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**THE
CONGREGATIONAL
HISTORY
SOCIETY
MAGAZINE**

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Contents

Editorial	282
News and Views	282
Correspondence	284
Secretary's Notes	285
The Congregational background of the Chartist martyr, John Frost, and Frost's influence on the Congregationalist who played a key part in the creation of modern Cardiff <i>Jean Silvan Evans</i>	289
'Faith and Fun': Congregational Sponsored Social Activities in late Victorian and Edwardian Basingstoke—c.1880–1914 <i>Roger Ottewill</i>	297
Gabriel Gregory—'A Bit of a Lad'—by his lad <i>Ian Gregory</i>	310
Friends and Family—Some Thoughts on Fifty Years <i>Alan Argent</i>	314
Reviews	318
Index to volume 9	321

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EDITORIAL

Our magazine this autumn contains articles on the Welsh Chartist, John Frost, on John Batchelor and their influences on south Wales, on Congregational fun in late Victorian and Edwardian Basingstoke, on Gabriel Gregory by his son, and it offers some reflections on the years 1972–2022, given the coming commemorations of the formation of the United Reformed Church and other Congregational groupings. It has something of a Victorian, even a modern flavour, although our book reviews extend back further than the nineteenth century to John Milton and to the Protestant Reformation in this country. We welcome as contributors to our *Magazine* Jean Silvan Evans and Ian Gregory. If you wish to respond to any of the articles printed here, please write to the editor.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Members' Deaths

Sadly the biographer of Philip Doddridge, with wide interests in Northampton and its county, Malcolm Deacon, died earlier this year. Malcolm passed away on 12th May, 2021, after a very sudden decline in his health. He had been diagnosed with inoperable cancer and was to receive chemotherapy. A good friend to our society and to its members, his cheerfulness and Christian generosity will be missed.

The widow, Mrs Semper, has written to say that her husband, the Rev. John Semper, a keen CHS member, died in June 2020. She recalled how much pleasure John used to find in reading our magazine.

Other loyal and supportive CHS members who have died in the last year include Mrs Jean Young, and the Revs Richard Woodhouse and Ken Jacques. Such friends are not easily replaced.

The Dissenting Deputies 2021

After an enforced hiatus, the Dissenting Deputies are meeting again at 6.00 pm on Wednesday 27th October. The speaker will be Rev. Dr Robert Pope, the Director of Studies in Church History and Doctrine at Westminster College, Cambridge. His title is “The Greatest Terror of Mankind”: Contagion, the Church and the Providence of God. He is to address the response of Christians to pandemic disease.

The “Dissenting Deputies” were established in 1732 as elected lay people, working with a body of ministers, to contend for the removal of restrictions against dissenters from public life. Free speech is essential to sustain dissenters’ worship and witness. The dissenting deputies keeps alive the historic right of approach to the Monarch.

Those wishing to attend should inform the Free Churches Group. This invitation is strictly for dissenting church members and ministers in the greater London area. Respecting the historical structure, it would be appropriate to nominate two “Deputies” from each church but all are welcome. A contribution would help to cover the meeting costs.

Study with the University of Glasgow

This MTh degree in Ministry, Theology and Practice is a part-time Masters degree intended for pastoral professionals to develop and enhance their abilities. This programme has been developed as part of a collaboration for over 300 years between Dr Williams’s Trust in London and the University of Glasgow, in supporting the development of Christian ministry. The Trust dates back to 1716 and to the will of Dr Daniel Williams (1643–1716).

Applicants may be eligible for small-scale bursaries from Dr Williams’s Trust. The Masters degree is designed to help mature students to develop their skills and understanding in ministry, preaching and theological inquiry. The University of Glasgow which Daniel Williams admired has a well-deserved reputation for excellence.

The programme is taught on a part-time basis over 24 months, and can be undertaken in either Glasgow or in London. Those interested should view the MTh programme uofg.org.uk/t/4S63-HKPM-2IKXZT-EDHR8-1/c.aspx on the University’s website. The programme begins in September 2021. Those who wish to apply or have any questions about the programme, should contact: Professor Mark Elliott, mark.elliott@glasgow.ac.uk Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at the University of Glasgow

Association of Denominational Historical Societies and Cognate Libraries

The annual lecture of ADHSCL will take place on Zoom on the 4th November 2021 at 2.00pm. the secretary of ADHSCL, Pauline Johns, intends to send out the link near the time, but asks all those interested to put the date of this important meeting in their diaries and encourage others to attend. The lecture is due to start at 2.30pm when Professor David Bebbington is to speak on ‘Fin de Siecle Nonconformity: The Concerns of the Young at Brunswick Wesleyan Chapel, Leeds in the 1890s.’

Walpole Old Chapel

This well-preserved ancient chapel at Walpole, originally Congregational, is situated in rural Suffolk and is well worth a visit. Please look at the chapel's website. Even a glance will provoke thought on how a worshipping community should be organized for worship. The chapel is now in the care of the Historic Chapels Trust, with its local committee chaired by Revd Bill Mahood, once a minister in north London and a former moderator of the United Reformed Church's general assembly. He is also an old friend of the *CHS Magazine's* editor. The chapel has launched a major appeal, which members/readers may choose to support: <https://walpoleoldchapel.org/fundraising/>

For the avoidance of doubt, both can be freely and widely shared should you have the opportunity and the inclination.

Church Closures

CHS members may share my sadness at learning recently of the closures of some former Congregational churches. Christ Church, Leatherhead, and Beckenham United Reformed Church have closed or are about to do so, and Whitfield URC, near Dover, in Kent closed in December 2018 (with demolition of the latter expected). We all understand that buildings and congregations are not here forever but we also know that families, memories and so much more are intimately bound up with these buildings where we, and many others, have worshipped, prayed to Christ, and in some mysterious ways have glimpsed the immortal.

Correspondence

It was good to receive a response from Prof Clyde Binfield to our CHS Secretary's Notes, on the naming of churches, in the last issue.

Clyde has written to Richard Cleaves,

'On the naming of churches: you are of course right in general terms in what you say in 'Secretary's Notes' in the current *CHS Magazine*, but you are not quite right with regard to the newly named Downing Place church. St Columba's church commands/commanded the corner of Downing Street and Downing Place, Cambridge. Architecturally its entrance is/was on Downing Street. Round the corner, on Downing Place, much altered but still recognisably a chapel, is the building which Cambridge's Congregationalists used before moving to Emmanuel. It is very close to St Columba's but quite separate from it, and it has long been in other (University) hands.

Now, it may be that when the premises of the present Church have been reconfigured the main entrance will be on Downing Place rather than Downing

Street—that I do not know; but I think that the decision to call the united church Downing Place URC is thus a fusion of retrospect, prospect, and present reality. It is a gentle nod to the historic Congregational dimension, which ‘Downing Street URC’ would not have been (though that would have been an almost fun name). Nobody would ever have accused the people of either Emmanuel or St Columba’s of elegance, but it is rather an elegant solution, as names go.

In the same letter, Clyde recalled the days first his mother, and then his sister spent at Leicester’s Domestic Science College. Both worshipped at Clarendon Park Congregational Church, Clyde’s sister in the 1960s when Richard’s father, Reg Cleaves, was minister at CPCC and chaplain to both the University and the Domestic Science College. Clyde recalled ‘a good congregation, good music, good sermon: thoroughly Congregational with a bracing liturgical structure. That memory of a service coloured my delving into P. T. Forsyth—see “An East Midlands Call: Its Context and Some Consequences. The Genesis of Clarendon Park Congregational Church” (*Transactions, Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* Vol 79, 2005, pp 107–127.’ Clyde recalled quoting at length from the letter accepting the call to its ministry which I reflected on when I retired. He also draws attention to another article: C. Binfield, ‘P. T. Forsyth as Congregational Minister’ in T. Hart ed. *Justice The True and Only Mercy. Essays on the Life and Theology of Peter Taylor Forsyth*, (Edinburgh 1995), pp 7–40.

John Thompson has written—

‘I thought the last *Congregational History Magazine* was another good one—well done! I see from the United Reformed Church History Society’s minutes that a stronger link between the CHS and the URCHS may be desirable on both sides.’

John understands that the appeal of both the URCHS’s *Journal* and the *CHS Magazine* is to a similar readership but, he suggests, that ‘the focus is different’. He offers the opinion that the *CHS Magazine* is lively.

SECRETARY’S NOTES— TRACING THE FAMILY

The fascination about researching family history captured my wife’s imagination a long time ago. By now, I’ve acquired the bug and, with Felicity as a guide, have visited places far and near, shared joys and sorrows and, with glorious serendipity, engaged with a much bigger history. Her researches into her family and mine have taken us to the western front, to Versailles, to Potsdam: they’ve introduced us to Woodrow Wilson, to Franklin Delano Roosevelt and to

Trump, his 'theft' of a family coat of arms, and his Mar-a-Lago home. They've helped us fall in love with the poetry of Dylan Thomas, a third cousin once removed of Felicity's, and taken us to New York's Greenwich Village. Research on behalf of other members of our family has brought us unexpectedly to a street round the corner from where we live. Felicity's research on behalf of a friend from our former church in Cheltenham brought us face to face with the horrors of the UK government's 'Hostile Environment' when it comes to immigration and citizenship: it formed part of a package of papers presented to ACAS, ready for an Industrial Tribunal. It took us to struggles over Irish independence, the British army in India, the mass migrations after Indian independence and to the newly independent Pakistan. It eventually led to the obtaining of a British passport, the restoration of a job and to the metaphorical sound of wedding bells. All those, however, are stories for another time.

For the moment, what interests me is family history itself. Curiously Richard Dawkins of all people made me realise for the first time how family history is done. I have no time for Dawkins' writing on theology but all the time in the world for his books on evolution. In one of the most magnificent, *The Ancestor's Tale*, he tells the story of evolution from the very first appearance of life to homo sapiens and the present. At the outset, however, he encounters a problem. It is simply not possible to tell that story from beginning to end. To demonstrate he reflects on the way family history is done which, he observes, may only be tackled backwards. It is simply impossible to identify an individual of long ago and trace the story of their family forwards: within a couple of generations there will be too many trails to follow. As more generations pass, the family will branch out in so many directions that the story cannot be told.

Family history may be done only if you start with an individual and trace the story backwards. On that basis he starts with us today, with homo sapiens, and goes back to the point at which we share a common ancestor with another branch of the tree of life. Then he moves to an earlier 'common' ancestor' and follows the trail back and back to the beginnings of life.

Hold on a moment to that reflection. In 2022 we will be marking the fiftieth anniversary of the forming of the United Reformed Church, the Congregational Federation, involving also the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches (whose history goes back to 1966) and the creation of a trust body for the Unaffiliated Congregational Churches. We shall no doubt recollect that the re-formed Churches of Christ joined the URC and the Fellowship of Churches of Christ started, and that a good number of churches in the Congregational Union in Scotland joined the Congregational Federation, and that a larger number joined the URC. As we reflect on that complicated but still tiny bit of church history, it's timely to ponder how we 'do' church history. We need to

do so because it shapes our understanding of how we come to be the people we are and how we understand the Church or church.

Most church histories start with Jesus, Pentecost and the New Testament and work forwards. Many, especially popular narratives, speak of fragmentation. The one, holy, catholic, apostolic church fragments into East and West at the great schism of 1054, and into Protestant and Catholic at the Reformation. Those of us interested in Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, the Churches of Christ and the United Reformed Church may speak of the fragmentation of the 'Reformed' Reformation, the Lutheran Reformation and the 'Radical' Reformation—sometimes called the dissidence of dissent.

