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**THE
CONGREGATIONAL
HISTORY
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MAGAZINE**

Volume 8 No 3 Spring 2017

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EDITORIAL

We welcome Stephen Tomkins to our pages. He gives here a consideration of the Elizabethan separatists, in this 450th anniversary year of the detention by the sheriff's officers of some members of the congregation meeting then at Plumbers Hall, London. In addition this issue of our *CHS Magazine* includes the promised piece on history and preaching to which many of our readers in this country and abroad contributed. Although this is merely a qualitative study, we hope that it may offer support to those who argue for the retention of specialist historians within ministerial training programmes. Certainly its evidence suggests that those who dismiss history as of little or no use to the preacher will lack support from many practitioners. Finally Roger Ottewill offers a study of Edwardian Congregationalism in Winchester, one town we might expect to identify with the establishment. He shows that in the early twentieth century Congregationalism had a firm presence there.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Gateway to Early Modern Manuscript Sermons

The Gateway to Early Modern Manuscripts (GEMMS) will be formally launched at Dr Williams's Library, London, in May this year. It is the creation of Prof Jeanne Shami and Dr Anne James of the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada and promises to be a major resource for students of English preaching and preachers, touching as they did on all walks of life from the 16th to the 18th centuries. The GEMMS project seeks to improve researchers' access to manuscript sermons (1530–1715) in British and North American libraries, to encourage research on manuscript sermons, and to develop an online community of sermon scholars. We shall be interested in responses to this resource once it is up and running.

No Blue Plaque for Elsie Chamberlain

London boroughs are becoming more selective in erecting blue plaques on buildings. Some of you may know that a campaign to honour Revd Elsie Chamberlain with such a plaque in Islington had been active for some time. Andrew Gardner of Union Chapel, Islington, had taken the initiative in this

bid and had gained considerable support from many both within and without the churches but sadly it was not successful. I am informed that “The winners gained many more votes, but we were among the front runners of the runners up”. Thanks to Andrew Gardner and all who worked so hard.

Congregational Books and Libraries

As many of you will know, perhaps from experience, on retirement individuals often move home to a smaller property. This downsizing forces some to make difficult decisions about books. Ministers and others in such circumstances may choose to donate some of their books, where relevant, to the **Congregational Library** in London or to our own **CHS** Library in Bedford. However archives should be lodged with an appropriate library—for instance the records of local churches should go to the county record office. Again, as many of you will know, the **Congregational Federation** has failed to retain a complete collection of its council, committee and board minutes. If then, you are in a position to help because you sat on one such body in the past and have kept your papers (even if these are incomplete), please inform Dr Janet Wootton who, planning for herself one future retirement project (probably one of many), hopes to discover and collect such archives with the intention of forwarding them to the Congregational Library, London. The Unaffiliated Congregationalist Churches Charity, the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches and the United Reformed Church have already deposited their records there (or have promised to do so). This then leaves a gaping hole where the CF material should be. Clearly it would be best for scholars now and in the future for the records of all the (former) Congregational denominations to be in one place.

Janet has written, “I’ve done quite a lot of this over the years, as various organisations move beyond the first generation and records tend to get lost.”

We welcome this initiative on Janet’s part and hope that she will find many people willing to co-operate. Those who have books of a more general nature on Congregational history and principles may opt to offer them to the CF’s library in Nottingham.

Books from the Congregational Federation

Some of our readers may have discovered, and been frustrated by the discovery, that books published by the Congregational Federation are not available on Amazon. This decision was taken some years ago by the CF’s officers because of the high costs involved. However, for the convenience of any interested *CHS Magazine* readers, we have listed a few of those books of direct relevance to students of history, and still available, on page 61 of this magazine.

Forthcoming Events

The Friends of Dr Williams's Library lecture in 2017 is to be held on 19 October. Prof. Diarmaid MacCulloch of St Cross College, Oxford, has agreed to speak on a theme related to the Reformation. As a historian the distinguished Prof. MacCulloch, Kt, FSA, FRHistS, FBA specialises in church history and the history of Christianity. He has chosen as his lecture's title, 'Thomas Cromwell's Religion Revisited'. Given his popularity as a speaker on television and radio, as well as his occasional forays into journalism, this promises to be very well attended. All those interested are advised to make a special note in their diaries.

Correspondence and Feedback

In response to requests for feedback on the *CHS Magazine* the editor was pleased to receive the following.

Robert Richard spoke for others when he wrote, "I think that the *CHS Magazine* strikes the right balance between editorial, articles and book reviews. Indeed the articles display a fine range of scholarship in a variety of fields. There is also good coverage of different parts of the United Kingdom, which demonstrates the scope of the Congregational way. ... I particularly enjoy those touching on the Reformation and the Civil War era."

A number of appreciative and informative comments were made about the film of Mansfield College, Oxford, in the 1960s to which we made reference in our last issue. Martin Camroux wrote poignantly,

"Thank you for the reference in the last *CHS Magazine* to the Mansfield College film. I was there at the time and there are occasional glimpses of me in the background. I think at one point I detect my laugh. I fell in love with the architecture of Mansfield and chose the college largely for aesthetic reasons. What bliss to sit in the quad reading George Eliot. Today it all seems a very long time ago and in another country. The rather dim black and white images, the rather upper-class English voices, people writing with fountain pens, Nat Micklem remembering the time when he first came to Mansfield and there were horses rather than cars. At times it was almost tragic. John Marsh thinking he had preserved the old Mansfield when really he opened the way to the secularization that was about to destroy it, George Caird, declaring that he wouldn't be interested in being principal if there wasn't a continuing link with the Church, the hopes that this would become the ecumenical college. It was all rather like the officers on the Titanic reflecting how the voyage home would go. "Tread softly because you tread on my dreams" (W B Yeats).

Michael Hopkins, a much younger Mansfield man, had not seen the film, until alerted by the reference in our previous issue. He too found it fascinating and identified Kate Compston and Colin Thompson among the students.

He wrote,

“Thank you so much for bringing the Mansfield film to my attention through the magazine. It was a particular pleasure to see younger incarnations of people I know well, and also to see and hear people I have only read, and read about, ‘in the flesh’. For me, it was old enough to be history, rather than anecdotal nostalgia. I am most obliged to you for educating me in this area.”

He had other comments to make about the *CHS Magazine* ...

“As to the magazine generally, I particularly enjoy it because the main articles and reviews are good scholarly material, worthy of a ‘learned society’, but the notes and short comments near the beginning keep it from being too dry, and remind me of the human touches of church life, keeping things accessible to people who think of themselves as non-specialists.”

Martin Camroux also briefly responded to David Thompson’s review of his book in *CHS Magazine* (October 2016).

I believe that David Thompson “did not ever think that the URC would break the ecumenical mould. The point however is that John Huxtable did. And many of us believed him.”

One of our more frequent contributors, Roger Ottewill, stated ...

“I always enjoy reading the *CHS Magazine* and learn a great deal. As you know, in the past I have responded to specific points made in articles.

Since I was born and brought up in north west Surrey and lived in Guildford for five years, I was particularly taken with the article about Godalming in the last issue. I also found the article about the Great Fire of London particularly interesting and I am looking forward to reading the one on Shakespeare and Puritanism in the near future.

Rest assured that if there is anything on which I can comment in the light of my researches in Hampshire, I will bring it to your attention. You will recall the debate over the respective usage of the terms ‘pastor’ and ‘minister’! I still think ‘pastor’ was used more frequently than ‘minister’ in the years prior to the First World War.”

Certainly “the breadth of interest” and “mix of articles” in the magazine elicited favourable comments. Ian Gregory was reported as finding the *CHS Magazine* for autumn 2016 “the best yet. Full of good and informative things and no small inspiration”.

Secretary's Notes

Unity in Diversity—two anniversaries re-visited

A stepping-stone, a break-through, a sea-change ... however you describe the formation of the Congregational Church in England and Wales in 1966 it didn't lead to any major celebration on its 50th anniversary. Indeed, as our editor pointed out, it was an anniversary most missed. It would be good to receive recollections of that moment in the history of 20th century Congregationalism from those who recall it. Please write and let us have yours. Meanwhile let me pass on the recollections I have for what they are worth.

A matter of theological conviction shared with Baptist friends was that no such entity as 'a Congregational Church' or a 'Baptist Church' existed nationally. Following New Testament usage, the word 'church' had in the tradition of dissent been limited to the local church wherever gathered in the name of Christ and to the one world-wide church of Jesus Christ of all times. By the mid 1960s talks between the Congregational Union of England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England had stalled. The Presbyterians made it clear that conversations could only continue once the Congregational Union became a 'churchly' body. Those in the CUEW committed to the union agreed.

Consequently plans were made to disband the CUEW and replace it with the Congregational Church in England and Wales. The architects of that CCEW, which lasted only six years, drew on a fine tradition in our Congregational churches going back to the earliest days and invited all the churches of the Congregational Union of England and Wales to sign a 'Covenant' to become a single Congregational Church in England and Wales.

Many churches were prepared to sign such a covenant but several were not. The reason for such reluctance was theological. The oneness of the Church universal is made manifest in each local gathered church. In a local gathered church, the act of 'covenanting' together is done by those who know each other personally and are committed to one another in a shared faith. It was quite wrong, they argued, that the national denomination should be thought of as a Church alongside other Churches.

A deadline was set for all local churches either to sign the covenant or not. Some churches decided to register their opposition to what they considered the abuse of the word 'Church' in the formation of the CCEW by registering their vote against. Those churches were not included in the CCEW and their names did not appear in subsequent *Congregational Year Books*. Crucially they did not have a vote on the eventual scheme of union with the Presbyterians. Recognising that names would be deleted in this way, other churches opposed for the same reason but, wanting to exercise their vote in due course, decided

simply not to register their opposition to covenanting and so retained an involvement with their brothers and sisters in the CUEW, even though it gained a new name and identity (the CCEW). Those churches remained in the subsequent year books of the CCEW: they were, however, marked with an asterisk to show that they were 'deemed' to have covenanted.

My recollection is that several of the churches that subsequently became an Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches voted against and, in consequence, did not appear in the CCEW *Year Books* whereas many churches that later were linked to what the then Congregational Association (later still the Congregational Federation) did not return the forms and so were 'deemed' to have covenanted.

This might be a controversy not worth re-visiting, were it not for the way it goes to the heart of what is understood by church and church unity. Think of the one church universal in organisational terms as a single church body then movements for reform can be said to be fracturing the single church, something that is damaging to a 'church' that should be a single organisational entity. So it was that the language of repentance was used widely of the fracturing of what had allegedly once been 'one church' into the two 'churches': the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Church in England and Wales. We were urged to 'repent' of the divisions that had broken up this supposed 'one church'. The CCEW became a stepping stone towards the formation then of the single churchly body bringing the two 'churches' together in the United Reformed Church. That in turn, it was hoped, would be a stepping stone to the reunion of all national church bodies in England and Wales and the UK into 'one church' and so a stepping stone towards the re-construction of the 'one church organisation' that had been fractured in the Reformation.

Underlying these discussions is a narrative about the church that sees each reform movement as a break up of what was once a single organisation. That narrative was evident once again in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity this year. To mark the occasion at the start of this 500th anniversary year of the Reformation Justin Welby and John Sentamu made a joint declaration about the significance of that anniversary. Ed Thornton reported their statement in *The Church Times* of 20 January 2017, "The Reformation brought 'great blessings' but also did 'lasting damage ... to the unity of the Church.'" They acknowledged that in this anniversary year "many Christians will want to give thanks for the great blessing they have received to which the Reformation directly contributed. Amongst much else these would include clear proclamation of the gospel of grace, the availability of the bible to all in their own language, and the recognition of the calling of lay people to serve God in the world and in the Church."

So far so good.

“But,” Thornton continues, “the Archbishops also recalled ‘the lasting damage done five centuries ago to the unity of the Church, in defiance of the clear command of Jesus Christ to unity in love.

“Remembering the Reformation should ‘bring us back to what the Reformers wanted to put at the centre of every person’s life, which is simple trust in Jesus Christ’ [to which I should say a loud ‘amen’] ... It should also ‘lead us to repent of our part in perpetuating divisions’ and strengthen relationships with other Churches.”

That’s the point at which the narrative of the 1960s rears its ugly head once again. Their narrative is of one organisational church in the West represented by Rome from which the Reformers and their followers broke away. James D G Dunn’s chapter, ‘Enquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity’, was first published in 1977 when this narrative was to the fore. He revised it in 1990 and again in 2006. In his foreword to the second edition, he described living with his study of the earliest Christianity from 1969 to 1977 (not insignificant dates) and describes how he “became more and more convinced of *the positive function of diversity* within Christian unity.” (Dunn’s italics).¹

In the foreword to the 3rd edition (2006) he reflects on *the ecumenical implications* of the recognition of the New Testament’s unity and diversity. That paragraph is worth quoting at length.

“It has struck me with increasing force over the past decade or two that Paul’s image of the Church as *the body of Christ* reinforces many of the lessons to be drawn from the NT’s unity and diversity. For, as was well appreciated by the political philosophers of Paul’s time, to whom Paul was no doubt in at least some degree indebted for the image of the community as a body, the body is a unique kind of unity: a unity that consists and is possible only because the members of the body are all different and have different functions; that is, a unity that is not a unity of sameness, not a unity threatened by difference, but a unity that can only function as such by reason of such differences; a unity that involves recognition of and a living out of mutual interdependence but each on the other; a unity that can only thrive by integrated and co-ordinated diversity. That has implications for an individual congregation, as 1 Corinthians 12 makes plain, for the functioning together of several churches in any one place, as Romans 12 implies, and for the Church universal as Ephesians 1 and 4 suggest. The unifying bond of confessing ‘Jesus as Lord’ (or equivalent) should be sufficient to hold together the diversity of elaborated confessions, sufficient for the diversity to work together for the common commitment serving that Lord. To require assent to more elaborate confessions or to particular halakhic/traditional practices is to side with Pharisees who criticised Jesus for eating with

1 J D G Dunn *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (3rd Edition 2006) xxxvi.

sinners (Mark 2:16f.), or to side with the Peter whom Paul condemned for ‘not walking straight towards the truth of the gospel’ (Gal 2:14). We dishonour the unique centrality of Christ when we demand a larger unity and refuse to acknowledge the diversity through which the commitment to Christ can be expressed.”²

In the year following the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and in the year of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, I want to reaffirm an alternative narrative regarding the oneness of the church and use the language of celebration rather than repentance of its diversity. The earliest Christianity was characterised by a diversity that found its unity in Jesus as Lord. From the second generation on there was a tendency to seek a greater uniformity. That came to a head with the imperial takeover of the Church by Constantine.

As Mary Beard remarks in *SPQR*, that marked the end of the first millennium of the Roman Empire. “The second millennium,” she goes on to suggest, “which did not finally end until Constantinople, the capital of the Roman Empire in the East by the sixth century CE fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 CE, was grounded on entirely new principles, on a new world order and, for most of the time, on a different religion”.³ During that period of imperial domination of the church as an institution in the context of Byzantium and the Holy Roman Empire, there were continual movements of reform from Benedict to the Celtic monastic movement which produced the Lindisfarne Gospel, to Francis of Assisi, to the Lollards and John Wycliffe. Each of those movements for reform sought to return to the earliest Christianity of Jesus as Lord. However, the church continued to be contaminated by its entanglement with empire.

Hard on the heels of the fall of Constantinople came the invention of printing which meant that any subsequent movements for reform had the potential to spread quickly and thoroughly. Those movements for reform went back to the fount of earliest Christianity culminating in 1516 with the first printing of the Greek New Testament by Erasmus and Luther’s 95 theses at Wittenberg in 1517.

The Reformation whose 500th anniversary we celebrate this year sought to return to the first century churches and to their faith in Jesus as Lord. One of the fruits of that Reformation, cultivated by the printing press, was once again a rich diversity in the nature of the church. One of the abiding principles of the Reformation was the recognition of the need for reform: *Reformans Semper Reformandum*—Reformed and always in the process of being reformed.

2 Dunn *Unity and Diversity* xxvii.

3 M Beard *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome* (2016) 530.

We must join with John Sentamu and Justin Welby in condemning excesses that led to persecution, execution and war. But we must delight in the re-discovery of a rich diversity within the unity of the Church. Let's put to one side the language of repentance when we think of the Reformation. Let's reaffirm another of the abiding principles of the Reformation: reformans semper reformandum. The Church needs to be reformed and is called always to be in the process of being reformed. Maybe we should go further and quote James Dunn: "To think that we somehow can finally pin down or determine the unity and therefore strictly control or legislate the diversity is the modern sin against the Holy Spirit."⁴

Richard Cleaves

4 Dunn *Unity and Diversity* xxx.

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‘SEDITIONOUS SECTARIES’: THE ELIZABETH AND JACOBAN UNDERGROUND CHURCH

Four hundred and fifty years ago, in June 1567, Thomas Bowland of Thames Street in London booked the Plumber’s Hall, purportedly for a wedding to be celebrated on the 19th. The sheriff, however, had information that Bowland’s real purpose was more scandalous. The sheriff sent his men on the day and sure enough they found neither bride nor groom but more than 100 people gathered for prayer. They were not following the liturgy prescribed by the Book of Common Prayer since the 1559 Act of Uniformity, but using the Genevan Prayer Book of John Knox; they were also contravening the royal proclamation of 1560 which prohibited ‘any conventicles or secret congregations’. Seventeen worshippers were arrested and the rest of the congregation dispersed. The following day, seven or eight of them were interviewed by the Bishop of London, Edmund Grindal, and one of them, William Nixon, was thoughtful enough to record their conversation in writing.

This is the point at which the Elizabethan separatist movement emerges into historical view. The movement gave rise to what were later called the first Congregational churches,¹ to the Baptist split, and to the emigration to North America on the *Mayflower*. But the Plumber’s Hall meeting, though thanks to Nixon’s record it has dominated historical accounts of the movement’s origins, was by no means the first service. The separatists seem to have been meeting for a year, since the subscription crisis of Easter 1566, when 37 puritan ministers in London were suspended and fourteen eventually deprived for refusal to wear the vestments required by the ecclesiastical establishment. That was the event that the separatist John Smith identified as the occasion of their separation—‘when it came to this point, that all our preachers were displaced by your law’—and Grindal was aware that before their arrest the separatists had ‘gathered together and made assemblies ... many times.’²

The roots of the movement go back earlier still, to the tradition of illicit Protestant worship established during the Marian persecution, which gave them a conscious precedent for Nonconformist meetings. As Smith explained to Grindal: ‘Then we bethought us what were best to do; and we remembered that there was a congregation of us in Queen Mary’s days.’³

1 Whether the movement was congregational from the start is unclear. Albert Peel argued that it was; Michael Watts that there is insufficient evidence for the claim.

