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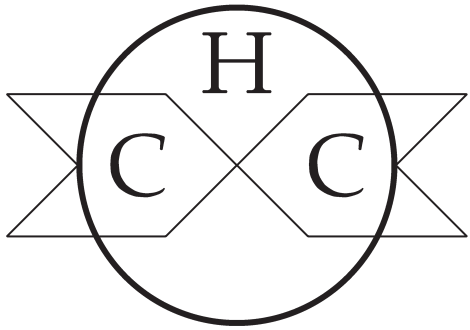
Congregational History Circle *Magazine*



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THE CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY CIRCLE MAGAZINE

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

This issue of our magazine, concentrating on the recent past, has the feel of contemporary history about it. We begin a series of articles by John Wilcox, the first secretary of the Congregational Federation. He will be reflecting on the years which led to the formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972 and to the beginnings of the CF. In addition, Janet Wootton offers her insights to the positive attitudes to ecumenism among Congregationalists, especially those of Elsie Chamberlain and Margaret Stansgate, before and after 1972. John Travell's obituary of Graham Adams continues the near contemporary theme.

Christopher Damp looks back on the achievements and mistakes of twenty-five years of the Congregational History Circle, the formative period in our existence. At the end of his article he raises the issue of our name and clearly he favours a change. Some may have reservations. If you agree with him, or have other views and wish to share them, please inform one of our officers so that the matter can be fully aired and discussed at a duly constituted and informed meeting. The short article on Bernard J Snell, and the review article on Tudur Jones's works in translation are the exceptions to the contemporary theme.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Dates for your Diary

The Friends of the Congregational Library will be holding their annual summer event at Dr Williams's Library, 14–15 Gordon Square, London, WCIH OAR, with an afternoon visit to the Evangelical Library, in Chiltern Street, London, WI, on Saturday 4th June. The gathering commences at 10.30am with coffee at Dr Williams's Library, followed by a programme of talks and discussion at 11am. The cost for the day will be £8.

The Congregational Lecture, also at Dr Williams's Library, will be on Wednesday 16th November, 2005. Dr Chad van Dixhoorn will speak on the "Minutes of the Westminster Assembly". The speaker for the 2006 Congregational Lecture will be Prof Keith Robbins.

Losses

We have lost through death our long time CHC member, Harold Wright, the former pastor of the church at Kibworth Harcourt, Leicestershire. The CHC secretary, Colin Price, has contributed the following.

Harold Wright (1927–2004)

With sadness I have to report that Harold Wright passed away last year after a long period of being bedridden. Harold was an enthusiastic supporter of all things Congregational and an avid follower during our yearly Chapel Crawls. He was an enthusiastic photographer and often seen on our trips festooned with at least two cameras, and equally ready to pull another from inside his voluminous coat with the remark, "And I've just brought this little job too". He made strenuous efforts to collect photographs of anything Congregational (particularly buildings) and meticulously recorded the details, as well as acquiring books and memorabilia.

His interest in Congregationalism derived in part from the church of which he was pastor, Kibworth Harcourt, with its associations with Philip Doddridge. This chapel was also that at which a certain Thomas Cook records in his diary for June 9th 1841: it was on the way to Leicester, "*just after passing Kibworth Congregational Chapel and Parsonage … [where] … a thought flashed through my brain—what a glorious thing it would be if the newly developed powers of railways and locomotion could be made subservient to the promotion of Temperance*". Thus began the idea of holiday excursions for the masses to which the name of Thomas Cook is still affixed. It was a tale Harold was very fond of repeating, among others.

The Marian Martyrs

This year marks the 450th anniversary of the deaths of the Protestant reformers, John Rogers (c1500–55), the Bible translator, Hugh Latimer (c1485–1555), the bishop of Worcester, and Nicholas Ridley (c1500–1555), the bishop of London, and also of other Protestant martyrs. At least 277 were put to death under Mary, 112 of them in London, 49 in Canterbury, 41 in Chichester and 31 in Norwich, suggesting that these were centres of the new reformed religion.

Rogers was the first Protestant to suffer death in Mary's reign 1553–58, being burnt at Smithfield on 4th February 1555. Latimer and Ridley had been notable critics of social injustices, contemporary corruptions, and ecclesiastical abuses, attacking Catholic teaching on purgatory, the use of images, statues of the saints etc. Both were arrested on the accession to the throne of Henry VIII's Roman Catholic daughter, Mary, and in 1554 with Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, were taken to Oxford to dispute with Catholic theologians of both English universities, especially on transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the mass. Refusing to accept the Catholic doctrine, they were excommunicated.

In 1555 heresy (a charge which then included holding Protestant views) became a capital offence and, after refusing to recant, Latimer and Ridley were burnt at the stake in Oxford, on 16 October. The Elizabethan propagandist, John Foxe (1516–87), told the moving story (revised and improved over the years) of their deaths in his martyrology, *Acts and Monuments*. In front of Balliol College, about to meet his fate, and stripped to his shroud, Latimer, reported Foxe, issued

his defiant proclamation, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man: we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as (I trust) shall never be put out".

Whether Latimer ever said these exact words we shall never know. They did not appear in the first English edition of the 'book of martyrs' in 1563 but were added in a later emendation. They derive originally from the account of the death of the second century Christian martyr, Polycarp, by the first historian of the Church, Eusebius. In using such language, Foxe may have deliberately sought to place Latimer and Ridley and, by extension, all the Protestant martyrs before Elizabeth's accession in 1558, in the vast procession of Christian martyrs from the beginnings of the Church. Certainly eye witnesses, to these Oxford martyrdoms, believed that this blood had been shed for the sake of the Gospel and such an understanding brought great emotional power to Foxe's account. Latimer's words at the stake, as Foxe recorded them, have often been invoked as a model of Christian courage in extreme circumstances. These two deaths played a pivotal role in proving the Protestant cause in this country.

Cranmer's story is, of course, peculiarly poignant. He was a gentle scholar and reluctant bishop, who, under duress and in acute depression, signed six recantations but unexpectedly, on the day of his death, famously renounced these recantations before being burnt at the stake, also at Oxford, on 21 March 1556, thrusting his right hand into the flames and saying, "This hand hath offended, writing contrary to my heart". We may expect that Cranmer's martyrdom will be widely commemorated next year.

Correction

Yvonne Evans writes that, in the previous issue of the *CHC Magazine* vol. 4, no 6, page 456, she had a problem transcribing Samuel Newth's Greek. John Proctor, of Westminster College, Cambridge, kindly provided the solution. He states that the letter *nu* in the first and last words should be kappa, making the line from Acts 26: 22 read as follows, ἐπικουρίας οὖν τυχὼν τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄχρι τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης ἕστηκα "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day …" (AV). We are grateful for this correction.

SOME MEMORIALS OF BERNARD J SNELL

My church in Brixton, Trinity Congregational, has recently acquired some relics, relating to the former minister of our once grand neighbour, Brixton Independent Chapel. We have been entrusted with a circular bronze plaque, about two feet in diameter, of Bernard Joseph Snell (1856–1934) and a large photograph album, presented to him in 1886 when he left his first pastorate, St Paul's Chapel, Newcastle-on-Tyne. These have been given to us by his grandson who had obtained the plaque from his aunt, Katherine Mary Cowan, Snell's youngest and last surviving child, on her death in 1997, and whose father, Harold Emley Snell, had himself obtained the album after Bernard, his own father, had died.

The plaque was originally made for, and given to, Brixton Independent Chapel on Bernard Snell's retirement from the ministry in 1930, after almost forty years in this one church. It consists mainly of a head and shoulders portrait in bronze relief of Snell and portrays a man of importance, confident and assured, with a neatly trimmed moustache and beard. As in the photograph, accompanying his obituary in the *Congregational Year Book* (1935), he does not wear clerical dress, in common with the majority of Congregational ministers of his day who shunned such formal attire, but rather looks the elegant man of affairs, resembling a successful and well respected business man of the times, in jacket and tie.[1] Indeed, Snell's image on the plaque bears a striking resemblance to the face and bearing of the Unitarian sugar magnate and philanthropist, Sir Henry Tate, whose bust sits atop a plinth outside the library, which he donated and bears his name, in Brixton.

In the bronze cast Snell favours a bow tie and looks younger, perhaps in his 50s, his prime years at Brixton, than he appears in his photograph where he has a wing collar to his shirt and wears a dress tie. The older, white haired Snell, in the photograph, must look as he did nearer his death. His head and body are turned to one side, away from the camera, and from the observer, looking resolutely forward, perhaps to the life beyond this. In contrast, the image in the plaque gazes straight out at the observer, a clear, strong, proud face, the picture of pastoral experience and gravitas.

The leather bound album contains a testimonial of six pages, all elaborately illuminated, in sincere and formal language. One page gives the signatures of five "elders" and five "deacons". The text refers appreciatively to the "helpmeet"

1 *Congregational Year Book* (1935) 289–90. Hereafter this publication is referred to as *CYB.*

Snell found in Newcastle, that is Kate Emley, a Northumberland girl whom he married but who died when the children were still young.

Then follows several pages of photographs, mostly of Newcastle-on-Tyne and scenic locations in the area, such as Alnwick, Bamburgh and Warkworth Castles, Durham Cathedral and Castle and, for some reason, a few of the USA and of Norway. The front cover carries the initials BJS, placed over each other, and most of the photographs are somewhat 'foxed', although the damage is not very marked. The only blemish is the absence of the large, ornamental and gilded clasp which the volume originally bore. My intention is to place the album in the Congregational Library, 14 Gordon Square, London, WCIH OAR. The plaque will probably remain in Brixton, if not at the building for which it was made, but at its less opulent and older Congregational sister fellowship.

The visit of John Snell, Bernard's grandson, also has thrown light on the circumstances surrounding his grandfather's mostly unscripted anti-German tirade, from the chair of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, in May 1917. However notorious, this speech probably accurately summed up the "highly excited attitude to the war" among Congregationalists at that time.[2]

Brixton Independent Chapel

At the turn of the 19th century, when Snell's star shone brightly in the Congregational firmament, Congregationalism was "still a growing power in the land". In the twenty-nine municipal districts of London proper, the 219 Congregational churches drew considerable numbers to their worship and other activities. According to the census, undertaken by Richard Mudie-Smith for the newspaper, the *Daily News*, Brixton Independent Chapel attracted a huge congregation of 1,985 on census Sunday, in the winter of 1902–3. It was the fourth largest attendance of any Congregational church in the capital, with The City Temple heading the list with an "astonishing" 7,008. The minister of such a church as Brixton Independent was a man of significance and weight, and not only in the immediate neighbourhood. However, the membership of Brixton Independent Chapel for 1903 stood at 462, less than a quarter of the attendance figures, suggesting that, in a time of crisis, the fellowship could be badly hit by the loss of the less committed among the many adherents.[3]

Bernard J Snell

Snell's father, Joseph Hony (1828–99), and his uncle, Thomas (1820–99), were Congregational ministers who had begun their preaching for the Wesleyan Methodists. Thomas later worked at Dr Andrew Reed's 'Idiot Asylum', Essex

2 RT Jones *Congregationalism in England 1662–1962* (1962) 357.
3 *Ibid* 319–20.

Hall, at Colchester while Joseph became a chaplain to Reed's Asylum, at Earlswood, Surrey, where Bernard was born.[4] Bernard, and his younger brother, Harry Herbert (1861–1935), were sent to the school for the sons of Congregational ministers, then at Lewisham (now Caterham School). Both young men entered New College, London to train for the ministry, with Bernard graduating from London university with a BSc and an MA, and Harry with a BA. The younger brother ministered at Congregational churches in Wednesbury, and Leicester, and then briefly as a Unitarian minister in Norwich. The older brother's first pastorate, in Newcastle-on-Tyne, lasted 1876–86. Then he went to Richmond Church, Salford where he remained for five years, only to be succeeded there by his brother, Harry Herbert, who thereafter remained a Congregational minister, holding four more pastorates.[5]

After five years in Salford, Bernard returned to London to begin "his great ministry" at Brixton Independent Chapel in 1891, succeeding there the notable Baldwin Brown. He stayed in Brixton for forty years, preaching his last sermon on 15 December 1929. Clearly ill, he resigned his pastorate in May 1930. Happily his health recovered and he lived at Bowdon, Cheshire, near his married daughter where he remained until his death.

A radical Liberal, Snell was keenly interested in politics and encouraged his church's involvement in social and philanthropic ventures. Brixton Independent Chapel set up the Moffat Institute in Kennington Lane (the area where Charlie Chaplin was then growing up in poverty) and the Baldwin Brown Convalescent Home at Herne Bay, in Kent. He was also a competent musician but was known particularly for "the splendour, the daring, the fire, and the intense passion of his preaching", as his obituary records. If, unlike his brother, he did not join the Unitarians, however fleetingly, he was known for the freedom of his thinking.

He had a "magnificent presence and voice, oratorical gifts of a high order, a well-stored mind and passionate conviction" which gave his sermons "an effectiveness that attracted multitudes and sent men and women away with new ardour in their souls". If the public knew him as "a great preacher", then a smaller circle "loved him" devotedly as "a great friend and brother".[6]

CUEW Chairman

These qualities would have brought Snell to the fore and made him a suitable candidate for the chair of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, although he also sat on the committee, chaired by John McClure which produced the hymn book, *Congregational Hymnary* (1916).[7] He was elected the

4 *CYB* (1900) 216–7, (1901) 209–10.
5 *Ibid* (1935) 289–90, (1936) 662–3.
6 *Ibid* (1935) 289–90.
7 Jones *op cit* 370.

CUEW chairman, on the first ballot in 1916, beginning his year of office in May 1917.[8] His oratory may have been understood as an asset at this time when Britain was engaged in the First World War. The number of pacifists, probably very few, in the Congregational churches during the war, is unknown, although some notable young ministers like C H Dodd and Nathaniel Micklem embraced pacifism. However most Congregationalists, in keeping with other Christians in this country, had little sympathy with the conscientious objectors and were unwilling to help them resist the harsh treatment which they invariably received.

Throughout the first two years of the war the British armed forces had consisted entirely of volunteers and those enlisting had done so from a deep sense of loyalty and patriotism. Yet in July 1916 the protracted campaign, known as the Battle of the Somme, broke out, lasting until November and resulting in over a million casualties—420,000 British, 200,000 French and 500,000 German.[9] This level of carnage must have affected a church like Brixton Independent Chapel, and Snell would have had young widows, orphans, bereaved parents and wounded soldiers among his congregation regularly. The introduction of compulsory military service in January 1916, stemming from the huge loss of life in the war and a decline in the number of volunteers, occurred before the Somme campaign had begun.[10]

Both Snell's sons were educated at Mill Hill School, the most prestigious Congregational school, then on the fringes of north London. The elder son, Harold Emley, was working in the Colonial Service in Fiji during the war but Harold's brother, Christopher, his younger son, had enlisted, only to be severely wounded at the Battle of the Somme in 1916, when he was some 20 years old. Christopher had earlier written to his brother, from the western front, advising him to stay in the Pacific and not to consider returning to join the armed forces. The critically injured Christopher was sent back to England, where he died of his wounds some months later. Bernard Snell had, therefore, shared in the tragedy of the war and had witnessed his young son's drawn out, dying agony.