In 1536 King Henry VIII annexed Wales and, at much the same time, broke with Rome, creating 'The Church of England' which, in spite of its name, included Welsh Anglicans until disestablishment in 1921, only a century ago. It is an indictment of the undemocratic nature of the constitution of the United Kingdom that the undemocratic half of the UK parliament has of right 24 seats for bishops of the established Church of England, no representation for churches (even Anglican ones!) in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, while only 20 of the 788 sitting members of the House of Lords live in Wales!

Further fragmentation followed, as this narrative goes, as Dissent fragmented into Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Quakers. More and more groups emerged with even more exotic names and fragmentation gathered momentum. Another big divide occurred in Anglicanism with the arrival of the various branches of Methodism and most English Presbyterians became Unitarians. Further rifts occurred between liberal and fundamentalist, between traditional and radical, between low church and high church.

The one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church is by now more fragmented than Humpty Dumpty. The tragedy is as great. The endeavour to put two of those fragments together in 1972 is little more than a footnote in that narrative. That's one way of approaching church history. Perhaps, it relates to the analogy in 1 Peter 2:4 where the writer depicts the church and its members as 'living stones' built into a 'spiritual house'.

I wonder whether the New Testament prompts us to take a leaf out of Richard Dawkins' book. Jesus invites his followers to pray to God as 'our Father'. The followers of Jesus address each other as 'brothers' and by implication as 'sisters' too. Should we not therefore think of church as 'family'? Indeed 'family church' was all the vogue in the 1960s when the formation of the URC was being discussed. The CUEW's youth and children's officer, Eric Burton, among the founders of the Congregational Federation, shared his vision of an inclusive church, welcoming to all, in his book, *No Walls Within*.

To think of the church as 'family' affects the way we 'do' church history. Thinking of church as family, let's start with the local church family we belong

to, be it URC, Congregational or any other. Let's trace back key moments in our church's story, the people who have made up that family, the affiliations the family has to a denomination, to mission partnerships, to ecumenical fellowships. Go back to its beginning and then to what inspired those who started it, be they Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Churches of Christ, or any other. Trace their roots, and the roots of those behind them. Soon we arrive at the Protestant Reformation. Digging further: as a Congregationalist I should return to the monastic movement, to Francis and the Franciscans, back further to Benedict. I should include the Synod of Whitby, the Celtic churches, the ecumenical councils, and going back beyond Constantine, to the rich variety of churches that encircled the Mediterranean world and reached beyond the frontiers of the Roman empire to the east as far as India, to the south into Africa. I should go back to the mixed bunch of followers of Jesus who made up the Jesus movement, to what James Dunn describes as 'the unity and diversity' of the church of the New Testament, to those first brothers and sisters in Christ, to Jesus himself. Whenever I've done church history in that way a thread has emerged that runs through the whole story, a person who binds the story together, Jesus who is the Christ.

Think of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church as 'family' and its rich variety becomes an aspect of its very nature. Of course, families fall apart and fall out, they grow apart and lose contact. But they still are 'family', something still gives them an 'identity'. It is as important as ever to work at healing, restoring and renewing and to pray for that oneness that mirrors the relationship between Jesus and his Father who is 'Our Father'. No longer need we think of fragments that must be glued together into a single structure. As history shows, true unity in Christ celebrates the diversity of a family who share what is sometimes called 'the family prayer' and say, 'Our Father ...'.

Richard Cleaves

**THE CONGREGATIONAL BACKGROUND OF
THE CHARTIST MARTYR, JOHN FROST,
and Frost's influence on the
Congregationalist who played a key part
in the creation of modern Cardiff**

The links between Congregationalism and Chartism, the movement for parliamentary reform and social justice that erupted in the first half of the 19th century, are not widely explored. But there was a deep symbiotic link between the democratic and social values of the Chartists' radical politics and of nonconformity in general, and perhaps of Congregationalism, with its emphasis on freedom from the state, in particular. In researching this area while writing an entry for the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* on the life of quite a different Congregationalist, I discovered the solid Congregational roots of renowned Chartist leader John Frost (1784–1877), an early fighter for social democracy, transported after the collapse of the ill-fated 1839 Chartist rising in Newport that alarmed Victorian society and proved to be the last rising on the British mainland.

The Congregationalist who I was researching originally was the mid-19th

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century Cardiff businessman/politician John Batchelor, who played a key part in creating modern Cardiff when this small market town was being transformed into the largest coal exporting port in the world. He broke the economic and political stranglehold on Cardiff of the Marquis of Bute, when, as a businessman, in 1856 he was the chief promoter of a parliamentary bill to build a rival dock that destroyed the Bute family control of the coal export trade; and, as a politician, in 1852 he spearheaded a campaign that saw the Bute favoured Conservative MP ousted by Liberal-nonconformist Walter Coffin, the first nonconformist to be elected to parliament in Wales.¹ My aim was to show that this combined triumph in no way defined Batchelor's life and purpose but that, central to understanding him, was his strong Congregationalist faith—that had Chartist overtones.

At that time religion largely dictated politics and there was a growing campaign in the 1820s/1830s to repeal the civil disabilities still suffered by nonconformists. Births were not recorded unless children were baptised in the Church of England; marriages could only be legally celebrated in the Church of England (except for Quakers and Jews); burials in the parish churchyard had to follow the *Book of Common Prayer* and be read by the parish clergyman. All this kept nonconformists firmly on the progressive side of politics.² Tensions eased with reforms in the early 1830s and the civil registration of births, deaths and marriages in 1836. But others went on for decades and campaigns continued. Burial by nonconformist rites was not allowed until 1880.

Wales, particularly, was swept up in the great 19th century Liberal-nonconformist tradition that made it 'a nation of Nonconformists', and ensured Liberal values dominated politics in Wales for generations. Here was a melting pot of religious-political, nonconformist-Chartist, shared ideals of democratic reform and social justice that often saw nonconformist churches open to Chartist meetings. Although none of the churches actually endorsed Chartism, leading nonconformist ministers would openly sympathise with the Chartist movement, while many Chartists leaders would use religious language.³

John Frost, the Congregationalist

In 18th century Newport, the only dissenting congregation licensed in the

¹ 'Death of Mr John Batchelor' *South Wales Daily News* 30/05/1883. All contemporary newspaper references have been found with the aid of National Library of Wales' 'Welsh Newspapers Online': <https://newspapers.library.wales>

² D Bebbington 'Nonconformists' website of the Liberal Democrat History Group. See this article, too, for an overview of the rise of Liberal Nonconformity: <https://liberalhistory.org.uk/history/nonconformists/>

³ See 'Chartism' in: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/modern-europe/british-and-irish-history/chartism>

town was Mill Street Meeting House, where the various dissenting groups got on as well as they could together—and where John Frost’s grandfather, who mainly brought him up after the death of his father, was an elder. The town’s first denominational church for Congregationalists was Hope Congregational Church, built soon after the turn of the century in 1808–10. John Frost joined the congregation at Hope Chapel on his marriage in 1812 to widow Mary Geach, who already worshipped there—although he maintained his payments to Mill Street Meeting House. Hope’s minister, Rev Benjamin Byron, was a close friend and loyal supporter of Frost and an undoubted supporter of the Six Point Charter.⁴

For John Batchelor, destined to become a key player in the great Liberal-nonconformist tradition, the combined influences of religion and politics came early. The Frost and Batchelor families were friends and both families worshipped at Hope Chapel. All eight children of John and Mary Frost were baptised at Hope between 1813 and 1826; and the seven later—of twelve—children of Benjamin and Anne Batchelor, were baptised at Hope in the intervening years from 1819 to 1829, including the infant John in 1822.⁵ Given the close and intimate nature of the congregation, John Frost, a generation older than young John Batchelor, would have been seen as a familiar and trusted mentor to him as he grew into teenage.

These Congregational links of John Frost were, of course, in the years before the Chartist rising—when he was a respected citizen of Newport playing his part in the swelling Liberal-Nonconformist politics of the time. Frost became interested in politics as early as 1816, before his marriage, advocating the democratic and social values that became the programme of Chartism. He was elected a town councillor as the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act saw more Liberal councillors elected and Liberals taking control in many town councils. He became a magistrate in 1835 and was mayor of Newport the following year. He suffered a rapid downfall as he became more actively associated with Chartism from 1838. He was removed from the magistracy in March 1839 and, on the collapse of the Chartist rising in November that year, Frost was sentenced, with the other leaders, to be hanged, drawn, and quartered. There was a national protest and appeals against the sentences by leading public figures, and the sentences were eventually commuted. Frost was one of three, known as the Chartist martyrs, transported for life.⁶

Frost never lived in Newport again and I found no further records of a Congregational association. When he returned to this country after an unconditional pardon in 1856, he settled in Stapleton, Bristol. By then in his

4 Les James, editor *Chartism eMag*, in correspondence with the writer.
 5 The National Archives, Records of Hope Congregational Church.
 6 See Frost in *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*.

70s, he lived a mainly quiet life until his death in 1877 at the age of 93. He was then interested in spiritualism. His will leaves most of his property and furniture to his youngest daughter Anne, then living with him. Some property interests he had retained in Newport were divided equally between three daughters, Catherine, Ellen and Anne. He appointed Anne his 'executrix solely'. Frost was buried, at his request, by the side of his wife and son, in the churchyard of Horfield parish church, Bristol.¹

In an interesting, contemporary note, in the 1980s, Richard Frame, secretary of the Newport History Society, set out on a detective trail to identify and mark Frost's grave, which had fallen into such an advanced stage of decay that the last resting place of the Chartist martyr remained for long totally unknown. When Frame managed, against the odds, to find it, the campaign to mark the grave resulted in a handsome new memorial that commemorates Frost as Mayor of Newport 1836 and Chartist Leader 1839. It also remembers his wife Mary, who died in 1857, soon after his return from exile and his son Henry Ford Frost (1822–42). The new gravestone was unveiled by Neil Kinnock, then leader of the Labour Party.²

I came to know of John Frost's Congregational background with a little help from my friends. On realising that I needed to know more about Frost to support my study of John Batchelor, I sought help—which came most generously—from both Chartist and Congregational historians. On the Chartist side, I approached Dr Les James, editor of the *Chartism eMag*. On the Congregational side, I was supported by doyen historian, Dr Alan Argent, and the Rev Christopher Gillham, secretary of the Congregational Federation of Wales. All were immediately enthusiastic, with the result that an article is being prepared for the Chartist magazine, and Dr Argent asked me to tell you something about it here, in the *Congregational History Society Magazine*.

John Frost's influence on John Batchelor

So, now I move on to John Batchelor, the Congregationalist whom I started with—and how his connections with Frost resounded through his life, and even after his death. There is a tradition that the young John Batchelor spoke from Chartist platforms, and this was certainly supported by the haste with which the family spirited the 19-year-old radical away from Newport, in the unrest that followed the collapse of the rising to the safety of a Sunderland shipyard, where he could practice the skills learnt when apprenticed in his father's shipyard. Eventually, he settled in Canada, where he developed and managed a large

1 'John Frost's Will' <http://www.newportpast.com/nfs/strands/frost/will.htm>

2 'John Frost's Grave Finally Gets a Headstone' http://www.newportpast.com/nfs/strands/frost/grave_stone.htm

shipbuilding yard in New Brunswick for three years. On his return to this country, Batchelor set up business in Cardiff in 1843 with his younger brother James Sydney, as Batchelor Brothers, timber merchants and shipbuilders, and was soon involved in the political and social life of the town as well as the economic.³

Then began the series of events that saw John Batchelor break the monopoly of the Butes to become a major force in the creation of modern Cardiff. He was elected to Cardiff Town Council in 1850, when a young widower of 30 living with his two young daughters.⁴ An extension of the franchise to include the upwardly mobile merchant class saw the Liberals take over the council three years later in 1853, when Batchelor's part in ending the political domination of the Butes with the election of Coffin was recognised by his appointment as Cardiff Mayor for the following year. Nationally, he campaigned for free trade, against protection and the corn laws, and against the compulsory payment of church rates⁵ that were still paid by nonconformists until 1868, when they were abolished by Gladstone's Liberal government and made voluntary.

