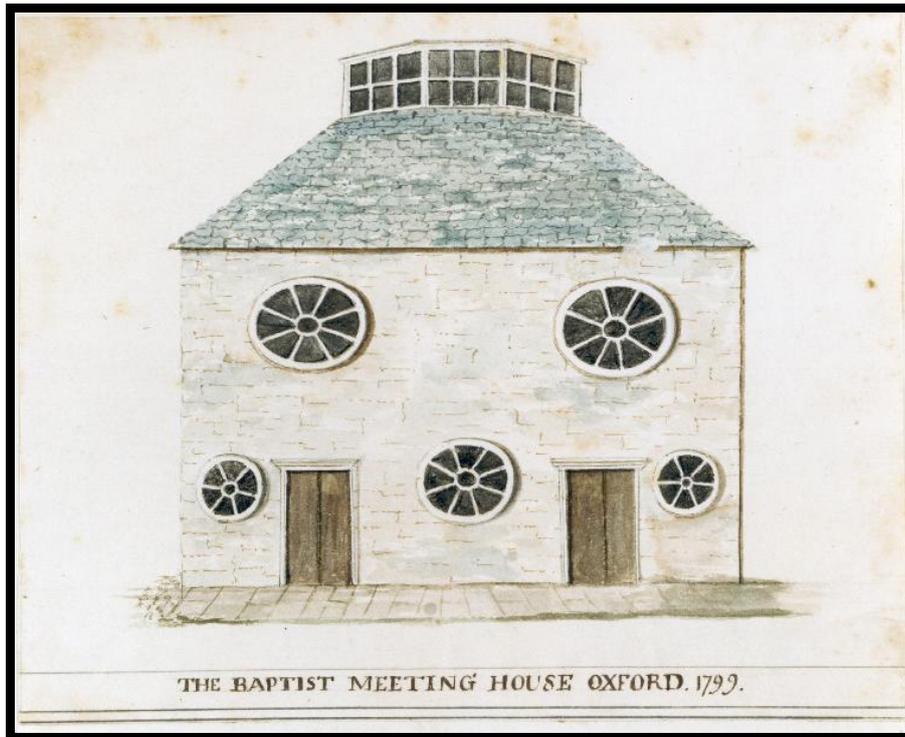


*‘A Protestant Catholic
Church of Christ’*



**Essays on the History and Life of
New Road Baptist Church, Oxford**

edited by

Rosie Chadwick

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Church of Christ

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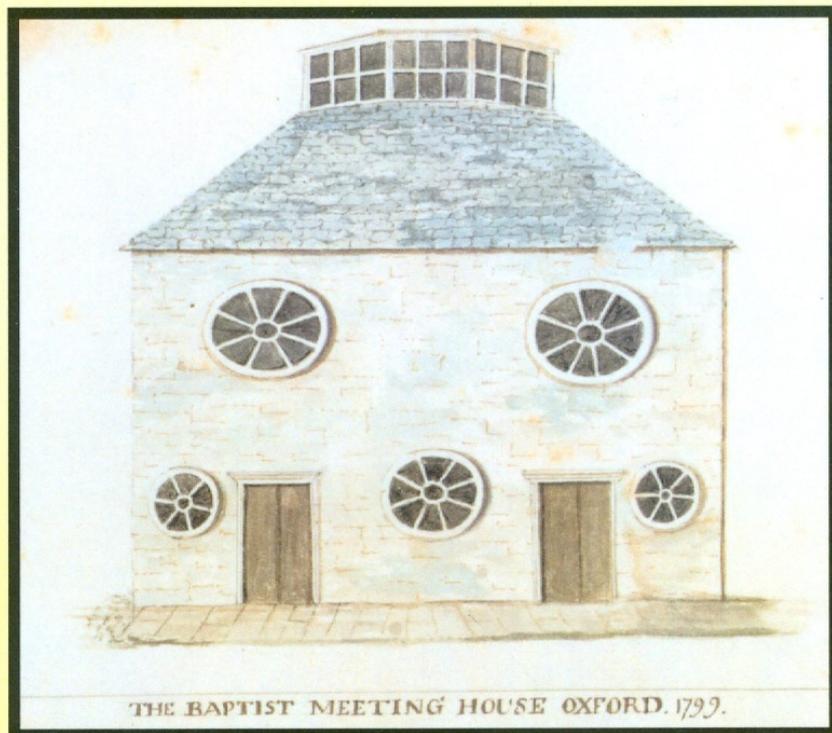
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Preface

With a significant anniversary approaching, the Baptists of New Road asked a number of historians and theologians, distinguished in their fields, each to contribute an essay on an aspect of the church's history. To our great delight, almost all of those we asked agreed, and this book is the result. We are immensely grateful to all the essayists for their contributions.

As one might expect, the essays are very different in style and standpoint. Included are studies of an individual and a family, accounts of particular eras and episodes in the church's history, thematic studies, and - in the chapter in the redevelopment - a chapter of record. Despite this variety, some common themes emerge. One such theme is of comings and goings. The picture that emerges is of a mobile church, variously buoyed up and enriched by being part of wider Baptist networks, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Some of these links were, and are, institutional. At least as often they were, and are, personal, the result of a web of contacts with family and friends who have moved away, and with those Clyde Binfield describes as 'the lively transients of a university city'.

Perhaps the most notable theme, though, is that implied by the title of this volume. For while many of the individuals featured in these pages are marked by a strong sense of personal identity and firmness of purpose, the church of which they are a part has proved resistant to labels. Many contributors remark on the church's 'imprecise Baptist thought' and 'lack of clarity concerning its ecclesiological identity'. The church's broad base and lack of clear identity has at times been problematic. But it is also inspirational. In the words of Paul Fiddes, 'the ecumenical thrill that the phrase 'Protestant Catholic' gives to the modern ear is not ... completely misleading'.

Rosie Chadwick

April 2003

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Thanks go to all the contributors whose work has made this collection possible; to Sue Mills and Jennifer Thorp for their help in fielding queries from all directions; and to the New Road 'technical team', Larry Kreitzer, Nick Parsons, David Steele and Debbie Pinfold. Thanks go, finally, to John, Christopher and Eleanor, to Chris and other Joyne's, for being tolerant and supportive as the need dictated.

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Thanks are due to the following for supplying pictures: Lincoln College (Edward Tatham); Angus Library (James Hinton and James Dann); Chris Mitchell (Benjamin Godwin); Elizabeth Perfect (Edward Bryan); Regent's Park College (Edward Underhill); Will Alden (Henry, Edward Cox and H.J.C. Alden); Oxford Mail (AG Cartoon); Laurence Manley (Tidmarsh Players).

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Colin Saunders was a solicitor in Oxford for many years, and a member at New Road. As church secretary from 1971–1988 he played a crucial role in the church's redevelopment, about which he writes in this collection.

Barrie White served as minister of Andover Baptist Church, later becoming tutor in Ecclesiastical History then Principal of Regent's Park College. President of the Baptist Historical Society for over a decade, Barrie is a member at New Road. His published works include an annotated version of the Particular Baptist Associational Records to 1660 and *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (1983 revd 1996).

The Organisation of the Particular Baptists, 1644–1660: the Abingdon Association

B.R. White

*In its early years the fledgling Baptist church in Oxford was closely linked to, and supported by, sister churches within the Abingdon Association. In this extract, reprinted from the Journal of Ecclesiastical History with kind permission from Cambridge University Press, Barrie White charts the development of the Abingdon Association, one of several local associations bound by a network of personal contacts and looking to London for leadership.**

On 8 October 1652 representatives from churches in Abingdon, Reading and Henley had met together to agree upon matters requiring inter-congregational collaboration and had decided that this would be profitable for mutual advice, financial support, and 'ye carrying on of the worke of God'.¹ At the next meeting, on 3 November, came representatives from Kensworth in Hertfordshire and Eversholt in Bedfordshire. Thereafter the meetings were held in the Oxfordshire village of Tetsworth where, in March 1653, the representatives, consistently termed 'messengers' in the records, met again to sign the document entitled 'The Agreement of the Churches'.² The 'Agreement' was in no sense a Confession of Faith but rather the basis upon which they agreed to work together. The

* Taken from 'The Organisation of the Particular Baptists, 1644–1660', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* XVII (1966), 209–226.

A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ

messengers also agreed to continue their meetings and to keep in touch with each other by letter through friends in London.³ Furthermore, it was decided that recommendations from the meetings of messengers should be sent to the respective church meetings for approval before being returned for confirmation at the next association meeting. This decision was central for the constitution of such representative meetings and underlines the fact that, whilst such gatherings could acquire considerable moral authority, they were not held to have coercive power over individual congregations.⁴ This meeting was the first at which the names of individual delegates were recorded and it is noteworthy that one of the two from Kensworth was Benjamin Cox.⁵

At the next meeting, held 10 June 1653, the most important business transacted was evidently the drafting of a letter to London reporting that:

we solemnly entered into such an association each with other as this enclosed copie of our Agreement doth manifest; and have agreed to the confirmation of some conclusions, of which we also send you here an enclosed copie. These things we thus represent unto you, not onely because we desire to conceale nothing of this nature from you, but also that we may manifest both our due esteeme of you, and also our desire to partake of the benefit of the gifts which god hath given you for counsaile and advice and brotherly assistance; and for the increase and furtherance of love and amitie and good correspondence betweene us. ⁶

At the four meetings that followed, the business was concerned with matters relating to the life of their local congregations.⁷ Then, from Tetsworth at the meetings held 26-27 December 1654, an answer was sent to the church at Warwick in response to an enquiry for advice about the formation of an association in the west midlands.⁸ The

The Organisation of the Particular Baptists, 1640-1660

messengers at Tetsworth wrote to encourage them, sending a copy of their Agreement and a report of the proceedings at the current meetings and commenting, in passing, 'we suppose you are allready acquainted with the results of former meetings'. The letter also promised to send John Pendarves of Abingdon and Benjamin Cox of Dunstable as representatives to any meeting the Warwick church should arrange.⁹ The churches of the Abingdon Association then each received a letter requesting them to authorise Pendarves and Cox to go to Warwick in their name.

When the messengers next met, 19-20 June 1655, the churches at Wantage, Watlington, Kingston and Haddenham were received into the association 'by the expresse consent of the churches before associated; and did by their messengers subscribe the agreement of the associated churches'.¹⁰ At the autumn gathering 17-18 October 1655 the church at Pyrton in Oxfordshire was received into membership and an association letter from Chard, in Somerset, was read.¹¹ It was decided to invite each of the associated congregations to read it and to ask them to permit their messengers to enter formally into correspondence with the Western Association. When, at the meeting in March 1656, the churches at Oxford and Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire were received into membership, the messengers answered a request for advice from Kensworth whose congregation was too scattered to be able to meet comfortably in one place.¹² The messengers, after carefully reviewing the position, advised a division into two. The second day was spent in prayer and a letter to the churches reported that 'Diverse brethren had such sweet, and lively, and soulevraving manifestations of Gods gracious presence, as they could not sufficiently expresse; and such as some of them had not enjoyed in all their lives, till this day'. From this they concluded that all the churches could enter into similar blessing by similar means. Before they parted it was agreed to ask the churches to consider whether it was lawful before God to pay tithes and church rates.

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At the next meeting, on 27–28 May 1656, a defence of the payment of tithes was received and rejected and negotiations were begun with the church at North Warnborough (now part of Odiham) in Hampshire concerning membership of the association.¹³ In their association letter the messengers noted the coincidence in three different parts of the country of a day of prayer which had been discovered when God ‘sent three of his choise servants to London, who acquainted each other with what was intended’.

The meeting held in the following September received the churches’ reactions to the suggestion that they should empower two representatives to visit each of the associated congregations.¹⁴ Kensworth, Eversholt, Pyrton and Hemel Hempstead opposed this and suggested instead that, first, stronger congregations should release members to aid weaker ones and, secondly, that at each meeting the messengers of each congregation should report on its spiritual health and decide if special help were needed. These proposals were adopted, and, thereafter, a new item appeared regularly in the records summing up, in a sentence or two, the current condition of each congregation.

The first entry concerning the December meeting involved the transcript of a letter to Petty France seeking advice concerning the appointment of elders and deacons.¹⁵ The reply, signed by Samuel Tull and Edward Harrison, was transcribed into the association records in full.¹⁶

In May 1657, when the messengers next assembled, a limit was set to the rigid application of ‘closed communion’ principles when the church in Eversholt was advised that those baptised by a man practising ‘open communion’ need not be re-baptised in order to join a ‘closed communion’ congregation.¹⁷ The autumn meeting in that year was of great importance, for it was then that Kensworth, Eversholt, Pyrton and Hemel Hempstead suggested that they should be allowed to form a separate association, both in order to cut down travelling and to draw congregations in their neighbourhood

The Organisation of the Particular Baptists, 1640-1660

into association with them.¹⁸ The proposal was unanimously agreed and, when they came together in March 1658, they 'did solemnly committ and commend the said churches ... to be henceforth a distinct Association'.¹⁹

At Tetsworth, in September 1658, some additional congregations were represented: Longworth and Newbury (in Berkshire), Andover (in Hampshire), and Isleworth (Thistleworth).²⁰ Benjamin Cox attended as one of the two sent on behalf of 'the association of churches in Hertfordshire &c., whose messengers lately mett at Hempstead'. The spring meeting in 1657 gave a glimpse of the sister association's meeting at Dunstable in March, where the churches represented had been not only the original four but also Bedford, Luton (in Bedfordshire), Newport Pagnell (in Buckinghamshire), Watford (in Hertfordshire), and Stukely (in Huntingdonshire).²¹ These reported that a recently gathered congregation at 'Wooliston' (Wollaston in Northamptonshire) had applied to join them, while first desiring to examine 'those sixteene articles of faith and order yt wee professedly agree in and those twelve conclusions that we have consented unto'.²²

The following year saw only five churches represented at the spring meeting and it is quite clear from the record that the reason assumed at the time for this was the unsettled political situation.²³ The final meeting recorded in the association MS., 19-20 June 1660, was attended by single messengers from Abingdon, Reading, Henley, Wantage, Kingston, Watlington, Haddenham, Oxford, Longworth, Wallingford and Newbury, with Benjamin Cox from the sister association.²⁴ Probably already a number of the leaders were in gaol.

NOTES

¹ Ernest A. Payne, *The Baptists of Berkshire Through Three Centuries* (London, 1951), pp. 147-9, printed from the Gould (Berks.) MS. the record of the meetings held in October and November 1652 at Wormsley, Oxon. These were not recorded in the Abingdon MS. The latter, deposited in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, came into Dr Payne's hands too late to be used in his *Baptists of Berkshire*. It reports the meetings of what eventually became the Berkshire Baptist Association from December 1652 to June 1660 and consists of 87 pages (9 in. by 5 in.) in the small, neat, hand of a single scribe. I shall cite it as the 'Abingdon Association MS.' to distinguish it from the Gould (Berkshire) MS. (which reports, more briefly, some of the same meetings), first because it came to include, during this period, more congregations outside Berkshire than inside it, and secondly to follow the precedent set by the report of the 1690 General Assembly which referred to 'The Association of the Churches in Abington, etc.'.

² This was printed by Payne, *Baptists of Berkshire*, p. 149, but included the names of congregations at Wantage, Kingston, etc., who joined later. The Gould MS. has them inserted in a hand different from that recording the first five.

³ Abingdon Association MS., 3.

⁴ These constitutional decisions are not recorded of any other association owing, no doubt, to the brevity of the extant documents. Since, however, this association later divided (see below) and since the so-called 'Midland Association' was probably, as will be seen, modelled upon this and has records of a similar type, it may be fairly assumed that they all shared the same basis. Similar records for the Western Association, together with considerable mutual inter-association visiting, would support the view that that association was similarly constituted.

⁵ Abingdon Association MS., 4. There can be little doubt that this Benjamin Cox wrote *An Appendix* in 1646. In *Trans. Bap. Hist. Soc.*, VI (1918-19), 'Benjamin Cox', the author noted a gap in Cox's known biography 1646-58 together with his association with Edward Harrison (once vicar of Kensworth) and the congregation meeting at Petty France, London. The Abingdon Association MS., 9, mentions Cox as 'of Dunstable' and reveals links with Petty France.

⁶ Ibid., 4.f. This letter appears to contain the earliest use of the term 'association' in the materials now extant. The letter's address to the 'Church of Christ of which our brethren John Spilsberie and William Kiffin are members, and to the rest of the churches in and neare London, agreeing with the said church in principles and constitutions, and accordingly holding communion with the same' poses a problem, since the Confessions of 1644 and 1646 show Kiffin and Spilsbury as leaders of different congregations. Had they come together again during this period? It hardly seems possible that Benjamin Cox would make a mistake about the London leaders.

⁷ 4 October 1653, 27 December 1653, 29 March 1654, 5-6 September 1654.

⁸ Abingdon Association MS., 7-11.

⁹ For John Pendarves cf. Payne, *Baptists of Berkshire*. W.T. Whitley, in *A History of British Baptists*, 2nd edn. (London, 1932), p. 92, wrote: 'fraternal intercourse was maintained, but not between the associations as such'. This statement can now be seen to be incorrect. It should also be noted that the Warwick church was requested to send details of their meetings for Pendarves and Cox 'to our brother Samuell Tull of London'.

¹⁰ Abingdon Association MS., 11-13. Payne, *Baptists of Berkshire*, p. 19 thought 'Kingston' was Kingston-on-Thames in Surrey but the Abingdon Association MS. (75) suggests that it was, in fact, more probably Kingston Blount in Oxfordshire.

¹¹ Abingdon Association MS., 13-21. This letter was signed by John Pendarves and Thomas Collier. Pendarves also signed the letter from Wells in April 1656: cf. G. F. Nuttall, 'The Baptist Western Association 1653-1658', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* XI (1960).

¹² Abingdon Association MS., 21-30. Cf. J. Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, Vol. II (London, 1811-23), pp. 170 ff. for Kensworth.

¹³ Abingdon Association MS., 30-40.

¹⁴ Ibid., 40-6.

¹⁵ Ibid., 46 f.

¹⁶ Ibid., 48 ff.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50–5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55–9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 65–8. The sole messenger from Isleworth was Richard Deane.

²¹ Abingdon Association MS., 68–79. At Tetsworth Wallingford was represented.

²² Presumably these were those adopted by the Midland Association. At the autumn meeting in 1657 the right of women to speak in church meetings was discussed at Tetsworth and account taken of the decision of the Midland messengers on the same subject at Moreton-in-the-Marsh in 1656. Cf. Abingdon Association MS., 64.

²³ Abingdon Association MS., 79–83.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 83–7.

‘Through grace they are preserved’:
Oxford Baptists, 1640–1715

Roger Hayden

In his contribution to an earlier history of New Road Baptist Church, Walter Stevens charts the beginnings of Baptist life in Oxford.¹ Stevens’ account begins in 1646, with Oxford’s surrender to the Parliamentary army and the arrival in the city of regimental chaplains and private soldiers preaching radical doctrines with missionary fervour. In this year, he argues, ‘distinctively Baptist principles first began to be actively canvassed in Oxford’. A Baptist church may have come into being almost at once, since the diarist Anthony Wood, a contemporary if hostile witness, refers in 1647 to ‘frequenters of the Conventicles of Independents and Anabaptists’. However, ‘the first date for which there is indisputable evidence’ of a Baptist church is 17 March 1653, when Oxford sent messengers to a meeting at Tetsworth of what was to become the Abingdon, or Berkshire, Association.

Stevens notes that ‘among Oxford Baptists were some old soldiers’; and that by 1659 the church was publicly baptizing. Leaders of the church in these early days were Lawrence King and Richard Tidmarsh, whose wives Anne King and Jane Tidmarsh were also members of the church. Cordwainers John Toms and Edward Wyans and their wives were among other ‘notable adherents’. Stevens identifies the fourteen years from 1646 as a period of ‘quiet development’ that came to an end in 1660 with the restoration of the Stuart monarchy. There followed years of harassment and persecution by state, church

and University, with Baptists indicted as 'seditious sectaries' and imprisoned for refusing to conform to the Church of England. Some respite came in 1672 with the passing of the Declaration of Indulgence, and again in 1688 when Oxford Baptists were among those nominated for various civic offices, while from 1689 the passing of the Toleration Act brought statutory protection. However, 'a conviction that, wherever else Nonconformity might gain a footing, Oxford ought to be "preserved free from the Infection of unsound and seditious Principles"' meant that Dissenters in Oxford continued to experience a 'special degree of dislike and hardship' into the nineteenth century.² By the end of the seventeenth century the Oxford congregation had 'shrunk to a remnant', dependent for its continued existence on support from the churches at Abingdon and Cote.

Stevens' picture of individual Baptists in Oxford, vitally related to the larger Baptist community at Abingdon, is in many respects entirely justified. However, we can now add to the picture of the early Oxford Baptists and say more about the role of the Abingdon Association and Oxford's part in it. The decline of the Oxford church at the end of the century also merits re-examination. Being Baptist in seventeenth-century Oxford deserves a new assessment.

A 'world turned upside down'

The 1640s were some of the most exciting and decisive years in the whole of English history, with the downfall of Archbishop Laud, the Civil War, and finally the execution of Charles I. It was a period of intense political and religious debate, as the Westminster Assembly of Divines failed to impose Presbyterianism upon England, and Cromwell emerged as a national leader. The 'sectaries', with an active and large following in the army, successfully planted Independent and Baptist churches across the country. Increasing numbers of people anticipated, on the basis of Old Testament prophecies,

'Through grace they are preserved'

the speedy establishment of the Kingdom of the Saints, a 'Fifth Monarchy' where King Jesus reigned supreme.

Baptists in England were part of a diverse Dissenting community, which included Independents, Presbyterians, Quakers and Levellers in a mushrooming kaleidoscope of new religious thought. Within this, those denominated Baptists included General Baptists, Particular Baptists and Seventh Day Baptists. English General Baptists were the first to voice in English a plea for complete religious toleration and the total separation of church and state. Their Arminian theology stated that salvation through Christ should be offered to all people, and they gave a central place to the classic creeds of Christendom in their *Confessions*. General Baptist churches from across the country met in an annual assembly to which churches sent their messengers.³ John Danvers and John Newman at Horley, near Banbury, led the closest General Baptist church to Oxford in 1651, and were signatories for Horley of the General Baptist Midland Confession.⁴

In 1633 a group connected with a Calvinist Separatist church in London separated by mutual agreement to form a congregation of baptized believers. The group remained Calvinist in theology, affirming the five articles of the 1619 *Synod of Dort*: unconditional election, a limited atonement, the total depravity of man, the irresistibility of grace, and the final perseverance of the saints. This English Particular Baptist theology meant little contact between the two Baptist communities. Particular Baptists also affirmed their beliefs in a series of *Confessions*, the first published in London in 1644, the last, a national statement agreed by a hundred churches, in 1689.

There were a minority of Baptists, known as Seventh Day Baptists, whose biblical literalism led them to keep the fourth commandment, meeting for worship on the Sabbath, [Saturday] not Sunday. In 1659 representatives of the Abingdon Association met with the Bledlow church, 'most of which do now hold the 7th day Sabbath'. It was decided that

although Baptist churches might disagree on this issue, they 'can all walk together ... or can have communion together'.⁵

Cromwell's New Model Army enters Oxford

After the battle of Edgehill, Charles I vacated London and withdrew to Oxford in November 1642. In 1643 he made an unsuccessful advance on London and the battle of Newbury left matters unresolved. The New Model Army, with Fairfax as General, decisively defeated the Royalist army at Naseby on 14 June 1645, and a year later the King ordered the surrender of Oxford to Parliament.

The army that entered Oxford was a well-disciplined force, with a political agenda to uphold the law of the land through Parliament, and committed to religious freedom for all. Later, when Cromwell took the title Lord Protector, some Baptists felt he had become the embodiment of the Antichrist. There was now a political necessity to overthrow Parliament and force the inauguration of Christ's rule of a thousand years, and some Baptists were involved in Fifth Monarchy risings such as that led by Thomas Venner. The majority of Baptists in Cromwell's New Model Army were, however, simple, unlearned people who understood the Bible in a literal manner, some keeping Saturday as Sunday, others looking for the second coming of Christ. In a speech to Parliament in 1657, Cromwell openly affirmed: 'I must say to you on behalf of the Army - in the next place to their fighting, they have been very good preachers ... accustomed to preach to their troops, companies and regiments - which I think has been one of the blessings upon them to the carrying on of the great work.'⁶ Richard Baxter recounts how soldiers would interrupt sermons, hold public disputations with ministers on points of doctrine, and 'thrust themselves up into pulpits'.⁷ It was this kind of conduct by soldiers in Oxford that thoroughly disgusted the Presbyterian Thomas Edwards, who reported:

'Through grace they are preserved'

Though the boldnesse and presumption of many of the souldiers, officers and common souldiers hath been very great, both against the command of God, and the Parliament, to preach in the open churches in all countries and places where they have come, putting by many godly and able ministers from their office and invading their pulpits; yet their open and frequent preaching in the University of Oxford, doth most of all declare their impudencie, that they should dare to do it in the midst of so many learned men, and in a place so famous for learning; and that in the public schools in Oxford to preach daily, and that against humane learning as they did for some time ... yet the souldiers continue still to preach in Oxford daily in a great house where they meet for that end; and I spake with one that came from Oxford in August last who told me they preach now daily in Christ's Church (one of the greatest colleges in Oxford) in a kind of gallery, where the souldier stands that preaches, many sitting on the stairs, and the young man heard one of them preach there...⁸

Some early Oxford Baptists

It was in this intense and often confusing atmosphere that a Baptist cause in Oxford first became established. There is evidence of Oxford people with Baptist views well before 1653. On 14 September 1643 the Mayor of Oxford received a letter from Charles I in which the King states 'that he understands there are several men, both aldermen and common council members, who have left the city many months since, to join the rebellion. His Majesty thinks its reasonable to recommend ... that such men be forthwith disenfranchised and removed...' Among those named were Roger Hatchman, Thomas Williams and Matthew Jollyman. On 29 June 1646, five days after Charles I had surrendered Oxford to Fairfax's New Model Army of Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists, those who had been removed from office by the 1643 Act were restored.⁹

It was Roger Hatchman who probably began the first Baptist meeting in his tenement in The Hamel, which he had leased on 20 December 1636 for twenty years.¹⁰ Later, in January 1660, the diarist Anthony Wood refers to a 'Major Hatchman a cashiered Anabaptist officer' that makes a realistic link back to the New Model Army's presence in Oxford.¹¹

Of those removed with Roger Hatchman, Matthew Jellyman (or Jollyman) was an Oxford resident designated 'Anabaptist' by Wood, but other evidence linking him to the Baptist community is circumstantial. He had moved to Abingdon when the King came to Oxford, and returned in 1646. On 10 October 1653 he was elected and sworn a registrar for five parishes which had become a united benefice, but seven years later Wood complains that Jellyman was so inefficient that in one parish, St John's, there were hardly ten names noted in the register.¹² Despite this, Jellyman was appointed gaoler of the city prison at the Bocardo, on 17 October 1671.¹³

The evidence that Thomas Williams, a milliner, was an Oxford Baptist is stronger.¹⁴ In the 1630s Williams was variously a constable and bailiff, and in 1641 he was chosen 'moneymaster' in Oxford. When the King came to Oxford he demanded Williams' house in the High Street was searched for arms in January 1642, well before he was dismissed from office in 1643.¹⁵ Reinstated in 1646, Williams was 'moneymaster' again in 1648, and a member of the Mayor's Council in 1652. Elected Mayor in 1653, thereafter he held a variety of city offices. As Mayor, Williams refused 'to confirm sentences of whipping passed on some Quaker "missionaries" and allowed them to hold a meeting at his house, at which his son was converted'. He also intervened to prevent undergraduates ducking three Quakers, among them Elizabeth Fletcher, who had 'walked the streets naked as a sign that God would strip those in power'.¹⁶ In 1659 he took a congratulatory message from Oxford to Cromwell as Lord Protector, his expenses being met by the city. He was removed from office when Charles II

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resumed the throne, but along with thirty others returned briefly to the Common Council in 1664, travelling to Windsor, London, and other places on business for the city.¹⁷

A church is formed

To say that there were Baptists in Oxford does not however mean that a church was in existence, and the use of the term 'Anabaptist' should not be taken as conclusive evidence, either of Baptists or of a Baptist meeting. To call people 'Anabaptist' in Commonwealth England was to discredit them in the community at large as political anarchists, guilty of the worst excesses of sectarianism. For example, there was a 'tumult' in 1656, two days after the funeral of John Pendarves, the Baptist minister at Abingdon, when thirty-three Baptist 'messengers' who had attended from around the country were arrested by Cromwell's troops on suspicion of planning a rebellion. Subsequently it was sufficient for one local opponent to publish a pamphlet, *Munster and Abingdon, or the Open Rebellion there, and Unhappy Tumult here* (1657), to link those gathered at Abingdon with the centre of Anabaptist influence and so make his point that the Baptists gathered were political and religious anarchists. 'Anabaptist' was a term of abuse used by commentators to smear the opposition, and in Oxford Anthony Wood freely used this term, but its use is not proof of the existence of Baptists.¹⁸

By the time the itinerating Quakers John Camm and John Audland arrived in Oxford in 1654, however, the Baptist meeting was well-established. Camm and Audland went:

to the Baptist meeting, and, waiting there until the person speaking had done, John Audland began to speak upon the same matter, and made those things more clear to the peoples understanding, greatly to the satisfaction of those that were there; and the man in whose house the Meeting was kept received John Audland and John Camm into their house.¹⁹

Two years later, in 1656, Oxford sent messengers to meetings with fellow Baptists at Tetsworth, providing indisputable evidence of a Baptist church.

Possibly by 1657, and certainly by 1659, the Oxford church was publicly baptizing. Wood recounts the preaching of Vavasor Powell, a Welsh Baptist preacher, at All Hallows on 15 June 1657, 'before a great multitude of scholars and laycs, for then after he had sufficiently railed against the Universities, was so impudent as to particularise certain persons'. Powell had been baptized at Mold, North Wales, in 1655, having arrived at Baptist opinions the previous year, and was clearly promulgating his convictions freely at this time. Wood adds that it was common 'in private meetings and conventicles of Baptists, Quakers and such like unstable people' to declare against uniformity. He had heard such things 'when Anabaptists publicly baptized people at High [i.e., Hythe] Bridge; and some I have seen baptized by one ... King, a glover of Oxon, beheld by hundreds of people, that would shout at it and make it ridiculous'.²⁰

Abingdon and the role of the Association

Oxford Baptists were always part of a larger regional association. Although the term 'association' eventually prevailed to describe a meeting of representatives, or 'messengers', of independent Calvinistic Baptist churches, the original phrase was 'General Meeting'.²¹ Dr White's earlier piece has traced the growth through the 1650s of the Abingdon Association. It was into this Association that the Oxford church was received in 1656, and the Association records give a picture of the Oxford church and the issues which concerned it.

One issue raised at the General Meetings was the recognition of each other's members; how to handle someone who for some reason had been excommunicated from a fellowship, and how other churches were to be made aware of this. The messengers agreed a neighbouring church could only receive a person under discipline when notification of

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repentance was given. The procedure worked well when John Belcher, a Seventh Day Baptist preacher and Fifth Monarchy man, was excluded by Abingdon, but was still praying and preaching in the other churches.²²

The messengers brought reports from their churches to the meetings, so there could be shared prayer and, if messengers felt it right, a visit to needy churches. Messengers sometimes asked each congregation to respond to common issues, as on 14 March 1656, when the 'paying of tithes' was reckoned 'an evill from which all the people of God ought to purge themselves...' Pastors should not be paid 'tithes or enforced maintenance' but by the voluntary contributions of 'those that are instructed by them'.²³ Similarly, those attending 'christning feasts (as the world calles them) which are held in honour of mock-baptisme of infants' should be disciplined.

When asked, should Baptists use parish burial grounds, the answer was, 'we should rather with Abraham buy a burying place for our dead than frequent ... their places with them'. This issue was to arise in Oxford when Anne King died in June 1681, and was buried 'without any divine service' in All Saints' churchyard. The matter was further compounded because she had been 'excommunicated' from the Church of England for refusing to have her children baptized. This case brought the sexton, Roger Cooper, before the Archdeacon's Court.²⁴

At Tetsworth, on 27 June 1656, Oxford Baptists asked: 'What the beast spoken of in the Revelation of John, what is his image, and what it is to worship him and to receive his marke upon their forehead or in their right hand?' They also asked, 'whether the seventh-day Sabbath, as it was given in Ex. 20.10, be in force to be observed by the saints under the Gospell', a relevant issue in 1660 when Seventh Day Baptist and Fifth Monarchy man, John Belcher, preached in Oxford.²⁵

The Association records contain two specific reports about Oxford Baptists that give an impression of the congregation

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just prior to the imposition of the Clarendon Code, beginning in 1661. On 5-7 May 1659, Richard Tidmarsh reported:

Oxford. Through grace they are preserved and kept in the faith of the Gospell: none herein staggering though many trials have been undergone. They have found by experience that comfort and refreshing doth follow a diligent waiting upon God. Two of them do observe the Seventh-Day Sabbath, yet forsake not the church. Two have been lately cast out, viz., Thomas Hatchman, a butcher who brake and ran away and hath wronged many and much blurred the Gospell. The other is a sister who is cast out for backbiting and other evils. One member is very low in spirit and in a very sad condition but not in so great extremity. There have been added about foure.

At the same meeting Wantage reported, 'there hath been one baptized, who now walks with the Church at Oxford'.²⁶

Later in the same meeting Oxford Baptists asked: 'How much and how farre a church is to deale with a member that holds communion with one lawfully cast out by another true church? This query is understood not of civill communion but of communion in worship and the things of God.' The answer was: 'They ought to deale with him as with one that manifestly and scandously sins inasmuch as his action makes voyd the ordinances of Christ which requires that a person lawfully cast out be looked upon as one whom the saints doe and must put away from among themselves.' If it is objected that the church which cast him out 'did not act lawfully and orderly therein' then remember the church ought not to be censured without sufficient proof as this is a church matter, not just one for individual members.²⁷

The next year, 1660, Roger Hatchman the Oxford messenger reported:

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Oxford. They are, through grace, in a good frame waiting upon God in the use of his ordinances. And the present dispensation hath bene unto them to the furtherance of zeale and quickning and encouraging. Three sisters have been received in. None cast out, but two members are lately fallen to the Quakers, and not yet dealt with; one sister is under dealing. As to outwards, they are in a condition to be helpful to others. Some feares of the prevailing corruption doe trouble some who yet have a sense of their corruptions etc, but generally they are lively in God's ways and they have great hopes of a good issue out of all their appearing crosse providences.²⁸

The picture that emerges is of a Baptist community concerned with fundamental beliefs, issues of ministry and fellowship, and practising believers' baptism openly until 1660.

Who were the Oxford Baptists?

When the Abingdon Association met in 1656 the church's messengers were Thomas Tisdale and Richard Tidmarsh. Tisdale, or Tesdale, had been at Tetsworth on 10 June 1653 representing the Abingdon church, but now he represented Oxford, having moved to St Martin's, in the St Thomas parish of Oxford.²⁹ Tisdale was appointed a 'constable' of the north-west ward of the city in September 1668, but was soon in trouble for 'not attending upon the Mayor on election day' a year later. Nonetheless he was 'chosen a common councillor on 30 September, 1673', but by 12 January 1674 he was still refusing to take the oaths required and 'refused to execute his office'. He was not alone in his action, a Mr Kiblewhite adopting the same stance, and the Council considered how to force them both to take the oaths. Kiblewhite conformed in August 1673, but Tisdale held out, and councillors demanded the 'Mayor to take immediate action to have Mr Tisdale brought before King and Council to answer his contempt of the city in not accepting his place on the common council'.

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Although elected bailiff for two years in 1674 and again in 1676, Tisdale, 'wilfully, with others, refused to come to Common Council in spite of several warnings, contrary to their oaths' and it was decided 'to take action to bring them to their obedience'. Ten shilling fines were imposed on 16 March, 12 April and 16 July 1677. It is not clear what this dispute was about, and how the matter was resolved is unknown, but on 27 August 1677 all his fines were remitted, and his bailiff's place restored. A month later Tisdale paid five pounds, took the oaths, and received the city keys. In September 1678 Tisdale took the oath and became the Mayor's assistant, surrendering his offices in August 1680.³⁰

The son of Oswald Tidmarsh, a husbandman, Richard Tidmarsh (or Titmarsh) had been baptized as an infant on 13 March 1626, in the parish church at Adlestrop, Gloucestershire. He was apprenticed to a tanner, James Yate, admitted a freeman of Oxford on 19 January 1652, and lived later with his wife Jane, in St Thomas parish.³¹ Tidmarsh became the leader of Oxford Baptists until 1690, when, after a spell at Colchester, he was appointed pastor at Tiverton in Devon, until as late as 1708.³² He was prominent in city affairs and first entered the Common Council on the nomination of the Mayor, Thomas Williams, his fellow Baptist, in 1654, but refused to pay four pounds 'in lieu of entertainment before admission to his seat' and so lost his nomination. This failure to pay was still under discussion in 1659 and a lengthy Council debate concluded 'he could not be admitted to the Common Council except by an election, but it is agreed he is to be given a chamberlain's place'. A year later this act of the Council was 'rendered null and void, as Richard Tidmarsh has never come to take his oath, nor attended the Councils'. On 6 August 1666 the Council allowed three pounds 'to Mr Tidmarsh from the City for the erection of an arch near his door', the local inhabitants having paid a similar sum towards the costs.³³ These changes were made, according to Crosby, when Oxford Baptists first used this site as 'the principal Baptist meeting place until 1715'.³⁴

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Later messengers from Oxford to the Association included Lawrence King and Roger Hatchman. Lawrence King and his wife Anne lived for a time at 119-120, High Street, Oxford. King, the son of an Oxford innkeeper, received infant baptism in the parish of All Saints on 18 November 1629, and examples of his later trade tokens are in the Ashmolean Museum. King was elected a constable for Oxford's south-east ward in September 1652 and a year later was nominated with others, 'to have Mrs Brooke's money'.³⁵ King was licensed as one of the church's preachers in 1672, but had been involved with Oxford Baptists from the 1650s and was in charge of the public baptism at Hythe Bridge described by the diarist Anthony Wood. When King went to the Association meeting at Tetsworth in September 1658, his late arrival was noted, and he was reproved:

The messenger of the church at Oxford not coming till the 15th day and the messengers of that church having twice before in like manner failed as to coming in the appointed time to the meeting of the messengers, the rest of the messengers sent a loving epistle to the church, beseeching them to consider acting in this respect and that this might be reformed for the future...³⁶

In May 1659 Roger Hatchman, as Oxford's messenger to the Association, reported the case of his namesake, Thomas Hatchman. Although their relationship is not known, they were both members of the Oxford congregation. Thomas was in trouble with the city authorities in June 1658 and fined for trading as a butcher in a wrong area of the city and on the wrong day.³⁷ In July 1660 at the Association meeting Roger Hatchman was again the messenger, when all the churches represented except one agreed to exclude 'John Belcher' from preaching in their churches. Apparently some churches were willingly receiving Belcher's ministry in prayer and preaching, 'though he standeth ... truly and justly excommunicate by that

church'. This could only 'open a wide dore to confusion and licentiousness'.³⁸ In January 1660 Wood records 'Mr [John] Belchior, the Anabaptist, preached at St Peters ... inveighing much against the present overtures, proceeding so far the Vice-Chancellor, Dr [John] Conant, turned him out of the church. He was set up by ... Andrews the butler of Exon College and Mr [Ralph] Austen, and major Roger Hatchman a cashiered Anabaptist officer'. Perhaps it was Hatchman who voted against the Association resolution.³⁹

Other names linked with Oxford Baptists include two of the staff of New College, James Jennings, 'the crop-ear'd under Butler of New Colledge', later a button maker, and Richard Quelch, the porter, both of whom welcomed the visiting Quakers, Camm and Audland in 1654. Both men had been put in post by the Parliamentary visitors to the University. Jennings was charged with being at an unlawful assembly at the Oxford Quarter Sessions in the autumn of 1661, and by early 1662, along with Lawrence King had paid his fine. Richard Quelch was also arrested on the same occasion.⁴⁰ Quelch's unusual name makes it possible to trace him in Oxford. His father and grandfather were both also Richard and they were all watch and clock makers.⁴¹ The Baptist Richard Quelch became an Oxford freeman on 26 November 1652, lived in All Saints and paid tax on two hearths in 1665, with property passing into the hands of his son, John, by 1667. In 1654 Mary Quelch of Oxford, a relation of Richard according to Ernest Payne, married Edward Stennett, before both adopted seventh day views in 1658. A Richard Quelch appears later as one of three deacons elected at Reading Baptist Church in January 1680, and he was still a deacon in 1683.⁴²

Edward Wyans and his wife, and John Toms and his wife, both appeared before the ecclesiastical courts in the Restoration period.⁴³ Edward Wyans had been a parish constable in 1648, and was appointed by the city council a 'searcher of leather', that is, an examiner of leather quality, in the 1650s. There is a will for an Edward Wyans, cordwainer or shoemaker, who

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died in St Mary's parish, in May 1687.⁴⁴ John Toms was also a cordwainer, who died in November 1693. He was chosen to receive twenty-five pounds for ten years given by various citizens, and for 1659, like Wyans, was a 'leather searcher and sealer'.⁴⁵

'Seditious sectaries'

Once Cromwell was dead and his son Richard had declined office, the move to bring back the monarchy swiftly gathered pace. Oxford Baptists had expressed their concern in 1659 through Thomas Tisdale, who signed *A Testimony to Truth* drawn up by five Baptist churches in the region, Oxford, Abingdon, Wantage, Longworth, and Faringdon, that embodied 'a republican and radical demand for government by the saints'.⁴⁶ Their demand was not realized, however. Despite promises made at Breda by the returning Charles II, church and state were again closely aligned against Dissenters.

After 1660 Nonconformists increasingly faced harassment from the Church and political discrimination as the Acts of the Clarendon Code were enforced, with fines and imprisonment for persistent absence from parish church services as well as attendance at their 'conventicles':

The Act Books of the Consistory and Archdeacon's Courts are of great interest because through them we can hear the voices of the accused. King said he did not go to church because 'hee doth not conceive hee is bound thereto by the Lawe'. Roger Hatchman and his wife, Mary, 'disputeth the case and denyeth any parochial church'. James Jennings said 'it was against his conscience to pay his tax to the church'.⁴⁷

The books note many cases of people being brought before the court for failure to attend public worship in the parish church for four Sundays together. As late as 1669 King was charged

with this offence and once more paid his four shillings fine, 'to be put out to the poor of All Saints'.⁴⁸

In 1661 Lawrence King, Roger Hatchman and Richard Tidmarsh were brought before the October Quarter Sessions, charged with being 'seditious sectaries, disloyal persons, for being present at an unlawful conventicle'. They pleaded 'not guilty' and were later placed in the Bocardo prison, and remanded to the next sessions, unless they took the Oath of Allegiance or paid their fines.⁴⁹

After an abortive Fifth Monarchy rising in London, there was considerable unease in Oxford and the militia surrounded the Baptist and Quaker meeting-houses. On 25 November 1661 the lieutenant of the local volunteers reported: 'Yesterday there was a very great meeting of the Anabaptists at Titmarsh his house, where they held forth in as seditious words as their capacities could well find out, which having understood I sent to the Mayor and wee immediately sent out the constables and secured them.'⁵⁰

At the end of 1661 Lawrence King and Roger Hatchman were again arrested for 'seditious preaching' at Tidmarsh's house, which earlier that year had been 'beset by the militia' and a number of the congregation arrested.⁵¹

From 1662 many former Anglicans who had rejected a restored, state-controlled Church and were ejected from their livings, and Presbyterians who only reluctantly conceded being a 'sect', experienced with Baptists and Quakers the 'conventicle-hunting and harrying that dominated Stuart Oxford' after the Restoration of the monarchy.

In 1663 and again in 1665 the court enforced the law with the following resolution: 'Quakers and Anabaptists and other seditious sectaries do frequently on the Lord's Day riotously and wilfully assemble themselves together in great numbers in many places in this city and suburbs thereof ... worshipping God otherwise than by the Lawes of this land...' It was therefore ordered 'that all constables within this city and suburbs do their utmost endeavour to suppress all conventicles

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and unlawful meetings ... and all others whom they suppose to be ringleaders of the conventicles ... and [bring] as many others as they can before one of his Majesty's Justices ... there to be proceeded against according to the Law'. Any constable refusing or neglecting to do this would be proceeded against with all severity.

Baptists and Quakers were often before the courts for their attendance at unlawful conventicles, when their fines were usually heavier than those meted out to Presbyterians for similar offences. In 1665 an excommunicated Anabaptist was given 'time to inform himself of those things which he at present scruples at'.⁵² When Dr Peter Mews became Vice-Chancellor of Oxford in 1669 it was reported, 'He last Sunday in the afternoon had seized another at one Kinges, a Glover in ye High Street, and for punishment brought the Speaker and another of the Chiefs to heare a sermon at St Maries'.⁵³

In 1672 Tidmarsh took advantage of Charles II's indulgence to register his house as a Baptist meeting-place, with himself and Lawrence King noted as the preachers.⁵⁴ A letter from James Penny, of Christ Church, in 1672 mentions 'there were two dissenting meetings in Oxford at that time, one Presbyterian, the other a mixed congregation of Baptists and Independents. Dr Langley led the Presbyterians. The teacher to the other Assembly is a tanner of this town, by name Tidmarsh, who is cryed up much above Langley even by his own party'.⁵⁵ The house of James Beckford, in Wolvercote, was also licensed for preaching in 1672, but nothing else is known.⁵⁶

Following Monmouth's unsuccessful rebellion and then the failed Rye House Plot, even moderate people were convinced that every Dissenter was a potential rebel. In Oxford, Lawrence King's house was searched for arms in June 1683. Active measures against Dissenters continued until James II suddenly changed his policies. On 4 April 1687, James issued a Declaration of Indulgence given on his sole prerogative, that gave liberty of conscience to all, authorized all Christian public worship, and abolished religious tests for offices held under

the Crown. As part of this policy, James granted a new charter to Oxford in 1688, James nominating King and Tidmarsh to various civic offices.

