ministers or churches. Most, however, were branches of larger organisations, some with a remit also for seamen, others with general mission aims, such as the London City Mission and the Salvation Army. Supporters of the work in their

own areas included Carrs Lane Independent Chapel, in Birmingham, and several canal companies.

A short chapter mentions some of those who have attempted to evangelise leisure users on the canals since 1970. Perhaps, because his work was aimed at young people in Birmingham generally, it fails to mention the work of Tom Hodgson who will be remembered fondly by members of Congregational Federation churches. One irritating feature repeated throughout the work is exemplified in the description of Lewis Carroll's father as "the Reverend Dodgson". An unfortunate error creeps in on page 63 where the chapel at Crick is listed as "Independent now UCR".

Well illustrated by current and archive photographs, with a gazetteer of numerous canal missions, cross referenced to a map of the English canal network and an index, this book will appeal to people from many different spheres of interest. It has clearly been well researched in both published and manuscript sources, including works not directly connected with the field, like Jeffrey Cox's *English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870–1930*. All these are referenced by footnotes at the end of the book. I recommend it to our readers.

Peter Young

***Modern Christianity and Cultural Aspirations*. D Bebbington and T Larsen eds. Pp xvi, 359. Sheffield Academic Press, 2003. ISBN 0–8264–6262–6 £75.00.**

This volume contains sixteen essays, broadly corresponding to the themes set out in the title. They were originally delivered as lectures at a conference held at Westminster College, Cambridge in the summer of 2001 to mark the retirement from Sheffield University of one of our CHC members, Prof Clyde Binfield and, as such, they reflect some of the fields of historical research which he has made his own—popular culture, architecture, education, politics and ecclesiology. Of course, Prof Binfield is and, despite his retirement, happily remains the editor of the *Journal of the United Reformed History Society* and his work is well known to our readers. His lectures and his written work reveal a breadth of cultural appreciation which traditionally have not been associated with nonconformity in general, nor with Congregationalism in particular. Yet in his inimitable way and with a carefully composed, polished, graceful style rare in our age, he has succeeded in removing some of the encrusted layers of prejudice and grime so that the vivacity, merriment, spiritual earnestness and ambition of nineteenth century nonconformists, especially, may be seen in something like their true colours. Loving the treasure which he knew was partially buried beneath the encrustations, but still visible to him, he has consistently set before his readers

and hearers pearls of great price. Consequently we are in his debt and this volume goes some way to acknowledge that debt. It is not enough but it serves.

The shortest of the essays is by Binfield himself and deals with his own "formation" and, alongside this, is an appreciation of him by the veteran historian, Reg Ward. Eleven of the papers are concerned with English nonconformity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Alan Sell offers personal reflections on Congregational ecclesiology during the 1960s. John Handby Thompson outlines the building of a Victorian chapel, in Highgate. Elaine Kaye assesses the first students at Mansfield College, Oxford and David Thompson considers the position of Nonconformists at Cambridge before the First World War. Other papers deal with sport and the Free Churches, the pottery industry and nonconformity, English Presbyterians and the Scottish disruption of 1843, Abraham Lincoln, religion and self-improvement, Methodist attitudes to education and youth, and several topics close to Binfield's heart. The editors recall that the conference was "an exceptionally congenial occasion" marked by "good-natured and insightful participation". Their book is a credit to them and to Clyde Binfield. I recommend it to all those caught in his web of words and images of past nonconformity and to those who share his exuberant joy in studying these saints and their works.

Daniel Brookes

***Daughters of Dissent: The Congregational Lecture 2003*. By Kirsty Thorpe. Pp. 23. The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust (1978) Ltd. 2003. Available from Dr Williams's Library, 14 Gordon Square London WC1H 0AG. £2.00. ISSN 0963–181X**

Of the seventeen speakers who have delivered the Congregational Lectures since 1987, when they were reinstated by the Congregational Memorial Hall Trust (1978), sixteen have backgrounds in Congregationalism, and one was brought up in the Churches of Christ, which are congregational in order. All the speakers have been ministers, thirteen from the United Reformed Church and four from differing branches of continuing Congregationalism. Four lecturers have been women, of whom one is from the Congregational Federation. We should recall that Elsie Chamberlain saw the URC as having an anti-women bias.