In those early years, his passion was unabated and his voice added to the political support for the Charter that continued into the 1850s. His advocacy was recalled after his death in a tribute by his long-time fellow Liberal councillor on Cardiff Town Council, Alderman Richard Cory JP, who—in a reflection of Batchelor's teenage Chartist support—recalled he was still then 'engaged in the noble task' of pressing for the 'six points of the Great Charter—the Charter to remove the disabilities and enfranchise the people'. Something, said Cory, he did even in those later years at the risk not only of losing his position and reputation but of 'actual transportation'.⁶

Continuing Echoes of Frost after the death of Batchelor

While Cory spoke in praise of Batchelor, his Chartist links were used vehemently against him by his political rivals. It was a time when politically-opposed newspapers expressed their views with unreserved partisan gusto. The Conservative interest was supported by the *Western Mail*, originally launched by the Marquis of Bute but then owned by Yorkshire Tory Lascelles Carr (1841–1902); and the Liberal side by the *South Wales Daily News*, owned by Scottish Liberal-Presbyterian David Duncan (1811–88). Cory was speaking at the unveiling of a statue in honour of Batchelor. The statue, sanctioned by a

3 'Death of Mr John Batchelor' *South Wales Daily News* 30/05/1883.

4 Religious Census 1851.

5 'Death of Mr John Batchelor'.

6 'The Batchelor Libel Case' *Western Mail* 14/02/1887.

Liberal Cardiff Town Council, was vigorously opposed by the Conservatives, and became the centre of a re-run of the controversies of Batchelor's life. The Conservatives initiated a petition of 1,200 signatures to remove it but—to *Western Mail* cries of the 'cowardice' of councillors—it was not passed by the council.⁷

The inscription of Friend of Freedom on the plinth, was another point of controversy. In a war of words typical of the acrimonious attacks Batchelor was subject to all his life, the *Western Mail* put forward derisive alternative inscriptions, including 'traitor to the Crown' in reference to his Chartist support, 'hater of the clergy' to highlight his nonconformity, and, a reference to his eventually bankruptcy when the Butes finally succeeded in ruining his business, 'sincerely mourned by unpaid creditors'. That particular attack actually launched a famous criminal libel case that made headlines across the country and set a libel precedent that lives on today. The judge ruled that 'the dead have no rights and suffer no wrongs' and ordered the jury to find for the defendants.⁸

But Carr kept up his spirited attack. In a later effort to justify words used in the original libel case—which he said he had 'ample authority' to prove had not the prosecution collapsed on the point of law that a dead man could not be libelled—Carr said when he wrote, in reference to Batchelor's stay in Canada, that 'he left his country for his country's good', what he meant to convey was that in his opinion it was for the good of the country that a 'political and social agitator, an associate and sympathiser with John Frost and his Chartist allies, like the late Mr. John Batchelor, should leave it'.⁹ So, well after Batchelor's death, there were still echoes of the controversies of his youth. The formative influence of the Congregationalist-Chartist ideals of democratic reform and social justice, learnt in Hope Congregational Chapel and put into practice all his life, were still questioned.

Batchelor's Congregational Heritage

As well as being a catalyst in the great Liberal-nonconformist transformation of Wales, Batchelor played his part, too, in the 19th century flowering of nonconformity in the country, where in the first half of the century a chapel opened every eight days. He was a prime mover in the establishment of a new Congregational Church in Cardiff. In his first years there, he was a member of the then Trinity Church in Womanby Street, which traced its origins as far back as 1640 to the Independent congregation set up by the radical preacher William Erbury when he was ejected from the Cardiff living in the run-up to

7 'The Proposed Removal of the Batchelor Statue' *Western Mail* 27/01/1887.

8 'The Batchelor Libel Case'.

9 *Ibid.*

the Civil Wars.¹⁰ Batchelor led a group there who believed a growing Cardiff would soon need another English Congregational Church and who left Trinity, amicably, to set up a sister church. Charles Street Congregational Church opened for worship in 1856.¹¹

Batchelor remained faithful to Charles St Cong, as it was affectionately known, all his life. Even when the family—he had married again and altogether had twelve children—moved several miles outside the town boundary, he still travelled regularly to its meetings, and when he died in 1883, the burial service was taken by the Rev Joseph Waite, then minister at Charles St Congregational Church. Thousands of people lined the route of the funeral cortege when it reached Cardiff.¹² In a sign of the amazing respect and affection in which he was held, when he was declared bankrupt, Liberals and nonconformists subscribed to a magnificent presentation that eventually reached £5,000 for him. In response, Batchelor stressed everything he had done was ‘done in company and association with you’. He said: ‘You found me beaten down, but not broken hearted.’ Then, in a biblical allusion that would have been natural to him, he said, to loud cheers: ‘You passed not by as the Pharisees on the other side, but like the true Samaritan you poured wine and oil into my wounds, I am now whole again.’¹³

The heritage of Charles St Congregational Church lives on in Cardiff to this day. Following the 1972 formation of the United Reformed Church with the union of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England, in 1976 the congregation of Charles St joined with Windsor Place Presbyterian Church to form today’s City United Reformed Church. After a period of meeting in alternate buildings, the new church settled in Windsor Place in 1978—where I am now a member, and so became interested in the Batchelor story, which had been long forgotten by the congregation.¹⁴ The original building in Charles Street is still thriving, too. Bought a few years ago by St David’s Roman Catholic Cathedral, sited on the opposite side of Charles Street, the grade II listed building is being developed, with the help of Heritage Lottery funding, as the community/conference centre Cornerstone.

End Note

On Batchelor’s death, tributes reflected the deeper motivations of his life.

10 B Ll James (ed) *New Trinity: The History of Cardiff’s Oldest Nonconformist Church* (Cardiff, 1987).

11 ‘Death of Mr John Batchelor’ *Western Mail* 30/05/1883.

12 ‘The Late Mr John Batchelor’ *South Wales Daily News* 02/06/1883

13 ‘Presentation to Mr John Batchelor’ *South Wales Daily News* 21/07/1874.

14 J Silvan Evans, ‘A familiar statue that remembers a forgotten man’ *Morganmug* Vol LXIV (2020).

Supporting newspaper *South Wales Daily News* said Batchelor was a man highly-esteemed ‘in the heyday of prosperity or in the shade of adversity’, his career was ‘one of the most remarkable instances of self-surrender to principle that one can find’. He was ‘singled out for persecution’ because he refused to be a ‘servile parasite’ just to ‘maintain commercial success’.¹⁵ Even the *Western Mail*, which admitted it was usually in opposition to him, said it was to him, more than to any other individual, that members of the radical section of the community were indebted for the position they held in the city. It recognised Batchelor’s intelligence, shrewdness, and ability; and paid tribute to him ‘as an active, industrious man of business, and a capable and sagacious political leader’.¹⁶

Although accounts of Batchelor’s life naturally focus on his historic economic and political achievements in the making of modern Cardiff rather than his faith, he was a man driven by service to his God and his community, and his historic achievements followed from that. He really was a Friend of Freedom—at a time when Freedom, and Nonconformist freedom particularly, needed a good friend.

Jean Silvan Evans

¹⁵ ‘In Memory of Mr John Batchelor’ *South Wales Daily News* 30/05/1883.

¹⁶ ‘Death of Mr John Batchelor’ *Western Mail*, 30/05/1883.

Back numbers of most issues of the *Congregational History Society Magazine* from volume 3 onwards are available from Peter Young (contact details on the back cover).

'FAITH AND FUN': CONGREGATIONAL SPONSORED SOCIAL ACTIVITIES IN LATE VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN BASINGSTOKE—c.1880–1914

Introduction

Although the principal concern of churches has always been the spiritual wellbeing of those living in the areas from which they have drawn their congregations, many have also contributed to the social life of the community in which they are situated. During the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, this observation applied as much, if not more so, to Congregational and other nonconformist churches as to the Church of England, notwithstanding the somewhat puritanical and killjoy reputations they had acquired due, in part, to their antipathy towards intoxicating liquor and gambling. In the words of Jeffrey Cox, they provided 'entertainment for the general community more readily than the Anglicans.'¹ Thus, as the nineteenth century drew to its close, for many Nonconformists there was no contradiction, within prescribed limits, between their faith and having fun.

That said, there were those who, as Watts points out, regarded any form of church based social activity as undermining the Gospel and potentially sinful, with some ministers and laymen believing that 'in the long run the churches' efforts to attract men and women by providing secular entertainment was self-defeating.'² The evidence suggests, however, that such a view was not prevalent amongst the ministers and members of London Street Congregational Church in Basingstoke. Dating its origins to the immediate aftermath of the Great Ejection of 1662, by the nineteenth century London Street was generally recognised as being the foremost nonconformist church in what was, by now, a rapidly growing industrial town, with expanding employment opportunities in the buoyant clothing and engineering industries. Indeed, some of the town's leading businessmen, as well as local politicians, were members of this church.

In this article consideration is given to the various types of social activity sponsored by London Street from the 1880s until the outbreak of the First

1 J Cox *The English Churches in a Secular Society* Lambeth (Oxford 1982) 85.

2 M R Watts *The Dissenters Volume3: The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity* (Oxford 2015) 180.

World War in 1914. Examples are provided of three broad categories of activity: entertainments, both *ad hoc* and regular; fund-raising events, such as bazaars and sales of work; and treats for Sunday school scholars, in which adults frequently participated. However, although considerable effort went into the provision of social activities, throughout the period under review there was an ongoing commitment to eschewing those regarded as harmful. Indeed in a sermon on gambling preached in January 1894, the Revd Capes Tarbolton, London Street's minister, 'remarked that the practice of gambling was threatening to do as much damage as drunkenness itself.'³ Thus, the constraints indicated earlier were very much to the fore. Nonetheless, if press reports are accurate, this did not prevent Basingstoke's Congregationalists and others who took advantage of the social activities they provided from greatly enjoying themselves. Having illustrated the various kinds of provision, in the final section of the article, some of the reasons for linking faith with fun are reviewed and critically examined.

Entertainments

Initially many entertainments, primarily consisting of music and recitations plus refreshments, were *ad hoc* and arranged by a particular church based organisation, such as the Band of Hope and the Mutual Improvement Society (M.I.S.). In April 1881, for example, the London Street Band of Hope marked its anniversary by holding a tea followed by exhortations to abstain from alcohol and a programme of songs, recitations, dialogues plus an address to which the children contributed.⁴ Thus, it could be said that underlying the entertainment was a serious purpose.

Another example was a *soirée* held in April 1884 by the London Street M.I.S. to mark the end of its 1883/4 session. This 'consisted of music, singing, speeches and agreeable *tete à tetes* in the intervals'. The musical items included Handel's "Harmonious blacksmith"; "In shadowland"; and "A little mountain lad".⁵ Interestingly all the performers were women. Such occasions were intended to provide some 'light relief' and informality to complement the more serious educational role of the M.I.S.⁶ To create a suitable ambiance, for a similar event in January 1893 it was reported that 'about fifty members ... the fair sex predominating, assembled in the schoolroom, which presented a cosy appearance, having been set out ... in the style of a large drawing-room.'⁷

3 *Hants and Berks Gazette* [hereafter *HBG*] 27 January 1894

4 'About 150 juveniles sat down to tea'. *HBG* 9 April 1881.