As a consequence some felt Tidmarsh along with other Baptists, 'for our Liberties sake, complied with the Popish Party, to the hazard of the Protestant Religion, and the Civil Liberties of the Nation'. Under pressure from Independents and Presbyterians, loyal addresses to James had come from several Baptist groups in 1687, including one from the Baptists of Oxford, Abingdon and Wantage. At the 1689 national Particular Baptist Assembly the vigour of the oppression many had undergone was recognized, as was the fact that some had succumbed and were disciplined by their congregations, but it still seemed 'unreasonable, that for the Miscarriage of a few persons, the whole Party should be laid under Reproach and Infamy' when on every occasion Baptists have 'ventured our All for the Protestant Religion and Liberties of our Native Country'. The statement issued, *Innocency Vindicated; or, Reproach Wip'd Off*, was signed by many of the messengers present, among them Richard Tidmarsh of Oxford, Robert Keate of Wantage, and John Tomkins of Abingdon.⁵⁷

A remnant

By the end of the century the Oxford church was in a poor state. Tidmarsh, after receiving financial support for his work among the East Anglian churches from the General Assembly, plus fifteen pounds for his travel expenses, moved to Tiverton, in Devon, where he was ordained by Thomas Whinnell of Taunton on 12 November 1691.⁵⁸ 'A man greatly esteemed and who had suffered much in the times of persecution for Nonconformity', Tidmarsh is named in an application for a new 'Anabaptist' meeting-house at Tiverton as 'Teacher or Minister'. In 1701 he is described as 'weak and infirm by reason of advanced years'; and in 1708, when a new list of members was made, Tidmarsh was at its head, 'notwithstanding his age and infirmity'. Tidmarsh's removal from Oxford at a very

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advanced age is very unusual. Perhaps there had been discontent in Oxford about his acceptance of civic office under James II. There is no hint of this at Tiverton.

John Toms, junior, followed Tidmarsh at Oxford as minister for a while, receiving ten pounds for his Oxford ministry from the General Assembly on 13 June 1690, but Crosby claims he had left for London by 1707.⁵⁹ By then the Baptist church had all but disappeared:

When the Berkshire Association was re-established (1707), the Abingdon church stated: 'Our friends at Oxfoard are in great measure destitute of Ministerial Supplyes and therefore desire yt you would Consider their distress and yt If it be in your power, you would afford ym relief.' The Oxford Baptists joined themselves to the Abingdon church and had a weekday meeting only. Joseph Collett and William Fuller, the ministers of Coate and Abingdon respectively, supplied the pulpit by turns.⁶⁰

Matters came to a head in Oxford on 29 May 1715 when an Oxford mob, assisted by university students, first attacked the Presbyterian meeting-house in New Inn Hall Street the previous day, then attacked the Baptist and Quaker meeting-houses, even though it was a Sunday and worship was in progress. The Presbyterian and Baptist congregations eventually joined together, under William Roby, to build on a new site, where the present Baptist church stands in New Road.⁶¹

Why was the Oxford Baptist church so weak at the end of the century? The congregation in Oxford was largely composed of the rising tradesmen of the period, who identified themselves with the Parliamentary forces in the nation, but they lacked the leadership of an educated ministry with separatist, Puritan sympathies. The congregation's leadership was to be found at Abingdon, in Thomas Tisdale, who moved to Oxford, and possibly John Pendarves, the university-

educated pastor of Abingdon. Oxford Baptists responded to the more radical preaching of Vavasor Powell and John Belcher, but in Richard Tidmarsh, the pastor over nearly forty years, they never found the quality of leadership that benefited these other congregations.

Oxford Baptists had an unusually good relationship with local Quakers, as expressed through Thomas Williams, but this was in sharp contrast to that pertaining in several other Baptist communities, where divergence from the Quakers led to a clearer Baptist identity with which to face times of persecution.⁶² Something of this imprecise Baptist thought is also revealed in the 'mixed' nature of the congregation as the century progressed.

Oxford Baptists lacked members who, before and after 1661, engaged in theological writing, either through published works or unpublished letters. Broadmead, Bristol, during the Commonwealth period had the Broadmead elder, Robert Purnell, a carpet weaver, who wrote extensively on many aspects of church life. Later, Thomas Hardcastle, a Cambridge graduate, related through marriage to Vavasor Powell, in a series of letters written from prison, provided some of the finest Baptist scriptural exposition of the period, for those trying to make theological sense of what was happening.⁶³

The distinctives that shaped Oxford Baptists are found in the Abingdon Association records and indicate what shaped them as a recognisable Baptist community in the seventeenth century. However, their inadequacy when faced with violent persecution and hostility from the restored church and monarchy, sharply re-enforced by the University of Oxford, was soon all too evident as the church nearly failed.

NOTES

¹ W. Stevens, 'The Pioneers and their Successors', in Walter Stevens and Walter W. Bottoms, *The Baptists of New Road, Oxford* (Oxford, 1948), pp. 3-9.

² W. Stevens, 'Oxford's Attitude to Dissenters', *Baptist Quarterly* (BQ) XIII (1949), 4-17.

³ W.T. Whitley (ed.), *Minutes of the General Assembly of the General Baptist Churches in England, 1654-1811*, 2 vols. (London, 1909-10).

⁴ A.S. Langley's suggestion that the destitute widow of a John Newman, 'a man of honest life' who had died in Flanders, 'leaving our poor sister in great want', in London in 1695, was the widow of this Newman, seems very improbable, *Transactions Baptist Historical Society* VII (1920-21), 19-20. Similarly, the possibility that the Horley Newman was an Oxford city councillor, bailiff, and key holder, between 1639 and 1664; see M.G. Hobson, *Oxford Council Acts, 1626-1665* (Oxford, 1933), pp. 95-6, 109, 122, 130, 132, 138, 177, 185, 193, 240, 269, 298, 327.

⁵ B.R. White (ed.), *Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland, Part 3, The Abingdon Association* (London, [1974]), p. 195.

⁶ Charles Frith, *Cromwell's Army*, 4th edn. (London, 1962), pp. 336-7. For Baptist chaplains, see A. Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains, 1642-1651* (Woodbridge, 1990).

⁷ Frith, *Cromwell*, p. 332.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 332f.

⁹ Hobson, *1626-1665*, pp. 115, 134, 183.

¹⁰ Philip Hayden, 'The Baptists in Oxford, 1656-1819', *BQ* XXIX (1981), 127, following White, *Association Records*, p. 215, fn. 126, both erroneously suggest it was Roger Hatchman's son of the same name who housed the Baptist meeting.

¹¹ Andrew Clark (ed.), *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, antiquary, of Oxford, 1632-95, described by Himself*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1891), p. 302.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 183, 266.

¹³ Hobson, *1666-1701*, pp. 71, 309.

¹⁴ Oxford Diocesan Records, c.9. f. 13, [in Latin] identify Thomas Williams as 'Anabaptist' when he appears before the court in 1664.

¹⁵ Octavius Ogle, *Royal Letters Addressed to Oxford and now Existing in the City Archives* (Oxford, 1892), p. 363.

¹⁶ W.C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 158–9. Christina Colvin, 'Oxford Protestant Nonconformity and Other Christian Bodies', in A. Crossley (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Oxfordshire*, vol. IV (Oxford, 1979), p. 415.

¹⁷ Hobson, 1626–1665, *passim*; possibly his will in Oxford Record Office, 107, 160.

¹⁸ B.R. White, 'John Pendarves, the Calvinistic Baptists and the Fifth Monarchists', *BQ XXV* (1975), 251–71; G.F. Nuttall, 'Abingdon Revisited', *BQ XXXVI* (1995), 96–103.

¹⁹ Philip Hayden, 'Baptists in Oxford', 127, 133.

²⁰ Wood's *Life*, vol. I, p. 294, fn. 6. Wood was apparently following Alexander Griffiths, *Strena Vavasoriensis...* (Oxford, 1652), which maligned Powell unscrupulously. R. Tudur Jones, 'The Sufferings of Vavasor', in John Mansel (ed.), *Welsh Baptist Studies* (South Wales Baptist College, 1976), p. 91. David Davies, *Vavasor Powell, the Baptist Evangelist of Wales in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1896), pp. 88f, 98f.

²¹ 'Association' and 'consociation' between individual churches are recommended in John Cotton, *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (London, 1644), but the idea was not taken up by Independent churches until the nineteenth century. B.R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 2nd edn. (Didcot, 1996), pp. 66–70.

²² White, *Association Records*, p. 205.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁴ *VCH*, IV, p. 417. It is important to note Colvin's footnote, 'The account of the 17th and 18th century nonconformity is based on an earlier draft kindly supplied by Mr W Stevens'. Stevens and Bottoms, *Baptists of New Road*, p. 7. King's family included five children, Philip Hayden, 'Baptists in Oxford', 133, fn. 11.

²⁵ White, *Association Records*, p. 158.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 196–7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 203–4.

²⁹ Philip Hayden, 'Baptists in Oxford', 133, fn. 9; Thomas Tisdale had a son, a mercer, also Thomas, who was made a freeman on 19 January 1652. A Richard Tisdale, apprenticed to James Yate, mercer, was admitted a freeman on 11 August 1646. Hobson, *1626–1665*, p. 135.

³⁰ Hobson, *1666–1701*, pp. 23, 32, 70, 72, 75f., 79, 111f., 127, 152.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

³² H.B. Case, *The History of the Baptist Church in Tiverton* (London, 1907), pp. 20–2, 24, 27.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 249, 267f., 350.

³⁴ Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists*, vol. III (London, 1740), p. 125f.

³⁵ Hobson, *1626–1665*, p. 192. No other details are known about Mrs Brooke.

³⁶ White, *Association Records*, p. 186.

³⁷ Hobson, *1626–1661*, p. 464.

³⁸ White, *Association Records*, p. 205, cf. pp. 145, 211.

³⁹ Wood's *Life*, vol. I, p. 302. John Belcher, who went on to become pastor of Bell Lane, London, a Seventh Day Baptist church, was imprisoned in April 1658 for suspected involvement in a Fifth Monarchy plot. B.S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-century Millenarianism* (London, 1972), p. 242.

⁴⁰ City Archives, O.5.11, f.49.

⁴¹ C.F.C. Beeson, *Clockmaking in Oxfordshire, 1400–1850* ([Banbury], 1962), p. 135. A Quelch clock is in the Ashmolean Museum, photograph in Beeson, fig. 34.

⁴² B.R. White, 'The Baptists of Reading, 1652–1715', *BQ* XXII (1967), 253. Ernest A. Payne, *The Baptists of Berkshire Through Three Centuries* (London, 1951), p. 47; Hobson, *Oxford Council Acts, 1666–1701* (Oxford, 1939).

⁴³ City Archives, O.5.11, f. 49, records Edward Wyans and John Toms being indicted, along with Lawrence King, Richard Quelch, and James Jennings, for being at 'an unlawful conventicle'.

⁴⁴ Hobson, *1626–1665*, pp. 158, 167, 170, 185, 192, 259, 323. There was a Thomas Wyans, also a cordwainer, in the city. Hobson, *1626–1665*, p. 281.

⁴⁵ Hobson, *1626–1665*, pp. 203, 249. Crosby claims that a John Toms, junior, was minister at the close of the seventeenth century, and removed to London, Crosby, *History*, IV, p. 138.

⁴⁶ White, *Association Records*, p. 207, fn. 8.

⁴⁷ Stevens and Bottoms, *Baptists of New Road*, p. 6.

⁴⁸ City Archives, f. 62, 68, 108v, f. 115v.

⁴⁹ City Archives, 1656–76, f. 45v, f. 46.

⁵⁰ Stevens and Bottoms, *Baptists of New Road*, p. 5.

⁵¹ *VCH*, IV, p. 417, fns. 64, 65.

⁵² Stevens and Bottoms, *Baptists of New Road*, p. 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 6. City Archives, O.5.11, f.49: the known Baptists, Lawrence King, John Toms, Edw. Wyans, James Jennings, Richard Quelch, were all charged 'with being at an unlawful Conventicle' in 1661, Jennings and King paying their fines in 1662.

⁵⁴ G.L. Turner, *Original Records of Early Nonconformity*, vol. I (London, 1911), pp. 243, 258, 440.

⁵⁵ Philip Hayden, 'Baptists in Oxford', 128.

⁵⁶ Stevens and Bottoms, *Baptists of New Road*, p. 6.

⁵⁷ A.H.J. Baines, 'Innocency Vindicated; or, Reproach Wip'd Off', *BQ* XVI (1955), 164–70.

⁵⁸ Philip Hayden, 'Baptists in Oxford', 133f, fn. 20. Case, *History of the Baptist Church in Tiverton*, pp. 24, 27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134, fn. 20 and 23. Contrary to the claim of Stevens, Claridge did not minister at New Road.

⁶⁰ Stevens and Bottoms, *Baptists of New Road*, pp. 8–9.

⁶¹ Philip Hayden, 'Baptists in Oxford', 129.

⁶² T.L Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War: The Baptist-Quaker Conflict in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford, 1997), extensively examines the shaping of Baptist and Quaker identity through their controversies.

⁶³ Roger Hayden (ed.), *The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol, 1640–1687* (Bristol, 1974), pp. 17–46, for the importance and contribution of an educated ministry during Restoration period.

Oxford and the Meeting-House Riots of 1715

J.H.Y. Briggs

Many histories of Dissent, such for example as Michael Watts' very helpful *The Dissenters*, have successive chapters entitled 'The Persecution of Dissent' and 'The Toleration of Dissent'.¹ History written from legislation would suggest that 1689 marks the change from the one to the other, but written in terms of local hostility a date as late as 1715 may well be justified. For not only did toleration within the meaning of the Toleration Act of 1689 provide only a very limited dispensation from the impediments of the law: the greater charity of central government sometimes contrasted sharply with the attitudes of local opinion and local authorities, when hot tempers were aroused against the Dissenters, and local magistrates chose not to exercise their legal authority, conniving at the actions of the mob.

The context of the riots: 'The Church in Danger'

The meeting-house riots of 1715 witnessed the destruction or severe damaging of between forty and fifty Nonconformist meeting-houses, more than ninety per cent of which were Presbyterian. They represent a belated and ill-fated response to the Act of Toleration of 1689 by those members of the Established Church who were opposed to the establishment of religious pluralism in England and Wales, even in the form of an exceptionally limited toleration. Macaulay, who in general

defended the Toleration Act as a major milestone in the development of a more liberal state, admitted that the Act's scope was limited: 'it recognised persecution as the rule, and granted liberty of conscience only as the exception'.² Nonetheless, from the point of view of die-hard high Tory High Churchmen, the world was moving in a most unfortunate direction. With the accession of the Dutch Calvinist William III to the throne of England, the old union of church and state with the Crown as the divinely appointed head of both was increasingly anachronistic, with consequent difficulties for its rationale as determining the shape of political life. Those clergy who, tied by their oath to James II, could not bring themselves to swear allegiance to the new dynasty were forced out of the Church of England and became the small surviving church of the non-jurors. At a time when it had been hoped to widen rather than narrow the scope of the national church, a further group had thus been excluded from its communion. The hope of a wider charity whereby 'a comprehension' would extend the bounds of the Church of England to include the more moderate Dissenters came to nothing.

The members of the lower house in Convocation rejected outright moves to create a more all-embracing Church of England. They thereby inflicted the gravest of blows on their own church, not only in terms of the quality of the men they failed to recruit, but in so far as the recipe to deal with Dissent had then to become toleration rather than comprehension. Toleration, on the scale now demanded, undermined the effective exercise of Anglican discipline at parish level. Freedom to attend conventicle could not in practice be distinguished from freedom to attend no place of worship at all. Attendances at parish churches plummeted, leaving the parish clergy, in an age of increasing rationalism, with a sense of impending calamity. It was then that the figure of a tottering church being hung outside a public house was given the title 'The Church in Danger'. In Geoffrey Holmes' words, the

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appointment of William III, the Dutch Calvinist, to the English monarchy, in the context of the Toleration Act, 'reduced to tatters the whole Anglican concept of an indissoluble link between the altar and the throne'.³

The meeting-house riots, which were most extensive, occurred in locations as far separated as Oxford in the south to as far north as South Lancashire and West Yorkshire, and from Montgomery in the west to Stamford in the east. Some forty to fifty chapels in all were involved, with an epicentre in Staffordshire and the Black Country. It has been suggested that this destruction indicated an over-reaction to a false calculation as to the strength of Dissent, based on the erroneous notion that every separate registration of a place of meeting represented a new and separate congregation, rather than in part the movement of some congregations from one meeting-place to another, or simply the exercise of a judicious insurance policy.⁴ But, as Gilbert argues, at a deeper level they were not wrong. The world of social control in alliance with a dominant Establishment was rapidly losing credibility.⁵ Moreover it was not only that Dissent was increasing in numerical strength; it was also advancing in wealth, status and influence, with many Presbyterians taking office in the boroughs, evading the penalties of the 1673 Test Act by the mechanism of occasional conformity, that is, taking communion in the parish church at least once a year.⁶ Whilst doubtless principally a political device, the Low Church party welcomed this practice in default of a more formal comprehension, as making for community of religious interest within the nation.

Set in this context, the Oxford riots have a threefold interest. They were the furthest south that riots are recorded; secondly, taking place on 28 and 29 May, they were the earliest of the riots of 1715, almost a fortnight earlier than any other disturbances; and, thirdly, they were the only ones in England where damage to other than Presbyterian meeting-houses, and the property of Presbyterian dignitaries, was recorded.⁷ The only other location where Baptist property was recorded as

suffering was Wrexham in North Wales, in a congregation of mixed tradition.

An Oxford firebrand: Revd Dr Henry Sacheverell

Oxford has a further part to play in the story in so far as the focus for the High Church rhetoric that girded intemperate individuals into action was the Revd Henry Sacheverell, a clergyman who surprisingly came of impeccable Dissenting stock. His grandfather, John, and his great uncles, Timothy and Philologus, were all three ejected in 1662, serving subsequently as Nonconformist ministers. Henry's father, however, conformed and served as Rector of St Peter's, Marlborough. Sacheverell went up to Magdalen in August 1689 at the early age of fifteen, and was a Fellow of the College from 1701 to 1713, holding office at different times as Senior Dean of Arts and Bursar. Sacheverell was, however, far from being an academic: so ignorant was he found to be in theology that when initially he sought ordination this was denied him.⁸ During an early preferment to the living of Cannock, his reputation as a high Tory preacher was already established through a sermon preached in Lichfield Cathedral in which he displayed a talent that an admiring Oxford encouraged.⁹

On 5 November 1709, the anniversary not only of Guy Fawkes' attempt to dispose of a duly elected Protestant Parliament, but also of the day on which William of Orange landed in Torbay to deliver the country from Rome and from arbitrary rule, Sacheverell was the preacher of a civic sermon in St Paul's Cathedral. The sermon, which became the subject of legal action, was not a new one but rather one which had already served him well in Oxford. The substance of what he had to say was already present in a sermon preached at St Mary's Oxford almost four years earlier on 23 December 1705. The text on both occasions was St Paul's autobiographical comment about finding himself in peril amongst false brethren. Thus under the title, *The Perils of False Brethren in both Church and State*, Sacheverell delivered the most passionate and violent

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attack that demagogic oratory could produce within the space of fully an hour and a half. Dissenters he characterized as 'miscreants begat in rebellion, born in sedition, and nursed in faction', thus to tolerate them in any way was to set up, 'a universal trade of cozenage, sharpening, dissimulation, and downright knavery'.¹⁰

Published privately against the wishes of the aldermen of the City of London, the printing of the sermon was a minor publishing coup. Accused of making remarks contemptuous of the Government, Sacheverell was unwisely taken through the courts in search of impeachment. During his trial in February and March the following year it was noted that those that stood bail for him were 'two of the chief men' of the University of Oxford.¹¹ About one hundred thousand copies were in circulation before the conclusion of the trial, in which Sacheverell, though impeached, was virtually acquitted because of the leniency of the sentence passed upon him.¹² None the less the House of Commons declared that Sacheverell's language embraced 'malicious, scandalous and seditious libels'. Notwithstanding this the learned doctor, presented to the well-endowed living of Sellattyn in Shropshire, after the conclusion of his laboured trial made a quasi-royal progress to his new charge, calling at Oxford in mid-May on his way north. Welcomed by the Earl of Abingdon, the Vice-Chancellor, the MP for the city, and a number of Heads of Houses and persons of distinction, he remained in Oxford until the end of the month.¹³ He was again fêted on 20 July on his return, when he was entertained by the sheriff of the county and a welcoming committee of some five hundred supporters who escorted him into the city.¹⁴

In a patently combustible situation, fate could have found no more able or active firebrand than the reverend doctor. In London, already at this early date, the rabble attacked Daniel Burgess's meeting-house near Lincoln's Inn and five other chapels, Government only acting against them when St John's Episcopal Chapel was attacked under misapprehension as to

its denominational loyalty. Provincial meeting-houses were also attacked in 1709 and 1710: on this occasion the West Country suffered particularly with attacks upon Dissenting meeting-houses in Cirencester, Exeter, Gloucester, Sherborne and Bristol where a chapel was totally dismantled and the materials thrown into the river. Across the border into Wales there were riots in Welshpool, whilst in Wrexham effigies of Dissenting ministers were burnt on bonfires. Nor did Oxford meeting-houses located within the alma mater of Sacheverell, escape in this first round of attacks. Bishop Burnet significantly comments that 'no notice was taken by the government of all these riots, they were rather favoured than checked'.¹⁵ Defoe, in no doubt that high-flying churchmen were to blame for the vicious actions of the mob, ironically reflected on the partiality of non-jurism: 'to these we owe riots to explain non-resistance and pulling down meeting-houses as a testimony of their tender zeal for indulgence of tender consciences'.¹⁶

In such a context, the Tories won a significant victory in the general election of 1710, celebrated with the ringing of church bells and attacks upon Presbyterians and 'tub preachers'.¹⁷ It was even suggested that a number of Dissenters had voted Tory, having been given assurances through their preachers by the Queen's confidant, and soon-to-be Chancellor of the Exchequer, Robert Harley, that their toleration would be 'kept inviolable'. Be that as it may, such collaboration could not have lasted long, for a pamphlet, generally attributed to Defoe and circulating in the following year, contained a Dissenting disclaimer that they had refused a sum of money offered them by Harley before the election as recompense for the damage done to their meeting-houses during the recent riots. By contrast, government compensation in 1715 was readily accepted.

Although impeached and suspended from preaching for three years from 1710, Sacheverell did not keep his own counsel in the midst of all this. Though denied the bishopric he thought he deserved, he was appointed by the Queen to the

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very rich living of St Andrew's, Holborn in April 1713. Towards the end of the next month he preached a sermon before the Tory House of Commons on *False Notions of Liberty*, an oration which was mischievously published by order of the House and which in printed version served to keep the Sacheverell image before his supporters in the country. Shortly afterwards, on 1 August 1714, Queen Anne died. At once the hopes of the Dissenters were kindled and Tory Church circles pressed to even further desperation, which would eventually find fruit in Jacobite plotting and action. Such action was more emotional than political: King George peacefully succeeded to the throne, and the Whigs turned the Jacobite rising to their own advantage by identifying opposition to their supremacy with treachery to the state. But as of 1714 the worthiness of the German king remained unproven, whilst the Whigs were unpopular in the country for their prosecution of a foreign war, which both kept taxes high and trade in a depressed state. The close association of Dissenters with the Whigs in the public mind caused them to share the disfavour of the politicians.

In such a context the Riot Act was finally passed after debate in both Houses on 20 July 1715, a week after its first introduction to Parliament, but unfortunately the terms of the Act were only to be operative after the last day of July 1715. This timing was crucial, for the Act provided for judicial proceedings against rioters not more than twelve in number who failed to disperse when called upon so to do by the authorities, and specifically included the death penalty for those convicted of the destruction of churches and certified Dissenting meeting-places, but all this only from 1 August 1715. In Worcester a mob indicated that it was well aware of the impending changes in the law, 'but threatened that they will have all the Meeting Houses down before that takes place'.

The Oxford riots

On 20 October 1714, the Sunday prior to George I's coronation, Sacheverell, then staying at New Hall, Sutton

Coldfield, preached in Sutton Church, 'about two hundred Jacobites from Birmingham' joining the congregation. Two days later, in an engagement preliminary to the main spate of riots in the following year, the same group attacked and badly damaged two Birmingham meeting-houses. In May two anniversaries unhappily all but coincided. The new King's birthday fell on the day before the anniversary of the restored monarchy. This the mob celebrated 'not only out of compliance to [the] former [that is the 1660] but rather with fond wishes and Hopes of a future Restoration'. Some put on mourning clothes for the royal celebrations, but new clothes for the second day. In London Cromwell was burnt in effigy at Smithfield and the Pretender's health drunk in public in Ludgate Street, whilst the justices in Westminster passed special orders against riots, mindful of a time 'when the licentious mobility, loosed from labour, and generally elevated by drink are ready for any mischief'.

'Oxford', it was reported, 'rioted in boisterous and extensive style'.¹⁸ On Saturday 28 May, a banquet was held to celebrate King George's birthday: sympathizers of the Hanoverian cause put lights in their windows and joined in the celebrations. These very lights made their houses excellent targets for missiles thrown at them by the Jacobite mob. The following day Jacobites and Tories celebrated the anniversary of Charles II's restoration and lit their windows. On that occasion the targets for the mob were unlighted windows. So extensive was the rioting, undertaken to the 'Sacheverell tune', that martial law had to be proclaimed. This was celebrated by Sir William Browne in the much-cited couplet:

The king to Oxford sent a troop of horse;
The Tories own no argument but force.
With equal care to Cambridge books he sent,
For Whigs allow no force but argument.¹⁹

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Presbyterian, Baptist and Quaker meeting-houses were all damaged: the Presbyterian pulpit was burnt near Carfax, whilst it is recorded that 'the Amen-raiser' of that place was put into the stocks. An effigy of the Presbyterian minister William Roby was burnt on a bonfire, the man himself escaping to London to petition the King on behalf of himself and his congregation. Locally, a most partial interpretation of the law denied them justice since both Vice-Chancellor and Mayor refused to take any action against the rioters. At the subsequent trial the presiding judge is purported to have remarked 'it was a wrongful usurpation of the powers of the state for private persons to suppress public nuisances such as Dissenting Meeting Houses', hardly a reassuring judgement to Nonconformist ears, especially as they learnt two weeks later of even more extensive riots in the North West, in Yorkshire and in midland England, which again required military intervention by central government.

The Oxford Presbyterians at that time numbered some hundred and fifty, but included only one gentleman. The other members were clearly tradesmen or the like, of whom eleven were freemen with just four qualified to vote in county elections. It is hard to see that such a congregation would have presented a major threat to the power base of existing local oligarchies, as in some of the midland and northern boroughs. The cause of the riot, therefore, seems to derive much more from Oxford's High Church tradition rather than any potential threat to the control of the corporation, or local factional strife.

Quaker sources provide us with an eyewitness account of the riot.²⁰ Thomas Story, visiting Oxford from the north of England, arrived on 28 May and lodged with Thomas Nicholls, a fellow Quaker. He confesses that initially he played the tourist and visited many colleges and gardens, which he found pleasant and commodious, but at the same time he was aware of 'a very great Load and Power of Darkness'. This soon revealed itself, 'for, in the Evening, a great Mob of the Scholars and others, arose and gutted (as they called it) the Presbyterian

Meeting-house; that is, they broke all the Windows, Doors, Benches, Wainscots, and Seats, carrying them away, and burning and destroying them; which made a great Uproar in the City’.

Attendance at the Quaker meeting the next morning was not large, but there were some scholars from the University in attendance. The Friends soon received intelligence that their meeting-house was to be dealt with that night in the same manner as the Presbyterian meeting-house had been attacked the night before. Apprised of this, they sent a message to the Mayor acquainting him with this possibility. The Mayor was, however, absent and the best they could achieve was to leave a message with a servant who promised to speak with the Mayor on his return. The message was to ask the Mayor, as the prime civil officer of the city, to protect the property of the Friends against the intended violence, but, comments Story, ‘we had no Benefit by it, as the Sequence proved’.

On the afternoon of 29 May, Story records that at a large Quaker meeting many ‘People of some Fashion in the World’ and some scholars were present, all ‘civil and quiet to the End of the Meeting, the Scholars taking off their Caps in the Time of Prayer’. Story was under the impression that his words during the service ‘seemed to reach their Understandings and take them’. After the meeting he congratulated the scholars on their good behaviour, contrasting it with the rudeness that Quakers had experienced from students elsewhere. About nine o’clock in the evening he became acquainted with the fact that the Quaker meeting-house was under attack:

They broke in by Violence, and took away all the Forms and Seats that were loose, and such as were fast around the House they broke and defaced; They took away the Doors also off the Hinges, and burnt them, with part of the Wainscot, in their Bonfire: They broke also all the Windows and Stanchers; and the Room next the Meeting-house they also abused and defaced; so that the whole was

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also ruined and destroyed, except the Walls and Tyling. Yet all this did not cool their Rage; for they broke into the Dwelling-house of our ancient Friend *Thomas Nichol[l]s's* Daughter.

Violence was committed there on the argument of searching for the body of a young nobleman who had been murdered and whose body they believed to be hidden there, a process 'shed[d]ing some blood'. His record continues, 'From thence they went to the Baptists' Meeting-house, and gutted that also, as their Term is'. The mob continued up the street to Nicholls' house where Story was lodging, occasioning him and his friends to take refuge under the stairs, but the mob seem to have contented themselves at this stage of their proceedings with merely smashing the windows. Peace did not come to the streets of Oxford until about two in the morning. Story reflects on the incident in these words:

But this I observed, that as Satan raged in them before they came up to the House, blowing them up by his infernal Breath into a Temper fit for the Action, Truth in our Minds moved his divine Love, and filled us with heavenly Consolation and Life; so that we were without any Fear or Amazement of what they could do farther.

He also offers a more short-term explanation of the cause of the riots. Some 'sober Neighbours' told the Friends that the source of the mob's anger could be traced back to an alehouse conversation on the Saturday afternoon, where members of the Low Church party drank certain 'Healts and Confusions' and there was talk of 'burning the late Queen's picture and *Sacheveral's*'. It was in revenge for this idle talk that the mob gutted the Presbyterian meeting-house: 'Their Pretence for using us in the same Manner was, because we voted for the Low Members of that present Parliament.' Such explanations would certainly accord with the factional politics clearly

apparent in the more sustained riots in the Midlands and the North West where Tory High Churchmen, in the context of local municipal contests, undertook a last violent attack upon Dissenting property which they saw as clearly allied to Whig and Hanoverian interests.

The next morning Story visited the site of the devastation and in the presence of many scholars and others pressed the question as to whether such destruction of sacred places could be 'the Effects of Religion and Learning?' He noted in his record that several scholars 'hung down their Heads, but none answered'. Nicholls followed this up with a short speech, in which he compared the behaviour of the citizens of Oxford with that of those of Sodom and Gomorrah, indicating that without repentance they too could expect a visitation of divine judgement. Story records that he soon departed 'that wicked Place':

This is one of the blind Eyes of this poor Nation! This is one of the filthy Fountains of their Religion and Learning, from whence the whole Land is poisoned and undone. Can sweet and bitter Waters issue from the same Place? Or can Religion flow from hence to the Nation, where the life of Religion is so remote from these vain Pretenders? And what Learning can they have, who are destitute of all Principles of Civil Behaviour?²¹

Story's account is backed up by Thomas Hearne, who records on Sunday 29 May:

Last night a good Part of ye Presbyterian Meeting House in Oxford was pull'd down. There was such a Concourse of People going up and down & putting a stop to the least Sign of rejoycing as can not be described. But then the Rejoycing this Day (notwithstanding Sunday) was so very great and publick in Oxford as hath not been known hardly since ye Restauration. There was not an House next

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the Street but was illuminated. For if any disrespect was shewn the Windows were certainly broke. The People run up and down crying King James the 3rd, the true King, no Usurper, the Duke of Ormond, etc & Healths were every where drank suitable to the Occasion, & everyone at the same time Drank to a new Restauration, which I heartily wish may speedily happen. In the Evening they pulled a good Part of the Quakers and Anabaptists Meeting Houses down. This Rejoycing hath caused great Consternation at Court. The Heads of Houses have represented that it was begun by the Whiggs, who met at the Kings Head Tavern on Saturday Night under the Denomination of the Constitution Club, & being about to carry on extravagant Designs, they were prevented by an Honest Party that were in an adjoining Room, and forced to sneak away. Some of these Fanatical Persons Shot off Guns in some Places, & had like to have kill'd many. Two or three were wounded.²²

Ward identifies the Constitution Club as 'an aggressive body of Whig graduates recently formed by some New College men', who met at the tavern mentioned to celebrate the King's birthday with bonfires and illuminated windows. Such a demonstration of Hanoverian partiality on 28 May provoked attention from a mob of townsmen aided by a group of 'disaffected scholars'. In the midst of the disturbance, Thomas Hamilton of Oriel, son of the late Queen's physician, fired a pistol at the mob. The following night Ingram, brother of Lord Irwin, who also associated with the Constitution Club, fired a shot at those assaulting his college, Oriel, and wounded a Brasenose man. It was in this context that the attacks on the meeting-houses had taken place.²³

So far as the Baptist meeting-house is concerned, it had already attracted attention back in the 1660s when, in the context of the Fifth Monarchist rising in London, it had been 'beset by the militia' and some of the congregation arrested.²⁴

Later in 1661 two of their leaders were arrested for making seditious speeches, and they and Tidmarsh, in whose house the congregation met, refused the Oath of Allegiance. The Baptists, along with the Quakers, were seen then as the most trenchant of Dissenters, less likely to accommodate to established views than either the Presbyterians or the Independents, and thus not likely to have been embraced by a policy of 'comprehension'. Their radical views were unpopular with the authorities, both civil and ecclesiastical.

The aftermath

Various representations were made to Parliament concerning the lawlessness apparent in the midland counties, as well as in Lancashire, which led to Parliament dispatching various forces to the several locations to quell the riots. On hearing this representation, the House of Commons also agreed on 15 July 1715:

That an humble Address be presented to his Majesty, That he will be graciously pleased to give Directions to the several Magistrates throughout the Kingdom, That the Laws be put in a speedy and the most vigorous Execution against all such Persons, who shall be found any way concerned in the late rebellious and tumultuous Riots and Disorders committed, and now carrying on, in several Parts of this Kingdom by Persons disaffected to his Majesty, and his Government; and that a strict Inquiry be made who are the Promoters and Authors of the said Tumults and Riots; and that an Account may be taken of such Justices of the Peace as have failed in the Discharge of their Duty, be forthwith put out of the Commissions of the Peace; and that such other Magistrates as shall appear likewise to have neglected their Duty therein, may be proceeded against with the utmost Rigour of the Law; and that his Majesty will likewise be pleased to direct, That an exact Account may be taken of the Losses and Damages,

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which his Majesty's Subjects have sustained by reasons of these tumultuous and rebellious Proceedings; and that the Sufferers may have full Compensation made them for their Damages; and to assure his Majesty, That all such Expenses as his Majesty shall be at on that account, shall be made good to his Majesty out of the next Aids that shall be afterwards granted by Parliament; and also that the Laws against Papists and Nonjurors may be effectually put in Execution.

The draft was ready by 18 July, and the substance of the Commons' petition set within the context of a loyal address which assured the King of their staunch devotion, in contrast to 'the false and traitorous insinuations of Persons disaffected to your Title and Government', otherwise identified as the King's 'open and secret enemies'. On 20 July the King's reply was received agreeing what had been proposed, confirmed later in the day when the King met personally with Members of Parliament.²⁵

Oxford magistrates had done neither their city nor their University any favours by their passivity during the riots. Bennett notes: 'As Oxford was considered the nursery of the clergymen who raised the cry of church and king (meaning by church, intolerance, and by king, the pretender,) that university was strictly watched and treated with some severity.'²⁶ Lord Townshend, one of His Majesty's Secretaries of State, wrote to Dr Charlett, the Pro Vice-Chancellor, threatening dire punishment on the guilty, whilst admonishing 'all persons whatsoever to avoid all odious and contumelious words of reproach and distinction which may tend to create discords and animosities'.²⁷ The riots in the event, served the University ill. W.R. Ward assigns to them the function of providing 'the chief evidence for the wholly unwarranted opinion that the University was a hot-bed of Jacobitism for more than half a century after the Revolution'.²⁸ The whole incident played its part in persuading Government to make specific reference to

meeting-houses in the forthcoming Riot Act which, under pressure from what was happening in the midland counties, was introduced into Parliament on 13 July, and passed a week later. But by then, and certainly by the date of implementation [1 August 1715], additional damage had been inflicted on all too many meeting-houses.²⁹

The troops sent to Oxford in October were successful in their mission and at least twelve prominent 'traitors' brought to London for trial. On 12 October a prisoner named Gordon, 'one of the Oxford conspirators' was committed to Newgate on charges of high treason; six days later a party of the Duke of Argyle's Royal Regiment of Horse Guards delivered eleven prisoners apprehended in Oxford by Major General Pepper, who with a detachment of dragoons had taken possession of the city.³⁰ Those sent for trial are recorded as Captain Holsted, Mr Spelman, Mr Wilson, Mr Kelley, Mr Lloyd, Mr White, Mr Burke, Thomas Dalsgrove, John Clarke, Thomas Tod and William Hughes.³¹ Ward indicates that one suspect had escaped over Magdalen wall clad only in his nightgown but that, at the trial, 'no conspiracy worth the name' could be proven.³² However, Thomas Rowney, MP for Oxford, appears among McLynn's list of alleged Jacobite MPs, and certainly he had been amongst those who had entertained Sacheverell on his triumphant progression north.³³ By the end of the month further troops arrived and the military occupation of the city was begun.³⁴ Bennett adds two comments: first, 'Oxford now had an opportunity of tasting the bitterness of popular odium; for when the university presented to his Majesty an address of a congratulation on the re-establishment of peace, it was rejected with disdain as the disgusting pretence of hypocritical disloyalty'. Secondly, 'Oxford and high church having thus rendered themselves obnoxious to the government, were exposed to the mortification of seeing the former victims of intolerance bask in the sunshine of royal smiles'.³⁵ Smiles there may have been, and certainly a changed attitude from Government. But in terms of legal formulae Dissenters, by their

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intense loyalty at this period of dynastic transition, in fact won few favours. For all the fine words and promises, they remained second-class citizens, even if demonstrably dependable and loyal ones.

The Dissenting clergy exploited their rights of access to the throne and made their own protests directly to the new King on 16 August 1715. For the first time the delegation was led by a Baptist minister, Nathaniel Hodges of the Artillery Lane Church, Spitalfields, the first Baptist minister to be knighted.³⁶ Hodges thanked the King for the protection that the Dissenters had received from the Crown during the riots, once the issue had been raised 'by your faithful Commons'. The Commons asked for full compensation 'to those, whose sufferings they so justly impute to their zeal and firm adherence to your Majesty, and your Government'. Whilst dissenting from the Church of England, they had in no way provoked this savage attack upon their persons and property. They believed that they too had civil rights which in justice needed to be respected, the more so that they were always ready to collaborate with the Established Church 'in defence of the protestant religion'. Indeed, every attempt to introduce popery and arbitrary power had witnessed early attacks upon Protestant Dissent, but they for their part assured the throne of their unqualified loyalty, especially when support was raised 'either at home or abroad in favour of a popish Pretender'.

The King replied by expressing his concern 'at the unchristian and barbarous treatment' the Dissenters had received, assured them of 'full compensation' and thanked them for their loyalty, assuring them of his continued protection.³⁷ Crosby notes that the Tories hit back with an article in *The Weekly Journal*, attacking the Dissenting clergy for their mean social backgrounds in trade and service. The writer focused specifically on the Anabaptists [sic] noting them as Hodges, Stinton, Jenkins, Allen and Noble 'who, tho' they were all formerly of mean occupations, have, since their call, been

looked upon as the most eminent preachers among that dipping set of people'.³⁸

The deployment of personal calumny against the Baptist deputies caused Crosby to comment on the Oxford riots. Crosby, writing only a quarter of a century later, provides evidence that the rioters tried to injure the Baptists more than by simply damaging their property. They sought also to malign their civic reputation and good name. A pamphlet, allegedly written by a scholar of the University, set out to slander the Baptists: 'the rabble pulled down a room formerly made use of by the Anabaptists, near the castle, tho' lately the sect has lost its name, as well as its credit here, by a famous prank of the last teacher's who christened two wenches in the morning, and was found in bed between his new converts at night'. The story was given nation-wide coverage, being placed in three out of the four high Tory papers: *The Examiner*, *The Post Boy* and *The Weekly Journal*.

This brought the welfare of the congregation to the consideration of the metropolitan Baptist leadership. Provincial accusations assumed national importance. The London organization became so concerned that they set up an enquiry to see what truth there was in these calumnies. Their searches established that the last preacher at Oxford was John Toms, 'a worthy gentleman of an unblemished character ... universally respected as an honest and sober man'. Toms removed to London early in the eighteenth century and is variously recorded as a messenger, deacon, minister and elder of the Devonshire Square Church.³⁹ After his departure the Baptists in Oxford had only a weekday lecture, supplied one week by Mr Collett of Cote and the following week by Mr Fuller of Abingdon. Fuller was consulted as to Toms' character whilst in Oxford and he unhesitatingly asserted that the accusations against him were, 'utterly false, groundless and malicious'. In his judgement they had, in all probability, been concocted by the editor of *The Post Boy*. It was judged wise to make extensive denials in the most influential papers and to take legal action

against the author if he could be traced, but in the end, since the author could not be identified, they decided to do neither.⁴⁰

Investigation and compensation

After the tumult of the riots had subsided, the Attorney General, a year later in August 1716 established nine county commissions to investigate the damage done to Dissenting property with a view to establishing appropriate levels of compensation. Those who had suffered were not themselves debarred from serving as commissioners. The prestigious Presbyterian solicitor, Henry Hattrell of Newcastle-under-Lyme, for example, who was to receive personal compensation in the sum of £100, was nominated to serve on the Staffordshire Commission.

The Oxfordshire Commission was composed of Sir Thomas Wheate, Bart., Sir Henry Ashurst, Bart., Sir Francis Page, Richard Carter, Esq., and William Wright, Esq., the Recorder of Oxford.⁴¹ The group is not without interest. Most particularly, Sir Henry Ashurst is identified as the son of a wealthy London merchant who was sufficiently successful to establish his family seat at Waterstock in Oxfordshire. His father, also Henry, and his uncles, one a colonel in the Civil War and another MP for Newton, Lancashire and then for that county, are described as 'being very zealous in the interests of the parliamentarians and presbyterians'.⁴² The friend of Henry Newcombe, Richard Baxter and Philip Henry, but most particularly the patron of John Eliot, Bible-translator and missionary to the North American Indians, Henry Ashurst senior provided generously for ejected Dissenting ministers and ministers' widows in his native Lancashire, and is also described as serving as treasurer to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. All this of the father; of the son we read that he was 'also a tried friend of Baxter, became a baronet', and was the builder of Waterstock.⁴³

Sir Francis Page had a much less savoury reputation, coming in later life to be known, unjustly some have argued,

for the coarseness of his language and toughness of sentencing as 'the hanging judge'. Whig MP for Huntingdon from 1708 to 1713, he had defended the Aylesbury voters who claimed corruption had deprived them of proper representation in the 1710 election. Knighted by George I early in 1715, he had married in 1705 as his second wife, Frances, daughter of Sir Thomas Wheate of Glympton in the county of Oxford. So through marriage Wheate and Page were related, and presumably therefore represented similar interests.⁴⁴ Oxford Nonconformists would not have been unhappy with at least some of those named to assess the measure of the damages inflicted on their properties, and certainly the tainted local magistracy was not represented on the Commission.

