ISSN 0965–6235

Congregational History Society

Magazine

Volume 9 Number 5
Spring 2021

ISSN 0965–6235

THE CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY SOCIETY MAGAZINE

Volume 9 No 5 Spring 2021

Contents

Editorial 238

News and Views 238

Correspondence 240

Secretary's Notes 245

John le Carré and David Cornwell (1931–2020)—Reviewed in Memoriam
Clyde Binfield 245

Leyton Richards (1879–1948) A Congregational Pacifist
Simone Ramacci 255

Woodford Wells Ecumenical Church
Diana Newlands and David Hatch 261

Reviews 272

All rights are reserved: no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the permission of the Congregational History Society, as given by the editor.

EDITORIAL

This issue contains a rich variety of offerings, two of them from new contributors, yet all our articles are set in the modern period. Clyde Binfield has returned to the *CHS Magazine* to examine the nonconformist background of the novelist, John le Carré, and how this fertile material affected and inspired his writing. Simone Ramacci explains his fascination with the early twentieth century Congregational pacifist, Leyton Richards. Lastly Diana Newlands and David Hatch have reflected on the story of their recently closed church, Woodford Wells Ecumenical Church. We welcome Simone, Diana and David to our pages and trust that readers will find here plenty to whet their appetites for our history.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Zoom Services and the Gathered Church Online

Barry Osborne has commented on the proliferation of worship online through Zoom and other means during the pandemic.

'During the current Covid crisis many Congregational churches, like those in other denominations, have found that being online their numbers have grown. Yelvertoft is an example where I and others have delighted to be part of an interactive congregation using Zoom. Former members, with no other local church roots, in Spain and Cornwall, have regularly attended and made what looks and feels like a Congregational church—gathered online—perhaps by the Holy Spirit.

Our esteemed forebears would never have envisaged this, but the gathered church online is a reality and I am keenly encouraging my friends to find ways of expressing Congregational values within the real (not virtual) online congregations. It is possible to set up appropriate induction into Congregational practices, and follow similar remote processes, but it does need to be thought through. How can we embrace the reality of a digital disparate congregation and its covenanted membership?

Incidentally, I conducted a special online communion service for Elstow (Bunyan Christian Fellowship) a few months back. I believe this was as real a communion with God and one another, and a profound reflection on the price paid for our salvation. How do others feel about this?

It is possible that our understanding of 'gathered' may need adjusting as

people, disenchanted with the experience of church in a building, are willing to come online as enquirers, or even commit online as disciples of Christ. Perhaps we need time to think through the theology but, we might recall, that the first Christians lived the experience and only afterwards tried to understand fully that experience.'

The Pilgrim Community on the BBC

Lesley Dean offered the following observation.

An episode of *Songs of Praise,* broadcast in September 2020, took as its theme the Mayflower and the 'Pilgrims' who sailed for the Americas, in 1620. At the time of writing, the programme is no longer available in full on BBC iPlayer but it is possible to view a clip of Aled Jones interviewing Stephen Tomkins, editor of the United Reformed Church magazine *Reform* and author of *The Journey to the Mayflower: God's Outlaws and the Invention of Freedom*, about the Separatists (https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08r1wvy). From his expertise, Tomkins stated that the Separatists wanted to strip away 'all the trappings of the Church of England' in the belief that these were leftovers from Catholicism rather than being biblical. Among those trappings were the 'priestly robes ministers were supposed to wear'. The use of the term 'priest' for clergy is still heard in the Church of England today but, as dissenters, we acknowledge the priesthood of all believers, respecting the gifts and learning of ministers in the same way that we respect those of all church members. Do we really need them to dress differently from us?

I found it incongruous that at the end of the programme the prayer was led by the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, dressed in a black suit, clerical shirt and dog collar. Presumably he was chosen as a senior representative of modern Separatists.

Brighton Suffragettes

Michelle Thomasson wrote in the *CHS Magazine* Autumn 2018 about 'Minnie Turner and the Suffragettes in Brighton', referring three times to Mary Jane Clarke, the younger sister of Emmeline Pankhurst. Mary was a long-term resident of Minnie Turner's boarding house in Brighton. Sadly Mary was beaten by the police in clashes that were later called Black Friday. She died on Christmas Day 1910, three days after her release from Holloway Prison where she had been force-fed. She suffered a fatal brain haemorrhage.

Proposals for a statue of Mary Clarke in the Royal Pavilion Gardens, near the Brighton Museum, have recently been made. Fundraising has already begun and Denise Dutton has been chosen as sculptor. She has produced a bronze

maquette of Mary which can be seen on maryclarkestatue.com—the appeal website. The Brighton *Argus*—argus.co.uk—has covered the story several times.

CORRESPONDENCE

In part prompted by Clyde Binfield's article in our last issue, Chris Idle has written.

'Much could be said about wearing dog-collars; most of my Anglican clergy friends (though fewer of the younger ones) wear a collar occasionally rather than regularly, and as a mark of function rather than status. Most clergy, like me, find that wearing such a collar opens some doors (giving unique opportunities) but closes others; it's up to us to assess what is appropriate for each situation. rather than opt for a blanket ban or a rigid insistence (like the high-churchly habit of going everywhere in a black cassock).

I normally wear one on formal visits to a hospital, care home, college or prison, especially for the first time. A porter at Grove Park Hospital complained about a new Free Church Chaplain who came in wearing a tie, 'If 'e's a proper vicar, why don't 'e dress like one?'

On a station platform, it is helpful to know who are the staff and who are passengers; likewise hospitals; staff or patients. Timothy Dudley-Smith often wears his collar, and a purple shirt, because (he says) if people find out afterwards that they have been talking to a bishop, they feel cheated. But TDS never wears a mitre. He even writes to newly-appointed bishops urging them not to do so. The one who confirmed me (Christopher Chavasse of Rochester) never wore one. and I think that the somewhat-evangelical David Sheppard was the first Bishop of Liverpool to wear one. The mitre-wearers say, 'But I wear one only for a few minutes in a month!'; to which TDS responds 'Yes, and those are always the minutes when the photographer is around!'

But I wander from the point …

Here's a short story for you: a rising young Surrey clergyman, whom I had met but did not know well, gave a paper at a big evangelical gathering in (I think) 1977. His paper, like those of other platform speakers, was published as one chapter of a small book; in both speech and printed word he argued strongly for the abolition of all pretentious titles (Rev, Rt Rev, Most Rev etc) and dress (robes, vestments, copes and mitres, even clerical collars) on just the grounds dissenters might take; because there is no trace of such nonsense in the New Testament.

After some years he became a bishop; Peterborough, I think. I wrote to him to ask if he still held the views published over his name in that book. He graciously replied at length; to my surprise, a warm and friendly letter. But at

no point did he come close to answering my question! So in that silence lay his answer and that (says the cynic in me) is one factor in becoming a bishop.

My case, and collar, rests, although we might add that the dog-collar seems to have been a Victorian (or just pre-Vic?) innovation; somehow the clergy survived without it in the eighteenth century. And the most-often heard argument is, 'How dare we spend all this time and energy arguing about collars, when the world around us is perishing?' Curiously, it's usually the well-robed collar-wearers who say that.'

On this score also Peter Young has contributed the following,

'It is worth noting that, even as archbishop, Rowan Williams always wore a black shirt—no doubt a Welsh influence. In eighteenth century costume dramas, clergymen are always distinguishable, though I doubt that in reality they wore clerical garb all the time. Isaac Watts's portrait in Dr Williams's Library and in the National Portrait Gallery (a copy of DWL's portrait) shows him wearing a stock and preaching bands, with a silk gown. However I remember Robert Forman Horton's declaration, on leaving Oxford for Congregational ministry in Hampstead, 'I shall wear no clothes that distinguish me from other men' and the Punch cartoon showing him apparently naked in the pulpit!'

In response to last autumn's *CHSMag,* Ian Gregory, having combined journalism and his ministry, has written.

'I have just read the History Society's magnificent article from Philip March about W T Stead and journalism. Thank you for it. Journalism has morphed into television and other media, so my own local papers and radio efforts mixed with ministry have nothing like the status of Stead's journalism.'

John Thompson has commented.

'I thought the last issue a very good read, although I was surprised to find Clyde Binfield's lyrical piece on Emmanuel. Philip March's account of W T Stead was a well-researched account of a character so out of line with today that he sounds like a caricature. March mentioned a number of real commercial and journalistic failures, evidence that Stead knew failure. He touches on Stead's interest in spiritualism, though not that this was the only time it attracted serious public interest. Do I remember Stead's daughter's claim that she had the first account of the *Titanic's* sinking direct from her drowning or drowned father, a journalist to the end?

In this period of failure and decline, Stead took sixth form boys from Silcoates School [which years later Dr Thompson attended] to dinner in Leeds. He seems to have valued his schooling. Is it not curious that both Stead and George Newnes were at Silcoates at the same time? The head was unusually progressive for the period and there was still a Bewglass prize at Speech Day in my time. *Tit Bits* hardly compares with Stead's *Northern Record* but I had cousins

who read it and it was a very interesting mix of the serious and the silly. Clyde Binfield has just written a history of Silcoates for its 200th anniversary.

Stead's eventual imprisonment made him to some a martyr and even in my day there was a portrait of Stead in oils proudly wearing his prison uniform, arrows and all, in the old Library at Silcoates. It disappeared sharpish in 1943 when a new modernising headmaster arrived. I believe it is true to say that one result of this scandal was Parliament's establishment of 16 years as the age of consent and that its many failed attempts to stop the abuse of little girls, by setting such a date, was one reason that Stead thought he was justified in what he did.'

Preserving Records

Amid fears that denominations will abandon printed year books, with all the useful material that they carry for historians, not least obituaries, Chris Damp wrote,

'To my mind electronic versions of things are most inconvenient! I simply do not enjoy using a computer; I struggle to work on a computer and have to print material off to read as I find it difficult to read on a screen. Being a bookbinder and creator of books, I much prefer paper. But those are just my funny ways!

The serious question is the *preservation* of a digital record. This is a real concern and I don't think that even the British Library has really solved this. Such a record needs to be continually updated and the work involved is enormous and will grow as the digital record grows. I cannot access material on my computer now from when I first came to Bunyan Meeting in 2005. Material I created on floppy disks is now totally lost to me—how on earth can I ever retrieve it, without going to a specialist company to undertake this work? How will someone in 2150 be able to look at an obituary published in an electronic *Congregational Year Book* in 2021? I just cannot see such material being preserved in the future!

A couple of months ago I was asked about a chap buried at Bunyan which led to a wonderful adventure of discovery—I readily found a little information about this chap, but then a huge amount of material about his brother who became a Congregational minister—of whom we knew nothing at Bunyan, in spite of his going from Bunyan into the ministry. I found his obituary in the 1874 *CYB*—within an hour I had found pretty much everything that had been written about him—all from books in my study. Now I doubt somebody would be able to do that in 2150 without the help of a specialist library—if the information survives at all. This to me is a serious problem for the historian of the future and the demise of the *CYB* is a part of this problem. What can we do as a CHS to preserve our record?'