5 *HBG* 9 April 1884.

6 R. Ottewill, 'Churches and Adult Education in the Edwardian Era: Learning from the Experiences of Hampshire Congregationalists' in M Ludlow, C Methuen and A Spicer (eds) *Studies in Church History Vol 55: The Church and Education* (Cambridge, 2019), 494–510.

7 *HBG* 21 January 1893.

Moreover, *ad hoc* entertainments continued into the twentieth century. Thus, in February 1903 the Young Peoples' Society of Christian Endeavour arranged an entertainment for which there was a 'large attendance'.¹ As reported, 'the programme was of a very varied character' consisting of live music, recitations and gramophone selections, that were 'attentively listened to and much appreciated by the audience.'² While at the beginning of 1907:

In place of their usual New Year's social the members of the ... Christian Endeavour Society invited nearly a hundred old folks to a tea and entertainment in ... the Schoolroom ... After tea had been disposed of an interesting programme of songs, recitations, etc., was rendered by the members and other friends. For those of the visitors who were unable to walk to the Schoolroom, an omnibus was requisitioned to convey them to and from their homes.³

This reflected the commitment of Christian Endeavourers to good works as a practical expression of their spiritual maturity and social awareness.

Entertainments on a regular basis commenced in the late 1880s with the advent of "Pleasant Tuesday Evenings".⁴ Little is known about these, however, and they do not appear to have lasted for more than a year or two. Far more successful, in terms of their longevity, were the "Pleasant Saturday Evenings" (P.S.E.) which were launched in 1900. These were an offshoot of the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon (P.S.A.) Society which had started a year earlier. As it was put in a report of the first annual meeting of the P.S.A.:

Having experienced the pleasure and profit to be derived from spending a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon together, the members also desire to have a Pleasant Saturday Evening. Arrangements are to be made for this also, and it is hoped that the meetings will commence at an early date.⁵

It is not known precisely when, but shortly after this declaration of intent, P.S.E. gatherings were launched and for the next 10 years were held weekly between October and March.

At first they proved to be remarkably successful and could be said to have had some of the features of a 'refined music hall.' For example, when they re-started on 24 October 1903, at the commencement of the 1903/4 season, the

1 Although Young Peoples' Society of Christian Endeavour was primarily an organisation for young people, events of this kind attracted people of all ages.

2 The proceeds were devoted to the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon fund. *HBG* 21 February 1903. In March 1904 the same society organised a concert. *HBG* 26 March 1904.

3 *HBG* 5 January 1907.

4 *HBG* 29 March 1890.

5 *HBG* 20 October 1900.

opening session attracted a ‘packed audience’, with something of what was on offer and the general atmosphere being captured in the following report:

The chair was taken by Mr Herbert Kingdon. Mrs Webber sang two songs, as did also Miss Coates who was encored both times. In the chorus of one of her songs she was assisted by her pupils. Mr H. Noakes, who sang some forty songs at these entertainments last year, bids fair to establish a similar record this season, for both his songs were encored, with the result that two more were sung; and, at the bidding of the singer, who quickly gets a rapport with his audience, those present joined in the choruses. Miss A. Kynaston also sang a song, the Misses Sapp played a pianoforte duet and Mr F. Webber gave two recitations.⁶

A week later on 31 October, as well as live music there were ‘selections on the gramophone.’⁷ Although some of the performers were church members, others were brought in from elsewhere. The entertainments were regularly reported in the *Hants and Berks Gazette* with full details of the organiser and performers being given. In one report the P.S.E. was described as providing ‘a means of enjoyment to a large number of both young and old’⁸ and in another as offering ‘a refined and high class programme’.⁹ Moreover, as explained in the first edition of *London Street’s* re-launched church magazine in 1908 the purpose of the P.S.E. entertainments was to ‘provide a healthy, enjoyable and attractive programme for those who otherwise might find it difficult to profitably and pleasantly spend the evening after the weeks toil is over.’¹⁰

Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century P.S.E. clearly met a need. However, these entertainments appear to have come to an end in 1911. The main reason for this was that, although there had ‘been some splendid entertainments’, the attendance was by now ‘very poor’. It was assumed that this was due to ‘various other attractions in the town.’¹¹ Thus, by the second decade of the twentieth century there were signs that increasing competition from secular providers of leisure time activities was undermining the Church’s involvement in their provision. It was perhaps no coincidence that Basingstoke’s first purpose built cinema, the Electric Palace, opened in October 1910.¹²

However, this did not mark the end of church based entertainments. In March 1913, for example, a recital and entertainment was held in the

6 *HBG* 31 October 1903.

7 *HBG* 7 November 1903.

8 *HBG* March 28, 1908.

9 *HBG* January 30, 1909.

10 *Basingstoke Congregational Magazine* 1(1) (January 1908) unpaginated.

11 *London Street Congregational Church Basingstoke Manual for 1911* 46.

12 For a detailed discussion of the origins of the cinema in the town, see M Gould *Basingstoke Entertained* (Wakefield 2007) 7–10.

schoolroom. For the organisers it must have been a little disappointing that ‘the room was not filled ... although the excellence of the programme warranted a crowded house.’ As usual, recitations, solos, duets and instrumental items made up the programme. Particular reference was made to ‘Mr Griffith Harris, on his first appearance as reciter in the town ... [and who] created a most favourable impression ... He was twice deservedly encored and kindly responded with extra pieces.’ The purpose of this event was to raise money ‘for some of the village Congregational chapels.’¹³ Thus, entertainments were frequently linked to a second category of social activity, namely fund-raising, or what today would be called ‘income generation’.

Fund-Raising Events

At first sight fund-raising might appear to have little in common with the social activities considered in the previous section. Indeed, its serious purpose could be said to conflict with the notion of amusement or fun. However, in seeking to reach out to the local community for financial assistance, London Street, like many churches, recognised that, in order to maximise takings, injecting an element of enjoyment was essential. As London Street grew, in terms of its membership and the size of its Sunday school, fund-raising was an ongoing preoccupation if the church premises were to remain ‘fit for purpose’. Thus, many fund-raising events were linked to projects involving the enlargement and/or improvement of buildings and accommodation for the Sunday school. Indeed, the extent of its fund-raising was a clear indicator of its success in attracting new worshippers and Sunday school scholars.¹⁴

During the period covered by this article, London Street organised two major fund-raising events and a host of smaller scale ones. The two principal events were the “Puritan” Bazaar and Fancy Fair held in 1888 and the “Reformation Times” Bazaar in 1903. Interestingly, in both instances, it was felt appropriate to compensate for their somewhat worldly nature by giving them overtly religious titles and ensuring that these received due recognition in the general format of the event.

Both bazaars were held in Basingstoke’s Drill Hall and specialist bazaar designers were employed to provide visitors with a memorable experience. For the former, the Drill Hall was ‘transformed into a very pretty and attractive Puritan village, representing old English houses’ (see Figure 1), with the ‘dresses of the stall-holders ... [being] made to harmonise with the style of the various stalls and shops.’ In addition to the stalls ‘laden with useful and ornamental articles’, there was ‘a museum, containing items of archaeological and general

¹³ *HBG* 8 March 1913.

¹⁴ By the 1890s there were well over 600 children on the Sunday school roll.

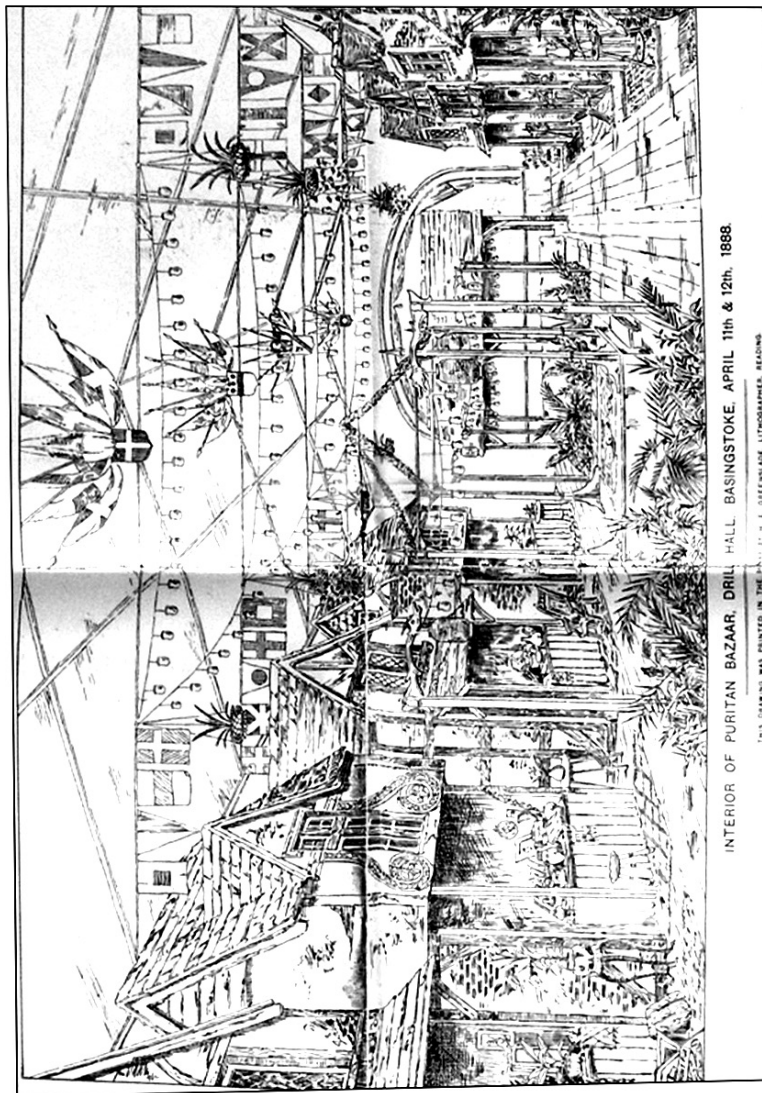


Figure 1: Sketch of the Puritan Bazaar
 Source: *London Street URC Archive*

interest' and each evening 'an excellent selection of vocal and instrumental music' provided by the string bands of the K. Company of the 1st Volunteer Battalion, Royal Hants Regiment, and Guildford Congregational Church.¹⁵ While at intervals, during the afternoon and evening, on the stage at the end

¹⁵ *Reading Mercury* [hereafter *RM*] 14 April 1888.

of the hall there was an exhibition of “old masters” in the form of tableaux.¹⁶ By all accounts the bazaar was a great success with the *Hants and Berks Gazette* commenting that:

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

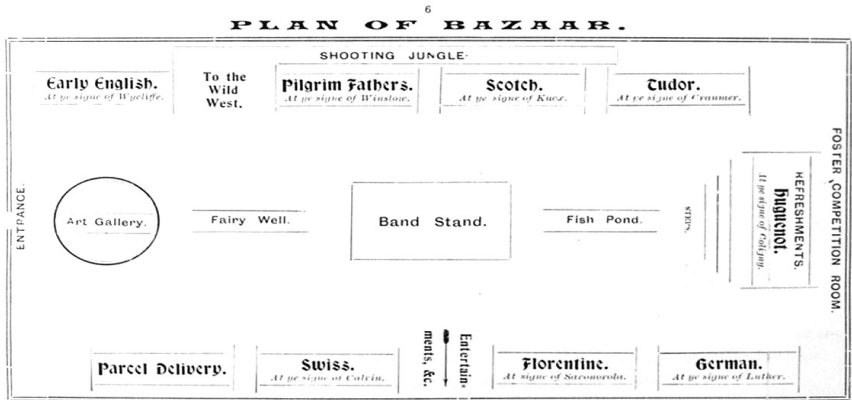
Indeed, such was the anticipated interest that the bazaar was held on Wednesday and Thursday of two successive weeks. The total sum raised was approximately £450 with expenses of £100 (a net amount of about £38,000 in today’s terms), with it being utilised for the London Street Congregational Sunday School Enlargement and Church Renovation Fund. The *Hants and Berks Gazette* concluding comment on, what could be termed, an extravaganza