Of all the commissions, only that for Lincolnshire failed to make a positive return. The total cost of compensation, together with costs, was eventually computed to have occasioned the Treasury an outlay a little short of £5,580, of which Oxford's £146 8s 3d was but a small part. The major distributions were to Staffordshire, over £1,722, Shropshire almost £1,064, and Lancashire almost £940, these together accounting for some two-thirds of the monies distributed.⁴⁵

Interestingly, the Oxford figures are recorded in two different ways. Both accounts judge the damages to the Presbyterian meeting-house in the parish of St Ebbe's, and the property of William Roby, the Presbyterian minister, in the sum of £108 17s 11d. The *Calendar of Treasury Books* for 1717, Vol XXXI, Part II, identifies the Anabaptist meeting-house, by that time the property of John Francklyn,⁴⁶ as justifying, together with compensation for damage to goods in his house, the sum of £19 0s 0d, but Evans' List, preserved in manuscript in Dr Williams's Library in London, has the damages to the meeting-house at only £17 0s 0d, followed by a separate entry for £2 0s 0d awarded to John Francklyn 'for goods etc', followed by an allocation to Anthony Francklyn of £15 0s 0d 'the front of his house damaged'.⁴⁷ Whilst this might suggest that the Francklyns are to be associated with the Baptist cause,

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Crosby argues to the contrary that they were in fact an Anglican family. Five other personal grants are recorded, in each case the Evans List providing more detail as to the damage compensated, viz:

Elizabeth Blower, ⁴⁸ 'for windows and looking glass broke'	£0 10s 10d
Rebecca Burroughs, ⁴⁹ 'for windows broken etc'	£1 10s 0d
Hannah Swift, 'for glazier's and carpenter's work'	£0 7s 0d
William Plater, 'for windows broken'	£0 12s 0d
Mathew Wisdom, 'for windows broken' ⁵⁰	£0 10s 6d

Behind these summary accounts lies the evidence that the special commissions had to evaluate.⁵¹ Witnesses were interviewed, leading to the general statement that by far the greatest majority of those harmed had repaired their own buildings and required no reparation, but were satisfied by 'the protection and security now enjoyed under His Majesty's most wise and gracious government'. More particularly, one of the Quakers interviewed indicated that damage of seventy-five pounds had been done but 'they thought themselves fully recompensed by His Majesty's tenderness of them seen in the establishment of this commission'. They were content 'to bear themselves what was past', satisfied that they live under a Government 'which will defend them from the like wrongs for the future'. They were apparently as good as their word for no money was allocated in reparation for damage to the Quaker meeting-house.

In their depositions both those who suffered damage and others gave evidence as to the nature of the riots. Anthony Francklyn described what happened to both the Presbyterian and the Baptist meeting-houses. When the riot was in full sway

on 28 May, one Mrs Jane Smart challenged him, whether 'he would see the Meeting House pulled down and not endeavour to save something?' Accordingly he went to the meeting-house. The pews and seats had already been carried away. Several people were attacking the ceiling and of the floor only a few boards remained. Similarly, hearing that the Presbyterian meeting-house was being pulled down 'by a great many people met together in a riotous and tumultuous manner', William Plater visited the site and saw seats and pews taken away, and the pulpit taken down and gone. He visited on the night of 29 May and witnessed the work of destruction continuing. He confessed that he now wished he had gone to the scene on the Saturday night but was deterred by the mob being 'so very violent and outrageous that he and some others with him were afraid to go whilst the mob was there'. Similar testimony was given by Edward P[r]ickett, schoolmaster, who numbered the mob at about two to three hundred, whilst Edward Francklyn timed the assault on his father [Anthony]'s house as at midnight: only next morning was he able to see the extent of the damage – the window cases, glass and frames all broken, the shattered slates from off the roof lying abandoned on the ground alongside the large stones which had been used as the missiles of attack. He also testified that a further raining of stones on the building had taken place a few days later. Matthew Wisdom was more specific about damage to his property, indicating that whilst a first attack had been made on 29 and 30 May, the mob had returned and done further damage almost a month later on 24 June, that is contemporaneous to the main meeting-house riots in the Midlands and the North.

The main purpose of the interrogation was to establish what might be fair reparations, and this information various tradesmen, some of whom were members of the congregations involved, supplied. Thus John and William Hawkins, carpenters, indicated that they had charged thirty pounds to do work on the exterior of the Presbyterian meeting-house as well

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as building a new pulpit and sounding board, supplying pews and forms and repairing floors and doors at a cost of a further sixty-five pounds, all this immediately before the riots, and therefore they argued that a like sum would be needed to do the work over again. William P[r]ickett, plasterer, estimated the cost of plastering and 'slatting' to put the building back in good repair to be forty shillings. John Francklyn's bill as a glazier would be £3 5s 0d for glazing and a further fifteen shillings for replacement casings. William Plater produced an estimate for demolishing what was unsafe and removing rubbish at £5 0s 11d, with a separate bill of £2 10s 0d for loss of the pulpit cushion, communion tablecloth, and several other movables.

The Hawkins' also gave evidence on the damage to Francklyn's house 'where the Anabaptist Meeting House was held'. 'Very much damaged by the riots in May 1715', repairs would cost £17 with a further £2 estimated for loss of chairs, tables and other goods lost or broken'. Anthony Francklyn's house had been so damaged in the judgement of Thomas Jordan, carpenter, and William P[r]ickett, slater, that it was impractical to repair the front which needed to be entirely rebuilt. This involved an element of betterment: simple repair could have been achieved at a cost of £15, which was the recompense that the commissioners offered to Anthony Francklyn. Elizabeth Blower claimed £0 10s 10d for replacing broken windows, whilst William Blackhall, ironmonger, for Rebecca Burroughs, claimed £1 10s 0d not only for damage to windows but for 'employing people to watch her house'. Hannah Swift, whose house was damaged earlier in the evening at nine o'clock, presented a glazier's bill for £0 4s 6d, and a carpenter's bill of £0 2s 6d. William Plater's house was also attacked at nine o'clock, when windows were broken that incurred a cost of £0 12s 0d to replace; Matthew Wisdom's costs for like damage were £0 10s 6d.

William Roby, the Presbyterian minister, submitted a separate petition. The threat of the rioters was such that he had

to employ guards for several nights, and, in the end, to evacuate his home with some of his property and his children. Because his own life was threatened, he was forced to flee to London for shelter, where he stayed for about two months. Roby thus made application to the Crown by way of a humble petition on behalf of both himself and his congregation, who were destitute in his absence. Because the mob had acted before 1 August, that is the date of implementation of the new Riot Act, innocent victims had incurred considerable expense; 'he humbly hopeth that you will be pleased to allow him such reparation as in your wisdom you shall think fit'. He also provided evidence as to a further complication. The meeting-house had been leased to the trustees by Hannah Hall, widow, with a clause allowing rebuilding or redevelopment of the site according to the trustees' needs. This they had already done at an overall cost of £150. Hannah Hall died around this time, and it became apparent that the lease was dependent on her life. Some of those whom, it was suggested, had been behind the riots persuaded her son not to renew the lease, instead requiring the Presbyterians to vacate the site. The congregation was, therefore, wholly destitute 'and without a home'. Members of the congregation were mainly 'in low circumstances'. Thus, by reason of the action of their adversaries in Oxford, they had been 'disabled to serve God according to their consciences' and were utterly incapable of purchasing ground to build a new place of worship 'unless the government do graciously allow them what may be thought necessary to that end'. Accordingly, Roby on behalf of his congregation asked the Commission to represent their case, 'they being in that respect sufferers by the late mob and the furious Spirit which occasioned them'. The Commission appended to this petition a statement 'attesting the case as above stated to be true'. True it may have been, but the actual costs awarded seem to indicate a very precise recompense against traders and craftsman's costs, but no visible response to William Roby's more general appeal.

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Crosby tells us that Anthony Francklyn, far from being a Baptist, was a member of the Church of England. The others listed, whose denominational allegiance is not stated, seem to have been of insufficient status in society to be noted in other documents. The Special Commission records do, however, provide their trades, and most who were in work were indeed tradesmen. Thus Anthony Francklyn was a tailor, John Francklyn a glazier, and an Edward Francklyn, who also appears in the Commission record as Anthony's son, shared his father's occupation. William Plater, who came from a family with long associations with both Presbyterians and Baptists, was identified as a chandler. Elizabeth Blower was the wife of Richard Blower, hatter, and Hannah Swift, a widow. Finally, Matthew Wisdom declares himself a cutler. The evidence of Rebecca Burroughs was presented by William Blackhall, an ironmonger, but her own position is not stated.⁵² Only Edward P[r]ickett, who appears in the Commission record as giving general evidence as to the nature of the riot, can be seen, as a schoolmaster, to belong to the professions.

Francklyn did, however, meet with the London Baptist leadership at the Coffee House in Finch Lane because he was judged a critical witness in the accusations of immoral behaviour levied at the Oxford Baptists. Having lived in Oxford for twenty-two years, he assured the London leadership 'that no minister, that had preached there, ever lay under such a charge, and that he had never heard of such a report as this, till now he came to London'. This assurance he was prepared to swear under oath.⁵³

In conclusion

What is to be learnt from this peculiarly violent episode? Clearly the Oxford Baptists in 1715 were a fairly weak group, but not so weak but that they incurred the High Church movement's wrath, as part of the wider face of that Protestant Dissent that had driven James II from his throne, and given its support to the German Lutherans of the house of Hanover,

rather than the Stuart Pretender. They still had a reputation for being amongst the most radical and unbending of the Dissenters, with some rather strained suggestions that, because of earlier history, they remained potentially dangerous to the regime. Sharing with the Presbyterians both in attracting the aggression of mob and scholars, and in the deprivation of appropriate accommodation for worship, Baptists and Presbyterians in Oxford were to share accommodation in their rebuilt chapel, which in due course led to the New Road church covenant being drawn up on interestingly open lines, allowing for membership to be open to both those baptized as believers and those baptized in infancy. In a period of transition, Baptists were grateful for the support of their fellow Dissenters. They were anxious that their losses should be confined to pecuniary and property matters, and were keen to act, centrally if necessary, to counter the engine of rumour and scandal. Equally, the metropolitan leadership was sufficiently concerned about events in the provinces to take up and follow through, as part of their own business, what had happened in Oxford, because they judged that false testimony, successfully sustained, could be damaging to the whole interest, right across the nation.

NOTES

¹ Michael Watts, *The Dissenters, From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978), chapters III and IV.

² T.B. Macaulay, *History of England*, vol. III, pp. 87–8, cited B.L. Manning, *The Protestant Dissenting Deputies* (Cambridge, 1952), pp. 3–4.

³ G. Holmes, *The Trial of Dr Sacheverell* (London, 1973), chapter 2 and p. 22.

⁴ James E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 52–3 on High Church misappreciation of the size of Dissent.

⁵ A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel, and Social Change, 1740–1914* (London, 1976), pp. 8–11.

⁶ For an example of this, see my 'The Burning of the Meeting House, July 1715: Dissent and Faction in Late Stuart Newcastle', *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies* 14 (1974), 61–79.

⁷ Diary of the Revd John Reynolds, Presbyterian minister in Shrewsbury, 14 February 1716, 'An hideous, malignant spirit broke forth in the months of June, July, August, and was remarkably rampant in Lancashire, Shropshire and Staffordshire. Mobs and riots arose in diverse places, and pulled down meeting houses, unprovoked, unmolested. They began in Oxford.' As cited in R. Astley, 'History of the Presbyterian Meeting House in Shrewsbury', *Christian Reformer*, May/June 1847, p. 13. See also A.W. Worthington, *Early History of the Presbyterian Congregation in Stourbridge* (1886), p. 6.

⁸ D. Bogue and J. Bennett, *The History of the Dissenters*, 2nd edn., vol. I (London, 1833), p. 259.

⁹ L. Stephen and S. Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1882 ff, entry Henry Sacheverell, 1674?–1724. See also Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, vol. I, p. 260, where it is said of Sacheverell, 'Oxford was, on different occasions, the theatre of his powers, which he exhibited there before a multitude of congenial souls'.

¹⁰ H. Sacheverell, *The Perils of False Brethren* (London, 1709), p. 36, cited by Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 263, and p. 21 as cited in H.W. Clark, *The History of English Nonconformity*, vol. II (London, 1912), p. 148.

¹¹ Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, vol. I, p. 266.

¹² Holmes, *Trial of Dr Sacheverell*, p. 74.

¹³ A. Boyer, *The History of the Reign of Queen Anne, ... Year the Ninth* (London, 1711), p. 202.

¹⁴ L. Stephen and S. Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1882 ff, entry Sacheverell.

¹⁵ A.T. Scudi, *The Sacheverell Affair* (New York, 1939), p. 130.

¹⁶ Cited *ibid.*, p. 123ff.

¹⁷ See M. Ransome, 'Church and Dissent in the election of 1710', *English Historical Review* 56 (1941).

¹⁸ Clark, *History of English Nonconformity*, vol. II, p. 179, citing, *Studies in Oxford History*, [Oxford Historical Society], pp. 145-8.

¹⁹ These verses appear in various forms, e.g. E. Calamy, *An Historical Account of My Own Life*, vol. II (London, 1829), p. 306; Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, vol. I, p. 85.

²⁰ *A Journal of Thomas Story, from the author's own manuscript and published by James and John Wilson of Kendal*, 1st edn. (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1747), pp. 474-6. This account is reproduced very extensively by Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, vol. II, pp. 80-1.

²¹ *Journal of Thomas Story*, pp. 474-6.

²² *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne*, vol. V, ed. D.W. Rannie (Oxford, 1901), pp. 62-3.

²³ W.R. Ward, *Georgian Oxford: University Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1958), p. 55.

²⁴ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, 1660-1*, p. 473 as cited in Christina Colvin, 'Oxford Protestant Nonconformity and Other Christian Bodies', in A. Crossley (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Oxfordshire*, vol. IV (Oxford, 1979), p. 417.

²⁵ *Journal of the House of Commons, 1714-18*, pp. 227-8, 229-30, 231, 232.

²⁶ Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, vol. II, p. 83.

²⁷ Ward, *Georgian Oxford*, p. 55.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁹ The following 15 meeting-houses had been attacked before legislation was introduced to Parliament – Oxford, [Presbyterian, Baptist and Quaker], Manchester, Monton [Eccles], Blackley near Middleton, Greenacres near Oldham, Stand [Pilkington], Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury, Stafford, Walsall, Longdon near Lichfield, and Stone. Seventeen more were attacked whilst the legislation was proceeding through Parliament: West Bromwich, Newcastle under Lyme, Whitchurch, Oswestry, Wem, Birmingham [two meeting-houses], Wrexham [ditto], Cradley, Bradley, King's

Norton, Coseley, Llanfylllyn [Co Montgomery], Oldbury, Dudley, and Stourbridge. Six more were attacked before the date of implementation: Failsworth [Lancs], Burton, Uttoxeter, Leek, Congelton, Ashbourne and King's Norton again. Seven more undated attacks are known to have taken place in Bilston, Darlaston, Wednesbury, all in Staffordshire, Warrington, Worcester, Leeds and Coventry, but even this list may not be complete.

³⁰ Ward, *Georgian Oxford*, p. 83.

³¹ A. Boyer, *The Political State of Great Britain*, vol. X (London, 1715), p. 419, 420.

³² Ward, *Georgian Oxford*, p. 60.

³³ J. McLynn, 'The Regional Distribution of Jacobite Support in England before 1745', *Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 3 (1983-4) 15, and Boyer, *History of the reign of Queen Anne, ... Year the Ninth*, p. 202.

³⁴ Ward, *Georgian Oxford*, p. 61.

³⁵ Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, vol. II, pp. 84, 85.

³⁶ For Hodges see J. Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, vol. III (London, 1823), pp. 340-5; W.T. Whitley, *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society VII* (1920-21), 208. He should not be confused with Nathaniel Hodges, 1629-88, physician appointed by the Lord Mayor to combat the Great Plague, who may have been associated with the Petty France Church.

³⁷ Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists*, vol. IV (London, 1740), p. 125ff.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

³⁹ Toms appears as a messenger of the Devonshire Square Church in 1704, Ivimey, *History*, vol. III, p. 48.

⁴⁰ Crosby, *History*, vol. IV, pp. 138-40.

⁴¹ *Calendar of Treasury Books, Jan-Dec. 1716*, Vol XXX, Part II, 1957, p. 424.

⁴² L. Stephen and S. Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1882ff, Entry for Henry Ashurst, 1614?-1680. Cf H.S. Skeats and C.S. Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England 1688-1891* (London, [1891]), p. 187.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., entry for Sir Francis Page, 1661?-1741.

⁴⁵ *Calendar of Treasury Books, Jan-Dec 1717*, vol. XXXI Part II, 1957, p. 185.

⁴⁶ Spelt Francklin or Franklin in some sources. For consistency, a common spelling, 'Francklyn', is used throughout this chapter.

⁴⁷ Historically this has been known as Thompson's (i.e., Josiah Thompson's) List, but in A.P.F. Sell, 'The Social and Literary Contribution of Three Unitarian Ministers in nineteenth century Walsall', in A.P.F. Sell, *Dissenting Thought and the Life of the Churches* (San Francisco, 1990), fn. 8 p. 449, J. Creasey, Dr Williams's Librarian, indicates that this was a mistake made by A.G. Matthews and that the list should be attributed to John Evans.

⁴⁸ Richard Blower in the Evans List, preserved in Dr Williams's Library, Gordon Square, London.

⁴⁹ Burrows in the Evans List.

⁵⁰ *Calendar of Treasury Books Jan-Dec 1717* Vol XXXI Part II, 1957, p. 189, and Evans List.

⁵¹ The reference for the Oxford parchments at the Public Record Office is E178/6906.

⁵² Evans records her as 'wid' presumably widow and an ironmonger named Blackhall presented her case to the commissioners. Philip Hayden, in 'The Baptists in Oxford', *Baptist Quarterly* XXIX (1981-82), states that Rebecca Burrows herself owned an ironmonger's business in the High Street, and a copy of the original deed of conveyance, lodged in the church archives, indicates that it was she who gave the site on which the new church was built. It seems legitimate to speculate that she was courted by Blackhall and inherited his property.

⁵³ Crosby, *History*, vol. IV, pp.139-40.

Receiving One Another: the History and Theology of the Church Covenant, 1780

Paul S. Fiddes

Many who listen to the church covenant of 1780 being read each year at the church anniversary service find themselves being moved by a statement of mutual acceptance at its heart.¹ According to the words of the covenant, those who believe that ‘true Christian baptism’ is the sprinkling of infants are welcomed into communion at the Lord’s Table and into church membership alongside those who hold to baptism as being the immersion of professing adults, and perhaps the most affecting part of this agreement is the phrase, ‘... as the Lord Jesus receives and owns them on both sides of the question, we think we ought to do so too’.² Much lies packed within these words, which are by no means a sentimental substitute for theology; the phrase evokes such aspects as the nature of covenant relationship; the primary duty of love; the identification of some issues as being inessential for fellowship; and the responsibility of the informed conscience to God alone. In this chapter I intend to explore these issues and to set them in the historical context of the re-forming of a church at New Road in 1780 on the principle of ‘mixed’ or ‘open’ communion.

The words of acceptance

Listeners to the phrase I have quoted above might well ask how those who signed the covenant *knew* that Christ had accepted and received those 'on both sides of the question', believer-baptist and paedo-baptist alike. The answer, as so much in Baptist tradition, is in the first place a matter of scripture. By the time the New Road covenant came to be written, there was a well-established resort by Baptist advocates of 'mixed communion' to the appeal of the Apostle Paul in Romans 14:1-15:7. Dealing with the controversy in his time between some Christians who placed restrictions on the food they ate and on the observation of holy days, and others who had no such scruples, Paul urged, 'Him that is weak in the faith *receive* ye, but not to doubtful disputations' (14:1, AV). The exact words '*Christ has received them*', applied to fellow Christians in disagreement with each other, do not actually appear in the text, but apologists for open communion appear to have derived them from combining the phrase in Romans 14:3 '*God hath received him*' with Romans 15:7 '*Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us*'. Among others, John Bunyan and Henry Jessey in the seventeenth century, and Robert Hall later in the nineteenth century, apply the assertion that '*Christ has received them*' to the practitioners of infant baptism, on the grounds that the same principles about not judging a fellow Christian should apply to the contemporary dispute over baptism as over the matter of clean and unclean food in Paul's time.³ Of course, advocates of 'strict communion', for whom baptism as a professing believer was an essential qualification for sharing the Lord's Table in a Baptist congregation, denied strongly that any such analogy could be drawn; it seemed to them that the issues were just not comparable.⁴

This established rhetoric of argument goes a long way to account for the first half of the key phrase, 'The Lord Jesus *receives* and owns them on both sides of the question...', but there remain the rather touching words 'we think we ought to

do so too'. These, as we shall see, offer evidence for the hand of Daniel Turner of Abingdon in the writing of the covenant. Turner, who was minister of Abingdon Baptist Church from 1748 to his death in 1798, not only witnessed the New Road covenant with five other local ministers, but preached the sermon on the occasion of the public re-opening of the chapel, which followed the signing of the covenant, on Thursday 16 November 1780.⁵ The sermon, on the theme *Charity the Bond of Perfection*, was subsequently published with an introduction by Turner describing the circumstances of the re-establishing of the church, an appendix containing a copy and a short explanation of the church covenant, and a postscript containing a defence of mixed communion. Turner's account here implies that he played a large part in the composition of the covenant, with such expressions as 'we thought it necessary...', and E.A. Payne judges simply that the covenant was 'no doubt drafted by Turner himself'.⁶

We shall return to the historical context of the covenant shortly, but what should be underlined now is that Turner had previously alluded to the 'receiving' of paedobaptist believers by Christ in two other publications which advocated mixed communion, as well as in *Charity the Bond of Perfection*.⁷ These were his *Compendium of Social Religion*, first published in 1758 (and republished in 1778) with a long conclusion arguing that the Lord's Supper must be shared with all those who 'appear to love our Lord Jesus in sincerity', and a tract entitled *A Modest Plea for Free Communion at the Lord's Table* published under the name Candidus in 1772.⁸ The latter seems to have been written in collaboration with his friend John Collett Ryland, minister in Northampton.⁹ I shall be returning to these three publications many times in this chapter, and will refer to them under the short titles of *Charity*, *Compendium*, and *A Modest Plea*.

It is *A Modest Plea* which most extensively refers to the argument of Romans 14 and 15, setting Paul's appeal 'Let us not therefore judge anyone any more' (Rom. 14:13) on the title

page and concluding with several pages comparing - in a satiric style - the disputes in the early church reflected in Paul's letter with the controversy between Baptists and paedobaptists. It is here too that we find a foreshadowing of the moving words in the New Road covenant, when Turner follows the assertion that 'it is *undeniably evident* that JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF *does accept of Poedobaptist Christians*, when they remember Him at his table; --- does indulge them the enjoyment of His gracious presence there', with the appeal: 'Surely ... if our *Blessed Lord* is pleased so far to overlook their (supposed) mistakes about baptism, why should not *we* do so too?'¹⁰ I suggest that we can find this last question poignantly echoed and indeed answered in the words of the New Road covenant, 'we think that we ought to do so too'. It may not be too fanciful to suppose that this was an expression that Turner often used. At any rate, when we come to expound the content of the covenant in detail, we shall find that the qualification in parenthesis - 'supposed' mistakes - is an interesting one.

Setting the scene: Abingdon, Daniel Turner and Robert Robinson

The connection with Abingdon Baptist Church had been significant for the Dissenting church in Oxford throughout the years of the eighteenth century, which had been troubled ones for the struggling cause there. While the Abingdon church itself had fallen into some decline prior to the arrival of Daniel Turner as its minister, it had always remained the stronger congregation.¹¹ As early as 1707 there is a record that the Baptist congregation in Oxford was being supplied with preaching from Abingdon by its pastor William Fuller (as well as by Joseph Collett of Cote).¹² When a new Dissenters' meeting-house was erected on the site of the present New Road chapel in 1721, following the destruction of both the Baptist and Presbyterian chapels during the Jacobite riots, some Baptists from the previous Baptist cause were probably members from the outset. The majority of members, however,

and a succession of ministers, seem to have been Presbyterians.¹³ Decline set in from about 1741 with the leaving of the last settled minister for some time, until the congregation consisted of a few members who met in private houses to hold Sunday morning prayer meetings, and to read sermons by Dr Owen and others.¹⁴ There was some revival in congregational life and occasional re-use of the meeting-house from 1764 onwards. In that year, records Daniel Turner, the Lord's Supper was celebrated twice, but not again until the re-establishment in 1780 when Turner himself administered the sacrament on the first Sunday following the signing of the covenant (19 November) 'and thereby sealed their covenant engagement'.¹⁵

The thirteen members and their minister who affixed their names to the covenant document included Presbyterians, Baptists, and some 'friends of Wesley and Whitfield'.¹⁶ Although John Howard Hinton claimed in 1824 in a biography of his father, James Hinton, that 'a small majority' were Baptists, it seems more likely that only four or five were Baptists at the time, although three of the others were baptized as believers shortly afterwards by Edward Prowitt (minister 1783–86).¹⁷ Three of the original signatories are mentioned by John Hinton as being leaders in the church when his father began his ministry in 1788: Thomas Newman and Thomas Pasco were the two deacons, and Hinton remarks that John Bartlett 'may be associated with them as a person of considerable prominence and usefulness'.¹⁸ Lively sketches of the three by Hinton include the comment that Newman and Pasco were worthy in every respect except the 'stationary character of their administration'; a minister who wanted to get things moving would clearly turn to the younger John Bartlett who possessed 'remarkable vigour both of body and mind'.¹⁹ Newman and Pasco are listed in the Abingdon Baptist Church records as having been members there and 'dismissed [i.e. transferred] to Oxford' in 1780, along with Susanna Newman (formerly Susanna Banbury) and Susanna Williams who also

signed the New Road covenant.²⁰ A manuscript in the Bodleian Library claims that before coming to Oxford in 1777, Thomas Pasco (a chemist and druggist) had sat under the ministry of 'Dr Gifford' for 'many years'.²¹ Probably this was the learned Andrew Gifford of the Eagle Street Baptist Church in London which was, significantly, an open-communion congregation. The register of church members at New Road from 1825 to 1836, the earliest such list extant, records only Jane Bartlett as still alive and in membership in 1825 from among the thirteen original signatories.²² Jane, presumably the wife of John Bartlett, is noted as being a paedobaptist at the time of her signing the covenant, but as being baptized as a believer in 1785. It might not be too much of a guess to suppose that John was also paedobaptist in 1780, but was later baptized. The loss of all church record books from this period prevents us, unfortunately, from being much more definite about the Baptist and paedobaptist constitution of the congregation in 1780.²³

Throughout the period from 1721 to 1780, Baptist members of the Oxford congregation had gone to Abingdon for the Lord's Supper where most were also members, and after 1780 the newly-established church continued to use Abingdon for baptisms for a few years until it had built its own baptistery.²⁴ The connection is marked by the number of Oxford Baptists buried in the Baptist burial ground in Abingdon (including Thomas Pasco in 1806). In the latter years leading up to 1780 Daniel Turner seems himself to have supplied preaching occasionally at Oxford; other neighbouring Baptist ministers who served in this way included John Reynolds and William Wilkins, both of Bourton-on-the-Water.²⁵ The Abingdon Church Book records that the appointment of Mr Norman as the assistant minister at Abingdon during 1778-80 explicitly included the responsibility of supplying at Oxford, even though for part of this time the congregation also had a William Miller, one of the witnesses to the covenant, as its minister.²⁶ The re-establishment of the church seems then to

have taken place under Baptist impetus, even if Baptists were not in the majority.²⁷ The winds of the Evangelical Revival no doubt added something to the momentum, with some Methodist believers joining the Dissenting group from 1770 onwards (despite the initial refusal of the Calvinistic congregation to allow John Wesley to preach in its meeting-house).²⁸ For all that, it seems to be stretching the evidence to suggest, with John Hinton, that the little company was given new life when 'the spirit-stirring discourses of Messrs. Wesley and Whitfield aroused the slumbering inhabitants of that splendid city'.²⁹ Rather, the initiative leading up to 1780 seems to have come from Abingdon and the circle around Daniel Turner. That circle included Dissenting ministers other than Baptists, notably the minister of the Upper Meeting-House in Abingdon, John Lake, who was invited by the congregation at New Road to be one of the witnesses to its covenant.³⁰ Perhaps then the initiative from Abingdon was one shared between its two Dissenters' meeting-houses, Baptist and paedobaptist.

Another significant Baptist figure who appears on the scene at this moment was Robert Robinson, the scholarly minister of St Andrew's Street Baptist Church in Cambridge, and a close friend of Daniel Turner. In 1780 Robinson journeyed from Cambridgeshire through Berkshire and Oxfordshire on his way to Scotland, and visited Turner, preaching in several places in response to popular demand. In his biography of Robinson, George Dyer claims that on this trip Robinson preached a series of sermons on 'civil and religious liberty' to the Oxford Dissenters, just prior to their making covenant together, and that his views were afterwards expressed 'for their use, principally' in his pamphlet on open communion published in 1781.³¹ Turner makes no report of Robinson's being in Oxford, but in his published sermon, *Charity the Bond of Perfection*, he refers his readers 'to my Friend's Pamphlet, which I suppose will be soon published, and in which, I doubt not they will find the practice of *mixed Communion* fully vindicated'.³²

Turner and Robinson shared theological concerns and were associated in a number of ventures, including a plan to establish a college for 'dissenting education' of university level, teaching 'law and physic', in the neighbourhood of Oxford (a foreshadowing, perhaps, of Regent's Park College!). According to a letter from Robinson to Turner in 1781, suitable premises were to be found near Wantage, in a house belonging to a wealthy Baptist friend and philanthropist, Abraham Atkins.³³ Nothing came of the scheme, nor of Robinson's later intention for a similar academy in Cambridge; but Turner, Robinson and Atkins continued to collaborate, not least in the founding of the Atkins Trust in 1786 which augmented the stipends of ministers in fourteen Baptist churches, including Oxford, and also supported the poor of the congregations and the upkeep of the buildings, all on condition that they practised 'general [i.e. open] communion'.³⁴ Turner and Robinson were Trustees of the fund, the others including the Baptist minister at Cote, Thomas Dunscombe, who was also a witness to the New Road covenant. The re-establishing of the church in Oxford thus has its context in wider associations of Baptist ministers and churches concerned for open communion and the unity of the church in general.³⁵ The covenant document, with its open spirit, was not only meeting the immediate need of a congregation consisting of paedobaptists and believer-baptists, but was expressing a mood among Baptists themselves.

Dyer *might* be trusted in his recollection that Robinson preached sermons on Christian toleration to the church at New Road, in so far as Dyer was actually the first minister (or at least resident preacher) to the re-established congregation, during 1781 to 1782.³⁶ Of this curious, short-lived, and largely forgotten episode in the life of one who had been a ministerial assistant to Robinson and was later an eccentric antiquarian and very minor poet, I intend to write more later; but if Dyer is correct then it is possible that Robinson's sermons had some impact on the content of the New Road covenant, alongside Turner's contribution.³⁷ Turner's *A Modest Plea* (1772) and

Robinson's *General Doctrine of Toleration Applied to the Particular Case of Free Communion* (1781) thus provide a relevant frame of reference for understanding the intentions of the covenant. Within this, we shall see that the covenant actually stands closer in tone to Turner's piece, despite Turner's warm commendation of his friend's pamphlet. This kinship has interesting implications for modern ecumenical concerns.

The covenant and reasons for open communion

The text of the covenant offers, explicitly and implicitly, a theological justification for open communion which shows interesting parallels with the three published pieces of Turner I have mentioned above. Placing the covenant in this wider context, we may draw out a number of reasons for the practice of open communion and open membership in a Baptist church. They all elaborate the basic principle of 'receiving one another' in imitation of Christ, and are worth looking at one by one.

1. *The bond of love and the unity of the church is primary.*

The covenant declares that 'notwithstanding this difference of sentiment [about baptism], we promise and agree to receive one another into the same affection and love'.³⁸ We have already seen the importance of mutual 'receiving' in the context of not judging each other (referring to Rom. 14-15), and in his sermon on *Charity* delivered to the newly covenanted group, Turner affirms the positive virtue of love as the power that overcomes 'the Spirit of Discord, yea, even *Bigotry*...'³⁹ In place of a vain search for 'An intire *Uniformity* in all the *Articles of Faith*, and *Modes of Worship*', urges Turner, people may (in direct echo of the phrase from the covenant just quoted) 'love one another with the same Christian Affection, though they cannot acquiesce in the same religious Sentiments'.⁴⁰ Those who have no feeling for the delights of love spend their zeal in 'angry Contentions ... and know not how to love their Christian Brother, who happens to think differently about those Things'.⁴¹ Love is primary, taking precedence over all

A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ

disputes, because it is 'the Brightness of [God's] own blessed Image', so that 'The Religion of JESUS, as it lies in His divine Book, appears to be peculiarly a RELIGION OF LOVE'.⁴²

Love is the 'Ruin of ... Party Cause', moreover, because it is the perfect bond of unity, as the text chosen makes clear.⁴³ Love is a 'uniting Power', and is the 'common Bond, by which the several Individuals that compose any religious Community, might be united together'.⁴⁴ In his printed introduction to the sermon Turner makes clear that the union of love runs throughout the Christian Church, not just in separate local fellowships:

We do not mean to set up this little Society in *Opposition to any other Protestant Church in particular*; nor as a *Separation from the Church of CHRIST in general*, but as an *Addition to it*, connected with it in the *Bonds of Christian CHARITY* – a small hallowed Porch annexed to that grand common *Temple*, which is the *Habitation of GOD through the Spirit...*

This echoes the statement in the covenant, that 'We therefore denominate ourselves a Protestant Catholic Church of Christ, desirous to live in peace and love with all men'.

Earlier in his introduction to the sermon, Turner had used the expression 'true *Protestant Catholic Spirit*' with regard to finding benefactors for a fund to support poor congregations, 'whether of the Established Church, or the Dissenters' (an appeal that was partly answered, we might observe, in the setting up of the Atkins Trust). The term 'Catholic' here of course means 'universal', and the phrase 'Protestant Catholic' means most immediately 'all Protestant churches' or 'the whole Protestant Church'; but, despite Turner's mention of the 'glorious Reformation from Popery' in his introduction, his language constantly reaches out to a vision of the whole 'Church of Christ', transcending in its universality even the Protestant and Reformed varieties.⁴⁵ In the phrase from the

Receiving One Another

preface quoted above, 'any other Protestant Church' is followed by 'the Church of Christ in general', as in the covenant the phrase 'to hold the communion of Saints with all Protestant Churches' is followed by 'and such as love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity'. It is a rhetoric that in its progression to a *non-specific* nature constantly seeks to escape labels. The ecumenical thrill that the phrase 'Protestant Catholic' gives to the modern ear is not, then, completely misleading.

In the covenant and the sermon on *Charity*, open communion and open membership is defended by a general appeal to the primacy of love and its nature as a bond of unity. In Turner's *Compendium* there is a more worked-out ecclesiology, in which the Lord's Supper is presented as a necessary sign of the 'visible' unity of the whole Church of Christ 'in the bonds of peace and love'. Though the Christian church is, 'because of the great numbers of its members', dispersed into 'many distinct societies', since these are all under Christ as one head 'they are to be considered but as parts of the same whole; composing one intire spiritual body'.⁴⁶ Elsewhere Turner adds that the dispersion into distinct societies (or local churches) is also due to the exercise of the God-given gifts of conscience and private judgement, as we shall see shortly. But to preserve their unity in love:

it is absolutely necessary, that, however different and independent in *some respects*, any of these societies may be, they should be *all form'd* upon the most *catholic* and *uniting* principles, *upon the whole*: and by some *common external* means or bond of *social unity*, maintain (if possible) a visible communion one with another...

This visible catholicity, urges Turner, is expressed through the Lord's Supper, which 'was intended, amongst other things, to be a standing, *visible, external* pledge and means, of that divine *union* and *fellowship*, all true christians have with Christ, and one another in ONE BODY...'⁴⁷ So it is the duty of all

Christian churches, concludes Turner, to lay the Table 'as open as possible to the free access of ALL, who appear to love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity'.⁴⁸ It is important here to see that open communion and open membership is not founded essentially upon individualism and private faith, but on a catholic ecclesiology with a clear concept of the relation of the local church to the whole Body of Christ. The sacrament is a visible bond of unity between *societies* of believers, not only between individual believers; the Oxford covenanters promise to hold the communion of saints with all 'churches'. This bond of love in a 'Protestant Catholic Church' is the context in which a second argument is advanced which does, however, seem more individualistic.

2. *Those baptized as infants are convinced in their own consciences that they are rightly baptized.*

The New Road covenant portrays its believer-baptist and paedobaptist members as each holding their own sincere beliefs about the nature of baptism: 'whereas some of us do verily believe ... and others of us do believe ... yet, notwithstanding this difference in sentiment...' The vivid form of expression here is significant, because it underlines what Turner and others at the time called 'the sacred right of private judgement'. This is also demonstrated elsewhere in the covenant, when the members promise to obey all rules and regulations agreed upon by the majority of the Church 'so far as we conscientiously can'. Though the notion of 'private judgement' has an Enlightenment ring to it, recalling a humanistic confidence in the light of reason, it is also rooted in the statement of Paul in Romans 14:5, 'let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind'. This in turn is placed in the context of *divine* judgement: 'for we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ' (v. 10). 'Private judgement' thus means, for Turner and his fellow open-communion Baptists, that every person's conscience should be respected because, in the last resort, all must answer for their convictions and

decisions to their master, Christ:⁴⁹ 'Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth' (Rom. 14:4).

Private judgement must be linked to divine judgement just because the human mind and reason is fallible. It is in this perspective that two apparently opposed views of conscience can be reconciled: private judgement must always be respected, but private judgement cannot be employed to exclude others. On the one hand, strict Baptists are 'wrong in setting up their own *fallible*, private Judgement against the Claims of their Paedobaptist Brother to Communion with them at the Table of their common Lord ...', but on the other hand, we defend liberty in the Lord by 'not by setting up *our own* infallibility as the standard of truth ... but by allowing the right of private judgment to every man, or that liberty of conscience to others which we claim for ourselves'.⁵⁰ The implication here for Baptists is that, while they may believe that they interpret scripture correctly concerning baptism, and must act according to their conscience, their judgement is still fallible. Turner dares to state here, in the face of some Baptist outrage, that 'it is evident in fact, that the points in Baptism, about which we differ, are not *so* clearly stated in the Bible (however clear to us) but that even *sincere Christians* may mistake them. A private opinion therefore, on the one side or the other, can never be *justly* made an *indispensible term of communion at the Lord's Table*'.⁵¹ To return to the sermon of 16 November 1780, the only test for the proper exercise of private judgement is love.⁵²

A further interesting stage in this argument from (fallible) conscience is a kind of theology of intention. The paedobaptist may be seen as upholding and honouring baptism in his own mind, argues Turner, because he intends to be baptized, and this intention should be respected until eschatological exposure of the truth. He writes in a *A Modest Plea*:

If my Poedobaptist brother is satisfied in his *own mind*, that he is rightly baptised, he is so to *himself*; and, while the

answer of a good conscience attends it, God will and does own him in it, to all the ends designed by it; so that while he considers it as laying him under the same obligations to holiness in heart and life as I consider my baptism to do me, why should he not commune with me at the table of our common Lord?⁵³

Similarly, in his appendix to his inaugural sermon on *Charity*, Turner speaks of the paedobaptist brother as having 'an equally just Right' to the Lord's Table because he is 'a Believer in CHRIST, answering in a good conscience to what HE thinks true baptism'.⁵⁴ The key question, as opponents of Turner gleefully pointed out, is whether a Baptist can give any objective value to this intention, that is to regard the paedobaptist believer as *actually* baptized, beyond respecting his *view* that he is baptized.⁵⁵ I intend to return to this question in a moment, when looking at what Turner regards as the 'inessentials' in the practice of baptism. For the moment we should notice that the argument from conscience and private judgement is a double-edged sword. Turner does not hesitate to draw the conclusion that if someone '*verily believes in his Conscience, after due Consideration that his Infant Sprinkling is a mere Nullity, and that other Mode is the Only true Baptism; He ought to submit to it, as an Institution of CHRIST*'.⁵⁶ Faced with the problem of so-called re-baptism in modern ecumenical relations, we may have to find a new kind of balance between the right of private judgement and the corporate bond of love.

3. *The subject and mode of baptism is not an 'essential' of Christian profession.*

The covenant affirms that the church will welcome all into its fellowship on the basis of their faith and Christian conduct, 'notwithstanding any difference of opinion as to the subject and mode of baptism'. It is important to note that it does not say 'notwithstanding any difference of opinion as to the

necessity of baptism'. What is regarded as inessential here is not baptism itself, but its 'subject and mode' – i.e. whether the person being baptized is an infant or a believer, sprinkled or immersed.⁵⁷ The covenant gives no excuse for admitting as a member someone who has not been baptized in any form, and it is interesting to find that this was the view of a church member writing the history of the church in 1904: 'the terms of the covenant', writes Edward Alden, 'afford no excuse for the neglect of the ordinance altogether'.⁵⁸

This approach to the question is of considerable interest, as the argument for open communion in the nineteenth century, as conducted for example by Robert Hall in opposition to Joseph Kinghorn, proceeded by detaching baptism from church membership.⁵⁹ Since those baptized as infants were regarded as equivalent to being 'unbaptized', baptism could no longer be regarded as an 'initiating ordinance', although the connection between baptism and membership had always been more of an emphasis among General than Particular Baptists. The result, as Michael Walker has pointed out, was the irony of diminishing the significance of one sacrament (baptism) in the interests of the other (the Lord's Supper).⁶⁰ To insist, by contrast, that what is inessential is only the 'subject and mode' of baptism certainly raises large questions about the theological meaning of baptism, but has the potential for recognition of baptism in two forms. One can see how this would be attractive for a congregation of mixed Dissenters like the Oxford one, which united existing Baptists and paedobaptists. But we seem to have in Turner the case of someone who is prepared to argue this more generally, in the situation of well-established Baptist churches opening their table to paedobaptists.

Turner's argument depends on a distinction between the 'substance' and the 'form' of faith and practice, combined with the right of private judgement already considered. Consciences can differ about 'non-essentials', which are to do only with form. In his sermon on *Charity*, he speaks of those who lack

love as spending their zeal 'in angry Contentions about the *Modes* of Faith or Worship, instead of the *Substance*'.⁶¹ This opens the possibility that there is a 'substance' to baptism which is deeper than the modes, and this is confirmed by Turner's language in the *Compendium*. Affirming the 'equal title' of all Christians to the privilege of the Lord's Table, he writes about 'our common union in Christ ... as professedly devoted to him by the same baptism, (at least as to what is essential to that purpose)...'⁶² This implies that Baptists and paedobaptists have 'the same baptism' in essence. The *Compendium* many times refers to the 'non-essentials of the Christian profession' and the 'lesser disputable points of religion'; Turner roundly criticises those who 'set up separate communities' based on 'non-essentials' with the result of dividing 'the visible catholic church'.⁶³ But clearly, baptism itself is not an inessential: Turner defines one of the essential marks of the gathered church as being 'submission to Christ by the same common sign or token of devotion to God, viz. *baptism* with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit', and regards baptism as the means 'by which we are first formally incorporated into the visible church, or body of Christ' and so 'the beginning and foundation of this external communion'.⁶⁴ We notice that he does not include the subject or mode of baptism in these definitions, and so it may be that again, if quietly, a distinction is being made between essence and form.

There are, of course, problems with this approach. In our day we have become rightly uneasy about stripping 'form' away from a supposed 'substance' in religious practices, aware of their inseparable cultural and social conditioning. But we should notice that Turner is not suggesting - as opponents objected - that baptism itself is a mere shadow or disposable sign of another substance such as faith, but that a particular *mode and subject* is the form which can be distinguished (not separated) from *baptism* as the substance.⁶⁵ This argument is, moreover, always placed in the context of respecting the

paedobaptists' own judgement that they have been baptized.

In his postscript to his sermon on *Charity*, Turner replies to a number of objections from advocates of closed communion, one being that, according to Turner's *own idea* of baptism as a Baptist, a paedobaptist must be '*not baptized* – and that to admit him would be to set aside the sacred Institution of Baptism...'⁶⁶ Turner's reply is a masterpiece of theological diplomacy, which neither agrees that paedobaptists are unbaptized nor unequivocally refers to them as being baptized, and which again distinguishes between the necessity of baptism itself and the non-essential nature of subject and mode:

I answer, not in the least – Even our Brother here admits the *Necessity of Baptism*, though he mistakes the *Subject and Mode* of it; And *I*, as well as *you*, consider it as the indispensable Duty of every Believer in Christ to conform to *our Idea* of it, when convinced of it ... Our Paedobaptist Brother pleads, "That he believes that he is rightly baptized – that if he is mistaken, it is an Error of his *Head*, not of his *Heart* ... That it ... does not affect the *Institution itself*, which he reveres, but *only* the *Subject and Mode* of it – That he ... feels in his Conscience the same obligations to Holiness of Life, which are the Essentials of Baptism..."

We note the delicious riposte that every Believer has a duty to conform to 'our idea' of baptism, '*when convinced of it*' – an argument from conscience. We would, however, like Turner to say more about what he considers to be the 'essentials' of baptism, beyond a devotion to Christ and a call to a holy life. John Bunyan had earlier argued that the paedobaptist has 'the doctrine but not the practice of baptism', explaining that the paedobaptist believes in the necessity of dying and rising with Christ, and shares in the one (spiritual) baptism of immersion into Christ.⁶⁷ However, Bunyan straightforwardly refers to the paedobaptist as 'unbaptized', as does Robert Robinson in his pamphlet in defence of open communion, and as does Robert

Hall later. Turner never refers to paedobaptists in this manner. Rather, he brings together the affirmation that Christ has accepted them, the right of conscience before God as the final judge, and the distinction between essentials and non-essentials, to imply some objective truth in the belief of paedobaptists that they have been 'rightly baptized'. Admitting that all are fallible in their private judgement (including Baptists), Turner rarely even says that paedobaptists are 'mistaken' about the subject and mode of baptism, though he himself firmly believes that the immersion of believers is the true form of baptism.⁶⁸ I have already drawn attention to the comment in parenthesis in *A Modest Plea* - '(supposed) mistake'. We may also note his disturbing question: 'Besides, it should be considered, who is to be the judge of what is, or is not Baptism in this dispute?'