This was the background to Bernard Snell's chairman's address, entitled "The Supreme Duty of Us Englishmen", to the CUEW in May 1917. Tudur Jones's damning verdict on the speech, "Rarely can the Assembly have listened to such an irresponsible display of rhetoric", came some 45 years later. Yet the address was warmly welcomed at the time, as one witness recorded, "I cannot recall a single occasion on which the address from the chair received so vociferous a tribute of

8 *CYB* (1917) 4.

9 T Travers "The Army and the Challenge of War 1914–1918" in DG Chandler and I Beckett (eds) *The Oxford History of the British Army* (1994) 223.

10 P Simkins "The Four Armies 1914–1918" in *Ibid* 250.

applause".[11] Was this the war fever of the times? Was Snell himself consumed with grief at the loss of his son?

The Chairman's Addresses

Snell saw his thoughts in May 1917 as "urgent" at a time when "incalculable forces" were "astir, as though Satan were loosed for a season". He claimed that the "will and conscience of mankind" were "against the return to Odinism with Berlin for its Mecca and the Kaiser for its prophet". Yet the war only confirmed his sense that "the universe was founded on right" and his "faith in justice". His rhetoric offered uncritical support for the men who had gone to war. "Lives not faith in our sons gone forth to uphold the sacred covenants of man and to destroy the works of the devil?" He condemned the Germans for sinking ships, carrying wounded servicemen—"Such degeneracy is an abomination in human nostrils" but "they glory in their shame". He decided that "though God willed not the war, He is using the war, and causing the wrath of man to praise Him".

Certainly Snell's address must have brought little Christian comfort to those who had lost loved ones, nor does it offer a consistent argument. Rather it was an appeal to support what, he understood to be, a righteous cause, for "If England to herself be true, peace will not come but as the crown of justice".

In October 1917, Snell addressed the autumn assembly of the CUEW in the City Temple, London on "The War-Map of our Minds" in which he continued his defence of the war. He spoke of the German "despotism whose savagery is made monstrous by the equipment of science" and that the allies were fighting "the greatest crusade that has ever claimed the loyalty of the children of light". The German government was "evil", her race was diseased and "dehumanized by the trained gladiators of her Court" and, to Snell, the British were "at war for Right, committed to it as a soldier is committed". He also condemned the disunity of the churches, the slums and poverty which, he maintained, need not exist. This autumn address was even more explicitly anti-German and pro-war than that of May.[12]

Lacking that element of criticism towards the claims of contemporary politicians which might be expected of Christians in general, and the detachment to the State of Congregationalists in particular, Snell, nevertheless, voiced sentiments which were widely shared by his hearers. Although the recent death of his son cannot excuse his unrestrained passion for the war, it must have informed his excesses.

The Chapel Closes

Brixton Independent Chapel did not survive very long after Snell's retirement. Damaged during the Second World War, it was found after 1945 that

11 Jones *op cit* 357.
12 *CYB* (1918) 20–37.

much of the former congregation had fled the bombing of London, far from the neighbourhood, in favour of the outer suburbs or further afield. In 1939 the chapel, with Snell's successor, Edgar Ambrose Willis, as minister, had 160 members and, in 1940, 151 members. By 1946 this figure had declined to 70, less than half its total at the beginning of the war, with Willis still the minister. In 1947 Willis had left and not been replaced, although the chapel again claimed 70 members. Yet the decline was too great a blow and the damage to the chapel too formidable an obstacle. By 1948 the chapel had closed.[13]

In time the building gained a new name, Our Lady of the Rosary Roman Catholic Church, which it retains to this day. Sadly the memorial, listing those who died in the First World War, was placed outside the building by the Catholics and has since decayed.

Alan Argent

13 *CYB* (1939) 412, (1940) 367, (1946) 151, (1947) 171.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON EVENTS LEADING TO THE FORMATION AND EARLY GROWTH OF THE CONGREGATIONAL FEDERATION

Part 1 *Anxious Congregationalists*

In 1959 the Congregational denomination set up a number of commissions which arose out of the strategy of the then secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, Howard Stanley (1901–75), and his suggested programme for "The Next Ten Years". The CUEW assembly, meeting in Westminster Chapel, in May 1959, welcomed "the initiative of its secretary in confronting the Union and its member churches with essential questions regarding the witness of Congregationalism during the next ten years". The eight commissions were "to elucidate the nature of the obedience to which God is calling us at this time".[1]

Each of the eight commissions was to consider particular aspects of the life and witness of the denomination (such as the local church, the ministry, rural Congregationalism, the relationship of the CUEW to the missionary agencies, and the drawing up of a confession of faith) and then to make appropriate recommendations.[2] Of these commissions, commission 1, chaired by John Huxtable (1912–90),[3] then the principal of New College, London, and 1962–3 the chairman of the CUEW, proved to be the most important because its remit was to examine the relationship between the local Congregational Churches and the national body, the Congregational Union of England and Wales. At that time the constitution of CUEW stated unequivocally that the national body was a voluntary association of Congregational churches but it soon became clear that members of commission 1 would be recommending fundamental changes, both to the nature of the national body and to its relationship with the member churches. In May 1962 Maurice Charles (1903–64), since 1948 the principal of Paton College, Nottingham, first expressed his concern at the CUEW assembly that commission 1 should exercise care in addressing the nature of the church, rather than be distracted from this "important" issue by a recent statement from the World Council of Churches.[4]

1 *CYB* (1960) 77–8. For Stanley see *United Reformed Church Year Book* (1977).
2 *CYB* (1961) 79–80.
3 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
4 *CYB* (1962) 89. For Charles see *CYB* (1964–65) 436–7.

The recommendations of commission 1 envisaged a "churchly" national body, to be formed by all the local Congregational Churches formally covenanting together to form this national church. The name of this national body was at first undecided but it came in time to be called the Congregational Church in England and Wales. In 1962, of the total of 2,915 churches in the CUEW, 656 churches had indicated their approval of the report of commission 1, 82 were against, and 89 had desired more detail. As a consequence, Dr H Cunliffe-Jones, then of the Northern Congregational College, Manchester, proposed and John Huxtable seconded the resolution, "That a serious attempt be made to implement the main findings of Commission 1, and that accordingly the assembly appoints a fully representative committee to prepare a Draft Constitution".[5]

By then a small number of individual Congregationalists had begun to express concerns about these fundamental proposals, and twenty-one of them had set out their concerns in a letter to *The Christian World*, dated 22 March, 1962. This weekly newspaper had been founded in 1857 and, although it had always been privately owned, Congregationalists had come to have an increasing interest in it. From at least the beginning of the twentieth century, it had devoted more space to Congregationalism and its affairs than to any other denomination. Even in 1960 it was "de facto the most widely read" Christian newspaper by Congregationalists in England and Wales.[6] These Congregational correspondents of March 1962 were later, in the religious press, referred to as "Anxious Congregationalists". Their interventions were to lead to a lively debate, at that 1962 May assembly of the CUEW, especially on the resolution of Cunliffe-Jones and Huxtable: "that a serious attempt be made to implement the main findings of Commission 1".

At that assembly Reginald W Cleaves (1915–80),[7] minister of Clarendon Park Congregational Church, Leicester, and Alan PF Sell, minister of Sedbergh Congregational Church, moved an amendment, "That a serious attempt be made to consider implementing the main findings of Commission 1 …", but, after discussion with Cunliffe-Jones, this was withdrawn. Commission 1 rightly decided that the only way that its proposals could be implemented was by altering the constitution of CUEW and this led to the preparation, by the commission, of a draft constitution, later revised. A further amendment in 1962, moved by Dr Albert Belden and G J Tate, that "In the Draft Constitution … the full freedom of our Congregational polity shall be strictly preserved" was "heavily defeated". The resolution, with a small modification, was accepted by that assembly, with "fewer than a dozen votes in opposition".[8]

5 *Ibid* (1962) 89–90, 323.
6 E Routley *The Story of Congregationalism* (1961) 107.
7 *CYB* (1980–81) 153–5.
8 *Ibid* (1962) 90.

The draft constitution was presented to the 1963 May assembly of the CUEW, with a recommendation that it be sent to the county unions and to every local Congregational church, for consideration and comment. This motion was passed by "an overwhelming majority". Discussion occurred concerning a commentary which had been written on behalf of the committee and it was proposed that this be sent to the churches "for their guidance". Dr Elfed Thomas of Leicester moved that, with the draft constitution and the commentary upon it, "a similarly printed document bearing the divergent views that are circulating among us" should be sent to the churches. This proposal was seconded by Harold Hodgkins, a tutor at Paton College since 1951, but, following "considerable discussion" the motion was submitted to the assembly and defeated.9

Thomas and Hodgkins were numbered among the "Anxious Congregationalists" and their amendment, to the formal resolution on the draft revised constitution, although defeated, meant that divergent views, to those of the CUEW leadership, would be aired. The dominant group within the denomination strongly opposed their amendment because they claimed that it would only confuse the churches.

Reg Cleaves of Leicester was particularly disappointed at this decision of the assembly, because he felt that Congregationalism was the one Christian denomination, which should allow dissenters to put forward their views, bearing in mind its past history. In fact, he felt so strongly about this decision that he decided to prepare a leaflet, outlining his concerns, so that it might be sent to every Congregational church in England and Wales. The title of this leaflet was "Six reasons why the draft constitution is not acceptable" and, whilst it had a mixed reception, the exercise turned out to be self financing because of the generosity of the Anxious Congregationalists.

When my own Congregational church at Loughborough, also in Leicestershire, considered the draft revised constitution, it did so in conjunction with Cleaves' leaflet. My church not only shared the concerns expressed in this leaflet but also had a concern of its own. This was that a fundamental alteration to the current constitution could be achieved merely by gaining a 66.7% majority at a special meeting of the CUEW's national assembly, especially convened for the purpose of altering the constitution. In other words, such an alteration did not require the consent of the individual member churches. The church at Loughborough, therefore, decided to submit the following resolution for discussion at a special meeting of the assembly, to be held during the 1964 May meetings of the CUEW:

> Any church may submit a resolution to alter the constitution provided it first obtains the support of its County Union or of fifty member churches. Any resolution must be sent to the secretary of the Union at least three months before

9 *Ibid* (1963–1964) 78–9.

> the Annual Assembly to give the Council time to report; and irrespective of the nature of this report opportunity must be given at the Assembly for a full discussion on the resolution. For the resolution to become effective immediately, a 90% majority of those present and voting will be required; if it is carried by a smaller majority the resolution must be referred to the churches for a postal ballot, which should be completed within the following six months. Each church to have one vote and, if three quarters of the churches voting are in favour of the resolution, then it is carried and the alteration comes into effect immediately.

Ransom Dow (1892–1989),[10] then minister of the Loughborough Church, and I, as church secretary there, were appointed by the church to move and second the resolution. When we arrived at Westminster Chapel, where the assembly was to be held, we were met by the irate secretary of the CUEW, Howard Stanley. He upbraided us for wasting the time of the assembly and indicated that, acting on behalf of the council of the CUEW (in effect the executive of the union), he would urge the assembly to reject our resolution completely. This he did with all the power and eloquence he possessed, when he explained the views of the draft constitution committee, to which the resolution had been referred. My own contribution, delivered in a nervous monotone, centred on the desire of all Congregationalists to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I stated that, in my view, the higher the percentage required for a particular resolution to be carried, the greater the chance that the spirit of such a resolution would not be contrary to the Holy Spirit. When the church's resolution was put to the Assembly, it was defeated by an overwhelming majority (97% of the 1600 delegates present were against the motion and only seven votes were cast in its favour!!).[11]

The incident reported above was not in itself of major significance, but for me the experience did have a profound effect. In particular, it made me realise that there was little chance of getting the CUEW assembly to give detailed consideration to major issues, if these had already been thoroughly discussed by the CUEW council, and that council had presented to the assembly specific recommendations. In other words, the vast majority of the members of the assembly felt that its council, which was composed of representatives from every Congregational county union, had much more time than they had to consider in detail every recommendation it presented to the assembly. In consequence, they were quite prepared to trust its judgements. I later discovered that many council members had similar trust in the judgements of the council committees, which resulted in the policy of the denomination being formed by a relatively small group of people. This led me to the conclusion that the only way a "dissenter" could influence the policy of the Congregational denomination was by direct communication with local Congregational churches. The 1964 May assembly was

10 *Ibid* (1990–91) 29.
11 *Ibid* (1964–1965) 89.

Howard Stanley's last as CUEW secretary. He resigned with effect from September 1964 and was succeeded by John Huxtable, who was the principal architect of the new policy within Congregationalism and the chairman of commission 1.[12]

After the 1964 May assembly, I gradually became convinced that the Congregational denomination was in serious danger of disappearing and, together with Ransom Dow, I began to attend informal meetings with other anxious Congregationalists. These meetings led to the view that some kind of loose organisation was needed, in order to contact like minded Congregationalists. Such an organisation was set up, with Reg Cleaves as chairman, the late Norman Prichard as treasurer and, on Mr Dow's recommendation, I was asked to be secretary. Our first task was to arrange a conference in Birmingham of those known to be opposed to the new constitution. Invitation letters were sent to such people in July 1964, advising them of a conference, which was being organised for Monday, 5 October, in the Civic Hall, Digbeth, Birmingham. Further invitations were sent to anyone known to have similar concerns. The conference was attended by 57 delegates from 34 Congregational churches. A further 28 Congregational churches, which in total represented about 4,500 Congregationalists (2% of the denomination) showed interest in our views.

At the conference it was agreed that some kind of more permanent organisation was required in order to make our views known to the churches, and the small group who had organised this conference were asked to continue under the hopeful name of "The Congregational Association for the continuance and extension of Congregationalism". The conference also decided that a letter should be sent to every Congregational church, setting out the views of those who opposed the new constitution. Many delegates expressed dismay that the denomination, and consequently the churches, were spending so much of their time on constitutional matters, at a time when local churches were facing enormous challenges, which in many cases related to their very existence.

The letter to the church secretaries included a brief report of the Birmingham conference, six reasons why the new constitution was a threat to Congregationalism and a reply form inviting Yes/No answers to the following three questions:

i. Is your church willing to accept an external authority?
ii. Does your church wish to exclude from membership of the national body any sister churches, who cannot conscientiously sign a covenant?
iii. Is your church prepared to sign a formal covenant as a condition of membership of the national body?

12 *Ibid* 83.

(The full text of that letter appears on page 21 of Reg Cleaves's *Congregationalism 1969–1976—The Story of the Federation*, Swansea 1977).

The task of distributing this letter to more than 2,600 church secretaries was carried out in November and early December 1964.

Responses to the letter were received from 1 January 1965 and continued right up to the 1965 May assembly. The letter also led to a long personal correspondence between the secretary of CUEW, John Huxtable, and me. Some of the responses were an enthusiastic 'no' to every question, whilst others complained that all the questions were loaded and could not be answered by a simple 'yes' or 'no'. It later appeared that question 2 caused considerable concern, even to those churches in favour of the revised constitution, because at the 1965 May assembly, an amendment to the revised draft constitution was introduced, which specifically included in the new national body, churches which were not prepared to accept any form of covenanted relationship, provided such churches fulfilled all the other requirements for membership of the national body. This led to a very lively debate and from my vantage point in the well of the hall, I was convinced that the amendment had succeeded. However, when the chairman announced the result of the vote, he reported 441 votes for the amendment and 548 votes against and, therefore, declared that the amendment had been defeated.[13] (I later heard that those delegates sitting in the galleries had voted heavily against the amendment). The assembly then agreed that the revised draft constitution should be sent to the churches.