Richard Cleaves has contributed:

'When we went on holiday we used to take a *Congregational Year Book*, find out times of services and visit churches. Often, we would be disappointed to find there wasn't a service at that time as the *Year Book* was already out of date when it was published. We now google the church and find information online—most churches have some kind of presence on the web and those that don't are included on the Federation Website with the information about services etc included.

The Congregational Federation will have to continue to keep the records it has always kept—I think that the information in the *Year Book* will need always to be updated and kept digitally. The information that's public (which most is) ought then to be in the public domain online. Personal contact details can be made available behind a password protected part of the website.

All the stuff at the front, including obituaries and all the other information, can be made available digitally.

None of that perturbs me. In fact, I think it's all very much more useful and user friendly, not least because once it is set up digitally it can be updated in real time without having to wait for the publication of a print copy of a *Year Book*.

The serious point is yet—how is information preserved for posterity?

As a History Society, I think we should welcome moves to put information on line. I think it would be much better to make a positive response, emphasising the importance of keeping in an appropriate way the records. Indeed, it may be that Dr Williams's Library and the Congregational Library are part of a network of libraries addressing this issue.

The possibilities that come to my mind immediately are:

- Each time an online publication comes out, it should be saved, together with an up to date version of the directory of churches in the kind of format recommended by digital archivists.
- It might be decided on each occasion to print off a handful of hard copies to be deposited in appropriate libraries and archives

In that way the historical record would be preserved.

New Congregational Memorial Hall Trust—Congregational Library website

The trustees of the Congregational Memorial Hall Trust and Library have launched a new website which can be accessed at www.conglib.ac.uk. The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust was founded in 1872 to create a memorial to those ministers who lost their livings in the Church of England following the Act of Uniformity in 1662. The fund established by the Trust was used to create the Congregational Library and encourage and assist Biblical studies. Since 1872

the Library has occupied several sites in London but now is lodged with Dr Williams's Library in Gordon Square, London, who manage the Congregational Library collections on behalf of the Trust. The United Reformed Church, the Congregational Federation and the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches, all of which grew out of Congregationalism, each have an interest in the Trust and have a right to appoint its trustees. Among the collections held by the Congregational Library are the archives of the Congregational Union/ Congregational Church, 1831–1972, and some of its successors, 1972 onwards: namely the United Reformed Church, and the Unaffiliated Congregational Churches Charities. The Congregational Library holds over 50,000 books, pamphlets and periodicals concerned with Congregationalism, Puritanism and Dissent in general.

ANTIQUE MAPS AND HISTORICAL PRINTS

SECONDHAND AND ANTIQUARIAN BOOKS

Clifton Books

John R. Hodgkins, B.Sc. (Econ.), M. Phil.

11 ROYAL TERRACE, SOUTHEND, ESSEX SS1 1DY

● WANTS LIST ●

We are particularly anxious to buy books on the following subjects:

CHURCH HISTORY
LOCAL HISTORY
BRITISH HISTORY
SOCIAL PROBLEMS
SOME THEOLOGY
POVERTY, UNEMPLOYMENT
HISTORY OF MISSIONS
POLITICAL HISTORY
BIOGRAPHIES
and similar matters

We also buy general second hand books in large and small quantities

We buy bookcases

Please contact us. We look forward to hearing from you.

Telephone: 01702 741538

E-mail: jhodgk9942john@aol.com

SECRETARY'S NOTES—A CHURCH AND ITS NAME

To quote Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, 'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet'. But, you may ask, what about a church?

My father was minister, and my mother a member, of West Street Congregational Church, (now West Street United Reformed Church), Maidenhead, when I was born and so that's where I was baptised. It's easy enough to find in the town centre, though I have a feeling nowadays you might direct people to the church behind Marks and Spencer.

We moved to Leicester when I was 18 months old and my father became minister of Clarendon Park Congregational Church which is where I grew up. Leicester was then expanding along main arterial roads and the church was located on London Road, on the edge of a new suburb called Clarendon Park: hence the church's name. It couldn't be called 'London Road Congregational Church' as there was already another with that name a mile closer to the city centre. Though something of a Gothic cathedral on a road that boasted mansions for the city's entrepreneurs, including one, two hundred yards away, belonging to Thomas Cook, the church quickly identified its mission, building Sunday School rooms and a sizeable hall.

I left for college in Oxford and worshipped for three years on Sunday mornings at Mansfield College Chapel and in the evenings at Jesus College Chapel. On Sunday mornings we often adjourned from Mansfield's Chapel to the city's Presbyterian Church (as it was in my first year), United Reformed Church (as it became in my second year): called St Columba's to identify it with its Celtic roots and probably its links to Scottish Presbyterianism.

I trained for the ministry in Coleg Bangor and attended each week Sunday services (when I wasn't out preaching) and midweek Bible studies at Penrallt English Baptist Church. Penrallt is Welsh for 'top of the hill' which was a little confusing as the church was sited only half way up a steep lane leading from the lower campus of the University College of North Wales to 'Top Coll' and the upper campus. To be fair, the lane was called Lower Penrallt Road. The church has grown and moved to the top of the hill so it's still called that—though it's now on Holyhead Road!

Following my marriage to Felicity we moved to Harden, outside Bradford: shortly afterwards I was ordained to the ministry of the one Church of Jesus Christ and inducted to Harden Congregational Church. Later we joined two churches south of Shrewsbury, serving Minsterley and Pontesbury where we belonged to Minsterley Congregational Church and to Pontesbury Congregational Church.

In 1991 we were called to Highbury Congregational Church, Cheltenham

where I became minister and Felicity joined in church work, not least in the Scout Group. It was oversubscribed so imagine her embarrassment when she phoned someone whose son had at last reached the top of the waiting list for Highbury Cubs only to find that they lived in Highbury, Islington, London! There was an explanation for the confusion. The church in Cheltenham had been planted in what was in 1827 a new town by, among others, people from the recently formed Highbury Congregational College in Islington, on the site that almost a century later became Arsenal's football ground. Many a Congregational church was planted by people from the College and took its name with them. Do you know of any in your locality?

A couple of years ago, we retired to Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr, Bridgend, and, taking the opportunity to use the Welsh we have been learning off and on for a life-time, joined the Welsh language church, Tabernacl. Note: that's not a mis-spelling. It's a loan-word in use in Welsh since the 14th Century. It's borrowed not from English, but as in English, from the Latin, tabernaculum. English has to add an 'e' at the end: Welsh has no need!

There's something significantly different … which is common in Wales. While Church in Wales parish churches are named after ancient Celtic saints (like Illtud, Tudno and most famously Dewi), Welsh chapels usually have Biblical names. My mother grew up in Horeb, Treherbert. Our Congregational church in Blaenavon has been given a wonderful new lease of life as a community space and café. It's called 'Bethlehem, Blaenavon' which, given that Bethlehem means 'House of Bread', is a fine name for a café church! As we gather together in Tabernacl, in person or on Zoom, there's a sense that here God's presence dwells.

It's unusual for a church in our Congregational tradition in England to be named in such a way. I feel that it's to be treasured! Our editor's church is, of course, one: Trinity Congregational Church, Brixton.

It is always sad to hear of the closure of a church, but good to know that its witness continues. In his 'Farewell to Trumpington Street' (*Congregational History Society Magazine*, Autumn 2020), under the tongue-in-cheek heading, 'Emmanuel's Last July', Clyde Binfield commented on the recent naming of the United Reformed Church in Cambridge: "The name taken in 2018 by the newly conjoined Emmanuel and St Columba's was a fusion of retrospect, prospect, and present reality: Downing Place United Reformed Church". I cannot see how that name fuses 'retrospect, prospect, and present reality'. To the contrary, it's a return to the standard naming of churches in our tradition in England, simply determined by geographical location.

That's a pity, not least because many recently formed churches use biblical names: I know of two Grace Churches, one Compassion Church and a number of United Churches now called Christchurch. Why, I wonder, was

the Congregational church that P T Forsyth moved to as minister, on leaving Clarendon Park, Leicester, called Emmanuel? That name goes to the heart of what it means to be church. Gathering together with such a name is a reminder that, as we gather in the name of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God is with us.

That's perhaps how Forsyth felt, as shortly after becoming minister of Emmanuel he first delivered, and then published his radical *Charter of the Church*, with its plea for separation of church and state and for a church, as his own church's suggested, whose charter 'is the principle incarnate in the eternal and irreducible personality of Christ' and whose 'changeless note is Grace'.

He had been 'called' to leave Leicester and go to Cambridge to engage with the thinking that goes on in such a University, as *The British Weekly* reported on 4th October, 1894. 'The principal factor in influencing his decision was a letter he had received signed by the leading men [sic] of the Congregational Union…. The letter urged the importance of the sphere to which P T Forsyth was invited. The church there was valued not simply because of its influence in Cambridge, but also in the University, and it was of primary importance that the pulpit should be fitly and influentially filled'. It is telling, then, that it was towards the end of his ministry in Cambridge that Forsyth published his *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, beginning as it does with the Preacher and His Charter and his claim that "it is with its preaching that Christianity stands or falls".

Just as much could be made, though in a different way, of St Columba's in Cambridge and the significance of a church deliberately associating itself with the Celtic Christianity of Columba. I have a feeling that when the Congregational Church in Cambridge was named 'Emmanuel' and the Presbyterian Church in Cambridge was named 'St Columba's' it could have been said that the very names captured the rootedness of those churches in the past, their vision for the future and the present reality. Perhaps Clyde Binfield might write a further article, assessing the radical contribution of Emmanuel, and of St Columba's, not only to the town of Cambridge but also to the thinking of the University?

If opportunity arises, I wonder whether newly planted churches, and even unions of present churches, might seek names that say more than geographical location!

Richard Cleaves

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).

JOHN LE CARRÉ AND DAVID CORNWELL (1931–2020) REVIEWED IN MEMORIAM

> In my childhood, everyone around me tried to sell me the Christian God in one form or another. I got the low church from my aunts, uncles and grandparents, and the high church from my schools. When I was brought to the bishop to be confirmed, I tried my hardest to feel pious, and felt nothing. For another ten years I went on trying to acquire some sort of religious conviction, then gave it up as a bad job. Today, I have no god but landscape, and no expectation of death but extinction …
>
> John le Carré *The Pigeon Tunnel: Stories from My Life* (2016) 258.

I

Charlotte Cornwell, who died in January 2021, was a much admired star of film and television and a fine Shakespearian actress as well. Her elder brother, Rupert Cornwell, who died in March 2017, was a much admired foreign correspondent for *The Financial Times* and *The Independent*. They had an older half-brother, David Cornwell, who died in December 2020. He was the best known of the three, because he was John le Carré, the novelist. They make a glittering trio and theirs was, perhaps, the last generation when such people might as a matter of course have had Nonconformists in their extended family.[1]

So it certainly was with David Cornwell. His grandfather, Alderman Cornwell, Mayor of Poole, was Treasurer of the Southern Baptist Association, church secretary, lay pastor and lay preacher. The Association's Memorial Resolution was gracefully phrased: "It is not easy to appraise his worth without seeming to do him an injustice".[2] An aunt married into a Parkstone family of active Congregationalists.[3] A cousin, Brian Haymes, has been Principal of

1 For Charlotte Elizabeth Cornwell (1949–2021) see A Hayward 'Charlotte Cornwell' *The Guardian Journal* 27 January 2021 p6; for Rupert Howard Cornwell (1944–2017) see R Fox 'Rupert Cornwell' *The Guardian* 5 April 2017 p31; for David John Moore Cornwell (1931–2020) see E Homberger 'John le Carré' *The Guardian Journal* 15 December 2020 pp10-11.