2 W Nicholson (ed) *The Remains of Edmund Grindal* (Cambridge 1843) 203, 202.

3 Nicholson *Grindal* 203.

The Marian underground church

During Mary Tudor's assault on Protestantism when nearly 300 men and women were killed between 1555 and 1558, 800 people escaped abroad, but they were largely those with means, and the majority of Protestants stayed. Many of them, with the encouragement of imprisoned Protestant leaders, formed underground congregations and met secretly. They worshipped in cellars and lofts, in woods and ships, in inns and private houses, and generally used the second Edwardian Prayer Book. They smuggled letters to the overseas exiles and brought back tracts.

Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* includes a good deal of information about the London church. Their successive leaders include Thomas Bentham who became Elizabeth's Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, and perhaps Edmund Scambler the Elizabethan Bishop of Peterborough. Another leader of the London church, Thomas Rose, was arrested when their service was raided in 1555 but escaped custody and fled the country. A later leader, John Rough, was arrested on the information of a spy in the congregation, and burned alongside his fellow member Margaret Mearing on 22 December 1557. A deacon of the church, Cutbert Symson, was tortured for names, which he successfully withheld, and executed in 1558. The church survived the five years of Mary's reign growing from twenty to sometimes 200 members by the end.

The Elizabethan London underground church

On Elizabeth's accession, the underground worshippers returned to their parish churches, but the unexpected limitations and moderation of the Elizabethan reformation, most notoriously in the matter of priestly vestments, gave rise to the puritan movement for further reform. Naturally many who had been part of the underground church became ardent puritans—not only were they the most passionately committed Protestants, but they had experience of fully reformed worship and hated going backwards.

For eight years, as puritans campaigned with a good hope of forcing further reform on the Church, a considerable number of London churches illicitly ignored the more objectionable elements of the Prayer Book regulations; but the watershed came in the subscription crisis of 1566. When Archbishop Parker commanded the 110 London ministers to sign a commitment to wear the cope and surplice, 37 were suspended for refusing and fourteen eventually deprived. Many Londoners were outraged: there are accounts of fighting in church, a vestment-wearing minister being assaulted and Grindal being 'unreverently

hooted at'.¹ At St Mary Magdalen's, Milk Street, someone stole the wafer and wine while the minister was reading the lesson, to stop him presiding in his vestments.

This is when, as John Smith put it, 'all our preachers were displaced by your law' and the deprived ministers and their ardent followers revived the underground church. The London underground church remained active throughout the remaining few years of Grindal's episcopal rule there. As well as the Plumbers' Hall service, we know of about eleven services being broken up during this period; and yet in the three sources for these accounts (English state papers, the Spanish ambassador's letters and the chronicles of John Stow) there is an overlap of only one event, so there may very well have been more such disturbances than we know of.

The leaders of the movement were largely deprived clergy—John Browne and Mr Pattenson who had been Marian exiles and were sponsored by the Duchess of Suffolk; plus Nicholas Crane and William Bonham. A fifth minister of their conventicles was Richard Fitz, but we do not know whether he had been deprived by the Church of England or was ordained by the underground church—Grindal records that they ordained their own ministers. Another leader was the layman William White, a well-to-do baker. A collaborator with the radical puritans Field and Wilcox in the *Admonition* campaign, White also wrote a separatist tract called *A brief of such things as obscure God's glory*.

The worshippers met in fields and warehouses and in a ship in St Katherine's Dock. One service was surprised in the house of a goldsmith, James Tynne, and other in the house of the Bishop of London's servant, which presumably surprised the Bishop too.

The leading twentieth-century scholars of the movement, Champlin Burrage and Albert Peel, believed that the separatists were organised into separate congregations from the start, and were sharply divided as to what dealings one might have with the parish churches, Richard Fitz's church taking the most hardline separatist position, 'the Plumber's Hall congregation' being more moderate—being puritan rather than truly separatist, according to Burrage. In fact, on the evidence of their writings, of their geographical spread and of the combinations in which they were arrested, they originally formed a single citywide network. They do seem to have split into factions late on, but not because the Fitz church was more extreme in its separation: the Fitz church considered those who remained in the Church of England 'dear brethren' and 'dearly beloved in the Lord'.² Our one source for the split, the separatist leader

¹ J Gairdner (ed) *Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles with Historical Memoranda by John Stowe* (1880) 140.

² A Peel (ed) *The Seconde Parte of a Register* (Cambridge 1915) I 57, 58

John Browne, says that the Fitz church chose to meet in a smaller separate group 'for fear of pricking with the thorns' of persecution.³

For the size of the movement we have wildly differing information. The Spanish ambassador reported 5,000; Grindal told Bullinger, the reformer of Zurich, that there were 200. It suited the ambassador to exaggerate the division among English Protestants, just as it suited Grindal to minimise. The separatists themselves spoke of their being 'many a hundred' and 'at least a thousand' which sounds more reasonable.⁴

Grindal also downplayed the movement by describing them as 'citizens of the lowest order' and 'more women than men'. In fact the ratio of the sexes seems to have been even, while the members we know of were skilled rather than unskilled workers, and judging by the number who could sign their names on a petition they were well above the national average for literacy.

This underground church had no doctrinal distinctives. Between the separatists of the 1560s and 1570s and the far greater number of radical puritans who remained in the Church of England, there was complete agreement in their Reformed theology and their abhorrence of the traditionalism of the Elizabethan Church. The only difference was that the puritans found it possible to remain in the Church and campaign for change from within.

Although they spent time in prison and considered themselves persecuted by the 'tyranny of the bishops',⁵ Grindal was surprisingly lenient with the illegal church. He had no love of the traditional vestments that the Queen required him to impose on ministers, and having been exiled in Mary's time to escape the persecution of 'Bloody' Bonner, the Bishop of London, he was unhappy to find himself fulfilling the same role. His policy was that 'clemency should in time work good obedience in them, which by compulsion of imprisonment could not be wrought'.⁶ He sent some of them scouting to Scotland in the hope that they might join the Kirk, to no avail. The separatists even claimed that Grindal, releasing them from prison in 1569, had promised them toleration and appointed Bonham and Crane as their preachers, though the Bishop strenuously denied this when word reached the Privy Council.

The fortunes of the underground church took a turn for the worse when Grindal was replaced as Bishop of London by Edwin Sandys who took a harder line, and we hear of few more releases from prison. The ministers Fitz and Pattenson died in prison, as did Fitz's deacon Thomas Bowland who had booked the Plumber's Hall, among others. Surviving members of the separatist network threw themselves into the presbyterian movement in the Church of

3 Peel *Seconde Part* I 60.

4 P Lorimer *John Knox and the Church of England* (1875), 300; Peel *Seconde Parte* I 149.

5 Peel *Seconde Parte* I 58.

6 Nicholson *Grindal* 317.

England in the 1570s, in the hope that they could thus root out the deficiencies of the national Church rather than simply avoid them. In 1571 the followers of the late Richard Fitz wrote to the Queen to protest the ‘wrongs and cruel handlings’ they suffered, and after that, if the underground church continued to exist, it was as a remnant small enough to escape notice.

Robert Browne and Robert Harrison

The second wave of Elizabethan separatism emerged in East Anglia around 1580, led by Robert Browne and his convert Robert Harrison. Unlike any of the earlier London separatists Browne was a profoundly radical thinker, becoming a pioneer of congregational ecclesiology and of freedom of religion.

Born into Rutland gentry, a relative of Lord Burghley, Browne was a radical puritan when he graduated from Cambridge in 1572. Hoping to spread the Gospel without having to wear the hated vestments, he worked as a schoolteacher until 1575, but gave it up as a bad job and returned to Cambridge where he preached without a licence. Whereas earlier separatist ministers had been driven underground when the bishops divested them from office, Browne from the start denied that bishops had any authority to decide who should preach the word of God, and even when he was, against his will, bought a preaching licence, he burnt it.

Failing to gather a separatist church in Cambridge, Browne became reacquainted with his old university friend, Harrison, and went with him to Norwich where Harrison was appointed Master of Great Hospital. From this base, Browne travelled the region and gained a following as far afield as Bury St Edmunds, reaping the harvest of the Bishop of Norwich’s anti-puritan crackdown of 1576.

Browne gathered a separatist congregation in Norwich, and in 1581 they joined together in a covenant to be a new church, appointing Browne as pastor and Harrison as teacher. Where the London separatists had abandoned the Elizabethan Prayer Book in favour of the Genevan Prayer Book of John Knox, the Norwich church abandoned all liturgy, or ‘read and stunted prayers in popish wise’ as Harrison put it.⁷ Their church order allowed ‘all men which had the gift’ to preach, while the congregation might interrupt the sermon with questions and objections.⁸

Browne and Harrison both spent time in prison for their disorders, as did other members of the church. Browne was expelled from the diocese but came back, and was sent in custody to London where his relative Burghley dealt

7 A Peel and L H Carlson (eds) *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne*, (1953) 59.

8 Peel and Carlson *Browne* 422.

gently with him. Life was made difficult enough for the separatists that in 1582 about forty of them left for exile in Middelburg in the Netherlands.

Middelburg was not easy for them either—they were ‘in poor estate, and for the most part visited by sickness’⁹—but did have the advantage of a strong, unrestricted printing industry. In August 1582, Browne published three books, including his most important work, *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarying for Anie*. This was, firstly, a manifesto for separatism, arguing that Christ had commanded all Christians to worship purely and truly, so they had his authority to do so, without waiting for Queen and bishops to reform parish worship. *Reformation without Tarying* was secondly a work of radical ecclesiology, setting out Browne’s congregational concept of the church. The Church is not ministers, he argues, but the people of God, and if the church is ruled by Christ then the people are answerable directly to Christ and not to elders or synods. Though a pastor himself, Browne insisted that the church meeting was above the pastor—though it should hear advice. ‘The voice of the whole people, guided by the elders and the forwardest, is said [in Scripture] to be the voice of God.’¹⁰ Thirdly, *Reformation without Tarying* was a groundbreaking defence of religious freedom, arguing that the state has no right to ‘compel religion’. True religion, Browne says, is essentially voluntary, in which case forcing the unwilling to church fails to make them Christians, but makes the church unchristian: ‘The Lord’s kingdom is not by force.’¹¹

Throughout all his writings Browne set out his fundamental principle of the conditional covenant, a mutual agreement with God which is what makes the Church the Church. The Bible sets out the conditions of the covenant, and when a church is in breach of the covenant—as English parish churches are—it is no longer a true church. This is why Browne’s congregation made a new covenant with God, to become a true church. The conditional covenant is the rule by which the Church of England is measured and found wanting, and the separatists’ practical model for the establishment and government of the gathered church. It is also the ground for Browne’s radical concept of religious freedom: a mutual agreement is a matter of free personal decision, so to force people into your congregation who have no true commitment is to undo the church.

Browne’s books were subversive enough for the Queen to issue a proclamation against Browne and Harrison in June 1583, and that month two of their followers in Bury St Edmunds, Elias Thacker and John Copping, were hanged for distributing them. Even Harrison was taken aback by Browne’s

9 T George *John Robinson and the English Separatist Tradition* (Macon, Georgia 1982) 39.

10 Peel and Carlson *Browne* 399.

11 Peel and Carlson *Browne* 161.

radicalism, eventually deciding it was ‘a pattern of all lewd frantic disorder’.¹² The pair of them fell out repeatedly and Browne was at least four times removed from office by the church in which he had recognised the authority of Christ.

Their church split permanently in 1584, and Browne and four or five families left Middelburg for Scotland. They applied to join the Kirk, but Browne’s ecclesiological negotiations with the elders ended with him being put in prison once again. King James released Browne and protected him, ‘to molest the Kirk’, but he returned to England, where he gave up his separatist experiment and on 7 October 1585 signed a submission to the Archbishop of Canterbury. By this time, Harrison seems to have died in Middelburg. Again the separatist movement disappeared—at least from the view of history—and despite the brilliance of Browne’s thought and the fact that he seems to have continued some kind of shadowy nonconformist ministry, his main legacy to later generations of separatists was the embarrassment of his apostasy.

Henry Barrow and John Greenwood

It was just two years after Browne’s submission that the separatist movement reappeared in London. Their number included survivors from both the earlier separatist movements in London and Norfolk, including the minister Nicholas Crane who was now 65. The church met in the fields a mile outside London during the summer, and worshipped sitting on a bank; in winter, they met in a member’s house from five on Sunday morning, where their prayers and preaching lasted all day. ‘In their prayer, one speaketh and the rest do groan or sob or sigh, as if they would wring out tears,’ according to one witness.¹³ Preaching was not confined to the minister, but was expected of every man. Men and women mixed together. They ate together and took up a collection to pay for the food and distributed the surplus to church members in prison.

One leading member of the church was John Greenwood, who had been a parish minister in Norfolk, probably at Rackheath, until about September 1585, when he quit and came to London. There is no solid evidence of a connection between Greenwood and Browne or the Brownist church, but as Rackheath is just five miles from Norwich the coincidence is compelling.

Despite the presence of Crane and Greenwood, the church never seems to have had communion or baptisms. Apparently, they did not recognise these men’s ordinations in the Church of England, and for some reason had not ordained ministers for themselves, although they claimed the right and recognised the need.

On 8 October 1587 their service in a private house was disturbed and fifteen

12 Peel and Carlson *Browne* 149.

13 L H Carlson (ed) *The Writings of John Greenwood 1587–1590* (1962) 294.

men and six women were arrested, including Crane and Greenwood. As well as Crane there was a survivor from the earlier London conventicles and one from Browne's church. Six weeks later, the gaoled separatists were joined by another Norfolk gentleman, Henry Barrow.

Barrow had been converted when he read Browne's writings. Finding Browne no longer a useful conversation partner on separatism, Barrow visited a surviving Norfolk separatist, Thomas Wolsey, in his cell in Norfolk Castle, then had come to London and joined Greenwood's church. Barrow was absent when the others were arrested, but he visited the separatists in the Clink prison, and was never allowed out.

By the time of his arrest, Barrow had already written his first separatist tract, *Four Causes of Separation*. The four reasons to abandon the Church of England which he urged on readers were false worship, ungodly members, antichristian ministry and antichristian government. This writing, which seems to have been circulated in handwritten pages, is the reason the authorities were looking out for Barrow.

In prison, Barrow proved a prolific writer, despite the difficulties. He and Greenwood wrote pastoral letters to their church and transcribed their interrogations by the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift. But most of their energy was put into controversial writings, debating with puritans who defended their decision to remain in the Church of England. Barrow wrote some very long books, including the 263-page *A Brief Discoverie of the False Church*, smuggled out of prison page by page. When necessary, he wrote in the margins of other books.

Barrow and Greenwood's main antagonist was George Gifford, a puritan so radical that he is the only minister known to have been deprived in Whitgift's 1584 subscription campaign. Alarmed by the idea that Barrow and Greenwood's separatism was the logical conclusion of his own attacks on the deficiency of the Church of England, he devoted himself to debunking their claims. Greenwood's debates with Gifford focused on the validity of read prayers, which the separatists considered 'superstitious babbling'.¹⁴ Barrow, meanwhile, debated with Gifford the validity of the Church of England, upholding Browne's idea of the conditional covenant. Gifford argued that God's covenant with the church is an unconditional promise, that in scripture all Israel remained the true church because they were 'in the loins of Abraham' and therefore inherited the covenant God made with him, to a thousand generations, 'though multitudes of them were infidels and idolators'.¹⁵ Barrow pointed out that on this basis all Jews today were as much part of the true Church as the Church

¹⁴ Carlson *Greenwood 1587-1590* 262.

¹⁵ L H Carlson (ed) *The Writings of Henry Barrow 1590-1591* (1966) 118.

of England, continuing to inherit the unconditional covenant from Abraham. In fact, Barrow said, in a stinging *reductio ad absurdum*, since God also made a covenant with Noah, 'then is the whole world within the covenant, of the church [and] holy, all being sprung within far less than a thousand generations of many faithful, and lineally come from the patriarch Noah.¹⁶ If there are no conditions to being the church then it has no boundary and no meaning.

Barrow also upheld Browne's idea that church membership must be voluntary. Their difference on this point was that Barrow's main concern in opposing compulsion is 'the profaneness, wickedness, confusion of the people which are here received',¹⁷ where for Browne freedom was a positive value in its own right. Consequently, Barrow and Greenwood welcomed magisterial forcing of religion in other areas. They disagreed with Browne about church attendance being voluntary, saying, 'the profane may be compelled to the hearing of the word, and prayer'.¹⁸ And they were explicit against tolerance elsewhere: the monarch ought 'to forbid and exterminate all other religions, worship and ministries within her dominions'.¹⁹

Barrow and Greenwood recorded their interrogations by Whitgift, and their tone is markedly different from those of Grindal with the Plumber's Hall separatists. Where Grindal spoke as a concerned pastor trying to reclaim lost sheep and to talk them out of their misdirected zeal, Whitgift spoke as a lord of the realm deriding religious criminals. In return, when asked by the Lord Chancellor Sir Christopher Hatton who he thought Whitgift was, Barrow replied, 'He is a monster, a miserable compound, I know not what to make him: he is neither ecclesiastical nor civil, even that second beast spoken of in the Revelation.'²⁰

Before 1588, the separatists were afforded a measure of protection by the fact that the state needed to maintain as much Protestant unity as possible in the face of the constant threat of Catholic invasion. In the years after the failure of the Armada, the threat faded. After the House of Commons refused to include Protestant separatists in new legislation against Catholics, Barrow and Greenwood were convicted of sedition under an existing law aimed at Catholics. After two reprieves, the two of them were hanged on 6 April 1593. A third separatist writer, the recent Welsh convert John Penry, was executed on 29 May. By the time of these executions, at least seventeen members of the church had died in prison and 72 remained in gaol.

¹⁶ L H Carlson (ed) *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow 1591–1593* (London 1970) 178.

¹⁷ Carlson *Barrow 1590–1591*, 38.

¹⁸ L H Carlson (ed) *The Writings of Henry Barrow 1587–1590* (London 1962) 156.