4. *Christ does not make a particular conviction about baptism a condition for sharing in his Table.*

The New Road covenant offers, 'among many reasons' for receiving each other at communion, that 'we can find no warrant in the Word of God for making such difference of sentiment any bar to communion at the Lord's Table in particular, or to Church fellowship in general'. While the next sentence of the covenant claims *positive* scripture warrant for the 'receiving' of all by Christ, this clause invokes the *negative* evidence that scripture does not require submission to a certain form of baptism before communion. This alludes to a point often made by Baptist advocates of mixed communion, that Christ himself had left no such command for admission to his own Table, and therefore obedience to Christ does not require following it.⁶⁹

Indeed, Turner points out in *A Modest Plea* that to exclude those whom Christ, as the 'great head and sole law-giver of the church', has positively 'received' is to be 'guilty of invading the prerogative of Christ, making ourselves judges of things not pertaining to us, contrary to the subjection we owe to him'.⁷⁰

The background thought here is that a covenanted community stands under the rule of Christ, as Prophet, Priest and King. In his kingly office Christ governs the community, which is why it is free from any external human authority. This concern to find the laws of Christ, through reading of scripture under the guidance of the Spirit, leads to a more specific point made by some advocates of mixed communion, but which I suggest is not so strongly made by Turner.

5. *There is no command of Christ that baptism must precede sharing in the Lord's Supper.*

It seems that Turner feels obliged to advance this argument, and it appears duly in the Postscript to his sermon on *Charity*. The insistence that baptism must always be prior to reception of the Lord's Supper was made by General Baptists consistently, and often by Particular Baptists, though it was the former who linked baptism most firmly with entrance into church membership. To this Turner replies that 'this Order of Priority ... is not a sacred Appointment, or express Law of Christ', and cites several scriptural examples against it.⁷¹ Particular Baptists tended to regard baptism as a 'death and resurrection' sacrament rather than an ordinance initiating into the Body of Christ, and it was indeed this tradition that enabled some of them early on to adopt open communion, while General Baptists were entirely opposed to the practice until about the 1830s. The denial of an order of priority might then be thought to appeal to Turner as a Particular Baptist, as it does to such writers as Robinson and Hall; but in fact the argument appears only very briefly in *A Modest Plea*, and not at all in the conclusion to the *Compendium*.

It is perhaps not difficult to see why Turner does not want to make too much of it. It can be used to make baptism itself a non-essential, and to admit paedobaptists to communion while denying outright that they are baptized. Turner does regard baptism as an initiating sacrament, and indeed the beginning of the 'outward manifestation' of the visible unity of the

Church Universal.⁷² He admits that the order in which baptism precedes communion is the practice of the Universal Church, though by historical tradition rather than the command of Christ, and we have already seen his interest in affirming the 'catholic' bond of love.⁷³ Moreover, if Turner is concerned not only to convince Baptist congregations to admit paedobaptists to the Table, but also to achieve united congregations of Dissenters who are both paedobaptist and Baptist, like the Oxford congregation, then an argument denying the necessary sequence of baptism and communion must be handled very carefully. It need not in itself imply that paedobaptist baptism is simply invalid, but it fits easily with talk of 'the unbaptized at the Table'. We are not surprised that nothing like it appears in the New Road covenant.

Turner's way of handling the argument is most instructive. In the postscript to his sermon, he admits 'readily' that while not an absolute law of Christ, it is 'the most natural and usual, and therefore the best Order, that Baptism should precede the Communion of the Supper'. But then, he goes on to say, our paedobaptist brother accepts this because he believes he is 'rightly baptized and therefore qualified', and then follows the argument from conscience and non-essentials we have already explored. In *A Modest Plea* he takes a slightly different tack. The order of baptism and communion is 'of some importance', though secondary to the explicit command of Christ to 'remember Me' at the Table.⁷⁴ But then, he asks, 'who is to be the judge of what is, or is not Baptism?' and there follows the argument from conscience and the fallibility of human judgement. In neither case, then, does he employ a denial of the order to defend the admission of those denoted 'unbaptized'. This concern to keep whole the unity of the Catholic Church, in love, leads to a final argument which has a peculiar 'Baptist' flavour to it.

Receiving One Another

6. *The only qualifications for communion should be those on which there is a common agreement among all true believers.*

Since the Lord's Supper is the 'common pledge of Christian unity' and 'an appointed means of grace necessary ... to all Christians in common', Turner thinks it follows that the qualifications for admission to communion insisted on by any church 'should be *such, and only such*, as are *common* to *all* who make a credible profession of the Christian faith, such as they may *all* conscientiously comply with'.⁷⁵ This search for a common mind on the rules of fellowship belongs to the ethos of a Baptist church meeting, but here it is extended beyond the boundaries of the local church to all true Christian believers who want to share in the Lord's Table. Turner thinks it to be 'incredible' that Christ should approve of qualifications for admission that would exclude 'myriads of true believers in him' who have 'sincerely *enquired after knowledge of his will*, in these disputable niceties' and are 'still of different sentiments about them'.⁷⁶ In his own pamphlet, Robinson expresses the same incredulity in a wickedly humorous passage in which five well-known Christian men and five famous women (including John Calvin, William Tyndale, Isaac Watts, Thecla and Margaret Baxter), all baptized as infants, are depicted as being proposed as new members in a strict Baptist church meeting: 'And you ... Pastor', enquires Robinson, 'what will you do?'⁷⁷

This point relies generally on the observation that those baptized as infants rather than as believers do not, for that reason, seem to exhibit less holiness of life, or be deprived of spiritual gifts, or show less concern for obedience to Christ.⁷⁸ As Turner concludes, 'By their Fruits ye shall know them'.⁷⁹ The concern to find the widest possible common mind among such believers about the will of Christ is the theological basis for the willingness of the Oxford covenanters to accept 'all such as are recommended to us from any of the Churches of different denominations ... as sincere Christians in full communion with them'. It also generally underlines the claim

to be a 'Protestant Catholic Church'.

An 'Oxford' and a 'Cambridge' approach to open communion

All six of the points mentioned above appear in the pamphlets commending open communion written by Turner and Robinson. In sketching the scene in which the covenant was signed, I have also suggested that the contents of Turner's *A Modest Plea* (together with Turner's other publications mentioned) and Robinson's *The General Doctrine of Toleration* helped to shape the covenant of the Oxford congregation through the personal influence of their writers. We may notice, however, that the six components appear in the two pamphlets in somewhat different blends and emphases. Both approaches lay considerable stress on love as the bond of unity in the church, and have a vision of the Church Universal (point 1). But a somewhat different weight is given to the 'disputable' nature of the case for different forms of baptism on the one hand (see points 2 and 3 above), and to the lack of scriptural authority for baptism as a necessary qualification for the Lord's Supper (see point 5) on the other. Since Robinson's style of argument was continued to a large extent by his successor in Cambridge, Robert Hall, we might venture to call it 'the Cambridge approach'. Since it is the angle taken by Daniel Turner which is, I want to argue, more closely followed in the New Road covenant, we might call it 'the Oxford approach'.

The style adopted by Robert Robinson in his pamphlet, *The General Doctrine of Toleration*, is to lay stress on the lack of support in scripture for the idea of baptism as an 'initiating ordinance' without which nobody should come to the Lord's Table. 'We affirm, then, that baptism is not a church ordinance, that it is not naturally, necessarily and actually connected with church fellowship...' ⁸⁰ This allows him both to regard paedobaptists as 'unbaptized', and to urge their admission to communion and membership. He argues that paedobaptists have a right to their private judgement that they are rightly baptized, and that their liberty to hold this view is one reason

for admitting them, but he is quite straightforward about the fact that they are mistaken:

We do not then plead for the admission of such a person because we think he hath been baptized, for in our opinion he hath not: but because he judges he has been baptized, and we have no authority to deprive him of the right of private judgement, but on the contrary we are expressly commanded to allow him the liberty of determining for himself.

With regard to 'private judgement', Robinson states that 'we plead for the allowance of this right to unbaptized believers',⁸¹ but finally it hardly seems to matter, since they do not need to be baptized for entry either to communion or to church membership. Baptism, on this view, is simply a means of public profession of faith, and Robinson urges the admission of paedobaptists because he respects the work of God's grace in their lives irrespective of it.⁸² Thus, the separation of baptism from communion is *stressed*, and only in this context is the right of private judgement about infant baptism affirmed.

Turner's approach is subtly different. He *concedes* that there is no clear scriptural warrant for making baptism a qualification for communion, but he *stresses* the importance of paedobaptists' belief that they have been baptized. With regard to the concession, he adds that Church tradition which makes a sequence of baptism and the Lord's Supper is 'the best order', even though it cannot be demonstrated from scripture as a law. He lays stress on paedobaptists' own convictions, not just because they have the right of private judgement, but because the judgement of Baptists also is fallible, and awaits vindication in judgement by Christ. Turner *believes* that he and Baptists are right about the subject and mode of baptism, but this is a human judgement about 'doubtful questions', and for this reason cannot be used to destroy the judgement of others. The difference in emphasis between Turner and Robinson can

be seen in that, while Turner never refers to paedobaptists as 'unbaptized', Robinson never refers to the subject and mode of baptism as 'disputable niceties'. Again, while both appeal to Romans 14 and 15, Turner only hesitantly identifies paedobaptists with those whom the Apostle calls 'the weak in faith', while Robinson invokes this passage in order to urge toleration of 'errors of faith'.⁸³

Although Turner commends his friend's pamphlet (unseen), it is clear that it is the style and tone of Turner that is reflected in the New Road covenant, which affirms in its key phrase that Christ receives and owns those 'on both sides of the question'. By contrast, we might say that Robinson would not recognize 'two sides' in this balanced way; he would perhaps have written that 'Christ receives those who are baptized and unbaptized'. Like Robert Hall later, he defends the paedobaptist's right of private judgement, but it is the right to be mistaken, to commit an error that is not fatal to either faith or fellowship. Like Bunyan earlier, Robinson urges that we need to respect the fact that – for whatever reason – God has not give a person 'light' into the truth of believers' baptism.⁸⁴ Turner leaves matters more ambiguous, because finally all are accountable to the judgement of Christ.

Turner, it may be said, is faced with a mixed group of believers, Baptist and paedobaptist, wanting to form or re-form a church, not with an established Baptist cause. But Robinson interestingly tells us how *he* has proceeded in just such a situation in the past, and it is different from the way that Turner acted in Oxford:

when I have had the honour to assist in forming a Christian church intending to hold mixt communion, I have first embodied the baptists, and they have afterwards admitted believers, who were satisfied with their infant baptism, on the footing of toleration.⁸⁵

If Turner had proceeded like this, on the basis of the Baptists in the congregation showing toleration to the others, who knows whether the church would have survived. In fact, by the time of the ordination and induction of James Hinton as minister in 1788, it appears that the proportion of Baptists had increased to be the majority in the congregation; but Hinton still seems to have continued the 'Oxford' tradition. Accused in 1790 by a respected paedobaptist member of the congregation of 'catechising' an applicant for church membership on his views about baptism, Hinton explained that it was his custom to ask a paedobaptist applicant the following question: 'Do you conscientiously embrace infant baptism as agreeable to the commandment of Jesus Christ; and are you, so far as you know, determined by the authority of the word of God, and that alone?'⁸⁶ Significantly, Hinton adds that he never failed to put this question to *every* candidate for church membership, 'whether baptist or paedobaptist' – in the former case, obviously adapted. Despite his own emphatic preaching on what he believed to be the truth of believers' baptism, when it came to admission to membership there was still an 'Oxford' even-handedness about 'both sides of the question'. The basic nature of the church as Baptist from the mid-1780s onwards is, however, shown by the fact that there is no account of any member of the church asking for infant baptism to be practised in the congregation, nor record that it ever was.⁸⁷ But the claim of Alden that the church always had Baptist ministers since its re-establishment probably needs to be qualified for the first year of its life, 1781 to 1782, as we shall see.

Covenant and sacrament

The phrase that 'as the Lord Jesus receives and owns them ... we think we should do so too' sums up the approach of the covenanters to the baptismal question, but it could also stand as a summary of the whole covenant which surrounds this particular issue. The language of 'receiving' in the baptismal section picks up its earlier use when the members 'solemnly

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covenant and agree to *receive* one another in the peculiar fellowship, form and order of the Church of Jesus Christ'. The making of a covenant together by a local congregation had its origin among the early Separatists in England, and during the seventeenth century it was more common among Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists than among General Baptists; but the practice had spread widely throughout Baptists of both kinds during the next hundred years. Such a covenant was understood to have two dimensions, a 'horizontal' agreement between members, and a 'vertical' relationship between the congregation and God.⁸⁸ Between each other, the members typically promised to 'walk together and watch over each other', but this was not just a voluntary arrangement like any other human society. They came together because they believed that *God* in Christ had taken the initiative to call them together into a covenant relationship with God's own self. They received each other because Christ had received them. Indeed, in some mysterious way that Baptists never logically worked out, the covenant in the local assembly at a particular time and place participated in the 'eternal covenant of grace' that God had made for human salvation in the death and resurrection of Christ.⁸⁹

The document signed by the members at New Road was thus not a merely administrative 'constitution'; it had theological depth, and the phrase in the final paragraph that the members set their names to it 'in the presence of the Eternal God' was no mere flourish. In the 'horizontal' dimension, two key elements were the promise of mutual fellowship - 'walking together' - and the pledge to exercise mutual pastoral care and discipline among themselves - 'watching over each other'. Both occur in the New Road covenant:

[We] also promise to watch over and admonish one another, as occasion requires, in the spirit of Christian love and meekness, and to live and walk together in unity and peace and the fear of God, according to His Word.

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The promise 'to live and walk together', with its imagery of a pilgrimage, evokes some sense of facing an open future in which 'new light and truth' could always break forth from the Word of God.⁹⁰ In the case of this new congregation, the mixed nature of communion lent this expectation a special poignancy. During the nineteenth century, the practice of making a covenant generally fell into abeyance among Baptists, largely because, in an age of inter-denominational societies for mission and social projects, a covenant was regarded as inward-looking. But the concept of covenant in itself is no justification for a community closing in upon itself; we can see from this example at New Road that covenant could have the widest horizons, opening the 'bond of love' to the whole life of the Catholic Church.

The promise, to 'watch over and admonish one another' had its theological basis in the belief that the risen Christ ruled in the congregation, and had given a share in his 'kingly' ministry to his people there when they gathered to find his mind. As we have already seen, rather than being subject to the discipline of an external ecclesiastical authority, they were to exercise discipline among themselves in making 'rules and resolutions' that 'the majority of the church shall agree upon' (with a conscience clause). In extreme cases, pastoral discipline could be exercised by excluding someone for a period from the Lord's Table. The claim of the early Separatists, inherited by Dissenters, was that this 'power of the keys' (Matthew 18:18) was granted to whole congregation gathered together to find the mind of Christ, not to any priest or bishop. In this covenant it is a natural sequence of thought, then, to follow the statement about church discipline with the more general declaration about admission to communion. Mutual reception in covenant was exemplified by mutual acceptance at the Table.

Church covenants are thus not to be confused with confessions of faith. In this period a Baptist church might well have both kinds of statement, and they could be placed next to

one another in the Church Book (though we have no evidence for such a confession at New Road). The confession was often the one adopted by the whole Association of churches, and it was typically understood to be an explanation of the faith of the congregation and an aid for teaching, rather than a *condition* for the signing of the covenant.⁹¹ The covenant itself was a shorter and more open document, setting out the mutual promises of the members about the manner in which they agreed to live and walk together. It was an expression of commitment and mutual trust, though it usually included a brief theological basis for agreeing together. So at New Road, the covenant begins with a short statement on the authority of scripture and an affirmation of repentance, faith, atonement and sanctification couched in trinitarian terms.⁹² We notice, however, that these beliefs are set out in the personal form of a report of what the members have 'professed to each other, to our mutual satisfaction' rather than in the strict form of a series of doctrines. In the appendix to his sermon on *Charity*, Daniel Turner admits that some will be offended because 'we have not inserted in the above Agreement more particular Doctrines of the Gospel, and have left the Door so wide open', while others 'will blame us for the Contrary, and think we have been too particular, and narrow...'.⁹³ His defence is that they simply wanted to declare the difference between a Christian and a 'Man merely of this world'. They wanted to identify what kind of people they were, and so it was sufficient to point out 'in a general Way, the Doctrines of an ATONING MEDIATOR and a SANCTIFYING SPIRIT'.

It is not surprising, then, that there is not much *theology* of baptism and the Lord's Supper disclosed in the covenant, beyond the profoundly theological affirmation of mutual acceptance. As I have already suggested, the practice of open communion espoused here does not necessarily imply that the theology of baptism held by the Baptist members was a 'non-sacramental' one of mere public profession of faith. While the document states that some believe true Christian baptism to be

administered in the name of the Trinity 'to adults *upon the profession* of their repentance, faith and experience of the Grace of God' [my italics] this does not necessarily mean that baptism is only a *matter* of profession. Indeed, we have seen that the baptismal theology of the covenant's probable drafter, Daniel Turner, stands against that assumption.⁹⁴ Likewise, the reference to meeting for the Lord's Supper 'in devout Remembrance of [Christ's] Sufferings and Death' does not imply a radically Zwinglian doctrine of *mere* remembrance. Since the majority of the congregation were Calvinist, either Presbyterian or Particular Baptist, we might expect them to have held, like Daniel Turner, a doctrine of 'spiritual nourishment' through the body and blood of Christ, exalted in the heavenly sanctuary.⁹⁵ We notice that the members grant to each other 'an equal right ... and interest in all the privileges ... of this our sacred confederation', and they would have held a high view of the 'privilege' of the Lord's Supper. Here for the last time we may return to Turner's pamphlet *A Modest Plea*, to catch a glimpse of his understanding of what that privilege was, and what 'remembering' entailed:

it is *undeniably evident* that JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF *does accept of Paedobaptist Christians*, when they remember Him at his table; --- does indulge them the enjoyment of His gracious presence there --- enables them, in the exercise of the same common faith, to feed upon the saving virtues of his precious body and blood, and thereby builds them up in the power and comforts of the divine life *equally* with us.⁹⁶

An historical postscript: the first minister, 1781-1782

The interest and involvement of both Daniel Turner and Robert Robinson in the re-establishing of the church at New Road is symbolized in the person of the first minister, the young George Dyer. Already in his youth an absent-minded character, Dyer was to become an eccentric though amiable

figure on the nineteenth-century literary scene, a bibliophile, antiquarian scholar and minor poet who was remembered affectionately by both Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt.⁹⁷ By 1790 he had become a unitarian, having perhaps been influenced by some tendencies of Robinson himself in that direction; but in 1779 he served for a year as ministerial assistant to Robinson at St Andrew's Street, having moved into the Dissenting persuasion after his graduation from Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1777 or 1778. Then in 1781, in his own words, 'I went to preach to a dissenting congregation at Oxford',⁹⁸ but left in 1782, probably to teach for four years at a school founded by the Baptist minister John Collett Ryland in Northampton.⁹⁹ Ryland, as we have already seen, was another friend of Turner and collaborator in the tract, *A Modest Plea*. It seems likely that Robinson recommended his clever young assistant to Turner and he in turn commended him to the new congregation in Oxford, perhaps both of them hoping that this appointment would play a part in his development as a Baptist minister. Anyway, New Road began its new life with a kind of student pastor, and for Dyer it turned out to be his only experience in pastoral charge.¹⁰⁰

An interesting feature of this story is that Dyer himself was probably not baptized as a believer, but had received only infant baptism as a former Anglican.¹⁰¹ Ernest Payne judges that 'there is no clear evidence that Dyer was ever baptized', and Dyer certainly never mentions receiving believers' baptism in the various accounts of his spiritual journey into and out of Baptist life.¹⁰² Robinson had secured funding from the Particular Baptist Fund in London for Dyer's support during his year as assistant to him, and Dyer mentions that there was something odd about the application to the Fund: 'I rather suspect that Robinson used, if not a *pious*, at least a *benevolent* fraud on this occasion'.¹⁰³ The reference to the irregularity of the grant might indicate Dyer's baptismal status, as well as meaning that Dyer could not have subscribed to other articles of faith of the Fund; Dyer himself notes that he was never

asked to subscribe, and had the managers of the Fund required this of him 'I should certainly have reckoned it the greatest insult they could have offered me'.¹⁰⁴

Did Turner and Robinson thus arrange for Dyer to come to Oxford, not only as a way of repaying his debt to the Particular Baptist Fund, but because he seemed the ideal candidate for a new mixed communion cause? He had strong Baptist credentials as assistant to a well-known Baptist minister who had made a highly popular preaching tour in the area the year before; at the same time, he may himself have been counted as a paedobaptist. Further, he was a Cambridge graduate in a city where Dissenters were having to make their way in the face of opposition and some contempt from the University.¹⁰⁵ In the event, Dyer's ministry lasted only a year, and it does not seem possible to recover the reasons why it was not more successful. There is no evidence that he was accused of 'heterodox preaching', a fate that befell his successor, Edward Prowitt who left in 1786. Indeed, Daniel Turner in a letter of 14 June 1782, referring to Dyer's intended move from Oxford to Northampton, calls him 'a man I have a very high esteem of', and judges that 'time and encouragement would make him a good preacher'.¹⁰⁶

By contrast, William Robinson, commenting in 1861 on Dyer's biography of Robert Robinson, judges that Dyer's year in Oxford was 'an example of the incompetency of most seceders from the Establishment for the position and duties of dissenting ministers'; but Payne seems to be right in dismissing this as 'an ill-natured gibe'.¹⁰⁷ Turner does mention that Dyer is 'apt to be a little eccentric and to be carried away by starts of fancy', traits that were to become more pronounced and endearing as he grew older. They were perhaps displayed in an anecdote recounted by a friend much later against Dyer, that he nearly 'drowned' a woman while baptizing her, leaving her under the water while he pronounced the benediction.¹⁰⁸ If there is any truth in this incident, it must have happened at Abingdon while Dyer was minister at Oxford, but it does not

seem to have affected Turner's positive impression of a young man whom Turner admits 'came quite raw to Oxford in the preaching way' but whose occasional oddity of manner showed 'an overflowing of the heart'. We might say that Dyer embodied in himself, at that time, the openness between Baptist and paedobaptist convictions expressed by the covenant of the newly-established church. It is fitting to recall him in telling the story of this covenant.

NOTES

¹ Edward C. Alden, in *The Old Church at New Road. A Contribution to the History of Oxford Nonconformity* (Oxford, 1904), p. 13, records that the custom of reading the covenant at the first communion service of each year had fallen into abeyance by his time. The earliest manuscript version of the covenant extant appears at the front of the 'New Road Baptist Chapel Church Book', dated 1866 on the title page and covering the years 1867-1888 (New Road records (NRR) Box 1, Angus Library, Oxford), with the claim appended that the covenant has been 'copied from the original which is in the first known church book'. The earliest printed form appears in Daniel Turner, *Charity the Bond of Perfection. A Sermon, The Substance of which was Preached at Oxford, November 16, 1780, On Occasion of the Re-establishment of a Christian Church of Protestant Dissenters in that City; with a Brief Account of the State of the Society, and the Plan and Manner of their Settlement* (Oxford, 1780).

² The phrase appears in the ms. copy of the covenant, 1866 (see note 1. above), in the form 'the Lord Jesus receiving and owning them'. This is the wording reproduced in the pamphlet *New Road Chapel, Oxford* (Oxford, 1901), Alden, *Old Church at New Road*, p. 15, Walter Stevens and Walter W. Bottoms, *The Baptists of New Road, Oxford* (Oxford, 1948), p. 25, and all modern reprints. The phrasing 'as the Lord Jesus receives and owns' appears in the printed covenant in Turner, *Charity*, p. 21. The echo of the verb 'receives' in Rom. 14 and 15 (see below) makes it likely that the participle form is a revision in the interests of a smoother reading.

³ John Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment about Water-Baptism No Bar to Communion* (London, 1673), p. 43, 'Christ hath received them'; Henry Jessey, Sermon on Rom. 14:1, 'Such as are weak in the Faith, receive you', printed as an appendix to Bunyan's *Differences in Judgment*, p. 105, 'The Lord has received them'; Robert Hall, *On Terms of Communion*, repr. in Olinthus Gregory (ed.), *The Entire Works of the Rev. Robert Hall*, vol. II (London, 1831), pp. 93-4, 'all whom Christ has received', p. 104 'those whom we acknowledge Christ to have accepted'.

⁴ For example, Abraham Booth, *An Apology for the Baptists. In which they are Vindicated ... Against the Charge of Bigotry in Refusing Communion at the Lord's Table to Paedobaptists* (London, 1778), pp. 73-7, 85-7; Dan Taylor, *Candidus examined with Candor. Or, a Modest Inquiry into the Propriety and Force of what is contained in a late Pamphlet; intituled, A Modest Plea for Free Communion at the Lord's Table* (London, 1772), pp. 12-13. Both tracts were responses to Daniel Turner's *A Modest Plea for Free Communion at the Lord's Table; Particularly between the Baptists and Poedobaptists* (London, 1772).

⁵ Turner (1710-98) is aptly commemorated by a monument in Abingdon Baptist chapel reading 'The Scholar, the Poet, the Christian'. A widely respected Calvinistic Baptist minister, he published poems, sermons, theology, and works on English grammar; he was also well known for his hymns, four appearing in the *Bristol Baptist Collection* (1769) and eight in *Rippon's Collection* (1787).

⁶ Turner, *Charity*, p. 23. Ernest A. Payne, *The Baptists of Berkshire Through Three Centuries* (London, 1951), p. 81.

⁷ Turner, *Charity*, p. 127, offers a passing reference to 'him that is weak receive ye...'; perhaps less notice is given in this pamphlet to Rom. 14-15 because the sermon centres on Col. 3:14.

⁸ Daniel Turner, *A Compendium of Social Religion, Or the Nature and Constitution of Christian Churches* (London, 1758), pp. 128-30. Turner, *A Modest Plea*, pp. 14-16.

⁹ The tract signed 'Candidus' also appeared with virtually identical content under the name 'Pacificus', to be identified as J. C. Ryland, so that it seems likely that the tracts were the result of collaboration between the two ministers. There is a copy of the 'Pacificus' pamphlet

in the Northamptonshire Central Library, as reported by Robert Oliver in 'John Collett Ryland, Daniel Turner and Robert Robinson and the Communion Controversy, 1772-1781', *Baptist Quarterly* (BQ) XXIX (1981), 77-8. A transcription of the 'Candidus' pamphlet in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford, can be read on the pages for the 'Centre for Baptist History and Heritage' on the website of the College, at www.regents.ox.ac.uk.

¹⁰ Turner, *A Modest Plea*, p. 6.

¹¹ So Michael Hambleton, *A Sweet and Hopeful People. The Story of Abingdon Baptist Church 1649-2000* (Abingdon, 2000), pp. 30-1.

¹² Evans' List in Dr Williams's Library, cited by Philip Hayden, 'The Baptists in Oxford, 1656-1819', *BQ* XXIX (1981), 134 n. 23; also Payne, *Baptists of Berkshire*, p. 71.

¹³ The first minister was a Presbyterian, William Rob(e)y, 1721-34, and three eminent Presbyterian ministers were among the first trustees; see Stevens and Bottoms, *Baptists of New Road*, pp. 9-10. A 'Mr Hicks' is mentioned as being minister for a short time in 1760, who may well have been Nathaniel Hicks, a Congregationalist minister: see Philip Hayden, 'Baptists in Oxford', 131.

¹⁴ James Hinton, *An Historical Sketch of Eighteen Baptist Churches, Included in the Oxfordshire Association* (Oxford, 1821), p. 6 recording the memories of 'a friend now living'. Turner, *Charity*, p. i., relying on 'information I have received from an Intelligent Friend at Oxford, on whose Fidelity I can depend'.

¹⁵ Turner, *Charity*, pp. iv & vi.

¹⁶ James Hinton, *Historical Sketch*, p. 6.

¹⁷ Alden, *Old Church at New Road*, p.13, counts the Baptists as only four in 1780. John Howard Hinton, *A Biographical Portraiture of ... James Hinton* (Oxford, 1824), p. 104, adds that 'the proportion was further augmented by the addition of several other persons of the same persuasion'. In the note appended to the 1866 MS. copy of the covenant (see n.1 above), 'a small majority' has been amended to 'only five' with regard to the original number of Baptists.

¹⁸ Newman was cook and mangle of St John's College, according to Walter Stevens in 'Oxford's Attitude to Dissenters', *BQ* XIII (1949), 12.

¹⁹ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, pp. 108–9. A note at the front of the New Road Church Book 1867–1888 (1866) lists Newman and Pasco as elected deacons in 1784, and Bartlett in 1798.

²⁰ List of Members of Abingdon Baptist Church, 1780, in the Angus Library, Oxford. Another member ‘dismissed to Oxford’ in 1780 was Hester Rooke, possibly the signatory to the covenant ‘E.H. Rooke’. Among the signatories, the only baptism explicitly recorded at Abingdon is that of Thomas Newman (23 April 1780), and Pasco is noted as being ‘from Dr Gifford’ and ‘from London’. I am grateful to Michael Hambleton for his researches here into the membership at Abingdon.

²¹ Bodley MS. Top. Oxon. c.300 ff.74–6, datable to the first quarter of the 19th century. This was rediscovered by Larry J. Kreitzer, and is transcribed in Chapter 6 below, pp.137–46.

²² Manuscript book, (NRR Box 8). The entry records her death on 14 October 1825 ‘in honour and peace’.

²³ The New Road Church Book 1888–1915 (NRR Box 1) includes a list of books and documents placed in the safe at the chapel on 22 April 1908; the earliest church book then held was, as now, 1838–1866, although there are also early accounts books extant covering the years 1806–1831 (NRR Box 17).

²⁴ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p. 133.

²⁵ James Hinton, *Historical Sketch*, p. 6.

²⁶ According to the Abingdon Church Book 1766–1798 (now in the Angus Library, Oxford), Mr Norman’s appointment for Michaelmas 1778 to 1779 was renewed for Michaelmas 1779 to 1780, but he remained only until March 1780 when he accepted a call to Plymouth: see entries for 31 October 1779 and 6 March 1780. Turner, *Charity*, p. vi., describes William Miller as ‘their own present worthy minister’. The Bodley MS (see n. 21) records a ‘Mr Millars’ as preaching from 1779–80.

²⁷ To the external support of the neighbouring Baptist churches, especially Abingdon, there might be added the internal activity of Thomas Pasco. The Bodley MS (see n.21) presents a more active picture of Pasco than John Howard Hinton’s later character sketch.

²⁸ John Wesley, journal entry for Tuesday Oct 17, 1769, in *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, vol. 5 (London, 1914), p. 345.

²⁹ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p. 103.

³⁰ Of the six ministers who witnessed the covenant, Thomas Dunscombe (Cote), Daniel Turner (Abingdon) and Hugh Giles (Chenies, Bucks) were Baptists; John Lake was minister of the Dissenters Upper Meeting-House (Congregationalist) in The Square, Abingdon (now Trinity United Church); S. Browne (Henley) was probably Presbyterian or Congregationalist, as was probably also William Miller. Turner's account, *Charity*, p. vi., records that the church had originally invited only Turner, Dunscombe, Lake and Miller to be the witnesses (two Baptists and two paedobaptists?), but that Giles and Browne happened 'providently' also to be present.

³¹ George Dyer, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Robert Robinson* (London, 1796), p. 197. Robinson's pamphlet, *The General Doctrine of Toleration Applied to the Particular Case of Free Communion* (Cambridge, 1781) probably also offers a reply to Abraham Booth's tract against open communion, *Apology for the Baptists* (1788).

³² Turner, *Charity*, p. 23.

³³ Dyer, *Memoirs of Robert Robinson*, pp. 190-1.

³⁴ See E.A. Payne, 'Abraham Atkins and General Communion', *BQ* XXVI (1976), 314-19.

³⁵ For instance, in a letter of 18 December 1772, Daniel Turner proposed to his friend Joshua Thompson in London a plan for a 'Union in respect of the external polity and conduct of the Dissenters as a body.' The letter is in the Devon Record Office, Exeter, and was brought to my attention by Stephen Copson.

³⁶ Although no mention is made of his ministry by either James Hinton or John Howard Hinton, this is established by a number of sources: Dyer's own statement in his *Memoirs of Robert Robinson*, p. 178 (see below) is confirmed by the Bodley MS. (see n. 21) and a letter of Daniel Turner, quoted in E. A. Payne, 'The Baptist Connections of George Dyer. A Further Note', *BQ* XI (1944), 238 (also see further below).

³⁷ This is the view of Oliver, 'John Collett Ryland, Daniel Turner and Robert Robinson', p. 78, though he appears unaware of Turner's own part except as a signatory to the covenant.

³⁸ Daniel Turner's published version (1780) reads: '... agree to receive and treat one another with the same Christian Affection and Love'; *Charity*, p. 21.

³⁹ Turner, *Charity*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁴⁶ Turner, *Compendium*, p. 119. This echoes the wording of the Particular Baptist 'London' Confession of 1644, Art. XLVII, reprinted in William Lumpkin (ed.), *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, 1959), pp. 168-9.

⁴⁷ Turner, *Compendium*, p. 120.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁴⁹ Turner, *A Modest Plea*, pp. 5, 11; Robinson, *General Doctrine of Toleration*, p. 39, arguing the connection between duty and benefit; Hall, *Terms of Communion*, pp. 91, 93, 95, 346; John Brown (Minister of Kettering), *The House of God Opened and his table free for baptists and pædobaptists, who are saints and faithful in Christ* (London, 1777), p. 3.

⁵⁰ Turner, *Charity*, p. 23; Turner, *A Modest Plea*, p. 6.

⁵¹ Turner, *A Modest Plea*, p. 7; cf. *Compendium*, p. 125. For Baptist outrage at this view see e.g. Taylor, *Candidus Examined*, pp. 12-14; Booth, *Apology for the Baptists*, pp. 82-3.

⁵² Turner, *Charity*, p. 19.

⁵³ Turner, *A Modest Plea*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Turner, *Charity*, p. 23 (my italics).

⁵⁵ E.g. Taylor, *Candidus Examined*, pp. 9, 11; Booth, *Apology for the Baptists*, pp. 59–60; later, Joseph Kinghorn, *Baptism A Term of Communion at the Lord's Table* (Norwich, 1816), p. 88.

⁵⁶ Turner, *Charity*, p. 28.

⁵⁷ Turner, *ibid.*, p. 22, maintains that the addition of the clause 'or other such non-essentials of religion' was 'intended' though 'not inserted in the copy signed'.

⁵⁸ Alden, *Old Church at New Road*, pp. 16–17.

⁵⁹ E.g. Hall, *Terms of Communion*, pp. 334–8.

⁶⁰ Michael Walker, *Baptists at the Table. The Theology of the Lord's Supper amongst English Baptists in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1992), pp. 79–80.

⁶¹ Turner, *Charity*, p. 17.

⁶² Turner, *Compendium*, p. 127: 'our equal title to, and joint interest in, all the privileges of the house of God'; cf. the words of the New Road covenant, 'an equal right and title to, and interest in, all the privileges ... of this our sacred confederation.'

⁶³ Turner, *Compendium*, pp.135–6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 120 note.

⁶⁵ The same approach is taken by John Brown, *The House of God Opened*, p. 7: 'Believing Paedobaptists have the same spiritual views of the ordinance of Water-Baptism ... as the Baptists ... so that there is an agreement in the substance, though not in the external mode of it.' For opposition to this view see e.g. Booth, *Apology for the Baptists*, pp. 135–7, cf. pp. 48–50.

⁶⁶ Turner, *Charity*, p. 26. Exactly this objection is made by Dan Taylor, *Candidus Examined*, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment*, pp. 32ff.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Turner, *A Modest Plea*, p. 12; *Compendium*, pp. 127, 138.

⁶⁹ e.g. Turner, *Charity*, p. 27.

⁷⁰ Turner, *A Modest Plea*, pp. 4–5; *Compendium*, p. 127.

⁷¹ Turner, *Charity*, p. 26.

⁷² Turner, *Compendium*, p. 120 footnote.

⁷³ Turner, *Charity*, p. 26

⁷⁴ Here, in the two versions of *A Modest Plea*, there is a difference between Candidus ('Though it be admitted that the order of churches is of *some* importance') and Pacificus (...of *great* importance....). See Oliver, 'John Collett Ryland, Daniel Turner and Robert Robinson', pp. 77-8.

⁷⁵ Turner, *Compendium*, p. 124.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 126, 125 [my italics].

⁷⁷ Robinson, *General Doctrine of Toleration*, pp. 46-7.

⁷⁸ This is a particular emphasis of Robinson, *General Doctrine of Toleration*, pp. 34-9.

⁷⁹ Turner, *Charity*, p. 28.

⁸⁰ Robinson, *General Doctrine of Toleration*, pp. 29-31, 45. In this he follows the Particular Baptist tradition of John Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment*, pp. 28-30.

⁸¹ Robinson, *General Doctrine of Toleration*, p. 24.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8.

⁸³ Robinson, *General Doctrine of Toleration*, pp. 24-5, 27; Hall, *Terms of Communion*, pp. 91-3, 101-2, explicitly equates 'weak' with 'erroneous', as did Henry Jessey earlier, in 'Such as are weak in the Faith, receive you', pp. 104-5, 112-15.

⁸⁴ Robinson, *General Doctrine of Toleration*, p. 19; cf. Bunyan, *Differences in Judgment*, pp. 16-17, 47-8.

⁸⁵ Robinson, *General Doctrine of Toleration*, p. 29.

⁸⁶ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p. 135.

⁸⁷ So Alden, *Old Church at New Road*, p. 16.

⁸⁸ See Paul S. Fiddes, "'Walking Together": the Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today', in W. H. Brackney, Paul S. Fiddes, John H.Y. Briggs (eds.), *Pilgrim Pathways. Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B.R. White* (Macon, 1999), pp. 47-74.

⁸⁹ For further details, see Fiddes, 'Walking Together', pp. 58-63.

⁹⁰ The version of the covenant published by Daniel Turner in *Charity* omits the words 'and walk', but given the time-honoured nature of these words, it seems likely that this was a printer's error; they are included in the 1866 ms. copy of the covenant (see n.1).

⁹¹ Among Particular Baptist churches usually some version of the Second London Confession of 1667/1688.

⁹² The qualification 'external' is significant in the phrase that scripture is 'the only infallible external rule of our religion, faith and practice'. We may understand the covenanters to hold that the final 'invisible' rule is that of Jesus Christ himself, and of the Holy Spirit internally in the heart.

⁹³ Turner, *Charity*, p. 23.

⁹⁴ In his *Compendium*, p. 27, n. 1., Turner defines the 'reasons, significations and uses' of baptism to be: pardon and purification, union and communion with Christ, participation in the Spirit, subjection to Christ and 'interest' in his death and resurrection.

⁹⁵ See, for example, the Particular Baptist Second London Confession of 1667, Chap. XXX, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 291-3. Also see my chapter on 'The Church as a Eucharistic Community', in Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces. Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle, forthcoming 2003). For Turner's view see *Compendium* p. 28, note 2, which speaks of: 'our participation of the benefits of his death'.

⁹⁶ Turner, *A Modest Plea*, p. 5.

⁹⁷ See E.V. Lucas, *Life of Charles Lamb* (London, 1905), ch. 14.

⁹⁸ Dyer, *Memoirs of Robert Robinson*, p. 178.

⁹⁹ He seems to have returned to Cambridge in 1786, living there until his permanent removal to London in 1792. The account of Dyer's early life above is somewhat at variance with that offered by Leslie Stephen in his entry on Dyer in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1888), but has been very well established by Ernest Payne in his two articles on 'The Baptist Connections of George Dyer', *BQ X* (1941), 260-7, and *BQ XI* (1944), 237-8.

¹⁰⁰ Dyer implies, in an 'affectionate' letter of resignation as a member of the St Andrew's Street congregation (December 1791) that he had

'occasionally' preached there during the ministry of Robert Hall ('your pulpit'); he prints part of this letter in the second edition of his *An Inquiry into the Nature of Subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London, 1792; first edition 1789), pp. 434–9.

¹⁰¹ Dyer's *Inquiry* (1792) contains a postscript on baptism in which he leans heavily on Robinson's recent *The History of Baptism* (London, 1790), but concludes (pp. 424–6) that Christ did not intend baptism to continue in perpetuity in the church, and argues that it is unnecessary for true religion.

¹⁰² Payne, 'Baptist Connections of George Dyer' (1941), 260.

¹⁰³ Dyer, *Memoirs of Robert Robinson*, p. 300; cf. p. 178.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 299–300.

¹⁰⁵ See Walter Stevens, 'Oxford's Attitude to Dissenters', 12–14. James Hinton felt obliged to reply to accusations from the University community in his *A Vindication of the Dissenters in Oxford, addressed to the inhabitants; in reply to Dr. Tatham's Sermon just published* (London, 1792).

¹⁰⁶ The letter is preserved in the Angus Library, Oxford, and is transcribed by Ernest Payne in 'Baptist Connections of George Dyer' (1944), 238.

¹⁰⁷ William Robinson, *Select Works of the Rev. Robert Robinson of Cambridge. Edited, with Memoir* (London: 1861), p. v. Payne, 'Baptist Connections of George Dyer' (1941), 263.

¹⁰⁸ The source is Mrs De Morgan, recalling an amusing conversation between Dyer and her father, the Cambridge Unitarian minister, William Frend; it is quoted by Payne in 'Baptist Connections of George Dyer' (1941), 265.

'Fear God and honour the King':
James Hinton and the Tatham Pamphlet Controversy

Raymond Brown

The arrival in Oxford of the twenty-six year old James Hinton (1761-1823) in the summer of 1787 marked the beginning of 'the most formative and, surely, the greatest ministry that New Road has ever had'.¹ Hinton's life spanned the long reign of George III; his thirty-six year ministry in one church was a remarkable achievement. Joseph Ivimey maintained that, coming straight from Bristol Academy, young Hinton was sent to 'one of the most difficult situations in which a Nonconformist minister in England could have been placed'.² Endowed with a gentle personality and cheerful disposition, he combined many gifts.³ He was a thoughtful preacher whose pulpit ministry was appreciated, not only by his own people but also by 'some members of the establishment' and of the University, despite the occasional evening disruption by rowdy students, then a particular hazard in university cities.⁴ Hinton's ministry in Oxford coincided almost exactly with Simeon's in Cambridge, where students regularly made a nuisance of themselves.⁵

Hinton was a caring pastor, reconciling factions when Baptist and paedobaptist members were not always in harmonious relationship, when moderate and 'high' Calvinists were at variance, and when others were trivially contentious concerning appropriate dress at worship. He was an effective, though reluctant, educationalist, maintaining his school primarily to supplement his slender resources, knowing that

some members regarded his teaching as an unhelpful diversion, causing 'universal discontent and complaint'.⁶ He was also a zealous church planter, actively participating by preaching and pastoral encouragement in the establishment of village churches. Moreover, he was a supportive partner in new ventures, sharing in the development of the Oxfordshire Association (becoming its earliest historian) and in the initial work of both the Baptist Missionary Society and the Baptist Union.⁷

These are considerable accomplishments. The narrower purpose of this essay is to explore one aspect of the relationship between church and University during Hinton's ministry; the context, response to and significance of a provocative sermon by a notably fractious University don, Edward Tatham.⁸

Dissenters' loyalty challenged

An outspoken Yorkshireman ten years Hinton's senior, the newly-elected Rector of Lincoln College was a formidable intellectual opponent. Tatham produced books and pamphlets on a wide range of subjects in addition to theology - logic, philosophy, politics, economics, higher education and town planning. His sermon preached in November 1792 marked the beginning of the controversy, though Tatham had earlier registered his intense dislike of Nonconformists in general and their ministers in particular.⁹

A scurrilous footnote to his 1789 Bampton Lectures ridiculed 'that formal and pompous class of men, the Dissenting Ministers', 'superficial' people, who speak with 'the profoundest affectation of learning'. At a precarious time nationally, with continuing reports of revolution across the channel, Nonconformists were deemed a political hazard, 'breeding civil mutiny and fomenting dissension in the state'.¹⁰ Blindly misled by ill-equipped leaders, Dissenting congregations were encouraging 'ignorant and dangerous enthusiasts, tools of men more wicked than themselves'.¹¹ His

'Fear God and honour the King'

Bampton Lectures appealed greatly to Edmund Burke, who called on the author to congratulate him on their publication.¹²

Tatham had also used earlier preaching opportunities to vilify Dissenters. A University sermon on 5 November 1791 tilted at the political loyalty of Nonconformists: when 'the safety or honour of the country is concerned we know it is not to the Dissenters that we are to look to fight our battles'. The nation's 'Constitution has excluded you from the administration of its government, we speak plainly, we wish you to be excluded'.

In Tatham's view, disaffection with the Established Church was synonymous with disloyalty to the state. The aim of radical politicians was to 'bring about the downfall of the Church, the extinction of the Nobility and the degradation of the King'.¹³ Similarly, Tatham's published letters to Edmund Burke applauded the convictions the politician had forcefully expressed in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*. Like Burke, Tatham was strongly opposed to extending the franchise because of potential insurrection; even the 'pious but ill-judged' Sunday School movement might easily 'become a national evil'. 'By teaching all the lowest people to read, they open an avenue into the minds of the multitude through which they can convey with ease their seditious doctrines.'¹⁴

Fierce opposition to Nonconformists was part of Hinton's family history. As a boy, his grandmother told him that his grandfather, a convinced churchman, had been bitterly opposed to Dissenters. When his eldest son left home to work for a Nonconformist employer, he was under strict instructions 'never to enter the meeting-house'. Influenced by his employer's lifestyle, yet anxious to obey his father, the young man listened in the porch, and eventually came to personal faith. Seeking his father's permission to attend their meetings, he was ordered home. His angry father felt morally compelled to replace him so sent another son with the same prohibition, and an identical outcome. Increasingly impressed by the eldest son's life and devotion, the mother and all her children became

committed Christians though, initially, the obdurate father made life exceptionally difficult for them all. Hinton never forgot the family's experience of such inordinate antagonism.¹⁵

Hinton would have been aware of Tatham's antipathy to Dissent but could hardly have prepared himself for the public attack launched on a November Sunday in 1792. Preaching at the University Church of St. Mary's, the Rector used 1 John 4:1 ('believe not every Spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God') to denigrate Nonconformist preachers and their message, focussing particularly on those who ministered in the vicinity. He deplored the fact that, though Oxford had 'more than a dozen parish-churches', its citizens were being 'led away ... by ignorant and itinerant teachers of every denomination'.