2 For A E F [Frank] Cornwell (1876–1946), of Bay View, Mount Road, Parkstone, Dorset, Treasurer of Southern Baptist Association from 1931, President in 1936, Secretary of Parkstone Tabernacle, see *Southern Baptist Association Year Book, 1946–1947* 8, 9, 25.

3 Her husband, Harold Hayman, was Secretary of Westbourne Congregational Church; his

two Baptist theological colleges and closed his pastoral ministry at the famous Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church.[4]

That was on his father's side, the Cornwell side. His grandfather on his mother's side, William Glassey, was a Congregational minister and an uncle, Alec Glassey, briefly a Liberal M.P. and holder of minor government office, was a lay preacher who served on committees and became Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales.[5] Each of William Glassey's four pastorates was in Yorkshire and although Alec Glassey's longest associations, like the Cornwells', were with Parkstone, he had risen from a Yorkshire base. He and his wife were for a while members of Sheffield's Cemetery Road Congregational Church and her family, the Longbottoms, had left their mark on local Congregationalism. One of them, Mary Hannah Longbottom, was Matron of Sheffield's Fir Vale Workhouse. That was a commanding as well as a demanding post; not many such were open to women in Edwardian Sheffield, and memories survived of Miss Longbottom in her pew near the Longbottom memorial window in Burngreave Congregational Church.[6]

So far, so admirable but by David Cornwell's reckoning there was another side to this. There was his father, Ronald, the alderman's son. David described Ronnie Cornwell as:

> … conman, fantasist, occasional jailbird … a crisis addict, a performance addict, a shameless pulpit orator and a scene grabber … a delusional enchanter and a persuader who saw himself as God's golden boy, and he wrecked a lot of people's lives.[7]

And John le Carré's finest novel, *A Perfect Spy* (1986), immortalises that man as Rick Pym, conman beyond compare. It also immortalises the uncle as Sir

---

father had been its organist and choirmaster. I am indebted to Revd Dr Brian Haymes for alerting me to this link.

4 Brian Haymes, minister in Bristol, Exeter, and Nottingham 1965–1981, and Bloomsbury 2000–2005; Tutor, then Principal, at Northern Baptist College, Manchester 1981–1994; Principal, Bristol Baptist College 1994–2000. Again I am indebted to Dr Haymes for further information about the Cornwell connection.

5 For William Glassey (1863–1906), minister at Normanton, Whitby, Penistone, and Dewsbury (Earlsheaton) see *Congregational Year Book* (1907) 155–6. His energetic ministry at Penistone (1893–1904) is described in A E Beard *A Short History of Netherfield Congregational Church Penistone 1786–1900* (Penistone undated c1972) 15–22. For Alec Ewart Glassey (1887–1970), MP East Dorset 1929–1931, Junior Lord of the Treasury September to November 1931, Chairman CUEW 1941–2, see C Binfield and J Taylor (eds) *Who They Were in the Reformed Churches of England and Wales 1901–2000* (Donington 2007) 74–6.

6 The Longbottoms were in coal; their names crop up frequently in Sheffield Congregational Year Books from c1904 to c1921 and in the records of Burngreave Congregational Church from 1883. I am indebted to Miss Kathleen Head for much Longbottom and Burngreave information.

7 le Carré *The Pigeon Tunnel* 255, 256.

Makepeace Watermaster, arch-hypocrite, master of resounding platitudes. It is a cruelly convincing characterisation of Alec Glassey, the man who had been the author's guardian and had paid for his expensive education.[8]

David Cornwell's formation, at least in retrospect and as seen by him, was shadowed by deceitfulness. It was smoke, mirrors, and appearances. No wonder John le Carré's novels are master classes in betrayal, steeped in ambiguity, portraying disappointed traitors for whom shame awaits. How could his family's "faith" sustain him?

Most families have their shadows although few have been subject to such precise and pitch-perfect dissection as John le Carré's Cornwells and Glasseys but it cannot quite be left at that.

John le Carré's novels strike home because of their author's Cornwell and Glassey inheritance and not despite it. That inheritance was stamped in his handsome features, his beautifully modulated speaking voice, his ear for the rhythms of speech. Diction was his forte. It had come to him from the lay preachers on both sides of his family, not least from that nationally known (at least in Congregational circles) uncle who was so proud of his elocution. It was embedded in the Nonconformity from which he could never wholly disentangle himself. It was there in the way he "spoke truth to power through his novels".[9] It was there in "his very strong sense of the right and the wrong, aligned with a wonderful sense of humanity's complexity. His characters … all wrestling their ambitions and frustrations and inadequacies and posturings." [10] It was there in his "ear for the dialect of the governing classes of this country, perfectly tuned to their evasions, their deceits, their melancholy … his deep moral sense … his ability to walk moral high wires."[11] All these are tributes made after his death. And it is there in his last novel.

II

Agent Running in the Field was John le Carré's twenty-sixth novel, published just over a year before he died. It ran true to form, as the blurb makes clear:

> Nat, a forty-seven-year-old veteran of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, believes his years as an agent-runner are over. He is back in London with his wife, the long-suffering Prue. But with the growing threat from Moscow Centre, the office has one more job for him …[12]

---

8 This is explored in C Binfield, 'Sir Makepeace Watermaster and the March of Christian People: An Interaction of Fiction, Fact and Politics' in J P Parry and S Taylor (eds) *Parliament and the Church 1529–1960* (Edinburgh 2000) 164–184.

9 Ruth Windle *The Guardian Journal* 16 December 2020 p5.

10 Ralph Fiennes *The Guardian Journal* 15 December 2020 p11.

11 Jonathan Freedland *The Guardian Journal* 19 December 2020 p1.

12 J le Carré, *Agent Running in the Field*, (2019) (hereafter *Agent*), dustjacket blurb.

Nat is the narrator. There is also Ed—Ed Shannon, "introspective and solitary"—and half Nat's age:

> Ed hates Brexit, hates Trump and hates his job at some soulless media agency. And it is Ed … who will take [them] down the path of political anger that will ensnare them all.[13]

There is little action; action, in le Carré's novels tends to be cerebral.[14] That is another sign, perhaps, of their author's ineradicable nonconformity and our present concern is with the religious thread, indeed the Nonconformist Christian thread, that runs, deft, occasional yet persistent, through this particular narrative.

At its beginning Nat is told about Ed by Alice ("sixty years old, whimsical, portly and always a little out of wind"), the Caribbean-born receptionist of the sports club in Battersea where Nat and Ed play badminton: "He's heard about you, now he's come to get you, sure as David did Goliath." [15]After several matches they exchange views. Ed explodes over Trump and "all the tunnel-vision fanatics he's got round him. The fundamentalist Christians who think Jesus invented greed!" Thus it builds up for Ed, "whose Nonconformist background has become by stages a notable feature of these outpourings."[16]

That background is carefully, accurately, coloured in. There is nothing random in the fact that their game is badminton: "For unbelievers, badminton is a namby-pamby version of squash for overweight men afraid of heart attacks. For true believers there is no other sport." … That choice of words, "unbelievers" and "true believers" …[17]

There is another idea to be planted in the reader's mind: "Badminton is stealth, patience, speed and improbable recovery. It's lying in wait to unleash your ambush while the shuttle describes its leisurely arc."[18] Just think how many church halls have been fitted out for badminton; and think too of how it might prepare an agent for running in the field—it is not a team sport, its players "tend on the whole to be a lonely lot", individualists, as some Nonconformists like to be.

Ed is taking shape. He is a grammar school boy ("don't ask me which one") from somewhere near Doncaster, "one of two children born ten years apart into an old Methodist family of North country miners … His mother spent whatever

13 Ibid.

14 The characteristics of a le Carré novel have been explored by a fellow novelist: W Boyd, 'The spy master's style' *New Statesman* 8–14 January 2021 pp32-6.

15 *Agent* 3, 7

16 Ibid 58, 61

17 Ibid 62.

18 Ibid.

free time she had from work at adult education classes until they were cut", and we later learn that she was "on record as a serial *marcher*, protester and *rights activist* on a wide range of *peace* and similar *issues*" (italics are a trademark tic of le Carré's). Ed's sister Laura has learning difficulties and is partially disabled and he—aged eighteen—had "renounced his Christian faith in favour of what he called 'all-inclusive humanism', which I took to be Nonconformism without God, but out of tact I refrained from suggesting this to him." He had gone on to a "new" university, "I am not sure which." [19]

Ed Shannon, with his "secularized Methodist soul", is not the only character to be placed confessionally. There is Percy Price, "head of the Service's ever-expanding surveillance arm … a keen churchman".[20] There is Sergei, a Russian defector, who "also believes in God … But his faith must not be mediated. As an intellectual he has no love of clergy".[21] Is nobody free from religion's clasp? So much seems to be belief and conversion.

Take the agent, Arkady, an "essentially decent man … strapped from birth to the roller-coaster of contemporary Russian history"; le Carré goes to town with him:

> The illegitimate street-child of a Tbilisi prostitute of Jewish origin and a Georgian Orthodox priest is secretly nurtured in the Christian faith, then spotted by his Marxist teachers as an outstanding pupil. He grows a second head and becomes an instant convert to Marxism-Leninism.
>
> At sixteen he is again spotted, this time by the KGB, trained as an undercover agent and tasked with the infiltration of Christian counter-revolutionary elements in northern Ossetia. As a former Christian and perhaps a present one, he is well qualified for the task. Many of those he informs on are shot.[22]

That was then, because now Arkady is an oligarch, hiding comfortably in the Czech Republic, in what used to be Carlsbad and is now Karlovy Vary: "We have an Orthodox cathedral. Pious Russian crooks worship in it once a week. When I am dead I shall join them." [23]

The entanglements intensify. There is a password, Jericho, something to do with Operation Jericho, a secret Anglo-American accord to undermine the EU. There are the Bryns, Bryn Jordan and his Chinese wife, fond of madrigals and living in Hampstead. Jericho? Jordan?