Figure 2: Reformation Times Bazaar Extracts from Official Handbook

Source: Willis Museum Basingstoke

¹⁶ ‘Among the pictures presented was that in which Piety, Prudence and Charity ... [were] represented as arming Christian for his journey. Another was a group representing Faith, Hope and Charity.’ *HBG* 14 April 1888.



was: ‘This we believe to be the grandest achievement in the way of bazaars that Basingstoke has ever seen.’¹⁷

The “Reformation Times” bazaar was equally ambitious (see Figure 2). Indeed, a ‘brilliant spectacle’ was the phrase used by the *Hants and Berks Gazette* to describe the event. Even allowing for a touch of journalistic hyperbole, the language coupled with the substantial amount of newsprint devoted to the bazaar indicates that it was a noteworthy event in the life of the community.¹⁸ As the newspaper observed, it was ‘necessary to go back some fifteen years to the “Puritan” Bazaar organised by the same Church to find an event to compare with it in its artistic features or to surpass it in its financial success.’¹⁹

Indeed the net sum raised by the bazaar was £278 (just under £30,000 in today’s terms). Its objects, as spelt out in the Official Handbook were to raise money ‘(1) “in aid of the funds of the Hampshire Congregational Union, which relies on help of this kind in order to carry on its work in the poorer districts of our county; (2) in aid of the renovation of our village chapels, our evangelistic and other allied works; (3) towards the purchase of a site for a Mission Hall in the newly developing part of the town.”’²⁰ Again it incorporated a wide variety of attractions. These included the stallholders who were primarily women, being attired in costumes ‘illustrative of various Periods and Countries of the Reformation’;²¹ music; *tableaux vivant*; conjuring; and competitions;

¹⁷ HBG 14 April 1888.

¹⁸ In addition to the HBG, three other newspapers the *Hampshire Chronicle*, the *Hampshire Observer and Basingstoke News* and the *Andover Advertiser* also covered the bazaar.

¹⁹ HBG 7 March 1903.

²⁰ HBG 7 March 1903. For a detailed discussion of the character and significance of this bazaar see R Ottewill ‘Basingstoke’s Grand “Reformation Times” Bazaar 1903: Aspiring Congregationalism’, *Congregational History Society Magazine* vol 5 no 5 (2009) 303–317.

²¹ HBG 28 February 1903.

as well as ‘an art gallery, fairy well, fish pond, and a bandstand’.²² However, elaborating on the point about constraints made earlier, the rules of the bazaar, as set out in the official handbook, incorporated a number of clear moral principles. There were to be ‘1. No unfair prices. 2. No raffles. 3. No obtaining money under false pretences’ and 4. No one was to be ‘unduly bothered to buy’. Applying these meant that everyone could ‘enjoy the bazaar in peace.’²³

There can be little doubt that both the “Puritan” and “Reformation Times” Bazaars were not simply occasions for raising money but major events in the social life of community. They offered everyone who attended something to remember and even cherish. Alongside them can be set a number of less ambitious, but equally memorable, occasions designed to combine fund-raising with pleasure.

One example of a smaller scale fund-raising event was an “Industrial and Loan Exhibition” held in January 1883.²⁴ This comprised a wide variety of objects of interest and curiosities loaned by members of the community, including specimens of Japanese weapons; an Indian opera cloak and Chinese silk shawls; ‘interesting pencil and other sketches of Old Basingstoke’; New Zealand ferns; and ‘a wedding dress of 1708 and silver shoe buckles’.²⁵ Held over two days, just under £109 (approximately £7,300 in today’s terms) was raised for the London Street Renovation Fund.

A couple of months later an evening concert was also held to raise funds for the Renovation Fund. The performers were ‘members of the choir, assisted by friends’ and under the direction of Mr W. Hudson.²⁶

A final example of a smaller scale fund raising event was a sale of work held over 30 years later in December 1913. This was formally opened by the mayoress. Its aim was to raise money to support the work of the London Missionary Society and locally the Hall in May Street, which the church had recently ‘bought and renovated ... and put a minister in charge.’ In addition to the stalls selling items, during the evening ‘a string band rendered selections of music.’ The net proceeds were approximately £49 (or about £4,700 in today’s terms).

Clearly, as these examples demonstrate, fund-raising and entertainment in its broadest sense were seen as complementary activities. London Street’s bazaars and similar events afforded the residents of Basingstoke, whether or not they were churchgoers, something to anticipate and from which they could derive some pleasure.

22 *Hampshire Chronicle* 7 March 1903.

23 “Reformation Times” Bazaar. *Official Handbook*: 7

24 In the *HBG* this was described as a ‘bazaar and sale of work’. *HBG* 27 January 1883.

25 For a full list see *RM* 3 February 1883.

26 *HBG* 10 March 1883. The sum raised on this occasion is not known.

Sunday School Treats

Watts argues that ‘Sunday schools were pioneers in the art of using entertainment to entice people to religion.’²⁷ Treats for Sunday school scholars were seen as one of the highlights of the Church’s year with the most notable occurring in the summer months. Although primarily intended for the children, as the following report of one for London Street scholars held in July 1889 indicates, it could also be an enjoyable occasion for adults:

SUNDAY SCHOOL TREAT.—On Tuesday afternoon, the teachers and children belonging to the Congregational Sunday Schools at Basingstoke held their annual festival at Chineham, that favourite rendezvous for Sunday Schools ... The children started in procession from the schools in London-street at about half-past one, the infants being taken in a wagon. Chineham being reached the youngsters at once began to engage in the youthful sports, which were continued to four o’clock when the bell rang for tea. When the little ones had had their fill, the adults of whom there were many present, had tea on the lawn, during which the Railway Temperance Band ... played selections of music. It is estimated that not far short of a thousand persons were provided with tea, including the school children, and the contingents from village congregations and schools. During the evening, a variety of amusements kept the young folk in a joyful mood, and the races ... proved a source of pleasure and fun to the competitors and spectators alike. The proceedings terminated at nine o’clock ...²⁸

A somewhat similar, albeit more ambitious, event was organised for senior members of the Band of Hope in May 1893. This was an ‘excursion and picnic’ at Dogmersfield Park on Whit-Monday and included a trip on a canal barge ‘nicely fitted up with seats and tarpaulin as a protection against the possibility of a shower’; several hours of ‘various games and amusements’; and a ‘sumptuous repast’, followed ‘by several games [until it was] time for the return journey’.²⁹

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the form and spirit of Sunday school treats was very similar to that of 30 years earlier. Thus in July 1909:

The Congregational Sunday School held a joyous festival at Viabes Farm, kindly placed at their disposal by Mr Gear. The Salvation Army band enlivened the proceedings with music, and there was the usual programme of games and sports, and, of course, the tea for the scholars, and afterwards the adult friends.³⁰

Treats in the form of outings and picnics were seen not only as an incentive

²⁷ Watts *Dissenters* vol 3 173.

²⁸ *HBG* 20 July 1889.

²⁹ *HBG* 27 May 1893.

³⁰ *HBG* 17 July 1909.

for the children but also as a means of recognising the contribution of teachers and friends to the ministry of the church to children and young people. Parents might also be invited. Furthermore, on occasions events were arranged specifically for adults connected with the school. For example, in June 1881 Sunday school teachers enjoyed a picnic in Oakley Hall Park.³¹

Reasons

Underlying the activities illustrated in the preceding sections was ‘the doctrine of the ‘institutional church’, that is the belief that church premises should be social centres as well as places of worship, ... which had [such] a pervasive influence as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth.’³² In other words, churches were expected to make a contribution to the social life of their congregations and others within their sphere of influence, in the belief that the Christian faith applied to every aspect of a person’s wellbeing, their minds and bodies as well as their souls. Moreover, social activities offered a means of fostering fellowship in planning, and preparing for, them and sharing in the enjoyment they provided. They can also be said to have helped to reinforce the principle that Christianity was not just for Sundays. In addition, as Watts points out, the ‘institutional church’ was seen as the ‘culmination of the efforts by the churches to provide alternative attractions to secular entertainment’ and by this means to assist the Church in determining how members used their leisure time.³³

A further reason was the church’s desire to deter members and others from availing themselves of what were deemed to be inappropriate forms of entertainment offered by secular providers. Something of this can be seen in a controversy which arose in the autumn of 1909. In a letter to the *Hants and Berks Gazette*, the then minister of London Street, the Revd Reginald Thompson, and two nonconformist colleagues wrote:

Dear Sir,—We venture to submit to the notice of the Town Council ... concerning matters in which our only interest is the welfare of the town.

(1). The Corn Exchange during last winter and also for a few nights this autumn has been hired for a class of entertainment to which objection is felt on account of its being of a low standard and that the audience consists largely of children and lads and girls.

We would like to ask whether it is possible for some sort of supervision to be exercised over the entertainments for which the Corn Exchange can be hired

³¹ HBG 2 July 1881.

³² For a fuller discussion of the doctrine of the ‘institutional church’ see Ottewill ‘Churches and Adult Education in the Edwardian Era’.

³³ D Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure* (Woodbridge, 2010).

with a view of avoiding those of the lowest standards and of attracting better class entertainments to the town. There is reason to believe further that if it is possible to exclude all children under 16 from these entertainments unless accompanied by an adult a great deal of harm might be avoided ...³⁴

Although their concern was primarily the adverse impact of what were unspecified entertainments on the young, implicit in their standpoint was the need for wholesome social pursuits which could only be guaranteed if they were provided by the churches themselves.

That said, as indicated in the Introduction, church based social activities were by no means unproblematic. As Dominic Erdozain has forcefully argued, the pursuit of pleasure in its many forms carried considerable risks for the churches. In particular, it endangered their principal rationale, namely the saving of souls.³⁵ Indeed, at the time, there were some who shared these concerns. Watts, for example, suggests that the publication in 1889 of a pamphlet entitled *The Devils Mission of Amusement* by Archibald Brown, one of Spurgeon's former disciples, was the high point of 'the conservative assault on the attempt to harness entertainment to the cause of religion'.³⁶

Thus, churches needed to be wary if they were to avoid devoting too much of the time and energy of members to social initiatives. Ideally, they had to ensure that the social served the spiritual and that the latter remained dominant. As Smith and Wrigley argued in 1910, a church's 'week-night Programme should be designed primarily not to attract outsiders to religion, but to provide for those already within the Church's sphere of influence. ... It would be a fatal error to attempt to substitute the concert for the Cross.'³⁷

Notwithstanding the examples provided in this paper, London Street remained conscious of the need for outreach by more traditional means. Each month there was an evangelistic service on Sunday evenings designed to be welcoming, lively and accessible to non-churchgoers, with a string band to accompany the choir and congregation and addresses by the minister with quirky and intriguing titles, which were advertised in the local newspaper.³⁸ While such services acted as a counterpoint to social pursuits, from the surviving evidence it is difficult to determine precisely how much weight was given to the spiritual *vis-à-vis* the social. It is probable that the leadership, both clerical and lay, saw them as mutually reinforcing, with entertainments and treats being

34 *HBG* 11 September 1909

35 Watts *Dissenters* vol 3 168.

36 Watts *Dissenters* vol 3 179.

37 *Examiner* 20 June 1910 222.