After the 1965 May assembly, correspondence between the Congregational Association and local Congregational churches increased and gradually a mailing list was compiled, of churches, ministers and individual church members, who had serious concerns about the proposed revised constitution. By the summer of 1965, this mailing list consisted of 130 names. Other evidence suggested that about 170 churches were against the proposals but this only represented about 6% of the total number of Congregational churches in England and Wales.

In September 1965, the secretary of the CUEW, Revd John Huxtable, wrote to all Congregational ministers and churches advising them of the current position in respect of the proposed revised constitution. The main points in this letter were as follows:

1. The 1965 May Assembly approved a revised draft constitution, which is based on the concept of local Congregational churches formally covenanting together to form a national body.
2. The name of this national body is to be "The Congregational Church in England and Wales".[14]

13 *Ibid* (1965–1966) 83–4.
14 *Ibid* 85.

3. All member churches of CUEW will remain in membership with the new body unless they give notice of their intention to withdraw.
4. However, because the proposed revised constitution is based on each church covenanting with other Congregational churches, it follows that each church has to come to a decision on this matter at a duly convened church meeting.
5. In order that council and the 1966 May assembly can be advised of the names of churches, which have agreed to covenant, could you please advise the Revd John Huxtable of your church's decision?

The period between Huxtable's letter and the 1966 May assembly was an exceedingly busy one for those involved with the work of the Congregational Association. Correspondence with the local Congregational churches greatly increased, and this led to contacts with more churches, who were now expressing concerns. One development, however, was in my view premature. This was the decision of a small number of churches to withdraw completely from the national Congregational body because of their total opposition to the proposed new constitution. These churches numbered just over twenty and were indicated in the 1966–67 *Congregational Year Book* with the bracketed letters (RW) in front of the name of the church.

At the 1966 May assembly, Huxtable reported that 1761 Congregational churches (representing 80% of the total number of church members then in the CUEW) had voted to covenant together and form the Congregational Church in England and Wales. Only 42 churches had definitely declined to covenant, 56 churches had deferred their decision, and 24 were reported as being "in correspondence". As this was a clear majority the Congregational Church in England and Wales was formally inaugurated at that assembly. A service of thanksgiving and dedication was held at 10.30am, on Sunday, 22 May 1966 at the Whitefield Memorial Church, Tottenham Court Road, London, and was televised by the BBC on its national network.[15]

Before coming to a judgement on the value of the above achievement, it is important to consider what effect all these efforts for constitutional change had on the local churches. In this respect, it is illuminating to compare the statistical summary of the denomination in 1960 to that in 1966. In 1960 there were 2970 Congregational churches, with a total membership of 211,329. In 1966 the corresponding figures were 2,747 churches, with a total membership of 196,171.[16]

The table below categorises these churches, the figures being based on those recorded in the 1966–67 *Congregational Year Book*.

15 *Ibid* (1965–1967) 88, 96.
16 *Ibid* (1961) 312, (1966–1967) 329.

Category	Churches	Number %	Approx. members	%
Churches which covenanted	1761	59.3	157,000	74.4
Churches which withdrew	22	0.7	2,000	1.0
Churches which did not reply	954	32.1	37,000	17.5
Churches which closed (1960–1966)	233	7.9	15,000	7.1
TOTALS	2970	100.0	211,000	100.0

Referring to the statistics, no one can prove that if the enormous effort devoted to constitutional change had instead been directed towards helping our local churches, then the denomination would not have lost 15,000 Congregationalists and a spiral of steady decline would not have set in. It is, however, reasonable to assume that the losses would have been significantly less. Furthermore it is absolutely clear that the major constitutional changes brought divisions into a denomination which in 1960 was a united fellowship.

John Wilcox

THE CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY CIRCLE:
THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

Beginnings

A letter from John Bray of Torbay appeared in the January 1978 edition of *Congregational News* reminding readers that, because of the independent nature of the Congregational churches, "there is no central organisation … to compile the histories of our churches". He urged readers to send him ideas which might help to preserve the history of those Congregational churches which had not joined the United Reformed Church. He asked, "Should an occasional history news sheet be sent out giving information on the history of our churches?"[1]

In the next issue of *Congregational News* (March/April 1978), Mr Young of Tutbury modestly suggested that people might keep scrapbooks of old photographs, newspaper cuttings and other such items of interest. These could be passed on to a local church for safekeeping. In the May edition of *Congregational News* Bray reported that he had received a number of useful suggestions. These included a note to be sent to the churches with the *Congregational Year Book*, reminding them that nothing of historical interest should be thrown away but rather should be placed in the care of local records offices, Memorial Hall or sent to the Congregational Federation's office at Nottingham; that an article of a historical nature should be included in *Congregational News* or be circulated with the magazine; and that a meeting should be held at the May Meetings each year, with possibly "an eminent guest speaker". Perhaps the comment of most interest to us is that several people had suggested the re-establishment of the Congregational Historical Society, which in time might hold day or weekend conferences. John Bray intended that a first meeting should be held at Westminster Chapel during the May Meetings that year.[2]

A news item headed "Congregational History Circle" duly appeared in the July issue of *Congregational News*. The aims of this new organisation were "to enable Congregationalists to derive inspiration from our history; and to encourage the preservation of records and documents". It was noted that a newsletter would be issued during the winter and that another meeting would be held at the 1979 May Meetings. But not everyone was happy at the formation of

1 *Congregational News* (January/February 1978) 10.
2 *Ibid* (May/June 1978) 14.

the Congregational History Circle. Neil Caplan wrote a letter which stated that the formation of a historical Society was "an unhappy and unrealistic suggestion", given that the United Reformed Church Historical Society was a learned society whose scope already covered the history of Congregationalism. Caplan, despite being a "continuing Congregationalist and former Committee member of the Congregational Historical Society", who occasionally contributed to its *Transactions*, urged readers to support the work of the United Reformed Church Historical Society. Donald Raine of Shipley echoed these sentiments, stating that since 1972 he had been a member of the United Reformed Church Historical Society and that it had met "all my needs in relation to Congregational History, with the addition of a further aspect of nonconformity—the history of the Presbyterian Churches".[3]

Trevor Watts responded to Caplan and Raine in the November edition of *Congregational News*, commenting that those "who wish to pay subscriptions to the URC society as well [as to the History Circle] are free to do so. That Society will not be a very helpful one for those who are concerned about Congregational Tradition and Principle. I do not think it would like to give a full discussion of the book by Reg Cleaves, for example", referring to Cleaves' *Congregationalism 1960–1976 The Story of the Federation* which had been published only in the previous year.[4]

The Congregational History Circle Magazine

In January 1979 the first edition of the *Congregational History Circle Magazine* appeared. It was edited by Dr J W Ashley Smith and the first page listed John Bray as secretary of the Circle and David Morrell of Torquay as treasurer. Membership of the History Circle was then a mere fifty pence! John Bray, in his notes, commented that the Circle had a membership of twelve churches and thirty-six individuals, with donations to date amounting to £31.50. Some two thousand duplicated leaflets had been circulated amongst an Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches, the churches of the Congregational Federation and the unaffiliated Congregational churches. Ministerial training colleges had been notified of the formation of the Circle and there had been some overseas contacts made. Readers were urged to discover what archive material existed and where it was located. It should not be allowed to end up on the "rubbish pile" but might perhaps be placed at Memorial Hall. Indeed lists of such available records might be published.

It was suggested that slides and photographs should be collected of both buildings and people. The late Harold Wright took this suggestion to heart and

3 *Ibid* (July/August 1978) 13–14.

4 *Ibid* (November/December 1978) 15. RW Cleaves *Congregationalism 1960–1976: The Story of the Federation* (Swansea, 1977).

collected a huge number of photographs of chapels and Congregational events. He shared the hope that the Circle would act as a safe repository of chapel histories, whilst the memories of older people might be written down for future generations.

This first edition of the *Magazine* included articles by its critic, Neil Caplan, on 'Sources for Congregational Church History and the History of Protestant Dissent', and by Bill Ashley Smith on 'Guestwick-Briston: Gathered Church and Popular Religion'. Notice was given that the next meeting of the History Circle would be at Norwich, during the May Meetings of the Congregational Federation, when Alan Argent would give an address on "The Importance of History to Congregationalism".

The second *Magazine* appeared in May 1979 when John Bray wrote an article on 'The Importance of Preserving our Church Records'. Angela Robinson reviewed a biography of the Countess of Huntingdon and Trevor Watts contributed notes on the Welsh Congregational Historical Society and their magazine *Y Cofiadur*. A third *Magazine* appeared in November 1979 when Trevor Watts succeeded Bill Ashley Smith as editor. Alan Argent's address, delivered to the May meeting of the Circle, was published along with an article expressing concern about the History Circle's reaction to proposed changes at Memorial Hall, in relation to the Congregational Library and its future. A good deal of discussion had been given over to this topic at the Norwich meeting and fears were expressed that the library might be broken up and possibly dispersed. John Wilcox reassured readers of the *Magazine* that the future of the Congregational Library was a matter of the utmost concern to the Memorial Hall Trustees and that they desired to make the library more useful to scholars.

From this time on the *Magazine* appeared twice a year, in May and November. In the May 1980 *Magazine* it was noted that a joint meeting was to be arranged with the Union of Welsh Independents Historical Society, with Dr Arvel Steece of the American Congregational Association and the History Circle, during the International Congregational Conference at Bangor, in north Wales, during July 1981. The annual meeting of the History Circle was held at Bristol in May. Further links were being built with other Congregational bodies around the world at this period, something that seems to have lapsed over the years. The secretary wrote in the November 1980 *Magazine* of regular advertisements appearing in the Irish, American, Welsh Congregational publications, and articles from as far a field as New Zealand being passed on to the editor for inclusion in the Magazine. Membership had increased to 87 individual members, whilst overseas, church and college membership made a total of 120 members. Trevor Watts, returning to a favourite Shrewsbury theme, wrote on Job Orton. Neil Caplan noted a recent find of chapel records, in a closed URC building, which he had arranged to be transferred to the local records office and he urged

members to track down similar records, whilst articles on Kilmainham Congregational Church in Dublin, St Mary's Congregational Church, Gloucester, and James Scott and the Heckmondwike Academy also appeared.

The annual meeting of the History Circle was held on the evening prior to the May Meetings at Trinity Chapel, Brixton in 1981. It was reported at this meeting that individual membership had increased to 104, whilst with overseas members, colleges and other historical societies about 170 copies of the *Magazine* were now distributed. Articles on the beginnings of Welsh Congregationalism, the Colonial Missionary Society and the church at St. Austell appeared, amongst those published.

International Links

The November *Magazine* contained several pages of news from the International Congregational Conference in Bangor. The History Circle appears to have played quite a large part in arranging outings to places of historical interest and hosting evening meetings. Perhaps the highlight of these events at the Bangor Conference was a trip to Rhosmeirch, on Anglesey, to see the ancient Congregational chapel there. A brief service was held in the chapel with members of other local Congregational churches, joining members of the conference. The Conference *Record of Proceedings* notes that "two coaches and a number of cars were not sufficient to carry all those wishing to attend and regrettably we had to leave behind some who would otherwise have participated".[5] Following the service, Dr Harry Butman of the USA unveiled a plaque, in the graveyard of the chapel, in honour of the Revd Jenkin Morgan, the first Congregational minister in the area, and also commemorating the conference being held in Bangor.

On the Thursday of the conference a crowded meeting was held to hear a panel of eminent Congregational historians, including Dr R Tudur Jones, Dr Arvel Steece, Revd Dafydd Wyn Wiliam and Dr ED Jones. Bill Ashley Smith chaired this meeting at which the panel answered questions from the floor and Tudur Jones gave a lecture, entitled "Off to Cincinnati in the morning: a portrait of Principal Dr Michael D Jones". It was noted with pleasure that members of the various Congregational historical societies around the world were able to meet there and put faces to names, known previously only through correspondence.[6]

The History Circle took a keen interest in the preservation of Union Chapel, Islington. The *Magazine* included the comment in 1981 that the building was threatened with demolition and members of the History Circle were urged to get

5 *The Bangor Challenge: International Congregational Fellowship Record of Proceedings 1981* (1982) 93.

6 *Ibid* 93–4.

involved, writing letters to ensure the survival of the building. In what seems to be all too common in the *Magazine*, during its early years, Union Chapel was mistakenly referred to as Islington Chapel. Betty Taylor, then church secretary at Union Chapel, wrote in the next issue of the *Magazine* that Islington Chapel, although once Congregational, is a different building currently used as a factory not a church! The high number of factual errors in the early issues of the *Magazine*, not to mention spelling mistakes are something that the History Circle cannot be proud of. The Circle and its publications then witnessed to an enthusiasm for Congregationalism and its traditions and became, at least in part, vehicles for campaigning on certain issues and causes, rightly or wrongly perceived to be at risk. It is fortunate that over recent years the *Magazine* has improved significantly and can now stand as an equal alongside the publications of other denominational historical societies.

Chapel Tours

In May 1983 the first tour of chapels and places of historic interest was held in Sheffield, on the Friday prior to the CF May meetings. Over the years these regular pre-May Meetings tours have become known, to some, as the "Chapel Crawl"! Others prefer a title with less unfortunate associations. Dr Clyde Binfield led this first Chapel tour before the AGM held in the evening at Central URC.

The 1984 Chapel tour was held in London, with members gathering for lunch at Trinity Chapel, Brixton. A coach had been arranged for this tour which took members of the Circle to Grafton Square URC, Clapham, past Wheatsheaf Hall, Vauxhall, Stockwell Green URC, Grove Chapel, Camberwell and the former Claylands Congregational Chapel, near Kennington Oval. In the evening the AGM was held at Trinity, Brixton. Bill Ashley Smith chaired the meeting, at which it was reported that the CHC membership had increased to 183, whilst the total number of the magazines distributed was 222. A small archive of material was now held by the Circle at Trinity, Brixton and the secretary, John Bray had been given a lot of material which he hoped to add to the material at Brixton. At this meeting the History Circle adopted a constitution. Bill Ashley Smith spoke about "Christian Heritage Year" and noted that a historical exhibition would be held at the Congregational Centre, Nottingham, in the autumn to coincide with the Federation's Autumn Assembly. He also requested the loan of various Congregational hymn books for this exhibition.

The December 1984 edition of the *Magazine* contained a lot of material on International Congregationalism. Tudur Jones traced the origins of the International Congregational Council, Dr Butman looked at the formation of the International Congregational Fellowship and Iorwerth Jones looked forward to the forthcoming International Conference to be held at Beverly, Massachusetts in the following August.

The 1985 Chapel tour was held at Oldham, in Lancashire. CHC members visited the Congregational chapels at Greenacres, Hope, and Ashton Road, where tea was provided, and Dobcross and Chadderton, where the AGM was held. But perhaps the most interesting of the buildings visited that day was the Independent Methodist Chapel in George Street. This impressed as a quite extraordinary building and the church meeting there claimed to be the first to use the title Independent Methodist (around 1800). The chapel retained all its fittings and beneath the building were stables. It was sad to hear recently that this building had been demolished.

