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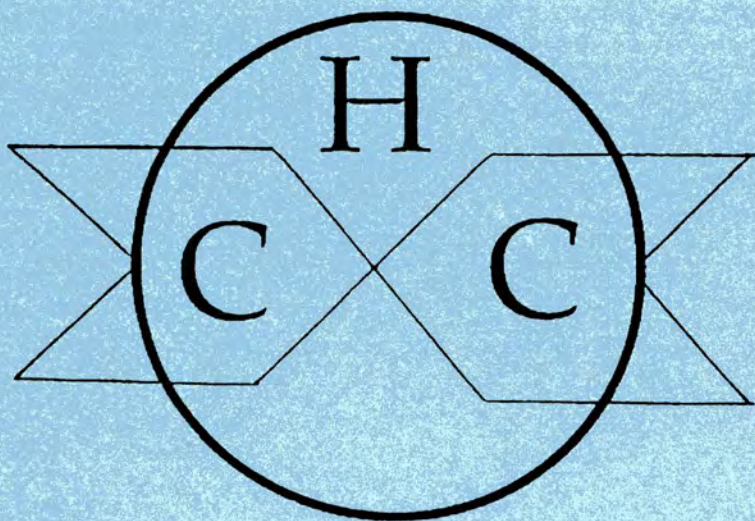
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Congregational
History Circle
Magazine

Volume 4 Number 2



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Congregational History Circle Magazine

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EDITORIAL

Articles on Elsie Chamberlain, on Highbury Congregational Church, Cheltenham, and on Mary Higgs of Oldham do not readily provide a common theme for this issue of our CHC Magazine and we should not attempt to force one. Neither Elsie Chamberlain nor Mary Higgs were historians and both might have found it odd that historians should find them of any more than passing interest. Yet Elsie's strengths always lay in her warm understanding of people and Mary Higgs had an extraordinary Christian compassion. Elsie wanted to explain simply the truths of Christian living so that others might understand and share in Christian faith. Mary Higgs wanted to reclaim people from destitution. Highbury's desire to serve the people of Cheltenham, through all its buildings, echoes similar concerns. Educate, explain, befriend - as Christ did and does still. Dr Richard Cleaves, the minister of Highbury, has explored his church's early history for our benefit. We welcome Christina Evans-Argent, Dr David Wykes, the Director of Dr Williams's Library, London, the Revd John Taylor of Penge, and the Revd Michael Durber to our reviews columns.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Congregational Lecture Chris Damp writes that for some time the Congregational Library Committee have been discussing ways of making the series of lectures, commenced in 1987, more effective. The relatively small numbers attending the annual lecture and low sales of the printed lecture suggest that a not inconsiderable amount of money, and work on the part of the lecturer, are having little impact on the life and witness of our churches. The committee members have felt that a more effective use of resources would be a scholarship programme. It is hoped that, by funding an annual research project, material would be produced which could be used in our churches to greater effect than the lecture is now. The lecture could well continue with the research student presenting the fruits of his or her research each year. It is hoped that the scholarship programme would be established within the next two years.

In the meantime the Congregational Lecture will continue in its present form. This year the Lecture will be given by Revd Dr Jack McKelvey on 2 October at 5.30 pm (following tea at 5pm). His topic will be "the Millennium and the Book of Revelation".

The **Congregational Library** is beginning a programme of computerisation. It is hoped that the catalogue of the library will be

computerised over the next few years and that the Charles Surman Index of Congregational Ministers will eventually be available on CD ROM. A Congregational Library web page will soon be on the internet. The first edition of the Bulletin of the Congregational Library will be published in 2000 and should be available to all our churches, giving news and information about the library's rich resources.

Terry Upton of the Congregational Federation Ltd reports that the **church records** held at his office in Castle Gate, Nottingham are now located in a secure room. Jean Young is currently sorting through and cataloguing the records stored there. If any Congregational History Circle members are interested in looking at the records, when Jean has finished her catalogue, they can be inspected between 8am and 4pm Mondays to Fridays by prior arrangement.

Members of the CHC joined the United Reformed Church History Society in September 1999 at Union Chapel, Islington to commemorate the centenary of the former **Congregational Historical Society**. We were treated to a spirited and informative lecture on the early years of the CHS, its Transactions, and some of the founding fathers of the society by Clyde Binfield. After lunch we enjoyed a visit to Abney Park cemetery and had tea at Albert Peel's "round church", Clapton Park Chapel, Hackney, passing some notable north London chapels en route, including Harecourt and Newington Green, and the former headquarters of the China Inland Mission.

The Congregational History Circle offers its congratulations to Dr **Clyde Binfield** on his recent election to a chair at the University of Sheffield. Prof Binfield, a member of the CHC, is the editor of the Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society. He is well known for his studies of Nonconformist, especially Congregational, history.

The death of **Edwin Welch** from cancer in 1999 is a sad blow to the historians of eighteenth century dissent. Dr Welch grew up in Leicester and had a long and distinguished career as an archivist, starting at Plymouth, then Southampton, and moving to Churchill College, Cambridge in 1967. There he became familiar with the letters and papers of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (1701-91), beginning his service as honorary archivist to Cheshunt College in 1969. In 1971 he moved to Canada to be Professor of Archives at the University of Ottawa and later was the archivist of the North-West Territories. His publications include Two Calvinistic Methodist Chapels 1743-1811 (1975), The Bedford Moravian Church in the Eighteenth Century (Bedfordshire Historical Record Society 1989), a selection of records for the Hertfordshire Record Society in Cheshunt College The Early Years (1990), Spiritual Pilgrim A Reassessment of the Life of the Countess of Huntingdon

(University of Wales 1995), Bedfordshire Chapels and Meeting Houses Official Registration 1672-1901 (Beds Hist Rec Soc 1996), and a number of works and articles in learned journals. Edwin Welch's papers are to be deposited at Dr Williams's Library.

The annual **St Bartholomew's Day** service in memory of the ejected ministers, their families and churches who suffered at the Restoration of King Charles II will be held on August 19, 2000 at Cole Abbey Presbyterian Church, Queen Victoria Street, London, EC4 at 3pm. Prior to the service a posy will be placed at the commemorative stone in Fleet Lane, off Farringdon Street at 2.15pm and prayers said.

The Association of Denominational Historical Societies And Cognate Libraries is holding a conference, 26-29 July, 2000, at Westhill College, Selly Oak, Birmingham. Papers will be given by leading scholars who will address the theme "Protestant Nonconformity in England and Wales in the Twentieth Century: A Retrospect". Further details are available from Howard Gregg, 44 Seymour Road, London, SW18 5JA (020 8874 7727).

We have recently learned of the resignation from the **Kuruman Moffat Mission**, South Africa, of its minister, Dr Steve de Gruchy, after six years' service. He has been appointed to a post at the school of theology at Natal University, Pietermaritzburg, and hopes to continue his research there for a new biography of the pioneering LMS missionary, Robert Moffat. Laurence Gilley, an experienced missionary and an American Congregationalist, will be continuing at Kuruman for several years and plans to help Dr de Gruchy's successor when appointed. We thank the Revd Alan Butler of Wimborne, formerly of Kuruman, for this information.

Readers may be interested to learn of **Lord Bullock's** latest book, Building Jerusalem (Allen Lane), which is a memoir of his remarkable but hitherto unknown father, Frank, and includes a selection of his father's writings. Frank was brought up a Congregationalist but his views led to his becoming a Unitarian minister in Bradford. His studies for the ministry were squeezed into a busy life, early in the morning and late at night. Like other ministers, also unknown to a wider world, he not only preached but he delivered lectures of a high quality on a whole variety of subjects, from theology to literary criticism, from classical history to philosophy. This is a fascinating account of one minister's life in the first half of the twentieth century by one of the most eminent British historians of the second half of that century.

Marylynn Rouse has updated the biography of **John Newton** by Richard Cecil, by including previously unpublished material, so that the book has doubled in size. The Life of John Newton includes references to his taking

charge in 1760 of an Independent church at Warwick. Newton was a follower of Whitefield and seriously considered becoming an Independent minister.

In the recent book, **Alistair Cooke The Biography** (Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1999), by Nick Clarke, readers learn that Cooke's daughter, Susie, to her father's consternation, determined to train for the Congregational ministry and was later ordained in the United Church of Christ. As a youth Cooke's first ambition had been to be a minister but at Cambridge he became an agnostic. In time he came to be proud of his daughter's decision and told her that hardly a day went by, without his remembering a verse of scripture, which he had learned as a child of eleven or twelve. Cooke's father was a Wesleyan local preacher and, in Edwardian Salford, had helped to establish and run "the Wood Street Mission for deadbeats, drunks and derelicts", which served as a shelter for runaways, battered wives, and abandoned children.

CHAPEL TOUR 1999

As is our custom, members of the History Circle met on the Friday before the Congregational Federation May Meetings for the annual Chapel Tour. The Congregational Assembly was again in London in 1999, yet we managed to see a variety of buildings which had escaped us on previous London crawls. We gathered at Wesley's Chapel in City Road where we spent an hour or so touring the Museum of Methodism in the basement of the chapel. This is a most interesting display and it is a great pity that we Congregationalists do not have a similar exhibition, for we have a long and noble history and almost as many artefacts.

We crossed the road to Bunhill Fields, the old Dissenters' burial ground, where many of our spiritual forebears are laid to rest. Isaac Watts, John Bunyan, John Owen and Thomas Goodwin are amongst those buried there. After a short walk around the burial ground, we returned to Wesley's Chapel for our lunch before a tour of Wesley's House, next to the chapel. The house has recently been restored and contains many objects connected with Wesley and much of his library. We were shown around the house by a very enthusiastic guide and spent longer there than intended.

We did not have time to stop and look at Islington Chapel (later URC, closed and now a recording studio) or Claremont Chapel (now URC), but we continued to Tabernacle Welsh Congregational Chapel, King's Cross. Tabernacle was originally built as Battlebridge Congregational Chapel (later known as Pentonville Road Congregational Church) in 1854. (See the **Congregational Year Book** 1856, p271) The church united with Claremont,

at that time further along Pentonville Road, and was sold to the Welsh Congregationalists in 1888.

The Welsh Congregational church which meets at Tabernacle was founded in Snow Hill, Holborn in 1847 and later moved to Fetter Lane, where a chapel was opened in 1850. The chapel was enlarged in 1879 but, due to further expansion, had to move to King's Cross. For many years (1904-1940) Howell Elvet Lewis was minister at Tabernacle. Dr W T Owen, the chapel's former minister and historian, accompanied the present minister, D Gwylfa Evans, who gave us a tour of the chapel and told us something of the difficulties faced by the church today. The congregation is now very small and most members travel several miles to attend the church. Most of the London Welsh churches have seen a great decline over the last twenty years and Tabernacle is no exception.

We boarded a bus outside Tabernacle which took us almost to the door of the Congregational Library. The library was founded in 1831 and occupied buildings in Blomfield Street, Finsbury Circus. The books were almost all lost in storage, before the library moved to the newly built Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, in 1875. Joshua Wilson (1795-1874) left his great collection of books to the Library, which is strong in 16th, 17th and 18th century Dissenting works. There is a vast collection of chapel histories, books about various Congregational bodies, and a fine collection of several thousand hymn books.

Following quite a difficult history (the Congregational Union decided to sell books in 1933!) and a number of moves, the library is now housed at 15 Gordon Square, next to Dr Williams's Library. It is still under the management of the Congregational Memorial Hall Trust, yet complements the Dr Williams's collection, and is used by Dr Williams's Library readers and visitors. We had an interesting tour of the library and then looked at a display of material which had been prepared for our visit by David Powell, who has spent many years cataloguing the library. Amongst the items on display were the first minutes of the first meeting of the Congregational Historical Society a century ago.

The afternoon closed, a little later than planned, with a splendid tea served in the hall of Dr Williams's Library.

C.J. Damp

ELSIE CHAMBERLAIN 1947-1967

After her marriage to John Garrington in July 1947 at St John's church, Friern Barnet, a victory over Anglican stuffiness and convention, and also her earlier service as a chaplain in the RAF (the first woman chaplain in the British armed forces), Elsie Chamberlain had acquired a national celebrity, rare in a Congregational minister, if not unique in the late 1940s. Such fame made her settling down as minister of Vineyard Congregational church, Richmond-upon-Thames, awkward both for her and her congregation. She was not only in a new pastorate and newly married but in addition she had to cope with all the demands, imposed upon her, as the wife of the busy vicar of All Saints' church, Hampton.

She had encountered considerable difficulties in her life and ministry so far, at least partially because she was a woman. These experiences were necessarily to influence her later decisions but her strong will and self-confidence gave her a resilience, enabling her to triumph over vicissitudes and to take her own line, if need be, against the voices of friend and foe alike.¹

Life at Hampton

Elsie and John lived in the vicarage at Hampton, Middlesex, their first home together, a detached, double-fronted house, with a large garden. Elsie was not keen on housework. She had never needed to do it and, at Hampton, a parishioner would come in to clean the house. John's study and the lounge were always immaculate for the reception of visitors. On at least one occasion the Vineyard Congregational church deacons held a formal meeting at All Saints' vicarage. Elsie took seriously her role as the vicar's wife, caring for John's church as well as her own. Her "terrific enthusiasm and vitality" made her a force in the parish, especially on Sundays. Although Elsie and John were so different- she was teetotal, he drank, she was tall, he was

¹Elsie Chamberlain's family have corrected errors in my earlier article. Her marriage was not at Christ Church Congregational church, Friern Barnet, but at St John's and Sydney Chamberlain served in the Royal Naval Air Service, not the Royal Flying Corps. Thanks to Geoffrey A Chamberlain and Janette Williams for these. Thanks for help with this paper are also due to the Ven F House, Rev E Robertson, Rev R Courtney, Rev Rachel Storr, Rev Elisabeth Neale, Mrs A Forbes, Mrs Ruth Lawrence, Mrs B Smith and Mr P I Young.

shorter, she was a Congregationalist, he a high Anglican- theirs was “a strong and mutually supportive relationship” which brought them both happiness. One close friend described their “improbable marriage” as illustrating “by their mutual understanding the true ecumenical spirit”. In the parish Elsie was always Mrs Garrington.²

Soon after their marriage Elsie, at 37 years, and John, at 35, decided to adopt a child rather than have children of their own. Elsie’s still delicate health and her dedication to her calling were considerations. They chose to adopt a child of an age approximate to any child who might have been born to them, had they married when they had originally hoped to do. Janette was in the British Legion children’s home at Richmond-upon-Thames, close to Elsie’s church, in the Vineyard. The children were sent to this church where Janette was in the Brownies. On a visit to Vineyard John took a shine to her and she was fostered with them. This led to her eventual full adoption.