> … the Bryns as we called them were Old Catholics and there was a Christ on

19 Ibid 64–5, 201.
20 Ibid 71–2.
21 Ibid 104.
22 Ibid 127.
23 Ibid 139

> the cross lurking in the shadows of the hall to tell you so. How a Welshman of all people becomes a devout Roman Catholic is beyond me, but it was in the nature of the man to be inexplicable … And that's Bryn Jordan for you, the river you only cross once. [24]

It is Bryn who instructs Nat to turn Ed into a double agent. Given that, where does the following scene fit into the tangle? Ed has parked his bike, in order to sit in a church for twenty minutes. His minders seem mystified:

> 'What sort of church?'
>
> 'Low. The only sort that leaves its doors open these days. No silver, no sacred paintings, no raiment worth a damn.'
>
> 'Who did he talk to?'
>
> 'Nobody. There were a couple of rough sleepers, both bona fide, and an old nelly in black across the aisle. And a verger. Shannon didn't kneel, according to the verger. Sat. Then walked out and cycled off again. *So*'—with revived relish—'what was he up to? Was he committing his soul to his Maker? Pretty bloody odd moment to choose in my judgement, but every man to his own. Or was he making sure his back was clear? …[25]

We are approaching the end. Ed is to marry Florence. It is all arranged. Florence, with her Cheltenham Ladies College voice, is also in the Service. It is to be "a quick Register Office job, no bullshit", but Ed, as we learn from Nat, our constant narrator, has told his mother. Perhaps that was why he had sat for twenty minutes in that church?

> '… and she was *magic*', he confides, leaning forward over his beer and grabbing my forearm in his enthusiasm. 'She's into Jesus in a pretty big way, Mum is, same as Laura, always has been. And I *thought* she'd say, you know, "if Jesus isn't going to be at the wedding it's a washout." … 'Only Mum can't travel, not easily', he is explaining. 'Not at short notice. Not with her leg and Laura. So what she said was: do it the way you both like. Then when you're ready, not before, we'll do it the proper way in church and have a big spread and everyone can come round … So we're all fixed up for this Friday, as ever is, twelve o'clock prompt at the Register Office in Holborn because there's a queue, specially with the weekend coming up. They reckon fifteen minutes maximum to do you, then its next couple in and round to the pub, if that's all right with you and Prue at short notice …[26]

24 Ibid 220.

25 Ibid 229.

26 Ibid 250.

That is our last glimpse of le Carré's religious thread. It peters out with "a quick Register Office job". We will never know if Ed's mother will get her way—church, a big spread, and everybody coming round. We will never know what becomes of Ed, our agent running in the field, or indeed of Nat, who runs him, though we might guess. All, from beginning to end, has been riddled with deception. Who knows what? For how long? On whose behalf? I read the book before reading of its author's death but, knowing that he was eighty-eight, I wondered as I read if this was to be le Carré's last. And now, re-reading it, I find it to be such pure le Carré as almost to be a caricature.

Where does this get us? This excursion into family and local history has turned into an essay in lit. crit. Is this novel total fiction, innocent of any moral? Is the constant threading of religion merely a mannerism, a careful plant, an author's trick (or tic) to convey period detail? That is how it is most likely to appear to future readers. They will know little of Methodism or any sort of "Nonconformism" secularized or otherwise. But to the author's generation this thread was integral to their experience. Is it so far-fetched to imagine David Cornwell's minister and lay preacher grandfathers, his church secretary and committee-conscious uncles, his theological college principal cousin, sitting behind or beside Ed in that London church, with his conman father looking furtively, perhaps brazenly in, not to mention that workhouse matron whose family were in coal?

And is it possible to write so depressingly well of deceit and betrayal without some sense of what is right, a strong sense indeed of honour, of fidelity, of the keeping of promises? David John Moore Cornwell, Sherborne, Oxford, the Foreign Office, MI6 and MI5, with time spent teaching at Eton, remained a nonconformist; John le Carré retained a claim on what his narrator, Nat, would have called Nonconformism but we know it as Nonconformity.

Clyde Binfield.

LEYTON RICHARDS (1879–1948)—A CONGREGATIONAL PACIFIST

It's another autumn day at the office, everyone is going about their work, trying their best not to let disturbing news from the outside world obstruct essential tasks. All of a sudden, a loud commotion is heard towards the entrance and a flurry of trench coats and constables appears, their determined looks somewhat troubling: being followed by police officers and surprise searches are all common experiences by now.

The constables begin to go through stacks of papers, drawers, and cabinets, when a voice raises up: 'I will save you some trouble by giving you straight away the most subversive literature we have in this office'. Looking at the General Secretary who has just spoken, you see him offering to hand over a copy of the New Testament, an act made more poignant by the fact that the government has declared in parliament that printing the Sermon on the Mount falls foul of current censorship provisions.[1] The date is 14th November 1917, and you've just witnessed police raiding the office of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, just the last in a string of searches and other intimidating actions, supposed to curb any attempt to damage the British war effort.[2]

This story helped frame a sermon preached at Wivenhoe Congregational Church earlier in the year during Conscientious Objector Sunday celebrations, as the General Secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (henceforth FoR) on the fateful day in 1917 was Leyton Richards, a Congregational minister who had been also among the founding members of FoR in 1914.

Alan Argent's work on *The Transformation of Congregationalism* (2013) in the last century provides some fascinating insights to the different attitudes to both World Wars in our churches and, without it, I should not have matured such an interest in the rich history shared between the Fellowship of Reconciliation and Congregationalism.[3] Whilst Christian pacifism has always been a minority position within Congregationalism, it has been the home for some celebrated Christian pacifists nonetheless, including Constance Coltman (née Todd)[4]—

1 J Wallis *Valiant For Peace* (London 1991) (hereafter *VFP*) 30.

2 C Barrett *Subversive Peacemakers: War Resistance 1914–1918: An Anglican Perspective* (Bristol, Connecticut 2014) 166.

3 A Argent *The Transformation of Congregationalism 1900–2000* (Nottingham 2013) 98, 103.

4 K Thorpe 'Constance Coltman—a Centenary Celebration in Historical Context' in *Feminist Theology* 26 (1) 8–18; C Binfield and J Taylor (eds) *Who They Were in the Reformed Churches of England and Wales* (Donington 2007) 40–41.

who was a lifelong FoR member and the founder of Christian CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) as well as Congregationalism's first female minister, from 1917; therefore, I believe it is important to explore this extraordinary minority as an essential part of our shared heritage, as I shall try to do in retelling the life of Leyton Richards, and commenting upon it, which I am better able to do thanks to a now out-of-print biography, published by his wife Edith, as well as what little material I was able to access on the internet.[5]

Formative Years

Born in 1879 in Sheffield, Leyton Richards was the middle of three surviving sons of Charles and Jessica Richards. His mother was a keen Nonconformist in religion and a Liberal in politics, and his father was an accountant by training who had taken up the family clothing and outfitting shop, and was better suited for modern theology than business. Charles' entrepreneurial attempts would see the family move to the United States of America for two years (which Leyton would always remember with great fondness)[6], as well as to London, before finally arriving in Reading, in Berkshire, where Leyton's passion for the Church was kindled by the life-long friendship of Rev Dr Ambrose Shepherd (1854–1915) of Trinity Congregational Church there. After two pastorates in the West Riding of Yorkshire, Shepherd had moved in 1891 to Reading where he remained until 1898.[7]

Not only was the Richards family in attendance there, but the youthful Leyton also took the opportunity to develop his preaching skills, as he was encouraged and supported in playing a more active part in worship, even visiting and leading worship in the rural chapels which Trinity was then responsible for. Aged 19 years, Ambrose Shepherd encouraged him to pursue a call to ministry and arranged for Trinity to pay Leyton a small allowance which he supplemented with preaching, writing, and working on steam boats during the summer, eventually leaving Glasgow University with an MA and a reputation as a 'natural orator'.[8] As well as completing his training at Mansfield College, Oxford, 1903–1906, Richards also met his wife (and future biographer) whilst in Oxford, the daughter of a Congregational minister whose mother came from the Congregational branch of a Quaker family.[9] She was a Somerville College

5 Edith Ryley Richards *Private View of a Public Man: The Life of Leyton Richards* (London 1950) (hereafter *PVPM*).

6 *PVPM* 1–7.

7 Surman Index of Congregational Ministers at Dr Williams's Library, London.

8 *PVPM* 8–18.

9 *PVPM* 23–25; E Kaye *Mansfield College Its Origin, History, and Significance* (Oxford 1996) 129. Edith's father was Samuel Pearson. See Surman Index.

student. Both had strong characters. He was over six feet tall and talked 'like a torrent'. They married in 1907.[10]

First Pastorate

Having been called to his first pastorate in Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, where he served 1906–1910, he did not neglect his life-long commitment to the Liberal Party. Rather he kept active politically and even criticised their foreign policy as a possible catalyst for a future European war.[11]

Australia

After four years in Scotland, a call was received for Richards to minister in Melbourne, Australia. There Richards distinguished himself by preaching openly about local affairs; during his time in Australia the government passed a law mandating military training for boys aged 12–18, with an exemption for he who was 'forbidden by the doctrines of his religion to bear arms'.[12] Having attended some of the hearings in which children were expected to prove their right to an exemption, and as a staunch Nonconformist and Liberal, Leyton Richards was incensed by such an 'assault to [the] rights' of conscience,[13] as he saw it, and he began a series of sermons on compulsory service which drew mixed reactions such as: 'A good many irresponsible people have said much the same as Mr Richards',[14] 'The somewhat violent and very illogical discourse delivered by Rev Leyton Richards',[15] 'The Minister of Defence … said … any man who confused citizen defence with militarism did not know what he was talking about'[16], 'Sir, I am glad of the Rev. Leyton Richards' stand. He is teaching Christianity, and his position is therefore sound'.[17] Lastly one critic stated, 'If these good folks find it necessary to protest against compulsory service, how is it they are content to live in a country which … will continue to spend money on preparations for war?'[18]

Even with the controversy that his preaching stirred, his eventual departure from Australia in 1913 saw many people wishing him and his family farewell; he travelled back to England by way of South Africa, where he first was introduced

---

10 Binfield and Taylor *Who They Were* 189–191.
11 *PVPM* 31–35.
12 Defence Act 1911.
13 *PVPM* 39–46.
14 *The Herald* (Melbourne) 17 June 1912 p4.
15 *The Argus* (Melbourne) 18 June 1912 p6.
16 *The Register* (Adelaide) 18 June 1912 p4.
17 *The Argus* (Melbourne) 19 June 1912 p4.
18 *The Bathurst Times* 22 June 1912 p4.

to Gandhi's non-violence, thanks in part to his brother-in-law who had been active in the local community.[19]

Bowdon Downs

As churches in 1914 had a generally 'pacific but not pacifist' attitude, word of Richards' opposition to conscription in Australia had spread to England, where he was invited to address both the Quaker and the Free Church Council annual meetings on the matter, but also to fill a vacancy in the Cheshire town of Bowdon Downs, where the Congregational church had joined enthusiastically in the war effort. Far from growing up a pacifist, Richards had only fully come to his views during the Australian affair and, as such, he thought himself an anomaly in the English Christian landscape, with the exception of the Quakers, with whom he was at times involved, and thanks to whom he was invited to a Cambridge conference in December 1914.[20] This conference, convened by Dr Henry Hodgkin—a Quaker—gathered 130 peace-affirming Christians with the purpose of creating a movement that would not just oppose war, but embody a positive view of life on the basis of Christian values; thus the Fellowship of Reconciliation was born, and quickly grew to 1500 members by 1915.[21] Invigorated by the birth of the FoR, Richards started preaching that "the Church was guilty of a denial of her faith by supporting the war", though the vast majority of the congregation were not pacifist, as the author of their church history recalls "Mr Richards held very strong pacifist views … and he felt compelled to put them forward here—which he did with a force and passion quite new to his hearers in general. That he carried them with him it cannot be said", after all 160 members had gone to the war, and some had already perished.[22] His preaching on the war was so incessant that "there was no rest for the congregation at all", and he just as strongly opposed the blockade of Germany as he did the fighting proper, once preaching from Romans 12 by ending the verse "Therefore if thine enemy hunger" with an extempore "starve 'em out!"; whilst many in the church might have felt unease at his preaching, a small minority was so transformed by it as to form an FoR branch which was still in existence in 1950, and it is also reported that soldiers tended to agree with him much more than their civilian relations.[23] One always to put his words into action, Richards found himself in court over a leaflet he had co-authored with other members of the No-Conscription Fellowship for "prejudicing recruiting

19 *PVPM* 49–51.