¹⁹ Carlson *Barrow 1587–1590* 228.

²⁰ Carlson *Barrow 1587–1590* 188.

The churches in Amsterdam

Though the leaders of the London separatist church were killed, the church survived and its leadership was replenished in an unexpected way. Francis Johnson was a puritan who had been expelled from Cambridge for his presbyterian views. He became minister to the church of the English trading company in Middelburg in the Netherlands, as other radical puritans had before him, including Thomas Cartwright, the pioneer of the movement for presbyterian reform in the Church of England. While there, in 1591, he discovered that books by Barrow and Greenwood, printed in Dort, were being smuggled through Flushing into England. Johnson helped the English governor at Flushing seize the books and burn them, but kept a copy of each for himself 'that he might see their errors,' read them and in so doing was converted to separatism.²¹

Failing to convert his Middelburg congregation, Johnson returned to England in 1592, joined the London separatist church and was elected its pastor. He was in prison from 1593 to 1597 where he continued the literary work of Barrow and Greenwood. An Act of 1593 gave 'seditious sectaries' a choice of exile or execution, and so Johnson was released along with other members of his church, including his brother George, on the instructions of Lord Burghley, on the understanding that they help to colonise the Magdalen Islands, off Nova Scotia. They were not destined to be the Pilgrim Fathers, however, and they quickly returned to England and took their church to Amsterdam instead.

From Amsterdam, Johnson and the church's teacher Henry Ainsworth sent a stream of separatist apologetics back into England, hoping to be 'a light upon an hill' to English puritans. They called themselves the Ancient Church, thereby escaping the usual fate of new religious movements, of being named by their detractors. They retreated farther than Barrow from Browne's belief in freedom of religion, Johnson saying governments should 'establish and maintain by their laws every part of God's word his pure religion and true ministry.'²²

The separatist cause was given a huge boost by the established Church in the new century. All hopes of reform had hung on the new king but James appointed Richard Bancroft as Archbishop of Canterbury, whose regime was more violently anti-puritan even than Whitgift's. Where Parker's 1566 subscription campaign had removed fourteen ministers, and Whitgift's in 1584 had a single casualty so far as we know, Bancroft's 1604 subscription campaign removed between 73 and 83 ministers.

The new wave of separatism included two nearby congregations, one in

²¹ W H Burgess *John Smith the Se-Baptist, Thomas Helwys, and the first Baptist church in England* (London 1911) 33.

²² W Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge 1969) 95.

Scrooby, Nottinghamshire, led by John Robinson, the other in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, led by John Smyth (different from the earlier Smith). Both churches moved to Amsterdam between 1607 and 1608, but Robinson disliked Smyth's extremism and took his hundred-strong congregation to Leiden the following year.

The growth and freedom of English separatism in Amsterdam accelerated their fissiparous tendencies. Francis Johnson had already excommunicated his brother George after a dispute over the way Francis's wife Tomison dressed. The Ancient Church also objected to new teachings of John Smyth. Instead of having one pastor, one teacher and a couple of elders, Smyth said, a church can have any number of ministers, each fulfilling all roles—an innovation that gave work to the large number of former ministers in his church. Smyth taught that churches should not accept donations from non-separatists—a dig at the Ancient Church who were supported by puritans at home. And oddly, he took the separatist objection to manmade liturgies to the extreme of banning translated scriptures from their worship.

Even these minor differences were not the kind of things separatists could live with, but in early 1609 Smyth came up with a theological development which rocked their world. He came to the conclusion that babies did not fulfil the criteria for membership of the church, and so should not be baptised into it. The baptism of babies was not true baptism, he realised, so any church that practices it is not a true church, and anyone who has received it has not been baptised and is not a Christian.

Smyth perfected the scandal of this innovation by baptising himself, on the basis that there was no baptised person left anywhere to do it for him. He then baptised his fellow leader Thomas Helwys and between them they baptised those members of their church who were willing, reconstituting the New Testament Church from scratch, or at least creating the first Baptist church. Later in 1609 they furthered their breach with Reformed tradition by abandoning the doctrine of predestination. They also believed ardently in religious freedom, reviving Browne's commitment after years of retreat.

The shock and soul-searching that the separatists experienced after these baptisms was profound: Smyth's conclusions were unthinkable extreme, damning the entire Reformed and Lutheran traditions including the separatists' own churches, and yet his conversion also looked alarmingly like the logical conclusion of many of their own arguments and teachings. If the covenant is conditional on obedience and true faith, as they had insisted to their antagonists in the Church of England, then how do babies fulfil those conditions? If true Christianity is essentially voluntary, a willing decision, then how are babies capable of it? (And how could it be predestined?) If the separatists had been

baptised in the false church that had false sacraments, then had they really been baptised at all? And if not did they not need a new baptism?

Francis Johnson and the Ancient Church's teacher Henry Ainsworth engaged the Baptists with a series of tracts arguing against their rebaptism. But in their awkward attempts to defend their own baptisms in the Church of England Johnson and Ainsworth fell out with each other and the Ancient Church was split. Johnson renounced the idea of the conditional covenant and found himself conceding that even 'the Church of Rome is the church of God, and under his covenant.' Ainsworth vehemently disagreed, but ended up asserting that all humans are in the church, having inherited God's covenant with Noah—the position that Barrow had pointed to as the *reductio ad absurdum* of Gifford's conservatism.

Smyth soon came to repent his rebaptism, but his problem was very different to Johnson and Ainsworth's. He realised that his was not the only true church in the known world, because the Mennonites of Amsterdam also practised believers' baptism. He should not have baptised himself when he could have been baptised by them, he concluded, so he joined the Mennonites and was baptised a third time, taking three-quarters of his church with him. This move led to a split with Helwys, who stood by their first rebaptism. He and about ten remaining Baptists returned to London in about 1612, convinced it was their duty to face persecution and establish their new faith with England, both of which they did. After Johnson died in 1618, the majority of his church died in another abortive attempt to cross the Atlantic, this time to Virginia.

In contrast to this turmoil in Amsterdam, Robinson's moderate separatist church in Leiden, though it followed the news with dismay, enjoyed tranquillity, unity and growth. In the 1610s, the church was 300 strong, new arrivals outnumbering the original migrants. As time passed, debate with puritans modified Robinson's separatism further, until he allowed his followers to hear sermons in non-separatist churches. It was 102 of Robinson's church who, with his blessing, sailed on the *Mayflower* to Plymouth Rock. This ensured that it was the mildest separatists, with their Congregational ecclesiology and ambivalent commitment to religious freedom, who first settled in New England, while the Baptists, with their extreme separatism and complete commitment to religious freedom, attempted a spiritual colonisation of their own country in old England.

Stephen Tompkins

HISTORY IN PREACHING

As an historian I need no convincing of the value of history which attitude one might reasonably expect CHS members to share. In contrast to this conviction, I am reliably informed that students in training for the Christian ministry, in most, if not all denominations, seem to discern little value in church history, especially when it comes to its use in preaching. As if to underline this dismissive attitude to the study and use of history, the various denominational historical societies all testify to their difficulties in recruiting new ministers or students to their membership, suggesting little interest on the part of several influential individuals in the churches in the history of their own traditions, let alone in Christian history in general.

Consequently I have enquired of a number of ministers and preachers of their attitudes to history. The 35 to 40 friends and colleagues who answered came from the United Reformed Church, the Congregational Federation, the Baptist Union, the Methodist Church, the United Church of Canada, the United Church of Christ in the USA, the Union of Welsh Independents, the Church of England and the German Lutheran Church and I remain indebted to them all for their open and helpful contributions. Beyond their denominational boundaries, the respondents, both male and female, are from all stages of life including retirement. Several are in active ministry in town and country, some are lay preachers and one is a senior church administrator. Some pastor a number of churches, more have only one church. I am indebted to them all for their contributions to this qualitative study.

I wished to discover if my correspondents see any practical use for history and in particular what their responses are to the subject of preaching and history. Do they refer to history, to individuals from the past, and to specific episodes from Christian and denominational history in their sermons and, if so, how often? The following responses differed widely; some were brief, some fulsome, some were only loosely related to the questions. They were asked:-

1. Do you refer to episodes from church history in your sermons—regularly, seldom, never?
2. How does church history inform your own faith and your communication of it?
3. Have denominational history and Christian tradition influenced your thinking?
4. Do we, or should we, learn from history?
5. Many historical incidents call for explanations which seem to go beyond

the immediate and call for ongoing compassion, understanding and forgiveness. For instance, you may have noted that 22nd July is the anniversary of the bombing in 1946 of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem when 91 lives (Jewish, Arab and British) were lost. What lessons might today's politicians, Christians, citizens at large, and all glean from such episodes?

1. Do you refer to church history in your sermons?

Most answers were positive. My first correspondent stated that, however much we may think that Congregationalism is derived directly from the New Testament, it is history and especially English church history of the last four hundred years and European history of the last five hundred which has made us what we are. He maintained firmly that theology students and preachers should be aware of history, commenting that, given the anniversary of Luther's beginning the Protestant Reformation in 1517, he intended to preach a series of sermons on the concept of "Reformed churchmanship". Indeed he found that over his long ministry historical anniversaries had proved very useful in supplying themes for sermons. Therefore the Mayflower pilgrims, John Bunyan, Barrowe, Greenwood and Penry, the Great Ejection of 1660-62, and David Livingstone had all stimulated his preaching, as had also the 10th, 25th and 40th anniversaries of the founding of the United Reformed Church in October 1972. History had proved a regular but not frequent stimulant for his preaching.

In contrast another younger respondent felt that he lacked "the depth of knowledge" to make regular reference to church history in his sermons, although when appropriate he researches "a specific event or era in order to illustrate" any point he wishes to make. Some correspondents simply affirmed that they often refer to church history when preaching. One reply allowed that history informs much of his thinking, and that "history is not about turning the clock back, but about enabling us to know where we're going by knowing where we've come from".

Of course, specific events, like a church's anniversary, call for an historical witness. One country church had recently gathered for worship "in the original place" where nonconformist services had begun in that locality. "Although now a house, the original building can be clearly distinguished"; it was "an awesome experience". They used Psalm 20 because that was the reading used by the first minister there on the Sunday before he died.

One Welsh minister refers to history in "perhaps 80 per cent" of his sermons. His references to specific church history, other than to the Book of Acts and the letters of Paul, are less frequent but certainly occur. These are mainly "to incidents in the Reformation, 17th and 19th century nonconformity and the Age of the Saints in Wales."

One retired Englishman confessed that he had drawn on history in his sermons over the years “simply because that is the way” his mind works. He supposed that “biography and major events in church history were more common than history in general” in his preaching. One lay preacher regularly refers to “episodes from church history” in his sermons though his hearers probably believed that this occurred “too regularly”. Another respondent argued that “some knowledge of history is indispensable for a preaching ministry”. Preaching from “much of the Old Testament” demands “an understanding of its historical background” given that the prophets “addressed particular historical situations in which they saw the hand of God”. In the New Testament “the Christ of faith is rooted in the Jesus of history”. While it is impossible to write a conventional ‘biography’ of Jesus of Nazareth, “he and his ministry were rooted in historical situations”. As the Apostles’ Creed puts it, ‘suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried.’ “Can the resurrection be described as an ‘historical’ event? Perhaps not in the normal understanding of historical events, but it certainly put its stamp on history and the emergence of the Church.”

A Church of England vicar stated that history is “often a core contextual feature of my preaching ... because so much of the now dying institutional culture of the C of E has been invested in the historical development of English society and the state and we are now at a point of profound death perhaps rebirth. The social and historic culture we have inherited and still vestigially inhabit as Anglicans no longer really functions publicly.” He concluded this section, “We are all congregationalists now!”

A Methodist admitted that his most frequent references to history are “to the Wesleys and the origins of Methodism” but he also refers to wider issues around the Reformation and “the Christian social reformers of the 19th century and Latin American liberation theology of the 20th crop up too.” He went on to mention Luther, Bonhoeffer, Oscar Romero and Martin Luther King. A retired United Reformed minister stated that he “regularly” refers to events and personalities in history. He teasingly asked, “Did not Napoleon say that he could command armies yet Jesus Christ had won the hearts of millions?”

A Bavarian friend concentrates in his sermons on “the explanation of the Biblical text and normally does not make reference to church history”. Rather “the relevance of the gospel for the life of my congregation is my focus”. But he does occasionally refer to the Reformation, Martin Luther, the history of the Confessing Church in Germany and to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. One reply from a well-informed minister stated that she believed that many Christians have only the vaguest idea of church history. She thinks there is “a widespread scepticism about history, along the lines of ‘you can find historical material to prove just about anything’”. The work of holocaust deniers, for example, or the

debate around the Armenian genocide of 1915, gives the impression that people manipulate history rather than tell it straight.

Those who are not in pastoral charge but preach in different churches may regularly refer to episodes of church history in their sermons. One American friend seldom includes references to church history in his sermons, apart from Thanksgiving. One Welshman refers to church history regularly, although the reasons for doing so vary. Historical allusions are intended to throw light on the theological point he is making.

One Englishwoman, seeing church history as a “wide term”, is surprised, on looking back” at her sermons for the last year, that she touched on church history in every one. “Admittedly, this has simply been ... an illustrative story like Martin Luther throwing inkwells or the escape of Dirk Willems. However last year I asked my church to share stories about the Blitz and used their stories in my preaching. I tried to ... ask a few hard questions as well as make connections that were hopefully not too crass. For example, we are a congregation which knows what it is to be bombed. Can we imagine what it was like to not know the outcome of the Second World War? Does the fact that the building was bombed give us a victim mentality or does it connect us with those who live in a war-zone now? The church had to start again from the rubble in 1945 and there was a strong move to join with another church. Was it admirable determination or stubborn independency that held sway? What does our continued inter-dependency as Congregationalists look like?”

A Welsh minister often finds in past Christians inspiration for today. Another is fascinated by biblical history, especially the Old Testament, the Egyptian captivity and the Exodus, themes, he argues, which apply to Wales now. The prophets also feature. Early church history is a favourite as it offers examples of situations to which small congregations may easily identify.

One eminent Baptist frequently refers to church history in preaching, rarely to secular history unless it impinges on Christian issues, values, enterprises etc. A Scot notes that we are led now, as in the past, by the Spirit through church meetings, to take responsibility for our buildings and finances, taking decisions which best suit our own local situation. At other times he draws on references to key figures from Congregational and wider church history.

A variety of answers, therefore, but no shortage of suggestions for the use of history, especially church history, in preaching.

2. How does church history inform your faith and your communication of it?

The majority of correspondents replied that their faith is informed by their interest in history which assisted them in communicating the faith. While a student at Mansfield College one felt that he had then come into the succession

of “the Genevan school of 20th century Congregationalism” making him “aware of 16th and 17th century practice” and making him test “what we do and propose against what our forebears believed, witnessed and practised, eg church covenants, baptism of the children of the congregation, decisive stands against the state or monarchical authority (including monarchical-episcopalianism) in church affairs”. He had written a paper on the emergence of the Council for World Mission from its predecessor bodies to mark the anniversary of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference and noted how missionary thinking matched ideas arising in international missionary and ecumenical conferences. He discerned that “twentieth century history shows great movements of the Holy Spirit—the liturgical movement, the ecumenical movement and renewed acceptance of the Bible as supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God’s people.” He does “not believe we have yet reached the end of history”.

The particular setting of worship must influence the preaching and one comment referred to a painting of Isaac Watts which hung where worship was conducted for two years. As a result my respondent made mention of Watts especially when announcing his hymns. Indeed when preaching elsewhere, on a Watts’ anniversary, he chose all his hymns that morning from Watts. One preacher stated that when preaching at churches, steeped in tradition, she had found that history informed her communication of the gospel. It had been “salient, relevant and inspiring” to share stories of “our forebears” in ways of being church and also in the ways the early Christians met and shared. Congregations valued and enjoyed those stories.

One maintained that a grasp of church history prevents that parochialism which inhabits only the thought world of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, noting that fanaticism is not a modern phenomenon. He cited the “rather weird religious ideas and primitive communism of the Diggers and Levellers which antedates Marx by several centuries”. The Fifth Monarchists of the 17th century anticipated later millenarianism. He hoped that his knowledge of history enabled him to appreciate the origin of ideas and referred to the Putney debates of 1647. The essence of these debates was ‘What sort of country do we want to live in’ which to him should have been the essence of the recent debate on membership of the European Union.

A newly ordained minister believed that her appreciation of history differed from Anglicans and Catholics who placed more stress on tradition, rather than scripture. She related a discussion between Anglican neighbours about what colour of robe to wear at an induction in Lent. Her faith does not depend, as theirs does, she stated, on the correct liturgy, lectionary, service patterns etc. Such freedom enables her to be more direct. One respondent is inspired by Celtic Christianity and its connection with the Desert Fathers. “Its closeness to

nature encourages me. As a nineteenth century specialist, I fear that I hark back too much to my Victorian idols, chief among them, Henry Richard”.

A retired minister observed that television “endlessly informs us about the Tudors but little public information is available about the Church’s story or those through whom the faith has come to us”. One writer’s natural inclination was to find illustrations in history which he feared was not to the taste of his congregation so he tried not to overdo it. Nevertheless church history informed his faith “because it helps me understand how I have been shaped, and hence who I am, and hence what I can be and do.” These correspondents invariably found that denominational insights impacted positively on their faith—“hugely, so much I can’t begin to start unpicking it all!” One writer itemised the areas—“ecclesiology, missiology, liturgics, psalmody, church practice, pastoralia, social witness and ethical practice”. One admitted that he rarely included history within the services, but knew that he is influenced by the past. Although for him “the Congregational Way is the right way” he understood that several in his church “would disagree”.

One Christian preacher, Jewish by birth, confessed to being, “as a post holocaust Jew, ... seriously tentative about being part of recent church history in Europe which had over the centuries been a disincentive to associating with any church, let alone becoming a minister and preaching!” Yet he nevertheless found himself drawn into understanding Christian faith, and his interests when training for ministry centred on “the history of the church and synagogue, Jesus the Jew, how the Pharisees came under attack (as the sect that survived the destruction of Jerusalem), how the break between church and synagogue came about and how the conflict within Judaism between ‘Followers of The Way’ and other Jewish sects crept into the scriptures.”