The vicarage was full of furniture and crockery bought at low prices at salerooms and Elsie and John would also buy second-hand books. Elsie made many of her own clothes and, in the early years, those for Janette also. Elsie was too energetic to sleep all night and, well into old age, she would go to bed late and rise very early.³

Elsie’s love of music led her to direct and conduct oratorios at All Saints, Hampton, to which she would invite members and friends of Vineyard. In similar fashion, but on a smaller scale, she would hold musical events at Vineyard. At Hampton Elsie joined the Mothers’ Union and in November 1947 she founded the Young Wives’ Club which she conscientiously attended, even when working at the BBC. She realised that young wives needed a night out and club members would listen to music, hear talks and have socials. Elsie would take friends from the parish with her on visits to the city churches. The Wives’ Club still continues although, after fifty years, without the epithet young. Elsie herself ran the club up to 1963 when John left Hampton to move to a living in Essex.⁴

While at Hampton John and Elsie bought a cottage in Hampshire, at Chute, near Andover where they spent holidays and occasional days off. Later they bought other houses, often in a dilapidated state. One cottage, near

² Williams First Lady of the Pulpit (Lewes, Sussex 1993) 49. Vineyard Congregational church (hereafter VCC) deacon’s meeting minutes 1 Nov 1948. The Times 12 April, 1991; The Guardian 15 April, 1991; The Independent 20 April, 1991.

³Williams *ibid* 50-51.

⁴*ibid*. Information supplied by Mrs B Smith.

Plymouth, was used by John as the consulting rooms, for his work as a counsellor and psycho-therapist. He would hypnotise people, referred to him, in an effort to help their recovery from emotional and mental problems. He saw this healing as complementary to his work as a priest. Elsie always drove John to Plymouth as he did not drive. She would often take with them the family cat who roamed at will in the moving vehicle. Elsie's ardent teetotalism could cause awkwardness, as at Janette's wedding, after which the groom's family wished to serve sherry and wine. Elsie vetoed this!⁵

In 1963 the Garrington family moved from Hampton to the rectory at Greensted near Ongar, in Essex. In this early nineteenth century house, with its whitewashed exterior and large garden, Elsie felt very much at home while John was proud of the church which he served. He would personally conduct visitors around the church building which is Saxon in origin, having been built to mark the place where St Edmund's body rested, on its way from London to Bury St Edmund's in 1013. Greensted parish church, with its distinctive oak walls, curiously is dedicated to St Andrew, and not to St Edmund.⁶

The Vineyard, Richmond

Vineyard Congregational church had been unsuccessful in its attempts to find a minister early in 1947. In June that year the moderator of the London Congregational Union recommended Elsie Chamberlain. Her first visit to the church was "much appreciated" and the church members were unanimous in their invitation to her to preach again. The church sent a telegram to Elsie and John congratulating them on their marriage. A special church meeting on 18 September, 1947 unanimously confirmed an earlier decision to invite Elsie to be the minister of Vineyard with a stipend of £300 per annum. Elsie had written to suggest that, in view of the possible effects of the coming winter on her still delicate health (she had been invalided out of the RAF and suffered also from arthritis) perhaps she should only agree to serve for the next six months, after which the position could be reviewed.

At Elsie's first church meeting, in October 1947, she announced her plans to hold church membership group meetings. Her induction service as minister was to be held on 14 November when Revd John Huxtable was to be

⁵Williams op cit 53, 55, 58, 59; The Independent loc cit.

⁶Williams ibid 57; Victoria County History : A History of Essex IV (1956) 60,61.

the preacher. The deacons' meetings in October and November 1947 outlined a winter programme which included a toy service, a nativity play, and carols services. They also recorded that one couple were transferring their membership to Richmond Presbyterian church- perhaps in response to a woman minister. In contrast four new women members were added to the roll.⁷

Elsie's interest in music surfaced in the choir's plans to sing Stainer's Crucifixion on Palm Sunday 1948 and Handel's Messiah on April 3. In January 1948 the church meeting discussed Elsie's infrequent attendances at Sunday evening services. The members hoped she could preach on Sunday evenings more often by adjusting the morning rota. Elsie was then looking for a motor car. In March 1948 the six months which Elsie had initially agreed to serve were completed. The deacons felt that her health had been "satisfactory" and the church members were unanimous in reaffirming the invitation to Elsie. In response she stated her belief that there was much for her to do at Vineyard. An encouraging development was that four new members joined the church and two dozen additional communion cups were ordered. In April three more members were added to the church roll. In June 1948 the deacons recommended that a communion service should be held quarterly at the church meeting at which new members should be received.

Also that summer Vineyard "adopted" a church in Germany which they could help, Pastor Heuner's church in Dortmund, which received gifts of clothing. In September the West London Orchestra was given permission to use the schoolroom on Monday evenings for rehearsals and Elsie's old friend, Lady Stansgate, became a church member. The deacons also considered the current negotiations for unity between the Congregational Union of England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England. The church meeting unanimously approved the deacons' proposal that Elsie's stipend should be augmented by an expense allowance of £25 per annum.⁸

In late November 1948 the deacons who had studied the documents individually gave their general approval to the Congregational/Presbyterian talks. The report, they felt, provided "a basis for fuller and official

⁷VCC - deacon's minutes - 24 June, 25 August, 29 Sept, 26 November 1947 - church meeting minutes 29 June, 27 August, 18 September, 23 October, 27 November 1947.

⁸VCC - church meeting minutes - 31 December 1947, 28 January, 31 March, 29 April, 3 June, 29 July, 8, 29 September 17 October 1948; deacon's minutes 1 March, 30 March, 26 April, 21 June, 26 July, 6, 27 September 1948.

negotiations". On December 1st Elsie explained in detail to the church meeting the state of the Congregational/Presbyterian negotiations and the church members also approved the talks but went further, by urging the Free Church Federal Council to inaugurate moves for a union of all the Free Churches.

The church meeting in late December accepted the plan to assemble a "gathered choir" to sing Handel's Messiah in April. Elsie reviewed the work of the previous year, especially referring to the Missionary Week, the publicity campaign, and the Rotary Club's goodwill Christmas tree which yielded £12 for her to help those in need. She intended to begin a junior church in January 1949. At this time Elsie's pastoral work included visiting absent members and other absentees. She announced that her annual vacation was to be held over six Sundays in June and July when she would attend the International Congregational Council meetings in the United States of America.⁹

In March 1949 the deacons advised that some names should be removed from the membership roll as they had received no replies to their letters of enquiry. However that month one young woman formally joined the church as a member. In April a new piano was bought at Elsie's suggestion, for the beginners' department and in June Elsie and a married couple from Vineyard set off for the ICC meetings at Wellesley, Massachusetts. During Elsie's absence on holiday, the Revd Rachel Storr supplied the pulpit. Rachel Storr, when a laywoman, had preached her first sermon in Elsie's church, Christ Church, Friern Barnet. They had met at the inter-denominational group for the ordination of women. Rachel had been brought up in the Church of England and was a graduate in English of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. Her father, Vernon Faithfull Storr (1869-1940) was a canon of Westminster, rector of St Margaret, Westminster, and the author of The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century 1800-1860 (1913), and several other works. She and Elsie were great friends and Elsie encouraged her to become a Congregational minister. She was ordained in 1948 and served at Claremont Central Mission and Putney before moving to Brentford. In August 1949 the Vineyard deacons sent their good wishes to Rachel Storr on her removal to Brentford Congregational church.¹⁰

⁹VCC church meeting minutes 1 December, 30 December 1948, deacon's minutes 22 November 1948

¹⁰VCC church meeting minutes 30 March, 28 April, 1 June, 22 August, 28 September 1949; deacon's minutes 17 January, 21 March, 26 April, 26 May 1949. R T Jones Congregationalism in England 1662-1962 (1962) 429; F L

Recent repairs to the church organ were marked by invitations to Dr Eric Thiman of the City Temple and to Sandy Macpherson, the well known musician and broadcaster, in the summer of 1949 to give recitals. Elsie often began church meetings at the Vineyard with short talks on church history. In September 1949 she introduced a series on the early history of Independency, with reference to the Westminster Assembly of Divines of the 1640s and to the Westminster Confession. The Assembly and the Confession were principally of importance to Presbyterianism and Elsie's choice of these subjects reflects the Congregational/Presbyterian unity talks of that time. Elsie also announced to the church meeting that she would devote one evening service per month to answering questions, previously submitted by members of the church and congregation, and a box would be provided into which questions could be placed.

On 28 September 1949 Elsie continued her talks on Congregational history, addressing the subject of the Savoy Declaration of 1658. A church magazine came into being. In November Elsie spoke on Christian heritage to the church meeting and later reported on her visit to the USA. In December the plan to start a men's club in January 1950 at the church was announced and, alongside this, a small prayer group had been founded. Throughout 1949 several new members joined the church - a man in June, three women in September, a married couple by transfer from Blackheath Congregational Church in October, and two women in January 1950. Significantly on February 1st, 1950 Rev Edward Charles Dudley Stanford and his wife and daughter transferred their membership to Vineyard.¹¹

In March 1950 Elsie proposed to the deacons that before Sunday evening services "half an hour of community hymn-singing" be held outside the church. At the church meeting Mr Stanford suggested that Vineyard should hold open-air services by the Thames riverside, merely yards from the building, on Sunday evenings. In May this proposal was qualified by inviting the Presbyterian and parish churches to co-operate but, in the absence of any

Fagley (ed) Proceedings of the Sixth International Congregational Council (1949) 122-127, 180-181. URC Year Book (1999) 258; private conversation with Miss Storr.

¹¹VCC church meeting minutes 1 September, 28 September, 3 November, 30 November, 22 December 1949. Sandy Macpherson, a former cinema organist and BBC radio broadcaster, presented Silver Chords and Chapel in the Valley on the Light Programme, playing music and hymns with "deliberate sentimentality". K M Wolfe The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation 1922-1956 (1984) 375-6.

clear response from both of them, Vineyard prepared its own scheme. Also in May the church meeting unanimously voted Elsie an increase in stipend to £350 pa (including expenses) and Elsie was congratulated on being appointed president elect of the Women's Federation of the CUEW. In June 1950 the Presbyterians indicated that they were unwilling to support the proposed open-air meetings so the scheme was postponed.¹²

In July 1950 Elsie told the deacons that she had been offered a part-time post in the "organising of religious broadcasts" for the British Broadcasting Corporation which she would like to accept. She hoped to depute to others some of the tasks at Vineyard but she accepted the need to develop the church's work in Richmond still. In particular she was concerned about the need for a "Free Church on the new housing estate at Ham, where over 300 families were already housed, with the probability of an additional 238 in the near future". It was suggested that Revd Ted Stanford might be willing to help as joint minister with Elsie. The church members found this proposal acceptable, in September 1950, when 34 voted in favour with none against. At the same meeting it was announced that one of the church members, Elisabeth Neale, was soon to begin her studies at King's College, London. She hoped to train for the ministry. The church agreed to recommend her to the Surrey Congregational Union as a candidate for the ministry.

Stanford began as co-pastor in December 1950 and from January 1951 onwards he and Elsie alternately chaired the deacons and church meetings. In April 1951 Stanford was appointed to an administrative post in the education department of the British Council of Churches. In June the deacons decided to increase the combined stipend to £400 pa. In May Stanford addressed the church members on the recent joint session of CUEW with the Presbyterian Assembly during the May meetings. He read the declaration, "pledging mutual co-operation" between the two bodies. On 22 October 1951 the deacons discussed the possibility of joint social activities with Richmond Presbyterian church.¹³

Ted Stanford (1903-94) was educated at Hackney and New Colleges, London before serving in pastorates at Bury St Edmund's and Olton, Birmingham. From 1946 to 1949 he worked in administrative posts for the

¹²VCC deacon's minutes 20 March, 24 April, 22 May, church meeting minutes 30 March, 4 May, 31 May.

¹³Elisabeth Neale studied at Western College, Bristol after completing her course at King's College. VCC church meeting minutes 26 July, 28 September, 2 November 1950, deacon's minutes 17 July, 26 July, 27 October 1950, 22 January, 22 October 1951. Jones op cit 432-433.

CUEW and 1949-51, during which time he joined Vineyard, he was general secretary of the Christian Auxiliary Movement. From 1950-54 he shared the pastorate of Vineyard with Elsie while continuing to work with the British Council of Churches 1951-62. Later he served the British and Foreign Bible Society 1962-63 and then was Education Secretary of CUEW 1963-67. In 1967 he was asked to collate and report on the replies from local Congregational and Presbyterian churches to the draft basis of union between these two bodies. In 1968 he produced a “massive document” setting out the various responses. In 1972 he joined the United Reformed Church. Stanford’s joint ministry with Elsie was deemed to have worked well at Vineyard. He was a capable preacher, a tactful man and a good listener. His calmness was a good foil to Elsie’s fireworks.¹⁴

In February 1952 the church meeting decided that the new hymn book, Congregational Praise, should be bought. 25 music copies were needed, plus 200 ordinary copies and in May the Revd Erik Routley, one of the book’s compilers, conducted an evening of hymn singing at Vineyard. In July the church returned to the theme of evangelising the Ham housing estate, in conjunction with Kingston Congregational church and Richmond Presbyterian. Services were held in the Working Men’s Institute at Ham on Sunday evenings for a trial period of six months, although these later moved to the hall of the new school. The Presbyterian church was invited to join Vineyard for its Christmas day service and in 1953 a combined service with the Presbyterians was planned for Good Friday.¹⁵

In March Elsie asked the deacons for leave of absence for June, July and August during which time she would forego her stipend. She felt that she needed “a long vacation owing to pressure of work” and she referred particularly to the “strenuous task” of visiting. The church meeting later agreed to this. In October 1953, while Elsie was in the chair, Ted Stanford addressed the deacons on the shared pastorate. He explained that both ministers felt that they had “insufficient time to give to the Church”, especially in pastoral matters. They could maintain the church at the present level but “saw no prospect of the work advancing under the present

¹⁴URC Year Book (1995) 268. Surman Index of Congregational Ministers at Dr Williams’s Library, London. A Macarthur “The Background to the formation of the United Reformed Church” in Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society (vol.4 no.1 October 1987) 10-11.

¹⁵ VCC church meeting minutes - 29 February, 4 July, 31 Oct; deacon’s minutes - 20 February, 21 July, 20 October, 24 November 1952, 16 February 1953.

arrangements". Therefore they had decided to terminate their ministry at Vineyard at the end of the year. The deacons decided to approach St Paul's Congregational Church, their neighbour in Richmond, with a view to the two churches uniting under one minister.¹⁶ At that time St Paul's pastorate was vacant and the church building, which had been destroyed by bombs in 1940, had not been rebuilt. Discussions between representative deacons of the two churches were held in early 1954 but the churches did not unite. In the summer of 1954 both Elsie and Ted Stanford were still chairing church meetings at Vineyard.¹⁷

Elsie demanded much of her church members. She would, on occasions, telephone absentees from the church meeting and ask for explanations. Her prayers in public worship were much appreciated although opinions differed about her preaching. She read widely and kept up with popular theology. Her theological views were broadly liberal and at least one church member noticed that she rarely, if ever, spoke of Jesus as her saviour. She was a warm friend and maintained a steady, thoughtful correspondence over the years in her large bold handwriting. Yet Elsie was always forthright and could also be sharp and reproving.