20 *VFP* 7.

21 M Palayiwa in *FoR: 100 Years of Nonviolence* (Oxford 2014) 7–8.

22 A R Edmonson *The Bowdon Downs Congregational Church 1839–1939* (Altrincham 1939) (hereafter *BD*) 18–19.

23 *PVPM* 60–61.

and military discipline", of which they were all found guilty and fined £100.[24] Though his church was immensely supportive, Richards decided it was time for him to resign, and would not yield to the Meeting's request that he took six months off instead .

Liverpool & Bowdon

Having spent some time campaigning in the United States, Richards returned to England and was elected the General Secretary of the FoR, which is when we met him at the beginning of this story.[25] Perhaps because of the lack of 'prudent restraint' in making his 'pacifist feelings' known, he did not receive another call until 1918, when he secured the pastorate of Pembroke Chapel[26] before being called back to his previous pastorate (though this time without unanimous support from the church meeting).[27]

Birmingham

Having received a call from the prestigious Carr's Lane Church in Birmingham, Richards was wary to start anew when he found himself with a congregation that supported his pacifist views; nonetheless he was strong-armed into preaching there and, to his surprise, the staunchly pacifist sermon he had picked did not dissuade the meeting, so that he left Bowdon again in 1923.[28] As the minister of Carrs Lane, Richards received positive reviews both at home and abroad for his preaching abilities, one such reviewer noting his pacifist stance:

> It reminds me of my curiosity as to how Mr Richards became an uncompromising pacifist. Not, I think, because of any rigidly interpreted text. Nor, I suspect, because of any predisposition to general meekness. That he made his decision 'honestly facing the historic Jesus' I do not doubt … [He], it is fair to surmise, has actually experienced the perilous adventure of peace.[29]

As well as preaching, his time in Birmingham was full of other engagements, from participation in the ecumenical Christian Social Council of Birmingham, to his role as chairman of the BBC Midlands Religious Broadcast Committee, to his lecturing and preaching engagements in North America every three years, as well as inspiring the formation of the Carr's Lane Pacifist Group within his Church, much like he had before in Bowdon; members of this group would

---

24 *The Times* 18 May 1916 p3.

25 V Brittain *The Rebel Passion* (n.p. 2012) (hereafter *RP*) 25.

26 *The Bulletin* (Sydney) 15 August 1918 p52.

27 *BD* 21.

28 *PVPM* 72–77.

29 Martin Pew of *The Christian World*, cited in *PVPM* 84.

go on planting other FoR groups across England and Wales thanks to an itinerant ministry of their own, though not everyone approved of the Church's reputation as that "pacifist church" .[30] His life-long throat troubles meant he decided to resign his pastorate in 1936 , and accept a Fellowship at the Quaker Woodbrooke College, also in Birmingham.[31]

Final Years

World War Two found Richards working at Woodbrooke, at the same time as the college provided accommodation for refugees from both sides of the conflict. Curiously a fellow at Woodbrooke 1943–45 was the young Congregational historian and pacifist, Geoffrey F Nuttall, then completing his thesis for his Oxford DD. With other residents they experienced the nerve-wracking reality of German bombing, about which Richards wrote to his brother:

> The imbecility of this whole thing would be unbelievable were it not so tragically real, for we are doing just the same to unoffending German citizens with our aircraft … What fools these mortals be! … No one stops to think what victory means or whether if we win the war we shall lose the peace, as we did in 1918.[32]

At the same time, his work and friendship with many Quakers, finally led him to request membership of the Society of Friends in 1946, though he never renounced the calling as a Congregational minister.[33] It is therefore not surprising that after his death in 1948 the memorial took place at Carr's Lane.[34]

Only one of the fellowships Leyton Richards served in his life, Peterhead, remains as a Congregational Church. The rest have either ceased to exist, or merged into some form of uniting body. Gone are the Bowdon Downs and Carr's Lane peace groups, gone are all the FoR local branches. out of print are Leyton Richards' books. If his world has largely gone, yet his legacy continues: in the transformed lives of countless Christians, in the work of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and in the books of many Christian thinkers who were inspired by his works. Leyton Richards was a combative man, defiant and self-assured. It is my hope that this summary of such a life of witness may inspire people within the churches to reconsider the claims of Christian pacifism.

Simone Ramacci

---

30 *PVPM* 89–93.

31 *The Times* 9 December 1936 p10; *RP* 58.

32 *PVPM* 119–120.

33 *The Times* 31 August 1948.

34 *The Times* 25 August 1948.

A HISTORY OF WOODFORD WELLS ECUMENICAL CHURCH— BY TWO FOUNDER MEMBERS

Beginnings

One evening in late January 1983 a group of around 40 like-minded Christians met in a home in Woodford Green to discuss an exciting new venture. Most had come from a multi-denominational background and felt that those things Christians had in common were much more important than the things that divide them. They felt that the moves towards greater ecumenism were too slow, perhaps even going backwards. One local church, for example, from which many of those gathered that night had come, had become more denominationally rigid since joining the United Reformed Church. However, there was no desire to break away from the established denominations or to become 'a house church'. No-one wanted us to turn our backs on them but rather to forge as close links as possible with them, learning from all the great traditions. For that reason the phrase 'Independent Church' was rejected in favour of the more cumbersome title of 'Ecumenical Church'. We were accepted into membership of the Congregational Federation and, on the recommendation of the London Baptist Association, the Baptist Union amended their rules to allow us to become full members. We became a registered charity.

A Place to Worship

Our venture seemed to be blessed from the outset as the Governors and Head of Bancroft's School offered us the use of their beautiful chapel, which was available on Sundays, as the school had recently stopped taking boarders.[1] Additionally, they made available classrooms, the dining room for refreshments and fellowship after the service and other facilities when needed. We also quickly obtained the blessing of Canon Michael Cole, the local Anglican priest in whose parish the chapel was situated, and of the diocesan bishop, the Right

1 Bancroft's School, founded by a City merchant, in Mile End, London in 1737 on the site of what is now Queen Mary, University of London. It moved to its present site in 1887. K.R. Wing *A History of Bancroft's School 1737–1987* (1987).

Revd James Roxburgh, Bishop of Barking.[2] We received support from the local churches of all denominations, Catholic and Protestant, and local church leaders were ready to offer their services if at any time we felt the need for the help of an ordained person.

Church Structure

It was agreed that the management of church affairs should be in the non-conformist tradition, with a secretary, treasurer and leadership team whom we chose to call 'Servants'. Their terms of continuous service would be limited to four years. Final decisions would be authorised, under God's guidance, by a monthly meeting of all church members. The Servants took responsibility for specific aspects of the running of the church, including liaison with the school, pastoral care, mission and youth care. We also agreed not to have our own minister but to seek visiting preachers from all Christ-centred denominations, both Catholic and Protestant. We would carry out our own pastoral work, at least initially. We would hold a meeting for prayer every Tuesday evening. This has been a key feature of our church's life and has been held virtually every week throughout our history. We also established a midweek meeting on Thursday mornings: a place to share news of members and friends and to pray for all in need, to engage in regular bible-study, to invite speakers or hold discussions. This regular time for fellowship together proved to be a significant source of mutual encouragement and support through good times and bad. Both these meetings were held in members' homes.

Plans for Worship

A 'Duty Servant' would liaise with the preacher in preparing the service, with members participating as required in Bible reading and leading prayers. Not a few commented over the years that participating in these ways increased their confidence in the faith and helped them grow spiritually. Wherever possible, we would try to follow the format of worship of the visiting preacher's denomination. This meant, for example, that we would alternate between the Anglican tradition of receiving communion at the altar rail and the nonconformist style of serving the elements in the pews. We did not rely solely on visiting preachers: over the years at least 25 church members were invited to speak—a valuable experience for all the community. (A few would have a sermon up their sleeve in case the visitor had to cancel at short notice or hit traffic hold-ups on the way.) Sometimes drama was included, generally

2 For Cole see *Crockford's Clerical Directory*. For Roxburgh (1921–2007) see *Church Times* 10 Jan 2008.

by the younger members, and found to be powerfully effective. A tradition was soon established to hold a service of lessons and carols each Christmas; this became popular locally and in 2019 the size of the choir had grown to 24 with many enthusiastic 'augmenters' swelling the sound. In latter years, the church celebrated Pentecost with the Daisy Road, Woodford, Salvation Army Corps.

Our Statement of Faith

It gave us a wonderful sense of freedom to be able to write our own simple Statement of Faith:

> 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator and sustainer of the Universe, in Jesus Christ his Son, my Saviour, who died on the cross and rose again, and in the Holy Spirit whose indwelling power enriches and guides my life. I accept the Bible as God's word and embrace the church as His Fellowship on earth.
>
> Through faith I shall endeavour to live my life according to His way of love, and to witness to Christ my Lord.'

Getting Started

Planning immediately began for the first service, to be held on Sunday, 6th March, only six weeks after the first meeting. This was very much an act of faith as only two weeks before the date no preacher had been booked for either of the first two services. Again the Lord seemed to bless us as the Revd Roger Forster, leader of the Ichthus (Ecumenical) Christian Fellowship, agreed to lead our worship on both these dates.[3] The inaugural service was attended by over 100 people.

The importance of shared social events was not overlooked: outings, picnics, communal meals for special occasions, self-generated entertainment. One of the most unusual and very enjoyable events in our calendar was our annual informal ecumenical supper to which the leaders of all local churches were invited. Although one or two were initially cautious about accepting, ('What's the agenda?') and there were even lingering reservations about 'sharing a meal with Catholics', virtually all accepted. Several of them had never met the others but they all knew us since they had been to lead our worship, so we were able to effect introductions, some of which led to lasting friendships.

A church magazine, *Good News*, was very quickly born, with news of all kinds but also including summaries of all the sermons. Some years later our website took shape and became an important place to outline our inclusive

3 For Forster and Ichthus see S M Burgess and E M van der Maas (eds) *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (2002).

identity. Certainly the fact that we had embarked on a new—perhaps almost unique—way of 'being a church' meant that we had a story to tell—a tool for witness, to friends and relations. People found it intriguing.