The Chapel Tours continued in 1986, with a visit to Leicester, followed by the AGM in the church house of Clarendon Park Chapel. The treasurer, David Morrell, retired from his office and Christopher Damp was elected in his stead. Around this time the task of treasurer was difficult, as expenditure seemed to be greater than income. Both the treasurer and secretary had lent money to the History Circle to enable it to continue, and no *Magazine* was published in 1986, a double issue being published early in 1987. The chapel tour that May toured sites in north London, including Abney URC and the Clapton Park URC, which was then in a derelict state, with the congregation meeting in a small school room. I vividly remember venturing up into the attic, which contained the winding devices to lower the chapel lamps, and ascending the narrow staircase, leading to the roof, to see the view over Hackney. The day finished with tea and the AGM at Union Chapel.

Again there was a break in the production of the *Magazine*, the next issue appearing in June 1988. That year the Chapel tour was held in Exeter. Visits were made to various chapels including Point in View and Pinhoe, whilst tea and the AGM were held at Topsham Congregational Chapel.

The 1989 Chapel tour was held in Cambridge. Recalling his years as an undergraduate, Bill Ashley Smith led the touring CHC party to an old chapel, then part of a department store, in the centre of Cambridge, to the exterior of the former Cheshunt College, to Emmanuel URC (formerly Congregational), and then on by car to a number of village chapels, including Little Shelford, Litlington and Guilden Morden. As the party was about to leave Cambridge, it was realised that Paul Faunch, Marion Beales and Brian Phipps were missing! After a good deal of delay and with some of the cars having left, the missing trio were found very breathless—much to their relief! On another occasion when visiting chapels on a coach, the party was held up for twenty minutes because our former editor had needed some cough mixture and had gone to find a chemist shop! Many such adventures enlivened these early and popular Chapel crawls. Problems continued into the next year with finance and the production of the *Magazine*.

At the AGM in 1989, held at Guilden Morden Chapel, the secretary warned that the production of a *Magazine* during the year would absorb all the available money, leaving little to cover the cost of postage. It was thus agreed that the *Magazine* should be produced ready for the CF May Meetings, so that copies could be handed out to save postage. This practice has continued and a regular History Circle table at the May Meetings usually produces a number of new members each year. The 1990 Chapel tour started from Brixton where the AGM was held in the evening.

In January 1991 the driving force behind the foundation of the History Circle, our secretary, John Bray, died suddenly. This dealt a great blow to the Circle for its progress to date was largely due to his energy and enthusiasm. He had made many contacts with colleges, friends overseas and was a great advocate for the Circle. Something of the initial zest and campaigning zeal of the History Circle died with John. That same year, Southam, near Leamington Spa, was the starting point of the Chapel tour. Lunch was served at Southam, before a visit to the surrounding village chapels was made by car. The chapels at Narborough, Long Itchington and Ullesthorpe were all visited, before the AGM in the evening at Southam. It was at this meeting that our present secretary, Colin Price was appointed. Members of the Circle were securely accommodated at the convent in Southam, before the May Meetings the next day, although an evening outing resulted in the majority of the overnight guests being locked out, albeit temporarily.

The accommodation the next year was much more basic. Most of us stayed at the Liverpool YMCA but the Chapel tour more than made up for any discomfort. We met at Port Sunlight URC and were treated to a splendid lunch, prepared by the members of the church. We were then conveyed by Mervyn Ashton, in one of his collection of historic buses to Oxton Road Congregational Chapel, in Birkenhead, by now in a state of decay and delapidation. After discovering some rather wet and mouldy church minute books, we went on to Great George Street Chapel, now a community centre, and then to the historic Toxteth Chapel. Our next stop was Wavertree Congregational Chapel, where we had tea, before visiting the United Reformed churches at Anfield and Chadwick Mount. The latter building was interesting, only having recently been built. It had no windows in the outside walls because of vandalism but had a central garden with large windows all around. There was a slightly awkward moment when leaving Anfield when a gang of teenage boys took an unwarranted interest in the bus, on which we were travelling. Mervyn decided it was best to leave, despite a number of us still not being on board. We were forced to run behind the bus and jump on as best we could whilst the boys pelted us with pebbles!

Dr Alan Argent took over from Trevor Watts, as editor of the *Magazine* from the Liverpool meeting, editing the first number of volume 3, in May 1993. The

style of the *Magazine* changed under the new editor. Those who had been instrumental in the beginnings of the History Circle were now taking a back seat. The *Magazine* lost some of its intimacy but, in doing so, became more of a learned journal. Dr Argent's first number contained articles on Congregationalism in 1930s Cambridge, and on Henry Allon of Union Chapel. The 1993 Chapel Crawl began again at Brixton, from where we travelled to some of the sites connected with the martyrdoms of the Elizabethan Separatists, Penry, Barrow and Greenwood—1993 being the four hundredth anniversary of their deaths.

The 1994 *Magazine* continued the more academic flavour, introduced by the new editor. Ian Sellers wrote about a Cheshire village chapel, Derek Watson wrote on Muriel Paulden and Trevor Watts revisited his hero, Job Orton. The Chapel tour that year returned to some of the sights in and about Sheffield. We met at Central URC, from where Clyde Binfield, the editor of the *Journal of the United Reformed History Society*, led us on a tour. Later in the day we held our AGM at Tapton Hill Chapel, before visiting the other two Congregational chapels in the city, Wycliffe and Hillsborough Tabernacle.

The following year our Chapel tour took us to the Welsh capital, Cardiff, where Christopher Gillham led the, by now intrepid, veterans in the CHC party on a minibus trip around various chapels. After visiting the former Presbyterian Church of England (now URC) in Cardiff, we travelled to Congregational chapels in Barry, Blaenavon, Dowlais, Llanhilleth, Abertillery, Beaufort and Ton Pentre where we had a proper chapel tea—much appreciated! 1995 saw the publication of our first supplement to the *Magazine*, in conjunction with the United Reformed Church History Society and the Cymdeithas Hanes Annibynwyr Cumru, on the history of the Congregational Fund Board.

In 1996 we met again in London, this time at the chapel in Kentish Town. From there we visited the former Lyndhurst Road Chapel at Hampstead, now a recording studio, where the very first meeting of the Congregational Federation was held, we saw the exterior of their former mission building, Lyndhurst Hall, in Kentish Town, then went to Abney Park Cemetery, via the historic Newington Green Unitarian Chapel. The magnificent cemetery houses the graves of many of the great and the good of nineteenth century Congregationalism. Over the years members of the Circle often have sung a hymn, on these occasions, and thus we gathered around the statue of Dr Isaac Watts in Abney Park to sing "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord"—much to the amazement of other visitors to the cemetery! After tea at Harecourt URC in Islington, we paid a brief visit to Camden Town URC, before holding the AGM at Kentish Town.

A second visit to Oldham was made in 1997 when we visited some of the chapels surrounding Oldham. We met again at Greenacres, before travelling to

Uppermill, Delph and Dobcross. In 1998 we met at North Street Congregational Chapel, Taunton and from there visited Taunton School, Paul's Meeting URC, Taunton Unitarian chapel and the Congregational chapel at Stoke St Mary. The following year we met again in London and visited Wesley's Chapel, Bunhill Fields, Tabernacle Welsh Congregational Chapel, and the Congregational Library, where we examined the minutes of the founding meeting of the Congregational Historical Society, held a century earlier.

Since 1999, we have not held a Chapel Crawl (except Perth in 2002) nor organised an annual meeting. The officers of the History Circle have met in 2002 and 2003 to discuss urgent business. The *Magazine* continues to be produced each year, ready for distribution at the May Meetings and has become a respected journal of Congregational History, under Alan Argent's editorship. But the work and enthusiasm of the early days of the History Circle seems sadly to be no more. It is time we once again tried to recapture the playful spirit of these earlier days and to this end it is hoped that a Chapel tour and an AGM will be held, prior to the May Meetings this year in Cheltenham.

A Suggestion

One final thought. I have never much cared for the name Congregational History Circle—it makes me think of a knitting circle or magic circle, or some such thing. It is over thirty years since the old Congregational Historical Society was absorbed into the URC History Society. Congregationalists today have a distinct identity from the URC and a growing confidence in their own ecclesiastical principles and heritage. If we wish to be known as a learned society, should we not once again become the Congregational Historical Society? This would be fully in keeping with the desire of those who wrote to *Congregational News* in 1978 calling for the re-establishment of a Congregational Historical Society.

Chris Damp

TWO GREAT ECUMENICAL CONGREGATIONALISTS:
MARGARET, LADY STANSGATE AND REVD ELSIE CHAMBERLAIN

The history of the Congregational Federation owes much to two formidable women, both ecumenically minded, but both equally unminded to accept the union of the Congregational and Presbyterian denominations, that is the United Reformed Church in 1972, and both committed to the advancement of women, particularly in church leadership. These two concerns were not separate, but came together as a passionate desire for better and more just structures and attitudes in the Christian Church.

Revd Elsie Chamberlain called herself an 'ecumaniac',[1] and Margaret Wedgwood Benn, Viscountess Stansgate, described herself as 'deeply ecumenical'.[2] Both women were committed to and involved in ecumenical work. But at the formation of the Congregational Federation, composed of churches which did not join the United Reformed Church, Lady Stansgate was the founding president, and was followed a year later by Elsie Chamberlain.

Their attitude may appear paradoxical, especially to those for whom the formation of the United Reformed Church was the culmination of many years of ecumenical vision and endeavour, and a pointer to the future. However, as I will demonstrate, theirs was a truer ecumenical vision, and one which the British churches as a whole came to adopt, a generation after the events of the 1970s.

Legitimate Diversity

In her presidential address to the newly formed Congregational Federation in 1972, Lady Stansgate spoke of 'unity in diversity'[3], a phrase which had appeared in her letter in January of that year in *The Times*, where she spoke of, 'unity in the richest diversity'.[4] This came to be the language of the ecumenical process of the

1 Recalled by me and others on many occasions. First documented in her chairman's address to the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1956, see A Argent "Elsie Chamberlain 1947–1967" in *Congregational History Circle Magazine* vol 4 no 2 (Spring 2000) 108.

2 M Stansgate *My Exit Visa* (1992) 50.

3 Argent, "Elsie Chamberlain, Years of Decision 1967–1973" in *Congregational History Circle Magazine* vol 4 no 3 (Spring 2001) 191.

4 *Congregational News* (March-April 1973) quoted in Argent, "Margaret Stansgate: Radical Dissenter" in *Congregational History Circle Magazine* vol 4 no 6 (Spring 2004) 435.

1980s, superseding that of organic and visible union, current in the 1960s and 1970s. The 1989 newsletter, *Not Strangers but Pilgrims*, describes the process as it stood on the threshold of decision: 'All this depends on a new vision of life together: not one monolithic church but rather a family gathering together the gifts and diversities developed while churches worked apart'.[5] This could almost be a quotation from Lady Stansgate's presidential address, in which she said that Christianity should not be seen as, 'a rigidly-organised monolithic Church'.[6]

The Swanwick Declaration, enshrined in the so-called, 'Marigold Book', which arose out of discussions in the 1980s and undergirded the formation of the new ecumenical instruments in 1990, spoke, rather more guardedly: 'In the unity we seek, we recognize that there will not be uniformity but *legitimate diversity*'.[7] This cautious phrase only hinted at what was in fact a seismic shift from a vision of organic union to one of shared life and mission. The name of the process, 'Not Strangers but Pilgrims', suggested a model of like-minded people walking and working together, rather than alien people needing to overcome their strangeness to each other.

Margaret Stansgate

Lady Stansgate was born into a family with roots in the complex variety of Scottish Christianity though her parents were not practising Christians but, in their own words, 'puritan agnostic humanists'.[8] Her father was a Liberal MP and her mother a feminist. Influenced in her politics by both parents, she joined her mother in supporting women's suffrage; her own marriage expressed a reasonable degree of equality, given the times. Marriage to another Liberal politician gave her the opportunity to travel and to meet many political and religious leaders.

By her own choice, she became a Christian as a child, at first attending an Episcopalian Church alone. The development of her Christian life demonstrates both commitment to her faith and a lively, radical, questioning mind. Studying theology as an external student at Kings College, London, she acquired a love for the Hebrew scriptures and their language. She brought up her own children on the Old Testament, in particular, the prophets, with their call to justice.[9] Later, invited by Elsie Chamberlain to speak on 'Lift Up Your Hearts', she chose the prophetic challenge as her theme. [10]

She was a lifelong supporter of women's leadership, particularly of women's ministry in the churches. She knew Constance Coltman and Maude Royden,

5 *Not Strangers but Pilgrims* (1989) 1.

6 Congregational Federation 141st Congregational Assembly 14 October 1972 Record of Proceedings, p. 31, quoted in Argent *loc cit*.

7 *Churches Together in Pilgrimage* (1989) 7. The italics are mine.

8 Stansgate *op cit* 21.

9 *Ibid* 70.

10 *Ibid* 226.

and used to attend services at the Guild House, where Royden preached and hosted services to which guest speakers, like Gandhi in 1931, were invited.[11] Joining the League of the Church Militant, which worked for and supported women's ministry, she found it lacking in funds and activities, so became a member of the committee which came to meet in her house. Her energy and her contacts, helped the League to gain influence.

As part of the Women's Suffrage Movement, the League was disbanded in 1928, when that cause was won. However, the allied cause of women's ordination was far from achieving the same outcome, so in 1929, she shared in founding a new organisation, the 'Society for the Equal Ministry of Men and Women Men in the Church (interdenominational)', which later changed its name to 'The Society for the Ministry of Women in the Church (ecumenical)', and has disbanded only recently, after 75 years. The demise of the Society is partly due to the success of the long campaign for women's ordination in the Church of England, and partly due to the difficulty of maintaining an ecumenical organisation. In its early days, it had two presidents, Lady Stansgate being its Free Church President.

During the first half of the 20th century, the ordination of women must have seemed to be within the grasp of the major Protestant denominations. Constance Coltman had been ordained to a Congregational church in 1917, and Maude Royden, an Anglican, had been called to share in the ministry of the City Temple in the same year. Though there was still terrific opposition in the Church of England, and though there was only a trickle of women taking up ministry in those churches that offered them ordination, the movement must have seemed to be gaining, particularly in the light of advances in the equality of women elsewhere in society.

Elsie Chamberlain

Elsie's mother was an active Congregationalist, at Islington Chapel, London, becoming its church secretary in 1929. Encouraged in her vocation to ministry, Elsie began a theology degree at Kings College, London in 1936, expecting to do her ministerial training at Mansfield College, Oxford. However, she eventually entered the Congregational ministry in an unorthodox fashion, asking for her practical training with Muriel Paulden in Liverpool to be counted, instead of taking the conventional course of study at Mansfield.

Elsie was also a member of the Society for the Equal Ministry of Women and Men in the Church, and a powerful supporter of women's ministry. The minutes of the society during these years resound with purposeful resolution and a sense of optimism. The society was confident of its power and influence, with a lively expectation that its campaigns would be successful.

11 *Ibid* 72.