Yet disappointingly “In the church, many Christians were content with a surface reading of scripture, as though what they read was literally true, and for some, dictated directly by God, so that they justified hatred, bigotry and injustice by ‘The bible says...’ A knowledge of how the Bible came into being seems vital to diffuse and disintegrate the Jew hatred (read also ‘oppression of blacks, gays and women’) that can be fomented by reading the Bible.”

This respondent grew up ...

“during the decades following the holocaust, under the South African apartheid regime, where the ruling Afrikaners justified their racial intolerance and separation of the races by passages from the bible. They identified themselves with the people of Israel, and South Africa as their promised land. Goodness gracious! That was certainly a learning for me—that it was possible to base one’s entire life and political philosophy on a falsehood, by declaring, ‘the Bible says ...’”

Therefore in his ministry, he made a point of addressing passages and

attitudes that encourage anti-Judaic thinking (and other falsehoods). He explained their origin and offered alternative ways of understanding them. That he was able to do this justified in his own mind his being a minister in the church, among “the historic enemy.” Understanding the times when Jesus taught is “absolutely vital” to understanding his parables, as is knowing something about the ancient world in order to understand Paul’s teachings.

One preacher confessed that she was not very interested in “the machinations of the church institutions after the first century” nor in the differences between the churches. Rather she has “picked and chosen ... from different traditions”. Indeed she is “more interested in Christian individuals” than in the history of the church. As a result she has used their stories in sermons, those of John Woolman, Martin Luther King, Bonhoeffer, Wesley, etc.” Yet church history has informed her faith and its communication tremendously and she recognizes the “overriding importance of context, and the particular problems in articulating a historical faith in relation to a God, for whom the time is always the present”.

For one middle-aged Briton “church history is pivotal” to his faith because Christianity is based on a historical event. The gospel was an event in history and has “something to say about history (both in terms of salvation history and in terms of an eschatological fulfilment). History, then, is the stage on which God works out the salvation of humankind and the creation” and therefore history must be understood theologically. However our theological understanding is contextually situated, and thus there is historical development to that understanding. If history has to be understood theologically, theology can only be grasped if understood through its historical development. Also on a basic level, history shows us that we do not face anything particularly new in our day, and wisdom may be gleaned (as well as folly rejected) from the past. One example given is a letter to *Reform* last Easter which insisted that we cease to talk about concepts like resurrection which are meaningless to modern minds. The letter argued that Jesus’s resurrection was only believable in a past where people were unscientific and were governed by superstition. History shows that resurrection has never been easy to believe!

Another sees history as grounding him within an *originating* tradition—the New Testament witness to Jesus—as well as within a *denominational* and *theological* identity. Yet he wondered if he dwelt more on people than events. A former teacher of ministers saw his faith and understanding of worship and models of being church as “keenly informed by historical patterns and theology”. His theology has been shaped by the study of different historical periods, specifically the Reformation and the centuries since then. It is through reading how people wrestled with faith in the past that his commitment to the Congregational way has developed. He found that various historical points which arise from news stories and times of commemoration invite reflection on faith today.

One Methodist believes that any understanding of our present situation (as church but more broadly as God's people) depends on a sense of where we are coming from. For him it is important for his preaching to help people share in the debates that occurred through the centuries, and to draw their own conclusions from them. One respondent is "very conscious of how we are shaped by people and events of the past—seeking to understand how those people and events have shaped our world, our church, and me is the task of history". He is moved by "their courage, creativity, responses to changing situations and holiness". That has hugely enriched his own Christian life, and he has tried to convey in preaching "that these great characters are not distant people left behind in an antiquated and irrelevant past" but "our partners in Christ who have left a huge treasure which it is folly to ignore".

"The people I have met have shaped me but so also have those whom I have read and those I have read through others' writings—all that informs my faith and has importance in helping me to communicate that faith. I am aware that some are critical of my love of history but some delight in it". In preaching "I am not so comfortable recounting illustrations from my pastoral ministry—I am conscious of issues of confidentiality". That drives him more to history which reinforces the message and encourages those on their own journey. "For me, the story inspires on a profound level and enables preachers to inspire and communicate the faith."

Another tried to research local church history when visiting churches, especially on anniversaries. He called on the biography of James Chalmers, the missionary martyr of New Guinea, but suspects his use of his story was markedly different from how it would have been done fifty years ago, because he stressed his anticipation of modern mission philosophy. "So it's not just history, but what you do with it."

One distinguished lay preacher stated that history is merely an integral part of his faith and its communication. He added, "A personal faith is not simply a here-and-now reality. The past, present and future are aspects of eternity, and an awareness of the past is a crucial part of Christian stewardship." He is surprised that evangelicals and liberals are prone to deprecate history.

A retired Baptist minister speaks of "profound biblical conviction that ours is a historic faith" which "constantly looks back to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the miracle of the Exodus etc not to escape from the realities of the present but to find inspiration" for new, demanding challenges. The Hebrews "saw the past ... like a glorious vista stretching out in front of them; the future was hidden from them, as it is from us, but you can see where you have been, like Newton's 'His love in time past, forbids me to think, he'll leave me at last in trouble to sink'—and like Richard Baxter, I'm cheered and inspired by what he called 'the bright light in others'". Casting all denominational prejudice

aside, he also cited John Henry Newman's preaching an Oxford, St. Mary's sermon along those lines and, after a graphic reminder of the great exploits of exemplary OT and NT believers, said 'Now it is our turn!'¹

One modest church official wrote of the "massive help" she had received from studying the witness and occasional mistakes of Christians who went before us. She continued that to belong to the people of God is to reach back to New and Old Testament times and means belonging to the gracious activity of God as witnessed in the scriptures and above all in Jesus. Another wrote of stories from various episodes of church history serving to capture the imagination of congregations and also providing examples of paths we could possibly take. He often refers to the main characters of the various periods in history—"the age of the saints, one or two from the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Puritans, the Methodist revival, the 19th and 20th centuries" in particular. The early days of Welsh nonconformity also feature, again because the picture they offer is so similar to the situation we are in today. They were going up; we are going down, but the two lines seem to intersect, and at that point the experiences of the past become relevant for today. "It seems to me that in this age of flat-lining spirituality, many are fascinated by the enthusiasm and fervour of their spiritual forebears. To some it is inexplicable, to others something exciting and to be admired."

One contributor admitted that he reads "a surprising amount of church history and is particularly interested in issues of peace and justice". For him "church history is not a comfort 'that nothing changes here' but that things do and will change". Therefore, he calls attention to "points of historical dissonance that challenged an unfair continuum or consensus e.g. Philip Doddridge's attitude to a hypothetical smallpox vaccine, the ordination of Constance Coltman or the witness of Congregational churches in apartheid South Africa". Consequently if change has happened before why not now? If the freedoms we take for granted have been hard won, what and where is the next fight?

Of course, he realises this is "one, probably warped, reading" of history. Yet this realisation causes him to lose confidence. He is "so aware of multiple interpretations, the need to think critically and weigh up source material" that perhaps he shies away "from including more history" in his preaching. "Is there adequate time in twenty minutes? Will I be nuanced enough? Is a sermon the right forum?"

Again these preachers on the whole affirmed the value of history but expressed some concern that the denominations centrally might slip into

¹ J H Newman 'Warfare the Condition of Victory' from *Plain and Parochial Sermons* (8 vols 1898-1901) 24th May 1838.

complacency, leaving younger practitioners less informed, less able to evaluate critically recent events, in the light of past experience.

3. Have denominational history and Christian tradition influenced your thinking?

An older minister replied that history had much influenced his ministry, especially the history of the Reformed tradition. However if he were in pastoral charge today, he would place greater emphasis on “the particularities of our tradition”. One Canadian minister stressed that the traditions of The United Church of Canada are liberal and social justice oriented, reinforcing these attitudes in him. Yet he realised that other traditions like evangelical Anglicanism, the Quakers and the charismatic movement had also been of influence.

One respondent traced his interest in “the history of dissonance and ... of minority struggles” from the Congregational tradition. “We have been the prophetic minority” but, less often, “we’ve also been a powerful constituency in the country”. He mentions the American theologian Phyllis Tickle (1934–2015) who said that “every five hundred years the church has a rummage sale”.² My respondent thinks that the church in the West is in the middle of a jumble sale and “we are trying to discern what to keep and what to let go of”. History tells him not to be afraid of this because the church has been here before. Congregational history helps at such a time. He continues,

“Where has our hymn-singing come from? What do we gain by singing our theology that we can’t just get elsewhere? Is it *these* hymns or it is about meaningful words and accessible tunes? I find it fascinating that proponents of the emerging church in this country are not jettisoning church history but re-discovering it. Emerging churches or Fresh Expressions are not history-free and you can often see which denomination has sponsored them even though they are also highly contextual. So far it has tended to be more sacramental traditions which have done this re-discovery and they’ve tended to explore monasticism and the Celtic Christian tradition, maybe slightly uncritically, but I do wonder whether congregationally-ordered emerging churches are possible and what they would look like?”

He states that he is involved in “a sort of fresh expression of church ... and the parts of the tradition I am not prepared to relinquish are a) an honest wrestling with Scripture as the Word of God b) an understanding that all people are spiritually gifted and that God gives enough strength not to individuals but to church communities c) that decisions should be made by the whole body of people under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

² See: P Tickle *The Great Emergence—How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Oxford, 2008)

My Bavarian friend uses the Lutheran Hymnbook as part of his daily life and “Every day I read from *Die Losungen* of the Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine³ following the Zinzendorf-tradition”. Coming from a strong Lutheran family, he feels “very much at home preaching from a reformed pulpit”. He is necessarily influenced by Lutheran traditions but is ecumenical in his thinking, having many good Catholic friends. He appreciates “the richness of the church of Christ with its different denominations”.

One Welsh Independent, serving seven chapels, is steeped in the tradition which has influenced his personal history and upbringing. Among his mentors is Tudur Jones who touched deeply the lives of many. He refers in preaching to Welsh history but also to overseas mission work (Madagascar in particular because of the Welsh connection) and may relate a few stories from the USA. A fine Baptist preacher does not believe that denominational history has been prominent in his preaching, although he quotes Baptist worthies, but no more than others.

A Scottish friend found the Congregational way not only “Biblically referenced but ... more loyal to the original intentions of the Scottish Reformers, before they moved in a Presbyterian direction”. He sees the church meeting as key to “denominational life”, and to his understanding of the minister’s role. In Scotland, Congregational churches have been influenced by Presbyterianism in feeling the need for a recognised, ordained minister. This does not sit naturally with “a Congregational understanding of the gifts of all members, which should always be encouraged”. Circumstances now dictate that some churches must be maintained without a minister in situ, so at times they have arrived at a more Congregational model, though not always by design.

Again, history is important in his self-understanding and also an important part of helping the church family to appreciate who they are and where they come from. “My church family includes (now in glory) all those who have belonged since it was first gathered about 1832, five years after people first started meeting together for Sunday worship. Owing that history is very important for my own faith and for my belonging in church.” Yet those who assembled in 1827 did so because of a history that made them who they were. Surely we “can trace our roots back to Jesus and indeed beyond to the people of God in the Old Testament”.

One respondent saw the question as touching on ecumenism which he understands as “more than searching for ways to join together”. Rather it should be about respecting “our differences through our different historical journeys”. In so doing “it would be wrong to ignore our past and the sacrifice made by all our spiritual forebears”.

3 The German Protestant Brethren have published *Die Losungen* annually since 1731. It contains both Old and New Testament readings for each day.

One scholar wrote that he is “captivated by the Reformed tradition”, though he believes that this is “mediated to us in England and Wales” through Nonconformity. He holds that “Congregationalism is correct in seeing the local, gathered community of saints as the expression of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”. Yet “how we ensure that local, gathered communities of saints are not rogue communities but true expressions, living in Christian fellowship, is the real issue”. He doubts that the United Reformed Church does this “as best as possible; but I am not sure that a voluntary Union (or Federation) offering mutual support does it either”. Without a better way, he thinks that as long as both try to emphasise “the importance of the local as the only real expression of the Body of Christ (so long as not separate from other expressions of the Body of Christ), we have the best we can probably aspire to”. However “the insights for this come from the Separatists and Dissenters of the 16th and 17th centuries”.

What he is convinced about, from that tradition, is

“that centralized, hierarchical organizations, the exaltation of a priestly caste, enforcement of orthodoxy through a magisterium, dominance of bishops as prelates—these things are at best *adiaphora*. ... so far removed from the Jesus of the gospels to be idolatrous when they are perceived to be anything more than for the *bene esse* of the church. It is possible that they could be for the *bene esse* of the church; I cannot see that they are of the ‘*esse*’ and I think they are hindrances to the ‘*plene esse*’.”⁴

Again he stated categorically that “these insights come from the English Dissenting and Nonconformist traditions, and we need to remain faithful to that witness!”

One Anglican neighbour wrote that “if Anglicans were to sort themselves out institutionally then history could have a renewed importance liturgically. Why not a National Health Service feast in the lectionary or End of the Slave Trade or Magna Carta?” An American colleague is influenced by “a strong sense of intellectual roots in his denominational tradition” and occasionally calls attention to it. A Methodist friend knows that Methodist history is “particularly important” to him, in exploring both “the theological and social currents of the 18th century and their continuing relevance” today. Yet the “foundational principles of Methodism” point him towards “an openness to other currents of thought and to an umbilical link between faith and action”.

A Congregational colleague is influenced by denominational history but “less so than by his understanding of the overall Christian tradition”. Yet he

4 *Adiaphora* (Greek) means spiritually neutral, debateable. *Esse* (Latin) means being, essence; *bene esse* means well being; *plene esse* means fullness of being.

finds that “the independence of the local church is a key way” in which his thinking has developed. He advocates “ordinary theology”, which is almost Congregational in nature by stressing the “importance of non-formally trained people” in developing “real-life theology”. Another states that denominational history has profoundly influenced him and his church, just as the writer of *The Epistle to the Hebrews* was moved by the example of faithful people of past years.

One minister from a Baptist background writes that his denominational upbringing had “a crucial impact” on him. He early accepted “the importance of a personal commitment within the Church as one part of the Body of Christ on earth”. This enabled him to accept and understand other denominations. “We all work for the same firm, yet pig-headed denominational bigotry still gets in the way”. Another retired minister would agree that denominational tradition has influenced his thinking. Having been a lifelong Congregationalist, it has “always provided the framework” for his thinking and work. A knowledge of church history in general provides “alternative views of the church” against which to critique one’s own Congregationalism. Denominational history and tradition provides a background from which one can understand the context of our history and tradition. This is useful in preventing one from thinking “that something is ‘What we have always believed’ when in fact it is what we have believed for the last thirty years”. He found that a “knowledge of Congregational history, thought and principles—and the sources of them—was very useful” when he chaired a denominational committee and dealt with people who thought that their ideas were what Congregationalists must accept as gospel.

One younger minister affirms that her thinking is influenced by tradition though she brings new ideas from her wider reading. She feels “humbled by and proud of our church traditions, enjoying the counter-cultural elements of our forebears”! She may use hymns with Congregational influences and will share such history in the service. “It might be a story from local dissenters or wider relevant history—about John Robinson after I had met the folk from Leiden” to whom she stated confidently, ‘I think one of our ministers worked there!’, as if it were yesterday!” She also refers to John Smith of the London Missionary Society “when there have been current issues about bonded labour”.

Shorter answers included “Very much: I am who I am not just through birth but also by choice”; “denominational history and tradition have influenced my own faith, though not, I hope, in any ‘blinkered’ way”; “Yes; from childhood”.

Others see their training as influential, suspecting that its influence on their thinking may be greater than at first appears. One Baptist is aware that he belongs to “one strand of Christian expression” which is “a tradition to be celebrated and explored”, although “understandings and applications change as our context vary. Tradition neither dictates nor stands still Thus we

make our history”. One sees that “Welsh Congregationalism has been a major shaper” of his “brand of radical, left-wing nationalism”. Another is “a little wary of depending too much on tradition” because, being open to the needs of others, “sometimes means doing things in a new or at least amended way”.

4. Do we, or should we, learn from history?

On the thorny subject of learning from history, the replies were clear that Christians should so learn. However experience showed that “the church and the world all too often fail to learn anything whatsoever, as mistakes are repeated so often”. One expressed this more fulsomely;

“we have to learn from mistakes and wrong turnings in church history as well as the high points and heroes/heroines. The (European) Reformation is formative for our church and is a major corrective of errors and excesses of which the mediaeval church was guilty without being completely lost. Indeed there is much to value in the mediaeval traditions. One may question the genuineness of the supposed Celtic tradition, but we derive value from it now. Above all, we need to be aware of the historical context and chronological development around the formation of the New Testament. One cannot preach in an informed way without wanting to see the early church and its statements in their historical and ethnic/national/religious/philosophical contexts. The classic statements of doctrine, the Apostles’ Creed, the creed of Nicaea, the rebuttal of heresy and affirmations of orthodoxy culminate in the definitions of the Council of Chalcedon⁵; the Constantinian transformation of the church in relation to the state—all are set in history and need to be understood historically, but they ought to be known and understood by preachers, especially as a test of one’s orthodoxy (or conceivably heterodoxy) and preachers ought to know what they are about even if they but rarely mention them to a congregation.”

Another newer minister believes that “history is important, and certainly enjoys reading it”, noting that “we should learn from history, but rarely do”. The “lust for power and intolerance ... continue to haunt our world” for “those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed in many cases to repeat them”. One quoted the poet Steve Turner who made “the simple but insightful comment in his ‘History Lesson’:

History repeats itself.
Has to.
No-one listens.”⁶

⁵ The Council of Chalcedon of 451 CE attempted to settle the Christological heresies of the early church with its definitions of the faith.

⁶ See G Ambrose *Together for a Season* (2009).

One lay preacher found this fourth question “the hardest”. We rightly distrust “any politician who claims that lessons will be learned”. When we hear “some brother or sister at Church Meetings refer to our traditions”, we know that they will get them wrong. “That is not to be cynical”; as a teacher he has always told students that “they could never, ever, get History right (so depressing) but, by the same token, they could never get it (wholly) wrong. Hence the value and fascination of the discipline. It is tailor made for the inquisitive; equally for those who seek to know their fellow men and women”.

Yet another respondent finds the issue of learning from history very difficult, allowing that different people may learn different things, from the same episode. He believes that “the way we treat the anniversary of the Reformation will be a test of that”. However what is most difficult is trying “to dislodge some of the great misconceptions” derived from versions of church history, “without either seeming disrespectful of another person’s viewpoint or dislodging more than a particular view, ie the whole foundation of another’s faith”. He finds that from a pastoral perspective to be “very difficult, particularly if it seems as though one is pulling rank in the process”.