In 1947 when Elsie became minister at Vineyard the church had 94 members, 52 children and 22 teachers. It had no lay preachers. In 1954, when she and Ted Stanford left its ministry, the church had 105 members, 82 children and 13 teachers. In 1955 it had 95 members, in 1956 with Rev Ernest Crutchley in his first pastorate it had 82, and in 1957 it had 86. Elsie made firm friends at Vineyard and is remembered still with affection by older members of the church. While its minister, she had begun her work in religious broadcasting which she was to find so fulfilling and which proved to be, in the words of one BBC colleague, "the central part" of her "stormy life".¹⁸

¹⁶VCC church meeting minutes - 1 May, 4 December 1953; deacon's minutes - 18 March, 20 April, 19 October 1953.

¹⁷St Paul's voted to become part of the URC in 1972 and Vineyard joined the Congregational Federation. VCC church meeting minutes - 11 July, 30 July 1954.

¹⁸Congregational Year Book (1947) 216, (1954) 243, (1955) 245, (1957) 245. The Independent loc cit.

Elsie and Women Ministers

Elsie drew women in particular to her churches. She showed especial interest in those who felt called to the ministry and a number of women from her churches were subsequently ordained. Some of these came originally from other denominations and Elsie's advice was often to follow her own pattern rather than to follow CUEW guidelines. This could cause embarrassment both to individual students and to moderators. At one point Andrew James, the moderator of the CUEW Southern Province 1950-1966, was furious with Elsie, for misleading one student who mistakenly believed that she was accredited as training for the Congregational ministry, although she had not been through the interviewing procedure then required by the CUEW. Elsie really saw little need for moderators and claimed that a London BD rendered a Congregational or any minister the equal of a Church of England bishop.¹⁹

At the International Congregational Council meeting at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts in June 1949, Elsie Chamberlain gave an address to the women's divisional meeting on the 'Life and Work of Women in the World Church'. She also initiated a lengthy discussion, on the number of women to be nominated for the ICC Executive committee, which resulted in an undertaking that in future "consideration should be given to more complete representation of women" from the different national unions. Among the delegates was Rev Muriel Paulden with whom Elsie had worked as assistant minister 1939-41 in Liverpool.²⁰

Elsie's enthusiasm for ecumenism led her in August 1948 to attend the inaugural meeting of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam, not as an official delegate of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, but as an "accredited visitor".²¹ Elsie was present from 15 to 31 August 1954 at the second assembly of the World Council of Churches at North Western University, Evanston, Illinois, in the USA. She was one of five official delegates from the CUEW among delegates from 160 churches worldwide. Accompanying her were Dr Leslie Cooke, Dr J Trevor Davies, B J Hartwell

¹⁹For William Andrew James (1904-1975) see URC Year Book (1976) 299-300.

²⁰Fagley op cit 16,17,19,22. Muriel Paulden gave an address to the ICC at Wellesley.

²¹W A Visser 'T Hooft (ed) The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1949) 261. The CUEW delegates were S Berry, A M Chirgwin, Leslie Cooke and John Marsh. Their alternates were Philip Ashton, John Huxtable, Cecil Northcott and S Maurice Watts. 244, 253.

and Dr John Marsh, Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford. Sidney Berry was there also, representing the International Congregational Council. Elsie's star was rising.

On the fourth day of the assembly, 18 August, Elsie was both leader and preacher at the morning service, the only woman delegate chosen to lead worship at Evanston. Elsie must have preached then to a minimum of some 1500 people - hundreds of them leaders and theologians of note in their own countries and churches. On her return to London Elsie told a female colleague at the BBC that on one of the days at the WCC assembly in the sweltering heat, the chairman gave permission to the delegates to remove their gowns. Elsie was not able to do this as she didn't have anything on underneath hers!²²

CUEW Chairman

Elsie Dorothea Chamberlain was elected chairman of the CUEW 1956-57. She succeeded the eminent William Gordon Robinson, principal of Lancashire Independent College since 1943, and she was in turn followed by Hubert Cunliffe-Jones, since 1947 principal of Yorkshire Independent College, Bradford. She could not claim such scholarly credentials. She had not published books of great literary merit. She had not served as a moderator of any of the nine provinces of the CUEW. The two churches to which she had ministered were of no great size and both were situated in the unassuming suburbs of London. She had gained some fame as the first woman chaplain in the armed forces but had left that post some ten years previously. To cap it all she was, of course, a woman and her election to the chair of CUEW is a remarkable tribute to her and reveals the confidence felt by ordinary church members, ministers and CUEW officials alike in this commanding but still youthful woman of 46 years. John Marsh saw Elsie as "an entirely normal person" with "quite unusual gifts", "a radiant person with a joyful faith". These attributes qualified her to be CUEW chairman.²³

She was the first woman (and the only woman minister) to chair CUEW, serving almost forty years after Constance Coltman, the first woman to be ordained to the Congregational ministry, began her pastorate at the King's

²²The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1954 (1955) 35, 272, 283. Williams op cit 74. H G G Herklots Looking at Evanston: A Study of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1954) 14-15.

²³Reform (May 1991) 18.

Weigh House, London in 1917. Only one other woman, Gwen Hall, a laywoman, ever became CUEW chairman, in 1969. Elsie would not have stood for election against her old friend, Muriel Paulden, had she been nominated and accepted that nomination. However Elsie was the first woman to preside over the assembly of any of the major Free Churches in England, which probably means that she was the first woman to preside over any Christian denomination anywhere at all.²⁴

By 1955 when Elsie was chosen to be chairman-elect of CUEW she had become very well-known. Not only her battle with the Church of England hierarchy, in order to marry John Garrington, but also her struggle to gain recognition as the first woman chaplain to the RAF, brought her to public attention. In the 1950s her work for BBC radio made her even better known. She seemed an outstanding candidate to occupy the CUEW chair.

Leslie Cooke, secretary of CUEW 1948-1955, wrote to Elsie to inform her of her election to the chair in May 1955. He assured her that it was in “recognition of the distinctive service that you have given over the years”. That distinction lay in her RAF chaplaincy, her BBC post, and her tenaciously clinging to her love of a high Anglican priest, which he returned, against the wishes of his ecclesiastical superiors. She was by temperament an individualist, going her own way, but she had been forced to do so often by circumstances beyond her control. Her refusal to compromise on matters of principle, both personally and professionally, had brought her trials and pain but eventually came triumph. This in 1955 had been her “distinctive service” to Congregationalism.²⁵

John Marsh recognised in Elsie “a ready openness of mind that seldom, if ever, left her”. “She possessed a great good humour which made her conversation - and public speaking - a lively and enjoyable experience.” Her CUEW chairmanship was not, however, considered a success, neither by Elsie herself, nor by others. She felt that she had been “disastrous” as chairman although she loved visiting the churches, attending the Cenotaph service on Remembrance Sunday, and going to Buckingham Palace to a garden party.²⁶

Yet she came to the chair at a most awkward time. Leslie Cooke had resigned unexpectedly as secretary in 1955 to take up a position with the World Council of Churches in Geneva. The CUEW council had been expected to nominate as his successor, Revd Howard Stanley, but the council

²⁴Williams op cit 78; The Times loc cit.

²⁵Jones op cit 393.

²⁶Williams op cit 80.

voted 184 for and 61 against. Stanley felt that this an insufficient majority to constitute a call to office. As a result Sidney Berry who had been CUEW secretary 1923-48 had been recalled from retirement unanimously by the May assembly in 1955. He filled the breach 1955-56 until Howard Stanley was eventually appointed to the post. Stanley had been a success as moderator of the Lancashire province of CUEW but had a reputation as “a ruffler of feathers”. The aged Berry was supremely competent but was persuaded only reluctantly to return to office for an interim period. The CUEW was considering its future leadership during this transitional phase and Elsie must have sensed all these elements as she travelled the country, speaking to church gatherings, and attending and chairing meetings. In May 1956, at the May assembly of CUEW, Elsie, as chairman, presided at Westminster Chapel at the service of dedication of the newly-elected secretary of the union. At the central part of the service, she put questions to Stanley and to the assembly. Aware of all the sensitivities, Elsie needed a steady nerve and great strength of mind.²⁷

Elsie’s gift for cutting through needlessly long and tedious perorations, an asset at the BBC, could be seen as simple impatience and, when CUEW chairman, she upset some sensitive colleagues who felt that she “was teaching them their job”.²⁸ Even her friends saw that she confronted established practice too much, thereby riding roughshod over those who “had always done it this way”. As CUEW chairman, at this time in particular, she might have achieved more with tact and charm than the sword.

In her chairman’s address in May 1956 Elsie spoke modestly of herself. “I can -and will- only speak of knowledge gained through practical experiences”, she began. She stressed her “ecumenical home” (a Church of England father and a Congregational mother) as “my training for future work” and for her own marriage. She paid tribute to her formative work in Liverpool, where she had “discovered that theology is practical and knowledge of the Bible relevant to daily life”, and especially to Rev Muriel Paulden who had been the minister at Berkley Street, for thirty-seven years.

She went on to decry the divided churches, to praise the World Council of Churches, and to doubt the accepted use of the term independent. She stated that she believed “it is time the Free Church Council started to plan its own demise, that out of its ashes might rise in every place a council of churches, as interdenominational as the World Council of Churches”. She

²⁷Jones op cit 428; Congregational Year Book (1956) 91-93, (1957) 92, 99-101.

²⁸The Guardian loc cit.

recalled that issues of church unity called for remedies even within Congregationalism and that “closer relationships” were needed between CUEW and the London Missionary Society and the Commonwealth Missionary Society. Elsie even claimed, in her chairman’s address in 1956, that she was an “ecumaniac” and she spoke of her work for the BBC.²⁹

The BBC

In August 1945 Elsie was invited to give six talks in the programme Lift Up Your Hearts. These talks, of four to four and a half minutes each (650-700 words) went out October 22-27 from 7.55 to 8 am. Elsie was advised to put her thoughts into simple words, avoiding traditional phrases of Christian piety, but encapsulating “some truth of the Gospel”. She was congratulated for these “really excellent broadcasts” by Kenneth Grayston, the assistant director of religious broadcasting. In November 1948 Elsie took part in a discussion on “Women as Ordained Clergy”, to be transmitted to Sweden.³⁰

On the basis of these forays into radio, Elsie was encouraged by her mother in May 1950 to apply for the post of assistant producer in the Religious Broadcasting department of the BBC. Hundreds of applications were sent in, from recently unseated former Labour MPs and ministers and laypersons of all denominations. The advertisement stipulated that two posts were to be filled and Elsie was one of the last to be interviewed. The selection board had more or less finalised its choices by the time of her interview but “she was never in danger”. One interviewer recalled that “Once she entered the room we knew that she was the person we wanted and the interview was memorable, as were the next seven years that I worked with her”. In fact three appointments were made.

Elsie began her work for the BBC in July 1950. Her own considerable personal gifts “began to define her job in the department” and it became obvious that “she was the right person to produce Lift Up Your Hearts “which reached an audience of about three million listeners, most of whom were non-churchgoers”. Lift Up Your Hearts, although it sounded like a talk, was regarded as “a species of small sermon”. It was designed for those Christians who could not benefit from the daily service and also for listeners who may have been interested in but were not committed to Christian faith.

²⁹E D Chamberlain White to Harvest (1956) 3, 6, 7.

³⁰BBC Written Archive - Contributors’ Talks, File I 1945-1962 Revd Elsie Chamberlain.

Elsie took responsibility for the yearly schedule for these broadcasts and she vetted scripts. Her colleagues had total confidence in her ability to communicate in her own “plain and simple” way, as well as to enable others to use successfully “that crucial spot”. Elsie would “clean up scripts”, sweeping away “complex theological ideas” and dogma. Thus she “decanted the parson’s voice and made sure that all could understand what was being said”. Elsie was keen to vary the themes and subject matter in Lift Up Your Hearts.³¹

She stated that why she agreed to work full-time for the BBC in 1954 was because “I had discovered that whereas a church tended to engulf the whole of a minister’s time the BBC gave me a missionary job”. She enjoyed the freedom on the radio “to go into factories and clubs, the circle of local government and education”. The BBC allowed her “to work for those outside the Church”, for their wants and needs. She felt that BBC religious broadcasting over the years “has been building a bridge across the gulf of irreligion”. She denied, however, that there was a “Radio Church”. To her the “finishing of the bridge” must lie “with the local community of the Church”. The BBC enabled Elsie to “reach the ‘outsider’ ”, as she hoped to do in all her ministry, being a “true evangelist”.³²

Lift Up Your Hearts, consisting of a story, a hymn and a prayer, went out live on the Home Service and Elsie developed an exceptional skill in helping the invited speakers to broadcast effectively, as if they were having a friendly chat with the individual at home. Elsie received a steady correspondence with comments both favourable and unfavourable. Lift Up Your Hearts was not only broadcast in Britain but also on the overseas service. She had responsibility for Work and Worship too, an overseas programme aimed specifically at missionaries. In October 1956 this carried a report by Kenneth Slack about the World Council of Churches’ central committee meeting, recently held in Hungary. Two years later she interviewed Slack for Work and Worship on the work of the British Council of Churches, of which he was then the general secretary.³³

In the summer of 1952 Elsie was asked to take part in an unscripted discussion programme with Bishop Bell of Chichester and Father Corbishley, principal of Campion Hall, Oxford. William Clark, on the editorial staff of The Observer, was to be the chairman. Elsie felt “inadequate to the role”. The

³¹Wolfe op cit 407; Williams op cit 61-2; The Independent loc cit.

³²Chamberlain op cit 16; Reform loc cit.