During the Second World War, the society set up a 'War Emergency Committee', on which both Constance Coltman and Elsie Chamberlain sat. The ordination of Li Tim Oi, an emergency measure during the war, by the Anglican Bishop of Hong Kong was greeted with enthusiasm. In 1942, the society planned an 'At Home' to include discussion of a sermon by the Bishop which was strongly in favour of the ordination of women, when, 'Miss Chamberlain undertook to be ready to start or to carry on the general discussion'.[12]

Women's Ministry

In 1944, the following resolution of the society was widely publicised: 'This Society for the Equal Ministry of Men and Women in the Church notes with warm interest the ordination to the Priesthood of Miss Lei Tim Oi of China; gladly recognises that the admission of women to the Priesthood has thereby become a matter of world interest, debate and importance; and prayerfully expresses the hope that the Chinese Church will be accorded in this matter that liberty of action and experiment which is claimed by the Church of England, for itself and for other National Churches, in matters not contrary to Holy Scripture.'[13]

Despite this carefully worded resolution, and the widespread support for the ordination, the official reaction of the Church of England was hostile to this pioneering appointment in Hong Kong. Liberty of action was not allowed, and Archbishop Fisher of Canterbury put considerable pressure on the Hong Kong Synod to overturn Bishop Hall's action. This proved successful and Li Tim Oi resigned from her priestly ministry. Lady Stansgate notes that, 'I held a meeting in my house at which a very indignant Bishop Hall told us about the enormous pressure that had been placed upon him',[14] which included the threat of withdrawal of aid from the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

This furore formed the background to a bold move by Margaret Stansgate and Elsie Chamberlain when Margaret's husband was appointed at Secretary of State for Air in the post war cabinet. Margaret seized the opportunity to fulfil her ambition to encourage women's chaplaincies in the RAF and, seeing in Elsie someone who could fulfil this role, she asked her husband to secure a place for her. Against ferocious opposition from Archbishop Fisher, Elsie was appointed, the first woman chaplain in the services.

Although hopes for women's ordination in the Church of England were dashed, the post war period saw great optimism in the desire to bring about

12 Minutes of The Society for the Equal Ministry of Men and Women in the Church (interdenominational), War Emergency Executive Committee, 16 October 1942.

13 Minutes of The Society for the Equal Ministry of Men and Women in the Church (interdenominational), War Emergency Executive Committee, 10 October 1944.

14 Stansgate *op cit* 200.

reconciliation and peace. The United Nations came into being and, in Britain, the British Council of Churches was formed in 1942, and the World Council of Churches was inaugurated in 1948 in Amsterdam. The two women were enthusiastic at these developments.

International Ecumenism

Both Margaret Stansgate and Elsie Chamberlain attended the inaugural assembly of the WCC. The latter was present as an accredited visitor, not as part of the Congregational Union of England and Wales' delegation, though by the time of the second assembly in Illinois in 1954, she was one of the five delegates. At that later assembly, she was the only woman to lead and preach at one of the morning worship sessions.

Margaret Stansgate played a more active role in the 1948 assembly. She was on the Study Commission and a member of the committee on the Nature of the Church in God's Design, at the instigation of the general secretary, Dr Willem Visser't Hooft. She was also a consultant on the Place of Women in the Church, on the committee chaired by the Principal of Isabella Thorburn College in Lucknow, Sarah Chakko, and she chaired the 'alternate' committee on the same theme. This issue had been identified as one of the four main concerns to be addressed at the assembly, though women actually formed a very small minority on the Council.[15] She attended then, as an Anglican, but recalls Archbishop Fisher's reaction to her appointment, which was to write to Visser't Hooft, 'warning him that my views on the ministry of women in the church were not those of the Church of England'.[16]

Returning from the assembly, therefore, she left the Church of England and became a Congregationalist. By this time, Elsie Chamberlain was minister of Vineyard Congregational Church, Richmond-upon-Thames, to which she had been called in 1947. Lady Stansgate became a member of Vineyard, under Elsie's ministry in 1948.

This was a time of intense ecumenical discussion. Derek Palmer notes that, with the failure of the unity talks under the Churches Council for Covenanting and the Church Unity Commission in the 1980s, 'over a quarter of a century of hard slog, much prayer and millions of words, written and spoken, came to a shuddering halt'.[17] In the context of the formation of national and the World Councils of Churches, at a notable sermon at Great St Mary, Cambridge, in 1946, Archbishop Fisher had invited the Free Churches to take episcopacy into their own system.

15 E Kaye, J Lees, K Thorpe *Daughters of Dissent* (2004) 98.
16 Stansgate *op cit* 205.
17 D Palmer *Strangers No Longer* (1990) 14.

Although only the Methodist Church responded officially to the Archbishop's invitation, thereby embarking on a long and bitter process, which, after interruptions, still continues, other unity talks were under way. In 1948, the deacons of the Vineyard Church were invited to consider the negotiations between the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and the Presbyterian Church of England, negotiations which led, a generation later, to the formation of the United Reformed Church. Not only did the deacons approve the talks, they urged upon the Free Church Federal Council the further step of working towards the union of all the English Free Churches. Elsie was as enthusiastic about unity at local level as at the denominational. In the 1950s, she tried to organise open air services by the Thames in Richmond, together with the local Presbyterians and Anglicans, but without success. However the Vineyard continued to work with the local Presbyterian Church.

This was not out of character for Elsie Chamberlain, as her call to her first church, Friern Barnet, had been on the basis of her positive attitude to interdenominational co-operation.[18] During the 1950s, both women were intensely active, working for their two great aims: reconciliation between divided religious communities, and the advancement of women, particularly in ministry.

Margaret Stansgate's Work for International Reconciliation

Lady Stansgate embarked on a series of global travels with her husband, meeting many political and religious leaders, as she records in her autobiography. She had visited Jerusalem in 1926, a year after the Hebrew University had been founded. It is difficult to imagine what her feelings would be about the present situation in Israel and Palestine, but at that time she was a convinced supporter of the Jewish cause. She notes Arab hostility without comment.[19] Later, through her husband's involvement in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), she was very aware of the situation surrounding the foundation of Israel in 1949, and subsequent events. She notes that, 'The Israeli government under Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister, was anxious to take every opportunity of becoming part of the comity of nations'[20] and was delighted when the Israeli delegate, Rabbi Narock, spoke to the IPU in Hebrew, 'for the first time ever a modern international conference was addressed in the language of the Prophets and one in which Jesus himself had been proficient'.[21]

Visiting Israel in 1968, she records emotional scenes of reconciliation when the operation, 'Eagles Wings', brought many Jewish 'exiles' back to the land.

18 Christ Church Friern Barnet church meeting minutes 1938–1950, 3 September 1941, quoted in "Elsie Chamberlain: The Early Years 1910–1947" in *Congregational History Circle Magazine* vol 4 no 1 (Spring 1999) 18.

19 Stansgate *op cit* 83.

20 *Ibid* 207.

21 *Ibid*.

Whole Jewish communities were transported by air to settle in Israel. She remembers her host, Moshe Rossetti, almost in tears, declaring on the arrival of immigrants from Persia and Afghanistan, 'These are the same people as myself and we haven't met for three thousand years'.[22] Later she was asked to speak at a lunch where she and her husband were guests of the Knesset.

Lady Stansgate worked to promote the cause of Israel, proud of the foundation of the Hebrew University, which she saw as a sign of the Jewish love of learning, and of the civilisation of a people who established a university even before they had a State. She attended fund raising events and worked with the women's group of the British Friends of the Hebrew University, recording her pride when, in 1975, a substantial amount of money had been amassed, and the Margaret Stansgate Library was founded. 'It is appropriate', she writes, 'that I am associated with an institution to help people catch up with their education, for that is what I have been trying to do ever since I started school!'[23]

She keenly promoted closer relations between Christians and Jews. The Council of Christians and Jews had been founded in 1942, and was re-launched after 1945. Lady Stansgate attended this re-launch with her sons, Anthony and David, being a vice-president of the council.

This concern was in the minds of those who planned Lady Stansgate's memorial service, held in St Margaret's church, Westminster, on 17th December 1991. I shared the leadership of the service with Rabbi Jackie Tabick. The service ended with our saying the Aaronic blessing alternately in Hebrew and English. Tony Benn notes in his diary, 'she'd have been terribly pleased about a woman rabbi and a woman minister in the parliamentary church, absolutely delighted.'[24] Incidentally, Jackie Tabick is at present the chair of the World Congress of Faiths, which, though Lady Stansgate does not mention it in her autobiography, Tony Benn reports that she supported in his 'Appreciation' at the end of the book.[25]

Elsie, the CUEW and Ecumenism

Elsie Chamberlain, in the meantime, was pursuing her ministry through the local church and on a number of wider fronts. She worked for the BBC 1950–67, producing such features as 'Lift up your hearts' and the Daily Service, which she was the first woman to lead. She was president of the Women's Federation of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1950 and CUEW chairman 1956–7. Alan Argent notes that she was 'the first woman (and the only woman minister) to chair CUEW' and 'the first woman to preside over the assembly of

22 *Ibid* 210.
23 *Ibid* 231.
24 R Winstone (ed.) *Tony Benn Free at Last! Diaries 1991–2000* (2002) 67.
25 Stansgate *op cit* 234; www.worldfaiths.org.

any of the major Free Churches in England, which probably means that she was the first woman to preside over any Christian denomination anywhere at all'.[26]

This was at a time when the representation of women on the council and committees of the CUEW was declining. Most counties sent only male representatives, and only just over 6% of council members were women. Elaine Kaye comments, 'In general, therefore, the decision-making processes of the denomination were still in practice in the hands of men.'[27]

Despite this, Elsie Chamberlain's chairman's address focused not on women's ministry but on the call to the churches to work together. She said, 'I believe that a minister is a minister, regardless of whether that person is a he or a she. And it is as a minister that I shall be serving the Union.'[28] Nevertheless, her gender did not go unnoticed. Williams reproduces a note from Revd Dr Gordon Allison, a Roman Catholic, in which he quips, 'I suppose in popish terminology you are a Right Reverend MONSIGNORA', but also comments, 'With purple like yourself at the top, reunion is that much nearer—at any rate, union of charity, if not of faith.'[29]

It was to the latter concern that she turned in her chairman's address, where she spoke about Christian Unity. She praised the World Council of Churches, stating her opinion that, 'it is time the Free Church Council started to plan its own demise, that out of its ashes might rise in every place a council of churches, as interdenominational as the World Council of Churches.'[30]

Her desire was belatedly fulfilled, and more than fulfilled, in the formation of the new ecumenical instruments in 1990. Elsie's vision, together with those of other Congregationalists, notably Graham Adams, who were involved in the discussions leading to the formation of these instruments, must have been influential in the pattern that has emerged. The Free Church Federal Council has indeed engineered its own demise, having become, after a long period of discussion and definition, the Free Churches Group of Churches Together in England. During the previous decade, most local Free Church Councils had merged into local councils of churches, known under the new titles of, 'Churches Together in' whatever the town, village or area was called. In fact, they are more ecumenical than the World Council of Churches, since both the Roman Catholic Church and many of the smaller free and independent churches are full members.

Elsie Chamberlain's high public profile undoubtedly advanced the cause of women's ministry in the churches. Her work in the BBC enabled her to invite

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26 Argent "Elsie Chamblerlain 1947–1967" in *Congregational History Circle Magazine* vol 4 no 2 (Spring 2000) 106.

27 Kaye *et al op cit* 41.

28 J Williams *First Lady of the Pulpit: A Biography of Elsie Chamberlain* (Lewes, Sussex, 1993) 79.

29 *Ibid* The capitals are his.

30 Argent *op cit* 107.

women, as well as men, to speak and her leading the Daily Service got people used to hearing a woman taking a leadership role in religious services, though many still found it unpalatable.

She took opportunities to promote the cause. In June 1949, at the assembly of the International Congregational Council, she gave an address to the women's division on the 'Life and Work of Women in the World Church, which led to the resolution that, 'consideration should be given to more complete representation of women'.[31] Sadly, this battle is still being fought. I am the first woman moderator (2001–2005) of the successor body, the International Congregational Fellowship, and the executive committee is still overwhelmingly male. I have encountered opposition and pressure to stand down, from speaking at representative engagements, because of my gender.

Having left the BBC, Elsie contributed to a book called, *In Her own Right: a Discussion Conducted by the Six Point Group*,[32] a group working for the equality of women. Her chapter, 'The World in Which We Worship', strongly advocated women's ministry and ordination, contrasting it with other professions where women were successful, and where their presence was unremarkable. In the 1960s it seemed astonishing that so many denominations did not ordain women. Women had been exercising leadership in the churches since the previous century, serving as officers in the Salvation Army, preaching and leading services in some of the most difficult areas. Women had been ordained for nearly a hundred years in the United States and over fifty years in Britain. Many of the black majority churches, then gaining status in Britain, had women ministers and even bishops.[33]

Of course, the main target was the established Church, the Church of England. Even here, Elsie Chamberlain's example was cited. In the historic debate which culminated in the vote to ordain women to the priesthood, the Bishop of Chelmsford mentioned, 'a suburban parish in north London where the down-town end had been dominated by a Congregational Church where the minister was a woman, namely the Revd Elsie Chamberlain, who became in time the president of the Congregational Union'.[34]

Elsie never shared my view that the issue of women's ordination in the Church of England overshadowed discussions of and development of women's

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31 *Ibid* 104.

32 George Harrap & Co. (1968).

33 See J Wootton "The Ministry of Women in the Free Churches", a paper given at the AGM of the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, meeting on 11 November 1993 and published in *Feminist Theology Journal* no 8 (January 1995).

34 J Field-Bibb *Women Towards Priesthood, Ministerial Politics and Feminist Praxis* (Cambridge, 1991) 122, quoted in Argent, "Elsie Chamberlain: The Early Years 1910–1947" in *Congregational History Circle Magazine* vol 4 no 1 (Spring 1999) 22, where the author notes that Elsie was never president of CUEW, but was chairman of CUEW in 1956–57 and president of the Congregational Federation 1973–75.

ministry in other denominations. The popular discussion was always conducted as if 'The Church' did not ordain women, and as if there were no women already in leadership in any churches. When the first women were ordained in the Church of England, the media reported avidly on the first ordinations, the first wedding to be conducted by a woman, and so on, again, ignoring by then more than 50 years of women's ordination in England.

The URC and the Congregational Federation

By the late 1960s, the discussions between the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England were beginning to produce results. Even in 1966, when invited to covenant together as the Congregational Church in England and Wales, some local churches had refrained. The lines were being drawn up, between those who would join the United Reformed Church and those who would continue as Congregationalists.

Judging by their strong ecumenical stance, the expectation was that both Margaret Stansgate and Elsie Chamberlain would join the United Reformed Church. After all, it grew out of the discussions which both had supported during the post war years. The Vineyard church, at which Elsie was minister, and Elsie herself, in her chairman's address to the CUEW, had not only approved the talks, but had promoted a vision of further unity.

Indeed, while Margaret Stansgate became involved at an early stage, Elsie Chamberlain was not involved in the counter movement which grew up alongside the unity talks, led by Revd Reg Cleaves and John Wilcox, among others. The 'Congregational Association' at first argued against the formation of the new denomination, and then, when it seemed inevitable that it would be formed, worked to ensure that an organisation would exist for those churches which would choose not to join it. This was difficult work, since the stance of the CCEW was overwhelmingly in favour of the union. None of the official communication routes was available to the dissenting group, and I have memories, as a young person in the Loughborough Frederick Street church, at which John Wilcox was church secretary, and which had not covenanted in 1966, of stuffing envelopes for the mailings which went to all church secretaries and ministers, informing them of the alternatives.

Lady Stansgate had met John Wilcox at the CUEW May assembly in 1965, and was convinced by his concern for the future of Congregationalism. She became fully committed to the association, which held its committee meetings in her flat in London. She showed her support for the cause by speaking at rallies and sharing in writing letters to the press.[35]

35 Argent, "Margaret Stansgate—Radical Dissenter", in *Congregational History Circle Magazine* vol 4 no 6 (spring 2004) 430.