He preached the sermon again the following Sunday in the city church before local councillors and, when news of its repetition reached Hinton, he wrote to Tatham. The Rector was mounting a deliberate and sustained attack, not only on Nonconformists in general but particularly on those who worshipped in Oxford. Tatham replied briefly, indicating that he had not intended to 'injure any class of men' but was determined to halt 'the spread of disaffection and irreligion in these licentious times'. There had been many requests for the sermon's publication and he would send his correspondent a copy as soon as it came off the press. Hinton was grateful for a reply (however terse) but disappointed with the response. Calling at Lincoln, he left a note, in the Rector's absence, asking if Dr Tatham might be willing to add a sentence to his published sermon indicating that he had been personally assured that local Dissenters were innocent of the specific offences he had described. Hinton maintained that 'if no distinction is pointed out', Oxford people, 'will vent all their dislike' on local Dissenters.

Hinton's fears concerning possible mob violence were scarcely alarmist. The previous year, during a four-day onslaught in the Birmingham 'Church and King' riots, both of

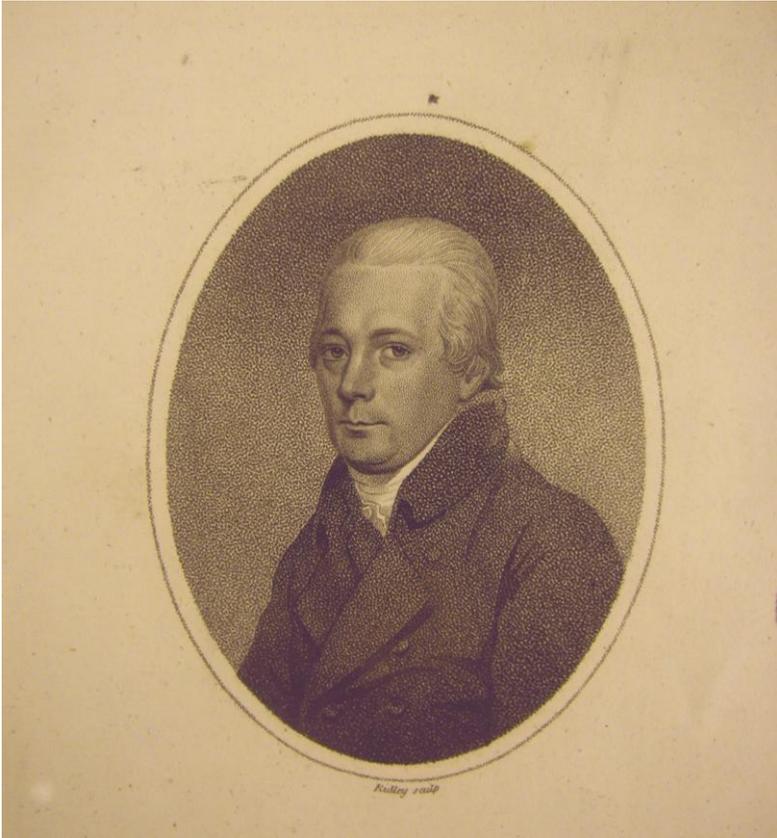
'Fear God and honour the King'

Priestley's meeting-houses and additional buildings had been seriously damaged; aggressive molesters were hardly likely to distinguish between evangelical and rational Dissenters.¹⁶ The rioting and looting spread to other parts of the country. William Cowper wrote to William Bull whilst his Independent minister friend was away in Sussex, 'I have blessed myself on your account that you are at Brighton and not at Birmingham, where it seems they are so loyal and so pious that they show no mercy to Dissenters', adding playfully, 'Come, be received into the bosom of mother-church; so shall you ... save, perhaps, your Academy from a conflagration'.¹⁷

Following the publication of Tatham's sermon, Oxford's Methodist service was disturbed by angry students and others who 'pulled down the Preacher, dragged the seats out of the chapel, and beat and otherwise ill-treated many of the people'.¹⁸ Such occurrences were not rare; hostile crowds frequently attacked Surrey Dissenters as they met for worship, throwing stones through the windows of their meeting-place.¹⁹ As in Priestley's Birmingham, where almost thirty houses were either threatened or damaged, Dissenters' homes were also in danger.²⁰

Hinton's gentle request for an explanatory note concerning Oxford Nonconformists was ignored. The Rector repeated his sermon in two further Oxford parishes on successive Sundays, and by mid-December its printed version was available to the wider public.

Hinton felt compelled to reply. His firm but courteous initial letter, Tatham's curt response and Hinton's further letter requesting an explanatory note were all published together with a considered response to Tatham's strictures.²¹ The controversy's local context is of considerable interest but its issues belong to a wider canvas. Tatham's accusations and Hinton's reply illustrate the widely canvassed hostility to Dissent in late eighteenth-century England.



James Hinton

The Bible accessible to all

Offended by the irritating proximity of Dissent in a university city, the Rector was appalled at the preference of local people for 'ignorant' teachers. Surely Oxford citizens were aware of 'the many years' the Established Church's ordinands 'devote to deep and important studies', 'the many lectures in Divinity' given in the University, to say nothing of the 'magnificent libraries, built ... for the benefit of our studies'.



Edward Tatham, Rector of Lincoln College

Yet, ignoring their well-educated clergy, numerous locals preferred to be taught by 'Methodists and Enthusiasts, by Anabaptists and Dissenters'.

Hinton replied that Tatham's remarks suggested a multiplicity of meeting-houses in Oxford which 'at least equalled' those 'of the Parish Churches' who were said to have lost 'the greatest part' of their regular worshippers to Dissent. Hinton assured the Rector that he had little cause for alarm. Apart from 'a Quaker's Meeting-house, which is seldom used', there were 'only two places where the form of worship differs from that of the establishment' - one, his own church, the other belonging 'to the followers of the late Mr. Wesley'.²² Neither preachers nor members of these two congregations were remotely guilty of the Rector's charges.

Tatham's complaint concerned not only the number of Nonconformist meeting-houses, but the quality and nature of the teaching that might be heard in them. Tatham berated Dissent for the intellectual inferiority of its ministers. He was particularly offended by the average Nonconformist minister's ignorance of biblical languages: 'the smell of Greek' had scarcely 'passed upon their garments'.²³ Such accusations were not unusual. A Bedfordshire vicar similarly complained that Nonconformist preachers were 'destitute of Greek learning, the language in which the New Testament was originally written'. Like Tatham, who noted that Dissenting preachers were drawn from 'the meanest professions and lowest occupations of life', the vicar, Robert Woodward also observed that Bedfordshire congregations were dependent on the ministry of shoemakers, upholsterers, carpenters, gravestone-cutters, watchmakers, tailors, wheelwrights and woodmen.²⁴

The Rector's objection to the intellectual 'ability' of Oxford's Dissenting ministers raised a sensitive issue for Hinton. Tatham held that people 'possessed of weaker understandings', employed in life's 'lower but useful' occupations were dependent on the Established Church's clergy, 'who have greater opportunities to know' the Church's

message and 'are better qualified to judge' the nature of Christian truth. Faith could grow healthily 'from a second-hand information and out of a weaker conviction, as its proper soil'. The teacher must possess 'ability of head and integrity of heart'; the learner needed only 'docility and obedience'. The Johannine injunction to 'believe not every spirit' was pointedly applied to Oxford's worshippers; their world was infested with 'lies and heresies' that would undermine the faith of innocent but misguided hearers. Without the help of informed clergy, how could less privileged people discern truth from error when the Bible was 'written in learned languages, and in a style in many parts as mysterious as the subjects of which it treats?' They must surely 'be content to receive religious instruction from others'.

In his reply, Hinton exposed the quasi-medieval nature of Tatham's argument: 'to keep the people in ignorance' and 'resign their consciences to their spiritual guides' was better suited to 'the dark ages of popery' than to the utterance of 'a Protestant Divine at the close of the eighteenth century'. He presented three arguments: the unique perspicuity of the Bible; the spiritual discernment of the hearers; and the intellectual ability of the preachers.

If the biblical revelation was intended for all mankind, how extraordinary that its message should be so tantalisingly 'unintelligible to the greater part of men'. Hinton recalled that he had once sat in the church where Tatham's sermon was preached, hearing with 'great pleasure ... the late excellent Bishop Horne' argue 'the superiority of the Christian Religion, from its being so plain, that even a child might understand it'. George Horne, who had died the previous year, was greatly respected in Oxford.²⁵ Quoting an Anglican preacher of considerable reputation would have gained Hinton a respectful hearing from non-Dissenters; the writer could scarcely be dismissed as a bigoted Nonconformist, averse to entering an Anglican church.

Further, had Tatham not seriously underestimated the spiritual discernment of the committed Christian? In asserting the crucial role of knowledgeable teachers, the Rector had quoted the affirmation of the pastoral epistles, 'Great is the mystery of godliness...',²⁶ but Hinton asked how Dr Tatham, by whatever learned means, could 'pretend to explain what an Apostle has confessedly left in mystery?' 'May not a plain man, who can read the first chapter of John, believe the Divinity of our Lord as fully and as clearly as the most learned Divine?'

Tatham had tilted at the theological orthodoxy of Dissenters. It was important for Hinton to assert his unqualified commitment to evangelical belief: 'The doctrine of the Trinity ... is with me an important article of the Christian faith.' Even so, Hinton argued, firm Trinitarian conviction was not devoid of mystery. He again referred to a former Anglican bishop, this time to Jeremy Taylor. He is not only an appreciative listener of Anglican sermons; he is a discerning reader of their theology. In the words of Bishop Taylor, he who speaks about 'the mystery of the Trinity, and does it by words and names of man's invention' and talks of:

*essences and existencies, hypostases and personalities, priorities and co-equalities, &c. may amuse himself, and build a tabernacle in his head, and talk something he knows not what: But the good man, that feels the power of the FATHER, and to whom the SON is become wisdom, sanctification and redemption; in whose heart the love of the SPIRIT of God is shed abroad - this man, though he understands nothing of what is unintelligible, yet he alone truly understands the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity.*²⁷

Moreover, the Rector must not imagine that Nonconformist ministers are largely uneducated. The majority may not be graduates of English universities but a 'course of attendance at an academy or university, is not always a decisive testimony of great learning'. Oxford itself had a variable reputation in the

period.²⁸ Furthermore, learning does not guarantee theological orthodoxy: 'One LEARNED man' says prayer is unnecessary, another 'would recommend Socinianism' whilst 'a third enforces sentiments esteemed orthodox'. Which 'learned man' shall we follow? Genuine believers will search the Scripture for themselves and not depend on 'second-hand information', though they value the help of reliable Christian teachers. Learning 'is an excellent assistant in the Ministry, though it cannot supersede the authority of Scripture', and Dissenters do everything to 'promote the education of pious and intelligent young men'; 'in proportion to their numbers' they possess 'as many learned men as ANY other community'. Hugh Evans, one-time Principal of the Bristol Academy (and father of Hinton's Principal there) had insisted that the 'able minister' needs 'the improvements of human learning' when such learning is 'sanctified and humbly devoted to the service of God'.²⁹

Understandably, Hinton took exception to Tatham's strictures concerning 'Anabaptist' preachers in Oxford 'who are self-taught without the power, and self-ordained without even the appearance, of learning'. Answering the 'self-taught' accusation, Hinton mentioned his own theological training at Bristol 'under worthy and well-known tutors', adding that, locally, 'many respectable citizens' had sufficient confidence in his intellectual ability to entrust the education of their sons to him by sending them to his school.³⁰ Moreover, he was no 'self-ordained' Dissenter, having been publicly ordained for ministry at a service led by three ministers, all prolific authors with academic distinctions.³¹

Hinton then passed to a further Tatham criticism: Dissenters are politically disloyal. The Rector had used the Pauline 'fruit of the Spirit' reference to describe the loyal Anglican commitment to church and state, contrasting this with seditious Nonconformity: 'love of our King', whom Dissenters 'labour to despise', and 'love of our Country, which

they labour to destroy' and love 'of each other as members of the same Government, which they labour to overturn'.³²

The Dissenters are 'labouring to turn' the established churchman's 'national and universal Joy' into 'scenes of sorrow'. 'We have *Peace* within our walls which they would have us change for civil-war accompanied with horrors at which our blood runs cold', an inflammatory threat when news of the vicious September massacres in Paris was not far from the minds of Tatham's hearers. Instead of 'the Love of our King, of our Country, and of each other', the Oxford Dissenters, and their compatriots elsewhere, 'are labouring to promote' the opposite characteristics described by the apostle, '*Hatred, Variance, Emulations*'. In 'the place of Joy and Peace' they 'would bring in *Wrath and Strife*'. Instead 'of a Catholic Faith uniformly *professed*' they 'would introduce *Heresies and Schisms*' and 'in the place of *Longsuffering and Obedience* to the powers which are ordained of God ... would introduce *Sedition and Rebellion*'.

Tatham was committed to the essential alliance of church and state, like 'soul and body' as Sir Roger Newdygate, the University's fiery Member of Parliament, had asserted in the 1772 Subscription debate: 'Civil and Religious establishments are so linked and incorporated together, that, when the latter falls the former cannot stand'.³³ Nonconformity was seen as seriously undermining this mutual dependence. Challenging this notion, Hinton claimed that it was both unwise and unjust to insist 'that the Church and the State are so connected, that whoever cannot conscientiously enter into the former, must necessarily be disaffected to the latter'.

At the time the Rector preached his sermon, political allegiance was a highly explosive topic. Tatham's hearers were familiar with Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), the politician's irritated response to a provocative sermon preached by the rational Dissenter, Dr Richard Price. Price's widely circulated (and extravagantly phrased) sermon had been published by the Revolution Society with an Address

of Congratulation to France's National Assembly. Burke shared Tatham's hesitations about the political loyalty of the Dissenters. Whilst writing his *Reflections*, he received a letter from Richard Bright, Chairman of the Three Denominations in Bristol, seeking his support for Dissenters in the continuing debate on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.³⁴ Burke replied that, in the light of recent events, he could not possibly accede to his constituent's request: 'Extraordinary things have happened in France; extraordinary things have been said and done here, and published with great ostentation.' Two 'extraordinary works' had lately come into his hands, Samuel Palmer's *Protestant Dissenter's Catechism* and Robert Robinson's *A Plan of Lectures on the Principles of Nonconformity*. Burke feared that such authors and their people were 'proceeding systematically, to the destruction of this Constitution', and told Bright he was shocked 'to find religious assemblies' turned into places 'for the nourishment of a party which seems to have contention and power much more than piety for its Object'.³⁵

Burke was not alone in citing Robinson: in the 1787 debate on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, William Pitt had referred to 'a class of dissenters in Cambridgeshire' who would not allow that the Established Church was necessary, mentioning by name, 'the minister of the congregation, Mr. Robinson'.³⁶ Burke's judgement in 1790 was that Robinson's printed catechism consisted of 'one continued invective against kings and bishops'. In short, it was 'a catechism of ... anarchy ... grossly libelling the national assembly in every part and passage'. The 'leading preachers among the dissenters were avowed enemies to the Church of England' who were possibly 'recommending the same sort of robbery and plunder of the wealth of the Church as has happened in France'.³⁷

The following year Burke told Henry Dundas that nine-tenths of the Dissenters were 'entirely devoted' to 'the principles of the French Revolution'.³⁸ With such inflammatory (and bogus) information circulating in high places, Tatham's strictures were hardly surprising. Hinton was pleased to quote

a third Anglican bishop, this time one who had spoken warmly both of the Dissenters' loyalty to crown and nation, and their contribution to learning. During a 1779 debate in the House of Lords, Jonathan Shipley, Bishop of St Asaph, had urged his episcopal colleagues to regard Dissenting ministers as 'fellow labourers, engaged in the same honourable task with ourselves'. They are men who 'deserve our esteem for their science, their literature, their critical study of the Scriptures, and their excellent writings ... and ... they have of late stood forth almost singly in defence of the natural, civil, and religious rights of mankind. They have been considered in the two former reigns, as loyal subjects, and as good citizens', to which Hinton added as an apposite postscript the bishop's question, 'Can Oxford herself boast of having produced more steady friends to the House of Hanover?'³⁹ All Dissenters did not share the radical views of Richard Price, and Hinton asks the Rector: 'If a whole community were to participate in the guilt of a disaffected individual, would the University itself be innocent?'⁴⁰

Tatham had also accused Dissenting ministers of theological heterodoxy, saying that 'some of our modern teachers *out of the Church* ... vilify and blaspheme the dignity and divinity of Him ... who is called in Scripture "My Lord and my God"'.⁴¹ Hinton reminded the Rector that he 'may find Socinians in the Church as well as out of it', adding that in his congregation, 'there is *not* ONE of Dr. Priestley's sentiments among us'. Much as he might deplore it, Tatham knew that some of his fellow Anglican clergy did not share his high Christology or commitment to Trinitarian doctrine.⁴²

Hinton felt particularly aggrieved when the Rector's sermon moved from political and theological issues to a crucial aspect of personal spirituality by asserting that the Dissenters' teaching would rob its hearers of their eternal security. These 'artful and treacherous impostors' not only 'disturb our happiness in this world by undermining the Church which is apostolical, or the State which is admirably constituted', but

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'bereave you of your hope in the next'. Such 'deceivers' will 'labour to destroy your happiness here and your hope hereafter'. That winter there were many uncertainties; the future had threatening dangers. Within a few weeks Louis XVI was executed, and England was at war with France. Politically and economically, the times were difficult. For a university don to warn his hearers that listening to Nonconformist preaching could be spiritually perilous, affecting their eternal destiny, was deeply offensive to an evangelical pastor.

Tatham had appealed to his Oxford congregations: 'The conduct ... which will secure your happiness both in this world and in the next, is prescribed in one short command of holy Scripture - 'Fear God and honour the King.' In this biblical injunction, 'LOYALTY and RELIGION are coupled together, forming one great compounded virtue'. Those 'teachers out of the Church' he had described 'directly oppose' such devotion to God and loyalty to the monarchy, for 'libertines in politics are libertines in religion'. So, when their 'happiness both in this world and in the next' is at stake, they must recognize these preachers for the harmful innovators they were. His hearers must 'Fear God and honour the King: and meddle not with them that are given to change'.

Loyalty to George III was a highly relevant contemporary issue. In his *Reflections*, Burke was appalled at Richard Price's denigration of the French monarchy. Viewing 'from the Pissgah of his pulpit, the free, moral, happy, flourishing and glorious state of France', Price had said how thankful he was to have 'lived to see *Thirty Millions of People*, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery' and '*Their King led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects*'.⁴³

Any desire for change, such as the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the campaign for universal suffrage, was regarded as the inevitable precursor of anarchy, anti-monarchy, destruction and bloodshed. At such a precarious time nationally, disloyalty was one of Tatham's most damaging accusations. Hinton insisted that there was no

evidence whatever that any of his fellow Dissenters in the community had ever 'disobeyed, or spoken disrespectfully of, the AUTHORITY OF PARLIAMENT, or of the power vested by the CONSTITUTION in the hands of the KING'. On the contrary, the 'Dissenters of Oxford being vindicated from the accusations and insinuations' of Dr Tatham wished publicly 'to declare their full 'attachment to the KING and CONSTITUTION'.

An exemplary response

Hinton's *Vindication* was an exemplary response. Its irenic spirit was especially commendable in an age when difference of opinion frequently degenerated into divisive acrimony. Ivimey maintained that, in discussion with convinced churchmen, Hinton's 'firm and yet conciliatory manner ... produced better results than the cutting and bitter irony' of Robert Robinson. The Oxford minister's 'soft answer turned away wrath, whilst the sarcasms of Mr. Robinson increased and perpetuated it'.⁴⁴

Furthermore, Hinton was astute in his use of appropriate quotation. It was particularly skilful to support his argument from the preaching and writings of well-known Anglican bishops, all three Oxford graduates, acknowledged scholars who had each earned the University's doctorate in Divinity. Unprejudiced people would scarcely wish to dismiss Hinton as one of Tatham's 'ignorant' ministers 'of whose learning and abilities' Oxford citizens 'have not had the smallest proof'.

The Rector's reference to Oxford's 'magnificent libraries' provided Hinton with an opportunity to contrast the restricted access to the University's libraries with the libraries of the Dissenting Academies, 'which are not thus confined'.⁴⁵ He optimistically believed there were University officials 'who need only to see the complaint stated, to induce them to remove it', an ambition which continued to be unfulfilled in his case until 1802 when his Master's degree from Nassau-hall, USA, secured his admission as a reader.⁴⁶

'Fear God and honour the King'

His concluding remarks to Tatham give expression to Hinton's deep evangelistic concern. He is sad that Christians should be so sharply divided when thousands of their contemporaries either do not attend churches or attend them 'to very little purpose', and longs that 'ALL Ministers of the Gospel may unite in endeavouring to reclaim' such people. 'In this work there is ample room for all our exertions; and with the Spirit of truth and peace for our guide ... our labour will not be in vain'.

False charges repudiated

Hinton's was not the only reply to the Rector of Lincoln College. His local colleague, Daniel Turner, had quickly responded to Tatham's published strictures with a pastoral exhortation, subsequently printed, to declare the loyalty of 'Dissenters in general' because of the 'false charges brought against them' in many 'inflammatory pamphlets, Sermons and other Papers'.⁴⁷ Although Nonconformists were 'obliged, by our Consciences to *dissent* from the Established Church' they were 'sincere Friends to her Peace and Prosperity'. Turner admitted that there may be 'a few, among our many *Thousands*, misled by the wild doctrines lately started ... who may think and act differently; but no whole bodies of Men can be justly chargeable with the wrong Sentiments and Conduct of every individual among them'. He also appealed to his people to fear God and honour the king; churchmen had no monopoly of the familiar Petrine exhortation.⁴⁸

In addition to Hinton's forthright *Vindication* and Daniel Turner's veiled response to the Tatham denunciations, two further pamphlets, one by a Methodist leader the other by a London Quaker, answered the Rector's criticisms.

Joseph Benson, a vigorous apologist for the Methodist people wrote fiercely in their defence, particularly as Tatham had mentioned their local congregation in his sermon.⁴⁹ Its members and their Oxford meeting-place, it will be remembered, had suffered at the hands of a destructive mob,

an incident Benson blames entirely on Tatham. The Rector's unbridled use of 'illiberal, abusive and slanderous language' had stirred up 'a lawless rabble of gownsmen' and others.

After describing the damage to their premises and the physical assault on the worshippers, Benson exclaimed, 'Such, Sir, is the blessed fruit of your preaching!'⁵⁰ Benson's pamphlet, which quickly went to three editions, is written in a more expansive style than Hinton's, and is certainly less controlled. One of his biographers thought it 'an able performance', but admits that its language is 'too severe in a few places'.⁵¹ On one issue, Benson and the Rector were in full agreement: "Fear God and honour the King" was 'an apt summary of the conduct which will secure our happiness both in this world and the next'.⁵²

Tatham made no response to Benson's *Five Letters* but, on reading Benson's work, William Russel, a Pershore curate, sprang to Tatham's defence in a pugnacious work described by one reader as 'low rancorous abuse'.⁵³ Benson produced a typically forceful reply to Russel's invective, bringing that particular Anglican-Methodist pamphlet exchange to a close.⁵⁴

The reply to Tatham's sermon by the London Quaker, Theophilus Haddock, is an interesting example of another spirited response to the Rector's criticisms. Haddock appears to have known nothing of Tatham's attack until he came across 'James Hinton's reply to it'.⁵⁵ Like Hinton, he too is disturbed that Tatham makes little allowance for the spiritual discernment of committed Christians, however limited their educational background. Whatever their intellectual capacities, 'Carpenters, Upholsterers and Fishermen' have declared the good news 'more clearly, perfectly and emphatically, than any man instructed into it after the wisdom of this world ever did or could'. Recalling the familiar Nicodemus narrative, the pamphleteer gently taunted the Rector: 'EDWARD ... Art thou a master in Oxford and knowest not these things?'

Haddock said that when 'it pleased God to reveal his Son in Saul of Tarsus he conferred not with flesh and blood; neither

went he to Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh or Aberdeen for ordination'. His reference to the two Scottish universities was an informed tilt at those Dissenting ministers who, barred from obtaining Oxford or Cambridge degrees, travelled north of the border for higher education.

Although Haddock could not 'subscribe to the Church of England being the apostolic and holy catholic church', he was persuaded that 'there are in all church communions' people who 'make up the truly catholic and apostolic church the world over'. The Rector should consider what restitution he might make for the injuries he has done, when his 'false accusations' have 'robbed thousands ... of their good names and loyalty'.

In support of revolution

In the weeks following the Tatham and Hinton publications, Loyalty Meetings were held in various parts of the country, providing Dissenters with the opportunity to affirm, alongside local churchmen, their unreserved commitment to George III and his Government. At Thame, for example, local residents, 'including the Minister and Members of a Dissenting Congregation', met to declare their 'dutiful Allegiance to the King, and most ardent Desire to preserve inviolate the present constitution of Church and State'.⁵⁶ Following the execution of the French king, Nonconformists in Devon 'joined with members of the Establishment in making professions of attachment to the Constitution & of their abhorrence of all attempts to overturn it by seditious writings'.⁵⁷

Through his *Vindication*, Hinton had publicly declared his allegiance to king and country, yet there were local people who still distrusted him. Their caution is understandable; some Baptist pastors had recently published sermons containing politically radical material. In the summer of 1791 Mark Wilks, a Norwich Baptist minister, celebrated the second anniversary of the fall of the Bastille by preaching two sermons in which,

fiercely critical of Burke's *Reflections*, he made approving use of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*. He held that 'the French revolution is of God', marking 'the downfall of tyranny, despotism and oppression'. England's king, ministers, clergy and laity must surely 'admire a Revolution' across the channel 'that prevents one here'.⁵⁸ Similarly, Robert Hall, the Cambridge Baptist minister, vindicated the revolution for 'displaying the value of freedom, the equal rights of mankind, the folly and injustice of those regal or aristocratic pretensions by which those rights were invaded'; 'in this light' the revolution 'has been justified with the utmost success'.⁵⁹ On one of the Sundays Tatham delivered his contentious sermon in Oxford, another Baptist minister, William Winterbotham, preached a discourse in Plymouth, certainly considered 'seditious', for which he was fined heavily and imprisoned for four years. Claiming for the revolutionaries that 'God is on their side', and that their freedom 'ought to afford us joy', he asserted that the British people 'have a right to change the form of their government when they think proper'.⁶⁰ Local people might well consider it possible that Oxford's Baptist minister secretly entertained ideas similar to his colleagues in Norwich, Cambridge and Plymouth.

News of Winterbotham's sermon and trial were widely publicized. At the time, Hinton received an anonymous letter with a local postmark indicating that an 'Anabaptist clergyman' in Plymouth had appeared before the local Mayor 'for preaching sedition'. The correspondent's Latin quotation conveyed a sinister warning: 'Happy he whom strange dangers make cautious'.

Dissenters' loyalty reaffirmed

Soon after the publication of Tatham's sermon and Hinton's response, England and France were at war. Despite all their affirmations of loyalty to king and country, Dissenters continued to be viewed with suspicion. Preparing for possible insurrection, the militia was called out in 1792, and there were

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treason trials in the two years that followed. Yet, in such a tense context, some Oxford believers publicly identified themselves with the Nonconformist cause. In the April following the pamphlet exchange, Hinton baptized ten young men.⁶¹ His life was not without personal sadness; in the same month as the baptisms, he lost his one-year old boy with measles. In the following year, an older son was seriously ill, as was his wife a year later.

Concerned that the Oxford church should extend its ministry to the surrounding villages, Hinton began preaching in Woodstock, a venture that, on a Sunday afternoon in 1794, had dangerous consequences.⁶² He and his fellow-worshippers, meeting in premises licensed for worship, were physically assaulted by a hostile crowd of three to four hundred people. Publicly vilified as a 'Jacobin rascal' Hinton, along with others, was stoned, returning home 'much wounded by the mob'.⁶³ News of the Woodstock incident had unhappy social repercussions. In Oxford he could 'hardly step a few yards into the street without being bitterly cursed'. Village preaching was considered 'so disgraceful a thing' that some wished he had been killed in the incident.

Increasing tensions marked the years that followed - serious food shortages, financial crises, military defeats and naval mutinies. Tatham did not exaggerate when he described the times as 'difficult', the period 'awful and momentous'.⁶⁴ Yet, throughout these troubled years, Hinton continued to draw large congregations, so much so that many, unable to get a seat, stood for the whole service whilst others could not even get into the crowded building.⁶⁵

The precarious national situation in 1798 called for volunteers who would, if necessary, defend their localities against a French invader. In a further pamphlet, *Brief Thoughts on the Importance of Defending our Country*, addressed to 'the inhabitants of Oxford and its neighbourhood' Hinton supported these calls, and in doing so explained his personal reasons for writing. 'Misrepresentation' had 'often been

employed to injure his reputation'. In the present crisis, when such 'unjust imputations' might well be revived, he reaffirmed 'his attachment to the British Constitution and to the British Throne'. Believers 'who conscientiously dissent' from the Church of England 'are not the enemies of religion, or of the nation, but firm friends to both'. The French would wish to exploit our country's 'internal divisions' but its people must let 'religious bigotry disappear'. Doubtless referring to the campaign to extend the franchise and efforts to remove the civic disabilities of Nonconformists, Hinton is convinced that 'this is certainly not the moment to urge their claims'. It is better by far 'cheerfully to wait the return of Peace and Prosperity, in the confident hope, that the British Legislature, now justly anxious to guard us from the destructive inroads of anarchy, will be equally careful to preserve us to the blessings of genuine liberty'. Personal sacrifices must be made if, with 'a coast so extensive as ours', Britain is to be protected 'from the ravages of a licentious and plundering army'. This was not alarmist propaganda; an enemy raiding party had landed at Fishguard the previous year, and French troops were gathering along their coastline nearest to our own. To 'wars of ambition and of conquest', Hinton is 'an utter enemy' but defence is nothing other than 'employing the common strength for the common good'.⁶⁶

At this point, the Tatham-Hinton pamphlet controversy moved toward an unexpectedly pleasing conclusion. A copy of *Brief Thoughts* came into the hands of Edward Tatham who made public his warm approval by writing an open letter to Hinton in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, thanking him for his 'statesmanlike' exhortation: 'I love you for the Patriotic Zeal and Religious Principle which pervade your short address'.⁶⁷

Tatham gradually appears to have become more accommodating to Nonconformists though, in the new century, concerned about 'the weight of their increasing numbers', he could still write about the nation becoming 'infested' with 'Dissenters, Methodists, and Anabaptists'. He

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confessed, 'As to myself, I like the Papists ... better than the Dissenters'.⁶⁸ Locally, tolerance had its limits; in 1817 he made strident efforts to prevent the erection of a Methodist church in Oxford, storming on to the building site, ordering the men to stop their work.⁶⁹

Disappointed by the Rector's continuing animosity, Hinton may have reflected on the more charitable sentiments expressed by an earlier Fellow of Lincoln College. Recognising that 'all men will not see all things alike', John Wesley had pleaded for a 'catholic spirit': 'Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?'⁷⁰ Hinton's Baptist colleagues in the north of England had made a similar plea in the year prior to Tatham's controversial sermon. In combating the 'odious demon' of 'religious bigotry', Christians should recognize that it is 'unreasonable to expect that their religious opinions should be exactly alike'. When the apostle Paul 'exhorts us to be "of the same mind ..." he does not so much intend a unity of opinion as a unity of affection'.⁷¹ New Road's pastor took seriously the apostolic injunction about 'speaking the truth in love'; it characterized his response to a belligerent Anglican sermon and was attractively exemplified during a life's ministry in Oxford and beyond.

NOTES

¹Walter Stevens and Walter W. Bottoms, *The Baptists of New Road, Oxford* (Oxford, 1948), p. 12.

²Joseph Ivimey, *The Excellence and Utility of an Evangelical Minister as exercised by Protestant Dissenters* (London, 1823), p. A2.

³When Hinton first came to preach, the congregation was attracted to his 'affable temper'. One of his local colleagues said 'it was impossible to be in his company and be dull', see J.T. Dobney, *The Decease of Eminent Ministers ... A Sermon preached at the Protestant Dissenting Chapel, Eynsham* (Oxford, 1823), p. 22.

⁴ For biographical references to Hinton, see John Howard Hinton, *A Biographical Portraiture of ... James Hinton* (Oxford, 1824).

⁵ W. Carus, *Memoirs of the life of the Rev. Charles Simeon* (London, 1847), pp. 88–93. Robert Robinson observed that ‘irreverence in places of public worship have always been complained of in university towns’: *Miscellaneous Works*, vol. III (Harlow, 1807), pp. 238–9. See also Vol. I, lvii–lix.

⁶ Hinton had some notable pupils, including two later Secretaries of the Baptist Union, Edward Steane and his own son, John Howard Hinton: E.A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London, 1959), pp. 84–5. Some pupils later opened their own schools. ‘Giles, Father and Sons’ *Baptist Quarterly* IV (1928–29), 333–6.

⁷ James Hinton, *An Historical Sketch of Eighteen Baptist Churches Included in the Oxfordshire Association* (Oxford, 1821). For Hinton and the BMS see the chapter by Basil Amey, ‘Giving and Receiving’, pp. 351–78.

⁸ For Tatham, see V.H.H. Green, *Oxford Common Room: A Study of Lincoln College and Mark Pattison* (London, 1957), pp. 41–61, and *The Commonwealth of Lincoln College 1427–1977* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 360–86.

⁹ Edward Tatham, *A Sermon Suitable to the Times*, 5th edn. (London, 1792).

¹⁰ Newspapers were eagerly read for details of the Revolution; for example, by 1791–2, first-hand reports of events in France had greatly increased the sales of the *Whig Morning Chronicle*; see Ian R. Christie, *Myth and Reality in late eighteenth century British politics* (London, 1970), pp. 344–5.

¹¹ Edward Tatham, *The Chart and Scale of Truth*, vol. I (Oxford, 1792), pp.116–17. The derogatory footnote was removed from the revised edition of Tatham’s *Bampton’s* by E.W. Grinfield, who was ‘unwilling to perpetuate forgotten controversy, or to reiterate charges, which can no longer be sustained’, [rev. edn., vol. I, 1840, p. xi]. Grinfield discreetly acknowledged that the ‘characteristic energy of Dr. Tatham often led him to use somewhat stronger expressions than the occasion would justify’ [rev. edn., vol. I, p. 368].

¹² Tatham, *Chart and Scale of Truth*, rev. edn., vol. I, 1840, p. xxxvii.

- ¹³ Edward Tatham, *Sermon preached before the University of Oxford on 5th November, 1791* (London, 1791), pp. 36–7, 32–3, 29.
- ¹⁴ Edward Tatham, *Letters to the Rt Hon. Edmund Burke on Politics* (London, 1791), p. 94.
- ¹⁵ *Evangelical Magazine* XII (1804) 210–15.
- ¹⁶ For the Birmingham riots, see R.B. Rose, 'The Priestley Riots of 1791', *Past and Present* 18 (1960), 68–88; G.M. Ditchfield, 'The Priestley Riots in Historical Perspective', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* 20 (1991) 3–16, and David Wykes, "'The Spirit of Persecutors Exemplified": The Priestley Riots and the victims of the Church and King mobs', *ibid.*, 17–39.
- ¹⁷ Josiah Bull, *Memoirs of William Bull* (London, 1864), p. 207, cf. pp. 218–19, 221.
- ¹⁸ Joseph Benson, *Defence of the Methodists in Five Letters addressed to Dr. Tatham* (London, 1793), p. 33.
- ¹⁹ J. Waddington, *Surrey Congregational History* (London, 1866), pp. 208–10.
- ²⁰ Dissenters at Yarmouth, for example, were 'arming to defend their houses'; see J. T. Rutt (ed.), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, vol. I, *Life and Correspondence, 1787–1804* (London, 1831), p. 173.
- ²¹ James Hinton, *A Vindication of the Dissenters in Oxford, addressed to the inhabitants; in reply to Dr. Tatham's Sermon just published* (London, [1792]).
- ²² For Oxford Quakers, see Stephen Allott, *Friends in Oxford: The History of a Quaker Meeting* ([n.p.], 1952), p. 17.
- ²³ Tatham, *Chart and Scale of Truth*, p. 116–17.
- ²⁴ J. Brown, *The History of the Bedfordshire Union of Christians* (London, 1946), pp. 45–6.
- ²⁵ Fellow of Magdalen from 1750, President 1768–91, and Vice-Chancellor of the University (1776–80). For Horne, see C.J. Abbey, *The English Church and its Bishops 1700–1800*, vol. II (London, 1887), pp. 257–61.

²⁶ In a slip of the pen, Hinton attributed this 1 Tim. 3:16 reference to 'the apostle John'; Hinton, *A Vindication*, p. 7.

²⁷ Jeremy Taylor 'Via Intelligentiae', A Sermon preached to the University of Dublin', in *The Works of Jeremy Taylor*, vol. VIII (London, 1850), p. 387.

²⁸ V.H.H. Green, 'Reformers and Reform in the University' in L.S. Sutherland and L.G. Mitchell (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. V (1984–2000), pp. 615–22, and J. Macdonald, *Memoirs of Rev. Joseph Benson* (London, 1822), pp. 246–7.

²⁹ Hugh Evans, *The Able Minister: Sermon preached... before the Bristol Education Society* (Bristol, [1773]), pp. 10, 18.

³⁰ Hinton was taught at Bristol by Caleb Evans (who, in recognition of his prolific writings, had been awarded the DD degree by both the Baptist University, Providence, Rhode Island, later Brown University, USA, and Aberdeen University) and James Newton, MA.

³¹ In recognition of their considerable literary output, Caleb Evans and Joseph Stennett were awarded an Aberdeen DD, and Daniel Turner an MA by Providence Baptist University, USA.

³² Gal. 5: 19–23.

³³ *The Parliamentary History of England*, XVII (1771–74), 255, see G.M. Ditchfield, 'The Subscription Issue in British Parliamentary Politics 1772–79', *Parliamentary History* 7 (1988) 45–80.

³⁴ For Parliamentary debates on the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, see G.M. Ditchfield, 'The Parliamentary Struggle over the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787–1790', *English Historical Review* LXXXIX (July 1974), No. CCCLII, 551–77.

³⁵ *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, eds. A. Cobban and R.A. Smith, vol. VI (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 83–4; letter to Richard Bright, 18 February 1790.

³⁶ *The Parliamentary History of England*, XXVI (1786–88), 831.

³⁷ *The Parliamentary History of England*, XXVIII (1789–91), 436–7, 439.

³⁸ Burke, *Correspondence*, VI, pp. 419–20. Letter to Henry Dundas, 30 September, 1791.

³⁹ *The Works of the Rt. Rev. Jonathan Shipley*, vol. II (London, 1791), pp. 238, 245.

⁴⁰ For rare political radicalism in the University during these years, see L.G. Mitchell, 'Politics and Revolution 1772–1800' in Mitchell and Sutherland, *The History ...University of Oxford*, V, pp. 186–7.

⁴¹ My italics.

⁴² For examples, see G.M. Ditchfield, *Theophilus Lindsey: From Anglican to Unitarian*, Friends of Dr. Williams's Library Lecture (London, 1998), pp. 21–3, and relevant endnotes.

⁴³ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), ed. C.C. O'Brien (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 157.

⁴⁴ Ivimey, *Excellence and Utility*, pp. 3–4.

⁴⁵ Hinton's elusive comment suggests the possibility that (perhaps at Bristol, if not elsewhere) local ministers may have had limited access to Dissenting Academy libraries.

⁴⁶ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p. 371.

⁴⁷ Daniel Turner, *An Exhortation to Peace, Loyalty, and the support of Government*, 2nd edn. (Henley, [1792]).

⁴⁸ 1 Peter 2:17.

⁴⁹ Joseph Benson, *A Vindication of the People called Methodists* (London, 1800); also *An Apology for the People called Methodists* (London, 1801).

⁵⁰ Benson, *Defence of the Methodists*, p. 33.

⁵¹ Macdonald, *Memoirs of Benson*, p. 245.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁵³ W[illiam] Russel, *A Few Hints for the consideration of Methodists and other dissenters*; Richard Treffry, *Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Benson* (London, 1840), p. 159.

⁵⁴ Joseph Benson, *A Further Defence of the Methodists in Five Letters addressed to Rev. W. Russel* (London, 1794).

⁵⁵ Theophilus Haddock, *Error Detected and Fiction Rebuked in a Letter to Edward Tatham, DD, so called, and Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford ...* (London, 1794). For Haddock, see Joseph Smith, *A Descriptive*

Catalogue of Friends' Books, vol. I (London, 1867), p. 902, and *Supplement*, p. 176.

⁵⁶ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 19 January 1793.

⁵⁷ Letter of Timothy Kenrick, minister of George Meeting, Exeter, 26 February 1793, Kenrick Papers, in *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, 4 (2), 177–8.

⁵⁸ Mark Wilks, *Two Sermons on the Origin and Stability of the French Revolution* ([Norwich], 1791), pp. 7, 29, 63.

⁵⁹ Robert Hall, *Christianity consistent with a Love of Freedom*, in Olinthus Gregory (ed.), *The Works of Robert Hall*, vol. III (London, 1866), p. 22.

⁶⁰ William Winterbotham, *The Two Sermons preached 5th and 18th November 1792 at How's Lane Chapel, Plymouth* (London, 1794), 'The Commemoration of National Deliverances', p. 32.

⁶¹ Ernest A. Payne, *The Baptists of Berkshire Through Three Centuries* (London, 1951) p. 81. The candidates included an apprentice cabinet maker, Francis Franklin, who, with Hinton's encouragement, trained at Bristol, later becoming minister at Coventry; see J.C.G. Binfield, *Pastors and People: The Biography of a Baptist Church* (Coventry, 1984), pp. 39–43.

⁶² One of the reasons Hinton listed for not moving to London's Little Wild Street church in 1795 (on the death of Samuel Stennett) was that 'the country around Oxford is almost barren of the gospel, and many plans just begun must fall to the ground'.

⁶³ *The Protestant Dissenters' Magazine* II (1795), 252–6.

⁶⁴ Edward Tatham, *Letter to William Pitt on the National Debt* (London, 1795), p. 1.

⁶⁵ The building was twice enlarged during Hinton's ministry, first in August 1798, doubling the accommodation to 500 seats, and again in 1819 to increase the seating capacity to 800.

⁶⁶ James Hinton, *Brief Thoughts on the Importance of Defending our Country respectfully addressed to the inhabitants of Oxford and its neighbourhood* (Oxford, 1798).

⁶⁷ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 5 May 1798.

'Fear God and honour the King'

⁶⁸ Edward Tatham, *A New Address to the Free and Independent Members of Convocation* (Oxford, 1810), pp. 22-5.

⁶⁹ James J. Moore, *Earlier and Later Nonconformity in Oxford* (Oxford, 1875), p. 27.

⁷⁰ John Wesley, Sermon XXXIV, 'Catholic Spirit', in E.H. Sugden (ed.), *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, vol. II (London, 1964), pp. 132, 130.

⁷¹ *Christian Benevolence: The Meeting of the Dissenting Ministers of the Baptist Denomination [of Yorks. and Lancs.] in Association at Salendine Nook [Huddersfield], June 15-16th, 1791*, pp. 7-8.

The 1799 Baptist Meeting House Drawing and the Origins of the Tidmarsh Baptismal Tradition

‘They baptized in the mill stream near adjoining’

Larry J. Kreitzer

The earliest representation of the New Road Baptist Church buildings is a pen and ink drawing from circa 1799. The drawing is pasted on page seventy-six within the foliated manuscript volume designated Ms Top Oxon c.300, now part of the collection of the Bodleian Library in Oxford.¹ The manuscript is, in the main, a collection of topographical views of Oxford, drawn by a number of different artists and pasted into a scrapbook according to a geographical arrangement. The drawing itself is delicately hand-coloured, with an aqua-blue roof and brown doors, and bears the words ‘The Baptist Meeting House 1799’ at its base (see the cover illustration).