³³BBC Archive - Religious Scripts on Microfilm.

programme was entitled “How can the churches help to solve world problems?”.³⁴

Elsie was the first woman to lead The Daily Service which she conducted “with a special kind of naturalness”. Of course, some listeners in the 1950s objected to a woman leading worship to the nation, when woman ministers were rare, but others commented on her “very beautiful voice” and “delightful” tones. Some found that her “deep and distinctive” voice had an “allure” which drew them to listen more attentively while yet others found that Elsie’s voice was insistent and authoritative. Just after Elsie’s death, Radio Four broadcast a brief excerpt from one of her recordings, giving at least one friend a sharp pang of sadness. She would take her turn to conduct Saturday Night Prayers, about once a quarter, and she helped on occasions with the production of outside broadcasts of religious services in the London area. Elsie was also responsible for a kind of “agony column of the air”, entitled The Silver Lining. This programme was devised as a means of helping the many distressed listeners who wrote in to the Religious Broadcasting department. It had a clear pastoral aim, responding to subjects arising from unsolicited correspondence, and it gained a large listening audience among working-class women. The staple fare of the programme was “simple prayers and comfortable words”.³⁵

The Head of Religious Broadcasting was uncertain what reactions her first broadcasts would produce. He need not have feared because it was “wholly favourable”. Although the department then had some very able people on its staff Elsie is judged to have “more than held her own”.³⁶

She appeared on Woman’s Hour from time to time, talking about topics of a Christian nature, from books to children’s upbringing, and she made a few television appearances. She trained for television but did not take to it. She believed that radio was “for communication and that was her medium”. Television to her was for “demonstration and entertainment”. She felt that it stressed too much the speaker, to the detriment of the message he or she was trying to express.³⁷

During her time at the BBC Elsie published in 1959 a small book of broadcast talks, entitled Lift Up Your Hearts, and in 1961 she published Calm Delight, based on the hymn “Eternal Light” by Thomas Binney. This takes a phrase from the hymn as the source of a thought or reflection for each

³⁴BBC Written Archive - Contributors’ Talks loc cit.

³⁵Wolfe op cit 372-3.

³⁶BBC Written Archive loc cit.

³⁷Williams op cit 62, 64, 65, 66; The Independent loc cit; The Times loc cit.

day of the month. Elsie supported her thoughts with literary and theological quotations. Her aim with both books was to bring the reader nearer to God.

Those who worked with Elsie at the BBC recall her as tall and imposing, with a very strong personality. She was always kind and sympathetic to those with problems but knew how to be bluntly dismissive of others. She would be annoyed if men held doors open for her to pass through first as a woman but when Cardinal Heenan, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, was in the same corridor he smartly nipped through first! Elsie was not a tidy worker. Her office, in the old Langham Hotel, had papers everywhere, piled high in stacks. It was painted in battleship grey by the BBC who did not keep it scrupulously clean. While speaking on the telephone one day, Elsie used her rubber to draw a mural of Jacob's dream of a ladder, reaching up to heaven, with angels ascending and descending, as in Genesis 28:12. Her artistry was much admired.³⁸

In 1967 Lift Up Your Hearts was axed in line with "the secularising tendencies" of the BBC's then director-general, Sir Hugh Greene. It was argued that a replacement was needed to prevent the programme going stale. However Elsie believed that Lift Up Your Hearts still had life in it and that she herself had many more ideas both for it and for other programmes. Eventually Elsie felt that she had no alternative but to resign. As the producer of Lift Up Your Hearts, she maintained that she should leave with her programme. A colleague in the Religious Broadcasting department described her as being "driven out of the BBC". Clearly she was very unhappy at the manner of her leaving for she had enjoyed broadcasting and was good at it.

Yet she was on the air frequently after her resignation in January 1967. She conducted six services on the World Service which were broadcast in February. She filled the Ten to Seven slot on the Home Service also that month. She led The Daily Service at All Souls, Langham Place in April, and in May she did the readings and comments on four consecutive Sundays for The First Day of the Week. In June she broadcast again on the World Service and led The Daily Service. In September, October, November and December she appeared on The Hymns We Love for the African/Cultural Services at Bush House. She regularly broadcast on various programmes 1968-72. In 1973 she appeared on Radio Four's Sunday programme, she was interviewed by Jeanine McMullen for On Reflection, and she again led The Daily Service on several occasions for the BBC World Service.³⁹ Later she was to broadcast on BBC Radio Nottingham's Thought for the Day and she

³⁸Williams *ibid* 63.

³⁹BBC Written Archive - Contributors Talks *loc cit*.

continued to write scripts until her death. In 1988 she was the proud guest of honour at the sixtieth anniversary of The Daily Service from All Souls. On this occasion she was again interviewed on Woman's Hour although she confided afterwards that she had not enjoyed that particular interview.⁴⁰

In June 1953 Elsie was among the CUEW delegates to the Seventh International Congregational Council meetings at St Andrew's, Scotland, as was again her old friend and mentor, Muriel Paulden of Liverpool, whilst Viscountess Stansgate was an associate delegate. Elsie was there elected to serve on the executive committee of the ICC. On Sunday June 28 the service from the meetings was broadcast live on BBC radio. Sidney Berry led the service and the sermon was preached by Douglas Horton of the USA. Naturally Elsie, with her broadcasting expertise, was involved. She is remembered as enthusiastically conducting the entire assembly in the singing of the final hymn and then, with total control, silencing them all as one.⁴¹

Conclusion

Elsie is best known for her work at the BBC where she enjoyed herself immensely. Part of her achievement was that, as a pioneer in this field, she made millions of listeners familiar with a woman's voice, in leading worship and setting out Christian views in a direct and acceptable style, so that other women broadcasters, following her, faced far less hostility. However, to her, even more important than this accomplishment for women was her accomplishment as a Christian minister who discovered the possibilities, afforded to the churches, by the medium with which she worked. If Elsie was good to the BBC, the BBC was good to Elsie. Through her broadcasting career she gained an independent status. She was not reliant on a local church which could never have given her a national appeal and would have paid her only a small stipend - even if her being a woman minister had been acceptable. The BBC gave Elsie a prominence which otherwise would have been denied her. John Marsh wrote of her that "Few ministers have had, and seized so effectively, the opportunity to reach the large and secular world" in which the churches of our day must work.⁴²

⁴⁰Williams op cit 67-71.

⁴¹R F G Calder (ed) Proceedings of the Seventh International Congregational Council (1953) 14, 152, 170, 171, 178.

⁴²Reform loc cit.

By 1967 Elsie Chamberlain had realised her supreme gift as a “communicator of the Gospel” to the widest possible audience. At the BBC her ability and desire to strip away all “pretence and obscurity” in its communication had been given free rein. Henceforth in her preaching and speaking she would strive to make the Christian message effective and heard. She left the BBC, in difficult circumstances, at the height of her fame and her powers. She was by no means a spent force in her own estimation, nor in that of the world. Rather she was greatly loved and respected. She was energetic and willing to serve. The coming years would hold a few surprises for Elsie and, ever the Independent, she would produce a few of her own.⁴³

Alan Argent

⁴³The Independent loc cit.

WHEN IS A CHAPEL NO LONGER A CHAPEL? HIGHBURY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, CHELTENHAM, AND ITS FIRST BUILDING

It still looks like a chapel and has the feel of a chapel. Yet it is a long time since it was used as a chapel. Outside it has a typical nonconformist chapel facade, in keeping with the Regency architecture of Grosvenor Terrace. Inside it has the feel of an old dissenters' chapel - a gallery all round, but no seating in the gallery, with little rooms off the very narrow walk-way of the gallery.

Since 1932 it has been used for the children and young people of Cheltenham, serving as an extension for nearby St John's School, supplying generations of children with their dinners. More recently it was a youth and community centre, providing a home to a wide range of activities from a Play Group to an After School Club, from a Drama Studio to a Gymnasium and Boxing Club.

In 1932 it was sold by Highbury Congregational Church when they demolished the Gothic building which for eighty years had been their home just round the corner and sold their town centre site to the Gaumont cinema, now Cheltenham's Odeon. The move brought together on one site, in ultra-modern, purpose built premises, the children's work and the rest of the church's life. Those are the premises which for Highbury are still home. For eighty years, from 1851 to 1932, Highbury's passionate commitment to working with children and young people meant that it maintained and developed a building, specifically set aside for work with children.

Some of the oldest church members still recall the days in the 1920s when two hundred children, from the streets around, would crowd into the building on a Sunday afternoon for Sunday School. The youngest had a room of their own at the back and were led by a team of leaders who met for preparation one evening a week, prior to Sunday. The other departments started together, in the main part of the building, before separating into their departments, in the rooms off the gallery. Some boys proved a handful, climbing onto the outside of the gallery and trying the patience of their leaders. Other children from the streets around, not of a mind to 'go to Sunday School', would pass their Sunday afternoon throwing stones at the windows and banging on the door. Just as well the leader of the youngest children became Cheltenham's first woman magistrate!

Prior to the 1902 education act the church had run a day school on the site, as well as a Sunday School. Although in this period the building was used by Highbury Congregational Church it would be wrong to think of it as

a chapel. Indeed, so important was the members' commitment to education that they carved out in large letters above the main door to the building the name ... Highbury British School.

This British school had been the brainchild of one of Highbury's most zealous reforming ministers, Andrew Morton Brown ... or rather of his wife. A keen supporter of the Liberal Party, Dr Andrew Morton Brown played a key role in reforming many of Cheltenham's institutions and in national reform campaigns in the mid-nineteenth century. Mrs Brown had an equal passion for education and the responsibility of the church to children in its neighbourhood. As one of the histories of the church records, "She was always at her post morning and afternoon through many years. She was always honoured and loved by all her teachers, ever ready with her gracious manner to guide and encourage all who came under her care and notice." Taking a personal interest in every scholar, she "reigned over the school as Dr Brown reigned over the Church, but in each case it was an autocracy of love."

In 1851 Andrew Morton Brown decided that the rapidly growing congregation of Highbury Congregational Church should move out of those premises in Grosvenor Terrace, then known as Gyde Terrace, and build a monumental church in the town centre. The decision to keep on the old building was not entirely philanthropic! Some in the congregation wanted to move out altogether. It was only when the residents of Gyde Terrace petitioned the recently formed Congregational Union of England and Wales, of which Andrew Morton Brown was to become Chairman three years later in 1854, that the church decided to retain the premises.¹

1851 was not, however, the point at which the building on Gyde Terrace ceased to be a chapel. For the previous twenty years it is clear that it was known not as a chapel but as a church. It had not always been the case. For the first years of its existence it had been regarded as a chapel. How Highbury Chapel ceased to be a chapel and became a Christian church is related in the first minute of the first minute book, here transcribed.

¹ Morton Brown in fact took the place of Robert Halley (1796-1876) who was chosen by the committee of CUEW to be chairman in 1854. Halley decided to go on a tour of the continent. Morton Brown took his place and was "thanked for his kindness in accepting the office of Chairman". A Peel These Hundred Years (1931) 200. See his obituary CYB (1880) 310.

**A Register
of Proceedings relative to the
Re-Opening
of the place of Worship in Gyde's Terrace,
Cheltenham
called, Highbury Chapel,
with Minutes of the transactions of the Christian Church
afterwards formed in that place.**

The Place of worship which is situate in Gyde's Terrace, Cheltenham, was built in the year 1819 by an architect from Brighton, at the expense of Mrs Wall, the ground having been purchased from Mr William Gyde. It is believed that the total expense was about £3700. Mrs Wall presented the chapel to the Rev W Snow, who had previously seceded from the National Religious Establishment, and who preached therein for the space of ...²

Mr Snow gave the Chapel to the Rev W.Simeon of Cambridge, who endeavoured, but in vain, to obtain its consecration according to the usages of the National Church.

The Chapel was afterwards sold by auction, at the Plough Hotel, to W.Lucy, for £2100.³

It was subsequently resold by auction to the Rev Jenin Thomas for £1200.

The Rev W Moxon, then curate of Trinity Church, Cheltenham, would have purchased it of Mr Thomas, if the Bishop of Gloucester had been willing to consecrate it. The Bishop declined doing this on account of the unwillingness of Lord Sherborne to enfranchise the ground. The ground on which the Chapel stands is copyhold of inheritance; the ground behind the chapel on part of which the Vestry stands, is held on Lease.

In the month of May 1827, Thomas Wilson Esq of Highbury near

² In fact he had left the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion chapel in Cheltenham. A C H Seymour Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (1839) ii 440.

³ William Lucy was ordained in Lady Huntingdon's chapel, St Augustine's Place, Bristol in 1823; Seymour *ibid.* ii 395. See also CYB (1873) 338.

London, and Rev John Burder of Stroud, purchased the Chapel of Mr Thomas for £1300.⁴ The purchase was effected through the medium of Mr Burder. Mr Wilson agreed to advance £1200 without Interest, on condition that Mr Burder would be responsible for all other expenses both of repairs and of worship, and that Mr Burder would also undertake to see the pulpit supplied with Ministers until the affairs of the place could be so settled as to render his further assistance unnecessary.

The writings were drawn up by Mr Richard Wyatt, Attorney, Stroud. The Trustees were Thomas Wilson, Esq, Joshua Wilson Esq, both Highbury, London, and Rev John Burder, Henry Wyatt Esq and John Paine Esq, all of Stroud. The Deed declares that the premises are to be used by Congregational Dissenters, maintaining the doctrines and practice which are usual among Christians of that Denomination. The Deity and Atonement of Christ, the Work of the Holy Spirit, Infant Baptism and Baptism by effusion (or pouring) and the Independency of churches of each other are specified as the distinguishing tenets of the Body.

The purchase was completed and the writings were signed on the 8th of August 1827.

The Chapel, having undergone a thorough repair by Mr Richard Billings, under the direction of Mr Burder, was re-opened for public worship, on the 9th August 1827. The only consecration which Christians of this body seek for their place of worship when they are either re-opened or originally opened consists in Thanksgiving, Prayer and the Proclamation of “the Truth as it is in Jesus”.

Among the Ministers who officiated on the solemn and joyful occasion were Mr Fletcher of Stepney, Mr Leifchild of Bristol, Mr Burder of Stroud, Mr Bishop of Gloucester.⁵

On the following evening a meeting for worship was held and Mr Burder delivered an Address.

Mr Fletcher preached on the two following Lord’s days to large congregations.

⁴ For John Burder see CYB (1868) 27.

⁵For William Bishop of Southgate, Gloucester see Evangelical Magazine (1833) 45ff.

A Lecture was immediately established on Friday evenings, and a Prayer Meeting on Monday Evenings.

On the 26th of August Mr Redford of Worcester preached, and on the subsequent Friday Evening, Mr Stamper of Uxbridge.

Mr Edleins of Nailsworth officiated on the 2nd of September, in the room of Mr John Burder, who, in the interval between the re-opening of the Chapel and the day last mentioned, had been grieved by the death of his beloved wife. Mrs Burder had been present at both services on the day of re-opening and, apparently in good health, had expressed great satisfaction that the labours of her husband in reference to the Chapel had been so far crowned with success. Her unexpected removal from the church on earth to the church above, was felt by very many persons to be a God call "to work which it is called today."

The Revd Mr Winstanley, episcopal Minister in Cheltenham, presented, through the medium of Mr White, a Pulpit Bible for the use of the Chapel.

Mr Burder having undertaken at the request of the other Trustees, the temporary Superintendence of the affairs of the Chapel, desired Mr Wells, Mr R Billings, Mr Landen, Mr Potter, Mr Bulgin and Mr White, to act as a Committee, for the purpose of assisting him, especially in the management of the secular concerns of the place, it being understood that this appointment would cease as soon as a Church should be regularly organised and Deacons chosen.

Of this Committee Mr Wells was requested to act as Secretary, Mr Burder being the Treasurer.