After seven years it was decided that the pastoral work would benefit from the help of a part-time ordained pastoral minister and in the spring of 1991 Revd John Parker of the Congregational Federation was appointed. In 2001 Revd Carol McCarthy, a Baptist minister, succeeded him and in 2007 Revd John Edwards, a retired United Reformed Church minister, became our third and final pastoral minister.[4]

Our Preachers

Over the 37 years of the life of WWEC, more than 400 preachers accepted an invitation to lead our worship. Within the first 18 months, the pattern was established: we had already welcomed to our fellowship canons of the Anglican Church, priests from the Roman Catholic Church, ministers and lay-preachers from the United Reformed Church and the Congregational Federation, leading Baptist and Methodist ministers, a bishop from the Moravian Church, Salvation Army majors, speakers from the London City Mission, the Y.M.C.A., the London Healing Mission, university chaplains: this was a richness and breadth of preaching we had never experienced before.

As the years went by, we were guided into silence by Quakers, we came to understand and inhale the prayerful incense brought by one of our High Anglican visitors. We clapped with the Salvation Army tambourines, sang choruses with the Evangelicals. We came to appreciate the deep spirituality of a local community of nuns and we were treated to great sermons (and barbecues) from the members of a small local Jesuit house. Speakers from many Christian organisations and charities broadened our knowledge of the varieties of Mission: the Salvation Army, the Leprosy Mission, Mercy Ships UK, the Cambridge University Mission (now the Salmon Youth Centre), Christian Peacemaker Teams, the Christian Education Project, St. Francis Hospice, to mention but a few.

It is impossible to convey the sense of rich blessing and broadening of understanding and outlook we were being given. It's perhaps invidious to identify some of the most memorable moments and, yes, most extraordinary visitors but readers may well enjoy such details. Within a few weeks of our foundation, Canon Robert Birchnall jumped in his car after morning worship at St Mary's Woodford, fully robed, and walked up the aisle in Bancroft's

4 For McCarthy see *Register of BUGB Accredited Ministers as at February 2021.* baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=199733 accessed 2/3/21

Chapel to lead our first Easter Communion Service.[5] A softly-spoken monk in sandals and brown habit with string round the waist, university chaplain Brother Thomas Dunton, surprised us in the vestry by saying, "I believe you are leading the prayers today? They will be sung." (Fortunately, the Duty Servant happened to be a singer.) 'Have you brought the music?' 'No, just sing as you feel.' That was an occasion when the growing adaptability of the congregation was really tested. And was not found wanting. They immediately sang out each phrase like veterans. Many of us find ourselves recalling extraordinary sermons. The Revd Don Black, a passionate and sometimes controversial Baptist preacher, based an entire address on the word 'so' (See John 13 v 3–5 NIV). Before he moved from Loughton to Thaxted, Canon Geoffrey Holley regularly led us: when the bookings secretary rang to book a date, he memorably once responded, 'Ah yes. What did I talk about last time? Did I encourage you, or did I castigate you? I like to alternate.'[6] URC minister, the Revd Alwyn Knight, brought his first-hand experience of the plight of the Palestinians in Hebron. Canon Chris Bard (1952–2007), of BBC Radio Essex fame, led our Harvest Festival celebration on one occasion when it included a service of infant baptism. Surrounded by displays of apples and pears, Chris held up the baby and announced, 'Simon is a fruit'.[7]

In retrospect, it seems particularly remarkable that so many leading figures from different Christian traditions were willing to make the trip to Woodford Green: Norman Ingram-Smith came down from St Martin-in-the-Fields Social Service Unit during the first month of our existence.[8] Father Michael Seed, Cardinal Basil Hume's Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs, came from Westminster Cathedral.[9] Revd Leslie Griffiths, later the President of the Methodist Conference, was another early visitor.[10] Some of our members were involved with Message, the Christian Telephone Service, working alongside the Bishop of Winchester, the Right Revd John V. Taylor (1914–2001).[11] He too agreed to come in 1990. On that occasion, Father—now Professor—Michael Barnes, one of our regular Jesuit preachers, joined the congregation and was pleased to let the bishop know that during his Jesuit training it was the bishop's

---

5 For Birchnall see *Crockford's Clerical Directory*.

6 Holley died at Thaxted; *Church Times* 2 Nov 2006.

7 Bard was vicar of Theydon Garnon and Epping Upland, and chaplain to Capel Manor College. He had broadcast on BBC Essex since 1989. bbc.co.uk/essex/content/articles/2007/09/03/chris_bard_announcement_feature.shtml accessed 1/3/21.

8 Norman Ingram-Smith was director of Saint Martin-in-the-Fields Social Service Unit 1965–85.

9 M Seed *Nobody's Child* (2007).

10 Leslie Griffiths (b.1942), since 2004 Baron Griffiths of Burry Port, a life peer who sits with the Labour Party. He was President of the Methodist Conference 1994–95.

11 For Taylor see *The Guardian* 7 Feb 2001.

books that had been read aloud during mealtimes. Janet Wootton (dynamism personified) wonderfully represented the Congregational Federation on several occasions, as did others, including Karen Stallard, Peter Larcombe and Alan Argent. During her visit as Federation General Secretary, Yvonne Campbell described us as the most congregational church she had come across. Major Shaw Clifton led us five times during the '80s. He would be appointed to the international leadership of the Salvation Army, the General, in 2006. Bishop Birtill of the Moravian Church evidently enjoyed his visits (and his Sunday lunches) with us: 'We were ecumenical centuries before you!' The Jesuit Father Gerard Hughes (1924–2014), author of *The God of Surprises* (1985) also led our worship.[12] Can't think how we managed that. Broadcaster and chief executive of the Renewal Programme in Newham, Canon Ann Easter, turned up on one of her frequent visits wearing scarlet robes from head to toe. She had been invited to become one of the Queen's chaplains.[13]

Strengths and Weaknesses

The broad spectrum of preachers from across the denominations was undoubtedly one of the strengths of the church, which led to a deepening of the Christian faith of many members. One member, a committed Baptist, said before moving out of the area that he had probably learnt most whilst he was with us from the visit of two Jesuit Fathers. To be worthwhile, however, this account needs to ask critical questions. Some of our preachers inevitably prompted searching self-examination. They were international evangelists on the Pauline scale, risking their lives in seriously dangerous parts of the world to bring the Gospel to thousands. Our witness was in a comfortable London suburb in a loving, supportive community. Where was mushrooming growth? Who was this church really for? How do churches grow? In our defence we can point to the fact that WWEC was invisible. Our bill-boards were outside the school on Sundays but not appropriate during the week. We had no building in which to hold weekday activities, though our homes had become a natural extension of our church premises. Some passers-by quite reasonably assumed we were organically connected to the school. One couple did miss their bus to a more distant church and came in to visit us. They stayed. But marketing on any big scale seemed to us to verge on being distasteful, given the immediate and wholehearted support of the rest of the local Christian community. Most growth came when members invited other friends and relations. Again, in

---

12 Hughes refused to be bound by dogma, admitting that he was a 'bewildered and confused' Christian. *The Guardian* 4 Nov 2014.

13 She was the second woman to be ordained in the Church of England and became a chaplain to the Queen in 2007. *Crockford's Clerical Directory*.

our defence, virtually no-one who settled at WWEC left, except for moving from the district or 'going to glory'. The children were all from the families of founder members; as they grew up and mostly went up to university, they usually settled somewhere with less prohibitive living and housing costs.

Did 'numbers' really matter? On the positive side, being relatively small in size was by no means a disadvantage. A palpable sense of unity and friendship developed and deepened and was frequently remarked upon by all who came to visit. The fact that all office bearers had to stand down for at least a year after four years continuous service allowed many more members to take part in the running of the church and hence to grow spiritually. Over the thirty-seven years of the church's existence we were served by nine church secretaries: Alastair Newlands, Michael Dorman, Barrie Sharpe, David Hatch, Moira Sharpe, Fiona Brooke, Jenny Brewster, Angela Tervet and Diana Newlands. Several served on more than one occasion.

Where was our witness? Was this a worthwhile project? At times, not a few of us asked ourselves whether we deserved the rich spiritual fare brought to us by our preachers. Was it right to ask them to travel to fellowship with a relatively small group? Over the years the congregation reached a level of between 30 and 40. We knew that a church should be for 'those outside' rather than for 'those inside'. How did we come to terms with this? I think many of us saw our church as a powerhouse. A place and a people where we were refreshed and built up spiritually and equipped for our individual lives as Christians. In our defence, we had members involved in night-shelter projects, in family and community care, in the Christian Resources Centre in Loughton, and we were well represented in the Woodford Fellowship of Churches and Churches Together. We supported outreach projects in other local churches and ecumenical services and Lent lunches etc.

Some members held positions on national bodies involved in welfare work and evangelism. One of our members spent several years with the United Mission to Nepal, supported by the church and by the Baptist Missionary Society. One or two of our members had experience in lay-preaching and were regularly invited to lead worship for other churches in the area. The negative effect of being hidden away in the chapel of a school was offset by its positive aspects. Successive Heads, chaplains, staff and caretakers were generously supportive and helpful and we were even invited to lead assemblies from time to time. In particular we must mention the Revd Father John Thackray who led our Sunday service on numerous occasions during his chaplaincy at Bancroft's.[14] Even after he left and moved on to further school chaplaincies, he never stopped coming to us, and asked to be an honorary member. Of course, the school

---

14 For Thackray see *Crockford's Clerical Directory*.

was responsible for the maintenance of the chapel, so our only major expenses were the monthly rent, and the preachers' and organists' fees. Our income far exceeded our expenses so we were able to contribute significant sums of money to a broad spectrum of front-line Christian projects both local and world-wide, some of which have already been mentioned.

The Ending

In 2020 the onset of the world-wide corona virus pandemic and broad sweep of lockdown became the catalyst, but definitely not the cause, of our decision to close WWEC. Our sudden, entirely understandable exclusion from Bancroft's Chapel—it is very important to stress this—was again not the cause. Our church secretary, Angela Tervet, called us together in a socially-distanced church-meeting in October 2020 to give serious and prayerful attention to the future of the church. The letter that was sent subsequently to our visiting preachers probably best articulates the mood and outcome of our discussion.

> I am writing to let you know the decision made in our church meeting, convened very recently to take stock of our position as a church. Our Secretary has asked for my help in contacting all our visiting preachers.
>
> We were locked out of Bancroft's School with only hours of notice when the Covid crisis began. Entirely reasonably of course. They had been excellent hosts for 37 years. It was a situation that could last for months, possibly years. In a way, this gave us time to think carefully about our future. A lot of prayer has been going on! And had been for some time. With the four year terms of office of both the treasurer and the secretary coming to an end in April 2021 and the age of almost all of those able to take on major responsibility (including preacher booking) now near or over 80, we knew these vital roles would be hard, almost impossible, to cover. Were we going to see our exciting adventure peter out or should we consider celebrating and giving thanks for all that we had shared and look to make new beginnings? Surely better a bang than a whimper. Would the most 'ecumenical' course be to scatter into the churches of various denominations in the area? One thing we agreed was vital: the continuation of our midweek fellowship meetings. We would seek a place to meet legally where more than six could get together. Although our recent church meeting did take the decision to close and it was heart-breaking, it also seemed absolutely right and the opening-up of new ways forward. The Ecclesiastes 3 reading had never seemed more apt. Even those who had been founder members were of one mind; we felt that small groups determined to 'hang on' were not good witnesses to our Faith. We trust that the preachers who came to us were encouraged by our broad church outlook. For all of us it has been a time of immeasurable blessing. That's our news, dear friend. Your willingness to include us in your calendar over many

years has been wonderful. Extraordinary. Words aren't adequate really. With love from all at WWEC.