A copper engraving plate of this drawing was also produced at some point, probably in anticipation of the celebrations of the 300th anniversary of the church in 1953. Mounted on a block of wood, this plate is now contained in the archives of the Angus Library at Regent’s Park College, Oxford. The plate clearly derives from the pen and ink drawing in the manuscript; there is an irregularity in the roof line above the upper right-hand round window which is caused by a small tear in the paper of the drawing, and this irregularity has been incorporated within the copper plate. A black and white photograph of this early drawing of New

A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ

Road Baptist Church, produced by H. Minn, was included within the booklet entitled *The Baptists of New Road, Oxford* by Walter Stevens and Walter W. Bottoms. This was published in 1948 for the 150th celebrations of the opening of the new chapel at New Road in 1798.²

More important, at least as far as interests in the origins of Baptist life in Oxford is concerned, is the fact that the 1799 drawing is accompanied by two pages of hand-written text. Most of this is written by an anonymous author who offers a short summary of the history of the church up to his own time, probably sometime between 1799 and 1821 when the buildings were remodelled (no mention is made of this remodelling, or indeed of any specific date later than 1806). Confirmation of the dating of the manuscript page to the first quarter of the nineteenth century also seems indicated by the fact that the writer mentions that the present pastor of the congregation is James Hinton, minister at New Road from 1787–1823. It was during James Hinton's ministry that the church was rebuilt and took the form seen in the 1799 drawing. A lead memorial plate dating from 1798 has survived which marked the rebuilding of the church.³ The inscription of the plate reads:

RE BUILT 1798

JAMES HINTON PASTOR

T + NEWMAN

DEACONS

T + PASCO

I + BARTLETT ARCT

1798

HH

The 1799 Baptist Meeting House Drawing

The writing on the front page of the folio within the Bodleian consists of twenty-six lines; that of the reverse contains seventeen lines. The reverse page also contains the inscriptions of five different obituary monuments, the first two involving three members of a family with the surname Rook(e).⁴ The third is a brief obituary notice for Daniel Turner; the fourth a brief notice for Thomas Plater. The fifth notice is clearly from a different hand and is written with a much darker ink. This is an inscription of a funerary monument for Thomas Pasco, an active deacon within the life of New Road Baptist Church and one of the signatories of New Road's church covenant of 1780, as well as one of the two deacons listed on the lead plate described above. This marble monument is still mounted on a wall within New Road Baptist Church.⁵

The hand-written text of the document is as follows:

(f. 76 recto)

There are traditions of Baptist congregations in Oxford many years back. The last minister before the Meeting ceased was a Mr. Titmouse, who lived in a lane since called Titmouse's Lane, and they baptized in the mill stream near adjoining, on the east side of which, at low water, were visible some few years back, stone steps to the bottom of the river. The time this Meeting stopped is uncertain. The best account of the present Dissenters in Oxford, we have from the introduction prefixed to a sermon preached at Oxford 16 Nov, 1780 on the establishment of a Church of Protestant Dissenters, by a worthy minister Daniel Turner M.A., many years resident in Abingdon. He says,

There were Dissenters in Oxford more than one hundred years ago, of the presbyterian denomination, and that a Mr. Beck and a Mr. Oldfield were Preachers among them.⁶ In the reign of George 1st Mr. Wm Roby, a pious and learned man, was their pastor, when the

A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ

rioters of those times destroyed the Meeting, but it was rebuilt and opened again in 1721, Mr. Roby preaching from the first Book of Kings 8 ch. Ver 27. Mr. Roby died in 1734 and was succeeded by a Mr. Snashal. After him a Mr. Parkes was selected pastor. They were destitute of a minister for some time, but in the year 1743, they had preaching once in a month and the Lord's Supper administered three times in that year. From that year for ten years they had no public service, and only a few of them met in private houses to pray and hear sermons of Dr. Owens and others. In 1764 they had some public service, and received the Lord's Supper twice, and they preserved some little resemblance of their original Church state, but from that time they had the Lord' Supper no more till their present restoration. During the space of sixteen years they had only occasional preaching, once indeed for a year of two, and once in three or four years; but long had tedious intervals between.

(f. 76 verso)

Mr. [Miller]⁷ preached here 1779 to 1780, and was succeeded by a Mr. Dyer who officiated as pastor for one year, and was followed by a Mr. Proust, who continued till 1786 when the present minister (Mr. Hinton) settled among them. In the year 1777 Mr. Thomas Pasco, a chemist and druggist, settled at Oxford. He had been a [hearer] of Dr. Gifford many years, and under his ministry received those good impression [*sic*] which extended through the course of life, which terminated after a few days illness. He was buried at the Baptist burial ground in Abingdon by the remains of his mother.

Mr. Pasco, on his coming to Oxford, found the Protestant Dissenters sunk into a low estate, and he set about the revival of it. In 1780 he became a member, and soon after a

The 1799 Baptist Meeting House Drawing

deacon of a Baptist society in Oxford, both of which he held for many years. By his exertions the congregation soon became very numerous, especially on Mr. Hinton's becoming their pastor, that it was necessary to enlarge the Meeting House; therefore the building erected by the old Presbyterians about the year 1720, was very nearly all taken down, and in 1798, the Baptist Meeting represented in the preceding page, erected on its ruins.

No person was ever known to be buried in the Meeting House. There is one marble monument in it, to the memory of Mr. Archdale Rook, a mercer of Oxford who was buried at [blank]. The inscription as follows:

A.P.M.
Archdale Rook Arm
Qui obiit quinto die Julii
AD MDCCLXXII
Aetatis suae LXXI

Arms, A fesse engrailed between three Rooks S
Crest, a Rook upon a wreath.

On a stone in the yard.

In memory of John Rooke, Gent. who died
3 May 1786
in his 80th year.

Elis. His wife died 10 June 1786, aged 84
She was the mother of 2 sons, 1 daughter,
Richard, Archdale, & Elizabeth

On another stone.

Near this place lyeth the bones of Daniel
Turner, late of the Bank of England,
who died 17 July 1797, Aged 66 years.
In the hope of Eternal Life.

A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ

On a stone in the yard.

In memory of
Thomas Plater who departed this life
19 May 1786 Aged 68.
Lord I have hoped for thy salvation

My flesh shall slumber in the ground
Till thy last trumpet's joyful sound
Then burst the chains with sweet surprize,
And in my saviour's image rise.
When thou art sinking in the shadow of death
Grasping with pain for ever labouring breath,
O may thy soul, by some foretaste know
Its great deliverance from eternal woe,
If Christ be all to thee, tho' Life decays,
Thy spirit freed, shall mount the heaven in praise.

On a marble mount in the chapel.

To the memory of Thomas Pasco
who for twenty six years
honourably sustained the
office of Deacon in the Church
of Christ assembling in this place.
Devotion, Candour, Meekness
and Fidelity endeared him through
life to an extensive acquaintance
and rendered his death
a public loss.
He departed this life September
1st 1806 ... Aged 53 years.
The memory of the just is blessed.

NB: Mr. Pasco was buried at the
Baptist Meeting House, Abingdon

The 1799 Baptist Meeting House Drawing

Clearly the most important contribution that the document makes to our understanding of New Road's history is the light it sheds on developments within the eighteenth century. Most of the names and details mentioned refer to the difficulties the congregation faced during the 1700s, and much of the information contained within the document is directly based on a pamphlet published on 16 November 1780 by Daniel Turner on the occasion of the re-establishment of a Dissenters' church within the city. Turner published the sermon he preached on this happy occasion, along with a copy of the church covenant of 1780, and a postscript containing his theological reflections about the nature of Christian fellowship and the sacraments as *Charity the Bond of Perfection*.

Something not in Turner's account, but included in the manuscript, is the crucial role attributed to Thomas Pasco in the revival of the cause following his arrival in Oxford in 1777. A memoir of Pasco contained in the *Evangelical Magazine* for 1806 supports this interpretation, noting that, 'In Oxford the interest of serious godliness and especially among Protestant Dissenters had sunk into a very low state; and Mr Pasco was evidently directed thither by Providence, as the mean [sic] of cherishing and reviving it'.⁸

Several features of the brief opening sentences of the Bodleian document dealing with the *seventeenth century* history of the Baptist church in Oxford, which are *not* included within Turner's published pamphlet, are also worth noting.

For instance, the fact that the name of the minister in Oxford is given as Richard *Titmouse* is interesting in that it is additional confirmation of the vagaries that existed at the time in spelling Richard Tidmarsh's surname. His surname is elsewhere in contemporary documents variously spelled as Tidmarshe, Tidmersh, Tydmersh, Titchmarsh, Titmarch, Tittmash, Titmus and Titmous.⁹ Interestingly, within the manuscript page *Titmouse* is also said to be the name of the street on which he lived in the parish of St Thomas, namely *Titmouse Lane*. This was to remain the case until 1953, when the

pastor of New Road, the Revd Walter Bottoms, spear-headed a campaign within the city to have the name officially changed to the more conventional spelling *Tidmarsh* Lane. The rationale behind this, Bottoms argued, was that such a change would be a fitting monument to mark the 300th anniversary of Baptist witness in Oxford, and serve as a tribute to one of the pioneers of religious liberty within a city that was not renowned for respecting the Dissenting tradition. Indeed, a plaque was placed by members of New Road Baptist Church on the Park End Street Bridge in 1953 to mark the three centuries of Baptist witness in the city.

More significant is the fact that the manuscript is the ultimate source for the tradition, proudly asserted on the 1953 memorial plaque, that public baptisms took place in the stream below Tidmarsh's house, on the east side of the river. In fact, the document suggests that there were stone steps going down into the river which helped to facilitate these public baptisms, and this is a detail which is now an essential feature of such claims associated with the ministry of Richard Tidmarsh.

On the surface, there is no real reason to doubt the accuracy of these remarks, although it is not now possible to identify with any degree of precision where these stone steps were located, nor, for that matter, even where Tidmarsh's house on the east bank of the stream was situated. However, the point to be made here is simply that the earliest document which associates the house of Richard Tidmarsh with the performing of public baptisms in a stream of the Thames is, at best, dated *about 120 years or so after the event!* Ironically, if we want confirmation within primary sources about public baptisms being performed by Baptists during the seventeenth century, we have to turn elsewhere. In fact, we have to turn a rather hostile witness, the Oxford antiquarian Anthony Wood – who was certainly no friend of Dissenters – and to another leader of the Baptists who met in Oxford, the glover Lawrence King. Thus, Wood records watching Lawrence King conduct a baptismal service at Hythe Bridge in December of 1659:

The 1799 Baptist Meeting House Drawing

This I have seen & heard, wn ye Anabaptists publickly baptized people at High bridge; & some I have seen baptized by one King a glover of Oxon, beheld by hundreds of people, yt would shout at it & make it ridiculous.¹⁰

NOTES

¹ The title page of Ms Top Oxon c.300 has written on it, 'J.E. Robinson, Chieveley Vicarage, Berks 1848'. It was bought by the Bodleian Library in 1925 as part of the Morrell collection. According to the Bodleian Library catalogue entry for the manuscript, many of the drawings in the book are possibly the work of William Fletcher. The drawing of the Baptist Meeting House appears to be one of a number of artistic sketches of religious buildings which have been incorporated within the manuscript as a whole at relevant points. Thus, page seventy-one of Ms Top Oxon c.300 contains a coloured drawing of Alderman Edward Tawney's Almshouses which is similar in style and presentation to the 1799 Baptist Meeting House drawing. This additional drawing is pasted into the manuscript in the same way as the drawing of the Baptist Meeting House and also bears a date of 1799.

² The same photograph was later used within a twelve-page booklet published by the church in 1953 as part of the Tercentenary celebrations which took place in October of that year.

³ Now part of the archives of the Angus Library at Regent's Park College, Oxford. Also preserved with the plate is an explanatory note, probably written in 1798, which contains a line drawing of the plate and a hand-written comment: 'NB. The above inscription was engraved on a plate of lead and placed at the southeast corner of the new Meeting house, under the upper course of stone work with some copper coins of the same date.'

⁴ An E.H. Rooke was also one of the thirteen signatories of New Road's church covenant of 1780; presumably there is a family

connection here. See pp. 401–3 for the full text of the covenant, and pp. 65–105 for Paul Fiddes' study of the covenant declaration.

⁵ There are slight differences in the phrasing, capitalization, and spelling between the manuscript text and the memorial plaque itself.

⁶ Anthony Wood also associates Richard Claridge with the Baptist meeting house in Oxford (see Andrew Clark *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, antiquary, of Oxford, 1632–1695, described by Himself*, vol. V (Oxford, 1900), p. 393; Philip Bliss *Athenae Oxoniensis, by Anthony Wood*, vol. IV (London, 1820), p. 476. However, the Quaker historian Joseph Besse, in his *The Life and Posthumous Works of Richard Claridge* (London, 1726), p. 18, disputes any association of Claridge with the Baptist meeting-house. According to Besse, Claridge was baptized as a believer on 21 October 1691, having fallen under the influence of Baptists in Tewksbury; he did not remain a Baptist for long, for by 1697 he had joined the Quakers. As far as Anthony Wood's comment about Claridge taking over the meeting house at the Tidmarsh house is concerned, Besse describes this as a mistake in *Athena Oxoniensis*.

⁷ The MS is difficult to decipher at this point, but other sources suggest the name was Mr Miller.

⁸ *Evangelical Magazine* XIV (November 1806), 481–7.

⁹ In the few examples of his signature which have survived, the spelling is Richard *Tidmarsh*. This is also the spelling consistently used in publications produced by Baptists to which Tidmarsh was a signatory, notably *The Complaining Testimony of Some ... of Sions Children* (1656), *A Testimony to Truth* (1659), and *Innocency Vindicated: or, Reproach Wip'd Off* (1689). Christopher Hibbert (and Edward Hibbert) (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Oxford* (London, 1988), p. 453, notes that Richard Tidmarsh was apprenticed to John Walter in 1644 and suggests that 'the clerk who wrote his apprenticeship indentures spelled the name "Titmouse", having presumably misheard the pronunciation of a surname not usual in Oxford at the time.'

¹⁰ See Clark *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood*, vol. 1 (1891), pp.293–4. The manuscript in the Bodleian Library where this is recorded is MS Wood F 31 f.7b.

‘Walking together in unity and peace and the fear
of God’: the Challenge of Maintaining
Ecumenical Ideals, 1780-1860

Tim Grass

In the church covenant of 1780, the members of New Road expressed their commitment to living together in unity as those who had professed repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to receiving all whose testimony commended them, whether Baptists or paedobaptists. In a previous chapter, Paul Fiddes has discussed the theological context and significance of the covenant. This article examines the challenges which the church faced in striving to fulfil its ecumenical ideals during the eighty years following its refounding. Evidence for much of this period is fragmentary: in particular, the surviving church minute-books do not go back beyond 1838.¹ However, the evidence that does exist suggests that, on a number of occasions, relationships between different groups within the church were strained, with at least some of these strains clearly attributable to the broad base of the church’s membership. That schisms were avoided in the early years can in large part be attributed to James Hinton’s broad vision of the church, and to his willingness to acknowledge different points of view. However, the lack of a clear ecclesiology may have made the church more susceptible to division as Evangelicalism became increasingly fragmented during the nineteenth century.

'I cannot be free in my ministry without giving offence': the ministry of James Hinton senior

The most influential minister at New Road during this period was undoubtedly James Hinton senior (1761–1823), whose pastorate lasted from 1788 until his death.² This was a period of rapid growth for the church, membership increasing from 25 in 1787 to around 270 in 1821, and the congregation from 30 to 800.³ Maintaining the unity of his flock was no easy task, at one point causing Hinton to contemplate moving elsewhere. Considering whether he wished to succeed Samuel Stennett at Little Wild Street in London in 1795, Hinton confessed of New Road that 'the congregation is of so mingled a nature that I find it impossible to escape censure, either from baptists or paedobaptists; from dissenters or friends of the establishment'.⁴

A major cause of these tensions was the matter of baptism. Hinton's own thinking on the subject was remarkably tolerant, influenced in part by the differing views to be found within his own family. His parents had held differing views on baptism, and his wife was the sister of the Independent pastor Isaac Taylor.⁵ She was baptized as a believer in 1800, having been convinced of the rightness of believer's baptism through a sermon of her husband's; but it is significant that in this sermon he had been 'strongly representing baptism as a duty, not of relative, but of personal religion'.⁶ Disconnecting baptism from ecclesiology in this way, coupled with the need to resort to the chapel at Abingdon for the immersion of believers, was crucial to the feasibility of mixed membership at New Road, as Hinton's son acknowledged.⁷ This had the benefit of ensuring that any paedobaptist members seeking believer's baptism (and there were several) did so from personal conviction; since they were members on the same terms as Baptists, they had nothing to gain from requesting baptism, and no connections to dissolve.⁸

Not surprisingly, it was at Abingdon rather than at New Road that Hinton was accustomed to preach on the subject of

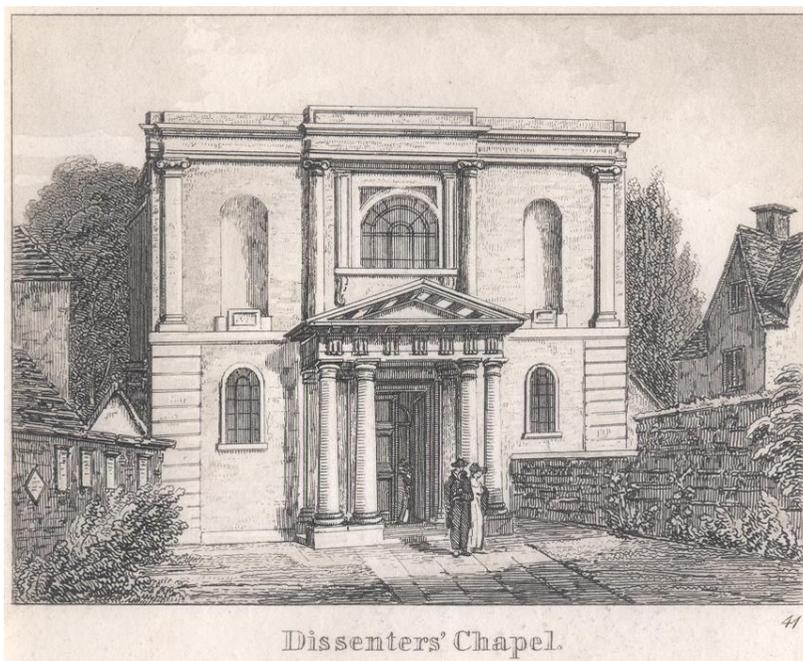
baptism.⁹ All the same, Hinton was not averse to dealing with the topic at New Road: his biography includes extracts from a sermon on baptism preached in 1790 in which he categorically rejected infant baptism as erroneous. This sermon was preached during a period of tension in the church arising from a member's allegation that Hinton had improperly questioned a paedobaptist applicant for membership. Apparently, it was Hinton's practice to ascertain whether applicants' views concerning baptism were rooted in personal study of the Scriptures, or whether they derived from tradition, upbringing or the influence of others. In the instance complained of, sensing that the applicant had not come to a decision based on his own study of Scripture, Hinton had suggested that he give the matter further thought. Whilst the church's membership included Baptists and paedobaptists, all except the complainant united in Hinton's support.¹⁰ This support was also apparent when a baptistery was finally installed at New Road, in 1819, when the church was enlarged for the second time. The Baptist historian E.B. Underhill, who grew up at New Road, recalled that it had been installed with the hearty approval of paedobaptist members, led by Samuel Collingwood (of whom we shall hear more later).¹¹

Another cause of tension was more doctrinal in nature. Much 'Old Dissent' of the late eighteenth century would have shared a commitment to Calvinistic doctrine.¹² More of a potential problem for New Road than differing views on baptism, therefore, was a form of Calvinist teaching which was widely regarded as aberrant: antinomianism, or the denial that the moral law has any continuing obligation upon the believer. This issue caused problems for many eighteenth-century Dissenting congregations and late-century Evangelicalism was partly shaped in reaction against it. There was considerable antinomian opposition to Hinton's preaching, which included general invitations and exhortations to the unconverted, insistence on the obligations of the Law upon believers, and clear explanation of the links between Christian duty and

Christian privilege.¹³ In 1795 the pastor of one Baptist church outside the city sent one of his members on an abortive mission to establish a strict-union Baptist cause and to effect Hinton's removal from New Road.¹⁴ Fortunately for the church, the attempt failed because of Hinton's godliness and moderation in dealing with his critics, and New Road's support for their pastor.¹⁵

Hinton's position was the more difficult because few Baptist ministers remained who shared his broad-mindedness. It has been suggested that, in the century after Bunyan, most churches in the Midlands and southern England practised mixed membership.¹⁶ Hinton was one of several influential Baptist ministers who favoured the practice of opening church membership to both Baptists and paedobaptists.¹⁷ Others included John Ryland senior (1723-92) of Northampton, Benjamin Beddome (1717-95) of Bourton-on-the-Water, Robert Robinson (1735-90) of Cambridge and Daniel Turner (1710-98) of Abingdon, under whose guidance the church at New Road was refounded.¹⁸ However, they were all much older than Hinton, and we may regard him as one of the last of the old-style advocates of mixed membership. In contrast, many of his contemporaries were more inclined towards a closed membership, restricted to those baptized by immersion as believers, and there was a widespread tightening of Particular Baptist convictions at the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁹ All the same, whilst he believed in mixed membership, Hinton was not ashamed of his Baptist convictions, and played a full part in denominational life. He was one of the motivating spirits behind the founding of the Oxfordshire Association in 1802, while, in a speech concerning the proposed formation of a Baptist Union, he denied that the closer union of Baptists would increase the spirit of disunity between the denominations.²⁰ In his opinion, Baptists owed allegiance to the same Christ, and acted in concert with Christians in other denominations.²¹

'Walking together in unity and peace and the fear of God'



The chapel in 1824, showing the enlargement of 1819

Given these causes of tension, how do we account for Hinton's success in keeping the church together? It would seem that both external and internal factors were involved. Externally, it seems probable that opponents contributed to the unity of New Road, especially in the politically unstable decade of the 1790s, by tending to lump together all manifestations of religious dissent. For example, in 1792 Edward Tatham, Rector of Lincoln College, attacked Dissenters in *A Sermon Suitable to the Times*, expressing concern that, for all the opportunities for instruction available to them, the inhabitants of the city were being led away from the Church by 'Methodists, Enthusiasts, Anabaptists and Dissenters'.²² Portraying Dissenters as unqualified to teach, he urged the duty of submission to the established order of church and state. Tatham's diatribe drew forth a spirited response from Hinton,

who feared that it would make Dissenters the subjects of public odium by its portrayal of them as religious enthusiasts, erroneous in their views of truth, deficient in their sense of moral duty, and disaffected towards the government of the day.²³ As late as the 1840s, High Church opposition to Dissent was apparent: Benjamin Godwin, pastor of New Road from 1838–45, recalled Puseyite intimidation of Nonconformists, alleging that it ‘had thinned our schools and diminished our congregations’.²⁴

Dissenters in Oxford were in a small minority, and this undoubtedly helped to unite them. In the face of the weight of Anglicanism in the city and the University, and its strongly-expressed opposition to all forms of religious dissent, differences between those who believed in a gathered church must have seemed insignificant by comparison. For some years New Road was effectively the only Dissenting congregation in the city, apart from the Society of Friends. We may draw a parallel here between Hinton’s views and context and those of John Bunyan; Payne comments that Baptists and Independents in the seventeenth century believed that if they were agreed on all except baptism, in a context in which Dissenters were few and liable to persecution, there was little apparent point in dividing.²⁵

A number of internal factors were also at work, however. The first of these was Hinton’s stress on the primacy of experimental religion over denominational allegiance, and on the maintenance of congregational church order as something which followed on from this.²⁶ Baptism, while important as clearly enjoined upon believers by Scripture, was a matter of personal obedience rather than the rite of admission to the visible church; admission to membership at New Road at that time was by written profession of faith.²⁷ This set and order of priorities, which reflect those of the church covenant, enabled Hinton to hold together with relative success a congregation marked by a measure of theological diversity (within the

confines of a fairly moderate Calvinism) and occasionally vigorous debate.

Hinton's ecumenical spirit, which derived from his stress on experimental religion, can be seen in his attitude towards other local Christians. Although a Calvinist, Hinton felt able to express his goodwill towards local Methodists and his concern for their well-being as a congregation because they preached experimental religion.²⁸ He indicated that New Road's congregation was occasionally augmented by Methodists from the Church of England, and that their ministers were welcome to preach in the chapel, but that actual accessions from this source were 'few and unsolicited'. In his view, there was room in Oxford for all Christian ministers to join in reaching those who did not attend any place of worship, or who did so without spiritual profit. Such an ecumenical vision was given practical expression by the day schools maintained by the church under Hinton's supervision, one for its own children, and three for the children of 'Church people'.²⁹

Another factor was Hinton's own style of leadership which, as we have seen, combined firmness with moderation and godliness in dealing with critics. Thus he became known and respected in the city and University for his moderation and tact, which enabled him to avoid direct clashes with the Anglicans, even though his growing congregation must have been regarded as something of a threat to the established order.³⁰ This style of leadership was not without its critics: a reviewer of his son's *Biographical Portraiture* felt that Hinton senior had on occasion held back from presenting the whole truth in an attempt to allay Anglican prejudices, and that he would have done better to have spoken out, and so avoided 'the vexation to which he must have been constantly exposed, from the pettishness and caprices of such hearers'.³¹ The reviewer did not hide his disapproval of open-communion principles, asserting that 'this *history of mixed communion at Oxford*, ought to operate as a powerful antidote to the *expediency*, as it is called, of altering the communion of strict

Baptist churches'. Indeed, the reviewer asserted that the constant controversy which resulted was the primary reason why Hinton would have welcomed a move elsewhere.³² However, Hinton's son and biographer John Howard Hinton responded by pointing out that New Road was an example, not of mixed *communion*, but of mixed *membership*. This gave far more opportunity for paedobaptist views to be heard; thus there was more debate in such a church than would probably be the case in a church which merely practised mixed communion.³³ In other words, we might say that the occurrence of such debate could be interpreted as a testimony to unity rather than disunity, in that it was taking place *within* one congregation, rather than *between* congregations.

Upheaval and unsettlement following Hinton's death

Whilst James Hinton did succeed in achieving a very real measure of peace and unity in the later years of his ministry, this was not to last long following his death. From the mid-1820s onwards, the church experienced three decades of strife which were to leave it considerably weakened. Around 1832, two causes of conflict developed almost at the same time. The first arose over claims made from 1830 that the charismatic gifts of the New Testament era had been restored to the church universal. The second was dissatisfaction with the ministry of Hinton's successor, William Copley, which led to the founding of George Street Congregational Church.

One of Hinton's last acts before his death was to set in motion the foundation of a Baptist cause just outside the city boundary at St Clement's. Its only minister was to be his son, also named James (1793–1862). A rather weak character, who has been omitted from most accounts of local Baptist life (including his own father's biography), he had assisted in his father's school before being ordained at Faringdon.³⁴ On his father's death, he returned to Oxford to take over the school and the new cause, which was strengthened by the dismissal of some members from New Road during the late 1820s.³⁵ St

Clement's was a very needy area, and even John Henry Newman (then still an Evangelical) recognized the good work that the younger Hinton was doing there.³⁶ After 1830, James Hinton junior tried to lead the congregation into Irvingite views and practices, including the encouragement of charismatic manifestations.³⁷ Eventually he became an Irvingite minister, in the process adopting paedobaptist views.³⁸ Although galleries had been added in 1828, by 1836 the building at St Clement's had to be sold in order to discharge the debt outstanding on the mortgage, and several of its members joined New Road in the years that followed.³⁹ The church at Eynsham, which had been founded during the elder James Hinton's time as part of New Road's outreach into the surrounding villages, was also affected by the younger James's adoption of Irvingite views. Unable to secure the church's acceptance of these, he formed a breakaway congregation there in 1830 which would become a congregation of the Catholic Apostolic Church.⁴⁰

A close friend of James Hinton junior was the outspokenly evangelical Henry Bellenden Bulteel (1805-66). Bulteel had been a Fellow of Exeter College, and served as curate of St Ebbe's until in 1831 the Bishop of Oxford withdrew his licence to officiate, on account of his practice of open-air preaching and his forthright condemnation of the religious establishment.⁴¹ That October, the Evangelical Dr John Hill recorded that Bulteel had adopted Irvingite views concerning the restoration of charismatic gifts.⁴² Bulteel himself never belonged to New Road, but was baptized by the younger James Hinton at St Clement's during 1832, having preached there regularly for some months.⁴³ Later in 1832, Bulteel built a chapel in Commercial Road, largely at his own expense, which rejoiced in the not inappropriate name of Adullam.⁴⁴ The chapel was for many years the largest Nonconformist place of worship in the city, and must have competed with New Road to attract new hearers.

The impact of Irvingism should not be over-estimated. Although the New Road membership register recorded that several of its members were 'Separated for following the delusions of Mr Bulteel, Mar. 1832', in total less than a dozen appear to have been drawn away. As for Bulteel himself, after a nervous breakdown in 1833, he recanted his Irvingite views and became a more conventional Evangelical preacher, which made possible easier relations between his chapel and New Road. There is a reference in the New Road minute-book to his congregation as having been dissolved in 1838, but this (if accurate) could only have been temporary, since its deacons were requesting a dismissal from New Road the following year.⁴⁵ Bulteel himself left Oxford by 1846, but according to the 1851 Religious Census, congregations remained in the order of five or six hundred (larger than New Road's, which were around four hundred). However, his successors were unable to hold the church together, lacking 'his personal force and private means'.⁴⁶ The church was again referred to as dissolved in 1858, and although a member was recorded as being dismissed to Adullam in 1860, this may have been to a Methodist cause which occupied the building for several years.⁴⁷

More debilitating was the division which led to the formation of George Street Congregational Church, causing New Road to be described by a Congregationalist historian as 'practically the mother church of Congregationalism in the city and neighbourhood'.⁴⁸ This division throws up some serious questions about the competence of Hinton's successor, William Copley, who ministered at New Road from 1825-34.

In July 1830, a group of New Road members met to discuss how 'to supply the lamentable deficiency of places of worship where evangelical truth was preached by erecting another chapel in the city'. An offer was made by Thomas Wilson of Highbury to contribute a considerable sum towards the cost of erecting a new chapel.⁴⁹ Wilson was known for his liberal benefactions towards the cost of building new chapels and his

'Walking together in unity and peace and the fear of God'

support of a range of evangelistic agencies such as the London Missionary Society and the Religious Tract Society. Moreover, his son Joshua was a prime mover in the formation of the Congregational Union in 1831.⁵⁰ This period was marked by an increased awareness of differences between denominations, and the latter event may have stimulated a desire to ensure that Congregationalism was suitably represented in influential centres such as Oxford, as well as a more co-ordinated approach to outreach and church-planting.

At first, the group met in the home of Samuel Collingwood in St Giles, while the new chapel was built in George Lane (also known as George Street). This was opened on 8 November 1832, and the new church formed.⁵¹ Sixteen members, mainly paedobaptist, obtained dismissal from New Road to form a church holding to the principles of the Independents. We should not regard this as a secession arising solely from evangelistic concern, heightened sense of denominational identity and differing views on baptism, however. Indeed, some who were recorded as transferring to the new cause had previously been baptized as believers. The evidence points towards some kind of dissatisfaction at New Road with Copley's ministry, and it is possible that some of the seceders felt that Copley lacked something of Hinton's evangelistic activism. It is noteworthy that Copley was not present at the meeting convened to initiate the project, and though he was informed by letter of its resolutions, his response in a brief note was simply to express his hope that they might be actuated by the wisdom which comes from above (James 3:17) and to pray that God's grace might be with them, which may imply a certain coolness towards their intentions. The seceders expressed their prayers for God's continued blessing to rest on Copley's labours. Copley took part in the new chapel's opening services, and New Road recorded their desire for its prosperity; but there had been friction within New Road beforehand.⁵²

This impression is reinforced by family recollections compiled by a descendant of William Copley's wife, Esther,

and by the letters of Copley's successor, Godwin.⁵³ According to Godwin, Copley 'possessed some talent with a remarkably good address and was exceedingly kind and eminently social in his habits' but was regarded as 'deficient in application and regularity'. The result was that 'the more intelligent members, who were very cordial at his first coming, grew more and more dissatisfied, and after a while a number of independents determined to erect their own chapel and several of the Baptists agreed to unite with them'. As for Copley, he resigned the pastorate after a long struggle, leaving two opposing factions in the church, divided by their estimate of Copley's ministry. Further members left seeking peace elsewhere.⁵⁴ Some of them went to George Street, which by 1836 had received a total of twenty-eight members from New Road.⁵⁵ However, after Copley's departure good relations appear to have been established between the two congregations; a monthly joint missionary prayer meeting was established in 1838, and there are occasional references to the baptism as believers of individuals in membership at George Street.⁵⁶

Something of a respite occurred under Godwin. He recalled that on arrival, 'my efforts were, as far as possible, to abate the feelings on both sides, to forbear identifying myself with one or other and to convince by my conduct that I was a friend of all'.⁵⁷ Membership, which was down to around one hundred and fifty by 1836, rose to two hundred by 1840 and continued to increase. Yet the church's peace was fragile. The business failure of one member, which affected others, caused some broken relationships in 1844, and may have helped to precipitate Godwin's resignation on health grounds the following year.⁵⁸ In his letters, he implies that it had not been the easiest of charges: in difficult circumstances when he arrived, problems were still apparent, else he might have been able to continue his ministry.⁵⁹ This was not entirely due to New Road: Godwin's letters indicate some tendency to depression, and it seems that his previous work, in deputation on behalf of the Serampore Mission, had taken a great deal out



Benjamin Godwin in later years



The young Edward Bryan

of him. One wonders why he should have accepted such a challenge as that presented by New Road.

It was during the pastorate of Edward Bryan, Godwin's successor, that New Road experienced what may have been the most unhappy period in its history. Bryan, who accepted a unanimous call as pastor in 1846, was evidently inexperienced, having come straight from college, and he emerges from the minute-book as an abrasive character, given to using the pulpit for the purpose of public rebuke.⁶⁰ A storm blew up over his ministry in 1853, in which he was accused of financial indiscretion and hot temper. A more serious problem was presented by his leanings towards Anglicanism. Many in the church, and especially the diaconate, were scandalized by the steps he was taking to be received into the Church of England, which in their thinking gave the lie to his claim to be a convinced Baptist. Complicating the situation was the fact that whilst the deacons had written to request Bryan to withdraw, two-thirds of the church expressed their desire that he should remain as pastor; prompting the diaconate to resign *en bloc* in August 1853 and remove to George Street.⁶¹ Following the loss of twenty-three members (including all the deacons), as well as many of the congregation, Bryan himself resigned in December 1853. Such was the ill-feeling generated by his actions that even then some were not satisfied, wishing to exclude him formally on the ground that his principles precluded his remaining a member of a Baptist church.⁶²

Bryan's ministry also witnessed fresh tension between New Road and the church at Eynsham, for whose property it seems that the minister of New Road customarily served as a trustee. Following the events of the 1830s, a measure of stability appears to have come with the arrival at Eynsham in 1836 of Henry Matthews, who was to pastor the church until his death in 1884.⁶³ However, the Eynsham Church Book includes a printed letter of protest dated 4 July 1852 from Matthews and the church, which indicates that there had been decline and division, and that Bryan and other local Dissenting

ministers had visited the village to investigate beginning another work.⁶⁴ The protest must have proved unavailing, as a second church at Eynsham was listed in the *Baptist Manual* for 1855, reported as having been founded in 1853.⁶⁵

Even relationships between New Road and George Street appeared to cool somewhat during the 1850s. New Road withdrew from the joint prayer meeting because of poor attendance, and in the letter sent to the Oxfordshire Association for 1852, the church aired the opinion that it might appear debatable whether the formation of George Street had actually strengthened Nonconformity in the city, although acknowledging that things had turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.⁶⁶ One scents here a reference to Philippians 1:12ff, in which St Paul rejoices that his imprisonment, and the decision of some to preach the gospel from unworthy motives, had nevertheless turned out to further it. Relations were not helped by the secessions from New Road in 1853. A letter requesting the dismissal of the seceders to George Street was met with the reply that it was up to George Street to decide whether or not to receive them; all that New Road could do was to recognize that they had withdrawn from it.⁶⁷

Bryan's successor was William Allen (1823-74), who joined the church in 1855 from Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh.⁶⁸ Allen's Nonconformist credentials were impeccable, as he had previously served as secretary to the Scottish Anti-State Church Association.⁶⁹ New Road seems to have entered on a more settled phase of existence during his ministry, and its identity appears by now to have been somewhat clearer; it may not be without significance that by this time a new wave of open-membership churches were coming into existence which, unlike New Road, owed little or nothing to the historic Dissenting tradition.

An obituary of Allen described the members of New Road at the time of his arrival as torn by internal dissension and the congregation as completely scattered, prejudice having been excited against the church by what had happened.⁷⁰ Whilst this

is something of an exaggeration, denominational statistical returns indicate that New Road had lost a hundred members in two years, dropping from 275 in 1852 to 175 two years later.⁷¹ However, the church gave a great deal of thought to achieving a reconciliation with those who had left, and most returned after Bryan resigned.⁷² Although things settled down under Allen, the continuing weakened state of New Road resulting from Bryan's controversial ministry made it difficult for the church to continue its former level of financial support and preaching provision for the village stations.⁷³

Further bad feeling between Eynsham and New Road was occasioned when Allen allegedly sided with a disaffected minority at Eynsham who opposed Matthews' revivalist preaching in the Finneyite tradition.⁷⁴ It would seem that by about 1860 the evangelicalism of New Road was, like that of many contemporary Dissenting congregations, broadening out (and perhaps becoming more respectable in the process) in a way which would have proved difficult for the more rural and perhaps more conservative congregation to accept.

The challenge of walking in unity: an assessment

The vicissitudes of the church at New Road provide an unparalleled example of the fragmentation of Evangelicalism of the period, in that many of the tendencies towards fragmentation were manifest within the life of this one congregation. Sadly, the ecumenical vision evident in the church covenant was being left behind by the increasingly sectarian temper of an Evangelicalism which tended to define ecclesiological positions somewhat more sharply than the previous generation had done, and which was consequently marked by a heightened sense of denominational identity and Anglican-Nonconformist tension.

The church may have been especially susceptible to division because of a lack of clarity concerning its ecclesiological identity. This, it might be said, had been built in from the outset. Only a minority of the thirteen members who

signed the covenant in 1780 were Baptists, although almost all the ministers have been Baptists, and there is no record of any infants being baptized there.⁷⁵ This lack of clarity was perpetuated by the elder James Hinton. The church had joined the local Baptist Association on its founding in 1802.⁷⁶ Even so, in a letter to a local newspaper in 1806, Hinton described it as:

a congregation of protestant dissenters, admitting of free communion with those who practise infant baptism; and receiving communicants from the church of England, or from any other church, if they fear God and keep his commandments. Such have been the views and practice of the dissenters in Oxford from their first existence, which was occasioned by the act of uniformity in 1662...⁷⁷

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that New Road's ecclesiological identity was not always clear to onlookers. In a sermon occasioned by Hinton's death, Joseph Ivimey described New Road as 'an Independent [sic] Paedobaptist Church'.⁷⁸ A Congregationalist writer described New Road's position as 'a little peculiar' in that it 'retained a certain trace of Presbyterianism in the conduct of church affairs', and it continued to be listed in Congregational periodicals until after the formation of the George Street church.⁷⁹

Oxford would have been one of the most difficult places in the country to minister, given that ecclesiological developments not infrequently affected the educated first before percolating through to the rest of the constituency; Brethrenism, Irvingism and Tractarianism all affected Oxford before they affected much of the rest of the country. It was a kind of ecclesiological laboratory, in which few of the experiments went smoothly. In such a setting, the church's open-membership policy may have been a factor making it more liable to schism. The débâcle over Bryan's adoption of Anglican views demonstrates that by the 1850s, however, the

church had a clearer sense of its Nonconformist identity, which would have been reinforced by Allen's appointment.

In the long run, however, what was critical for the church's continued unity was not its membership policy or ecclesiological identity, nor the continually changing nature of English Evangelicalism, but the personal leadership given by its ministers. It could be argued that Hinton and Godwin, who possessed wide experience and a willingness to conciliate where appropriate, fared better than Copley, who seems to have ignored warnings about the problems he was causing, or the angular and inexperienced Bryan. Yet all of them faced a challenging task, both because of the local situation and because of the tensions evident within Evangelicalism as a whole. Copley's ministry did not prove acceptable to everybody; Godwin testified to the difficulties he had encountered; Bryan precipitated the biggest storm of the church's history; and only with Allen, whose clearly anti-establishment convictions were, one suspects, a factor in his call, did the church achieve a greater measure of stability and harmony. By this time, too, some of the tension between Evangelicals of various denominations was beginning to lessen, and a new form of pan-Evangelical co-operation was emerging.

NOTES

¹ Thanks are due to two members of New Road, Rosie Chadwick and Malcolm Walker, for assistance in locating material.

² Hinton came to the church in the summer of 1787, initially on probation, formally accepting the pastorate in 1788: John Howard Hinton, *A Biographical Portraiture of ... James Hinton* (Oxford, 1824), p. 105.

³ Christina Colvin, 'Oxford Protestant Nonconformity and Other Christian Bodies', in A. Crossley (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Oxfordshire*, vol. IV (Oxford, 1979), p. 417ff.

⁴ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p.145, quoted in *Baptist Magazine (BM)* XVI (1824), 340.

⁵ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p.15; DNB, 'Taylor, Isaac, 1759–1829'.

⁶ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p. 74.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187ff.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁹ VCH, IV, p. 418; Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p. 133.

¹⁰ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, pp. 134ff, 141.

¹¹ *New Road Chapel, Oxford. Proceedings at the centenary of the reconstitution of the church, Apr.9th, 1883* (Oxford, 1883), p. 28. Although a Dissenter, Collingwood was the printer to the University. He became Underhill's father-in-law.

¹² 'Old Dissent' is a term sometimes used to denote those Dissenting traditions which owed their origins to Puritanism (Baptists, Presbyterians, and Independents) rather than to the eighteenth-century Evangelical Awakening.

¹³ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, pp. 108, 149.

¹⁴ VCH, IV, p. 417; Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, pp. 150, 154. The former source also asserts that there was friction during the 1790s between Presbyterians and Baptists.

¹⁵ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, pp. 154–7.

¹⁶ E.A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers: Baptist Thought and Practice Yesterday and Today* (London, 1952), p. 77.

¹⁷ According to the Members' List for 1825–36, some were also allowed into membership who were unable to be baptized on health grounds: New Road records (NRR) Box 8, Angus Library, Oxford.

¹⁸ Peter Naylor, *Picking up a Pin for the Lord: English Particular Baptists from 1688 to the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 1992), p. 60.

¹⁹ J.H.Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot, 1994), p. 44, following Payne, *Fellowship of Believers*, pp. 77–80.

²⁰ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p. 297.

- ²¹ 'Mr. Hinton's Speech at the Union Meeting', *BM IV* (1812), 410f.
- ²² London: J F. and C. Rivington, 1792. See the chapter by Raymond Brown, 'Fear God and honour the King', pp. 107-35 for a fuller analysis of Tatham's allegations.
- ²³ James Hinton, *A Vindication of the Dissenters in Oxford, addressed to the inhabitants; in reply to Dr. Tatham's sermon ...* 3rd ed. (London, [1793?]).
- ²⁴ C. Mitchell (ed.), *The Godwin Memorials: An Autobiography by The Reverend Benjamin Godwin D.D. 1785-1871* [priv. 1991, 1993], letter no. 56 (to 'My Dear John, April 1855); cf. nos. 54 and 55. The original Godwin letters are in the Angus Library, Oxford.
- ²⁵ Payne, *Fellowship of Believers*, p. 77.
- ²⁶ This was a phrase commonly used at that time to denote a form of Christianity which stressed the need for deep personal experience of the saving grace of God, through repentance for sin and faith in Christ.
- ²⁷ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p. 203.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 326ff.
- ²⁹ E.C. Alden, *The Old Church at New Road: A Contribution to the History of Oxford Nonconformity* (Oxford, [1904]), p. 29 n.
- ³⁰ *VCH*, IV, p. 418.
- ³¹ *BM XVI* (1824), 339f.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 340.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 515f.
- ³⁴ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, pp. 65, 83.
- ³⁵ *BM XVI* (1824), 532.
- ³⁶ Mary D. Lobel (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Oxfordshire*, vol. V (London, 1957), p. 265.
- ³⁷ Edward Irving (1792-1834) was a Church of Scotland minister in London, who did much to foster the expectation of a restoration of charismatic gifts. The manifestations of tongues and prophecy which occurred in his church from 1831 won him public notoriety and resulted in his being effectively evicted from his church. Irving then

set up another congregation, which became a prototype for a new form of church order founded upon the belief that apostles and prophets had been restored to the church, to prepare it for the imminent Second Coming of Christ. Several Baptist ministers joined the Irvingite movement, among them Thomas Groser (b.1802) of Wells, William Keene (d.1849) of Melksham and Thomas Thonger (1785–1834) of Birmingham; in addition, a Saffery dynasty developed in the Catholic Apostolic Church which became as well-known in that sphere as their Baptist relations were in theirs.

³⁸ For more details of this, see T.G. Grass, "'The Restoration of a Congregation of Baptists": Baptists and Irvingism in Oxfordshire', *Baptist Quarterly* XXXVII (1997–8), 283–97.

³⁹ *VCH*, V, p. 266.

⁴⁰ For details, see Grass, 'Restoration'.

⁴¹ For Bulteel's career, see the articles in *Blackwell's Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (BDEB) and *New Dictionary of National Biography*, (forthcoming) as well as Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals* (Oxford, 2001), *passim*, and Grass, 'Restoration'. He was by turns Anglican curate, high Calvinist seceder, Irvingite, Brethren sympathizer, and minister in the Free Church of England.

⁴² 'Diary of the Rev. John Hill' (18th October 1831), St Edmund Hall MS 67/8, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

⁴³ James Hinton, *A Nut Cracker; affectionately presented to a member of the Church of God at Oxford, who has found a hard nut to crack, with the hope of enabling him to get at the kernel without breaking his teeth* (Oxford, 1832), p. 5f. *VCH*, IV, p. 255 incorrectly states that John Hinton (i.e. John Howard Hinton, who was much better known than his brother) officiated. It is a curious fact that adoption of Irvingite views was linked with the adoption of Baptist views in Bulteel's case, but paedobaptist views in the case of James Hinton.