Subsequently, at Mr Burder's solicitation, Major Bean and Mr Bailey joined the Committee.

After a while, Mr Landen and Mr Potter retired from the Committee, and some time afterwards Mr Bailey and Mr Billings. Mr White removed to Leamington; so that at length the remaining members were Mr Wells, Major Bean, and Mr Bulgin. Mr Thick also consented to assist the Committee.

The following is a List of the Ministers who officiated in Highbury Chapel from the day of its re-opening to the 25th October 1830, the time

when these minutes were written. [There follows an extensive list of those officiating at Highbury]

At a meeting of persons frequenting Highbury Chapel, held in the vestry,
Nov 1828.

Mr Burder in the chair.

The Chairman reminded the friends present that, agreeably to the notification given from the pulpit the object of the Meeting was to consider whether it would be proper to invite any one of the Ministers who had visited them, to undertake the Pastoral office among them, or, to visit them again. He adverted to the importance of the subject and was grateful to think that they had implored divine direction.

The consideration of the Meeting was first directed to the Revd Woodwark of Upminster, who had lately spent a month with them. The most honourable testimony was borne to Mr Woodwark's character, and some of the friends were much attached to his ministry, but on putting the question to the vote, it appeared that of thirty five persons present, only thirteen were desirous of his settlement here.⁶

The Revd Mr Prost was next mentioned. He also was spoken of in the highest terms as a young man of exemplary character and of highly promising talents, but many persons were of opinion that this station required a Minister of greater age. The question was put whether Mr Prost should be invited to visit this place again, and it appeared that of the 28 persons then present only 11 were in favour of the proposal.

Lastly, the case of the Rev J. Miles was taken into consideration. Mr Miles had spent three Sabbaths here in the preceding Spring, and many persons expressed themselves much pleased with his services. On the question being put whether Mr Miles should be invited to visit Highbury Chapel again it appeared that twenty four persons out of the twenty eight then present were desirous of his so doing. Mr Burder engaged without delay to write to him.

⁶ John Woodwark remained in Upminster until 1832 when he went to King Street, Northampton. CYB (1870) 328.

The desired visit took place in March 1829, but no ulterior measures were adopted in reference to Mr Miles. He is, however, held in affectionate remembrance by not a few of the friends attending at this chapel.⁷

From the latter end of the year 1827 until the Summer of 1830, Mr Burder occasionally administered the Lord's Supper to a few individuals at Highbury Chapel. These persons had been, for the most part, communicants either in dissenting churches or among some denomination of evangelical Christians. Notice was given from the Pulpit that no person was expected to sit down at the Lord's Table without previously speaking to the Minister and being approved by him. All these persons, therefore, were admitted to the Lord's Table in the same way in which occasional communicants are allowed to sit down at the Lord's Table with regularly formed Churches. These persons were given to understand that their partaking of the ordinance for a time in this manner would not, as a matter of course, entitle them to church membership when a church should be formed.

In the Summer of 1830 it was deemed proper to proceed to the important business of forming a Church, or Christian Society. Accordingly on the 3rd of September Mr Burder delivered a discourse in the subject of Church Government, stating the reasons of dissent from the National religious Establishment, exhibiting the principles and usages of churches of the Congregational order, according to the platform laid down in the New Testament, and giving an outline of the plan on which it was proposed to proceed in the commencement of such a Church in connexion with this chapel.

He invited serious persons who were disposed to unite themselves in Church fellowship, to meet him in the vestry of the chapel on Thursday Evening, September 16th, when he expected Mr Good of Salisbury to be the officiating Minister at the Chapel, who would be able to assist them in the important business.⁸

At a meeting of a few serious persons frequenting Highbury Chapel, held in the vestry of that place of worship September 16 1830, convened for the purpose of considering the propriety of forming a Christian Church in connexion with that Chapel;

⁷ James Edward Miles was minister at Weston-super-Mare 1829-30 and lived in retirement at Cheltenham from the mid 1830s. CYB (1849) 111.

⁸ Surman's Index of Congregational Ministers lists Good as at Salisbury 1818-32 and that he died in 1859 but he does not have an obituary in CYB.

Mr Burder having been requested to preside, expressed his wish that the Rev J.E.Good of Salisbury who was then the officiating Minister at Highbury Chapel for two Sabbaths, should assist him in the proceedings of the evening.

Mr Burder having given out a hymn, and offered up prayer for divine guidance, requested Mr Good to deliver his sentiments relative to the important business for which the meeting had been called. Mr Good accordingly delivered an appropriate and instructive address on the nature of a Christian Church and the duties which Church membership involves.

Mr Burder then read that part of the Trust Deed of the Chapel which concerned the formation of a Church. A serious and friendly conversation ensued, the result of which was that Mr Thick, Mr Lacy, Mrs Lacy, Miss Lacy, Mr Ockfent, Elizabeth Evans, William Carrier, Mrs Dyke and Miss Walford signified their willingness to become members of a church on the principles required by the Trust-deed. They requested Mr Burder to act as their President until they should obtain a Pastor. To this request Mr Burder signified his assent. But as by that time the evening was far advanced, it was agreed that the meeting should be adjourned till after the public service on the next evening.

On Friday evening, Sept 17 1830, a meeting was held by adjournment, for the purpose of forming a Congregational Church in connexion with this chapel.

Present, Mr Burder, President, assisted by Mr Good, and Mr Thick, Mr Lucy, Mrs Lucy, Miss Lucy, Mr Ockford, Mrs Evans, Mrs Dyke and Mr Carrier.

A message was received from Miss Walforth expressing her wish to defer joining the Church.

With the other eight persons above named the Ministers conversed one by one, after which Mr Burder intimated that in forming themselves into a church, it was desirable that they should all be satisfied with one another. Having, therefore, spoken to them respecting the solemnity of the act which they were about to perform, he desired that if every one of them was willing to unite in Church fellowship with everyone present, they would signify their readiness to do by standing up.

All stood up accordingly, and Mr Burder declared the persons present to be a Christian Church.

As Mr Ockford and Mrs Evans had been members of other Christian churches, they were admitted with the understanding that in due time they would obtain satisfactory letters of dismissal from those Churches.

The names of Mr Cape, Mary Harding, Miss Walford, Mr and Mrs Brown, Mr Richards, Mrs Lea and Mr Mayor were mentioned as persons who would be suitable for church fellowship, and who, it was thought probable would be disposed to join the Church.

Solemn Prayer was then offered that the Head of the Church would give his sanction and blessing; that “the little one might become a thousand.”

A.R. Cleaves

MARY HIGGS OF OLDHAM

Recent research into social history has drawn attention to the pioneering work of Mary Ann Higgs, née Kingsland, wife of Thomas Kilpin Higgs, minister of Greenacres Congregational Church, Oldham.¹ She came to prominence, after her husband's death, as a powerful advocate of reform of the workhouses and other contemporary provisions for the homeless, both vagrants and casual labourers. She was also a pacifist, a Bible translator, and a writer of devotional literature. She was awarded the OBE, for public and social services in Oldham, which included her work in the founding and supporting of the Beautiful Oldham Society, an important community group which contributed much to fostering local pride.

Early Years

Mary was born on 2 February, 1854, the daughter of William Kingsland and Caroline Eliza, née Paddon, when he was minister of St Mary's Congregational Church, Devizes.² This church was ever short of funds and he pressed them many times to raise his stipend from the £150, which he had received as assistant minister, to the £225 that had been paid to his predecessor. His ministry there was clearly appreciated by some, however, as when he could afford to stay no longer, his leaving gift included £100 from Mr Humphries of Mexico who had greatly valued his preaching before he emigrated.³ Mary was eight when the family moved to Bradford where her father became minister of College Chapel, originally an outreach of Airedale College. They lived in the socially deprived area where the college was located, although by Kingsland's time the chapel was no longer formally linked to it.⁴ She took with her, to the industrial north, a love of the beauty of nature, being the daughter of a woman of the West Country (Truro) and a father who was born in Kent. William Kingsland had formerly taught in Totteridge and had trained for the ministry at Western College.⁵

¹ P Keating Into Unknown England (1981); S Cohen, C Fleay "Fighters for the Poor" History Today (January 2000) 37. I am grateful to Alan Argent, Neil Chapell, Yvonne Evans and Andy Vail for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

² The Friend vol 95 (1937) 282.

³ F Broster-Temple The Story of St Mary's (Trowbridge 1972) 31-2.

⁴ J G Miall Congregationalism in Yorkshire 238.

⁵ Congregational Year Book (hereafter CYB) (1877) 288; M K Higgs Mary Higgs of Oldham (privately published 1954) 5.

Mary was the eldest of three, having two younger brothers. Her father educated all three at home, leaving her with no conception of female incapability or inferiority. When she was older she was sent to “the leading private school for girls” in Bradford. She won a scholarship to the newly founded College for Women in Hitchin which, two years later, became Girton College, Cambridge. Despite having only one year’s access to the Cambridge laboratories, in 1874 she became the first woman to sit the Natural Sciences Tripos, gaining a second, although as women were not then given degrees, her first degree was an honorary MA, awarded in 1924. She stayed on briefly at Girton as an assistant lecturer then, aged twenty-one, she became a teacher of science and mathematics, first at the Bradford Girls Grammar School and, after that, at Saltaire School whose headmistress had been “the ideal teacher of her girlhood”.⁶

Throughout her youth she had been involved in the work of her father’s ministry, teaching in the Sunday school, at the age of 13, and being involved in the social activities of the church which included a visit of the choir to sing in a common lodging house. On her return from Cambridge, she resumed her involvement in this work (“I was also intended to be a sort of ‘curate’”, she later wrote), but this was cut short by her father’s death in 1876, at the early age of 49 years.⁷ In 1878 her brother, John Paddon Kingsland, went to Lancashire Independent College, Manchester, to train for the Congregational ministry. There he met Thomas Kilpin Higgs, whose study was two doors away from Kingsland’s. Higgs was a brilliant student, gaining in his final year the London MA, with a sufficient standard to be a prize medallist, if his age had not debarred him.⁸ Through her brother, Mary came to know Higgs who was born in 1851 in Ipswich, from “a long line of puritan forefathers”. He longed as a boy to go to sea or to be an artist, but several months at sea put him off the former and instead he chose to become an engineer. He did so well in his apprenticeship that he was offered a lucrative post in India but opted rather to enter the ministry, having “come under religious impressions under the ministry of the Rev J Cran”. Here we may see the mutual attraction, a meeting of two minds, his engineering to her science, and his interest in art to her love of nature. They married in College Chapel on 5 August, 1879.⁹

⁶ *ibid* 5-6; The Friend loc cit.

⁷ Higgs op cit 6; The Friend loc cit; CYB loc cit.

⁸ Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society XIV 174.

⁹Higgs op cit 6.

Hanley and Withington

Higgs' ministry commenced at Tabernacle Congregational Church, Hanley, Staffordshire, in 1879, having received a call before he had finished his studies at college. His preaching was noted at Hanley for attracting both working men and young people. During his pastorate much building work took place, first a new mission hall at a cost of £1,000, followed by the building of a new Tabernacle and schools at a cost of £18,000. To him fell the task of fundraising and supervising the building works, being suited to the latter through his engineer's training. Soon after the completion of these works the Congregational Union's autumnal meetings were held at Hanley in 1885. While at Hanley Mary gave birth to their three young children. The Higgs' family home was not isolated from the work of the church and they entertained frequent visitors, among them General Booth of the Salvation Army. Mary and Thomas Higgs also catered for many social gatherings. This busy life was relieved by occasional holidays in the Lake District, which they had first visited on their honeymoon. On one such visit a farmer asked them why the Bible was not in plain English. It was not an accident that Mary was later to be involved in the publication of the Twentieth Century New Testament.¹⁰

Following his ministry at Hanley came a difficult period for both Thomas and Mary. In 1888 after preaching (but not 'with a view') at Withington, Manchester, where the pastorate was vacant, he received an unexpected call to be the minister. He accepted the call "as it seemed to offer a wider sphere", although they were sad to leave Hanley and the church members were unhappy at losing them.¹¹ Before they went their third child had only recently been born and Mary was slow to recover from the labour of childbirth. On leaving Tabernacle, they spent a little time in Scotland for the improvement of her health. Taking up his new appointment, Thomas Higgs also accepted the secretaryship of Lancashire Independent College, a post he retained until his death. He put his energies also into fundraising for a new Sunday school building at Withington and £2,000 was raised or promised within two years. However, disputes with the deacons over both "church affairs" and doctrine led to his suffering a "serious nervous breakdown" and he resigned from Withington in 1890, a sea voyage having been prescribed for his recovery. Fortunately neither the disagreements nor his leaving

¹⁰ CYB (1908) 179-180; Higgs op cit 7-8.

¹¹ Interestingly his successor but one (1896-1904) was Dugald Macfadyen, later of Highgate, London. A G Matthews The Congregational Churches of Staffordshire (1924) 255.

prevented the building of the Sunday School which took place shortly afterwards. Also at this time Mary's brother, John, was out of pastoral charge (1890-95) and living "in the vicinity of Manchester".¹²

Mary, with her new baby girl, their fourth child, was undaunted by these troubles which left them very short of money, but sometimes she sought solace in writing poetry, in which she expressed both her love for the natural and the spiritual. She began work on the translation of the Twentieth Century New Testament which she found she could combine with her domestic work. In addition she was also secretary to the translators and this position brought her into contact with the leading journalist and social campaigner, W T Stead (1849-1912), who was guiding the enterprise. Stead was the son of a Congregational minister and, 1884-1890, he had been the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette. With Bramwell Booth he exposed the evils of child prostitution, receiving in the process a prison sentence of two months. Stead sailed on the Titanic on its fateful maiden voyage and drowned on 15 April 1912. He was to have an influence on Mary Higgs' pacifism, her social outlook and also on her spirituality. Although she does not appear to have shared his interest in spiritualism, she was to edit some devotional musings from his diaries, under the title The Way to the Joyous Life which was published for private circulation in the mid 1930s, along with her thoughts on the healings of Jesus, Christ and Personality.¹³

Greenacres, Oldham

In 1891, his health better, Thomas Higgs accepted the call to Greenacres Congregational Church, Oldham and once again involved himself in fundraising, this time to clear the debt on the recently completed schools. Building works again were to be a feature of this pastorate, with new vestries, an enlarged organ and other works to beautify the chapel. In addition to these, and his well remembered preaching (including children's sermons), this ministry was characterised by a new dimension. It was in Oldham, living at the Parsonage (as it was known), with a life of enforced "Franciscan poverty", that both Thomas and Mary became activists on contemporary social issues. Not having the money for family holidays, she and the children

¹²CYB (1908) 180; Higgs op cit 9; CYB (1946) 446.