The 2003 lecture "Daughters of Dissent" is both interesting and disappointing. The former because it shows how slow the churches were to ordain women, allowing for such radical 17th century activists as Katherine Chidley (although it seems odd to have consulted her 1645 pamphlet "Good Counsel to the Presbyterians" but not her weighty 1641 *The Justification of the Independent Churches of Christ*) and the large numbers of women in the churches since the eighteenth century. Kirsty Thorpe draws attention to the significant role women

have played in the Congregational churches. Also she provides an analysis of articles concerning women, published in *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* (iv 195–6) in the twentieth century (p. 8). Unfortunately in one of these articles, Courtney S Kenny spells incorrectly the name of an early minister of Emmanuel Church, Cambridge, Samuel Thodey, who was especially supported by women. Kirsty Thorpe repeats the mistake! Her reference to the body of work which should be studied to ascertain the importance of women in the history of the denomination is useful, as is the urgent call for first hand accounts of women's ministry from those pioneers who are still alive.

It would be good to know what proportions of the women, who became ministers before 1972, entered the URC, the Congregational Federation, and the other Congregational bodies (the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches did not favour women's ministry but is this changing?). Thorpe does not ask these questions but seeks only the opinions of those who entered the URC. As she herself states, 'History is written by the winners' (p. 5). Surely good historical research has no bias and, at least, attempts to be thorough.

Kirsty Thorpe and her colleagues in the Daughters of Dissent project have thrown some light on a branch of church history which has been ignored.

Yvonne Evans

***Reformed Ministry. Traditions of Ministry and Ordination in the United Reformed Church*. By Tony Tucker. Pp viii, 206. The United Reformed Church, 2003 £ 12.99. ISBN 0 85346 217 8.**

Tony Tucker explains that his book emerged from a discussion, with students training for the ministry, in which one put forward the view that they should be working toward the time when the ordained ministry would be redundant, for the 'ministry of the whole people of God' would render it unnecessary. This view was unchallenged by all present. Tucker was left to ponder—"Is the ministry of Word and sacraments essential to church order, or is it merely decorative—or even a hindrance to the ministry of the whole people of God?" He explores these questions from the points of view of those traditions which coalesced into the URC.

Tucker is not ignorant of the value of the historical perspective and he examines the roots of the traditions from Luther and Calvin onwards to the 1833 Declaration of the Congregationalists in an opening chapter. He then moves to a discussion of the changing understandings of ministry and ordination after the Lambeth Conference of 1920, in the light of the ecumenical movement. The varied responses of the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians and the Churches of Christ are treated separately and the coming of the URC, the Talks about Talks, the Churches Unity Commission, the Ten Propositions and proposals

for a Covenant, local initiatives on unity, and other recent declarations and agreements are included in this study.

The book ends with the passing of the twentieth century and the discussions with other denominations in which the URC was involved, although he concedes that the goal of visible unity remains elusive. Tony Tucker is a fair and reliable guide through these issues and his book deserves to be read, even though one may differ from him in points of interpretation and aspiration.

Daniel Brookes

OUR CONTEMPORARIES

The Baptist Quarterly

4(vol 40 no 2 April 2003)

Editorial: "The Decline of Congregationalism". David Killingray "Black Baptists in Britain 1640–1950". Timothy Whelan "John Ryland at school". Roger J Owen "Baptist beginnings at Beeston Hill". Keith Clements "Making a Denomination" (Review article).

(no 3 July 2003)

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Secretary:
Rev. C Price
The Congregational Chapel
Pound Green
Guilden Morden
Royston
Hertfordshire
SG8 0JZ

Treasurer:
Rev. C J Damp
Kentish Town Congregational Church
Kelly Street
London
NW1 8PH

Distribution:
Peter I Young
125 Sudbourne Road
Brixton
London
SW2 5AF

Membership Secretary:
Michael G Mackintosh
The Flat
Trinity Chapel
St Matthew's Road
London
SW2 1NF

Editor:
Dr A Argent
160 Green Lane
Morden
Surrey
SM4 6SR

Assistant Editor:
Rev. T Watts
16 Sheldon Road
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY3 8SS

Contributions to the *Magazine* should be addressed to the Editor.