⁴⁴ 1 Samuel 22:1–2 records that David escaped from Gath to a cave belonging to Adullam, where he received any who were in distress, in debt or discontented – i.e. all the malcontents.

⁴⁵ Minutes of church meetings (CMM), 29 August 1838 and 30 October 1839, Church Book (CB) 1838–66, NRR Box 1.

⁴⁶ VCH, IV, p. 418.

⁴⁷ VCH, IV, p.418; CMM 28 March 1860, CB 1838–66. Eventually, the building passed back into Baptist hands, finally closing in the 1930s.

⁴⁸ W.H. Summers, *History of the Congregational Churches in the Berks, South Oxon and South Bucks association, with notes on the earlier nonconformist history of the district* (Newbury, 1905), p. 246.

⁴⁹ 'Rise and Progress of the Church of Christ assembling for worship in the Chapel in George Lane in the City of Oxford', Records of George Street Congregational Church, 1/ii/1, Oxfordshire County Record Office; Summers, *History*, p. 251. In the event, Wilson gave £500 of the total cost of £3400.

⁵⁰ BDEB.

⁵¹ VCH, IV, p. 255.

⁵² 'Rise and Progress'; Summers, *History*, p. 251.

⁵³ Marion Clark (ed.), *Family Notes by Emma Mary Byles MBE* (1865-1942) (forthcoming). These allege that Copley took to drink whilst in Oxford, and that his wife sought to shield him, writing his sermons for him.

⁵⁴ Mitchell (ed.), *Godwin Memorials*, letter no. 50 (to 'My dear John', February 1855).

⁵⁵ VCH, IV, p. 418. These included the Underhill family.

⁵⁶ CMM, 25 April 1838, CB 1838–66.

⁵⁷ Mitchell (ed.), *Godwin Memorials*, letter no. 50.

⁵⁸ Mitchell (ed.), *Godwin Memorials*, letter no. 56 (to 'My dear John', April 1855).

⁵⁹ Copied following minutes of church meeting, 24 August 1845, CB 1838-66.

⁶⁰ BM XXXVIII (1846), 570.

⁶¹ CMM for 1853, CB 1838–66.

⁶² CMM, 18 December 1853, CB 1838–66.

⁶³ A. Crossley (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Oxfordshire*, vol. XII (London, 1990), p. 153.

⁶⁴ Eynsham Church minute-book 1837–66, NRR Box 71.

⁶⁵ *A Manual of the Baptist Denomination for the Year 1855* (London, 1855), p. 24.

⁶⁶ CMM, 2 January 1851, association letter for 1852, CB 1838–66.

⁶⁷ CMM, 3 November 1853, CB 1838–66.

⁶⁸ CMM, 2 August 1855, CB 1838–66.

⁶⁹ *BM XLVII* (1855), 302.

⁷⁰ *BM LXVII* (1875), 30.

⁷¹ See the appropriate issues of the *Manual of the Baptist Denomination*. Revision of the roll accounted for 45 of the losses (CMM, 25 June 1854).

⁷² *VCH*, IV, p. 418.

⁷³ ‘Statement made to the New Road Church ... on May 4, 1864 concerning their sale of the Appleton Chapel to the Trustees of the Longworth Mission’, CB 1838–66. The statement describes the Mission as ‘unsectarian like our own church’.

⁷⁴ *Letter to the Rev. W. Allen, Baptist Minister, New Road Chapel, Oxford* (Bristol, 1862), copy in the Eynsham Church minute-book. Charles G. Finney (1792–1875) was an American evangelistic preacher whose *Lectures on Revival* (1835) were widely read by Evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic. By contrast with the traditional view, he asserted that revivals of religion were not due solely to the work of God, but could be fostered by right use of human means. Thus he advocated the use of certain measures in connection with the conduct of revivalist meetings, such as the ‘anxious bench’ to which those under conviction of sin could come forward in a meeting to pray for salvation, and praying for individuals by name in public.

⁷⁵ Summers, *History*, p. 248; Alden, *Old Church at New Road*, p. 16.

⁷⁶ Summers, *History*, p. 249.

⁷⁷ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p. 352.

⁷⁸ Joseph Ivimey, *The Excellence and Utility of an Evangelical Ministry: as exercised by Protestant Dissenters* (London, 1823), p. 4.

⁷⁹ Summers, *History*, pp. 248, 249.

'Every one of us is called to be a missionary':
the New Road Chapel Home Mission, 1882-1916

Rosie Chadwick

The early months of 1881 found the New Road church and congregation divided and depressed. Back in March 1879, having lost the confidence of a sizeable section of the congregation, the church's 'saintly and scholarly' pastor of four years, John Pyer Barnett, had publicly announced his intention to resign, 'as soon as God shall please to direct me to another sphere of labour'.¹ Two years on, Mr Barnett was still in post, no other spheres having presented themselves. Many members of the church and congregation had 'actually or virtually' withdrawn, others were on the point of doing so, while newcomers were deterred from joining. Against this background, and with the prospect of being held to account at an imminent deacons' election, the church's deacons wrote to Mr Barnett urging him to set a definite date for his resignation, so ending 'the present disastrous condition of suspense'. This step, they argued, was 'the only alternative to a speedy break-up of the church and collapse of the cause'.

Replying, the sensitive Mr Barnett, now fifty-three, in indifferent health and with precious little income to fall back on, spoke frankly of his terror at stepping into an uncertain future, and of his blank incomprehension that this could be God's will. The deacons moved swiftly to soften the blow, resolving to pay their departing minister a hundred pounds in instalments over the next six months and informing him of this

the same evening, but their resolve did not weaken. On Sunday 27 March 1881 John Barnett closed his ministry at New Road, moving to calmer waters as editor of the *Baptist Magazine* until his death some four years later. With mastery of the double-edged remark, his obituarist in that journal commented that his ministry in Oxford had won 'the respect and gratitude of all who could appreciate sound Scriptural instruction, vigorous unconventional thought, and high-toned Christian principle'.²

For the pastor-less church, the way ahead was far from clear. With the passing of the Universities Test Act in 1871 the last major bar to Nonconformists attending Oxford had been removed, and the decade since had seen a growing number of students from Dissenting backgrounds attending the University. However, across the denomination and beyond concerns were being expressed that, on reaching Oxford, these young men were being lost to Nonconformity.³ Within the University, concern that young men from Nonconformist homes 'came up to the University, became Churchmen and 'respectable members of society'' prompted the formation of the Nonconformist Union, in which Congregationalist R.F. Horton played a leading part.⁴ At New Road the feeling was growing that, if the church was to have the impact it desired and appeal to students, John Barnett's successor needed to be a minister of stature; someone with 'considerable pulpit ability and a large amount of experience' who would command respect in both city and University. While significantly higher than the average, the two hundred pound salary the church felt able to afford was unlikely to be enough to attract such a person.

Faced with this dilemma, the deacons first sought financial help from leading figures in the denomination. Help was, however, made conditional on New Road joining forces with the other central Oxford Baptist church, Commercial Road, and while there was tantalising talk not only of a 'first rate' minister but of 'a new and handsome chapel' on a new site, overtures to Commercial Road came to nothing.⁵

'Every one of us is called to be a missionary'

The deacons next approached the Baptist Union, perhaps spurred by the petition presented on behalf of Oxford and Cambridge graduates at the Union's 1881 spring gatherings, urging the Union to do more to promote Nonconformist principles in the two Universities. In a letter to the Union Committee in October 1881, the deacons stressed the opportunities their situation presented for the denomination as a whole, and explained their difficulty:

For thirty years our church has experienced a succession of adverse circumstances which have left it comparatively weak ... We feel strongly that the Baptist denomination is very inadequately represented in this city and now especially when the opening of the University to all classes brings the sons of many influential dissenters to Oxford.

... We have a numerically small church, and are only able to raise about £200 for the support of the minister, a sum which we feel to be altogether inadequate to obtain the man we require. We are now without a pastor and feel this to be an opportunity which may not occur again for many years of placing our denomination here in a position something more in accordance with that which it ought to occupy.

In this difficulty we know we shall have your sympathy and prayers and we have ventured to ask also for your advice as to any course it may be possible for us to take.⁶

Again, this appeal came to nothing. The letter was referred to the Universities subcommittee, formed in response to the lobbying at the Union's spring meetings, and considered by the subcommittee alongside its plans for a series of lectures in both Oxford and Cambridge. However, the subcommittee members felt unable to do more than offer sympathy plus a vague

suggestion of assistance once the church had selected 'the best man available for their purposes'.⁷

Taking the subcommittee at its word, the church next invited Samuel Harris Booth (one of the subcommittee members) to become pastor for three years. At the time Booth was between spells as secretary of the Baptist Union, though still heavily involved in the Union's administration. The invitation letter lacked conviction: 'although we (the officers) very much wish you may see your way to undertake this duty', it ran, 'we feel it is almost too much to expect'. This apologetic tone, coupled with the frank admission that a substantial minority of members had opposed inviting him unless it was for a fixed term, may not have helped the cause. In any event Booth declined, gently citing his age (he was then in his late fifties) and his commitment to the fledgling church at Elm Road, Beckenham.⁸

An end to the period of uncertainty came in August 1882 when James Dann, then in his mid-forties, largely self-educated and with seventeen years' experience of ministry in Finchley, Hampstead, Chatteris, Bradford and Greenock, accepted an invitation to the New Road pastorate. Brief entries in the church officers' book listing letters sent and received suggest that it was Dann who made the first approach, anxious for a move from Greenock where, reportedly, the sea air did not agree with his health.⁹ Whilst in Bradford he had become financially embarrassed, giving rise to 'wretched rumours' about his fitness as a pastor, but discreet enquiries laid these doubts to rest. Dann was, said those enquired of, 'a man of most estimable character, and a thoughtful and finished preacher': his difficulties attributable to a large family of 'something like a dozen children', heavy demands and a too-small salary rather than to personal failings.¹⁰ Following personal visits by the treasurer to leading church members, New Road was able to offer an increased salary of £225 in the first year. With the official invitation, church secretary Isaac

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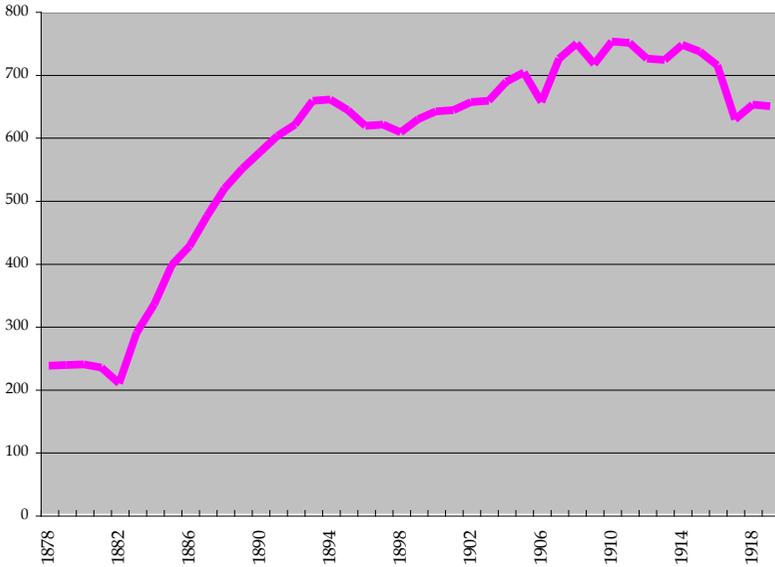
Alden sent his own personal letter, in which he painted a picture of a church in the balance:

I do believe this to be a crisis in the history of our church. If (accepting the pastorate) you should through the blessing of God be successful, I know that all would be so glad they would rally to support you and in that case I foresee a very bright future for us; but if on the contrary the cause should go back or even stand still, there are many who would stand aloof, look coldly on and very soon leave us altogether.¹¹

Within a decade of these anxious times, the picture was very different. In 1891, the church secretary, by that time Isaac Alden's cousin Edward Cox Alden, was reporting with satisfaction on nine years of prosperity unequalled in the past half-century at the church.¹² Church membership had tripled from 190 on James Dann's arrival to 602 by 1891, rising further, though more slowly and erratically, to an all time high of 752 in 1910.¹³ Sunday School numbers also rose dramatically from 528 scholars in 1882 to over 1000 six years later, topping 1000 for all but two years until 1908 and peaking at 1235 in 1904.

The tally of outlying preaching stations managed by the church also increased substantially, causing one distinguished visitor to remark in 1890 on the 'marvellous proportions' reached by 'the New-road Home Mission'.¹⁴ By then, eight further preaching stations had been added to the two long-standing 'village stations' supported by the church in 1882. To the existing work in Littlemore and Headington was added, in 1883, sole control of services at Osney (before that for a time managed jointly with Commercial Road) and a new station at Hinksey; in 1884 meetings in Wolvercote and assumption of control at Eynsham; in 1885 management of the cause at Charlton-on-Otmoor; and in 1887 oversight of Woodstock and Thrupp.¹⁵ Later additions included Botley (1894), Bayworth

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New Road church membership, 1878-1919

(formally adopted in 1898) and, for some five years from late 1903, oversight of the church at Woodstock Road. Satellites from the village stations extended the work still further. So, for example, for a time Littlemore supported preaching on the green in Baldon. Closer to home, services were conducted among the lodging-houses of St Thomas's, first in rented rooms then from 1893 in a purpose-built mission hall. Nearby, Sunday evening services were conducted in the Friars district of St Ebbe's in a room that doubled as a bakehouse, although stifling heat from the ovens meant that, in the summer, worship had to be curtailed.¹⁶ In 1895, the church also reported that 'we now find preachers for a Mission Room at Summertown'.¹⁷

With the rising number of preaching stations went investment in bricks and mortar. Speaking in 1892, James Dann noted that over the past nine years, 'upwards of £1,300 has

been spent on the purchase of property, new buildings, renovations and other matters', with works including a new chapel and schoolroom at Wolvercote, new schoolrooms at Headington and Littlemore, extensive renovations at Eynsham and a new vestry at Charlton for Bible Class and other meetings.¹⁸ Nor were the needs of the central church neglected. In 1896 several years of persistent enquiries followed by painstaking negotiations bore fruit in the purchase from Balliol College of land behind the chapel. A new schoolroom and classrooms erected on the site meant that, for the first time, chapel and Sunday School could be co-located.¹⁹

By any standards this was a dramatic turn-round. The tripling of the church's membership in the ten years from 1882 far outstripped the twenty-two per cent growth in numbers experienced by Baptists across Oxfordshire, which in turn exceeded growth across England and Wales.²⁰ The same was true of Sunday School numbers. County and country-wide the number of village stations was largely static in this period, and while many Baptist churches supported two or three branches or 'outstations' the size of the circuit that developed at New Road was exceptional. In 1890, no church listed in the *Baptist Hand-Book* apart from Spurgeon's mighty Metropolitan Tabernacle had as many preaching stations.²¹

In looking for explanations of this transformation, three significant factors stand out: first, the impact of revival, backed up by sustained missionary activity in which James Dann was a powerful driving force; second, the push to – and pull from – the villages; and third, strong organisation in support of these activities. The remainder of this chapter will look at each of these more closely.

Revival

The revival in question was organised, as distinct from the older tradition of spontaneous, community-based revivals. It was very soon a factor as, from 13–17 November 1882, six weeks after James Dann's arrival, Moody and Sankey were in

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Oxford, conducting a mission at the Oxford Corn Exchange. With the missionaries' visit fast approaching, the church agreed to hold special evangelistic services on the following Sunday, 19 November. Two thousand handbills distributed door-to-door advertised special addresses by James Dann with hymns selected from Sankey's *Sacred Songs*, newly purchased for the occasion. To follow, a series of special weekday meetings featured singing and assistance from Mr Parker 'who has taken a leading part with Mr Sankey in the recent mission services'.²²

Looking back, Dann judged that the direct effects of the mission had been few. What had made the difference, to his mind, was the 'spirit of expectancy' prevailing in the church at that time. For all that, the mission, or more especially the services held the following Sunday, acted as a powerful catalyst. Accounts in later years spoke of 'that never-to-be-forgotten evening, Sunday November 19th 1882' and of 'the remarkable movement which took place in the church at that time'.²³ Over the next five months, sixty-nine members were received into the fellowship. Notable converts included William Sale, soon to become an enthusiastic preacher in the slums of St Thomas's and the surrounding villages and briefly take on the role of congregational missionary before becoming pastor of the church at Little Tew.²⁴ Others coming into the church at that time included future local preachers Theophilus Smith and James Soame; future Baptist minister John Read; and several young people from established church families, among them five members of the next generation of Aldens, Marianne, Herbert, Lewis, Grace and Arthur, and two of James Dann's own children, Thomas and Edith.²⁵

Later revivals similarly triggered an influx of new members, mainly from among young people already connected with the church or its Sunday Schools. Notable among these, Thomas Cook's mission to Oxford in February 1899, organised by the Free Church Council, had 'gratifying results', over sixty new members joining the church in the

following three months.²⁶ A further inflow followed Gipsy Smith's mission, conducted at the Town Hall in February 1902.

Between whiles, sustained evangelism was the order of the day. At New Road itself, in 1883, part of the chapel garden was turfed to allow for outdoor services. At first limited to the summer, these were later held throughout the year. Also in 1883, a decision was taken to appoint mission convert William Sale as congregational missionary 'provided enough subscriptions could be raised'. Subscriptions were duly secured, though this plan was cut short when Sale left Oxford for Little Tew.

In St Thomas's, outreach sought to meet material as well as spiritual needs. In 1884 a Sunday morning Free Breakfast instituted by William Sale was reported to have proved very popular, a short service in the tramps' lodging-houses being followed by the free distribution of tea, sugar and bread.²⁷ Later years saw regular visits to the lodging-houses, special services in the Coffee Tavern Room, and the launch of 'a system of relief which provides food and lodging for the destitute, but requires a return in actual labour'.²⁸ An American visitor also described an outdoor preaching service involving 'straight gospel talk to the out-door audience of a few attentive women and a good many curious loafers'.²⁹

At the village stations open-air services were 'vigorously maintained', in some cases all year round. Tent and mission services also featured strongly. One year alone (1889) saw mission services at Headington, St Thomas's and Hinksey in January; the 'well-known singing evangelists Newell and Hall' visiting Eynsham in February and Mr Newell at Charlton in March. By June, John Johnson of the strictly non-denominational Evangelization Society of London was leading special services in a large tent in Twenty Pound Meadow along the Botley Road, after which the tent progressed to Wolvercote, Eynsham, Woodstock and Charlton. In keeping with the Society's ethos, emphasis was placed on evangelism through preaching simple Gospel truths, with sensationalism avoided.³⁰

'Every one of us is called to be a missionary'

A similar series of tent services took place the following year, this time interrupted when the tent was first damaged by high winds at Charlton then blown down in a storm at Headington.³¹

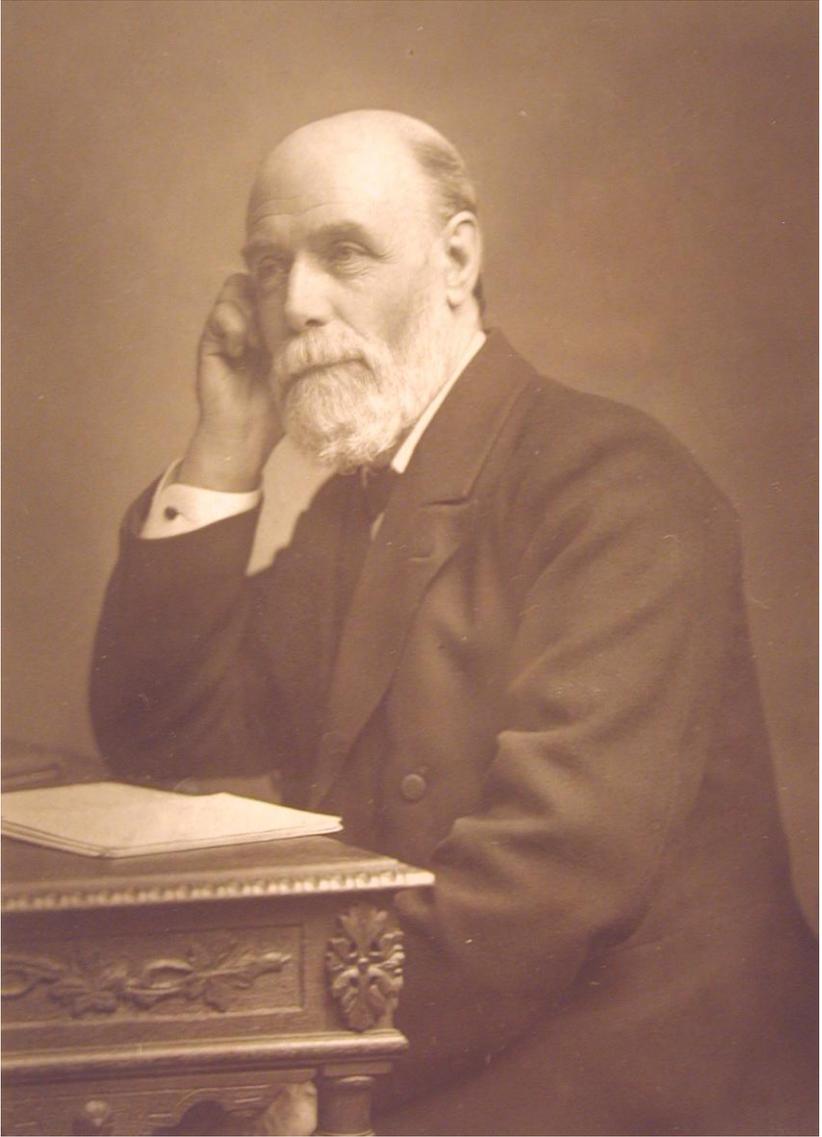
The scale and impetus of missionary activity bore the stamp of James Dann's emphasis on mission in all its forms, and on the missionary duty of all church members. This was the theme of an article by Dann, published in the *Baptist Magazine* in March 1884 under the heading 'The Strong Helping the Weak'. 'Any church', Dann stressed, 'is an utter failure which sees no interest beyond its own pale.' Nor were missionaries 'a distinct species of the genus Christian'. Rather, 'every one of us is called to be a missionary, a centre of living light and power wherever our lot may lie'.³²

Preaching at the church's annual Home Mission services five years later, Dann again pressed home the imperative to mission. 'The work of the Christian Church is essentially a missionary work', he began. 'Sometimes by her voice, always by her conduct, her obligation to proclaim the gospel is ever in force.' For Dann, the branches of mission, social and spiritual, home and foreign, were inseparable: 'The root of our work is the same in both cases.' What is more:

It never ought to be true of the Christian Church that she has no eye for slavery, inequality, and need, at home; only concerning herself with distant objects, and never putting forth the hand to save the lost ones in our own community. This reproach we seek to avoid, by the existence and work of our New Road Chapel Home Mission.³³

Looking back over the first nine years of his ministry in Oxford, Dann recalled that:

At the outset he had resolved, God helping him, to make his work evangelistic. Time was when he looked down on evangelistic preaching, spoke contemptuously of Sankey's



James Dann

'Every one of us is called to be a missionary'

hymns, and such agencies generally. But he had seen so much of their value, and shared so largely in the blessing they had brought, when in Scotland, that he could no longer so think and act.³⁴

In the missions he himself conducted, Dann was ably assisted by his ministerial student sons Charles and Thomas, home from their studies at Spurgeon's and Rawdon College respectively, and by his eldest son George during furloughs from missionary service in India.

The push to - and pull from - the villages

Much of the church's missionary activity was focused on the villages. Here again, Dann was a driving force. Writing in 1902, secretary Edward Cox Alden was in no doubt that:

it is the pastor to whom, under God, the church owes the impetus for the work of its home mission ... Those who were associated with him in the early days of his ministry, well remember the spirit of courageous faith and bold enterprise which encouraged them both by exhortation and example, when the dead or dying 'causes' at Eynsham and Charlton were revived against heavy odds; and one after another new spheres of work were entered on ...³⁵

The work in the villages was clearly an important factor in New Road's rapid growth through the 1880s and 1890s. Its impact can be seen from the fact that, of the 591 new members reported to have joined the church during Dann's first nine years in Oxford, 205 were from the village stations. Not without reason, this period has come to be seen as New Road's second great wave of village evangelization, following on from the first great phase of village outreach a century earlier, under the aegis of James Hinton.

However, to see this purely as an evangelistic impulse driven from the central church with the aim of sharing the

gospel is to over-simplify the complex forces at work. Many of the stations brought under New Road's 'management' in the 1880s and 1890s were not new creations formed as the result of recent missionary activity from the church. Rather, they were existing causes, in some cases 'planted' by New Road many years before, which now came to be supported by the Oxford church.

With some, New Road seems to have taken the initiative. So for example the officers moved swiftly to resume control at Eynsham following the death in 1884 of Henry Matthews, pastor of the church for fifty years. On the same day that Matthews' death announcement appeared in the *Oxford Chronicle* James Dann was reported as having led midweek worship in the village, conferring with worshippers about future arrangements. Within a week new trustees had been appointed, a schedule of essential repairs drawn up and negotiations set in train with Mr Matthews' surviving relatives to secure vacant possession of the chapel.³⁶ Six weeks later, over a hundred friends from Oxford journeyed to Eynsham for the reopening of the chapel, duly repaired, on a train specially laid on by the Great Western Railway Company.

More often, New Road was approached and asked to assume responsibility. In some cases the approach came from the village station itself. So, for example, Woodstock (with Thrupp) requested New Road's help in providing preachers in 1887 then sought closer affiliation in 1892 before resuming independence in 1893. The same was true of Botley. There, Baptists from New Road were active from the beginning but the cause began life as a 'Christian Society of Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England' under the management of a joint committee. Two-and-a-half years later, in October 1894, members of the society 'resolved to connect themselves' with the New Road church, driven at least in part by the difficulty of finding preachers they could rely on.³⁷

Other causes were taken over from the other central church at Commercial Road. As early as 1881 Mr Hackney, then

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minister of Commercial Road, was enquiring if New Road would be prepared to assume responsibility for Charlton, a cause overseen by them from the mid-1870s. New Road apparently responded by seeking the appointment of new trustees for Charlton, then by tough negotiations to secure the removal from Charlton of a troublesome resident evangelist, or colporteur, in spite of some resistance locally.³⁸ Similarly, in 1890, the church officers took up 'an offer from the church at Commercial Road to hand over the St Thomas's mission to us', merging this work with their own efforts in the neighbourhood. Later still the work at Bayworth was taken up by New Road having been supported by Commercial Road for its first twelve years.³⁹

This picture of New Road responding to requests for help is underlined by the fact that other causes knocked on the church's door and were refused, either from fear of becoming financially over-extended or because the cause proposed was thought to be ill-judged. Asked in 1884 if they would be willing to buy the chapels at Appleton and Wootton, the church replied that they 'could not at present entertain' this.⁴⁰ Seven years later, a request that the church take on the management of a planned new mission hall in Jericho was declined, and the project discouraged, on the grounds that the hall would be too close to an existing mission hall in Nelson Street and would be seen as competition. When the project went ahead regardless the church agreed a stance of 'benevolent neutrality'.⁴¹ Later still, in 1894, the church expressed itself more than happy to supply preachers for home mission work in Summertown, but in 'the present condition of our finances' - and knowing that the scheme's main activist could subsidise the venture if required - steadfastly resisted requests from church member Mrs Wiblin to rent a room there.

Other changes in the oversight of preaching stations seem to have been the result of deliberate attempts at rationalization. So, in 1890, the church successfully proposed to the city missionary Henry Clifford that the services begun by him in

Osney should in future 'be considered to be in connection with our Home Mission'.⁴² Conversely, three years earlier, deacon Robert Rhodes Alden was tasked with communicating with 'Mr Mawer and the Wesleyans, formally relinquishing to them the work at Baldon'.⁴³

Of the New Road preaching stations, Hinksey, Wolvercote and the church's own work in St Thomas's seem to have been the direct product of recent evangelistic activity. For the rest, a Home Mission appeal leaflet issued in 1893 put it aptly when it described many of the stations as having been 'taken in hand' during the present pastorate.⁴⁴

To some extent it seems that success bred success: stations like Botley approached New Road knowing that they would be provided for. However, earnest discussions among the Free Churches locally and in Baptist circles at county level and nationally also point to economic factors that lay behind this trend. With agriculture in recession and rural populations dwindling, village chapels struggled increasingly to be self-supporting. Addressing the Baptist Union autumn session in October 1881 on 'The Condition and Needs of Our Churches in Villages and Rural Districts' the speaker, Revd G.W. Humphreys, urged colleagues not to be alarmist. Even so, the picture he painted of widespread suffering and impoverished ministers was a sorry one. 'Our churches in villages and rural districts are' he acknowledged, 'in a critical condition.' This subject was one to which the Union often returned through the 1880s. It was echoed in Oxfordshire's experience, where the talk was of 'great changes taking place in our small churches' as 'the rural population of this, as other, Associations, is being gradually thinned'.⁴⁵ Nor was it peculiar to Baptists. Writing in 1897, the Oxford Wesleyan James Nix spoke of the fall-off in numbers and resources experienced generally by the Free Churches in agricultural villages 'chiefly by reason of agricultural depression'. The answer, in his view and that of many, was 'increased reliance on lay preachers under the

'Every one of us is called to be a missionary'

superintendence of town pastors ... without lay preachers, nine village chapels out of ten would be closed'.⁴⁶

Other than at Woodstock and Thrupp there is no direct evidence that financial considerations, in particular an inability to support a settled preacher, led to the various stations becoming attached to New Road. However, all bar one of New Road's village stations in the mid 1880s fell below, and in most cases far below, the threshold of fifty members identified by a Baptist Union speaker as the minimum needed to 'do something material' to support a pastor.⁴⁷ Even without the expenses of a settled pastor, Home Mission balance sheets show the central church subsidising hard-pressed outstations.⁴⁸

Seen from New Road there were powerful motives for taking on the challenge, among them a conviction that the villages risked neglect, ritualism and discrimination at the hands of the Church of England, and that the health and future of Nonconformity in the villages depended on their support. A sermon by James Dann to mark the church's Home Mission anniversary in May 1889 captures these motivations. 'In all our village stations' Dann proclaimed, '... we have to deal with ignorance, begotten of long ages of neglect: a stupor occasioned too often by the unwholesome influence of those who claim to be the guides, almost the consciences of our rural population.' Among other benefits, he went on, 'This union of our country members with the home church is a great help towards guarding against the sacerdotal pretensions to which they are exposed. It enables us, too, to defend them against the "boycotting" to which they are subject because they dare to enter our village "conventicles"'. Moreover, 'with the depopulation and depression existing in our country districts, it would be next to impossible without such help for village evangelical Christian communities to live'.⁴⁹ This viewpoint was echoed by deacon and local preacher George H. Cooper at a Home Mission conference held the following year. 'Considering the great depression of our agricultural population', Cooper reminded listeners, 'it was vital to the

interests of Evangelical Nonconformity in our villages that they should be connected with a strong central body, such as that with which they were associated in this Home Mission.⁵⁰

Oxford Free Church colleagues and Baptists from the county echoed these sentiments, regretting the 'fierce opposition to our work arising from Sacerdotalism' and the instances of 'petty persecution, semi-starvation, village exile and trade boycott experienced by many a harmless village congregation'.⁵¹ In support of their contention Dann and others cited Anglican authorities, among them William Haslam, himself a convert from ritualism, whose book *From Death to Life* 'draws a sad picture of the lamentable and widespread lack of the spirit of Christ, and of acquaintance even with the very elements of Christian truth, among his fellow-clergy'.⁵²

In truth, fears about ritualism gaining the upper hand in the countryside were almost certainly not borne out by reality. In 1903 a couple in Headington seeking to join New Road were reported to have been 'driven from the Parish Church by the ritualistic vicar', and Oxford itself was known as an Anglo-Catholic stronghold.⁵³ While moderate High Church practices had come to be quite widely adopted, however, studies point to ritualism affecting only a minority of churches, suggesting also that it was an urban rather than a rural phenomenon.⁵⁴

Instances of village Nonconformists suffering unfair discrimination for their faith at the hands of Anglican landlords were also very likely overstated. Writing on 'Life in Our Villages', the *Daily News* 'special commissioner' George Millin came close to home, with accounts from around Woodstock, including one case where a man's hosting of a cottage prayer meeting had led to him losing both his job and his tied house.⁵⁵ Such risks only tended to be run in parishes with a dominant Anglican landlord, however. Such parishes were by this time in the minority, certainly in Oxfordshire; and even where this was the case overt discrimination was increasingly infrequent.⁵⁶

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Well-founded or not, the sense that they were acting as the champions of Evangelical Nonconformity acted as a powerful driving force for the New Road Chapel Home Mission.

Organisation

Managing such an extensive Home Mission operation demanded effective organisation, and in this the church excelled. A start was made in 1883 with the friends at Littlemore and Headington asked to appoint two members each to a revived village stations committee, while the following year it was agreed to hold quarterly meetings of members of the village stations 'for prayer and conference'.

Rules for the formally constituted New Road Chapel Home Mission, adopted by the church in February 1887, extended these arrangements. The object of the mission was clearly stated as being: 'the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom by the preaching of the Gospel and maintenance of Christian work in stations now connected with the church and establishment of others under its authority'.

The rules provided for a superintendent and local committee of management to be elected locally each year at a special meeting of church members at each station, such elections to be 'subject to approval' by the central church. Usually members of New Road itself, superintendents were responsible for making the necessary arrangements, visitation of members, care of the sick, and 'the due maintenance of discipline'. New Road's Isaac Alden identified their role as vital: 'The people wanted someone to look up to, someone to advise in cases of trouble, to smooth down the little difficulties which are sure to spring up in small communities, where there is much more friction than is found in large bodies, and to see that the services are regularly and efficiently conducted'.⁵⁷ Under the rules, superintendents were to be 'summoned by the Pastor quarterly and at such other times as may be desirable for the purpose of consulting with the deacons on the affairs of the mission'. Oversight of the Home Mission as a whole was

A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ

vested in a central executive committee, consisting initially of minister and deacons. To them fell the duties of appointing preachers, deciding all questions of church constitution, and resolving matters of discipline that could not be dealt with locally. Conferences of the executive, superintendents, local committees and approved preachers were to be held each quarter to consider 'subjects connected with the Mission' with topics chosen including 'the best means of carrying out suggestions concerning systematic visitation of our rural parishioners' and how to secure greater continuity of ministry. The first such conference each year took the form of an annual meeting, at which the superintendents gave reports on the work of their respective stations.

From the mid-1880s a preaching plan, published three times a year, mapped out the various engagements of the army of local preachers needed to supply the preaching stations. Already by May 1884, the church could muster twenty local preachers.⁵⁸ Four years later, in 1888, former Baptist Union president Frederick Trestrail was astonished on visiting the church to hear of 'a band of thirty devoted men, some old and experienced others young and ardent, going out every Lord's day and on week-nights to keep these village churches alive and united'.⁵⁹

By 1890 there were thirty-six names on the plan, with no other church sending returns to the Baptist Union registering as many local preachers.⁶⁰ Thereafter, returns to the Union show the number of New Road local preachers rising steadily to forty by 1900 and fifty by 1915, excluding the dozen or more auxiliaries who routinely swelled the ranks. Turnover, in particular among auxiliaries, meant that the number of individuals involved was greater still. In all, the surviving series of plans for the five or so years from May 1889 to July 1894 include ninety individuals. Between them, ably led by Dann himself, 'a tireless preacher' and gifted organiser, these preachers shared responsibility for some twenty-seven regular Sunday and week-evening services each week, excluding

'Every one of us is called to be a missionary'

services at New Road itself and the array of tea, public and social meetings that marked each station's calendar.

Auxiliaries were not required to be members of the church, or indeed Baptists: those named in the plans from 1889-94 include Alfred Trotman and Henry Clifford, both city missionaries and pastors successively of the unsectarian mission on Magdalen Road, at least one Primitive Methodist, Thomas Cox of Murcott and D.P. Clifford, a Wesleyan Methodist.⁶¹

Others on the plans for this period include: nine of the church's ten deacons; five members of the Alden family; a sprinkling of University students; future Baptist ministers John Read, Harry Rolfe and Percy 'Praise-the-Lord' Monk; and a lone woman, Lizzie Hughes (née Cooper) superintendent of St Thomas's for the whole of its fifty-eight year life.

Of preachers whose occupations are known, three were butchers, three grocers, one a baker, one a draper and one a dealer in boots and fancy goods, pointing to the church's strong commercial bias. However, others came from diverse backgrounds. They included Samson Smith a labourer, platelayer Daniel French, boatbuilder Theo Smith, builder Frank Martin and Robert Champion, furniture van proprietor. Of those in undoubted 'white collar' occupations John Harris, trusted supervisor of New Road building works, was manager for building firm Kingerlee's; Thomas Horn, formerly a Congregationalist, was a solicitor's clerk, Richard Graham a post office clerk, while Edward Cox Alden, author of many Oxford guides, headed the Alden's expanding printing business. The plan brought together employer and employed, poor fund benefactors and recipients. From 1906 the preaching contingent was augmented with the appointment of Alfred Couldrey as village evangelist. Those taking this initiative were clear, though, that Mr Couldrey's work was supplementary, boosting rather than taking the place of 'the work already carried on so zealously in our mission stations'.⁶²

ARTHUR R. GRAHAM, Coal Merchant,

New Road Chapel Home Mission.

PLAN OF SERVICES, DEC., 1893, TO MARCH, 1894.

Superintendents: Littlemore, F. Martin, Divinity Road; Headington, G. North, 10, Clark's Row, and W. H. Alden, Ifley Road; Wolvercote, Ernest Alden, 102, Southmoor Road, and D. Collett, Wolvercote; Eynsham, R. R. Alden, Eastwick Farm, and H. Rolfe, 10, Walton Street; Charlton, John Harris, 58, St. John Street; Hincksey, R. R. Alden; Osney, J. E. Bacon, Osney Road; St. Thomas', Mrs. Hughes, 6, St. Frideswide's Terrace.

PLACES.	TIME.	DECEMBER.					JANUARY.				FEBRUARY.				MARCH.			
		3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	4	11	18	25
Littlemore	Morning, 10.45	37	9	19	9	34	28	9	26	5	21	19	25	22	20	9	1	19
	Evening, 6.0	18	9c	14	28	29	2	9c	18	15	1	8c	2	37	26	9c	18	36
Thursday Evening, 7.0		1	40	45	25	P	1	40	3	45	P	25	40	1	P	1	3	45
Headington	Morning, 11.0	22	20	7	32	45	56	16	7	35	14	13	17	41	28	19	37	35
	Evening, 6.0	41	2c	29	32	18	19	2c	28	w	w	2c	17	3	42	2c	16	41
Wednesday Evening, 7.30		34	5	37	35	16	15	20	w	w	3	P	37	5	35	16	34	3
Wolvercote	Morning, 11.0		31	29	17	19	1	28	14	34	18	29	9	48	19	34	28	1
	Evening, 6.30		34	4c	4	18	45	28	4c	34	18	29	4c	48	19	50	4c	12
Wednesday Evening, 7.30			Arranged by the Superintendent.															
Eynsham	Morning, 11.0			33	18	7	3	33	3	7	29	35	3	7	33	3	29	18
	Evening, 6.0			45	18	33	18	33	45	33	29	35	48	33	33	45	29	18
Tuesday Evening, 7.0			33	P	33	P	3	18	P	3	50	3	P	5	3	18	P	3
Thursday Evening, 7.0			3	33	3	45	33	3	33	45	33	18	38	33	50	33	45	33
Charlton	Morning, 11.0	19	1	18	46	1	29	1	19	47	17	18	1	18	3	47	35	28
	Evening, 6.0	19	1c	18	46	47	29	1c	19	1	17	18	1	18	3	1c	35	28
Thursday Evening, 7.0		P	Arranged by the Superintendent.															
Osney	Evening, 6.30	15	28	8	36	7	28	18	8	29	23	3	36	50	18	36	19	8
	Thursday Evening, 7.0	7	34	15	40	8	P	50	7	40	8	P	23	8	7	P	10	8
S. Hincksey	Evening, 6.30	45	22	16	3	17	50	22	37	45	34	16	38	45	50	7	34	22
	Wednesday Evening, 7.0	50	3	1	3	7	3	5	7	50	38	3	34	20	5	3	1	34
St. Thomas'	Evening, 6.30	Special Services																
	Thursday Evening, 7.0	19	H	17	38	50	w	w	H	38	45	H	3	17	45	7	38	19

NOTE.—c. Ordinance of the Lord's Supper. All Church Members are expected to fulfil the Saviour's command,—
"This do in remembrance of Me."

PREACHERS.	9. Cooper, G. H.	20. Harris, C.	31. North, G.	41. Clifford, D. P.
P. Dann, Rev. J.	10. Cowell, A.	21. Herring, W.	32. Payne, H.	42. Martyr, H.
1. Alden, Isaac.	11.	22. Herring, F.	33. Rolfe, H.	43. Brown, T.
2. Alden, E. C.	12. French, D.	23. Holliss, F. W.	34. Roberts, A. J.	44. Hall, G.
3. Alden, R. E.	13. Froude, S.	24.	35. Smith, S.	45. Norris.
4. Alden, Ernest.	14. Graham, R.	25. Martin, F.	36. Smith, Theo.	46. Scrivener, T.
5. Alden, W. H.	15. Greenaway, H.	26. Merriman, F.	37. Silvester, G.	47. Cox, T.
6. Allington, W. J.	16. Gardner, R.	27.	38. Soame, J.	48. Campagnac.
7. Bond, G.	17. Horn, T.	28. Newell, E. E.	AUXILIARIES.	
8. Bacon, J. E.	18. Harris, J.	29. Newton, A.	40. Clifford, H.	w. Mr. Wales.
	19. Hayman, J. M.	30. North, F.		

Brethren unable to fulfil their appointments are requested to communicate with the Secretary, Mr. R. R. ALDEN, who will also be pleased to receive any suggestion concerning the work of the Mission.

It is particularly requested that brethren using conveyances will arrange to reach Oxford not later than 9.30 p.m.

<p>HENRY SYMONDS, UNDERTAKER, <i>The Oxford Funeral Furnishing Depot.</i> Offices:—24, CHURCH STREET, OXFORD. (Exactly the bottom of Castle Street.)</p> <p>Funerals Furnished with every requisite on the most Economical Terms. OFFICES OPEN DAY AND NIGHT.</p> <p>Country Orders punctually attended to. Distance no object. <i>Memorials in Stone, Marble, and Granite.</i> <i>Memorials Cleaned and Repaired.</i> ESTIMATES FREE ON APPLICATION. <i>A large assortment of Wreaths and Grave Ornaments.</i></p>	<p>BEDFORD & CO., 29, CHURCH STREET, ST. EBBE'S, OXFORD, Manufacturers of all kinds of Mineral Waters.</p> <p>SOLE BOTTLING AGENTS FOR KOPS ALES and STOUT. (NON-ALCOHOLIC.)</p> <p>RETAIL AGENTS:— F. H. ALDEN, 3, Woodstock Road, A. F. SOLLOWAY, Walton Street. J. E. BACON, Osney. F. SELLERS, 38, Queen Street.</p>
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Home Mission Preaching Plan, December 1893- March 1894

'Every one of us is called to be a missionary'

Preachers needed transporting, and here the church was fortunate in having a number of members able to provide 'conveyances'.⁶³ They also needed preparation. By 1884, a weekly Local Preachers' class was meeting 'for the reading and discussion of papers, and the devout consideration of topics connected with the work of preaching the Gospel in the Mission Stations'.⁶⁴ A Mission Band, established in 1888 to support the work of local preachers, in particular by 'Open-Air preaching in suitable places', provided further opportunities for young men in membership of the church, or others admitted by vote, to prepare for their task at weekly meetings 'for instruction in the word of God, and for practice in proclaiming it'.⁶⁵ Later, the Young Men's Society (formed in 1901 or 1902 for 'Instruction in Divine Truth and Preparation for Christian Service') seems to have been the main arena for lectures on sermon construction and delivery, and for practising the extempore preaching heartily commended by James Dann.⁶⁶ A reference library, established in 1891, supported preachers in their efforts.⁶⁷ Even so, concerns surfaced from time to time about the quality of preaching.⁶⁸ As early as 1892, leading local preacher Evan Newell was suggesting that those on the preaching plan should undergo a 'test of fitness'.⁶⁹ Arising from these discussions, votes were cast on the ten 'select' local preachers to be invited to preach at Wednesday evening meetings of the home congregation.⁷⁰ Later hints on sermon construction, put forward once more by Evan Newell, were designed to meet the needs of 'many a local preacher ... put upon plan and left largely, if not completely, to his own resources for the preparation of his sermons'.⁷¹

Another task facing the Home Mission involved cementing ties between the branch stations and the 'home congregation'. From 1889 the *New Road Chapel Monthly Visitor* helped to meet this need, with regular reports from 'our headquarters' and 'our country stations'. The same year saw the introduction of 'periodical meetings in the villages to be addressed by the Pastor and other New Road friends'. These, it was felt, would

A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ

'show our friends at the different stations that the regard of them by the central congregation is fraternally affectionate and practical'.⁷² The addresses given by 'brethren of our own staff' covered topics such as: 'Why are we Nonconformists?', 'Our position as Evangelical Nonconformists', 'Baptism', and 'Different Methods of extending our Christian influence'.⁷³ High days and holidays in the church's calendar, the New Year Social Meeting, summer steam boat trips to Nuneham, the Sunday School anniversary and a yearly Home Mission 'rally' provided further opportunities for uniting the home church and its branches.