One inner city minister sees himself as “a front windscreen looker” rather than “a rear view mirror watcher”, that is he does “glimpse back into the past but would be more driven by what I see ahead”. He believes that “while we should be learning from the past, we don’t, so let’s get it right in the future”. Yet we should take inspiration from scripture as “the record of God’s dealing with humankind” and should “celebrate the efforts of people of faith who have done great things in God’s name. We may also learn from past mistakes.”

One minister of an historic church notes that history “informs our present and future”. He stated that Stuart Murray⁷ in a recent book observed that much is passed on in church life from generation to generation but he had never worshipped in a parish church where the prayers mentioned thankfulness for the freedom to meet together. Yet often in dissenting churches he heard such prayers and suggested that our thinking is very much shaped by our past.

One Methodist preacher allows that we may learn from history sometimes. In Britain, both “the schismatic sectarianism of the 19th century and the attempted top-down ecumenism of the mid-20th century” have given way to a “muddled form of living together in diversity and mutual respect (and even love!)”. Learning from history for one scholar is essential

“but with one caveat. I do not think that we should appeal to the past as if we can discover a truly authentic Christian life and witness from a golden age to which we ought to return. That is surely the mistake of the denominations which claim *adiaphora* to be of the Church’s *esse*. Christian truth is eschatological; we are

7 Stuart Murray is the author of *Church after Christendom* (2005) and *Post-Christendom* (2011).

being drawn forward to the eschaton when God is ‘all in all’ and everything falls into place. In the meantime, we look to the Gospel and to the best of our ability offer what seems to us to be a faithful exposition. History helps us to do that.”

One west country preacher sees a sense of history as “vital not only for understanding church and faith but also politics, society and the world”. He feels that this question is all important. “The all but impregnable city of Sardis fell twice to the same ruse because the citizens did not learn” from their history. “But I think the main reason we fail to learn from history is because we are ignorant of it in the first place”. Yet God has revealed in the past—his “sovereignty, faithfulness, mercy (using unlikely people and transforming lives), generosity (when his people have least deserved his help)”.

A church administrator believes that we should learn from history but “we do this less than we used to”. A retired minister spoke for many in noting that we live “in such faltering times” that it is “hard for people to speak with certainty about their faith, or anything else! And this begs the question about the value of faith history from a previous era. It seems that we’re forging something so entirely new in faith articulation and practice that it is hard to know the relevance of previous times!” Nevertheless he had no hesitation in stating that we “don’t learn from history. It seems to have to do with evil that just takes hold of the human heart in every century. The manifestation is different, but it is the same forces that we struggle against.”

A German pastor, very aware of his nation’s recent history, stated that “we learn little from history but we are not allowed to stop trying to learn” from it. One correspondent bluntly volunteered the view that we should learn from history “but it’s bloody hard!”

5. Historical incidents call for explanations beyond the immediate and demand ongoing compassion, understanding and forgiveness. What lessons might today’s politicians, Christians, and all of us glean from such episodes?

One answer addressed the “mythic” element in history which is “part of the problem in the complexities of the Middle East”. Given that people have differing “versions of history”, dialogue becomes “near impossible”. However history teaches that “violence only ends when people are prepared to talk”. Perhaps too we “only read dangers and warnings from history and not the joys and hope. Every New Year Afro-American congregations celebrate the end of slavery at special watchnight services.” Clearly “racism and vast inequality” still exist in the United States but remembering fuels hope that tomorrow might be better than today.

A concerned preacher commented that since 1945 “has been this wonderful

movement of humans trying to fix everything ... and great progress has been made in women's rights, gay rights, civil rights, animal rights, religious tolerance, economic unions of one kind and another. But now the fire that has been raging under the surface is erupting and good human beings are failing to contain it." He is worried that the "Brexit movement" has released "a nasty attitude to foreigners; The Trump rhetoric has legitimised speaking hatred. ... Pandora's box has been opened, the evil unleashed, and 75 years of struggle against speaking hatred has been reversed. To say nothing of the terrible backlash to the Arab Spring." Therefore, he asks, "What good is history? I don't know. It's good for the times when Pandora's box is *closed*. When there is a little hiatus from violence, during which humanity can make small advances. Make apologies. Tear down walls. Recognise wrongs done. Dream up safeguards."

One experienced minister writes that "no simple ways" exist "to glean wisdom from the stark episodes of history, as many (perhaps the King David Hotel incident more than most) have a complex context". Evidently "we need depth, rather than simple record, to learn well". He has been reading Nicholas Pelham's *Holy Lands: Reviving Pluralism in the Middle East* (New York, 2016) which argues that the Ottoman millet system at its best could offer a model by which the fatal link between ethnic/religious identity and land can be broken. Yet lessons from history in the Middle East and Yugoslavia were ignored with calamitous effects.

Others point to the war against terror becoming "an obfuscation which stops us engaging with the motivations of terrorists (be they Zionists, the ANC or even Bonhoeffer)". Are "all *those who engage in terror irredeemably evil?*" Another has preached in the past year on "the King David bombing, the murder of the Swedish Count Bernadotte, and the close links of British proconsuls and generals to the YMCA in the world of Lawrence of Arabia". He knows that "Christians cannot disentangle themselves from responsibility for what has happened since".

An Anglican colleague "shudders when he hears reports of bishops speaking in the House of Lords about social issues in Syria or the like" which is absurd. Rather they should "press the government to accept more refugees rather than make some footling speech for the sake of appearances!"

History shows that rarely do we use the "benefit of hindsight", most obviously when it comes to violent conflict. Rather politicians need to talk for "such an attitude is more in keeping with the concept of 'blessed are the peacemakers' than the 'shoot first and ask questions later' approach". Another example might be "the atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 which defined the modern era. How do we deal with these events from the standpoint of faith?" Yet we have "to keep talking, praying, listening, thinking,

linking up, building bridges and forging peace... we also have to remember how Jesus and other prophets, past and present, constantly worked across divisions, war-zones, intellectual, cultural, socio-economic, creedal and racial boundaries to build up humanity”.

Conclusion

One brief response mentioned the cheer felt when a former student confessed that he had included some insights from her church history lectures in his preaching. Another more cynically asked, “Do students believe in preaching, let alone history?” One response wondered whether we are “living in an age that mistrusts truth-claims and particularly historical truth-claims. We are all more unsure than we used to be.” Another obliquely answered the question about politicians learning from history by stating that in our postmodern world “we seem to approach everything as if it were new and thus we seek new responses to each and every situation in the world.” Although the world may never have seen a threat quite like ISIS, it has encountered other similar threats. History helps there. Also, nothing that happens (at least nothing which human beings instigate) in the world today happens in a vacuum; we are where we are because of what has gone before. History should help.

One respondent spoke for many in stating that “for any preacher/theologian it is absolutely essential to understand where the tradition of our faith comes from.... I am convinced that all theology is contextual, ie that it comes out of the questions of its ‘time’ and so understanding the contexts is crucial for understanding the theology. Another way of putting this is to say that God has not retired since the New Testament was written, but continues to influence and relate to human society (continuing revelation). To ignore church (and secular) history is to deny this.

In conclusion, having compiled this study, I feel compelled to state my admiration of many of those who have answered my questions, in some cases with searing honesty. I believe that their congregations do and will gain much from hearing their sermons as they struggle, with feeling and compassion, to address the needs of our day, informed as they seek to be, by scripture and history.

Alan Argent

‘OCCUPYING A PROUD POSITION IN THE CITY’: WINCHESTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN THE EDWARDIAN ERA 1901–14

Introduction

At Winchester Congregational Church’s anniversary celebrations in 1908 the city’s Primitive Methodist minister, the Revd George T Scott, felt moved to observe that Congregationalists occupied a ‘proud position’ in the city.¹ Indeed, it was an indication of the strength of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire that it had been able to sustain a presence in Winchester, with its well established Anglican credentials, since the seventeenth century. Celebrating its 250th anniversary in 1912, Winchester Congregational Church was a prominent feature of the city’s religious landscape. Although the building in Jewry Street, in which Winchester’s Edwardian Congregationalists worshipped, was by no means as grand as the cathedral or some of the Anglican churches, it did validate Nonconformity, in general, and Congregationalism, in particular, as legitimate expressions of Christian belief and practice. Moreover, at the time of its opening in October 1853, it was described in the *Hampshire Chronicle* as being ‘among the finest specimens of architecture which adorn this ancient city.’² While in the *Hampshire Independent* it was reported that:

The new Chapel is of unique design ... It combines lofty elegance with excellent arrangement for a congregation of 800 persons. The warming, lighting and ventilation, has also been accomplished with all modern improvements, in a most successful way. There is a large vestry for week-day services, a retiring room for the minister, and a library. At the rear of the chapel is a noble schoolroom, fitted for the instruction of several hundred children; and above, forming three sides of a quadrangle, are separate residences for the master and mistress, classrooms &c. It is admitted by all observers that, on a somewhat limited space, Mr Poulton, the architect [from Reading], has succeeded in giving, both in effect and accommodation, all that could be desired, and it reflects great credit on him for his professional taste and rare ingenuity.

The total cost of the scheme was expected to be in the region of £4000

1 *Hampshire Chronicle* (hereafter HC) 14 November 1908.

2 HC 15 October 1853.

with about £1300 still having to be raised at that point.³ Over fifty years later, Jewry Street was described as ‘undoubtedly still the handsomest Nonconformist place of worship in the city.’⁴

In this article, the fortunes of Winchester Congregational Church during the Edwardian period are reviewed in terms of the statistical record; the qualities of its ministers; the deacons; the organisations sponsored by the Church; its engagement with the wider community; and relations with the Congregational church in the village of Cheriton, for which it had specific responsibility. Much of the source material comes from local newspapers, especially the *Hampshire Chronicle*, which devoted a considerable amount of copy to the affairs of Jewry Street, another indication of the important role that it played in the religious life of the city. This is supplemented with insights gained from church records.⁵ By focussing on Congregationalism in Winchester it is intended to enrich the broader narratives of the Edwardian era, such as those of Reg Ward, who describes the ‘period between the middle of the nineteenth century and the First World War ... [as] the golden age of Congregationalism;’⁶ Alan Argent, who claims that: ‘The Edwardian years had been full of hope for Congregationalists who had never before enjoyed such power and prestige’;⁷ and R Tudur Jones, who uses the phrase ‘darkening skies’ to describe the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth.⁸ In the light of these assessments, it is legitimate to ask to what extent Winchester’s Edwardian Congregationalists were either optimistic or pessimistic in their outlook.

The Statistical Record

Table 1 has been compiled from data collected by the Hampshire Congregational Union (HCU), for onward transmission to the Congregational Union of England and Wales.

3 *Hampshire Independent* (hereafter HI) 15 October 1853.

4 *Hampshire Observer* (hereafter HO) 21 September 1907.

5 Specifically Winchester Congregational Church Meeting Minutes Books (hereafter WCC Ch Mtg) 1886–1906 Hampshire Record Office (hereafter HRO) 65M77/5 and 1906–1933 HRO 65M77/6; and Deacons Meeting Minute Book (hereafter WCC Dcn Mtg) 1897–1915 HRO 65M77/11.

6 R Ward ‘Professor Clyde Binfield: A Critical Appreciation’ in *Modern Christianity and Cultural Aspirations* (eds) D Bebbington and T Larsen (2003) 16.

7 A Argent *Transformation of Congregationalism* (Nottingham 2013) 79.

8 R T Jones *Congregationalism in England 1662–1962* (1962) 334–342.

Table 1: Membership and Related Data for Winchester Congregational Church 1901–1914

Year	Members		Sunday School	
	No	3 Year Average	Scholars	Teachers
1901	151	149	150	18
1902	165	162	149	18
1903	170	165	140	18
1904	160	163	140	20
1905	160	150	140	20
1906	130	138	130	16
1907	125	128	135	15
1908	130	132	140	18
1909	140	143	135	15
1910	160	153	140	16
1911	160	155	140	16
1912	140	148	140	16
1913	145	145	130	16
1914	149	148	130	16

Notes

- a. Most of the data in this table have been taken from the Yearbooks of the HCU. HRO: 127M54/62/46 to 59.
- b. The three year moving average has been calculated to even out sudden changes in the figures for individual years.
- c. It seems probable that returns for 1905 and 1911 were not submitted with the figures for the preceding year being repeated.
- d. The figures for Cheriton were reported separately (see Table 4).

As can be seen, the nadir of Jewry Street’s fortunes in terms of its Edwardian membership came in 1907. Overall, however, there was no consistent trend, with periods of increase and decrease. From the available information, it is not possible to determine the extent to which the increases were due to evangelistic

activity or decreases to more assiduous reviews of the church roll, with those ceasing to attend being struck off. It is important to remember, however, that the figures in Table 1 are net and do not show the numbers joining or leaving in any year. Even where there is a net decrease, Jewry Street might well have been attracting new members but not in sufficient numbers to offset losses, due to death, transfers and striking off.

While membership trends are an important indicator of a church's fortunes, they by no means provide the complete picture. For example, although a survey of churchgoing was not undertaken in Winchester as it was in some other Hampshire towns during the early years of the twentieth century,⁹ evidence from elsewhere would suggest that congregations greatly exceeded the number of members. Thus, it is likely that for most services, the church was more than half full. Many of those attending would have identified Jewry Street as their church but did not wish to take the ultimate step of becoming a member.

With respect to the Sunday school, numbers remained fairly consistent at around 140. As will be discussed later, work with children and young people had a high priority.

Ministers

As Ruth Godden records, during the last years of the nineteenth century, 'the internal life ... [of Jewry Street] was difficult ... with dissension between minister and deacons, and bitterness marking the resignation of Rev [Charles] Dickinson in 1899.'¹⁰ This assessment is confirmed by Carpenter in his history of the Church which was written to celebrate its tercentenary in 1962:

... the closing years of the [nineteenth] century do not appear to have been particularly happy ones. First, there was a dispute between the diaconate and the choir as to the control of the latter which resulted in the choir resigning en bloc whilst, about a year later, the church organist, who had already been criticised for his 'slovenly and careless way of playing', was dismissed ... worse was still to come, however, for, following a dispute with the deacons as to his method of conducting services, Revd Charles Dickinson himself resigned. At what must have been a stormy church meeting ... when the question of the minister's resignation was discussed, it seemed ... that the diaconate no longer had the confidence of the church and so they too resigned.¹¹

9 These were Basingstoke, Portsmouth and Whitchurch.

10 R Godden 'The Women of Winchester's Chapels 1851-1901' unpublished MA dissertation, University of Winchester (2007). Dickinson was minister of Wareham Congregational Church from 1901 to 1906, when he retired to Thundersley in Essex. He died in 1928.

11 F Carpenter *Winchester Congregational Church Tercentenary 1662-1962* 27-8.

These incidents graphically illustrate some of the problems when disputes arose within Congregational churches, especially those directly involving the minister and the lay leadership. Although external help in resolving differences could be called upon, this contradicted a key principle of Congregationalism, namely the independence of the local church. In this case, however, as far as the deacons were concerned, the matter was quickly resolved, for 'they were ... given an overwhelming vote of confidence at a subsequent Church Meeting and withdrew their resignations'. Moreover, 'the bitterness which marked... Dickinson's departure seems to have been forgotten ... with the passing of years'.¹² As will be seen, from time to time, he returned to preach at the Church in Winchester.

Nonetheless, for the members of Jewry Street, the arrival of a new minister in 1901, the Revd David John from Boston in Lincolnshire, was greeted with some relief. Indeed at his recognition service the church secretary commented that there had been days 'when clouds overshadowed their work ... but happily those dark days had gone.' While the deacon who chaired the public meeting, Charles Goodbody, observed that:

... [John] had already won his way into the affections of the whole of their hearts, and his eloquent and inspiring sermons had given all cause for gratification that such a gentleman had been sent to minister among them (applause).¹³

Two years later another deacon, Henry March Gilbert, spoke of him in the following terms:

... this same God who has been the life and strength of this Church from its earliest times has been gracious to us, and sent us one [i.e. David John] who, by His help, has been enabled to minister to us faithfully from Sabbath to Sabbath—to break the bread of life in such a way that it has been a means of strengthening and helping our higher life, a means of bringing us nearer to God, and to those out of the way an evangel wooing them to the same loving Father, whom as of old, is ready and waiting to welcome the wanderer back to his loving embrace. We are thankful that ... he has been enabled to go in and out amongst the people to be a cheer in time of sickness, a minister of help and comfort in season of sadness and sorrow, and at all times a welcome guest in our homes. We rejoice in the energy and help he has given to all the varied organisations of the church, never wearying in his efforts to do all in his power to promote the best interests of this Church.¹⁴

In his official obituary John's years at Winchester were described as 'happy and fruitful'. It went on:

12 Carpenter *Winchester Congregational Church* 28.

13 HC 30 November 1901.

14 HC 24 October 1903.

Under his thoughtful and earnest ministry large numbers gathered to hear the Word of God. The Church flourished and many needful works were carried through: the Church was renovated, the organ improved, and the schoolroom gradually rebuilt. Mr John's sympathies were wide, and he was ready to lend a helping hand in every possible way.¹

Clearly, his personality was such that the unhappiness surrounding the departure of his predecessor was quickly forgotten.

Alongside his contributions to the life of Jewry Street, John was one of a number of Congregational ministers whose activities extended into the secular sphere. Indeed, it is probable that he made no distinction between the sacred and the secular. This aspect of his ministry was much to the fore at the leaving event held for him in 1906, prior to his departure for Romford Road Congregational Church in Forest Gate. Symbolically, this was chaired by the mayor who commented that:

During the years he had been in Winchester Mr John had not only identified himself closely with the work of that church, but had become a citizen in the widest sense of that word by reason of his interest and work of a public character. In any scheme for the good of the citizens he had always displayed a ready willingness to assist ... They had met at many public meetings, and in many societies, and on all hands he had heard nothing but expressions of cordial appreciation of Mr John's services (applause).²

There were also contributions from various clergymen Anglican, as well as Free Church, thereby highlighting John's ecumenical credentials. As he put it:

He was ... glad to think that he was leaving on good terms with his friends of the Anglican Church. There were occasions upon which all Christians could unite, and if they could forget their controversies they would find that the points of agreement between them infinitely outweighed the points of difference (applause).³

As a member of the Board of Guardians and the City Education Committee, but especially in his dealings with the Discharged Prisoners Aid Society, he had close links with ministers from a variety of churches. For example, in a letter 'Canon Braithwaite testified to the esteem in which he held Mr John, and of the good work he had done' in assisting him at Winchester goal and in the cause of Temperance.⁴ While the prison chaplain, the Revd Robert Dickson Cruickshank, referred to Mr John's earnestness which 'had been a great factor in

1 *Congregational Year Book* (hereafter CYB) (1912) 150.