38 Examples include 'The ways and wisdom of the Ant' *Hants and Berks Gazette* 20 October 1894; 'Christ, the Silent' *Hants and Berks Gazette* 19 January 1895; and "The tools and tradition of the carpenter" *Hants and Berks Gazette* 17 January 1903.

regarded, first and foremost, as a means of cementing the loyalty of members and Sunday school scholars and fostering fellowship. Moreover, in their eyes, fund-raising was regarded not as an unfortunate necessity, but as an indication of a thriving Church, spiritually as well as numerically, which constantly needed to expand its premises as well as to contribute financially in support of Congregational interests and initiatives more broadly.

Conclusion

In many respects, London Street's embrace of the concept of the 'institutional church', in general, and its approach to the provision of social activities, in particular, exemplified the gradual shift from a more conservative stance on the character and constituents of church life to a more liberal one. Put a little differently, it was not abandoning the primacy of evangelism and the need for repentance and conversion, but was interpreting the role of the Church more holistically. To adapt a phrase, particularly associated with the Salvation Army, it was sympathetic to the view that 'the devil should not have all the best forms of leisure pursuit'. Thus, it was willing to incorporate aspects of what critics would argue was secular entertainment into its definition of what constituted the church's ministry and, in so doing, it did not feel that it was compromising its stance of being '*in* the world but not *of* it'. Indeed, it is likely that the residents of Basingstoke, who took advantage of the social activities provided by London Street, would still have regarded it primarily as a place of worship and a source of spiritual solace when the need arose.

Roger Ottewill

GABRIEL GREGORY—‘A BIT OF A LAD’—BY HIS LAD

There was a Congregational church at the end of our street in Bolton, Lancashire, so that's where my father Gabriel (1902–82) went after being converted by the evangelist [Rodney] Gypsy Smith (1860–1947) in Bolton's Market Place. Anyway, his older brother Abraham (1894–1915) went there, being old enough to be called up and killed in the First World War. My father, being so much younger, was heartbroken. The church had a gymnasium where Abraham taught his little brother to keep fit, as he was being taken on by Bolton Wanderers Football Club as a useful centre half. That would come to nothing when he became an enthusiastic Christian. Indeed his widowed mother was horrified when he said that he was going to be ordained to the ministry. She needed his meagre income as a cotton mill hand, so she took the few books he had acquired in preparation for his ministerial studies and threw them on the fire. So much for H P V Nunn's *The Elements of New Testament Greek*!¹

During the First World War Gypsy Smith served with the Young Men's Christian Association in France and elsewhere, being appointed MBE for his services in 1918. Afterwards he toured the British Isles under the auspices of the Methodist home mission department. Smith was probably the best known and most successful evangelist throughout the world at that time. He had a good tenor voice and a strong and colourful personality which rendered his preaching attractive. His methods were unconventional, although he avoided sensationalism.²

All in all, it was not by intellectual conviction that my father came to Congregationalism: rather it was by sorrow, accident and geographical proximity. Only later did it dawn on him, as it did to me, that this denomination among the many others on offer was the one that made most sense, notwithstanding Gypsy Smith, and met the needs of an enquiring mind. An additional reason was that the girls were prettier, one eventually becoming my mum. Oh, and there was that gymnasium where he trained with his older brother, Abraham, and caught the attention of a Bolton Wanderers 'scout' as a potential central defender, becoming an apprentice footballer with them.

By the good offices of the Lady Hewley Trust and her charitable legacy, and having had lessons in New Testament Greek from a retired professor (three

¹ Nunn's *The Elements of New Testament Greek* was first published in 1914 and went through numerous editions in the first half of the 20th Century.

² ODNB.

shillings an evening—about five pounds in today’s money) after a long walk to his house and home again to a job at the mill—the children’s shift was from 7.00 am to noon with school in the afternoon—he became a suitable candidate for the ministry. Certainly he learned enough to gain admission to Lancashire Independent College.³

As stated, his widowed mother was dismayed at his determination to enter the ministry which led to her fiery response, so urgent was her need for his small wage from the mill. At college his main accomplishment was learning how to drink at a pub in Sale, near Chorlton-cum-Hardy, by the name of Jackson’s Boat, helped by a fellow student, Frederick Arthur Fitch (1902–57), later to serve with the London Missionary Society in Africa. Fitch was at Kwekwe, Zimbabwe (then Que Que, Southern Rhodesia) where he remained 1930–57. He was awarded the MBE in 1952. The ‘Boat’ was a favourite resort of those college years. One student’s study at the college was known as the drinking den, as evidenced by a store of old bottles found under the floorboards there. Their contemporary, the historian Charles Surman, remembered ‘Gib’ Gregory as always ‘a bit of a lad’.⁴ Lancashire College’s distinguished principal 1920–43 was A J Grieve (1874–1952) who was particularly noted for keeping in touch with his former students.⁵

My father went to pastorates in Ashton-in-Makerfield, Besses o’ th’ Barn (Manchester), Normanton Road (Derby), Matlock, Dewsbury, Hornsea (Yorkshire) and Aberdeen before he died in retirement at Perth, Scotland, aged 80.⁶ While serving at Besses o’ th’ Barn, Manchester he played for a local football team, often appearing in the pulpit on Sunday mornings bloodied and limping from the exertions of his Saturday matches,

His pastorate during the Second World War in Derby was the most challenging, being where Rolls Royce engine factory and a major rail terminal were sited. These made Derby a principal target for the Luftwaffe’s bombs. By then he was a convinced pacifist and too old anyway for the call-up. At Derby he ran a regular Tuesday afternoon gathering for some 200 men whom he had found on park benches. I can still hear them singing joyously Sankey’s ‘When the roll is called up yonder, I’ll be there’. They are, of course, all there now.

3 For Lady Hewley’s Charity see R Potts *Dame Sarah’s Legacy: A History of the Lady Hewley Trust* (Chester, 2005).

4 Cards for Fitch and Gabriel Wilson Gregory in the Surman Index, held at Dr Williams’s Library, London.

5 A Argent *The Transformation of Congregationalism 1900–2000* (Nottingham 2013) 297; C Binfield and J Taylor *Who They Were in the Reformed Churches of England and Wales 1901–2000* (Donington 2007) 85–6.

6 W D McNaughton *The Scottish Congregational Ministry 1794–1993* (1993) 211.

He also founded a concert party of minstrels, with a name that would later be deemed unacceptable.

After his retirement, he looked after Trinity, Shiprow, Aberdeen for a few months, when he was living at my sister's home in Perth. There he also served another local church where his fee was a bag of manure for his roses!

I attended Lancashire College, thus following my father Gabriel and I was there for almost five years—being ejected through a ridiculous rule forbidding ginger wine on the premises, and sneakily betrayed by a Methodist teetotal zealot. At the university I became busy, being elected secretary of the men's student union (women were not allowed their own union then), editor of the Manchester student newspaper for two years, and chairman of the United Nations Student Association. The University Press published a book I wrote on the history of the men's union.

The college syllabus did not greatly interest me. On being ejected over the Christmas ginger wine incident, I stopped worrying who wrote Isaiah and immediately found a well-paid job as a reporter with the *Stockport Advertiser*. Then I edited the *Solihull News*, and for ten years was a producer with BBC Radio Derby. I also edited the *Leek Post and Times*, and managed to squeeze in lay pastorates at Solihull and Belper (Derbyshire) before being allowed to move on to ordination at Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire for a 20 years pastorate there.

During the Belper years, I found Leslie Weatherhead's book *The Christian Agnostic* (1967) which took the fluff off Victorian theology, then came Marcus Borg, the US progressive New Testament theologian, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, asking me whether mankind needed religion at all. I realised then that Congregationalism was the only right way to talk about such radical ideas, and founded a discussion group where diverse figures like the late Catholic priest Adrian Smith, Rupert Sheldrake and Martin Camroux all rattled orthodoxy. I toured the nation as president of the Congregational Federation, and resumed ministry in Newcastle-under-Lyme with a further grasp of Gospel certainties.

Camroux's blistering thrust at the possibility of Christian unity in his *Ecumenism in Retreat* (Eugene, Oregon 2016)), which viewed critically the fossilised United Reformed Church, was deservedly influential. I edited *The Congregationalist*, the magazine of the Congregational Federation, for ten years offering some paths to new reasons why Christianity needed to be restated in the science-bewildered modern world. Now at 88, I still produce an occasional magazine which hints at spiritual values derived from parents who both had fingers in spiritualism (or spirituality?). I am transfixed by Pim van Lommel MD's *Consciousness beyond life: the science of the near-death experience* but as nobody takes any notice of old men without a 'woke' note in their minds, that will do!

Today I asked my knowledgeable wife what ‘tik tok’ means and what a ‘ping’ church would look like. Being only 78, she knew at once.

My opinion, for what it is worth, is that Christian unity between denominations is irrelevant. We should agree to differ, as these traditions have no meaning for our times. What matters is an individual’s relationship to whatever he/she thinks of as the numinous. I am content with this: ‘There is an ultimate source of consciousness in a multi-dimensional space, and virtually every part of this endless and nonlocal consciousness is accessible to humans’.⁷

Ian Gabriel Gregory

⁷ P van Lommel *Consciousness beyond life: the science of the near-death experience* (New York, 2010) 308.

BOOKS WHICH MAY INTEREST CHS MAGAZINE READERS:

Selected from Congregational Federation publications. Order form at: www.congregational.org.uk/downloads/forms/publications-order-form-201804.pdf

The Challenge of Preaching the Gospel (revised edition 2016) edited by Lisa Isherwood and Janet Wootton £10

The Spirit of Dissent—A Commemoration of the Great Ejection of 1662 (2015) edited by Janet Wootton. £10

The Transformation of Congregationalism 1900–2000 (2013). Alan Argent examines a century of change for Congregationalists. £35

The Nature of the Household of Faith—Some Principles of Congregationalism (2011) by Alan Argent. £5

Serving the Saints—The History of the Congregational Federation’s Training Board 1979–2010 (2010) by Alan Argent. £7.50

Also available from Amazon and other retailers.:

The Angels’ Voice: A Magazine for Young Men in Brixton, London, 1910–1913 (Boydell and Brewer for the London Record Society, 2016) edited by Alan Argent.

Elsie Chamberlain: The Independent Life of a Woman Minister (2012) by Alan Argent

FRIENDS AND FAMILY—SOME THOUGHTS ON FIFTY YEARS

The coming fiftieth anniversary of the founding in 1972 of the United Reformed Church and also of the Congregational Federation leads me, and I suspect several others, to reflect. We need not indulge overmuch in the ‘what ifs’ which tempt historians. We might well consider that the highest hopes of both bodies remain unfulfilled. Why that is the case requires a fuller exploration than my reflections here allow. A shared discussion might help to mend fences and to renew and create personal friendships. We might also acknowledge that the animosity and ill-will of the 1970s are happily long gone.

We need not use the term failure of either body or both bodies. To do so would be unnecessarily harsh because all the Christian denominations in Britain have faced an uphill struggle in recent years to maintain numbers of worshippers and places of worship. More positively both bodies have been graced by outstanding scholars, preachers and personalities—male and female—and their regular week in and week out activities still provide much needed salt for our world, even if such provision is often unnoticed. They have made, and continue to make, modest but valuable contributions to British society.