During this time, when various patterns of association were explored and names for the new organisation floated, including that which came to be accepted, 'Congregational Federation', Elsie Chamberlain's views were not known. She admitted herself that she made her decision late in the day, in fact, while she was working as assistant minister at the City Temple.

Her view eventually was that the new denomination was overly complex and legalistic, in comparison with the simplicity and openness of the Congregational structure. She voted against the URC at the CCEW assembly in 1971, to the surprise of many. Her decision, and the publicity accorded to it, led to a correspondence in the press with her former colleague at the City Temple, Kenneth Slack. Slack's responses were probably aimed not at converting Elsie back to the cause, but at limiting the effect of her 'defection' on others. Argent quotes minutes of the deacons meeting at her then church, Hutton Free Church, to the effect that in her view, 'the cause of general church union was not … helped by this move'.[36] He notes that, 'Her decision not to join the URC was a blow to its upholders and her support of the Congregational Federation was a major coup for its promoters.'[37]

Two Women and Congregationalism's Future

Elsie Chamberlain's and Margaret Stansgate's relations to Congregationalism have a certain symmetry. In 1948, Margaret Stansgate had left the Anglican Church to become a member of Elsie Chamberlain's Congregational Church, influenced, partly, by the convictions of her friend. In the 1960s and 1970s, the influence went the other way. Janette Williams notes that, 'Elsie consulted with other Congregationalists, including Lady Stansgate, and they opposed the move … Lady Stansgate was concerned about the dangers to Congregationalism if it joined the URC and she warned Elsie.'[38]

The Congregational Federation was formed in 1972. In the series of meetings which shaped the new organisation, both Lady Stansgate and Elsie Chamberlain played a central part. More than that, their presence and support gave the Congregational Federation standing. Indeed, so high was Elsie Chamberlain's profile that it was almost counter productive, as she tended to eclipse the denomination which had gained her support.

For the next twenty and more years, we were known as, 'Elsie's lot', even though she was one among many visionaries and architects of the Federation, several of whom had been involved in its organisation, far earlier than she had

36 Hutton Free Church Deacons Minutes 1970–74, 12 May 1971, quoted in Argent, "Elsie Chamberlain, Years of Decision 1967–1973", in *Congregational History Circle Magazine* vol 4 no 3 (Spring 2001) 185.

37 *Ibid* 189.

38 Williams *op cit* 87.

been. *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* articles on Elsie Chamberlain and Lady Stansgate refer to the Congregational Federation in disparaging terms. Margaret Wedgwood Benn is said, with Elsie Chamberlain, to have "led the Nottingham-based 'rump', the Congregational Federation, of about 300 churches",[39] while Kenneth Wolfe writes of Elsie Chamberlain that, "Although she was subsequently involved with the ecumenical movement Chamberlain nevertheless defended those who wished to continue with the ideals of Congregationalism. It was therefore fitting that she helped lead the Nottingham-based splinter group, the Congregational Federation."[40]

These assessments are fair neither to the two women, nor to the emergent Congregational Federation. The latter was neither a "rump" nor a "splinter group" even at the time, and is presently a respected member of the ecumenical instruments at four nations and national level, as well as being involved locally through many local churches. It has produced a moderator of the Churches Commission on Mission and of the Council for World Mission, among others in administrative and leadership positions.

Neither were the two women joint leaders of some crazy enterprise. The Congregational Federation at its foundation had Reg Cleaves as its chairman and John Wilcox as its secretary. It quickly developed a training scheme, youth organisation, administrative and committee structure, using the talents of its leadership at the time and encouraging future leaders. We were proud to have Lady Stansgate, a woman of independent mind and great influence, as our founder president, followed in office by another such woman in Elsie Chamberlain.

Nor was Elsie's involvement in the ecumenical movement subsequent to her support of the Congregational Federation, as the *Oxford DNB* article suggests. She was appointed ecumenical officer of the Congregational Federation precisely because of her interest in and experience of the ecumenical movement over more than twenty years. At the inaugural assembly of the CF, on 14th October 1972, at Westminster Chapel, she called on churches to develop close local ecumenical links, and saw the Congregational way as the agency for closer unity.[41]

She repeated this sentiment in her presidential address in 1973, stating that the basic beliefs of Congregationalists could provide, 'the basis for the unity of all Christendom',[42] and again in a radio discussion with John Huxtable, one of the main architects of the URC and joint general secretary. Here, she said, 'I see the way forward as the basis of accepting each other's churchmanship—acceptance of faith in Jesus Christ as the basis of our togetherness … I believe this is the way to

39 RT Stearn "Benn, Margaret Eadie Wedgwood" *Oxford DNB.*

40 KM Wolfe "Chamberlain, Elsie Dorothea" *Oxford DNB.*

41 Argent, "Elsie Chamberlain 1971–1980: On the Road", in *Congregational History Circle Magazine* vol 4 no 4 (Spring 2002) 256.

42 *Ibid* 272.

unity that could include us all provided we do not want to push one another into our kind of mould.'[43]

Prophetic Vision

Again, her vision was prophetic, as this was the pattern adopted in 1990, following the process of which she was a part. As ecumenical officer, Elsie represented the Congregational Federation at the 'talks about talks' on church unity in 1974. The Federation could so easily at this time have become isolationist, both because of its need to develop its own internal patterns and relationships, and through a lack of people to represent it ably. It is a recurrent problem for small denominations that ecumenical representation requires a lot of people, or a few very committed people. The Congregational Federation had one highly ecumenically committed, extremely able and energetic representative in Elsie Chamberlain, who worked alongside Margaret Stansgate, among others, in developing and expressing the distinctively Congregational model of unity.

In 1974, the Federation participated with others in the Churches Unity Commission (CUC). Again, the press statement, of 11th November, made the nature of the vision for unity clear. Only two years after the formation of the United Reformed Church, the eleven signatories to the press release, including Elsie Chamberlain and Margaret Stansgate, could see that its model of unity was outdated and pointed to the model that was to come, that of the Church as, 'a mosaic, not a monolith'.[44]

Elsie, with others, notably Ivor Morris, Reg Cleaves and David Watson, continued to put forward a clear, consistent vision of unity, which ran counter to the prevailing views of the time. In 1976, CUC called for all Free Church ministers to accept episcopal ordination, in order that ministries could be recognised by all denominations. Elsie, Cleaves and Watson made a public statement, re-emphasising the ideal of unity in diversity. In the same year, in answer to the 'Ten Propositions on Unity' put forward by CUC, four Congregationalists issued, 'Ten New Points on Christian Unity'.

I recall a debate at Mansfield College, Oxford on the Ten Propositions, at which the existence of the Ten New Points was acknowledged with contempt, and my request to have a debate on them dismissed. The views and activities of Elsie Chamberlain and others were seen as ridiculous posturing by—yes—a rump of disaffected anti-ecumenists. This could not have been further from the truth. The Congregational Federation possessed a scripturally based and consistent vision of Christian unity which did indeed influence the future.

The mutual recognition of ministries, for which the Congregational ecumenists called, is now largely a reality, without the benefit of episcopal

43 *Ibid* 273.
44 *Ibid* 278.

ordination. The ecumenical movement was within sight of the shuddering halt described in Derek Palmer's book.[45] In 1984, Elsie reported on the failure of the CUC and CCC (Church Commission on Covenanting) talks on covenanting, and the churches had to find a new way ahead in their ecumenical co-operation.

Now the ideas of unity in diversity, of mosaic rather than monolith came to the fore. Elsie was very involved in the early years of the new process. She had been a representative on the National Free Church Women's Council for some years and was its president in 1984. She often spoke approvingly of the practical nature of the Free Church Women's Councils in comparison with the wordy debates in the largely male Free Church Federal Council.

The women were running local projects, including homes for old people, many of which had been in existence for years, and also engaging in new projects, such as women's refuges and work with homeless people. This was where Elsie felt the church's heart really was. As a young woman she had opted for practical training with Muriel Paulden in inner city Liverpool, rather than academic studies at Mansfield College. She was involved in high level debates with the aim of facilitating the mission and service of diverse local churches.

I recall sitting with her in the day-long gatherings, when the Women's Council would meet in the morning, to hear reports on local projects from highly committed women, who were running what amounted to major businesses, but as chairs of voluntary committees. In the afternoon, the Free Church Federal Council would gather. 'Pinch me if I snore', Elsie would whisper, and I would sit, terrified at the prospect of either doing something as impertinent as pinching Elsie Chamberlain or letting her snore! Of course, she never did. She remained alert to the discussion, and always brought the perspective of the local church, engaged in service, to the high level discussion.

A New Ecumenical Movement

This was the pattern of the new ecumenical movement. The 1986 Lent study for local churches, entitled 'What on Earth is the Church For?', was an explicit and conscious effort to earth the next generation of ecumenical structures in the expressed desires of the 'grass roots'. Participants were invited to fill in a questionnaire, the results of which were drawn together into the 'Views from the Pews' to form the basis for discussions.

In comparison with the hours of discussion and millions of words devoted to earlier unity talks, the process now became meteoric in speed. Two successive meetings in Nottingham and, in 1988 in Swanwick, led to the 'Swanwick Declaration' and the launch of the new instruments in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and Britain and Ireland, in 1990.

45 Palmer *loc cit*.

Elsie Chamberlain attended the Swanwick meeting, with Graham Adams also from the CF. Her and Lady Stansgate's vision of many years now had its hour. The new structures would not require the acceptance by one church of another church's authority, such as episcopal ordination. The aim was not organic union, but visible unity with, 'legitimate diversity'. At the inaugural services, the representatives or leaders of the denominations processed, a kaleidoscope of colour, as the black Free Church gowns walked alongside the white vestments of the episcopal churches, and the multi-coloured robes of the black majority churches. Far from moving towards uniformity, it was visibly evident that we had embraced a far wider diversity than could have been imagined in the 1940s, and embraced it with joy.

Conclusion

Had it not been for Lady Stansgate and Elsie Chamberlain, the causes of women's ordination and ecumenical working would have been greatly the poorer. The Congregational Federation would have probably begun without women in leadership positions, and certainly without such able and prominent women. This would have made the lives of women ministers in future generations more difficult. I, for one, am happy to acknowledge the enormous debt I owe to both.

And the Congregational Federation would have struggled to gain the acceptance and profile that it now has within the ecumenical movement. Following Elsie Chamberlain, I represented the Congregational Federation on the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland from its formation in 1990 till I resigned to take up my present post in 2003. It was clear that the Federation was held in considerable esteem as one of the larger of the small denominations, and that it had punched above its weight in the debates of 1986–1990.

Elsie used to say that she was never intimidated by the bishops and archbishops, since she had known most of them as curates! She paved the way for her successors to enter into ecumenical life with equal confidence.

Janet Wootton

CHRONICLING NONCONFORMITY IN WALES —A REVIEW ARTICLE

***Congregationalism in Wales*. By R Tudur Jones, ed R Pope. Pp xvii, 376. University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2004. £35.00. ISBN 0 7083 1887 8.**

***Faith and the Crisis of a Nation Wales 1890–1914*. By R Tudur Jones, ed R Pope. Pp xvi, 535. University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2004. £35.00. ISBN 0 7083 1909 2.**

Tudur Jones (1921–98) has an unassailable reputation as the most important of all twentieth century Welsh historians of the Church. In addition, he is also known as a fine and fluent writer whose journalism embraced both the academic and the popular. His unswerving commitment to the Welsh language, culture and people meant that, at his death, most of his works were inaccessible to non-Welsh speakers. The Centre for the Advanced Study of Religion in Wales, based at the University of Wales, Bangor, under its director, Tudur's son, Geraint Tudur, president of the Union of Welsh Independents 2002–3, has commissioned the translation and publication of these two works, the fifth and sixth books of its current series.

Both these works, therefore, were originally published in Welsh. *Congregationalism in Wales* first appeared in 1966 and *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation,* originally two volumes, appeared in 1981 and 1982. The latter is widely considered Tudur Jones's most significant contribution to scholarship and contains a singularly perceptive analysis of the Welsh religious revival of 1904–5. Its translation and publication in 2004 were intended as the Centre's contribution to the "study, interpretation and understanding" of that revival during its centenary.

East of the Severn, Tudur Jones is best known for his first major work, the magisterial *Congregationalism in England 1662–1962*, written to commemorate the tercentenary of the Great Ejectment. However the book's title and the author's remit prevented his examining in any detail the Elizabethan and early Stuart antecedents of Congregationalism, on which subject he had great expertise, and also ruled out proper consideration of his homeland. As he explained in its preface, he had originally hoped to introduce Welsh evidence to provide material for comparison and contrast with English developments. It soon became evident that this would make a long book even longer and so regretfully he had to omit almost all references to Wales, although a succession of Welshmen are shown to

have been notable leaders in English Congregationalism, from George Griffiths, the convenor of the Savoy conference of 1658, to JD Jones, who developed the system of moderators in the 20th century. *Congregationalism in Wales*, coming four years after this comprehensive work on English Congregationalism, clearly bears a close relation to it. With this translation, it is possible, for English readers, to follow the story of the Congregational churches in both countries, a story which is often inter-linked.

In *Congregationalism in Wales* we meet some familiar characters and institutions, like the English Separatists and proto-Congregationalists William Ames, John Robinson, John Cotton, Henry Jessey, Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye, and the London Missionary and Bible Societies, as well as familiar and unfamiliar Welsh Independents like John Penry, Vavasor Powell, Walter Cradock, Morgan Llwyd, S R (Samuel Roberts), Jenkin Jones, Henry Maurice, Stephen Hughes, Matthias Maurice, and David Davies of Swansea, to name but a few. The gathered church at Llanfaches, the first Congregational church in Wales, receives due attention, as do its ministers William Wroth, William Erbury and Henry Walter. In a book with a distinctly Welsh definition, Jones is nevertheless forced to consider the Savoy Conference of Independents of 1658, the death of Cromwell, the Restoration of Charles II and subsequent persecution of the Nonconformists, and the Education Acts of 1870 and 1902. By 1675 Wales had some 12 Independent churches, with Baptists and Paedo-Baptists often members of the same fellowships, following the tradition, not of John Bunyan here, but of Vavasor Powell. After the passage of the Toleration Act of 1689, chapel building began in earnest in Wales and, in the 18th century revival, the Independents praised God for the Methodist preacher Howell Harris, for the new vitality of its worship and preaching, for the development of the Welsh hwyl and of hymnody. The scholarship of Edward Williams, in developing moderate Calvinism, was merely one Welsh gift to the nineteenth century.

Between 1800 and 1850 a new Congregational cause was founded on average every five weeks so that, by 1851, 319 Welsh Independent churches existed. Throughout the 19th century, political issues arose with temperance and disestablishment prominent among them. The first annual assembly of the Union of Welsh Independents was held in September 1872 at Carmarthen. In 1920 the old union between the Church of England in Wales and the state was finally severed. The industrial developments of south Wales, both the rise and fall, presented challenges to the churches and, as Tudur Jones wrote, "In 1914 the earthquake came and, after the earthquake, came the years that the locust hath devoured". The years 1914–62 proved difficult for the Independents, as for other Welsh denominations, and practical considerations forced the churches to co-operate. We may agree with Tudur that "this small corner of the history of Christianity contains within it the majesty, romance and tragedy of the Christian

story everywhere" and also that "belief is intensely important—free belief without the compulsion of a monarch or of circumstances—and that the object of this belief, Jesus Christ, gathers his people to himself in a separate society discrete from the world and all its majesty and glory".