Was This a Worthwhile Venture?

We think we can say with real conviction that those who made WWEC their spiritual home have sensed God's blessing and have grown in faith and understanding of the Gospel message. For us it has been abundantly worthwhile. We hope and believe that the church's influence has extended far outside our community. We end this story by adding extracts from letters received from our preachers of many different traditions. Their words have moved us deeply, and reveal the extent to which they too have been influenced by their association with us. We leave readers to come to their own conclusions about the question.

Extracts from Letters sent by our Preachers on news of the Closure

I always enjoyed visiting you and invariably left feeling blessed and uplifted on my spiritual journey. My friends who occasionally accompanied me have also said how much blessing they had received from their visits. Having come to you over at least 20 years, it seems strange that the last time was the last time.

You have done a great thing together in being witness to an ecumenical, inclusive and critical faith (liberal in the best sense of the word). It is a form of faith I find attractive. There has always been a level of civility around the way preachers are treated, which is nurturing for the preachers and itself a valuable witness in an age when civility in public life can be severely lacking. I did read your email with a sense of bereavement at the thought of not coming again.

The news of WWEC closing is overwhelming. I am spiritually enhanced and properly proud to have been one of your most frequent preachers. Bancroft's, both in chapel and out, has been sustained by your prayerful and hospitable presence on Sundays, underpinning the ministry of chapel and chaplain, and the life of the school, and truly ecumenical. Woodford was blessed that such a faithful and active church was in its midst. To have led and spoken at so many of your services has helped me become a fuller priest. The faith that WWEC showed in deciding to close will lead to a fuller relationship with God. As servants of God you have been exemplary in faith, commitment and Christian living. My friendship with WWEC over 33 years has undoubtedly positively shaped my ministry. Thank you.

I have been blessed by the welcome, fellowship and prayers of the church. Yours was a bold and distinctive initiative. For whatever reasons, denominations

seem to continue to last through generations, while inclusive fellowships that span them are more vulnerable, long term.

I know this may sound overly sentimental for someone who only visited your church once, but it feels such a profound loss that the church is closing its doors. I have visited quite literally hundreds of churches in my speaking role for the Leprosy Mission. Among them there were maybe five or six I could ever have called 'home'. WWEC was one of those communities. It's never easy to explain or put one's finger squarely on these things. Nevertheless the one visit I made will remain firmly in my memory as something to look back on and appreciate deeply.

It has been a significant and wonderful journey in many ways. I have always appreciated my contact with your worshipping community. Thank you for your faithfulness over the years and for your stand for ecumenism. You have played a very important role in the local community of faith.

I could feel the pain and sadness because I am fully aware that "endings" are not easy. We can only trust God for what is in store for the future. It has been a real privilege and joy to have been associated with the Woodford Wells Ecumenical Church and I enjoyed worshipping with you all.

I can well imagine the difficulty of the decision but I think it is a brave one to reach. As you say, to everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven. I pray that God will guide everyone's next steps as they adjust and think about what comes next.

Congratulations to WWEC for 37 years of an inspiring and welcoming spiritual family. A beautiful venture. You were wise to make a definite decision by loving hearts still beating solidly within the WWEC body. Thank you for so many precious memories.

I have very fond memories of preaching at Woodford Wells, uniquely being offered a meal after the service. Especially generous. Your magazine was truly original. The ability of the church to attract top class preachers is a testament to how loved the congregation were. It was always a privilege to be asked to preach and I thank you for the opportunity.

I've always felt myself among friends with a warm welcome and attentive congregation. It is sad to hear that you are closing as a worshipping community, but the approach seems to me a wise one. I can think of other churches declining towards extinction without the ability to respond in a positive way such as you are doing.

The church has made its mark and should not just be a memory for a few.

There is much to be thankful for and celebrated. It has been such a positive experience. I am sure the connections made between the members will remain.

I am so, so sorry to hear your news. I have loved being with you over the past few years. You have made a brave and wise decision, which I feel sure, will prove to be a blessing to you all.

Diana Newlands and David Hatch

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 Ejectment 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

BOOK REVIEWS

***London and the 17th Century: The Making of the World's Greatest City.* By Margarette Lincoln. Yale University Press, 2021. Pp. xiii + 372. Hardback £25. ISBN 978–0–300–24878–4**

As the book's title suggests, Margarette Lincoln believes that London may rightly claim to be the 'world's greatest city', thus effacing New York, Tokyo, Paris, Madrid, Istanbul, St Petersburg and Beijing and all other possible claimants. She sees its rise as grounded in the seventeenth century.

Her story begins with the public spectacle of Queen Elizabeth I's funeral in 1603 and the arrival a little later of King James and his retinue which she characterises as 'pure theatre'. James addressed Parliament four days later stating that in England he found three religions—the true religion, established by law, Catholicism which might be suffered if Catholics kept the peace, and Puritanism which was 'a tendency' rather than a religion. Yet, despite this seeming dismissal, the puritan desire for radical reform did not disappear and by the century's end London would be transformed, in part by that desire.

Lincoln takes her readers through familiar scenarios like the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, the Civil Wars which devastated the three kingdoms for ten years and more, the Restoration and the excesses of Charles II, the Popish Plot and exclusion crisis, the brief but eventful years of James II's reign, and the events following the Glorious Revolution of William and Mary. All these were of great moment for puritans, nonconformists and dissenters which are different names for almost the same persons.

As well as these developments, Lincoln, who knows her maritime history well, writes of London's trade and civic identity, and the thousands of apprentices from all over England swelling the population. Such apprentices were always present, like later undergraduates, at public disturbances and demonstrations, attacking the Spanish ambassador's house, cheering their favourite MPs at Westminster, drinking too much and letting off steam. She notes the dramatists who detailed the city's life, like Thomas Dekker, John Webster and John Middleton but does not forget London's involvement in the Ulster plantations of Protestants.

So here is 'a city of extremes' with Charles I amassing an art collection that 'exceeded in quality those of any European competitor' but at the same time setting the country on the path to civil war. London proved to be the Parliamentarian city although the godly were then dividing into factions. Throughout the century foreign Protestants continued to enter the country, largely to escape persecution abroad and the 'stranger churches' of Dutch,

French and Italians, among others, were a feature of the town. Readers also learn of the beginnings of the Bank of England in the 1690s to finance the wars with Louis XIV's aggrandising France.

This is a handsome book, easy to read and well set out, with illustrations, end-notes, bibliography and index. For modern dissenting historians here are Milton, Marvell, and Defoe. This is modestly priced and a good addition to your book shelves.

Judith Holmes

***Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters' Hall Debate of 1719*. Edited by Stephen Copson. Centre for Baptist Studies in Oxford Publications, Volume 20, 2020. Pp [x] + 156. Paperback £18. ISBN 979–8–643443–42–1**

This collection of papers emerges from a day conference held in Regent's Park College, Oxford, in March 2019 about the Salters' Hall debates of 1719, some 300 years earlier. Salters' Hall itself was to become a byword for division and these debates had long-running repercussions. From this time onwards nonconformists began to choose between orthodox dissent and rational dissent, between Calvinist orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Was Trinitarianism justified by Biblical evidence alone? The meeting at Salters' Hall in St Swithins' Lane, London, was called to draw up advice for the Presbyterian and Independent churches of Devon which had been unsettled by a dispute over the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Although some London ministers felt uneasy about the coming debate, over 100 Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists met, some from outside the capital.

Here are six essays by scholars, with an introduction from Stephen Copson. Certainly the Salters Hall debates provided later champions of orthodoxy with a forerunner of what they saw as the decline into non-Trinitarian convictions of some influential dissenters (all before the rise of New Dissent and the Methodists). Others claimed that they were defending dissent against an imposed doctrinal conformity. These essays principally address the involvement of Baptists, both General and Particular, in the subsequent fallout after 1719.

Readers may note that in 1719 dissenters endured an unsettled political status. Only 30 years earlier the Toleration Act had removed legal penalties for their gatherings. Queen Anne had been no friend to dissent. In 1710 the high church Tory Henry Sacheverell had launched a populist pulpit onslaught which inspired widespread public disorder and attacks on dissenting meeting houses and private homes. In 1714 the Schism Act was aimed at dissenting schools and academies. The great fear, shared by all dissenters and many in the Church of

England, was that of the exiled Stuart claimant to the throne and his followers, the Jacobites. Although the 1715 uprising had failed, the threat of the Stuarts and a resurgent Roman Catholicism remained. The death in 1714 of Queen Anne and George I's accession had given Dissenters a sense of hope, yet unease was rampant.

The Salters' Hall debates played out therefore against a worrying political backcloth. Some sought to grant the dissenters more freedom while others saw them as radical and dangerous, directly descended from those who had executed the king. Baptist historians have varied in their assessment of the Salters' Hall debates. In the early nineteenth century, Joseph Ivimey saw those who voted against subscription as expressing their consciences, rather than being doctrinally unsound. Yet he considered Salters' Hall a milestone leading General Baptists to embrace unorthodox views of the Trinity, and to numerical decline. Twentieth-century Baptist scholars like Whitley, Payne, Brown and Bebbington have tended to accept the view that theological heterodoxy led to a decline in numbers.

Among the book's contributors, Stephen Holmes opens with a detailed and learned consideration of the doctrine of the Trinity, finding that doctrine difficult to outline well, although he argues that an adequate view of Salters' Hall requires a good answer to the question, 'What is the Trinity?' Secondly David Wykes discusses the significance of the Salters' Hall debates for the history of dissent, pondering whether the debates should be seen as 'a decisive milestone'. He points out that Salters' Hall enabled dissent's political enemies in the Church of England to exploit the divisions. He also states that Salters' Hall was not about doctrine, nor about denominational differences. Rather it has been understood by historians as an explanation of the development of heterodoxy (Arianism and Unitarianism) in the later eighteenth century. The Salters' Hall debates certainly generated heat and anger, as seen in publications on either side, but some individuals had already questioned the Trinity and other doctrines before 1719. The third contributor, Jesse Owens, turns his attention to the English General Baptists, noting that most General Baptists at Salters' Hall opposed subscription to a declaration on the Trinity. Yet he attempts with some difficulty to determine why most General Baptists opposed subscription. Stephen McKay addresses the Particular Baptists under the title, 'Mistaken Identity or Suitable Nickname?' In 1719, fourteen Particular Baptist churches were represented by fifteen pastors/elders at Salters' Hall. They affirmed the 'scripture-doctrine of the trinity lies at the foundation of Christianity'.'