¹³Higgs loc cit; A Peel The Congregational Two Hundred (1948) 242-244; British Library catalogue.

explored the countryside around the town while her husband converted a piece of moorland into a garden.¹⁴

During 1893 an engineers' lock-out and a long cotton strike caused much distress in the town and there were constant requests by the needy at the Parsonage door for help. Relief was also organised by the church members and the new Sunday Schools were used to serve many free meals, especially Sunday breakfasts to the poor children.¹⁵ This was not enough for either Mary or Thomas, however, and they began to enquire into the causes and background of social problems, reading widely and discussing the issues with friends from many fields. They wanted earnestly to know what the Christian approach should be.¹⁶

Mary stood in the election for poor law guardians in order to get closer to those in need. She was not successful but was invited onto the ladies' committee which visited the Union Workhouse and soon became its secretary. She also became acquainted with Sarah Lees (later Dame) of Werneth Park and her daughter Marjory, who were prepared to commit both time and money to social service in Oldham. Having visited the workhouse and seen the needs of destitute women at first hand, Mary arranged, with help from others, to set up a home where social workers gave training to homeless women and helped them to find permanent homes and jobs. At the beginning of the twentieth century, she wrote that she thanked God that she was now able to "pilot to self support and safety" every destitute girl who came to her door for help.¹⁷

She had wide interests, being involved at Greenacres in the work of many departments of the church and Sunday school. Her interest and influence in the Young Men's Class continued for many years and she was involved in the Forward Movement for foreign missions. When the church founded a Christian Endeavour Society she became its first president. Through the activities of the latter she came to know Mrs Wareing of Rochdale who was also a friend of W T Stead and a keen worker in women's issues and efforts for peace. When she died in 1922, Mary wrote her biography - Mother Wareing (Wigan 1924). Stead visited both Rochdale and

¹⁴Higgs op cit 10; S H Stowell (ed) Greenacres 1672-1922 by Mary Higgs and others (Blackburn 1922) 21-22.

¹⁵ibid.

¹⁶Higgs loc cit.

¹⁷ibid 10-11.

Oldham, in January 1899, to enlist supporters for his Peace Crusade and stayed as a guest at Greenacres Parsonage.¹⁸

Social service in and around Oldham

On 11 December 1901 the Oldham Chronicle published anonymously a piece by Mary entitled "Beautiful Oldham - Why not?" The idea that the drab and smoky industrial town could be transformed caught hold of the public imagination and a lively correspondence ensued. Her letters on this subject subsequently were always signed "the writer of Beautiful Oldham". Within a short time an inaugural meeting was held at Werneth Park, at the invitation of Dame Sarah Lees, which Higgs attended and the Beautiful Oldham Society was formed. Although she was not an office holder of the society, she worked tirelessly for its cause and took an especial interest in the Junior Society for boys and girls and the Young Oldham branch for those who had left school, writing a weekly newspaper column for them, under the pseudonym "Mrs Minerva"¹⁹

Both Mary and Thomas were fully involved in different kinds of social service in Oldham at this time - work for cripples, a paper sorting industry, the founding of a branch of the YWCA, a women's lodging house, and the Oldham Guild of Help. However Mary was biding her time. She had wanted for several years to do more in practical work to help the destitute but believed that she should wait until her children were older and she had more time to give. During this time as many as sixty poor women in one year passed through the house which she had established to help them and she wanted to discover if anything more could be done to prevent their falling into destitution.²⁰

In the summer of 1903, therefore, she stepped out into another world with a friend, dressed in old clothes and taking only half a crown in money with her. For five days and nights they tramped, starting only fifteen miles from Oldham, staying in lodging houses of varying quality, and in the casual ward of a workhouse, pawning a shawl for two shillings and sixpence when they ran short of funds. The story of their memorable journey was published in the Contemporary Review and it was reprinted as a pamphlet entitled The Tramp Ward (Manchester 1904). She wrote movingly: "Supposing we had no friends, what could we have done? Before us would have stretched in

¹⁸Stowell op cit 22.

¹⁹Oldham Chronicle 11 & 18 December 1901; Beautiful Oldham (Oldham 1905); Higgs op cit 12-13.

²⁰ibid 14.

grey monotony the life of poverty, a possible search for uncertain work, a gradual pawning of every available article to buy food. The last article gone, cleanliness lost, clothing dilapidated or dirty - what then? To wander helpless and homeless, driven to tramp on or to descend still further into vice.”²¹

This pamphlet aroused widespread interest, leading to action. In many parts of the country people began to establish better provisions for women and to improve those already existing. The Duchess of Marlborough became president of the newly formed National Association for Women’s Lodging Houses. Mary Higgs was the secretary of its northern branch. In Oldham three lodging houses were set up for destitute women, including one at Bent House, bought by Dame Sarah Lees deliberately for this work. With Mary’s children now being older, she travelled far and wide, speaking about the reforms needed and over the years she continued her incognito visits to all kinds of accommodation for poor women in different parts of the country.²² On these visits she was often assumed to be a “won’t work” vagrant because of the softness of her hands and treated accordingly. One of her worst experiences, she said, was in the casual ward at St Pancras, London.²³

Early Publications

Mary also continued to write for her cause. In 1904 she published How to Deal with the Unemployed. In its 202 pages she made proposals in categories, according to whether they were unemployed due to indolence, incapacity or lack of work. Some of her ideas would seem draconian to us today as, for example, she advocated forced work for the unwilling (although she believed that they constituted only 4% of the itinerants) but, in the main, she sought to combat the fact that the Poor Law’s basis of relief, given by the parish of origin, inhibited the movement of labour to where the jobs were. The commandment “six days shalt thou labour...” could not be fulfilled by those without work. She believed that lack of support for those travelling to seek work and those incapable of work, led to an inevitable descent into vice and degeneracy. She wanted to see a ministry of labour running a “Labour Market” to match people to jobs. She used metaphor and simile from literature and medicine among other sources to make her points in a readable way. Some of her descriptions of life for vagrants are clearly taken from her own travels “on the tramp”. She had read widely on the subject, noting and

²¹British Library catalogue; Higgs op cit 14, 17.

²²ibid 18.

²³The Friend op cit 283.

advocating certain methods used in other countries, such as the German labour colonies.²⁴ She was to say later that her first contact with the Society of Friends was the prize they awarded her for the book. Enquiries at the Friends' House Library, London have so far failed to reveal the nature or date of the prize given but the book was reviewed in The Friend on 19 August 1904. It should also be noted that an article by her - "The Tramp" - appeared in The British Friend for June 1904.²⁵

The following year she was given a prize for her devotional essay "Christ and his miracles in the light of modern Psychology" and she published a book "The Master" The Vision of a Disciple (1905). The year after that she won the Gamble prize, from Girton College, for her essay, "Vagrancy, its causes, history, and treatment in England and in other countries", which was published, along with an account of her investigative visits in London and around the country, as Glimpses into the Abyss (1906).²⁶

On 25 May 1907 Thomas Higgs died of pneumonia after only five days' illness. He had supported her wholeheartedly in all this activity and it was an upheaval physically as well as emotionally, as she would have to leave the Parsonage. Fortunately there was no immediate pressure to leave as the pastorate remained vacant for eighteen months. She moved to Bent Cottage, next door to Bent House, with her youngest daughter and her son. After they both married in the spring of 1912, she moved into rooms in Bent House which remained her home for the rest of her life. Bent House was increasingly a centre for all kinds of social involvement over the years. As well as a women's lodging house it was used by a school for mothers (inspired by Higgs' pamphlet The Evolution of the Child Mind 1910), a play centre, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides, a mothers' meeting, a poetry society, the Workers Educational Association, the Oldham Guild of Help and the Beautiful Oldham Society.²⁷

Mary continued, after Thomas' death, to write books, pamphlets and newspaper articles, some on social topics, others of a devotional nature. Her social work, both investigations and public speaking on the subject, took her abroad both to Europe and north America. From the late 1890s she had known JB Paton, since 1863 Principal of the Congregational Institute, Nottingham, later renamed Paton College in his honour. Paton had a passion for social reform and evangelization. "There was no limit to Paton's activity

²⁴M Higgs How to Deal With the Unemployed (1904).

²⁵The Friend vol 62 (1904) 552; The British Friend ns vol XIII 150.

²⁶M K Higgs op cit 18.

²⁷Stowell loc cit; Higgs op cit 20, 21, 23.

outside his college work - no man had more irons in the fire." He wrote to her asking advice for the Girls League of Honour he hoped to found. Later he wrote requesting her assistance in promulgating his ideas of Christian social service. As well as discussing these, she sent him some of her devotional writings and poetry which he appreciated.²⁸ She was involved in the summer school which he and his son organised at Hayfield, Derbyshire. From this grew the influential COPEC movement (Conference on Politics Economics and Citizenship) which held annual conferences, the first chaired by William Temple, attended by representatives of all the Protestant denominations in England to discuss social problems from a Christian perspective.²⁹

First World War and its Consequences

The outbreak of war in 1914 led to new needs for assistance. Mary was, as usual, innovative in her response. She began a workroom for women which came to the notice of the Queen. As a result Queen Mary's workrooms were established in many towns. Despite her being busy with much work in Oldham, both at Bent House and elsewhere, she found the time to write some devotional poetry inspired by the Lord's Prayer which was published as An Octave of Song (1917). In February 1916 conscription was introduced, prompting Mary Higgs, with her pacifist views, to change her religious allegiance.³⁰ On 3 May 1916 it was announced, at the Greenacres church meeting, that, having already joined the Society of Friends, she was resigning from her membership of Greenacres Congregational Church. It was resolved that a letter should be written to her expressing the church members' gratitude for all she had done for the church and school and the hope that this step would not diminish her friendship with Greenacres. This happily did not occur as she allowed her name as author to be given to the 1922 history of Greenacres, edited by the then minister Stanley Herbert Stowell (who was at Greenacres 1913-32) which, although ignoring the fact that she was no longer a church member, stated that she still on occasions visited the Young Men's Class.³¹

²⁸J L Paton John Brown Paton (1914) 321, 324, 498, 518-9; R T Jones Congregationalism in England 1662-1962 (1962) 306; Peel op cit 210.

²⁹Higgs op cit 20-1. Roman Catholics were also involved, but not as full participants. A R Vidler The Church in an Age of Revolution (1961) 260.

³⁰Higgs op cit 25-6.

³¹Greenacres Congregational Church church meeting minutes 3 May 1916; Stowell loc cit.

Although her social activity was initially aimed mostly at women, she gradually became more involved in assistance to men and boys. In 1914 she published My Brother the Tramp which arose out of her experiences with the paper sorting scheme she had helped to start, around the turn of the century. As a Quaker she joined the Friends' Vagrancy Committee. After the war one response to the increasing vagrancy problem it had exacerbated was initiated by Major Edward Evans who, as Brother Giles, led a small group who eventually became Franciscan brothers and started a training home in 1921 where they lived with tramps on a farm at Batcombe, Dorset. Mary visited their community, becoming a lifelong friend to this and other homes which they started.³²

Later Years

My Brother the Tramp was revised in 1924 under the title Down and Out which led to her introduction to the Wayfarers' Benevolent Association. This had organised a number of training hostels around the country. In time she came to visit all the hostels for homeless boys in England, helping to found in Oldham a home for boys following the methods she had seen in the Rhondda valley in Wales. She adopted Moore Place, a fifteen acre farm at Stanford-le-Hope, Essex, as her special concern. In 1932 it began to be governed by a committee of Friends, Mary being their secretary. She visited the home every month, befriending each boy and following the progress of hundreds of boys, even after they had left the home. To them and many others she became 'Mother Mary Higgs'.³³

During all this activity she was saddened by the death of her son in 1926. He left two children whose mother had died earlier. The boy lived with Mary at Bent House until he was ready for boarding school. When he left, although she had many friends there, Mary no longer had any family living in Oldham. Her brother John had by this time retired from the ministry and was living in Felixstowe. He had spent another period "in the vicinity of Manchester", from 1900 until 1909, when he became minister of his father's old church in Devizes where his reputation as a popular preacher was such that the other nonconformists in the town refused to allow him to join in Free Church Council activities, lest his preaching tempt their members away. This pastorate ended in 1917 when the church could no longer afford his stipend. From 1918 to his retirement in 1920 he was minister of Victoria Street

³²Higgs op cit 26-7.

³³ibid 27-8; The Friend vol 95 (1937) 283.

Congregational Church, St Helier, Jersey.³⁴ Oldham remained Mary's permanent home from which she travelled to visit family members as well as conducting her work for social reform. She continued writing her weekly newspaper columns which appeared in both the local papers. In 1933, at 79, she founded a Fellowship and Service Club for unemployed men in Oldham. Then over the next two years she started two Fellowship Hostels there also for unemployed men.³⁵

Her health was beginning not to be able to keep pace with her busy round. In 1934 she was forced through illness to stay for four months with her daughter in Shepton Mallet, Somerset. After this she resumed her many activities. Throughout her life and travels she had built up a network of friends at home and abroad. Others who had heard of her work supported her in prayer, including the worldwide Fellowship of Followers (a movement founded to pursue an ideal of W.T.Stead by his brother Herbert). She was again in Shepton Mallet for Christmas in 1936 when a letter arrived announcing the offer of an OBE. She went to the investiture on 23 February 1937. The king gave her the award with genuine warmth, having met her previously on his visit to Oldham. Feeling unusually tired after the ceremony, she retired to her daughter's house in Greenwich, cancelling her engagements. Many friends visited and she continued to write her newspaper column but her health declined until she died on 19 March. In London, as her funeral procession moved through the streets, the working people doffed their hats. In Oldham the whole town mourned and Greenacres Congregational Church was packed for her memorial service which was attended by the civic dignitaries.³⁶

Conclusion

Mary Higgs was a tireless worker and campaigner for the causes she believed in because she was inspired by her faith in Christ. Her obituaries describe her as a "mystic" but, for her, the spiritual life was one in which love for her neighbour was shown in practical work for his/her physical needs. She reminded those whom she helped that Jesus tramped the land with no home. She was a thinking woman who used her education and intelligence to consider how the destitute might be helped and then put her ideas into practice. From 1904 until her death she published over twenty books and pamphlets. In addition to this, she wrote numerous articles in journals and

³⁴CYB (1945) 446; Broster-Temple op cit 52-6.

³⁵Higgs op cit 28, 31.

³⁶ibid 31-3.

newspapers. It was her practical experience that made her evidence to numerous commissions of inquiry so valuable over the years. Only for the last three years of her life did she slacken the pace a little. She once described 'going on tramp' as her only hobby and continued to do so even as a seventy year old when she slept in the crypt of St Martin-in-the-Fields with the destitute men and women. This friend of the homeless strikes a peculiarly modern note for us now when we encounter the homeless so often still on the streets of our cities.