The editor of these two volumes, Robert Pope, has added a final chapter to *Congregationalism in Wales*, covering developments subsequent to the book's first publication, which he has entitled 'Survival, 1963–2003'. In it he touches on the continuing decline of Nonconformity and includes consideration of *Honest to God*, Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and Tillich, as well as the United Reformed Church, the Congregational Federation, and recurrent plans for a single Free Church in Wales. Pope spends much time, perhaps too much, discussing the changing stances of the Union of Welsh Independents, though his treatment of the ministerial training colleges throughout this period is necessary, and he gives due weight to two great, but markedly different, Welsh Congregationalists, Pennar Davies and Tudur Jones himself.

Tudur's *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation Wales 1890–1914* is a detailed study of those twenty-five years when, he believed, this small country endured a crisis of faith, suffering a sustained attack on its Welshness, especially on the Welsh language. The loss of a distinctive Welsh identity at this time, in the rush to become British, involved the churches collectively in eschewing their own traditions of Welsh Christianity and of Welsh theology. Consequently, the churches and chapels were in danger of degenerating into Welsh cultural centres rather than remaining households of powerful and vibrant faith.

He argued that the Christian faith had shaped the nation over many centuries but that the "complex and turbulent" years, from 1890 to 1914, were "fateful in Wales's history" and, therefore, a study of them may provide reasons for the loss of national confidence and the retreat from Christianity, so evident by the late 1970s when this book (much of which was first delivered as a series of lectures in Aberystwyth in 1977) was written. In the years under study, although the period abounded with energy, Jones stated that "enthusiasm was often stronger than wisdom and understanding weaker than confidence".

In 1890 the nation was undergoing enormous changes, with the prospect of employment in Wales attracting great numbers of Englishmen to its industries, rural depopulation within Wales bringing many to the towns from the country, and Welsh people migrating to England, the USA and elsewhere. Nevertheless, at that time Welsh remained the language of the majority of those living in Wales, although the proportion of church members decreased where the proportion of monoglot English speakers was high. Jones denounced the denominational sectarianism of the 1890s, pointing out that contemporaries, recognising that religion was in decline, were concerned about the spiritual condition of Wales,

with the once formative preaching tradition beginning to disintegrate, and intellectual doubt increasingly afflicting Welsh people at this time. Although one vital part of the Church's ministry throughout the centuries has been the education of its members, by 1914 effective religious instruction in day schools had been abandoned, for the educational system was largely secular and funded by the state.

The Revival of 1904–5, associated principally with Evan Roberts, was by no means confined to Wales but rather it inaugurated a spiritual re-awakening which crossed the globe. Yet it touched all kinds of areas in every county in Wales where the 'heavenly fire' of revivalist zeal prompted singing, prayer and excitement. Roberts himself was to slip into obscurity at the age of 28 years in 1906, declaring that the churches had fallen prey to demons and that he had withdrawn into the life of prayer. After the Revival a decline set in and a reaction against overt emotionalism came to characterise Welsh Christianity. The rise of the Labour movement, reinforced by the fashionable, but heterodox, New Theology of RJ Campbell and others, made inroads into the devotional life of Wales and also devalued the political worth of Wales's national identity.

Critics may argue that much of what Tudur Jones has to say is not exclusively Welsh but rather has a British dimension and a far wider relevance. One suspects that he would allow this claim, but only in part, and would reply vehemently that, in this study he is examining a particular people at a particular time, that is, their experiences and their choices, with the specific effects upon this nation. From 1890 to 1914, he states convincingly, Wales passed through a significant crisis, with the result that a culture, a language and the national identity, shaped by generations of Christian witness, were gravely undermined. Yet some may contend that for many years the English language and culture had been supplanting Welsh customs and practice and the Welsh churches had survived and even thrived. Jones here states that, in losing their language, which largely occurred at this time, the people lost a "vital link with their own past". For Wales this meant its cultural and Christian past. He puts forward a learned and thoughtful case and concludes, not on a dying note, but with the hopeful Christian prophesy that "where there is vision, the people will not perish". It is not difficult to imagine his expressing this in his inimitable way in the lecture hall, before an enthralled assembly.

Congregationalism in Wales contains a select bibliography of works, published since its original publication. The end notes in both works have been updated, where possible, by the careful addition of new writings since their first publications. Each of these volumes has a full index. Inevitably some mistakes creep in. In *Congregationalism in Wales* on page 13 the reference to Penry's activities should read 1588 and not 1558 and on page 59 we should learn of

Archbishop Sancroft, not Sandcroft. One suspects that greater familiarity with Islam, if not political correctness, would disallow the reference on page 44 to the God of the Calvinists becoming "a despot, an Islamic Sultan" in any work written now. Tudur Jones's many English admirers will rejoice with me at the publication of these two works and may join me in hoping for more such handsomely produced translations from Robert Pope, Geraint Tudur, the Centre for the Advanced Study of Religion in Wales, at Bangor and the University of Wales Press.

If I may insert a personal plea, one familiar to the books' editor, I should be grateful for the appearance in English of those biographical lists of Nonconformist clergymen who, at the Restoration, were removed from their livings in Wales, lists which Tudur Jones compiled with BG Owens and which were published by the Welsh Congregational and the Welsh Baptist Historical Societies in *Y Cofiadur* and in *Trafodion Cymdeithas Hanes Bedyddwyr Cymru* in 1962. AG Matthews had originally intended to include those ejected from the Welsh parishes in his indispensable *Calamy Revised* (Oxford 1934) but was prevented, for reasons of space, from doing so by Oxford University Press. Tudur understood this, knew the importance of the task and simply did the job himself. A revision of Matthews' work was issued by OUP in July 1988 (with some additions to the original) but again the Welsh parishes were omitted. It is high time that non-Welsh scholars knew of this valuable part of Tudur's legacy and that consideration of the ejected clergy of Wales became possible for non-Welsh speaking historians.

Of course, others may nominate those works from his canon which they should like to see available in English. Doubtless Tudur Jones would state that those seriously interested in Wales and its people should learn Welsh. Certainly his writings provide a strong argument for doing so.

Alan Argent

GRAHAM MICHAEL ADAMS (1939–2005)

The sudden death of Graham Adams on 29 December, 2004 has taken from the Congregational Federation a unique personality whose drive and energy, wisdom and vision proved a major force, guiding the Federation since its inception in 1972. Graham was not only one of its surviving founder members, but the leader who as chairman of the council, as president, as its representative in wider Church and ecumenical bodies, and above all as its general secretary, has been probably the most formative influence in ensuring the viability of the Federation and gaining it the recognition and respect of other denominations.

Graham was born in 1939 in Swinton, south Yorkshire, where his parents kept a shop, and where he attended the Congregational church. He moved to Leicester where he had gained a place at the university to study economics, subsequently becoming a principal lecturer at the Leicester Polytechnic. In Leicester he worshipped at Clarendon Park where he came under the influence of the Revd Reg Cleaves. It was there, he later said, that he came to a deeper understanding of Congregationalism. Cleaves encouraged Graham to study for the Congregational Union of England and Wales lay pastors' examinations and he became the pastor of the Congregational church at Narborough.

A deeply convinced and committed Congregationalist, Graham quickly joined the Congregational Association, set up by John Wilcox and Reg Cleaves in 1965 in opposition to the proposals for the uniting of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches, and was one of the original twelve sponsors to sign the 'Congregational Manifesto' in February 1967. When the Congregational Federation was formed in 1972, he was appointed its children's officer. Graham ensured that the Pilots organisation for children was continued within the Federation and, since Pilots was also shared with the United Reformed Church, this provided an immediate link between the two bodies which helped to establish good relations after the separation. From this he became Christian education officer and chairman of the Christian education committee until 1982. Under his guidance the committee introduced a highly successful home study course for teachers which was later supported by the Baptist Union and the URC. He was particularly responsible for developing the Federation's highly regarded integrated training course which provides a foundation course in Christian education, for members of churches interested in learning more about their faith, and leads on to higher levels of theological education and for some even to ministerial training.

In 1979, the Christian education committee, under the leadership of Graham and his wife Andrea, organised the first Family Conference at High Leigh. Graham represented the Federation as part of an ecumenical team which produced a home study training scheme for teachers in Family Church and Sunday Schools. He also represented the Federation on the British Lessons Council and presented the first discussion paper on 'Population Projects and the Church'. In this he considered the effects that changing population structure might have on the life of the Church over the next thirty years.

A man of remarkable energy and considerable gifts, Graham served the Federation in many other ways. His business training made him an invaluable member of the finance committee and apportionment committee, and chairman of the Congregational Federation Ltd. He followed Elsie Chamberlain as chairman of the council and in 1989, on the retirement of John Wilcox, he became the Federation's general secretary, adding to and improving the facilities available at the Nottingham Centre, including the bookshop, and doing everything he could to support and encourage local churches in practical ways.

Though ready to speak his mind with Yorkshire bluntness whenever necessary, he possessed considerable diplomatic and negotiating skills. These were used to good effect when a number of Scottish churches sought to join the Federation and were subsequently welcomed into its fellowship. He put the Federation's participation in the work of the Council for World Mission at the heart of the Federation, increasing the Federation's involvement with the other CWM member churches. In this he was actively supported by his wife, Andrea, who became a member of the CWM executive and then its moderator. Graham retired as general secretary in 2000.

In 1990 he was appointed a representative of the Federation on the Congregational Memorial Hall Trust, and became the trust's chairman, a post of considerable responsibility. He also represented the Federation on the Free Church Federal Council and as a nominative trustee of the Unaffiliated Congregational Churches' Charities. He was also a governor of Silcoates School, representing the CF.

At the same time he was still 'Pastor Graham Adams', continuing his much appreciated ministry in a succession of churches. From Narborough he went to Southam (1986–97), then Grassington (1997–2003). In 2003 he joined the Harden leadership team and, a year later, accepted the pastorate of the Centre church in Nottingham. He was elected president of the Federation in 1978–9 and again in 2003–4, sharing with Elsie Chamberlain the distinction of being elected twice to this office. His wife, Andrea, was also president 1994–5 and chair of council 2001–2.

Graham was no isolationist. He did not see the Federation as an end in itself but always as a part of the universal Church of Christ to which, although it might

be small, it had its own distinctive contribution to make. With Elsie Chamberlain, he believed firmly in 'unity in diversity' and welcomed every opportunity to meet with and work in partnership with fellow Christians of every variety and tradition. He greatly valued and supported the Federation's membership of the Council for World Mission, and served on the Federation's CWM committee. He was also among those who met together in Chislehurst, in May 1975, to form the International Congregational Fellowship and was appointed a member of its executive committee, for the first ICF conference in London in 1977. He continued to be actively involved in the life of the ICF, accepting appointment as its regional secretary for the United Kingdom. He was chiefly responsible for the organisation of its successful conference in York in 1997. One particularly happy memory is of the ICF executive meeting in Australia in 1995 when a party was held to help the American representatives celebrate their Independence Day on 4 July. The Americans began by singing 'America the Beautiful' and then requested those from other countries present to sing one of their national songs. When it came to the turn of the British, instead of the expected 'Land of Hope and Glory', Graham, together with Janet Wootton and the other British members of the ICF executive, gave them the Yorkshire anthem, 'On Ilkla Moor baht 'at'.

Graham was a big man, not only physically, but also with a big personality. He was big hearted, big in the warmth of his friendships and enthusiasm, big in his sense of fun and enjoyment of life, above all in his love of learning and his pursuit of knowledge. He was an avid reader of theological books and newspapers. In addition to his BA in economics, he possessed a teaching certificate and an MBA During his time at Grassington he gained an MA, in theology from the University of Leeds and was on the point of studying for a doctorate when health concerns overtook him.

Graham gave himself wholeheartedly to whatever he took on, and especially to the cause of continuing Congregationalism through the work of the Federation, and above all, in his zeal for his Lord. Theologically liberal, his personal commitment to Jesus guided and inspired the choices he made and the direction he took. In mourning his sudden and unexpected passing, the Federation has cause to thank God that this man was at the centre of its life and directing its work and witness for so long.

John Travell

BOOK REVIEWS

***Independency of Mind in Early Dissent: The Congregational Lecture 2004*. By Prof M A Stewart. Pp 36. The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust (1978) Ltd, 2004. Available from Dr Williams's Library, 14 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0AG. £2.00. ISSN 0963–181X.**

After some introductory remarks, Prof Stewart continues his lecture with reference to John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), an appeal to Parliament against the reintroduction of censorship. This is eighteen years before the formal beginning of Dissent in England and Wales. He quotes passages from several of Milton's works, including the sonnet 'On the new forcers of Conscience under the Long Parlament' which gives us the memorable phrase "*New Presbyter* is but *Old Priest* writ Large". It also refers to some of the "forcers", most of whom are Scots. Stewart follows one of these, Adam Steuart, to Leiden in the Netherlands where he opposed Adriaan Heereboord's promotion of the ideas of Descartes who challenged the traditionally accepted philosophy of Aristotle. The considerable upheaval over these arguments had effects in several European countries.

The story is carried back to England in the works of Heereboord which are used in many of the Dissenting academies. It is unfortunate that, after his first mention of academies (p12), Stewart does not explain that he means Dissenting academies, or why they existed, until much later (p20). They were set up for the education of prospective ministers and other young male Nonconformists who were not prepared to submit to the religious tests, required for admission to university after 1662.

Heereboord's works do not just contain the Cartesian system of thought but also the Aristotelian and students were encouraged to discuss the arguments for and against both systems. Stewart traces the use of this contrasting of different ideas, through a succession of academy tutors up to Isaac Watts's education at Thomas Rowe's academy in Newington (then just to the north of London, now within the inner London borough of Hackney). He points out that there was not a complete freedom of thought but that these methods were almost entirely restricted to philosophy (including what is now called science) while the possibility of atheism was not contemplated at all. The index is helpful for easy reference. This is a dense lecture but it is a useful reminder of the dissenting origins of what we know as intellectual freedom.

Peter Young

***Early Congregational Independency in Shetland*. By William D McNaughton. Pp 151. The Shetland Times, Lerwick, 2005. £9.99 paperback. ISBN 1 904746 05 5.**

***Early Congregational Independency in Lowland Scotland* volume 1. By William D McNaughton. Pp xvi, 681. The Congregational Federation in Scotland, Glasgow, 2005. £20.00 + £5.00 p & p. ISBN 0 900304 99 5.**

William D McNaughton is the indefatigable and prolific chronicler of Scottish Congregationalism. After producing the immensely detailed and learned *The Scottish Congregational Ministry 1794–1993* in 1993 and *Early Congregational Independency in the Highlands and Islands and North-East of Scotland* in 2003, he has published this year, not only the story of Shetland Congregationalism, from its inception until about 1867, but also the first volume of *Early Congregational Independency in Lowland Scotland*. The second volume of this latter work is expected to appear next year. He is to be congratulated for a remarkable achievement for which scholars and local historians alike will be grateful, both now and in years to come.