Personally, as a minister serving in the Congregational Federation, who trained at Westminster College, Cambridge, I have long had friends in the United Reformed Church. We exchange Christmas cards, attend weddings, reunions, and visit each others’ homes—as well as sit on committees together. My son and daughter-in-law hold office in a URC in the north of England and my home church uses the URC’s hymn book *Rejoice and Sing* (1991). All this is natural and normal. I preach in United Reformed Churches when invited and attend URC worship when on holiday, befriending and talking freely with other worshippers there. I am unaware of any awkwardness on such occasions. To my mind we are clearly brothers and sisters, more obviously so than we are kin with Baptists, Methodists and Anglicans who do not display a similar understanding nor offer a welcome with the same ease and openness.

In the Spring of 1972 John Huxtable (1912–90), the principal architect of the United Reformed Church and a former Congregationalist, wrote to a largely Methodist readership of the coming first general assembly of his new church.⁸ He stated that it would comprise ‘the great majority of the members of the present Congregational Church in England and Wales and all but two

8 For William John Fairchild Huxtable see *ODNB*.

congregations' of the Presbyterian Church of England. He announced that its 'total membership' would be 'rather more than 225,000'. A few months later Huxtable would become the first moderator of the URC's general assembly, and with Arthur MacArthur, his Presbyterian opposite number, he would be the joint general secretary of the new church 1972–74.

Huxtable saw 'the chief significance of this union' as removing 'the whole question of Christian unity' from 'the sphere of discussion to that of decision'. He did not dismiss the ecclesiastical unions of forty years earlier in Scotland and of the British Methodists but rather saw them in essence as intimate 'family reunions'. In contrast, the United Reformed Church was, he claimed, a union 'across denominational frontiers'.

Huxtable expressed the hope that the union of 'two of the smaller Free Churches' would encourage other groups of Christians to unite. Indeed, he stated, 'we hope that the United Reformed Church may as soon as it is right become involved in plans for further and greater unions'. He continued that those who framed the structure of the new church had 'not exactly' tried to combine into 'one reasonably flexible system the traditional characteristics of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism'. Instead they had sought to discover 'the right form of the Church in the present age with all its opportunities for mission in the closest possible association with other Churches'. Yet he conceded that the two traditions had influenced them greatly—'we are the children of our history'—although we trust that we are 'also open-ended'. Then Huxtable stated, 'We certainly have no intention of regarding the forthcoming union as the end of our ecumenical pilgrimage: our hope is that we shall shortly be involved in something bigger'.⁹

Indeed in 1974 Huxtable who was then widely acknowledged as the foremost English advocate of denominational unions was appointed the executive secretary of the Churches' Unity Commission where he served 1975–78. He strove exhaustively for the ecumenical cause that was so 'dear to his heart', believing passionately that the church should be organically one and conveying that passion to many others. In November 1978 he convened the initial meeting of the Churches' Council for Covenanting. As Alan Sell put it, the failure of the ten propositions for covenanting (which themselves resulted from the failure of the Anglican-Methodist unity proposals) led Huxtable to 'the rueful conclusion' that the Church of England, with its then opposition to the ordination of women and its attitude to non-episcopal ordinations presented insurmountable obstructions to wider ecumenism. In truth this setback broke his heart.

By the time of his retirement to Devon he was deeply saddened by the

9 J Huxtable 'The United Reformed Church' in *Kingsway* (Spring, 1972) vol 10, no 57, p 6.

knowledge that his life's dream of greater ecclesiastical union in England had come to nothing. A powerful preacher, a fine pastor, and a gifted broadcaster who knew how to inspire both individuals and large gatherings, in his last years Huxtable cut a tragic figure, making his way to the Methodist church in Newton Abbot with which the local URC, where he served as church secretary, had combined.¹

The leading spirit behind the Congregational Federation was Reginald Cleaves (1915–80), a Welshman, three years younger than Huxtable. He had studied at University College, Cardiff and then trained for the ministry at Coleg Coffa, Brecon, before becoming minister at Maidenhead in 1945. Later he was the minister of Clarendon Park Congregational Church, Leicester, 1955–80. Like others who declined to join the URC, he had been active in ecumenical co-operation, helping to form the Maidenhead Christian Council during his ten years' ministry in the town, and had been instrumental in founding the Leicester Council of Churches. He had been active in the Free Church Federal Council and in the London Missionary Society (later the Council for World Mission). Cleaves favoured a broader approach to unity than Huxtable and his colleagues, advocating rather 'unity in diversity'.

Cleaves rejected the change of name from the Congregational Union to the Congregational Church in England and Wales in 1966, seeing church pre-eminently as the local body of Christians, gathered in one place, rather than as a national denomination. In 1972 Reg Cleaves became the first chairman of the Congregational Federation, working hard with his colleagues to ensure that the CF maintained close links with local, national and international life.²

Among the URC's best critics have been its own members. Geoffrey Nuttall (1911–2007) stated that he joined the URC only to keep faith with his former students, believing that the continuing Congregational bodies were too small to survive. Yet he 'remained a Congregationalist in all essentials', having no love for the URC and its central decision-making which he argued worked only spasmodically and inconsistently. Nuttall viewed ecumenism differently from many contemporaries, sharing with the Roman Catholic historian David Knowles, whom he admired, the approach which stated that 'A love of our Lord is the only—and a sufficient—criterion of a fellow Christian'.³ Nuttall had no great hopes for institutional unions. Rather he favoured personal warmth and openness, accepting all those who sought to follow Christ.

Never friends with, and differing in many ways, from Nuttall whom he

1 ODNB, J Taylor and C Binfield (eds) *Who They Were in the Reformed Churches of England and Wales 1901–2000* (Donington, 2007) 109–110.

2 Taylor and Binfield *Who They Were* 36–7.

3 C Binfield "Geoffrey Fillingham Nuttall 1911–2007" *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, XIV, 443; *The Guardian* 12 Sep 2007.

regarded as ‘aloof’ even in their student days, the Welshman Daniel Thomas Jenkins (1914–2002), himself a keen and lifelong ecumenist, and a noted Barthian theologian, could not stomach moderators and their claim to be ministers without a local church to serve. To him this was theologically impossible. ‘How could they be shepherds without sheep, pastors without flocks?’, he would ask repeatedly with obvious exasperation. With many others, Jenkins was incensed by the URC’s apparent willingness, led by Huxtable, to accept bishops in the historic succession, as part of the wider church unity proposals of the mid to late 1970s, proposals which came to nothing.⁴

Fifty years on, both the URC and its smaller neighbour, the CF, seem to have something of a marooned quality to them. They are beached whales (admittedly of small dimensions), no longer swimming in the waters that once were natural to them, both dated responses to the enthusiasms of long ago. The world has moved on but they are left, seeking a role and seemingly without a solid identity. Despite their kinship, they are set on different paths in terms of their organisations—‘children of their history’, apparently irreconcilable victims of a faded vision. What should they do now?

Alan Argent

4 Taylor and Binfield *Who They Were* 114–15.

BOOK REVIEWS

***A People's Tragedy. Studies in Reformation.* By Eamon Duffy. Bloomsbury, London, 2020. Hardback. Pp 264. £20. ISBN 978-1-4729-8385-5.**

Eamon Duffy's eleven essays here continue the challenge he issued to the traditional Protestant view of the reception of the Reformation in England, when he published his deservedly famous *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale, 1992). The first six essays in this volume are labelled 'Studies in Reformation' and the last five are concerned with 'Writing the Reformation'. Duffy writes well of the cathedral pilgrimage during the late Middle Ages, of the dissolution of Ely Priory, of the rising of the northern earls in 1569 (exposing a widespread nostalgia for the old religion but not an appetite for martyrdom), of Douai, Rheims and the Counter-Reformation, of the King James Bible and of Richard Baxter in reminiscent mood. Duffy's eloquently expressed thoughts on Baxter pre-date the publication last year of the five volumes in the critical edition of Baxter's autobiography, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (Oxford, 2020).

He then turns to his second theme recalling Martin Luther through Catholic eyes, the Victorian historian James Anthony Froude and Queen Mary's reign, A G Dickens, the chronicler of the Reformation of only a generation or two ago, and the Medieval church, the shrine at Walsingham: Reformation and Reconstruction, and lastly on Writing the Reformation: Fiction and Faction.

As Duffy writes, historians have in recent years become 'newly sensitive to the vigour and popularity of many hitherto ignored and unstudied aspects of late medieval Christianity'. As a result the 'widespread discontent with and resistance to the Reformation' has been revealed and the Reformation itself is seen as a lengthy process, 'not a rapid and popular push-over'. Indeed the study of 'minority religious communities, Protestant and Catholic, who refused Conformity to the national Church has moved from a denominational niche interest to the historical mainstream'.

We have here a collection of challenging essays from a historian, at the peak of his powers, ranging widely across subjects related to the best part of three centuries, and re-interpreting those subjects in ways with which we may agree or disagree. Yet he provokes the reader to reconsider old assumptions. In doing so he touches on matters which have long excited the public and quickened the imagination of novelists, film-makers, playwrights, priests and poets, as well as historians, in this country and across the world. I have enjoyed reading this work and suspect that CHS members will enjoy it just as much.

At £20 this is modestly priced. It is well illustrated, has end-notes and an

index. Bloomsbury have produced an attractive work and Duffy's many fans will be pleased. Duffy himself continues to prove his mettle.

Alan Argent

***From Ritualist to Radical: The Theology of Milton.* By Gordon Campbell. Dr Williams's Trust. Friends of Dr Williams's Library. Sixty-Second Lecture. 2021. £5.00. ISBN 978-0-85217-090-8.**

As a brief glance will show, this lecture has been somewhat long in coming in its printed form. It was delivered by Gordon Campbell at Dr Williams's Library in 2008 but, after thirteen years, it has at last appeared and readers, having exercised patience, are the better for its appearance. Campbell, a prolific writer and the emeritus professor of Renaissance Studies at Leicester University and a fellow of the British Academy, is in the forefront of Milton studies. Since 2008 he has, with Thomas N. Corns, been engaged on editing the Oxford edition of *The Complete Works of John Milton*.

Campbell is at pains to explain his improbable title, with its reference to 'ritualist', because surely everyone knows that Milton was a puritan. Yet here Campbell, on the basis of previously unexamined documents, chooses to challenge that 'academic orthodoxy' and argues that Milton was radicalised about 1637 when the poet was 29 years old. Some years earlier, Milton's father, also John, had become the churchwarden of a new chapel of ease at Hammersmith. Given that the Bishop of London was then William Laud, this was a Laudian (high church) chapel. Young Milton moved to live at home there in 1632 when he came down from Cambridge, living then in the shadow of Laud's palace at Fulham. Secondly John Milton senior, the poet's father, became a trustee of the theatre at Blackfriars just at the time when William Gouge, a leading puritan preacher in the City of London, had led a campaign to have this theatre closed. Campbell finds support for his contentions in Milton's early poetry and the choice of Christ's College, Cambridge, with its Arminian associations, for a proto-Laudian position.

Campbell argues his case convincingly and, if I am still somewhat shocked to learn of Milton's foray into sacramentalism, then I have enjoyed the journey. Those who heard this lecture delivered some years ago will benefit from reading it now. Those who did not hear it will gain from its appearance in this form. This is a significant step forward in Milton studies and a feather in the cap of the Friends of Dr Williams's Library that it should grace their series of lectures. They are to be congratulated for doggedly ensuring that it has at last been published. I trust that readers of the *CHS Magazine* will welcome this lecture in print as I did and do still.