Peter Young

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BOOK REVIEWS

Public Spirit: Dissent in Witham and Essex, 1500-1700. By Janet Gyford. Pp xii, 216. Published by J Gyford, Chalks Road, Witham, Essex CM8 2BT. £13.50 inc postage. ISBN 0 946434 03 4

This history is arranged chronologically, with a helpful opening chapter on Witham itself, and a second explaining the basics - clergy, churchwardens, teachers, literacy etc. A variety of sources are used, including the preambles to wills and the records of the church courts. The chapters are sub-divided into reader friendly sections of one or two pages which deal with the differing themes of the period but centre on local families, individuals and issues. For instance the Raven family, who are recorded in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, are investigated for their Protestant activities during Henry VIII's reign. Essex was noted for its Protestant and Puritan links during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Janet Gyford notes that some will preambles in Witham and Essex contained both Catholic references to the Virgin and Protestant references to Christ. Such mixed will preambles were a feature of the sixteenth century but were surprisingly uncommon. Some long-serving clerics like William Love, who held his parish living through four reigns, managed to survive many reforms although he appears to have retained traditional Catholic beliefs. Love's successor at Witham, Edward Halys, was among the "unpreaching" clergymen of the county and was also a pluralist. In the late 1560s some Catholics came to light in Witham, the Southcotts and Southwells, and allegations of witchcraft were raised late in the sixteenth century although these allegations were dismissed by the courts.

The Barnardiston family moved to Witham Place in the early 1600s, bringing a strong Puritan influence with them. Katherine Barnardiston shows the important role played by prosperous women, in sustaining preachers, as she did for thirty years in Witham. The Barnardistons were key supporters of the Parliamentary cause in Essex during the Civil War but the King had local supporters also. Witham had its Nonconformists after 1660, with a notable Quaker presence. Robert Billio, ejected from his living at Wickham Bishops at the Restoration, held "conventicles" in Witham in the 1660s and the Presbyterian George Lisle, ejected from Rivenhall church, was active also in the area.

The book contains thirty-six fine drawings by Ray Brown as well as twenty-five figures (tables, graphs, facsimilies and maps). The maps are especially helpful. The author has been thorough in her preparation and

research. The book contains full end notes for each chapter and an extensive bibliography covering six pages. Janet Gyford has consulted manuscript sources in the Bodleian, British, London Guildhall, and Lambeth Palace Libraries, as well as the Essex, Public and House of Lords Record Offices, among other collections. Her index is useful. She shows a deep knowledge of Witham and its environs and of Essex in general, alongside a familiarity with English history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She is to be congratulated for this superior local history and, what's more, she confesses, at the close of the book, that she enjoyed writing it!

"Our Island" In War and Commonwealth. The Isle of Wight 1640-1660. By Paul Hooper. Pp 160. Cross Publishing, Chale, Isle of Wight, 1998. £13.13 plus postage. ISBN 1 873295 41 3

This is a handsomely produced, well illustrated book from a retired general practitioner who has lived on the Isle of Wight for forty years. Dr Hooper is a keen local historian with a great interest in the seventeenth century, and in Cromwell, John Hampden and the levying of ship money by Charles I in particular. The book is designed for those with family links with the island and, also for historians of the period, who may not know the island's history well. The inter-relations of notable island families are detailed, as are the military events of the 1640s. The arrival of King Charles I, to be held under guard in Carisbrooke Castle 1647-48, is described and the intriguing question of whether Oliver Cromwell himself may have visited the Isle of Wight in late 1647 is explored. Sir Thomas Fairfax did cross to the island in May 1649. Dr Hooper examines the civic life of Newport and describes the island's churches and their clergy.

He reveals that the islanders, who were proudly Protestant, boasted in 1642 that there were no Papists on the island. The Isle of Wight was divided into twenty-eight parishes and we are given a parish by parish account of the changing situation. We learn that a Presbyterian classis was active in Newport and that eight ministers on the island refused to conform to the Act of Uniformity in 1662, including Robert Tutchin of Newport whose church later became Congregational. The island had notable Royalists too, like Sir John Oglander and Sir Henry Knollys who suffered for their loyalty to the king.

An interesting chapter deals with prisoners, held on the island during the Civil War, including a French duchess, the king, two of his children (Princess Elizabeth who died from a chill, and Prince Henry), as well as John Rogers

and Christopher Feake, the Fifth Monarchists. Feake escaped from West Wight and returned to London. Rogers preached inflammatory sermons against Cromwell to the local people. He was removed to Carisbrooke where General Harrison was also imprisoned but Rogers would not be silenced and continued to preach from the window of his prison cell. In return he was roughly treated by his gaolers. In addition two further Royalists were held on the island in the 1650s- John Villiers, Viscount Grandison, and Sir William Davenant- while in 1656 Sir Henry Vane, the former friend of Cromwell and a fierce critic of the Protectorate, (later executed by Charles II simply for being too dangerous to live) was also sent to the island.

This book contains eight appendices, has a full bibliography, references and an index. Dr Hooper has done his homework in the local records and further afield. He has been thorough. He has consulted Bulstrode Whitelocke's Memorials of State Affairs and Edmund Ludlow's Memoirs, as well as Newport Borough Records, Lord Louis Library, at Newport, and the Oglender Papers at the Isle of Wight Records Office, among other important sources. Dr Hooper knows his territory. He deserves praise for a fine local history, clearly told, in short, easily digested chapters.

The author is a member of Newport Congregational Church and he wonders if the strength of British parliamentary democracy arose from the experience of seventeenth century parliamentarians, in the church meeting, where they learnt to discuss and debate without rancour. Inevitably some errors creep into the text - Independants (for Independents), principle (for principal) and council (for counsel). This is a worthwhile book, to be recommended to all interested in the Isle of Wight, or the period, or both.

Alan Argent

A History of Taunton URC. The First Paul's Meeting 1672-1797 By Brian Kirk 1999 Pp89 £6.99 Available from Revd B.Kirk BD, James Cottage, Stogumber, Taunton, Somerset, TA4 3TL.

Although two previous accounts have been written of Paul's Meeting, Brian Kirk's history contains more material than either of these and uses many more sources, including the original books and documents of Taunton United Reformed Church. In this history Kirk relates the founding of the First Paul's Meeting in Taunton, an important centre for Dissent in the 1660s. He traces the history of the church through its ministers, from George Newton and his eminent assistant, Joseph Alleine, to Isaac Tozer who

became minister in 1795, when the meeting house was in need of substantial repair, and who oversaw the building of a new Paul's Meeting where Kirk's history ends.

This history is well researched and makes for an interesting read. The booklet is divided into eight chapters, an appendix, notes, a list of sources, and an index of people. In addition are ten illustrations, including a fine reproduction of a painting of Paul's Meeting's manse by Harry Frier.

Christina Evans-Argent

Isaac Watts: Poet Thinker Pastor: The Congregational Lecture 1999. By Alan Argent. Pp 32. Congregational Memorial Hall Trust (1978) Ltd., 1999. Available from Dr Williams's Library, 14, Gordon Square, London WC1H 0AG for £2.00 plus p&p. ISSN 0963-181X.

Isaac Watts is remembered today largely as a hymn-writer. Yet Alan Argent, in his 1999 Congregational Library lecture to mark the 250th anniversary of Watts's death in 1748, shows that Watts deserves to be remembered as much more than a pioneering hymn-writer. His hymns are theological works in their own right, and there is increasing recognition by literary critics of his qualities as a poet. Less well known are Watts's textbooks on logic and philosophy. Particularly striking was Watts's capacity to write for audiences of all capacities, the poorly educated as well as the child. Even Dr Samuel Johnson, no friend of dissenters, admired Watts's literary works. Watts, as Dr Argent notes, never aspired to be more than a pastor, but because of his poor health he was forced to convey his ideas by writing rather than preaching. Despite his poor health he was extraordinarily productive, writing for example about 700 hymns. Although only a handful are sung today, Dr Argent thinks around twenty, his influence persists. They include 'Our God, our help in ages past', sung at almost every Remembrance Day service. In his lecture Dr Argent covers the main themes of Watts's life and the contribution he made to scholarship, to ministry and to literature.

It is to be hoped that Dr Argent will return to Watts again, for in an hour's lecture the main themes can only be sketched rather than developed. Watts, for example, seemed almost Baxterian in doctrine to some of his contemporaries. This theme might interestingly be developed when considering Watts's position on the Trinity, and thus avoid the rather anachronistic debate as to whether Watts was a Unitarian or not. Like many of his contemporaries Watts had difficulties in reconciling orthodox

interpretations of the Trinity with scriptural evidence, and like Richard Baxter he seems to have been anxious to reconcile conflicting views by adopting a 'middle way'. Too often because the orthodox formulas were not adopted unequivocally contemporaries confused genuine uncertainty with heterodoxy.

What is clear from Dr Argent's lecture is that Watts saw himself as a pastor, and all that he did was inspired by his religious faith. Too often Watts has been studied in isolation for his poetry, his hymn-writing, even his philosophy, divorced from his religion. It is good to be reminded of what inspired Watts and his readers.

David L. Wykes

Nonconformity in Nazeing: A History of the Congregational Church 1795-1995. By N Bonnett and P Hutchings. Pp 112. Obtainable from Paddy Hutchings, The Barn, Mansion House Farm, Middle Street, Nazeing, Essex. Tel 01992 892001. £4.00 plus 50p postage.

This history is written by the church's minister, Norman Bonnett, and a church member of fifty years' standing, Paddy Hutchings, who is keeper of the church archives. The work is written in two parts - the first deals with Protestant nonconformity before 1795 in England, with Essex nonconformity in particular, and also sets the eighteenth century scene. The second part deals more specifically with Nazeing Chapel which began with the gathering of a separate congregation in 1795.

John James, a student at the Countess of Huntingdon's college at Cheshunt, four miles from Nazeing, first preached the gospel to the villagers in the 1790's. In 1797 a local house was licensed for Independent worship and in 1816 the first chapel was built. Cheshunt college continued its association with Nazeing chapel for many years, supplying student preachers, pastors etc. Henry Reynolds, president of the college from 1860, supported the fellowship in many ways, not least by encouraging the college trustees to donate £100 in 1876 to the fund for a new chapel building. The new buildings eventually cost about £900, and comprised a chapel to accommodate 150 persons and school halls for 100 children. In 1972 the church members decided not to join the new United Reformed Church and, after prayer and listening to representatives from the Congregational Federation and an Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches, the church voted by a majority to affiliate to an EFCC.

As readers may expect, extracts from the archives are quoted at length, and the history gives more space to recent events, and to the twentieth century, than to earlier occasions and people. The authors have produced a worthwhile book with thirty-four illustrations, and a table, listing the original fourteen members who gathered the church in 1822. In addition are ten appendices dealing with, among other matters, the subscription list for the new chapel in 1876, the student pastors and ministers of Nazeing Congregational Chapel, the War Memorial from the First World War, the secretary's report of 1831, and the chapel buildings of 1816-1992.

On the Missionary Trail. The Classic Georgian Adventures of Two Englishmen Sent on a Journey Around the World 1821-29. By Tom Hiney. Pp ix, 367. Chatto and Windus, London, 2000. £16.99. ISBN 0 7011 6710 6.

Travel writing is hugely popular, as a visit to any bookshop will prove, while holiday programmes abound on television. We are saturated with paradisiacal visions from the farthest corners of the world. With all this has come an interest in and respect for travel writing of the past, such as that of Celia Fiennes or William Cobbett in this country, accounts of the Grand Tour, and the earlier and more hazardous journeys of Marco Polo. This book is an account of the travels of a Yorkshireman, George Bennet, and a Congregational minister from the Isle of Wight, Daniel Tyerman, who went as a deputation from the London Missionary Society in 1821 to report on the state of the LMS mission stations throughout the world. Hiney's primary source is the journal which they kept, and which was later published, and this is supported by contemporary journals, mission reports and letters. Without doubt Bennet's and Tyerman's work deserves to be better known. They embarked on the grandest of grand tours, all the way around the world, achieving this not in 80 days, but rather in 8 years.

Rarely is a work, celebrating missionary enterprise and endeavour, made the BBC Radio 4's Book of the Week but that distinction was given to Tom Hiney's book in February this year. It is a gripping adventure story. Hiney has discovered a rich vein. The missionaries' own stories are exciting and bizarre. Van der Kemp of south Africa had been a whoremonger and, after conversion, as a missionary had a price on his head and was pursued by would be assassins. Captain Wilson of the "Duff", the first missionary ship, had fought in the American War of Independence and, against the French, in India. There he was taken prisoner but escaped, only to be recaptured and to

suffer brutal treatment, before eventual release and subsequent conversion. The stories of other figures in the LMS are equally colourful.

After an initial chapter, explaining the origins of the missionary society, and its successes and failures, in Polynesia, south Africa, India, China, and Guyana, Hiney moves to his main subject, the extraordinary travels of Bennet and Tyerman. The two expected to be away from Britain for at least five years but, in the event, the journey lasted eight years and only Bennet survived. They were not evangelical ignoramuses, unaware of contemporary criticisms in the 1820s of the South Pacific missionaries as “paradise - breakers”. However they were struck, as Tom Hiney himself is, by the “lasting transformation”, rather than superficial evangelism, which occurred in Tahiti and the other Society Islands. They encountered cannibalism and infanticide, sailed through robber infested seas where pirates invariably slaughtered all their captives, and saw the effects of disease on the natives through contact with Europeans. They also encouraged the missionaries to train native pastors for the churches of the Pacific islands.

In 1824 they visited the penal colony of New South Wales, after a brief and dangerous stop in New Zealand, where they were almost slaughtered and eaten by the Maoris, only to be rescued by Wesleyan missionaries. Sydney was the nearest to a European town which they had seen in three years yet, in the colony, Bennet and Tyerman found no attempt to educate, protect and convert the aborigines. They established a mission station, having met murder and theft at first hand, among the Europeans.

They travelled in Java at the beginning of a major war. They just missed Robert Morrison, the great Chinese translator of the scriptures, in Macao. As they approached Calcutta they saw a human carcass floating in the river Hooghly, with vultures eating its flesh. At Serampore they met William Carey, the pioneering Baptist missionary, whom they thought “primitive” and “apostolic”. The villages on the banks of the Ganges, as they travelled 600 miles inland to Allahabad, seemed “like the images of a magic lantern”. In Madagascar, at Antananarivo, Daniel Tyerman became ill and died, probably from exhaustion and dehydration. Bennet was nauseous with grief and shock at the death of his friend.

This is not a historian’s book. Tom Hiney, who has previously written a biography of Raymond Chandler, the American writer of detective fiction, does not concern himself with precise details. The LMS was not the “first in the field” (that was the Baptist Missionary Society), and it is misleading to state twice that it was “disbanded” in 1977. Rather it was reborn as the Council for World Mission. He states falsely (p324) that Congregationalism only now exists as a body outside Britain. What of the Union of Welsh

Independents, the Congregational Federation, an Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches, let alone the Congregationalists in Ireland and Scotland? The blurb tells us that Tyerman was a “vicar” - not strictly Hiney’s fault, but clearly wrong.