The book on Shetland Congregationalism is a paperback consisting of eight chapters, dealing with the beginnings of the work of Congregationalists there, the 'Apostle of the Shetland Isles', George Reid, Alexander Kerr, the Commissioners of Religious Instruction Scotland, and the successive decades, the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s, and a chapter touching on the ministers active in Shetland in this study. Although introduced by men from the Scottish mainland, the various Congregational causes in Shetland continued with support from indigenous advocates. This book contains 16 black and white photographs, has appendices covering the churches, chapels and preaching stations, and also listing those who had given ministerial and lay service in Shetland. The indices are of persons and of subjects and places.

Those visiting Shetland would find this book offers an unusual way to explore this northern outpost of Congregationalism. The writing is clear and lucid, casting light on an important but largely forgotten contribution to the Christian witness of Scotland. In both these works, McNaughton makes clear that Scottish Congregationalism did not begin as a protest against some aspect of church polity or legal principle. Rather it emerged from the heartfelt desire to spread the gospel and arose at exactly the same time as the missionary impulse led to the founding of the (London) Missionary Society in 1795.

Volume 1 of *Early Congregational Independency in Lowland Scotland* seeks to relate the history of Congregational and Evangelical Union churches in the Lowlands. McNaughton traces the courses of these developing traditions, in this full and comprehensive account. He begins with the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home which was founded on 20 December, 1797, and with the work of Joseph Rate who was tireless in his itinerant preaching in the towns of Fife. A former variety theatre in Edinburgh, called the Circus, became a tabernacle and successfully revealed the need for fervent evangelical preaching in the Lowlands.

By the end of the 18th century, some 14 Congregational churches had been gathered in Scotland.

McNaughton reports on the witness at Kirkcaldy (where he has himself ministered for 20 years). This church dates its origins to 1800 when it shared the missionary character of the young Congregational churches in Scotland. He examines in turn the other Congregational churches in Fife, as well as those of Dundee, Angus, Kincardineshire, Dunbartonshire, Stirlingshire, Clackmannanshire, West Lothian, Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian, Berwickshire, Wigtownshire, Kirkcudbrightshire, Dumfriesshire, Roxburghshire, Selkirkshire and Peeblesshire.

His church by church treatment, if not conducive to an overview, provides a listing of the various causes and is most effective in throwing up thought provoking and challenging incidents. At Thornhill EU, in Dumfriesshire, we learn of the labours of Robert Hood, a student, who supplied the church for 3 months in the summer of 1861 and found conducting two services a day insufficient. Every Sabbath evening he took himself, with "some of the more devoted brethren", to one or other of the neighbouring villages and held an open air meeting. Is that selfless commitment confined to the past, without any modern equivalent? Do students consider giving their summer to Christian enterprises or are they too busy earning money or touring the world?

At Eyemouth, the EU congregation met in a tent for two or three years. Then they obtained a house and a site at a cheap price and the work of building soon began. Much depended on the voluntary labour of "fisher-folk" who brought cargo after cargo of stones for the building from beyond Berwick so that the church might be opened in January 1863. A century and a half later, it seems that Christians find it difficult to give their labour freely and lovingly, although churches and chapels in the past, especially in the country, have often depended upon it, for their founding and continuance.

It is difficult not to profit from a reading of this book which testifies to the vision, resolution and faithful witness of these missionaries and ministers and of their people. Their work outlives them, not always in their churches which in some cases have not survived, but less visibly, yet no less profoundly, in the soul and culture of the Scottish nation. McNaughton's total dedication to recovering these stories enables later generations to benefit from the contribution of these Congregational pioneers. By financing the publication of this work on the Lowlands, the Congregational Federation in Scotland has shown its commitment to the recovery of its history.

Robert Whittier

***Early Congregationalism in Queensland*. By G Lindsay Lockley. Edited by John Wheeler. Pp 183. Queensland Congregational Fellowship (2004). Obtainable from Queensland Congregational Fellowship, Brisbane, PO Box 112, Toowong 4066, Australia. Telephone +61 7 33 69 3007. ISBN 0–646–43766–6.**

I was delighted to receive this book from John Wheeler, an Australian Congregationalist of long standing. Lindsay Lockley was born in 1909 and, during his lifetime, attained academic distinction. He served Australian Congregationalism in many important roles, as principal of Cromwell College, University of Queensland, president of the Congregational Union of Australia, and secretary for Australia and New Zealand, on the Council for World Mission (CWM). He died in 1991, leaving behind a preliminary draft of his major work *Congregationalism in Australia*, which was edited by Dr Bruce Upham and published by the Uniting Church Press in 2001. This present work comes from a draft given to the editor in 1995 by the Lockley family. Alas Wheeler's poor health and, more particularly that of his wife, has delayed publication, as he states in the introduction.

Australia, as Noel Coward remarked of China, is "big" and this volume deals with the Brisbane area and northwards up the coast, of what was once part of New South Wales, until it became a state in its own right. Lockley intended to cover the first quarter century of the Queensland Congregational Union from 1861 to 1886 but in fact he collected interesting material dating from the founding of the Moreton Bay convict settlement in 1824 until 1887 and sometimes beyond. This is the same time span as George Wight's *Congregational Independency and Reminiscences of the Churches* (1887), with the difference that Lockley used documentary sources rather than reminiscences. Lockley also published *A Comprehensive Bibliography to Congregationalism in Australia*, edited and updated by Dr Bruce Upham and published by the Uniting Church Press.

In 1823 Sir Thomas Brisbane, Governor General of New South Wales, instructed the surveyor-general, John Oxley, to explore locations with a view for a new convict settlement. Oxley selected a camp on the Humpybong Peninsula, Moreton Bay. The first convicts arrived in 1824, but it was not until 1842 that the first free settlers arrived.

Depending on your point of view, it is either encouraging or disappointing that no record of any Congregationalists or Independents has been found among the convict lists or in that of overseers. It was arranged, however, by the London Missionary Society, the forerunner of CWM, that the Revd Lancelot Edward Threlkeld should accompany the first party to Moreton Bay. He had gone to the South Seas in 1817 as a colleague of John Williams, but his wife died, opposition arose and he never reached Moreton Bay. The LMS then founded its first Aboriginal mission at Lake Macquarrie, south of Newcastle. Thus it was not until 1847 that the Presbyterian John Dunmore Lang again raised the issue, as much to counter a rising Irish Roman Catholic presence in the new colony as anything else.

In June 1858, Thomas Binney (of King's Weigh House Chapel, London) founder of the Colonial Missionary Society, arrived in Moreton Bay. By 1859, the

CMS in London, realising that Brisbane would be the capital of the new territory, dispatched Revd George Wight from Portobello, Scotland.

Many of the first missions planted were jointly Congregational and Baptist. In Ipswich, for instance, "*all members forming its communion, whether Baptists or Independents, shall enjoy equal priviledges*" (sic).

Some places were rough indeed. Revd Joseph Coles Kirby, who died in 1924, as a respected Congregationalist, began his first ministry as a bush missionary in Queensland. Of Dalby he wrote in 1869, "*the women are scarce in the west [of Queensland]. The men are used to give passion the rein. The Destroyer seems to have all the chances. Blasphemy, Uncleanness, Drunkenness abound. I put capitals to their names for I respect the awful though damnable power they wield over this people* … I commend this book to all those interested in the history of missions and in Australian Congregationalism in particular. John Wheeler has served history well by ensuring that Lockley's researches are available for the reader.

Colin M Price.

***Daughters of Dissent*. By Elaine Kaye, Janet Lees and Kirsty Thorpe. Pp xii, 262. The United Reformed Church, 2004. £14.99. ISBN 0–85346–225–9**

The wonderful title, *Daughters of Dissent*, does suggest more than the volume actually offers. It is not about daughters, but women ministers within the United Reformed Church tradition, which is not only a narrower field than dissent, but the volume includes some women ministers who were brought up outside dissent. This may seem to carp too much since there are valuable references to the experiences of Baptists, Unitarians and even Anglicans, though curiously that of the Congregational Federation and Evangelical Fellowship are hardly mentioned. The volume commemorates the ordination of the first woman, Constance Todd, later Coltman, into the Congregational ministry in England on 17 September 1917. Although it is recognised that the Unitarians were the first denomination to accept women into the ministry, with the appointment of Gertrude von Petzold as minister of Narborough Road Free Christian Church, Leicester, in 1904, Coltman is rather offensively described as 'the first woman to be ordained to the Christian ministry in Britain' (pp 20, 69) as if von Petzold's ministry was not. Elaine Kaye provides a useful though brief overview of women and education among Congregational Churches. It is good to report that the records of Milton Mount School have been deposited at Dr Williams's Library. The crucial advance was the appointment of women to management boards, reflecting the political advances women were making as a result of suffrage and the increasing recognition of equal rights. In the second chapter Janet Lees makes clear that the record of the Congregational Union and URC over women in the ministry in the twentieth century is mixed. The missionary societies have had a better record than the Congregational Union, and the Union a better one than the Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists put together. The Presbyterian

Church's record was particularly poor, no doubt a consequence of its centralised government. In the 1930s Westminster College refused to consider applications from women to study for ordination because of 'insuperable difficulties'. As late as 1972 there were only four women ministers among the Presbyterians. By comparison more than fifty women have served in a formal ministerial role amongst the much smaller Unitarian movement since 1904. The ordination of women is only part of the battle, the much greater one is the acceptance of women ministers. Too often, as the volume makes clear, congregations have been unwilling to consider women applicants, a problem in other areas of modern society such as the selection of women candidates for parliament. Janet Lees also demonstrates that women served disproportionately the smaller, poorer congregations and, despite forming nearly a quarter of the URC list of ministers, only one of the 30 largest congregations had a woman minister in 2001.

No one should be in doubt of the importance of women to the church, they have always been the majority of those sitting in the pew, but churches have been slow to accept women. Certainly *Daughters of Dissent* provides plenty of evidence for the long, slow haul women have faced in being allowed to take part in church life, by participating in church meetings, by becoming deacons or members of committees and finally in entering the ministry on terms equal to their male counterparts. There is much to suggest that women first entered the Congregational ministry because of the shortage of male candidates, that advances were made during the exceptional war-time conditions of 1917, and that women were tolerated because they would accept lower salaries. Inevitably the volume reads like a series of landmarks in the history of women in the church, with the date of the first woman to study for a degree or to be admitted to a particular college, and there is a certain amount of writing women back into history. There are also details of some of the attitudes and preconceptions encountered by women in the ministry before 1970s. We are told 'male' preachers are still viewed as the norm in the URC, presumably by women as well as men (p 77). There is a valuable chapter based on the written and oral testimonies of women ministers given as part of the project. It is to be hoped that proper steps will be taken to secure this valuable archive. Both the Congregational Library and Dr Williams's Library are actively seeking the papers of twentieth-century ministers, aware both of their vulnerability and their importance for our denominational histories. The papers of the Revd Florence Frost-Mee, one of the ministers mentioned in the volume, have already been deposited by her executors.

The volume has three editors, and four other contributors. Although five of the twelve chapters are by Elaine Kaye and another four by Kirsty Thorpe, either alone or with Janet Lees, it is not so much a book as a volume of essays. As a consequence the volume has an uneven feel and there is a certain amount of repetition. The account of Susannah Rankin is essentially repeated only a few pages apart in adjoining chapters (pp 62, 75). The volume contains much valuable historical information, but it also has a contemporary feel. It is intended to serve a didactic purpose for the URC as much as an historical record. In an appendix David Thompson, in commenting on the methodology of the project, makes the

more general point it is 'our tendency still to write Church history predominantly in terms of ministers' (p 218). Churches only exist because of the commitment of their members.

Modern Congregational Federation and URC members may be proud of their record of women in the ministry, but this volume makes clear the actual record is rather more patchy and that much occurred by default or as a result of a few determined women and their male ministerial supporters willing to make the admission of women into the ministry happen. The experience of women in the Church reflects the experience of women in society, some liberal institutions moved quicker, indeed some conservative institutions continue to reject the role of women, but it is clear no denomination in this country can really look women in the face on the question of equal opportunity in the Church and the ministry.

David L Wykes

***Dare To Be a Daniel: Then and Now*. By Tony Benn. Edited by Ruth Winstone. Pp x, 278. Hutchinson, 2004. £17.99. ISBN 0 09 179999 6.**

Tony Benn sees this book as "a prelude" to the 8 volumes of diaries which he has already published. The title derives from his father's advice to young Tony, which itself indicates the hymn singing, chapel background of his forebears, 'Dare to be a Daniel, Dare to stand alone'. Even a passing acquaintance with his political career would confirm that Benn has taken this advice to heart. The first brief part of the book is entitled 'Honest Doubt' in which the author sets out his approach to religious belief. His doubts, he explains, are about "the risen Christ, not about the importance of Jesus" whom he sees as "one of the greatest teachers, along with Moses and Mohammed".

He writes also, in the book's second part, 'Then', of his childhood and upbringing within a particular social and political cultural milieu and begins with his great-grandfather, Julius Benn, who became a Congregational minister, and with his mother's family background in religious dissent. Both families established businesses which have now disappeared. Yet both sides of his family also had strong political interests, in Paisley and in the then new London County Council. In 1892 his grandfather, John Benn, was returned as the Liberal MP for St George's in the East, in the East End of London, using the slogan,

> Friends of Labour, Working Men
> Stick to Gladstone, Vote for Benn.

His mother's father, Daniel Holmes, was the Liberal MP for Govan. Tony Benn describes his father, William, as "a Gladstonian Liberal" who moved to the left when he joined the Labour Party. He is quite open about the eccentricities of his father's cousin, the celebrated actress, Margaret Rutherford, and the fact that her father murdered his own father, whilst suffering "some sort of mental breakdown".

Benn reports on his "happy home" and "devoted" parents. Born in 1925, as a child he kept an accounts book, detailing how he spent his pocket money each week. His father, who was "full of fun", was a teetotaller, moved by the level of

drunkenness in his native East End, and Tony has followed his father in refraining from alcohol. His father's distinguished career has its rightful place in the book although he admits that, as his father grew older, he became subject to depression. Tony Benn explains that he too has periods of depression when he wonders if he has "ever done anything worthwhile".

Home life is related, with Benn telling his children the stories his father had told him but now embellished and adapted. We learn that Lady Stansgate had no domestic skills, beyond making tea and toast. Family holidays were, and are, taken at Stansgate, on the Blackwater estuary, near Steeple, in Essex, and this is where his father's title derived from because he loved the house and its location. Tony's love for his family is apparent throughout and he admits to being something of a cultural philistine and a very sentimental person, easily moved to tears. He writes movingly of his wife, Caroline, who taught him "how to live and how to die" and was his "sternest and most rigorous critic".

The third part of the book, 'Now', comprises speeches and essays on some of the moral and political challenges of recent times, reflecting the influence on him "of the dissenting tradition" and the need to question conventional wisdom. The essays set out his reassessment of the role of a member of parliament, of ministerial office, and of the prospects for peace in a world dominated by "an American empire", with Britain as its colony. The remaining chapters consist of speeches, from debates in the House of Commons since 1990, including his last parliamentary speech, delivered in March 2001. They deal with justice, democracy and socialism.

Tony Benn was first elected to the Commons in 1950 and retired in 2001, making him the longest serving Labour MP in history. Whatever one's political views, none can deny that his contribution and his family's contribution to British political life has been and is still remarkable. This is a well produced book, containing some 46 photographs. Unfortunately it has no index.

Daniel Brookes

OUR CONTEMPORARIES

The Baptist Quarterly (vol 40 no 6 April 2004)

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