Emma Gargrave

Constance. Pioneer, Pastor, Preacher. Edited by Janet Wootton. The United Reformed Church. 2021. Pp 198. Paperback. £7.99 + p&p. ISBN 978-0-85346-351-1.

Do not be deceived, this is not a biography of Constance Coltman (1889–1969) which incidentally might yet be needed. In that respect then, the title is a mite misleading. Rather it offers an exploration of Coltman’s pioneering influence on women, and especially on women in ministry, throughout the twentieth century and still today. Coltman was herself aware of the growing women’s movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of the fight for women’s suffrage, for better education for women, for the formative role of women in the development of Christian pacifism, as well as that crucial influence upon women in the ministry of the churches and in braving the hostility of many churches towards women ministers. Janet Wootton is correct to stress that Coltman was truly a pioneer—brave, resourceful and intelligent, blazing a trail for others to follow for which all churches in all the denominations throughout the world should be grateful.

Here are included several papers, lectures, sermons, prayers, hymns etc around the theme of women’s ministry, inspired by Constance Coltman. The contributors come from Korea, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Zambia, the Philippines, Moldova, Guyana, and the United Kingdom. This collection is broad-ranging too, including both Protestants and Roman Catholics, and asking how Catholicism should proceed from its present position on this subject. Overall this book is really a taster for studies on women’s ministry. A more serious work could be called for.

Readers are supplied with a three page select bibliography. However I should have preferred a fuller index and I think that the book might have noted somewhere that the first trained female minister of any English denomination was the Unitarian Gertrude von Petzold—somewhat unfairly overlooked by Trinitarians. On a personal score, I should also have liked more references to Revd Elsie Chamberlain who was a strong influence on me and on many others who read this magazine. Perhaps Chamberlain’s mentor in Liverpool, Muriel Paulden, deserves a mention too, as do other pioneers. Yet, as far as it goes, this is a worthwhile book, bringing together diverse sources and unifying them under this heading. Thanks to those concerned with this enterprise, twenty-five contributors in total. Undoubtedly there is more to say about Constance Coltman and her influence on the churches of the last century.

Carol Barber

INDEX TO VOLUME 9 2019–2021

(pp 1–60 in No 1, pp 60–108 in No 2, pp 109–72 in No 3, pp 173–236 in No 4, pp 237–280 in No 5, pp 281–320 in No 6)

Authors

Argent, Alan: ‘A godly honest heart’—In search of Geoffrey Nuttall and the Welsh Saints	98
Argent, Alan: Ellen Ranyard and the Bible Women	43
Argent, Alan: English Churches in the Netherlands before 1640	156
Argent, Alan: Friends and Family—Some Thoughts on Fifty Years	314
Binfield, Clyde: A Farewell to Trumpington Street	209
Binfield, Clyde: John le Carré and David Cornwell (1931–2020)—Reviewed in Memoriam	245
Campbell, Gordon A: Bible women in Aberdeen	88
Cleaves, Richard: Called to be a Minister of Christ and of the Church Universal: Reflections on 40 years of Ministry and P T Forsyth	7
Goldstein, Erik: Building the Anglo-American relationship—The John Robinson Memorial Church, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire	67
Gregory, Ian: Gabriel Gregory—‘A Bit of a Lad’—by his lad	310
Griffin, Meegan: A ‘Special Relationship’. The Lyman Beecher Lectures 1872–1914	81
Idle, Christopher: Quietly rejoicing: the hymns of Albert F Bayly, 1901–1984; a personal tribute and reflection	138
March, Philip: William Thomas Stead (1849–1912): Nonconformist, New Journalist, and Social Campaigner	182
Newlands, Diana and Hatch, David: Woodford Wells Ecumenical Church	261
Ottewill, Roger: ‘A Flourishing Cause’: East Cliff Congregational Church 1901–1914	23
Ottewill, Roger: ‘Faith and Fun’: Congregational Sponsored Social Activities in late Victorian and Edwardian Basingstoke—c.1880–1914	297
Ottewill, Roger: Prosecuting the Faith: Congregationalism in Portsmouth c1750–1972	117, 219
Ramacci, Simone: Leyton Richards (1879–1948) A Congregational Pacifist	255
Silvan Evans, Jean: The Congregational background of the Chartist martyr, John Frost, and Frost’s influence on the Congregationalist who played a key part in the creation of modern Cardiff	289

Reviews

Binfield, Clyde, Ditchfield, G M and Wykes, David L (eds): <i>Protestant Dissent & Philanthropy in Britain 1660–1914</i>	166
Campbell, Gordon: <i>From Ritualist to Radical: The Theology of Milton</i>	319
Capp, Bernard: <i>The Ties That Bind. Siblings, Family, and Society in Early Modern England</i>	53
Coffey, John (ed): <i>The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions. Volume I: The Post- Reformation Era, 1559–1689</i>	233
Copson, Stephen (ed): <i>Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters’ Hall Debate of 1719</i>	273
Cornick, David: <i>Through Erik Routley’s Eyes: Theology, Ecumenism and Congregationalism in the 1950s and 1960s</i>	57

Davies, Michael, Dunan-Page, Anne and Halcomb Joel (eds): <i>Church Life. Pastors, Congregations, and the Experience of Dissent in Seventeenth-Century England</i>	165
Davies, Michael and Owens, W R (eds): <i>The Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan</i>	50
Duffy, Eamon: <i>A People's Tragedy. Studies in Reformation</i>	318
Hanciles, Jehu J (ed): <i>The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume IV: The Twentieth Century: Traditions in a Global Context</i>	275
Hayward, Anne: <i>A Pilgrimage Around Wales</i>	168
Humphreys, Peter C: <i>Four Hundred Years of English Congregational and Welsh Independent Churches in Liverpool (1618–2018)</i>	56
Hutchinson, Mark P (ed): <i>The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume V: The Twentieth Century: Themes and Variations in a Global Context</i>	277
James, Anne and Shami, Jeanne: <i>Remembering the Dead: The Role of Manuscript Sermons & Sermon Notes in Researching Early Modern Memorial Practice</i>	167
Larsen, Timothy and Ledger-Lomas, Michael (eds): <i>The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume III. The Nineteenth Century</i>	235
Lay, Paul: <i>Providence Lost. The Rise and Fall of Cromwell's Protectorate</i>	164
Lincoln, Margarette: <i>London and the 17th Century: The Making of the World's Greatest City</i>	272
MacCulloch, Diarmaid: <i>Thomas Cromwell: A Life</i>	49
Peel, David: <i>Crucicentric, Congregational, and Catholic: The Generous Orthodoxy of Alan P F Sell</i>	107
Rivers, Isabel: <i>Vanity Fair and the Celestial City. Dissenting, Methodist, and Evangelical Literary Culture In England 1720–1820</i>	54
Shaw, Jane: <i>Nonconformists and the Modern Revival of Mysticism</i>	278
Stanley, Brian: <i>Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History</i>	55
Stevens, Ralph: <i>Protestant Pluralism: The Reception of the Toleration Act, 1689–1720</i>	106
Thompson, Andrew C (ed): <i>The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume II: The Long Eighteenth Century c.1689–c.1828</i>	234
Tomkins, Stephen: <i>The Journey to the Mayflower: God's Outlaws and the Invention of Freedom</i>	162
Walsham, Alexandra: <i>Archives of Dissent: Family, Memory and the English Nonconformist Tradition</i>	232
Wooller, Les and Freeman, Mike: <i>The History of Harting Congregational Chapel</i>	58
Wootton, Janet (ed): <i>Constance. Pioneer, Pastor, Preacher</i>	320

News, Views and Correspondence

Aberdeen harbourside church	112
Association of Denominational Historical Societies and Cognate Libraries	283
Bayly, Albert	178
Chamberlain, Elsie	174
Cheltenham: Highbury Congregational Church	179
Clarke, Mary Jane (statue)	5, 239
Clegg, Alfred of Boscombe	6
Closing churches	284
Cox, Jeff	111
Cubitt, James	113
Deacon, Malcolm	282
Dissenting Deputies	282
Dr Williams's Library	4
Extempore prayer	112
Forsyth, P. T.	285
Gateway to Early Modern Manuscript Sermons	63

Glasgow, University of	283
Jacques, Ken	282
Journalism	241
Lamont, Professor Willie	3
Leicester: Clarendon Park Congregational Church	65
Leys School Cambridge	177
Livestream Sunday services	180
Martin, Arthur	179
Mary Challis House and Garden, Sawston	2
Mayflower Pilgrims and commemorations	113, 175, 239
Milligan, Ted	177
Ministerial garb	239, 240
Naming churches	245, 284
Pastors or Priests	63, 111
Records need preserving	242
Ruskin, John	3
Salters' Hall Debates	2
Secretary's notes	113, 179, 245, 285
Semper, John	282
Silcoates School	241
Southampton: Avenue St Andrew's URC	3, 65, 112, 178
Southampton: Pear Tree Independent/Congregational Church (URC)	179
Stivey's Chapels in the Valleys	175
Thomas, R S	176
Turner, J M W	3, 4
Turner, Minnie	5
Van Gogh, Vincent	4
Wales, Derek	177
Walpole Old Chapel	284
Watling, Dawn	174
Watts, Isaac	113
Women's ministry	113
Women's role in Congregational churches	6
Woodhouse, Richard	282
Young, Jean	282
Zoom Services and the Gathered Church	238

Subject

1972: Friends and Family—Some Thoughts on Fifty Years by Alan Argent	314
Basingstoke: 'Faith and Fun': Congregational Sponsored Social Activities in late Victorian and Edwardian Basingstoke—c.1880–1914 by Roger Ottewill	297
Batchelor, John: The Congregational background of the Chartist martyr, John Frost, and Frost's influence on the Congregationalist who played a key part in the creation of modern Cardiff by Jean Silvan Evans	289
Bayly: Quietly rejoicing: the hymns of Albert F Bayly, 1901–1984: a personal tribute and reflection by Christopher Idle	138
Beecher Lectures: A 'Special Relationship'. The Lyman Beecher Lectures 1872–1914 by Meegan Griffin	81

Bible women in Aberdeen by Gordon A Campbell	88
Bournemouth (East Cliff): 'A Flourishing Cause': East Cliff Congregational Church 1901–1914 by Roger Ottewill	23
Cambridge (Emmanuel): A Farewell to Trumpington Street by Clyde Binfield	209
le Carré: John le Carré and David Cornwell (1931–2020)—Reviewed in Memoriam by Clyde Binfield	245
Forsyth: Called to be a Minister of Christ and of the Church Universal: Reflections on 40 years of Ministry and P T Forsyth by Richard Cleaves	7
Gregory, Gabriel—'A Bit of a Lad'—by his lad by Ian Gregory	310
Netherlands: English Churches in the Netherlands before 1640 by Alan Argent	156
Nuttall: 'A godly honest heart'—In search of Geoffrey Nuttall and the Welsh Saints by Alan Argent	98
Portsmouth: Prosecuting the Faith: Congregationalism in Portsmouth c1750–1972 by Roger Ottewill	117, 219
Ranyard: Ellen Ranyard and the Bible Women by Alan Argent	49
Richards: Leyton Richards (1879–1948) A Congregational Pacifist by Simone Ramacci	255
Robinson—Memorial Church: Building the Anglo-American relationship—The John Robinson Memorial Church, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire by Erik Goldstein	67
Stead: William Thomas Stead (1849–1912): Nonconformist, New Journalist, and Social Campaigner by Philip March	182
Woodford Wells Ecumenical Church by Diana Newlands and David Hatch	261

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