2 *HC* 12 May 1906.

3 *HC* 12 May 1906.

4 *HI* 12 May 1906.

the success of the work among the young lads (applause).’ John was also active on the Free Church Council with a Baptist minister, the Revd Arthur William Wood, referring to him as ‘a gifted advocate and able officer, a true brother’.⁵

Thus, it is unsurprising that he and his wife were presented, as ‘a farewell token of love and esteem from the Church and congregation at Jewry Street’, with a ‘rosewood inlaid cabinet, built on Sheraton lines, and fitted with twelve silvered plates and cupboards and finished with brass fittings’.⁶

However, notwithstanding all these undoubtedly heartfelt tributes, John’s departure had been precipitated by the financial plight of the Church. As the minutes reveal, in his own words, ‘under ordinary circumstances he would not have considered [the invitation from Romford Road]. But the circumstances were extraordinary. The Church was faced by a grave financial difficulty.’ He went on to say that ‘it was not fair that the Pastor should bear the financial burden.’⁷ He also observed that ‘his going would be a financial salvation to the Church.’ Presumably this was a reference to his stipend. At the time of his appointment, this was £250 per annum, but out of this he had to pay for accommodation since the church did not own a manse. The outcome was that, with profound regret on both sides, it was felt there was no alternative but for John to depart.

Sadly, his long-term potential as a minister was not to be fully realised since five years later he met an untimely death, aged only 39, in a boating accident while on holiday. As an indication of the respect in which he had been held at Jewry Street, the congregation raised £110 to send to the Central David John Memorial Fund set up to assist his widow and children.⁸

For John’s successor, Nicholas Richards, Winchester was his first charge. Although there were reservations on the part of a number of church members, about his relative youth—he was in his late twenties—and consequently whether he had ‘the ability to represent the Church well in the City,’⁹ in the end the decision to offer him the pastorate was unanimous. His stipend was £200 per annum, but with the promise that ‘as finances improve he shall participate in the same.’¹⁰

A Welshman and graduate of New College London, at a meeting held to welcome him he indicated that ‘he was not insensible to the great office, the great dignity, and the great responsibility of the Christian ministry, and he had done his best to measure all the difficulties a minister’s life involved, and he

5 HC 12 May 1906.

6 HC 12 May 1906.

7 WCC Ch Mtg 1886–1906 HRO 65M77/5 316.

8 HC 2 December 1911.

9 WCC Ch Mtg 1906–1933 HRO 65M77/6 5.

10 WCC Ch Mtg 1906–1933 HRO 65M77/6 9.

prayed that God's help would be upon his ministry at Winchester.¹¹ At his ordination service held in November 1907 a college friend, the Revd William John Coates, who was the new minister of Skinner Road Congregational Church in Poole, congratulated Jewry Street:

... upon having chosen such a man as Mr Richards to be their minister and said that from his own knowledge of him he knew they would have reason to be glad all along the line that they had such a man among them.¹²

Notwithstanding this accolade, Richards only remained in Winchester for three years before accepting 'a call to be the first minister of the new church at Palmer's Green', where his 15 year ministry was described as 'notable'.¹³

Despite the brevity of his pastorate, Richards undoubtedly made his mark at Winchester. At his farewell gathering in 1910 there were tributes and expressions of regret although a recognition that 'he would have a wider sphere and greater opportunities for doing useful work in London than he had in Winchester.' With respect to his contributions locally, reference was made to (a) the fact that 'he had been very much sought after for anniversary sermons and gatherings'; (b) his outspokenness on the [unspecified] 'great moral questions of the day'; (c) his defence of 'the Free Churches with eloquence, courage, conviction, and courtesy'; and (d) his 'striking sermons.' In his reply, Richards observed, somewhat dramatically, that:

When he came [to Winchester] he was opposed root and branch to the Church of England, and its clergy, but he had now seen another side, and some of the clergymen he had met were some of the finest men he had ever known (applause). He had also been ... [able] to see how great an organisation the Church of England was, how many strong points and excellent features it had, and how well adapted it was for the work to which it was called.

Moreover, although 'Liberalism was in his very blood' during his time in Winchester 'he had been enabled to see something of what true Conservatism meant.'

Clearly, the ecclesiastical and political culture of Winchester had had a profound effect on Richard's views. Nonetheless, he left the city 'as much of a Nonconformist as when he came (applause), and a stronger Liberal than when he came (applause).'¹⁴ His leaving gifts were a roll-top desk and a fountain pen.¹⁵

Again, however, it is clear that behind the scenes all was not well and that

¹¹ *HC* 7 September 1907.

¹² *HC* 23 November 1907.

¹³ *CYB* (1958) 427.

¹⁴ *HC* 30 July 1910.

¹⁵ *HI* 30 July 1910.

Richards had been minded to accept the call to Palmer's Green 'owing to want of enthusiasm in the meetings at Jewry Street.'¹⁶ What prompted this rather enigmatic statement is not known but it suggests, at the very least, a degree of frustration on his part. In the circumstances, it is perhaps unsurprising that following Richards' departure, Jewry Street was without a minister for an exceptionally long time of two and half years.

During this period there were two failed attempts to secure a replacement for Richards. The first was a unanimous invitation in the spring of 1911 to the Revd Alfred John Brown of Bury St Edmunds. His stipend was to be £190 per annum but with the promise of an increase when finances permitted. He initially accepted but then withdrew. The reason would appear to have been the higher cost of rented property in Winchester compared with Bury St Edmunds.¹⁷ The second attempt came in the summer of 1912 when the Revd Griffith Evans of Swansea was unanimously invited. However, he declined on the grounds that 'his own people had made such strong representations to him of his obligation to them that he felt it impossible to leave his present church.'¹⁸ Other potential candidates, such as the Revd Edgar Mann and the Revd James Levitt, divided opinion amongst church members so no invitation was made.

Eventually, Jewry Street secured the services of the Revd Albert Hawes from Cheadle Hulme, who was appointed in late 1912 on an initial stipend of £225. He commenced his ministry in February 1913 as the church's third Edwardian minister. Like his predecessor, Hawes' pastorate was to be a relatively short one of about four years.¹⁹ Interestingly, one of the visiting speakers at his recognition service, the Revd William Garrett Horder from Ealing, observed that:

... Cathedral cities ... [were] places where buildings seemed to exist more for the purpose of preserving history, as shown in the different types of architecture, and for demonstrating the beauties of choral music, than anything else. Mr Hawes had come to work in a cathedral city, and he congratulated him but he thought he would find his work more difficult, in a certain sense, than in a manufacturing town such as he had left.²⁰

It is also noteworthy, that a speaker from his previous church referred to the

16 WCC Ch Mtg 1906-1933 HRO 65M77/6 44.

17 WCC Ch Mtg 1906-1933 HRO 65M77/6 67.

18 WCC Ch Mtg 1906-1933 HRO 65M77/6 95.

19 In his official obituary it is recorded that in 1917 'he resigned his pastorate to take up work of national importance in the Bank of England.' Although he never returned to full-time ministry, 'he continued to exercise his earnest and thoughtful ministry as a supply preacher for many years.' *CYB* (1956) 514.

20 *HC* 22 February 1913.

‘great support given him by’ his wife.²¹ Hawes concluded his address by saying that ‘they would go forward with the work, hoping, by the help of God, and by mutual cooperation and loyalty to the Christian ideal, that good days were in store for that church, and that from it there would go forth an influence which would be felt by the whole community.’²² At the 1913 anniversary meeting the church secretary commented that since Hawes’ arrival in January of that year ‘he had gained increasing respect and affection.’²³ Perhaps in view of earlier difficulties, the critical nature of the relationship between the minister and wider membership was something to which church secretaries frequently referred at church anniversary meetings. Thus, in 1914 he stressed that the minister ‘needed their prayers, their loyal love, and their practical co-operation to make ... [the] ministry successful.’²⁴ Although these remarks were directed at the church as a whole they had a particular resonance for his colleagues on the diaconate. Even at the time of David John’s departure the minutes of the last deacons’ meeting he attended record that:

... [he] expressed his sorrow at parting, and said how amicably we had worked together during his ministry—all the deacons spoke in warm terms of their affection for the Pastor and in appreciation of the good work he had accomplished in the church and city.²⁵

Deacons

Deacons were, of course, crucial to the effective running of Congregational churches. In serving as lay leaders and assisting the minister with the conduct of church business, they had a vital role to perform. Moreover, when a church was without a minister, which could be for lengthy periods, as was the case at Jewry Street between the departure of Nicholas Richards and the arrival of Albert Hawes, they had to ensure that the pulpit was supplied Sunday by Sunday. In addition, they had to arrange for prospective ministers to preach ‘with a view’, thereby providing church members with opportunities for assessing their suitability for the pastorate.

To ensure that Jewry Street deacons had the respect and confidence of church members, it was necessary for them to secure two-thirds of the votes cast in elections for the diaconate, as opposed to a simple majority. This could

21 For a detailed discussion of the role of ministers’ wives, see R Ottewill ‘The Woman of the Manse: Recognising the Contribution of the Wives of Congregational Pastors in Edwardian Hampshire’ *Congregational History Society Magazine* 6(6) (2012) 309–18.

22 HC 22 February 1913.

23 HC 29 November 1913

24 HC 14 November 1914.

25 WCC Dcn Mtg 1897–1915 HRO 65M77/11 1 May 1906.

prove to be a difficult hurdle to surmount and consequently, from time to time, the church was without its full complement of deacons. Moreover, within the diaconate personality clashes were not unknown and these could, at times, give rise to difficulties.

The composition of the diaconate in 1901 together with socio-demographic information about each member is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Winchester Congregational Church Deacons in 1901

Name	Age	Occupation	Address	Servants
Edward Couzens ²	57	Taylor and outfitter	23 & 24, High Street	1
Henry March Gilbert ¹	55	Bookseller	1, Grafton Road	1
Charles H. Goodbody	56	Registrar of marriages	38, Sussex Street	0
Henry D. Johnson ¹	39	Grocer	107, High Street	2

Notes

1. Joint Church Secretaries

2. Financial Secretary.

Servants = number of live-in servants

Sources: WCC Ch Mtg 1886–1906. Hampshire Record Office (hereafter HRO) Ref 65M77/5; 1901 Census Returns and Kelly’s Directory

Not surprisingly, given that Congregationalists tended to be drawn from the middle classes, the deacons all had relatively high status occupations and in three cases sufficient income to enable the employment of live-in servants.

In terms of Hampshire Congregationalism more broadly, by far the most eminent of Winchester’s deacons was Henry March Gilbert. He was Chairman of the HCU for the year 1907/8, having previously been President of the Federation of the Evangelical Free Churches of Hampshire for the year 1898/9. At his funeral service in 1931 the then minister of Jewry Street, the Revd Richard Sirhowy Jones, described him as ‘a deeply religious man, not flagrantly obtrusive of his religious profession, but he was not ashamed of his religion; he did not hide his light’ and mentioned that he had been ‘a leading member of Winchester Congregational Church for more than half a century, and had held office as Church Secretary, Treasurer and Trustee.’²⁶ While, in the church minutes it was recorded that ‘every institution of the Church found in him a

²⁶ HC 31 January 1931.

real friend and generous helper, for he always had at heart the best interests of the Church.²⁷ Arguably, his principal contribution during the Edwardian era was the provision of much needed continuity within the diaconate.²⁸

Apart from Gilbert, by 1911 there was a completely new set of deacons (see Table 3).

Table 3: Winchester Congregational Church Deacons in 1911

Name	Age	Occupation	Address	Servants
Henry Boorer	45	Foreman, nurseryman	16, King Alfred Terrace	0
Arthur C. Bunch	32	Architectural assistant	Not known	n.k.
Rowland C. Carter	43	Railway carrier's agent	75, Hyde Street	0
William Rustell East ¹	36	Furniture dealer's assistant	17, Jewry Street	0
Henry M. Gilbert ¹	65	Bookseller	Grafton Road	1
Edwin B. Holdaway ²	28	Caterer's assistant	St Andrew's, Petersfield Rd	0
George Read ³	60	Relieving officer	34, Colebrook Street	0

Notes

1. Church Secretary. In April Gilbert resigned from the offices of deacon and Church Secretary to be replaced by East.

2. Financial Secretary.

3. Resigned in the spring of 1911.

Servants = number of live-in servants

Sources: WCC Ch Mtg 1906–1933. HRO Ref 65M77/6; 1911 *Census Returns* and *Kelly's Directory*

²⁷ WCC Ch Mtg 1906–1933 HRO 65M77/6 489.

²⁸ For further information about the life and career of Henry March Gilbert see R. Ottewill 'Henry March Gilbert 1846–1931: Staunch Liberal and Nonconformist' *The Journal of the Southampton Local History Forum* No 22 (2014) 11–18.

Interestingly, in terms of their social standing, Gilbert excepted, the deacons of 1911 appear to have had somewhat more modest backgrounds than those of ten years earlier. Moreover, they tended to be younger. That said, between them, they undoubtedly possessed a variety of skills and competences which could be used to the advantage of the Church.

Church Life and Organisations

Worship was, of course, at the heart of Jewry Street's ministry, with the form and tone of the regular Sunday services and those for special occasions, such as Easter and Harvest, reflecting the traditions of the denomination as well as contemporary trends. Thus, they were relatively simple by comparison with the more elaborate liturgy associated with many Anglican churches in the city. However, services were enlivened with music led by the organist and choir and by exhilarating and thought provoking sermons. Not surprisingly, all three Edwardian ministers were, in their different ways, inspiring preachers. David John had acquired 'a fine reputation as a preacher' at his previous church.²⁹ Nicholas Richards was a philosopher, with a poetic temperament and a great gift of imagination as well as being a man of conviction and 'these qualities, moved by the peculiar Celtic temperament, made him a preacher great in every sense of the word'.³⁰ Lastly, Albert Hawes' sermons were described as being of 'a high order'.³¹

Each year, one of the principal events in the Church's calendar was the celebration of its foundation. Jewry Street Congregationalists held their anniversaries in October/November, with special services on the designated Sunday and a tea and public meeting during the following week. Usually there was a visiting preacher of some repute, including the Revd Arthur Pringle of Caterham in 1902; the Revd Ieuan Maldwyn Jones of Albion Congregational Church, Southampton, in 1905; the Revd Professor Herbert Tom Andrews of New and Hackney College in 1906; the Revd Thomas Nicholson of Paddington Chapel, London, in 1910; and the Revd William Justin Evans of Bromley in 1911. As elsewhere, anniversary celebrations served to showcase the church's achievements and to foreground the challenges ahead. In 1903 the church celebrated the golden jubilee of the opening of the building in Jewry Street. At the public meeting, Henry March Gilbert delivered what was described as a 'very excellent address ... upon the history of the church.'³²

29 *CYB* (1912) 150.

30 *HC* 30 July 1910.

31 *CYB* (1956) 514.

32 *HC* 24 October 1903.

In 1904, David John sought to inspire his audience by relating the past to the present:

People sometimes lamented that the good old-fashioned days had passed away, but they did not go back far enough. The good old days were the days of heroism, when men of faith endured hardships and persecutions for their religion. We need to revive our sense of spiritual kinship with them. There is a call to-day for the use of the same fine spiritual temper—to fight, to suffer for the pure faith and a free church. “The best was yet to be—the last for which the first was made.”³³

Eight years later, in 1912, an even more significant anniversary was that celebrating 250 years since the founding of the church in 1662.³⁴ Indeed, at the service on the Sunday morning of the celebrations ‘the Mayor and Corporation attended in state, at the invitation of the church officers.’³⁵ Their presence served to confirm that Congregationalism was now firmly entrenched in the civic culture of the city.

Although many of the speakers made references to the past in terms of both the religious discord which had contributed to the Great Ejection of 1662 and its aftermath, and the challenges faced by Nonconformists, they were keen to reflect the prevailing mood regarding inter-church relations. Thus the Revd George Ernest Darlston of Crouch End ended his sermon on Sunday morning by exhorting the congregation to:

Strive for that state of mind which refused to doubt the honour of the opposing party, and for the mutual respect, which allowed all to live in the light that was within them. Then they would find that they were not, after all, opposing parties, but units in the great army of Christ, presenting a common front against the common foe, which was selfishness, indifference, mammon worship, and all forms of sin.

While in a sermon delivered on the following Thursday afternoon the Revd Thomas Rhondda Williams of Union Chapel, Brighton, argued that:

There was a need for pioneer work in religion, so that the religion of the world should be more catholic, less narrow and sectarian than it was today; the religion of mankind needed to be as wide as the needs of man, and as ample as the love of God.

On Thursday evening the Revd Charles Dickinson was in the chair—another indication that he had been forgiven for the difficulties mentioned

³³ *HC* 29 October 1904.

³⁴ *HC* 24 October 1912.

³⁵ *HC* 24 October 1912.

earlier. He was even less sectarian in his remarks and commented that they were by no means ‘antagonistic towards the Church of England’. Indeed there was much in the Church ‘which they appreciated ... and in which they rejoiced.’