But the book is strong on feel, colour and imagination. Hiney, born in 1970, belongs to a generation unused to missionary endeavour and the romance that went with it. Quite properly he wants to know why ordinary men and women uprooted themselves and faced such life-threatening hazards with unflinching heroism. In our less adventurous age we may share his question. He does in large part find an answer, although he never really faces head on the issue of Christian faith and its power to move and transform, even the most blighted of lives. Yet each chapter begins with a quotation from the Bible, as if Hiney knows that the clues to understanding these men lie in there somewhere. In his final chapter Hiney explores the issue of paternalism and imperialism and authoritatively answers these charges against the missionaries, by quoting from the writings and life of Nelson Mandela who, like Hiney, believes that the missionaries’ good work considerably outweighs their bad and remains a potent force in our world. Such must be our verdict too.

The six maps are all welcome although I should have liked also one map of the whole series of voyages around the globe. The river Hooghly is spelt Hughly in the map of India and misleadingly the map suggests Tyerman and Bennet went to Agra which they did not. I much appreciate the twenty illustrations (several of them Tyerman’s own sketches) which accompany the writing. The book has an index, a bibliography and end-notes. It is a fascinating read and is inexpensively priced.

Alan Argent

For the work of ministry: A history of Northern College and its predecessors.
By Elaine Kaye. Pp xvi, 284. T.&T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1999. £29.95. ISBN
0 567 08659 3.

The motto of Northern College, εις εργον διακονιας, provides Dr Elaine Kaye with the title for her book. It is a most appropriate title, for not only does Dr Kaye offer us a wide appreciation of the life of the College and its predecessors, she also privileges us with an insight into the life and witness of many of the churches, and their leaders, through more than two centuries. This is much more than the history of an institution or an insight

into academia, although those things it certainly is. It is an engaging account of the highs and lows of some very significant strands in nonconformist history. We are shown how theological education was rooted in the life of local churches, and their culture, for much of the time since dissenting academies were first established, a concern which is still continued by Northern College and now particularly through its involvement with the new Partnership for Theological Education (Manchester). There is a clear demonstration too of the enormous importance placed upon learning within the history of Congregationalism, albeit, at a formal level, largely confined to the ordained ministry.

The geographical scope of the work is also large, for Northern College has its roots as widely spread as the Academies in Exeter and Heckmondwike. Those interested in the local history of Congregationalism will find a rich vein explored here. Through the pages are scattered references to many chapels and places which will be familiar, from Bradford to Witney and Edinburgh to Bala Bangor. The immediate predecessors of Northern - Lancashire, Yorkshire United, Paton and Western Colleges - are all treated in depth, but plenty of attention is given also to their antecedents, such as the Rotherham Independent Academy. Space is devoted to the Nottingham Congregational Institute, later to become Paton College. It was perhaps here, in Nottingham, that the encouragement of access to theological education is best demonstrated, with the Institute's, and College's, concern to enable men to train for the ministry whose "call comes at a later age than usual or where early education has been of an elementary character", as the Annual Report of the College put it in 1934. Kaye records that in 1960 applicants to the college included a carpenter and joiner, an electrician, an undertaker, a plumber and an insurance salesman. A photograph still hangs today on the wall of Cleaves Hall at the Congregational Centre in Nottingham, illustrating one year's students and clearly demonstrating that age was no barrier to training at Paton.

Here at Paton we see also a concern for integration, which is very much in evidence in the Northern College of today, and in the training now carried on by the Congregational Federation in Nottingham. Principal Maurice Charles argued, "it is in the field of integration of the subjects included in the course [the Joint Certificate in Religious and Social Studies] that most urgent issues for the life of the churches, the survival of our country and the advance of human civilisation have to be decided." Here too was taught a Certificate in Youth Leadership, a Certificate in Social Studies, and a BA in Theology.

Perhaps inevitably For the work of ministry tends towards a history of great men and noble causes, in which women generally took on ancillary,

though equally arduous, roles in hospitality and fund-raising. It is true also that here we have a largely uncritical account of the development of theological education, setting out to present the facts, as perceived from the vantage point of the College as it now stands. It is, therefore, largely adulatory, although the theological disagreements of the mid-nineteenth century are not brushed over. The debate, which emerged in one place as the Rivulet controversy, at the Lancashire College took the form of a disagreement in 1857 over the work of the biblical scholar, Samuel Davidson, and was in some measure the result of the influence of German Biblical scholarship. It led to the resignation of two members of staff. We are also given insights into Robert Vaughan's (principal 1843-57) middle class urbanity reflecting the aspirations of Congregationalism for respectability.

The contraction of theological education, with the merger of so many institutions, might be interpreted as a decline, but here we are clearly shown the way in which the past has helped to shape the present and to mould the wisdom of today. The painstaking work by Dr Kaye, reflected in the detail and interest found on every page, will continue to pay dividends not only for those interested in Nonconformity but also for those with an eye to understanding the place of learning in our churches and the context of theological education. With a history that comes right up to the present day, and the fresh perspective that we are offered, the book will be a valuable resource for generations to come.

Michael Durber

Friends of Religious Equality. Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England. By Timothy Larsen. Pp 300. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1999. £40.00. ISBN 0 85115 726 2.

This study of the national political attitudes, struck by Dissenters in the mid-nineteenth century, seeks to correct those misapprehensions held by many that their support for religious equality was mere rhetoric. They championed conscientiously the rights of the Jews, of Roman Catholics and of others who, like themselves suffered from legal discrimination in Victorian England. The role of theology and ecclesiology in informing these Dissenters' political philosophy is not overlooked by Dr Larsen. For Baptists and Congregationalists, an established church was wrong "not because it was bad politics but because it was bad theology". Indeed he argues

convincingly, in his thoughtful and readable work, that theology has been largely ignored by previous historians in this field and that it moved the various representatives of Old Dissent, in particular, beyond the defence of their own special interests. The positions taken by the Wesleyan Methodists are also considered but often in contrast to the stances adopted by the Congregationalists, Baptists, Quakers, and sometimes Unitarians.

Larsen tackles the contemporary grievances of disestablishment, state education, temperance, sabbatarianism, moral reform in general, and pacifism. The discussion of each concern is informed by reference to original source material, as well as to more recent studies. The struggle of the Evangelical Dissenters of mid-nineteenth century England to develop a coherent view of the duties of government produced their legacy of the notion of religious equality before the law. We are all in their debt for that.

Scholars and modern Free Churchmen alike are also in Dr Larsen's debt for this authoritative study. The bibliography testifies to his industry and to his familiarity with manuscript collections, official publications, newspapers and journals, biographies and diaries, as well as with secondary literature. This work is published as part of The Boydell Press's series of Studies in Modern British Religious History.

Alan Argent

Seeking God's Kingdom: The Nonconformist Social Gospel in Wales 1906-1939. By Robert Pope. Pp xiii, 194. University of Wales Press, 1999. £25.00. ISBN 0 7083 1568 2.

This book is to be welcomed as it fills the gap left, in Robert Pope's previous book Building Jerusalem (reviewed in the CHC Magazine Vol 3 No 6, Spring 1998) based on his Ph.D. thesis, where he was constrained to omit a major chapter on Welsh theology. Seeking God's Kingdom emerges from the Centre for the Advanced Study of Religion in Wales, within the School of Theology and Religious Studies in Bangor. In it Pope examines the work of four Welsh theologians of the social gospel - David Miall Edwards, Thomas Rees, Herbert Morgan and John Morgan Jones, between 1906 and 1939 - in the context of both European intellectual and philosophical ideas, of R J Campbell's 'new theology', and against the social and industrial unrest found throughout Britain during the period.

The serious social deprivation in Britain, caused by poor housing and insanitary conditions, had deleterious effects on the health of the population.

Comparing the death rates in 1910, between England at 13.6 per thousand and Wales at 15.32 per thousand, it transpired that rural Carmarthenshire had a death rate higher than any industrial centre in Britain, including such a notorious area as Stepney, in east London. D L Thomas, at the National Eisteddfod in Carmarthen in August 1911, concluded that “over 4,200 persons died last year in Wales who would have survived under English conditions” (p33).

David Miall Edwards, Thomas Rees, John Morgan Jones and Herbert Morgan, the first three Independents (Congregationalists), the fourth a Baptist, rose from relatively humble backgrounds (Miall Edwards had been a farmer and coal miner before entering the ministry) to have distinguished academic careers, after wide ranging educations which included, in the case of John Morgan Jones, studying under Harnack in Berlin, and Herbert Morgan studying in Marburg. Both Thomas Rees and John Morgan Jones were to preside over Bala-Bangor College as principal. All were interested in a re-interpretation of Christianity which not only would seemingly restore the original values and objectives of Christianity, but also construct the Kingdom of God on earth. This understanding of Christianity “depended on recent developments in both idealist philosophy and liberal theology, particularly that of the Ritschlian school.”(p36)

Albrecht Ritschl was among the foremost German liberal theologians of the age (P.T. Forsyth had been his student) and his thought was popular at Mansfield College, Oxford, which then trained men mainly, but by no means exclusively, for the Congregational ministry. In 1899 the principal, Andrew Fairbairn, one of the finest minds in Oxford, invited Alfred Garvie, another Scottish Congregationalist, to lecture on Ritschl. All these Welsh theologians, including Herbert Morgan, had been students at Mansfield, and the first three had heard these lectures. Mansfield was to play an important role in the development of theology in Wales. Other students there included Joseph Jones and John Daniel ‘Vernon’ Lewis who, with Miall Edwards, were later to teach at Memorial College, Brecon. Fairbairn was also the consultant on the theology curriculum offered in the University of Wales.

Pope notes that the older dissenting traditions - Independents and Baptists - had a more pronounced political tradition than the Methodists. John Morgan Jones was a member of New Bethel chapel, Garnant, Carmarthenshire (where some of my mother’s family still attend, as I do also, when in Wales) at the centre of the anthracite coalfield. Bethel’s minister, Towyn Jones, in 1912 entered parliament as a Liberal M.P. John Morgan Jones, writing of the debt he owed his former minister, explained that Towyn taught him “how the religion of Jesus could touch the social needs of that age

to the quick". John Morgan Jones added that it was the duty of each generation to apply the principles of the gospel afresh to the peculiar context and problems of their time.

Pope writes interestingly about the 'family-resemblance' between Nonconformity and the Labour movement. He notes that both held certain principles in common i.e. the offer of salvation, a purpose for human life, and absolute loyalty to a cause. Keir Hardie, founder of the Independent Labour Party, and other socialist leaders had a great admiration for John Morgan Jones, amongst other Nonconformists.

Robert Pope, using a variety of sources in both English and Welsh, introduces the general reader, in this slim volume, to an important period in Welsh religious history and to the thinking of some leading theologians. I should have appreciated one or two maps and some photographs of his subjects.

Yvonne A Evans

Doctor of Souls by John Travell. Pp 327. Lutterworth Press 1999 (paperback edition 2000). Hardback £27.50. ISBN 0 7188 2991 3. Paperback £15.00 ISBN 0 7188 3004 0.

Leslie Weatherhead remains an enigma, even now twenty-four years after his death. His style of ministry, preaching in a theatre-like building to large crowds, as an orator-minister has gone. Yet his writings still have an impact on churches today and Christians read and re-read his works. In the conclusion of his book, John Travell claims there has been a lack of interest in Weatherhead's life and works in this country, although sales of this book hardly bear that out. However in the USA there seems to be more support for his writings and theories. John Travell's devotion to redressing the balance in Leslie Weatherhead's favour is the motive for his book, leading us deeply into the soul of this great man. We are transfixed with the detail and feel almost as if we were there, watching his life unfold all over again, hearing his message, and adapting it for the twenty-first century. Yet the question comes to mind, "Was Leslie Weatherhead ahead of his time?" The ministry of healing in the churches, and the link between psychology, the individual and psychotherapy (one of his major themes) would find more support in the church of the twenty-first century than it did half-way through the twentieth century. His boldness to speak on issues we would not dare share with our congregations, and his honesty in dealing with complex issues are

impressive. How we would have gained from his wise counsel in the debates about human sexuality, and other deep and pressing issues.

We must read the book with some understanding of the church structures within which he worked, especially that of Methodism. We feel the frustration of Weatherhead's heart's desire in not becoming minister of the leading church in Methodism, Wesley's Chapel in City Road, London. Had he moved to Wesley's Chapel his ministry would have been very different, probably more restricted. He escaped from the confines of Methodism, into a supra-denominational church, the City Temple, where he was largely free to follow his own agenda. Doctor of Souls encourages us to follow this whirlwind life, leaving the reader breathless, yet at the end of his life there is the pathos of a once great hero in his declining years. During John Travell's long ministry in Penge, (where I now minister) not a Sunday would go by without the mention of Leslie Weatherhead, and his ministry and thought proved to be an encouragement to the congregation. His writings still enthrall after many years. Picking up his books in second-hand shops and looking through his devotional literature still encourage many.

John Travell portrays the genius of the man, yet there appear to be some issues that are not followed through. The book contains only passing references to women's ministry, mention is made of Maude Royden and Dorothy Wilson, Weatherhead's assistants, and later of the formidable Elsie Chamberlain. However we do not seem to enter into Weatherhead's mind on the place of women in the ministry. Does he see their role, as complementing his ministry, as fellow ministers and colleagues, or as subordinate to him? His name and ministry still enable passions to rise, depending how you see him, a mixture of evangelical, and liberal, receiving from and giving support to Billy Graham, believing in conversion, yet not accepting the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, nor being comfortable with the doctrine of the Trinity. Perhaps Weatherhead is too honest for us, in sharing his deepest convictions. Yet debate on these issues in the church is still lively. He was influenced by Russell Maltby who rejected substitutionary and legalistic theories and interpreted the Cross as the supreme revelation of divine love (p73). This theme has been taken up by Stephen Dawes and challenged by Howard Mellor. The debate stirred by Leslie Weatherhead is alive today.

Grounded as I was in rural Methodism, and appreciating the ministry of those local preachers and circuit ministers preaching in our village chapel, I met some contemporaries of Weatherhead, who had been influenced by him. At my Sunday School teacher's house, I found the 1932 Methodist Uniting Conference photograph on the wall. I was directed to a preacher from the Isle of Wight, one of the delegates with Weatherhead. We were encouraged

to read both Weatherhead and Sangster, although in our chapel Sangster was preferred to Weatherhead. Donald Soper came to our circuit rally, although I don't remember Weatherhead coming to the island. One of the local preachers, regularly planned at our chapel, left his books to me, most of which have found their way to Penge. John Travell's book repays a debt to his mentor, and is in that sense a life's work. It is a joy to one who only picks up a book if really necessary, I found it compelling reading, interesting and informative. Here is a rebel, breaking out from the confines of Methodism, to follow his ministry. I can't imagine him in a traditional Congregational church. What would we make of his enthusiasm? How would we cope today? I wholeheartedly recommend this work.

John Taylor

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