Peter Shepherd's essay, 'We are not all of us of Dividing Principles', concentrates on Thomas Hollis, the great benefactor of Harvard College. Hollis (1659–1731) was the grandson of a whitesmith in Rotherham and his father had moved to London to run his uncle's cutlery business. Hollis became Master of the Court of the Drapers' Company and helped set up the Particular Baptist

Fund in 1717, becoming one of its treasurers. In 1716 he and his brother John financed the building of the first baptistry in London north of the Thames, at Paul's Alley Baptist Church. Shepherd argues that Hollis's generosity was directed more towards New England because, in the aftermath of Salters' Hall, he was despondent at divisions within English dissent.

Lastly Stephen Yannells III addresses 'The Point in Question' at Salters' Hall: Baptists Contending for Trinity, Scripture and Freedom'. He asks whether Baptists should expect subscription to the doctrine of the Trinity and finds the answer not easy. Admittedly Baptists are Trinitarian by conviction. However, Baptists see themselves as 'people of the book and of liberty of conscience'.

Overall this is a valuable treatment of the issues surrounding Salters' Hall which continues to demand attention from historians. The catch for some readers is that they must purchase their copies to be printed on demand from Amazon. This book is worth reading and students will undoubtedly benefit from it.

Alan Argent

***The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume IV: The Twentieth Century: Traditions in a Global Context*. Edited by Jehu J. Hanciles. Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp xx + 449. Hardback £100. ISBN 978–0–19–968404–5.**

The series of histories included in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions* is clearly ground-breaking and fully deserves the praise and attention, from scholars and interested general readers alike, which it has so far received. Readers of the *Congregational History Society Magazine* will derive great pleasure, as I did, from browsing and on occasions reading intently these varied contributions. Volume IV is no exception to this rule. Here again a collection of scholars from across the world display their learning and wisdom for our benefit. After all the subject here, once very specialised but now demanding attention in the highest circles, is *Traditions in a Global Context* in the twentieth century. The editor, Jehu J. Hanciles, is to be congratulated on the achievement, as are the movers and shakers at Oxford University Press.

If we were to quibble we might question the use of the English term, dissent, in the title. Does this term really relate to the global context? Yet we are dealing here with *traditions* which goes some way to explaining its application. Hanciles and his collaborators deal with the Protestant dissenting traditions in their spread and development beyond England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland into the world. The volume also treats with those newer Christian traditions that have emerged from those earlier forms of dissent with which we are more familiar.

Volume IV examines this globalization of dissenting traditions. During the

twentieth century, Protestant dissent achieved both its widest geographical reach and also its greatest genealogical distance from its several points of origin. Volume IV therefore deals with North America and Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, Latin America, and the Pacific region. Here is a comprehensive investigation of dissent as a globalizing movement.

In the section on Africa, Hanciles opens with 'Emerging Streams of Dissent in Modern African Christianity', Allan Heaton Anderson treats with 'Charismatic Churches and the Pentecostalization of African Christianity' and Akintunde E. Akinade discusses 'Indigenization, Translation, and Transformation in African Christianity'.

Dealing with Asia and the Middle East, John Roxborough offers an overview of Dissenting Traditions in Asia in the Twentieth Century, Wonsuk Ma turns to 'Megachurches and Dissent', concentrating on the Yoido Full Gospel Church, Peter Tze Ming NG outlines 'Dissenting Traditions and Indigenous Christianity' in China, and Deanna Ferree Womack looks at Protestant dissent in 'Ottoman Syria' under the plaintive title 'Crying for Help and Reformation'.

In the section on America and Europe, Laura Rominger Porter writes on 'Dissent as Mainline', Bill Leonard tackles the fascinating 'Southern Baptists and Evangelical Dissent', David D, Daniels III discusses the Twentieth-Century Black Church: A Dissenting Tradition in a Global Context, Cecil. M Robeck, Jr contributes Pentecostals and Charismatics, and Toivo Pilli and Ian M. Randall examine 'Free Church Traditions in Twentieth-Century Europe'. Lastly in this section Sylvia Collins-Mayo writes on the challenging topic of 'Dissent by Default: 'Believing Without Belonging' in Twenty-First-Century England'.

In Latin America, Stephen Dove writes on the Historical and Ideological Lineages of Protestant dissent, Martin Lindhardt examines Chilean Pentecostalism: Methodism Renewed, and Virginia Garrard deals with Dissenting Religion in the continent.

In the Pacific Brian M. Howell and Michael A. Rynkeiwich examine how Christinanity became localized and part of the indigenous society. Jane Samson tackles Fijian and Tongan Methodism.

Such contributions lay bare the radical reconstructions that occurred as dissenting traditions encountered rich and varied cultures. These traditions have grown deep roots in many environments, where often major changes were happening simultaneously. These studies make clear that Protestant dissent' was transformed in these other locations.

Some readers may be daunted at the price, but for a hardback of this quality £100 is not too much to pay in today's market. Yet many will rightly expect to find such an authoritative book in their libraries and may consult it from there.

Sharon Butler

***The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume V: The Twentieth Century: Themes and Variations in a Global Context*. Edited by Mark P. Hutchinson. Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp xx + 543. Hardback £100. ISBN 978–0–19–870225–2**

Volume V in this Oxford series on the history of Protestant Dissenting Traditions traces the 'spatial, cultural, and intellectual changes' in dissenting identity and practice in the twentieth century, noting that in this century especially those traditions, once confined to western Europe, went global. Although in Europe religious dissent was often pitted against the conformist and confining tendencies of the (oppressive) state, dissent in 'a globalizing world' has often found its identity in opposition to imperialism and/or the dominant secular, (economic, ideological and intellectual) and religious monopolies. The contributors to this volume outline the meeting of the dissenting traditions with modernity and globalization; changing colonial attitudes and politics; the modern questioning of authority—biblical, denominational, and pastoral; with indigenous customs, cultures and languages. In addition here are many of the twentieth century's leading leitmotifs—race and gender, modern technologies, and structural change. In consequence, these writers have set out a great number of both local and globalizing illustrations which should fuel discussions on the part played by Christianity in contemporary societies.

The editor, Mark P. Hutchinson, has made a considerable contribution to this volume. He has written the introduction on 'Dissenting Traditions in Globalized Settings' with Candy Gunther Brown who alone wrote the first chapter on 'Encounters with Modernity among Received Spiritualities and Traditions'. Gordon L. Heath contributed a chapter on 'Dissenting Traditions and Politics in the Anglophone World' which is followed by Hutchinson again with 'The Bible in the Twentieth-Century Anglophone World'. Then appropriately K. K. Yeo has offered a study of 'Biblical Interpretation in the Majority World'.

The focus then turns to preaching, with Hutchinson tackling 'Dissenting Preaching in the Twentieth-Century Anglophone World' and Jason A. Carter ' Preaching in the Global South'. Andy Lord has written on 'Emergent and Adaptive Spiritualities in the Twentieth Century' before Hutchinson examines 'Globalized and Indigenized Theologies'.

Barry Ensign-George has offered 'Organizing for Ministry in the Anglophone World: Reception, Adaptation, and Innovation' and Graham A. Duncan his study of 'The Manufacture of Dissent: Reflexive Christian Traditions in a Global Setting'. Justin D. Livingstone treated with 'Dissenting Traditions and Missionary Imaginations: Novel Perspectives on the Twentieth Century' and Laura Rademaker with 'Gender, Race, and Twentieth-Century Dissenting Traditions'. Atola Longkumer turned to 'Mission, Evangelism, and Translation:

From the West to Elsewhere', Hutchinson contributed 'From Reverse to Inverse to Omni-Nodal Dissenting Protestant Mission' and finally J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu has written on 'Communications, New Technologies, and Innovation'.

This is an intriguing volume, as much dealing with almost contemporary developments as with history. Yet it is impossible to ignore if one wants to understand global developments in the worldwide church, especially with those now native traditions that arose from Protestant dissent. Many of us are deeply involved with our local patch. Here is the global context.

Julian Hayward

***Nonconformists and the Modern Revival of Mysticism*. By Jane Shaw. The Congregational Lecture 2020. The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust, 2021. Pp. 21. Pamphlet £3.50. ISSN 0963–181X**

The 2020 Congregational Lecture was delayed by the Covid 19 pandemic but was eventually delivered via Zoom on 28th January, 2021. Professor Jane Shaw, Principal of Harris Manchester College and Professor of the History of Religion at the University of Oxford, spoke on the subject, *Nonconformists and the Modern Revival of Mysticism*. As she demonstrated, the early twentieth century witnessed a revival of interest in mysticism, which led to a growth in retreats and prayer groups. The revival began among Roman Catholics and Anglicans but some nonconformists, particularly women, made important contributions to it.

The revival resulted in important new publications, and in modern editions of the medieval mystics. It generated enthusiasm for prayer meetings and spiritual retreats, and some even embraced asceticism themselves, hoping thereby to gain mystical insights. Among those nonconformists who happily took to mysticism was the eccentric and highly-strung but compelling preacher at the City Temple on Holborn Viaduct, R.J. Campbell (1867–1956). In her lecture Professor Shaw spoke learnedly of Dean Inge's writings and of Evelyn Underhill's large book *Mysticism* (1911) which was widely read and has never been out of print. As Shaw made clear, several interesting figures embraced mysticism including the Presbyterian journalist Emma Herman, and Muriel Lester, the founder of the radical Christian community, Kingsley Hall in London's East End. The Presbyterian minister (later an Anglican bishop), James Lumsden Barkway, also was excited by Underhill's work, as was Lucy Menzies, a Scottish Presbyterian. Shaw gives fuller attention to Emma Herman's critical engagement with the writings of Underhill and Dean Inge.

In conclusion, Underhill was not a representative Anglican just as Campbell was hardly the typical Congregationalist. Indeed he was later to conform and

spent far more years as an Anglican than as a nonconformist. Yet this is a largely unexamined subject and Professor Shaw revealed to her audience on their screens that it deserves further study. She is to be commended for that and for her willingness to deliver her lecture in an unfamiliar way.

Mary Bristow

Secretary:
Rev. Dr Richard Cleaves
20 Morfa Street
Pen y Bont
Bridgend
CF31 1HB
richard.cleaves1@gmail.com

Editor and Reviews Editor:
Dr A Argent
125 Sudbourne Road
London
SW2 5AF
alan.argent1@btopenworld.com

Treasurer:
Rev. C J Damp
Bunyan Meeting
Mill Street
Bedford
MK40 3EU

Membership secretary:
Peter I Young
24 Daisy Dormer Court
Trinity Gardens
London
SW9 8DW
piy@live.co.uk

Web site
conghistsoc.org.uk

Contributions to the *Magazine* should be addressed to the Editor.
Please note that the views expressed are those of the contributors and not those of the Congregational History Society.

Typeset by Quinta Press, Meadow View, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY10 7RN
Telephone: 01691 778659 www.quintapress.com