Lastly, the Revd William Miles of Buckland Congregational Church in Portsmouth asserted that: ‘God’s message to the Christian people of England now was that they should celebrate the memory of ... dead heroes [of the faith] not so much by engraving their names in marble as by living their lives, catching their inspiration, copying their virtues and so serving God in our own time as they did in theirs.’³⁶

Interestingly, Charles Dickinson again returned, along with Nicholas Richards, to preach and speak at the 1914 celebrations.³⁷ The former conducted special services on the Sunday and the latter spoke at the Thursday meeting on the subject of “Fellowship”. Given that the anniversary was taking place in the early months of the First World War, Richards argued that:

... the Christian Church must concern herself with the emotions evoked by the war. They wanted to continue to realise their fellowship, to make it effective in living service, humanitarian, generous in thought and action, and supremely in being prepared to sacrifice to the last their principles for that which was right and good.³⁸

Complementing the services and anniversaries, Jewry Street maintained a range of associated organisations which were formed, in the words of the church secretary at the 1908 anniversary celebrations, ‘to promote the well-being of the Church and the welfare of its members.’³⁹ Their range and variety were spelt out by the church secretary at the 1911 celebrations:

May we ask for your most loyal support in sustaining the various institutions of our Church life? Our desire is that they may become increasingly helpful to an increasingly larger number who shall find a spiritual home within this sanctuary. Every day something is being undertaken which calls for ungrudging service and sympathetic co-operation. On Sunday the services of the Church, the Sunday School and the Young Men’s Bible Class. On Monday the Young People’s Society. On Tuesday the Ladies’ Working Meeting, Band of Hope, and Literary Society. On Wednesday the devotional service. Thursday, the Girls Guild. On Friday the choir practice. On Saturday the lads’ institute.⁴⁰

Some of the activities were social and recreational, rather than spiritual,

36 HC 24 October 1912.

37 HC 14 November 1914.

38 HC 14 November 1914.

39 HC 14 November 1908.

40 HC 2 December 1911.

in nature, thereby reflecting the influence of the doctrine of the institutional church.

As can be seen, particular attention was given to work with children and young people. Here the Sunday school had a key role to play along with the Band of Hope, the principal temperance organisation, and for a number of years a branch of Christian Endeavour and Bible classes. The importance of such organisations was frequently stressed at anniversary meetings, as were the challenges involved in sustaining them. For example, at the 1905 anniversary the church secretary praised the fact that 'they had received something like 14 members of the Sunday School into the church'.⁴¹ While in 1907 at the Monday evening anniversary meeting, Nicholas Richards devoted almost the whole of his address to 'the religious education of the young.' As he pointed out:

... the children of today were the men and women of tomorrow, and that if they had the children they also had their Church secured to them. He [therefore] appealed for more helpers in Sunday School work and urged upon teachers the sacredness of their charge, and the necessity of educating themselves for its proper fulfilment.⁴²

The critical role of teachers was again highlighted in 1909 in remarks made at a presentation to one of the leading figures in the Sunday school, Mr Bunch, on the occasion of his marriage. As the church secretary observed, 'his influence among the young had been very great ... in training them to walk in good paths.'⁴³ However, the recruitment of teachers remained an ongoing challenge. In 1913, for example, the church secretary bemoaned the fact that one result of the loss of members through death and removal 'was that the Sunday school was in urgent need of fresh teachers.'⁴⁴

For adults a particularly influential organisation was the Jewry Street Literary and Social Union, with Henry March Gilbert as its President. This was one of the legacies of Nicholas Richards' pastorate. As Gilbert put it, at Richards' farewell gathering, he had 'been instrumental in founding a really first-class Literary Society at Jewry Street.'⁴⁵ As its title suggests, this was committed to the cause of what today would be called adult education.

There was also a Ladies' Sewing Meeting (renamed the Ladies' Working Meeting) which, as reported at the 1904 anniversary celebrations, 'had given them much financial help'.⁴⁶ While in 1911, 'with their usual generosity', the

⁴¹ HC 21 October 1905.

⁴² HC 23 November 1907.

⁴³ HC 27 November 1909.

⁴⁴ HC 14 November 1914.

⁴⁵ HC 30 July 1910.

⁴⁶ HC 29 October 1904.

Meeting made a donation of £10 to help clear an accumulated deficit on the church accounts.⁴⁷ In the same year, the ladies also committed themselves ‘to raise £25 annually to be allocated towards the pastor’s salary.’⁴⁸ As these references indicate, the principal task of this organisation was the production of items that could be sold at fund raising events, such as bazaars and sales of work.

These were required to meet not only regular outgoings but also the cost of capital projects, such as the major work of renovation undertaken in 1905 which disrupted both services and the operation of the Sunday school.⁴⁹ Repairs to the roof, lantern and hall were required, at a cost of approximately £1200, and to the organ, at a cost of £300.⁵⁰ It was this expense that contributed to the grave financial situation that prompted the departure of David John.

Wider Community

As has been indicated, by the Edwardian era Winchester’s Congregationalists were no longer outsiders, as they had been in the past, but fully integrated with the wider community. This took a variety of forms. Some of them were individual initiatives, such as David John’s involvement with various public and voluntary bodies and Henry March Gilbert who served on the borough council and local bench of magistrates.⁵¹ Likewise, in 1911, it was pointed out that the new mayor, Councillor Frederick W Holdaway ‘had practically all his life identified with the Congregational cause in Winchester.’⁵²

Another mode of community engagement was through the organisations which the church sponsored, such as the Literary and Social Union. Membership was not restricted to those linked to the church and such organisations were regarded by some as a means of outreach.

The church also engaged with the wider community through its fund raising activities. For example, the ‘great event of ... [1906] was [a] Japanese bazaar’ held in the Guildhall, with the church secretary acknowledging ‘the assistance they had received from members of the Established Church, and the citizens generally, who showed them much kindness, while their sympathetic help would be long remembered by them.’⁵³

Within the wider community of Congregationalists, Jewry Street was of sufficient size and standing to host the spring meetings of the HCU in 1906. These served as opportunities for both spiritual and administrative intercourse,

47 HC 2 December 1911.

48 WCC Ch Mtg 1906–1933 HRO 65M77/6 78.

49 HC 21 October 1905.

50 Carpenter *Winchester Congregational Church* 29–30.

51 Ottewill ‘Henry March Gilbert’ 11–18.

52 HC 2 December 1911.

53 HC 17 November 1906. Approximately £370 was raised.

with ‘the syllabus of the proceedings ... [incorporating] meetings for devotional and business purposes.’⁵⁴ Over 200 attended, from all parts of the county, and ‘the pleasures of the visit to the city were added to by the kind and thoughtful invitation of the Hon. and Rev. Canon Brodrick, Master of St Cross, ... to look over that historic building.’ Members of Jewry Street were praised for their hospitality and the meetings were marked by a spirit of ‘devotion and reverence.’ Delegates heard addresses on a range of subjects from “A young Congregationalist’s heritage” to the aims and objects of the Union, including the difficulties of sustaining work in the villages.⁵⁵ The latter was of particular relevance to the members of Jewry Street, because, as mentioned in the Introduction, during the Edwardian era they had a close relationship with the Congregational cause in the village of Cheriton.

Cheriton

The site of a famous Civil War battle, Cheriton is seven miles east of Winchester and two and half miles south of New Alresford. In 1901 the civil parish had a population of 621 and ten years later, 690. Not surprisingly most of the males of working age were engaged in agriculture, the chief products being ‘wheat, oats and green crops.’⁵⁶

According to the HCU Yearbook, the Congregational cause in the village was established in 1868. One source indicates that the chapel in which Congregationalists worshipped was erected in that year⁵⁷—a number of websites, however, give the year as 1862.⁵⁸ It had seating for 150 worshippers. The chapel was situated near the centre of the village and shared its Christian witness with the parish church of St Michael’s.

As the data in Table 4 confirm, the number of members and Sunday school scholars was relatively small, which was only to be expected given the size of the village. Nonetheless, they were indicative of the appeal of Nonconformity even in the more rural parts of Hampshire. In a similar manner to many other rural causes, Cheriton received financial support from the HCU to assist with its running costs. This amounted to £20 per annum. In return, the church was required to provide annual reports and additional statistics, which suggest that congregations were two to three times larger than membership figures alone might suggest.

⁵⁴ *HC* 28 April 1906.

⁵⁵ *HC* 28 April 1906.

⁵⁶ *Kelly’s Directory of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight 1907* 134.

⁵⁷ *Kelly’s Hampshire and IoW 1907* 134.

⁵⁸ See, for example, www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2591876 and www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/hants/vol3/pp311-314 [accessed 2 February 2017].

Table 4: Membership and Related Data for Cheriton Congregational Church 1901–1914

Year	Members		Sunday School	
	No	3 Year Average	Scholars	Teachers
1901	12	18	24	5
1902	12	12	40	3
1903	12	15	40	5
1904	22	19	46	5
1905	22	21	46	5
1906	20	21	40	4
1907	20	20	40	4
1908	20	18	42	4
1909	16	17	29	5
1910	16	15	29	5
1911	12	15	25	5
1912	16	14	29	4
1913	15	15	20	4
1914	15	15	20	4

Notes

- a. Most of the data in this table have been taken from the Yearbooks of the HCU. HRO: 127M54/62/46 to 59.
- b. The three year moving average has been calculated to even out sudden changes in the figures for individual years.

In their annual reports, there are frequent references to the help Cheriton Congregationalists received from Winchester. In 1901 it was reported that: ‘The relationship of this Church with that of Winchester, by which it is worked, is of [a] happy character, and the members are well pleased with the preachers who take the services’;⁵⁹ in 1902: ‘The Church at Winchester carries on this work ... [which] presents many pleasing features, and our friends find much cause for gratitude’;⁶⁰ in 1903: ‘The Church at Winchester has continued

⁵⁹ *Annual Report of the Hampshire Congregational Union* (hereafter *Ann Rep HCU*) (1901) HRO 127M94/62/46.

⁶⁰ *Ann Rep HCU* (1902) HRO 127M94/62/47.

its labours at Cheriton’;⁶¹ in 1905: ‘Our friends at Winchester are kindly continuing the oversight of the Church here’;⁶² in 1906: ‘... the results of the ordinary preaching services, conducted by the Church at Winchester, as well as those of special services, have been to increase the interest in the work and strengthen many in their faith’;⁶³ in 1907: ‘The Rev N. Richards has visited us once or twice since his settlement at Winchester, and his Ministry has been much appreciated’;⁶⁴ in 1908: ‘The Church is grateful for the help which the Rev. N. Richards and the Winchester friends have given through the year’;⁶⁵ and in 1913: ‘The work carried on efficiently under the superintendence of the Church at Winchester.’⁶⁶ However, at Jewry Street’s anniversary gathering in 1914 the church secretary reported that the ‘Cheriton Church, for which they had been responsible for the past fifteen years, had now been united with the Alresford Church, but although this relieved ... [them] of some responsibility, they had promised to help at Cheriton as much as they could.’⁶⁷

Conclusion

Although the difficulties Jewry Street had experienced at the turn of the twentieth century were resolved and it was able to recruit a succession of competent ministers during the Edwardian era, it is reasonable to suggest that the church was not entirely at ease with itself. One indication of this was that although, in public, ministers departed on good terms, the minutes of church meetings confirm that difficulties, including those of a financial nature, played a part in their decision to leave. Another was the fact that candidates for the diaconate sometimes struggled to secure the two thirds majority they needed.

However, as was mentioned by Mr J T Hamilton of Southampton in his remarks at the 1907 Monday evening anniversary meeting:

Cathedral cities were not supposed to be the very best kind of places for the Free Churches to flourish in, but he was certain that they were the most necessary of all places for their work (applause).⁶⁸

Thus, Winchester Congregational Church had a valuable contribution to make to the religious life of the city and despite the challenges it faced, in

61 *Ann Rep HCU* (1903) HRO 127M94/62/48.

62 *Ann Rep HCU* (1905) HRO 127M94/62/49.

63 *Ann Rep HCU* (1906) HRO 127M94/62/50.

64 *Ann Rep HCU* (1907) HRO 127M94/62/51.

65 *Ann Rep HCU* (1908) HRO 127M94/62/52.

66 *Ann Rep HCU* (1913) HRO 127M94/62/57.

67 *HC* 14 November 1914. For the links with Alresford see R Ottewill ‘Congregationalism in Edwardian Alresford 1901–1914’ *Alresford Articles* No.6 (2016) 47

68 *HC* 23 November 1907.

particular the debt burden which had reached £1350 by 1911,⁶⁹ it continued to afford a vibrant spiritual home for those who appreciated its preaching and musical ministries. In a review of the Nonconformist churches of Winchester published in 1907 it was described as a 'live' church, with a plethora of organisations using its premises. Moreover,

The vigour of the work is second to none in the city, and it is a matter of congratulation that those who are most engaged in the work for their own [Congregational] cause are to be found hand in hand with those of other sects and creeds working for the best welfare of the ancient city of Winchester.⁷⁰

Thus, any pessimism which might have surfaced from time to time was offset by the high regard in which Congregationalism was held in Winchester, not only within Free Church circles but also more widely.

In addition, it is worthy of note that the building in Jewry Street still continues to be used. Today it is home to the United Church, Winchester, which combines the traditions of Congregationalism and Methodism within the city.

Roger Ottewill

69 WCC Ch Mtg 1906–1933 HRO 65M77/6 61.

70 HO 21 September 1907.

BOOKS WHICH MAY INTEREST CHS MAGAZINE READERS:

Selected from Congregational Federation publications available in 2017. Order form at: www.congregational.org.uk/downloads/forms/publications-order-form-2017.pdf

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

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

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

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

REVIEWS

Bad Queen Bess? Libels, Secret Histories, and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I. By Peter Lake. Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp xii + 497. Hardback £35. ISBN 978-0-19-875399-5

Peter Lake is Professor of the History of Christianity at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. He is a distinguished scholar of early modern England and its religion. Here in this work, with its deliberately teasing title, he draws on the work of the Protestant Patrick Collinson to whom he acknowledges “a very considerable, and more or less lifelong, intellectual debt”. Lake in this book attempts to take seriously what Catholics were saying about themselves and the world from the 1560s to the 1590s. As its subtitle indicates, he examines some of the literature published by Catholics opposed to the Protestant settlement of Elizabeth I and the replies made to it from the government side. His study then is of the secret manoeuvres of political agents, driven by the will to power, money, advantage and status, rather than by a commitment to “the causes of true religion and the commonweal”. That is he explores the world of publicity and mostly printed propaganda (but sometimes manuscript tracts) to see how effective the government and its opponents were in managing the rumours, truths, half-truths and lies of Elizabeth’s reign. This is the stuff of television history and drama and of numerous historical novels.

Lake’s book is not an exercise in Catholic history but rather political history. However he considers the extent and strength of English Catholicism at that time and reminds his readers that the triumph of Protestantism was by no means assured until well into the queen’s reign which fact contemporaries on both sides of the confessional divide understood. Indeed, given the slow realisation that Elizabeth would not marry, the Protestant state was extremely fragile with the possibility of a Catholic acceding to the throne ever present. Whilst applauding Collinson’s insightful researches, Lake criticises him for only seeing things from a Protestant point of view. He uses the phrase “libellous secret history” to describe the kind of fake news used by both sides, each alleging clandestine action by the other’s political agents dishonourably motivated by profit and power rather than religion.

This book emerges from six Ford lectures given by Lake but here expanded beyond the death of Mary, Queen of Scots and the Armada to the 1590s. He arranges his material into seven sections, ‘The Marian Movement’, ‘The Catholic Loyalist Movement’, ‘Burghley’s Commonwealth’, ‘Rogue States and

Universal Monarchs’, ‘The Regicidal Moment’, ‘Resistance and Compromise?’ and ‘Ripostes and Replies’, with each section comprising two or three chapters.

As Lake asserts, it is a commonplace that in the post-Reformation period politics and religion were inextricably linked. By charting the ideological struggle between the regime and its allies and the Catholic opposition, he reveals the murky underbelly of late Tudor politics. All was not well in the England of Elizabeth as Lake amply demonstrates. Yet his careful analysis requires the reader to concentrate hard as he guides him/her through the “back and forth” suspicions, intrigues and conspiracies of the day. Although England is central to his concerns, his net stretches to Ireland, Scotland and the continent.

The absence of a bibliography mars this work of almost 500 pages. Yet Lake shows his scholarly debts in both text and footnotes. This helpful work is of great originality and, though not for the faint-hearted, it is a must for the serious student of the Elizabethan world.

***John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat.* By Crawford Gribben. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp xiv + 401. Hardback £47.99. ISBN 978-0-019-979815-5**

Crawford Gribben is a cultural and literary historian, and is currently professor at Queen’s University, Belfast. He is particularly interested in the development of religious ideas, especially in apocalyptic and millennial thinking both in puritanism and evangelicalism, and has continuing interests in Milton’s theology, Calvinism in early modern Europe, the history of Dublin, and evangelicalism in America, among other concerns. In short he is an accomplished and prolific scholar with extraordinarily broad expertise. John Owen, therefore, was bound to come into his field and, since Peter Toon’s study of Owen’s correspondence (1970) and his life (1971), some significant studies have appeared including Tim Cooper’s *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (2011), Carl Trueman’s *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (2007) and Mark Jones’ edition of the *Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology* (2015). Gribben acknowledges his intellectual debt to these and to Sarah Gibbard Cook and Richard Greaves (the latter wrote Owen’s entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*). Therefore the time is ripe for a critical and substantial biography, especially as last year marked the 400th anniversary of Owen’s birth.

John Owen (1616–1683) was the leading minister among the Congregational divines at and after the Restoration of 1660, having been prominent in the ecclesiastical and political life of the Commonwealth. He had come to the fore at the New Model Army’s siege of Colchester in 1648 and travelled to Ireland with the army as chaplain to Cromwell. Owen was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford 1652–1657. In 1663 he was living in London near Moorgate and often met with Thomas Goodwin, his fellow Congregationalist. He was indicted

for holding “unlawful assemblies for religious worship” in 1664/5 but was not imprisoned and later was preaching in Moorfields and Hackney. In 1669 he was advising a mixed church of Independents and Baptists at Hitchin, Hertfordshire. By 1673 he was pastor of a gathered church in Leadenhall Street, London, but was informed against in 1678. In 1683 he was presented at Guildhall Sessions for holding a conventicle but died later that year. Like many other dissenters before and after him, he was buried in Bunhill Fields.

Over the years Owen’s importance has not been questioned by historians and theologians. Indeed he left behind him a prodigious quantity of writings (eight and a half million words) most of which The Banner of Truth Trust published some years ago. Yet, despite the praise of conservative evangelicals, Congregationalists have not rushed to read Owen and few genuine admirers have been found in their midst in the last century. Gribben allows that Owen is a “challenging writer”. Congregational historians, like F J Powicke and Geoffrey Nuttall, have rather warmed to Richard Baxter who seems more human than Owen whom Nuttall described as “strangely elusive”. That is Owen’s intellectual stature is not in question and Congregationalists remain proud of his achievements but have been more likely to write on Baxter, the “meer Catholic”, who worshipped when he could in the parish churches and had been offered, yet refused, a bishopric.

Then what should we make of Owen? Crawford Gribben offers a “religious and theological biography” which depicts Owen as able to adapt to the changed environment in which he found himself after 1660—note his subtitle *Experiences of Defeat*—yet concentrates on his work in the 1640s, 1650s and early 1660s. In truth Owen left little which tells us of his family background, forcing the scholar to focus on his ideas. His first chapter “Apprentice Puritan” sets the scene of “uneasy conformity” into which Owen was born and educated. Later chapters detail his emergence as a theologian, his work as a “Frustrated Pastor”, as an army preacher, an Oxford reformer, a Cromwellian courtier, and a defeated revolutionary. The final two chapters address his life as a “Restoration Politique” and a nonconformist divine. If he had experienced defeat often, his funeral was a grand public occasion, with perhaps 67 carriages of noblemen and gentlemen in attendance.

Gribben sees Owen as “extraordinary”, the leader of “a marginalized community that refused to admit defeat, the intellectual father of the evangelical movement that would emerge in the 1730s to dominate global Christianity, and a seminal contributor to discussions about the religious condition of modernity”. In this latter respect, although Owen was the heir of the medieval scholastic tradition, he was also deeply but critically interested in republicanism.

The author writes confidently and convincingly, persuading the reader to trust his authority. This readable biography helps to rescue Owen from

the relative obscurity into which he had fallen. Yet through Gribben's concentration on Owen he explains much of the culture and character of the world around him. Certainly Gribben shows that Owen was a seminal and profound theologian, "the genius of English Puritanism—its preeminent thinker" through whom we may see wider complexities of faith and politics during the Commonwealth and Restoration. For this he is to be congratulated.

Alan Argent

***The Textual Culture of English Protestant Dissent 1720–1800.* By Tessa Whitehouse. Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp xiii + 250. Hardback £55. ISBN 978-0-19-871784-3**

This book arose out of Tessa Whitehouse's postgraduate studies, much of which were carried out among the archives at Dr Williams's Library. It centres on the literary achievements of the circle of nonconformists principally associated with Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge. As she explains, her book is about "the textual, social, and pedagogical means by which a group of Protestant dissenters ... sought to develop a reputation of candour, moderation, and learning for their community". Candour, a marvellous 18th century word, means here generous openness. They wished, even at that time, to avoid being caricatured as "'strict Dissenters' by the world at large". Clearly they enjoyed some success in this regard, although stereotypes often display an ability to re-assert themselves despite the facts. As "authors, educators, and editors" these men, among whom were John Jennings, Philip Doddridge, Job Orton, Andrew Kippis, and Caleb Ashworth, helped influence, and emerged from, the dissenting academies which themselves proved "crucial to the development of this textual, educational culture". For these men and Samuel Clark, senior and junior, Mercy Doddridge, Philip Furneaux, Thomas Greaves, David Jennings, Nathaniel Neal, Samuel Palmer, Benjamin Sowden, Thomas Stedman and James Stonhouse, Whitehouse supplies an appendix of biographical notes.

Watts was not an academy tutor but wrote much that was important to both tutors and students. His *Logick, The Art of Reading and Writing English* and *The Knowledge of the Heavens and Earth made Easy*, among other works, rendered him "a leading pedagogue of the period". Although Watts and Doddridge were "highly significant religious authors" an understanding of their roles in "educational, religious, and cultural life within and beyond the dissenting world" requires some consideration of "the activities of their friends". Whitehouse sees this network as an "associative, supportive community whose members strove to combine social action and intellectual endeavour". In this, the younger men read books written by the older men and were lectured by them in the academies.

Later in turn they gave lectures of their own, closely modelled on those of their tutors, and in addition they edited the works of their tutors and mentors. The texts which emerged were both “memorials and celebrations of a moderate, learned dissenting tradition” and “a spur and guide to future generations”.

Such activities were important because dissenters were outside the English establishment and cultivated “alternative institutions” through which they might sustain their traditions. They did this through their “textual and educational culture”. Hence the book’s title.

These men were influential not just in their own localities but in England as a whole. Indeed their writings gave them a readership on the continent and in the American colonies where in New England Congregationalists were the dominant force. Tessa Whitehouse has examined their lecture notes, letters, journals, manuscript accounts of the academies, and printed works in detail. Her book sets out the links between the world of religious dissent and education and publishing. The role of personal friendship is traced through conversation and letters, as are also the traditions of the dissenting academies.

In a section headed “Polite Ministers”, Whitehouse points out that Jennings and Doddridge insisted that their dissenting education provided students with a range of skills which rendered their academies as “comparable, or even preferable to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge”. In fact they dared to suggest that their education “developed the taste as well as learning of a gentleman”. Watts’s roles firstly as an educationalist and secondly as a publisher are given consideration in separate chapters, although we are told that his role in English-language hymnody “has been amply discussed by scholars”. Certainly his hymns are not this author’s chief focus.

In this book Whitehouse makes clear that Watts was not “an isolated genius”. Rather his work was “embedded in an intellectual culture with a rich heritage” and it “flourished” beyond English dissent in New England, in female education, and among Anglican evangelicals, like Hannah More and Sarah Trimmer. The literary texts surveyed here were disseminated to many readers—children (both rich with their own private tutors and the poor at charity schools), servants, apprentices, academy, college and university students, women, ministers in Britain, Europe, and the American colonies. She concludes that these dissenters reached beyond the confines of denominationalism and “celebrated knowledge” so as “optimistically” to assert “the transformative yet sustaining potential of books”.

This scholarly work with an index and a bibliography of 20 pages is a useful addition to the literature of the 18th century. It not only considers the familiar stalwarts of Watts and Doddridge but takes the reader beyond them, exploring their milieu and the thought world of their successors.

***The Life of Friends in an Age of Revolutions: James Wodrow and Samuel Kenrick.* By Martin Fitzpatrick. Friends of Dr Williams's Library Sixty-Ninth Lecture. Dr Williams's Trust, London, 2016. Pp 39. Paperback £5.00; £2.50 (for Friends of Dr Williams's Library). ISSN 035-3962**

The correspondence between Samuel Kenrick (1728–1811) and James Wodrow (1730–1810) is one of the most extensive and revealing collection of letters which survive from the later years of Georgian Britain. The collection is extensive in the chronological sense, since the 280 separate letters cover the period from the 1750s until Wodrow's death in 1810. It is revealing in that it is a relatively rare example of a balanced archive, with an almost equal number of letters from each writer. And it is valuable through the detailed information and illustration of opinion on a variety of subjects which it provides. It would be no exaggeration to describe the correspondence as a well-informed commentary upon the major developments in British history during these years, developments which included war, the successful revolt of the British North American colonies, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, early evidence of industrialization, and the changing nature of the relationship between England and Scotland. Samuel Kenrick, a successful co-founder of a bank in Bewdley, Worcestershire, belonged to a family which became an eminent Unitarian dynasty during the nineteenth century and his own Presbyterian sympathies evolved into unitarianism during the period covered by his letters. James Wodrow trained for the ministry in the Church of Scotland and was minister of Stevenston, Ayrshire, from 1759 until his death. The two friends had in common an education at the University of Glasgow, where they benefited from the liberal theological teaching of its principal, William Leechman. Each correspondent was well-read and well-informed, and each had particular knowledge, information and opinions to communicate to the other.

As Dr Fitzpatrick's Dr Williams's Library lecture lucidly explains, the letters which Kenrick and Wodrow exchanged were frequently of substantial length and carefully considered; one of Kenrick's letters was written during the two weeks from 29 January to 13 February 1778. The two friends did not always agree. Kenrick was a critic of the administration of Lord North and the British use of force against the rebellious American colonists; Wodrow, probably reflecting the increasing importance of the Scottish stake in the empire, supported the government and insisted that the war was a just one and that that it would ultimately produce a British victory. These differences of opinion did not damage their friendship (the correspondence continued and there were mutual family visits) and they offer a good example of the 'candour' of enlightenment exchanges, on which Dr Fitzpatrick has written elsewhere. Similarly, Kenrick admired the French Revolution and was appalled by the Birmingham riots of July 1791 of which Joseph Priestley was the main target

and which took place uncomfortably close to his own residence. During the 1790s he opposed the war against revolutionary France and came close to condoning the extreme policies of the revolutionary regime by pointing out in March 1799 that ‘The French have had every provocation’. By contrast Wodrow expressed anxiety about radical movements in Scotland and, through his connections with the non-subscribing Presbyterians of Ulster, was well aware of the economic and social, as well as the religious, problems of Ireland. Kenrick admired Napoleon; Wodrow did not.

However, their friendship was underpinned by a shared commitment to religious liberalism. Just as Wodrow drew back from the Calvinist rigour of the Church of Scotland and supported his fellow-minister William M’Gill of Ayrshire during his prosecution for heterodoxy during the early 1790s, Kenrick in 1790–91 applauded the unsuccessful moves north of the border for the repeal of the Test Act as it applied to Scotland. As one would expect of products of the Scottish Enlightenment, both expressed disapproval of the emotional appeals of Methodism; to Kenrick John Wesley was ‘the canting Methodist’, while Wodrow referred in 1795 to a preacher who ‘seemed a little cracked [and] is probably a Methodist’. But although seriously disturbed by the high costs of the Napoleonic War and gloomy as to the short-term possibility of extensions to religious pluralism, both retained a measure of optimism (more pronounced with Kenrick than with Wodrow) over the potentialities for human improvement, material, moral and intellectual.

Dr Fitzpatrick brings to his lecture a distinguished academic record, including the co-editorship of *The Enlightenment World* (2007) and *The Reception of Edmund Burke in Europe* (2017). Moreover the lecture provides a foretaste of the edition of the entire correspondence which he is in the process of editing, in collaboration with Drs Emma Macleod and Anthony Page, and which is to be published by Oxford University Press. Dr Fitzpatrick rightly observes that the Wodrow-Kenrick correspondence has hitherto been under-used, even though it has been well preserved at Dr Williams’s Library, and even though there is an excellent handlist of the letters compiled by John Creasey on behalf of the Library. The appearance of this edition will be of enormous benefit for anyone interested in the religious history of this period together with the social and political developments against which that history evolved.

G M Ditchfield

Platform and Pulpit in Peace and War, 1913–1920. By Clyde Binfield. The Congregational Lecture, 2016. The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust (1978) Ltd 2016. Pp 56. £3.00. ISSN 0963–181X

With his usual erudition and insight, Clyde Binfield used his Congregational Lecture in 2016 (and this expanded publication) to review the work of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. While the addresses of its Chairmen, during the years of the Great War, receive detailed attention, the discussion is topped and tailed by the last man elected to address the Union immediately before the business of Congregationalism which, quite clearly, continued throughout the war years, with temperance, disestablishment (for Wales), home and overseas mission and theology all taking a prominent place on the Union's agenda. It was not business quite as usual, however. All being equal, these Chairmen would all have delivered two significant addresses, one in Spring and one in Autumn. But there were no Autumn assemblies in 1914 and 1918, and no Spring assembly in 1917.

Morgan Gibbon's use of military metaphors to describe the church militant might have fitted the period to the summer of 1914 given that war was hardly on anyone's radar, despite the depth of the tension arising from imperial ambition and the undeniable increase in Prussian militarism. But these words were perhaps considered inappropriate, or possibly appeared a little hollow, once the conflict was underway. Nevertheless, all the Chairmen discussed here supported the war, five of them had sons who enlisted and two (Snell and Selbie) found themselves grieving the loss of loved ones, apparently lost in the cause of justice and righteousness. Some extolled the voluntary principle to the extent that conscription, when it came, was considered a betrayal (Griffith-Jones, a hardy supporter of the war and of enlistment, gave his support to conscientious objectors as a result), but Snell had considered it not simply a just war but a holy crusade, while the businessman and former MP Haworth argued that it was no different to compulsion in other parts of life, such as the Factory Act, the Education Act and the much sought Temperance legislation. Interestingly, many warned about the problems which would arise once the conflict was over, though this tended to revolve around the expectations of returning soldiers than of rebuilding international relations and securing the peace.

This is not a lecture about the war alone but one about Congregationalism as it grappled with a world irrevocably transformed not just as a result of the Great War, but as the conflict proceeded. This is a discussion about how to be *relevant* in a society which was being transformed, while also representing an *eternal* gospel. Women's roles were changing, and Constance Todd (later Coltman) was ordained in 1917; moderators were introduced in 1918; work with children was highlighted; reunion with the churches was mooted, though

few saw much mileage in J. H. Shakespeare's Free Church of England. For the Union, this was a time of confidence in the national and international mission of the church, in peace as well as in war. The lecture encapsulates the mood of the age as well as highlighting its strengths and weaknesses.

This summary should whet the appetite. Professor Binfield tells us much about the official Congregationalism of a hundred years ago, both elegantly and engagingly. It is fascinating, and well-worth reading.

Robert Pope, University of Wales: Trinity St David

Schoolgirl Days at Milton Mount College 1920–1960: The Old Girls Remember! The Miltonian Guild, 3 Clipston Lane, Keyworth, Nottingham NG12 5NW, 2016. Pp 150 + 4 pages of photographs. Paperback £10 plus £2.50 p + p. ISBN 978-0-9935322-0-7

This is a well-researched book about the everyday life of schoolgirls at Milton Mount College between 1920 and 1960 in which year the college closed. There have been factual books about the college but this brings together memories from the Old Girls—all aware they are getting older so their recollections need to be written down! There are numerous photographs which well illustrate the narrative.

The college began at Milton Mount in Gravesend in 1873 as a school for the daughters of Congregational Ministers. At that time there were many free endowed schools for boys but few for girls. The school moved in 1920 to Worth Park in Sussex with its extensive grounds. Worth Park was a very grand building, though somewhat lacking in what we would expect as 'mod cons'. It was mainly a boarding school with a few daygirls who lived nearby.

The beautiful grounds, the routine of school days, sport whatever the weather, expectations of church and quiet on Sundays, music and drama productions as well as the food are all described from the memories from the Old Girls themselves. There are detailed descriptions of everyday life. For instance, the beds were basic with iron frames, and wire springs that often protruded through the mattress. Baths had a line painted showing the limit to the amount of water to be used. Baths were three times a week but hair was only washed every three weeks! The toilet block was a separate unheated block on the ground floor. There were radiators or at least hot pipes on the ground floor—but nothing above, meaning many suffered chilblains.

Details of how discipline was enforced are given for those deserving punishment for misdemeanours. This was regarded as strict but fair. "The worst experience was to be called into the headteacher's study and reprimanded for

some misdemeanour or other and told that, as a minister's daughter, I should know better. I always found that hard to understand—and still do.”

The ending at Worth Park mirrored the earlier move from Gravesend when the building was occupied during the war, but little or no compensation paid for damage incurred. The Worth Park building was finally sold and the school amalgamated with Wentworth School in Bournemouth—and is now part of the United Schools Trust and known as Bournemouth Collegiate School. I am a trustee of the Milton Mount Foundation which was set up in 1967 to administer the proceeds of the sale of the grounds. It should be noted that there are Congregationalists as well as URC members on the Board, and URC and Congregational ministers and members can apply for grants for daughters' (and sons') education: www.miltonmountfoundation.org.uk

Margaret Morris

***A Patterned Life: Faith, History, and David Bebbington.* By Eileen Bebbington. Pp xvii + 145. Wipf & Stock, Eugene, Oregon, 2014. ISBN 978-1-65264-929-4**

The variety of topics which have engaged David Bebbington's attention as a Christian historian mean that few readers are unlikely to have come across his work: W E Gladstone, the 'Nonconformist Conscience', the Baptists, Evangelicalism, and philosophies of history have all received book-length treatments at his hands. And here we have—for the first time in print—David Bebbington the preacher, in sermons included as appendices.

This short memoir, written by his wife, shares some of the characteristics of David's own work: concise yet packed with thought-provoking statements, lucidly and elegantly expressed, and premised on the conviction that there is a pattern discernible in history—whether at the 'macro' level or at that of the individual. Eileen is not a historian by profession, but she has written a biography which will interest historians of the worlds which David inhabits. Aiming to uncover the influences on her subject and husband, she modestly states that he had a queue of books to write, so she wrote this one instead! I for one am glad that she did.

The preface, by Timothy Larsen of Wheaton College, assesses his influence, especially for his definition of evangelicalism, which has dominated the field ever since it was propounded in 1989, but also as a noted political historian. Larsen also pays tribute to the way in which David Bebbington has expounded a distinctively Christian approach to historiography, and done much to place evangelicalism (and the study of the movement) in the wider intellectual context.

Three chapters explore his upbringing in Nottingham, his studies in

Cambridge, and his career in Stirling. An advantage of a biography by a family member is that the subject can be brought to life more vividly, even movingly, as seen in Eileen's coverage of his early years. His background in East Midlands Brethrenism, the freedom he was given to amuse himself and develop his own interests, and the early development of propensities for which he has become renowned all receive illuminating attention. During his years in Cambridge (which included doctoral studies supervised by David Thompson), he developed what (for a Baptist of the time) was a remarkably ecumenical range of contacts, something which he has continued to do ever since. But at the same time he was cutting his preaching teeth in village chapels, an experience which has doubtless helped to shape his concern for clarity of thought and expression in contexts far removed. The Stirling chapter is notable for an honest description of how ME affected his life in many ways. But it also discusses the growth of his interest in the interplay between religion and politics (a topic which was off-limits among the Brethren), and his reactions to the changes in higher education during the 1970s and 1980s, many of which were not, he believed, for the better. His wife comments that, as an external examiner of doctoral theses, he 'believes in giving the candidate a thorough grilling' (p.86). Indeed! This review is written twenty years since I proved for myself the truth of those words ...

Apart from the sermons, other appendices include a talk on the use of history, a *curriculum vitae*, and a list of his books so far (it would have been of great interest to extend this to include journal articles, though I suspect that it would have taken considerable work). As befits a work by an author named Bebbington, there is a full index. Illustrations (not a characteristic feature of David's books) bring the narrative to life and demonstrate the value of collections of family photographs. My favourite was one of David in one of his natural habitats, a second-hand bookshop.

It would have been interesting to hear more of Eileen's own career, and about the extent to which the two have cross-fertilized intellectually. I would have valued more comment on his spirituality, although I recognize this is not an easy topic about which to write, and that many Baptists are more reserved on such matters than outsiders might think. But the book does great service by tracing the patterns at work in David's life, reflecting his quest for patterns in history. We may be thankful for one who so serves God's purpose in his and our generation, and wish him many productive years.

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