In June 1916 James Dann reluctantly retired at the age of seventy-eight. By then the Home Mission enterprise was showing signs of strain. Even before the war, complaints about 'the standard of efficiency among our local preachers' were growing louder. Attendance at some Home Mission conferences was proving disappointing. When those involved did meet in April 1911, discussion centred on 'the lack of additions to our church from our various stations'.⁷⁴ Coupled with this, there is a sense that James Dann had outlived his generation. Writing in reflective mood from Blockley in 1908, where he was recovering from an accident, Dann observed to one well-wisher, Harry Paintin, 'You are among the rapidly decreasing group of old friends to whom, during the many years of my Oxford ministry, I have ever been able to look for kind thoughts, able co-operation, and loving sympathy'.⁷⁵ In spite of these discouragements the New Road Chapel Home Mission still had progress to report, with for example Barton added as a substation of Headington in 1913 and new church buildings opened in Botley in 1913 and in Hinksey the following year. When family, friends and colleagues came together to bid the New Road minister farewell he was firmly established as Oxford's Nonconformist elder statesman. Tributes were paid to the church's progress and standing in the city.

'Every one of us is called to be a missionary'

An admittedly biased observer (one of James Dann's sons) noted in 1899 that New Road 'has become remarkable for its village work, operations in a large number of stations being conducted on an almost unique plan by zealous voluntary helpers'. 'Almost unique' was probably about right. Examples can be found of Baptist churches joining together to meet the religious needs of outlying villages and districts, as in Bristol, where the Baptist Itinerant Society came into being in 1824, but a home mission operation of such scale based around one church remained exceptional.⁷⁶ Arguably, it was only possible because Oxford was small enough for a 'Home Mission' centred on one church to be practicable, and because the broad base of the church's operation meant that it could meet the demand for preachers.⁷⁷ Over time the model that prevailed was one whereby county Associations and the Baptist Union played an important role in orchestrating the home mission effort. Sometimes, these two approaches clashed. When, in 1887, the Baptist Union resolved to mark Queen Victoria's Jubilee by raising a Jubilee Fund to support Home Missions, New Road's reply that 'we have come to a determination to raise a Jubilee Fund in aid of our own Home Mission' was greeted with some consternation.

If New Road's city standing and village work came to be applauded, less can be said of the church's impact on the University. At Dann's farewell, a London Baptist colleague 'bore testimony to the kindly regard and sympathy of Mr Dann for undergraduates in the colleges ... his own son and many others found not only a Christian home but a home of learning in Oxford'.⁷⁸ A small number of students became members of the church. As has been seen, students served as local preachers and auxiliaries, among them Ernest Campagnac, classics scholar at University College, future warden of Manchester University Settlement and Professor of Education; future missionary Ernest Burt, in Oxford to study Chinese, and St John's classicist Percy Hart. Others taught in the Sunday School, and the Sunday School centenary celebrations of 1913

found several former students reminiscing, among them Edward Hayward, formerly of St John's, by then an assistant to the revered Dr Clifford at London's Westbourne Park and a leading light in the Baptist Union Youth Department.⁷⁹ Christ Church mathematician and future Baptist minister Frederick Benskin was both a preacher and a Sunday School teacher, finding time also to sit on the committee of the Mutual Improvement Society. As will be seen in the next chapter, Percy Alden was also notable in spanning town and gown, combining membership at New Road and oversight of the Osney Sunday School with undergraduate life at Balliol.

However, while one undergraduate's recollection that in 1884 he was the only undergraduate to attend the chapel smacks of overstatement, the number of students involved in the life of the church remained relatively modest, and little different from the 1870s when the talk was of 'Meetings and week-evening classes conducted principally by Members of the University in association with us'.⁸⁰ Moves in the 1890s to designate a 'University Sunday' and form a University Baptist Guild took place independent of the church, while the annual Baptist service was held in Mansfield chapel, described by R.F. Horton as 'a spiritual rallying point for Nonconformists'.⁸¹ When the John Bunyan Society was established in 1905 as a focus for Baptist students, (the Baptist Guild having proved short-lived) the eminent academic Professor W. Steadman Aldis, now retired and living in Oxford, was more to the fore than was James Dann.⁸² When, in 1910, the society lobbied for 'someone - an Oxford man for preference - to look after Baptist students in Oxford' thoughts turned to the option of a tutor based at Mansfield College. Even for those students who, coming to Oxford, sought to retain their Baptist allegiance and identity, the gulf between Baptist town and gown was not to be easily bridged.

NOTES

- ¹ Minutes of deacons' and officers' meetings, (DMM), 1879-1881, New Road records (NRR), Box 3, Angus Library, Oxford. For description of J.P. Barnett see *Baptist Magazine* (BM) XCII (August 1899), 363.
- ² BM LXXVIII (August 1885), 341.
- ³ See M.D. Johnson, *The Dissolution of Dissent, 1850- 1918* (New York, 1987) pp.169- 89.
- ⁴ R.F. Horton, *Autobiography* (London, 1917), p. 53.
- ⁵ DMM, April & October 1881.
- ⁶ Letter dated 22 October 1881, DMM.
- ⁷ Baptist Union Minute Book, 1881-84, pp. 12-49, Angus Library.
- ⁸ Minutes of church meetings (CMM), March 1882, NRR Box 1. Booth had been secretary of the Baptist Union from 1877 to 1879, a post he resumed from 1883-1898.
- ⁹ Correspondence relating to Dann's appointment, NRR Box 27.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ DMM, July 1882.
- ¹² *New Road Chapel Monthly Visitor* (MV), November 1891.
- ¹³ Numbers taken from reports of the Oxfordshire Association (OA).
- ¹⁴ Revd J.C. Briscoe, President of the London Baptist Association, in MV, July 1890.
- ¹⁵ *OA Reports*. Other information about the preaching stations is taken from the minutes of church and deacons' meetings, the *Monthly Visitor* and the *Oxford & District Free Church Magazine* (ODFCM).
- ¹⁶ *ODFCM*, November 1902. Those involved reported that the room's dual purpose made it very warm in winter but unbearable in summer, when they were often obliged to have very short services.
- ¹⁷ *OA Reports*, 1895, p. 18.
- ¹⁸ *Oxford Chronicle*, 5 November 1892.

- ¹⁹ Appeal leaflet in Papers relating to the Free Churches in Oxford, GA Oxon 40 270, Bodleian Library.
- ²⁰ *OA Reports*. See also J.H.Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot, 1994).
- ²¹ *Baptist Hand-book* (1890). This shows the Metropolitan Tabernacle as having thirty-seven mission stations, two other churches with eight and two with seven preaching stations.
- ²² *Oxford Times*, 18 November 1882.
- ²³ See, eg CMM, 1 August 1887; *Manual for the Church and Congregation Assembling in New Road Chapel, Oxford, 1884*.
- ²⁴ *Baptist Hand-book* (1888).
- ²⁵ Church membership register 1854-1885, NRR Box 8.
- ²⁶ *BM* (August 1899), 363; *OA Report* (1899).
- ²⁷ *Manual for the Church and Congregation ... 1884*.
- ²⁸ DMM, December 1887; *OA Report* (1888), p. 18; *MV*, February 1889.
- ²⁹ *MV*, June 1889.
- ³⁰ For the Society see J. Wood, *The Story of the Evangelisation Society* (London, 1907); D.J. Tidball, 'English Nonconformist Home Missions 1796- 1901', University of Keele Ph.D., 1982.
- ³¹ *MV*, June, August 1890.
- ³² *BM* LXXVII (March 1884), 122.
- ³³ *MV*, June 1889.
- ³⁴ *MV*, November 1891.
- ³⁵ *Baptist Times & Freeman*, 24 October 1902.
- ³⁶ Eynsham Trustees Minutes, 1884-1885, NRR Box 71.
- ³⁷ Botley Church Minutes, 1892-1895, NRR Box 70.
- ³⁸ DMM October 1881, October 1884; CMM January 1885.
- ³⁹ *ODFCM* August 1898; July 1900.
- ⁴⁰ DMM, May 1884.
- ⁴¹ DMM, March & April 1891.

⁴² DMM, August 1890.

⁴³ DMM, May 1887.

⁴⁴ Appeal leaflet dated January 1893 in Papers relating to the Free Churches in Oxford.

⁴⁵ 'The Importance of Lay Agency in Connection with our Churches and how best to develop it', *Oxfordshire Association Circular Letter* (1882).

⁴⁶ ODFCM, March 1897.

⁴⁷ *Baptist Hand-book* (1884), 24.

⁴⁸ Eg, MV, August 1891.

⁴⁹ MV, June 1889.

⁵⁰ MV, April 1890.

⁵¹ ODFCM, March & December 1897.

⁵² MV, June 1889.

⁵³ See letter from W.S. Aldis in Dann papers, NRR Box 27.

⁵⁴ G.I.T. Machin, 'The Last Victorian Anti-Ritualist Campaign, 1895–1906', *Victorian Studies* 25 (1982); J.E.B. Munson, 'The Oxford Movement by the End of the Nineteenth Century: The Anglo-Catholic Clergy', *Church History* 44 (1975), 382–395.

⁵⁵ [Geo. Millin], *Life in our Villages by the Special Commissioner of the Daily News* (London, 1891), cited P. Horn, 'The village in Victorian Oxfordshire', *Oxfordshire Local History* I (Oxford, 1983).

⁵⁶ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London, 1989), p. 126 notes that 'rural pressures making for social and therefore religious conformity have often been overstated'.

⁵⁷ News item pasted into Home Mission Executive Minutes, 1907–1919, NRR Box 38.

⁵⁸ *Manual for the Church and Congregation ... 1884*.

⁵⁹ News item in Home Mission Executive Minutes, NRR Box 38.

⁶⁰ The previous year only Liverpool's Toxteth Tabernacle came close, with twenty-seven preachers, *Baptist Hand-book* (1889).

- ⁶¹ DMM, September 1891; MV, March 1890; ODFCM, September 1902.
- ⁶² Mr Couldrey's Mission, Associated Papers, NRR Box 39.
- ⁶³ Appeal leaflet in Papers relating to the Free Churches in Oxford.
- ⁶⁴ *Manual for the Church and Congregation ... 1884*.
- ⁶⁵ MV, February 1889.
- ⁶⁶ 'Reading, Pronunciation, and Action. A Paper read before a meeting of the New Road Chapel Young Men's Society by Rev. James Dann, President' (Oxford, 1904).
- ⁶⁷ DMM, December 1890.
- ⁶⁸ MV, October 1892; March 1893.
- ⁶⁹ MV, October 1892.
- ⁷⁰ DMM, June 1893.
- ⁷¹ Evan E Newell, *Sermon Making: Hints to Lay Preachers by a Lay Preacher* (Oxford, 1905).
- ⁷² MV, November 1889.
- ⁷³ *OA Report*, 1890, p. 16; MV, April 1890; May 1890.
- ⁷⁴ Home Mission Executive minutes, 1907-1919, NRR Box 40.
- ⁷⁵ Letter in Papers relating to the Free Churches in Oxford.
- ⁷⁶ R. Whitehouse, *The Widening Circle ... 150 Years of the Bristol Baptist Itinerant Society* (Bristol, 1974).
- ⁷⁷ Thanks to David Bebbington for his observations on this point.
- ⁷⁸ *Oxford Times*, 24 June 1916.
- ⁷⁹ Record of Centenary Celebration May 11-15 1913, reprinted from *Oxford Times* and *Oxford Journal Illustrated*.
- ⁸⁰ *OA Report*, 1879, p. 25; Sir F Tillyard, 'The Oxford Nonconformists' Union 1883-86', *Congregational Quarterly* XXV (1947), 133-7.
- ⁸¹ MV, April 1892; June 1893.
- ⁸² Minutes of the John Bunyan Society, 1910-1928, Angus Library. See also W.W. Bottoms, *Fifty Springs. Oxford University John Bunyan Society 1905-1955* (Oxford, [1955]).

The Aldens of New Road: A Baptist Continuity

Clyde Binfield

I start with a song from the Sixties and a letter from last January.¹ The song is Baptist. It celebrates the joys of conformity. The letter is Anglican. It is suggestively nonconformist. The song was composed for a New Road social evening, the letter was written to a national broadsheet. Here are two verses of the song:

I sing a song of the New Road Saints,
Ancient they were and few;
Who ran the Church in the good old days,
When none of the tunes was new!
For 34 years there was Pastor James Dann –
The members were Aldens and Alden and Alden
And Aldens there were in every pew
And I'll be an Alden too.

They all went out in their wagonettes,
Not a village was left forgot.
And chapels were built, and sermons were preached –
In all, quite a busy lot.
You could see them at Bayworth, Woodstock, and Botley,
At Charlton and Eynsham, Headington and Cowley –
And they all had their Aldens out there to tea –
Can't I be an Alden too?²

I doubt whether there could be a better encapsulation of the Alden contribution to New Road than that. Even its rhythms remind us of that family's addiction to complicated music-making.

The letter has no direct bearing on New Road, although it was written by an Alden with a Baptist in mind, for it protested at the suggestion that Bill Clinton would make a good Chancellor of Oxford University. The letter's nonconformity lay in its choice of broadsheet (*The Independent*), its assessment of Oxford (agreeing that when Oxford 'tries to exert the power it possesses ... it always shows itself to be provincial, self-important, and rather absurd'), and its dismissal of 'an ex-President who is so much better at electioneering than actually achieving anything worthwhile when elected'. Yet who could be more conformist than its writer, (the Dragon School, St Edward's School, Worcester College and housemaster at Rugby) and what could be more assured than his opening, 'As a fifth-generation citizen of Oxford and a second-generation member of Oxford University'?³

Song and letter alike convey a sense of family, a sense of place, and a sense of what might be called concerned command. Here are thinkers, communicators, and doers. Though the order sometimes varies, here are Aldens. Here is continuity.

There can be no escaping the discontinuity implied by a gathered church witnessing to a felt faith. Its membership is separated from its wider community. Each member's faith is unique. There can be no presumption that faith runs in families, or at least not in natural families, for in the gathered church the church is family. And where the gathered church is Baptist, the symbolism is certainly not to be escaped: the waters of baptism separate the believer from the associations and relationships of unbelief.⁴

Yet it is not quite like that. The Gospels team with relationships and their redefining. The models can be

unexpected. Was there ever an older contemporary household than that of Lazarus and his contrasting sisters, Martha and Mary? The scriptural pattern of family is not to be ignored by a gospel church, even if its outlines are sometimes startling.

And in the passing world, imperative marches with convenience and turns easily into convention. What more natural (or convenient) than to marry within the fellowship rather than marry out? Social and political prudence thus accompany spiritual prudence. A gathered church, constantly renewed, also becomes a rooted church, interacting with its surrounding community, sometimes in a position to shape it, often to influence it. So too that church and its hinterland are threaded with family connection. It was a rare Baptist church of any age or size that was not similar, its family networks buttressed by professional or commercial prudence, sensibly enlarged by their need for reliable tradesmen and artisans to serve them, and then confirmed by that most unpredictable of constants (and that least attractive of emotions for the contemporary historian), affection, even love. All families confronted tragedy. Not all were dysfunctional. They were the motor of society.

Such were New Road's Aldens. They furnish a dense network, concentrated in Oxford but not indigenous to it or restricted to it. Aldens were to be found in North America, Australia, Chipping Sodbury too. They could point to at least six Baptist generations, each represented in New Road, but there have also been Congregational, Quaker, Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Aldens. They have flourished as butchers, printers, publishers, teachers, engineers, and in medicine and music. Their story is punctuated and on the whole encouraged by such myths as sustain most families. They have been socially resilient, but not immune to bankruptcy or, more recently, divorce.

Churches are often categorised by their veneer of notables. Aldens were certainly New Road notables. New Road was 'the Alden church', but there was sufficient Alden variety for that

to be more an accolade than otherwise. Indeed, the liveliness of their witness suggests the seriousness of the religion to which they had committed themselves. It also suggests the strength of that form of churchmanship. It would have been a foolish as well as a brave minister, and probably a poor pastor, who crossed the Aldens, though many a minister must have pursed his lips and drawn in his breath at the name. One interesting aspect of Alden networking is the way in which New Road's ministers were drawn into their web of connection. Yet, although there were many prominent Baptist ministers who were Alden connections, there was no notable British Alden minister, even though the best-known Alden in public life found his way to public note and service through the Nonconformist ministry.

The Aldens also represent New Road's place in Oxford life. They have chiefly represented it in Oxford's trading and commercial life, the life of Oxford town, but they have played their part in Oxford's professional, civic, educational and sporting life, edging into its university life, and with distinguished outworkings in university life elsewhere. Today the Baptist links have lessened greatly and the New Road links have all but snapped. But just as famous Quaker families which have long ceased to be Quakers still retain Quaker characteristics and pride in their ancestry, so it is with the Baptist Aldens.

It is time for the sustaining myths. There are three. All are to the credit of Baptists. All will endure even though two have been exploded; the third has enough circumstantial implausibility about it for it to ring true. They were given currency by one of New Road's most attractive Aldens, Edward Cox Alden (1838-1912). He was the Alden who gave the family printing business an enjoyable touch of class. He possessed to the full all the more positive Alden attributes. He was intelligent and musical. He liked words and facts. He was a good businessman and an instinctive craftsman. He was also a firm Baptist. The memorial tributes begin to write

themselves: without 'the advantage of an extended scholastic education', he 'developed in early youth an extraordinary capacity for the acquisition and retention of knowledge'. He also developed an 'ability for ready and eloquent public speech'.⁵ Thus, 'delighting in music and art, with a mind stored with gems gathered from the best English authors, and the pen of a ready writer', Alden was ready to celebrate Oxford. His *Oxford Guide* placed him in the front rank of Victorian popularisers, the perfect companion for the visitors 'whom he delighted to pilot through its streets, colleges and groves ... [in] his enthusiastic efforts to make them acquainted with its treasures'. His was everyman's Oxford, the people's Oxford, for this Oxford man was a townsman, a 'staunch and intelligent Free Churchman and Liberal', with 'to a remarkable degree the power of extracting the good from every fresh experience'.⁶

An autodidact, brought up on the Bible with a passion for rhythm, fact and word, was bound to be a creature of imagination, or at least a child of the Religious Tract Society.⁷ Hence the three myths which inform the artfully printed memorial *Appreciation* and have been willingly appropriated by far-flung family members.

The first is that the Aldens came from Scandinavia. They may well have done, but the story of their flight from Alden Island, off the coast of Norway, driven by their Protestant beliefs to East Anglia, has been briskly dismissed by Hugh Williamson, one of the two most indefatigable Alden historians, as 'invented by Harry Paintin, a popular local historian, who went on a cruise to Norway, heard of Alden Island, and concocted a story about Norwegian turmoils during the Reformation of the *fifteenth century*. The island is hardly more than a huge crag, and there was no religious turmoil in Norway at the time of the Reformation'.⁸

The second is that the Aldens, East Anglians now, moved west – Norwich, Bury St Edmunds, Chipping Sodbury. Among them were Robert Alden, a Londoner whose money backed the

Mayflower and John Alden who actually sailed in the *Mayflower*. His great-grandsons James, William and Samuel, found their way back to Chipping Sodbury, and William's grandson, Isaac, was the first Oxford Alden. Their line of descent was determinedly charted by Leonard S. Alden, Isaac's great-great grandson and Edward Cox Alden's first cousin twice-removed, in the mid-twentieth century.

That connection had naturally thrilled E.C. Alden. Because of it 'many prominent Americans became his warm friends'.⁹ It can have done no harm to the sales of the Alden Press. Besides, Robert, John, William, James, even Samuel, were family names. Nonetheless, Hugh Williamson was surely correct to locate its origin in Longfellow's *The courtship of Miles Standish* (1858):

Near him was seated John Alden;
fair haired, azure-eyed,
with delicate Saxon complexion.

That John Alden (c. 1599–1687) lived long and fruitfully with his numerous descendants including a great-grandson Samuel Alden (1712–57). A seafaring merchant, Samuel returned to England and died in Gloucestershire, not far from Chipping Sodbury where Aldens had certainly now lived for several generations, beginning with the Old Sodbury blacksmith, Robert Alden, (c. 1600–77) and his son John. Those Aldens just as certainly were the ancestors of the Oxford Aldens, but no family connection has yet been proved between them and Samuel, the childless mariner home from the colonies.¹⁰

This seems to be an instance where clues turn out to be coincidences. Nonetheless the *Mayflower* connection was tenaciously held by Leonard S. Alden (1901–63), head of the Eastwyke Farm Aldens. Thanks to him it was given wide currency in 1959 by the writer S.B.P. Mais and forty years later it featured in the funeral service for the last Alden to be in membership at New Road, Leonard's sister-in-law Dorothy

Alden (1911–99).¹¹ It is cherished still. It is bracing to be of Pilgrim descent.

So to the third myth. E.C. Alden's memorial *Appreciation* recalled how his grandfather Isaac 'then in the service of the Duke of Somerset', came to Oxford 'to attend to the Duke's son, Lord Seymour'.¹² Twenty-three years later Arthur Langley crafted the story for *The Christian*.¹³

In that watershed time, 1789, Edward Adolphus Seymour, then in his fifteenth year, went up to Christ Church. When Seymour's father became tenth Duke in 1792, young Mr Seymour became Lord Seymour. Less than two years later, and still an undergraduate, Lord Seymour became eleventh Duke of Somerset.¹⁴

The young nobleman had rooms in Canterbury Quad, which he shared with his valet, Isaac Alden, just turned twenty. Alden, it seems, 'prevailed upon his master to rise on the Sabbath day earlier than usual, so that after the valet had dressed him, the servant could go into the city to meet some of his friends'. The friends, like Alden, were Baptists. They met at New Road where James Hinton was newly settled.

One Sunday Seymour had a hangover. He was furious at being dressed so early and, learning why, 'he told his servant that never again would he get up so early. His Baptist friends must come there ... Thus ... during term time, as long as Seymour remained at Oxford, the Baptists of the city met for prayer on the first day of the week in the college whose chapel was the Cathedral of the diocese'.¹⁵ Not since a Congregational church had gathered in Westminster Abbey can there have been so gratifying a vindication of gospel principles. All turned out for the best. Alden went on to become a solid Oxford citizen and Seymour went on to do his duty as a duke. It would be hard to imagine a more representative beginning for an Oxford family.

The story does not quite fit. Gilded undergraduates had been stopped from bringing their personal servants into college in 1773, but then rules are there to be bent and Seymour could

easily have kept his man in neighbouring lodgings.¹⁶ The dates do not quite fit either. Seymour was at Christ Church from February 1792 (not 1789) to July 1794, overlapping with his younger brother who was there from January 1794 to January 1798. But New Road's Isaac Alden was baptized by James Hinton (at Abingdon Baptist Church) in April 1793. He married Martha Curtis in May 1794, and a few months later they transferred their membership to Chipping Sodbury's Baptist church. Their eldest son was born in Chipping Sodbury, although a few months previously Isaac had been admitted a freeman of Oxford, where, of course, they eventually settled.¹⁷ Such things do not happen, even to a young duke's valet, without independent means and good prospects.

There is no evidence then or later that Isaac benefited from Seymour's patronage, and when he leased Eastwyke Farm, where six generations of Aldens were to live, he became a tenant of University College. Just as there were no Seymour links, so there were no Christ Church ones. Perhaps Lord Seymour's valet was a quite different Alden, from one of the Seymour properties. That would solve the problem of why a Gloucestershire yeoman should become gentleman's gentleman to the noble heir of estates in Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire and Lincolnshire - but not Gloucestershire: he did not. Two contemporary Aldens and their early Oxford doings had been conflated.

Yet the story is not wholly implausible. Vikings and Pilgrim Fathers were distant; the Oxford of the 1790s was much closer. For E.C. Alden's generation it was almost within living memory. The dates are not impossible, and Somerset was a strange duke to choose for a consciously crafted fabrication. Moreover, Christ Church was the right college for that branch of the Seymours.¹⁸

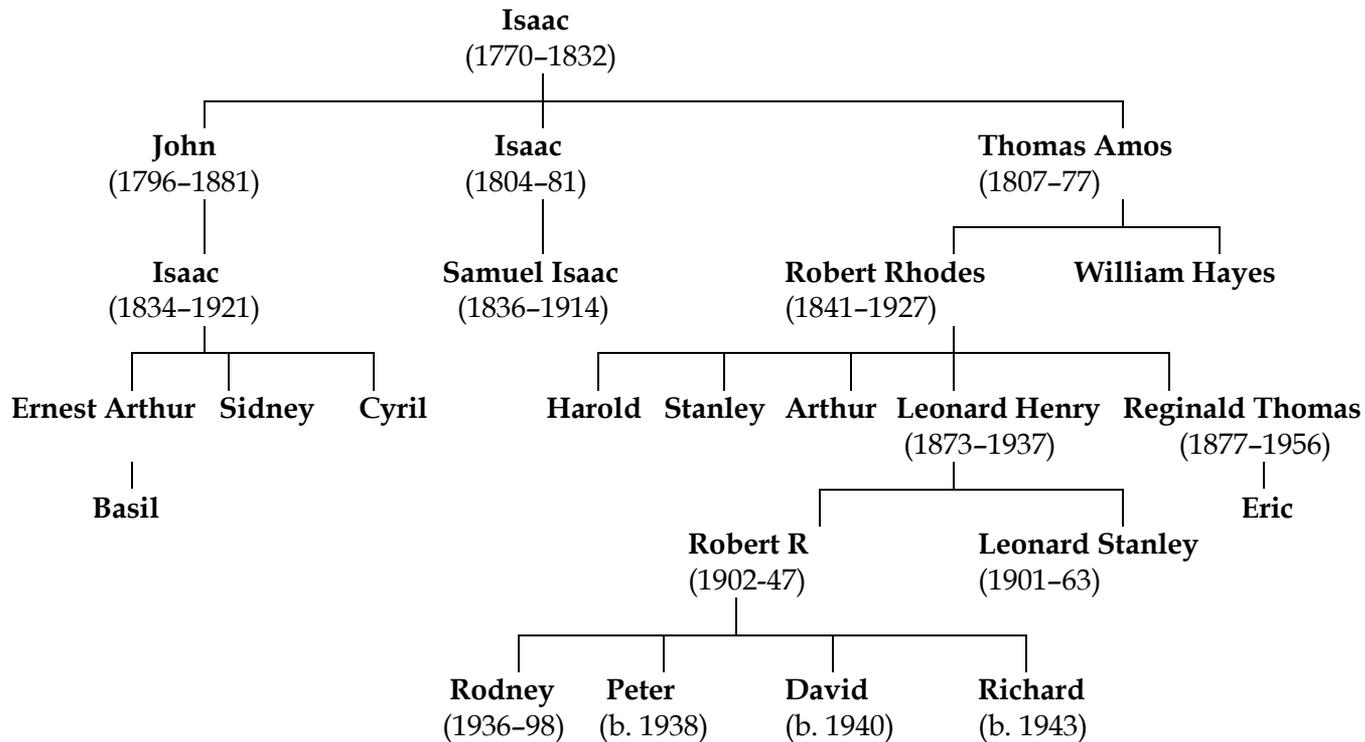
The Seymours bore an honoured if chequered name in English Protestant mythology. Their lineage was indisputably grand. It was also indisputably complex. The branch to which

the dukes in question belonged was the senior branch, but the title had returned to the eighth duke by chance on the death of a fifth cousin once-removed, and was almost to slip from them in future. The eighth duke had been a sixth baronet. Alas, estates which were ample for a baronet were inadequate for a duke. Consequently, the late Georgian and Victorian dukes combined parsimony with Evangelicalism (and a tendency to dodgy marriages). Socially, they had plenty of clerical connections. Politically, they were Whigs, sustained by minor office and gamely stifling their mounting distrust of that truly great Christ Church man, W.E. Gladstone. Eventually, Home Rule allowed them to escape into Toryism.

The Christ Church duke (Alden's duke) and his younger Christ Church brother had an intellectual bent. Both were Fellows of the Royal Society. Alden's duke was also a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, as well as presiding over the Linnaean Society, the Royal Literary Fund, and the Royal Institution. Since the Learned Societies had their rooms at Somerset House, the duke's presidencies and fellowships may have owed almost as much to his name as to his scholarship. None of this advances the relationship of Edward Adolphus Seymour to Isaac Alden, but it leaves open the possibility that there was one.¹⁹

There were five generations of Aldens in Chipping Sodbury between Robert (c. 1600–77) and Isaac (c. 1770–1832).²⁰ They were blacksmiths, farriers, farmers. There was a mariner, but butchers predominated. There was also a Dissenting connection. Gloucestershire's oldest surviving church is in Chipping Sodbury. It claims to have documentary evidence for a continuous existence from 1656. Most of the Sodbury Aldens, Isaac's siblings among them, were baptized, buried, and married in local parish churches, but Aldens had owned the land on which the town's Baptist chapel was built in the early eighteenth century, and Robert Alden's grandson William (1667–1747), who had sold the land to the chapel's trustees, was buried in the chapel yard. Isaac was William's great-

The 'butcher' Aldens



grandson, but the other known local Baptist family connections came in Isaac's wake: his brother Thomas's son, Isaac Amos Alden, was buried with his wife in the chapel yard, and four of his brother James's grandchildren were listed in the chapel's register.²¹

Great-grandfather William was a farrier; nephew Isaac Amos was a carrier; brother James and his son Thomas were butchers. Not all Baptists are butchers, and there have been Aldens who have been neither, but there have been Alden Baptist butchers since at least the mid-eighteenth century, and it was as butchers and Baptists that they first became known in Oxford.

In 1889, the *New Road Chapel Monthly Visitor* carried advertisements for three Oxford butchers, Isaac Alden, William H. Alden and Robert R. Alden. William and Robert were brothers, Isaac was their cousin. All were New Road Baptists, grandsons of the founding Isaac. It takes a connoisseur to distinguish between them. All three were 'University and Family Butchers'. All three regularly waited upon families for their orders, and all three were in the Market. Robert R. Alden ('Late Thomas Alden') was at 16, 17 and 18, Market, 'Corner of Third and South Avenues'. He advertised 'Pickled Beef and Ox Tongues in prime condition'. William H. Alden (also 'Late Thomas Alden'), of 1 and 2 Market, offered 'Superior Pork & Ox Tongues in prime condition'. Perhaps they differed only in their Market location, and their use of italics and bold type.

By then the Oxford Aldens had been butchering for at least ninety years. It is not clear when the first Isaac opened his business. He was described as a butcher when he became a freeman, but he was then probably at Chipping Sodbury. He was back in Oxford by 1804, and he had become the tenant of Eastwyke Farm, less than a mile from Oxford's centre, by 1819. At his death he left his business to his widow, the house (on her death) to his eldest son, and upwards of one hundred and seventy pounds to each of the seven younger children.²² It was

enough to set the sons up in business. John (1796–1881), Isaac (1804–81), and Thomas Amos (1807–77) became butchers.

John's branch produced four Baptist generations of Oxford butchers. He had set up on his own before his father's death and for the next hundred years his family's shops spread from Walton Street to Botley and Wheatley, with a farm at Wolvercote, but Oxford Market remained at their core. John's son Isaac (1834–1921) had three sons in the business, Ernest, Sidney and Cyril. Theirs was a busy, practical, retail world. Alfred Roberts, the Grantham Methodist grocer, would have recognised it. In the fourth generation Basil Alden, then the 'son' of what was now Ernest Alden and Son, met his second wife across the Market Avenue: his shop was opposite her brother's greengrocery. They lived over the Botley Road branch of Ernest Alden and Son, loyally decorating it for the King's Silver Jubilee in 1935. Three years later the business failed. The Market shop was taken over by Basil's fourth cousin, the Eastwyke and Wheatley Bridge Aldens, and the fifth Baptist generation of the senior Oxford Alden branch found its future in electrical engineering.²³ It will be seen that this branch produced the best-known Alden, in Ernest's brother Percy. As L.S. Alden, their second cousin once-removed, put it to S.B.P. Mais, 'though butchery doesn't generally attract the erudite, Isaac's family was distinctly cultured'.²⁴

John's younger brother Isaac (1804–81) was the least successful of the family's Oxford butchers. His business failed in 1844, a time of widespread economic disruption. New Road felt that the circumstances of his failure merited faithful and affectionate admonition from his minister, Benjamin Godwin: Isaac was excluded from communion for three months.²⁵ Eight-and-a-half years later Isaac, his wife, two of their three daughters, and their sixteen-year-old son Samuel Isaac arrived in Australia. There Samuel Isaac Alden (1836–1914) moved from Victoria to Queensland and from butchery to coach-building and then the Christian ministry, not as a Baptist but as

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a United Methodist who became a Presbyterian (having married in a Congregational church). He was the first of two Alden ministers, neither of them Baptist.²⁶ The father's career is a reminder of the uncertainties of the retail trade even for careful families in the Victorian age. The son's career is a reminder of the different ecclesiological patterns of Australian Protestantism.

It was Thomas Amos Alden (1807-77), the youngest of the second Oxford generation's three butcher brothers, who founded the longest-lived and most successful of their businesses. He continued his father's business and inherited the Eastwyke connection. Two of his sons, Robert Rhodes and William Hayes, followed him, but it was under the former that the business's comfortable expansion began. Robert Rhodes Alden (1841-1927) was the sort whom obituaries would call 'one of Oxford's foremost tradesmen'. He was a judge at Smithfield, which reflected his national standing in the trade. He added Wheatley Bridge Farm to Eastwyke, and at his funeral thirty of his staff lined the approach to New Road church.²⁷

Five of his eight sons - Leonard Henry, Reginald Thomas, Harold, Stanley, and Arthur - followed him in the trade. Two of these should be noted here: Leonard (1873-1937) and Reginald (1877-1956). Both were active in the Oxford and District Master Butchers Association, Reginald was one of its founders and secretary, Leonard was president. Leonard concentrated on the farming, living at Eastwyke and breeding at Wheatley Bridge, noted for his herd of Aberdeen Angus and following in his father's footsteps as a judge at Smithfield and agricultural shows nationwide. Like his third cousin Ernest he was a Food Distributor in the Great War: in his case Slaughterhouse Agent and Fresh Meat Distributor and Grader of Cattle for the Ministry of Food.

A fellow butcher described Leonard Alden's as 'probably the biggest butchering business under one roof in England'. He died at the peak of his business and civic success, on the verge



Robert Rhodes Alden (1841-1927)

of handing Eastwyke on to the next generation. At his funeral his former minister, Ronald Hobling, allowed himself the sort of reflection which an unmerited end to a successful life encourages, even in Baptist ministers. It was still the age of Mary Webb's novels and Stanley Baldwin's broadcasts, and Hobling saw at once the ending and the handing on of a tradition:

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We see the passing of a type for he had lineage and descent ... generations under the same roof ... farming the same fields, and known and respected in the same city life ... And on that yeoman stock Leonard Alden grafted some new qualities. He did not rise in any pretentious way above it ... he loved his flowers and his cattle, and his fields. He was a yeoman of England.²⁸

The business expanded greatly with the next two generations. By the 1950s Reginald's son Eric took over the shops of another New Road butchering family, the Wiblins. Meanwhile Leonard's third son, Robert (1902-47) had taken charge after his father's death, moving from Wheatley Bridge to Eastwyke, and Leonard's second son, Leonard Stanley (1901-63), left a promising career with Morris Motors to join him. "I'm Leonard Alden", he would say on his visits to village Baptist churches, "... you know the butcher from Oxford, you send me money for the Home Work Fund ... how are you?"²⁹

When Robert died suddenly in Oxford Market on Christmas Eve 1947, Leonard found that he had taken over four nephews as well as the family business. So he 'positioned a cane above the clock at Eastwyke Farm, purely as a symbol of what would lie ahead for those who misbehaved'. Two of the nephews took it down and sensibly broke it.

Thus Eastwyke came into the last stage of its long Alden prime. It had over forty acres of 'what was something like the biggest back garden in Oxford', perfect for Baptist outings and family raft and tree-house building alike, and with a cow bell to summon the boys. Robert's widow did secretarial work for the firm, for years keeping its cow cards in order, with the number of each cow and its medical and breeding details on each card, meticulously and logically recorded.³⁰ Her sons were the sixth and last Baptist generation of Oxford's butchering Aldens.

Change and advance came in the late 1960s. In 1969 a frozen food centre was opened at Eastwyke and in 1977 there

was a dramatic restructuring. By then Rodney (1936–98) the eldest son, was director in charge of the Meat Hall, Peter (b. 1938), the second son, ran Wheatley Bridge Farm, raising the cattle which provided the beef sold at the Eastwyke frozen food centre. David (b. 1940) ran the catering side and Richard (b. 1943), the youngest, was managing director. That April shops were sold in Headington, Botley, and Summertown, together with one of the two remaining in the Market, while the Eastwyke centre was transformed into a supermarket and the catering supplies department was switched to Abingdon, ‘the first time ... that part of R.R. Alden Ltd. has been outside Oxford’s city boundaries’. The developments were persuasively featured in a four-page supplement in the *Oxford Journal*.³¹

Habits were changing. So were directions. Some of them would have raised eyebrows among older-fashioned Nonconformists, even in the 1970s. The surviving Market shop was now for the gourmet in search of ‘cheese, bacon, tea, coffee, herbs and spices’. The new catering depot went all out for restaurants and the public house trade, as well as the old University connection. ‘Publicans who don’t want to rush out to the cash and carry during the afternoon gap between opening hours can ring Aldens ... order their pickles, cheese, pickled onions, scampi and chips, and napkins, which will be delivered the next day ... Alden’s appreciate a publican’s needs.’

That left Eastwyke for the family. The days of small shops dealing with small quantities and relying on their good name had passed. People were cutting down on their meat buying, but Eastwyke offered economies of scale and every convenience. ‘Aldens, where you can park with ease and shop in comfort ... where quality and competitive prices really count ... where caterers get fast and efficient service.’ Alden’s, with ‘an atmosphere rarely known in supermarkets and shops’, ideal for ‘a one-stop shopping visit to buy in bulk or just to get the week’s groceries and accessories’. All sorts of goodies were

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promised. In June 1977 there was to be a Jubilee Food Festival, with demonstrations and samples and a Jubilee Pen for those who spent over five pounds, 'Free Balloons for the Kiddies', and a Wine and Cheese evening, 'Admission Free'. Great store was set by the variety of groceries and the wines and spirits, fine wines as well as medium-priced wines, with a 'few home labels', and 'a self-service area ... providing each bottle with a full explanation of its quality and type'.

It was promising, popular and sophisticated. It was ambitious and necessary. It was not enough. The Eastwyke supermarket failed, and was closed in 1986. Although Wheatley Bridge remained in the family, Eastwyke reverted to University College and a hotel was built on part of the property. Two hundred years after Isaac Alden opened his butcher's shop, his descendants' butchering was once more concentrated in their specialist shop in Oxford Market.

The *Monthly Visitor* advertised a fourth Alden business, Alden & Co. These Aldens were quite as well known locally as the others. They were driven by the same characteristics and were soon to embark on a similar pattern of expansion. They were printers, stationers and booksellers of 35 Cornmarket Street. Their advertisement was more easily and aptly angled to the *Monthly Visitor's* readership than those of their butcher cousins:

The Old-established Shop for
Bible, Hymn & Tune Books
Sunday School Rewards, etc.,
A Good Discount For Cash
Oxford Depot for The Sunday School Union.

This was accurate and to the point but it told only a fraction of the story.

We have already met Alden & Co.'s principal, Edward Cox Alden (1838-1912), first cousin of Isaac (1834-1921), William Hayes and Robert Rhodes Alden (1841-1927), the Market

butchers, and of Samuel Isaac (1836–1914), the Methodist-turned-Presbyterian minister in Queensland and grandson of the founding Oxford Isaac. Edward had succeeded to the business founded by his father Henry Alden (1809–72), Isaac's youngest son. There are still Aldens at its head, although they descend from Isaac not Henry.

Printing and its associated trades offered unusual opportunities to alert Nonconformists. Technical competence, a modicum of craftsmanship, an eye for an opening, a keen political sense, a practical intelligence and self-discipline opened some heady horizons to printers even more than to drapers, grocers, or butchers. So did the stimulus of being on the knife-edge of success, with a networked access to enough capital, the whole linked by the companionship of mutual improvement classes, mechanics' institutes, literary and philosophical societies for those who could aspire to them and – after some false starts – Young Men's Christian Associations. For these mental art men there was the world of encyclopaedias, books, journals, and the press. Publishing jostled with journalism for a go-ahead printer's heart.

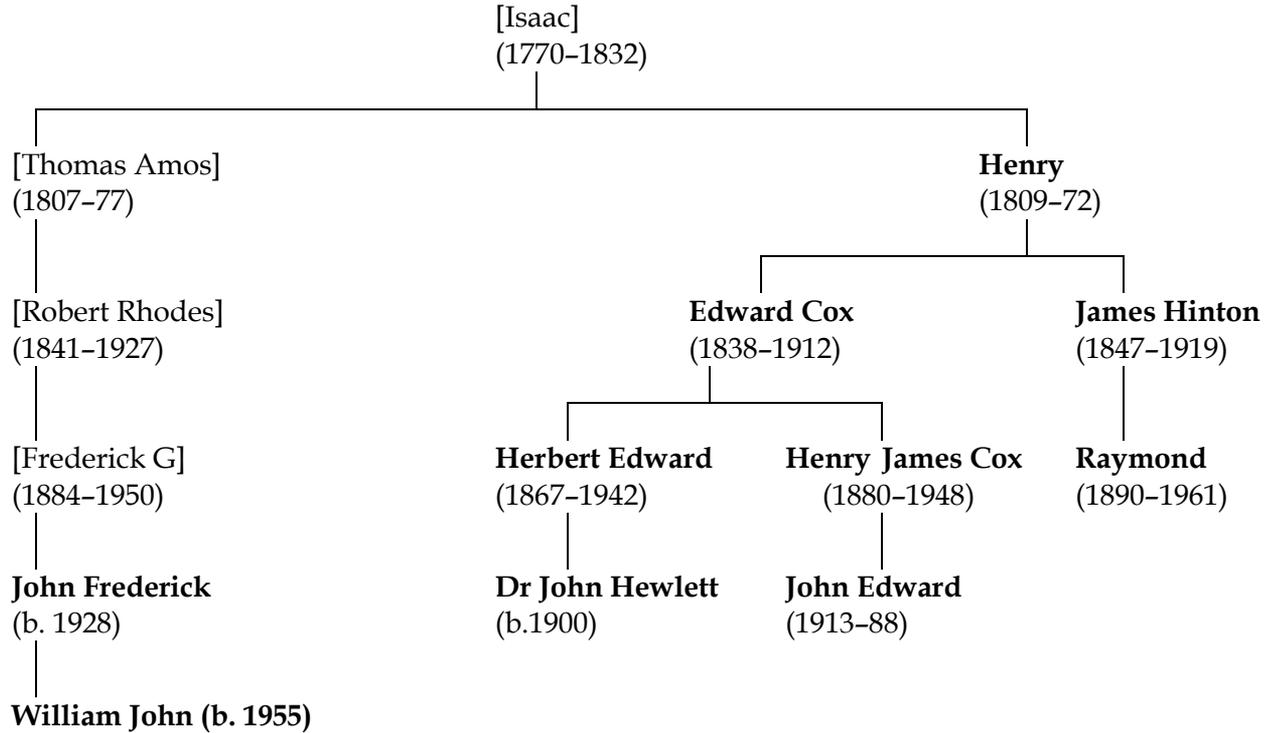
Henry Alden's career demonstrates a sense of all these possibilities, although his business kept its nineteenth-century feet firmly on tradesman's ground. The historian of its early years describes Henry as 'a small and probably typical provincial book-tradesman of his time', whose 'own words about his own work show him to have been mediocre and conventional enough to have intended to be typical'. He targeted 'literate adults of the lower economic classes'; he did not set his sights on university, nobility or gentry.³² There was no sign here of the eleventh Duke of Somerset or his learned societies.

But then Oxford was frustratingly fertile territory for a down-to-earth printer. This celebrated home of lost causes and ecclesiastical conservatism was nonetheless a handsome and growing town, and the University's growth outpaced that of the town. It had a significant professional stratum, a strong



Henry Alden (1809–1872)

The 'printing' Aldens



commercial sector, and an unusually large number of schools. Its trade was jealously controlled by the University, much of it restricted to 'privileged persons', 'sworn to the service of the University'.³³ Within the city limits, business was restricted to freemen. This discriminated against Dissenters, who could not in theory be privileged persons. There were nonetheless notable exceptions to prove the rule, not least at New Road, like the Collingwoods and Davenports, and after the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 these restrictions eased.³⁴

The 1830s were thus a crucible decade for an Oxford printer, and the Aldens were well placed to benefit. Isaac, as has been seen, became a freeman in 1795. His youngest sons Thomas Amos the butcher and Henry the printer became freemen in 1830, the year when they were baptized at New Road. The butcher Aldens presented themselves as 'University and Family Butchers'. The printing and bookselling Aldens kept their distance at this stage from the University. This was wise, given its tradition of long and easy credit, while the national context of rapid mechanization, cheaper paper manufacturing and steadily reducing 'taxes on knowledge' provided ample opportunity outside the University. There was a newly literate, tract-reading, hymn-singing, Sunday School-formed public to be served.

Henry Alden's introduction to printing came through that world. He was apprenticed in 1823, almost certainly to the New Road business of Bartlett and Hinton, whose principals were the son and son-in-law of James Hinton. If this supposition is correct, then a fellow apprentice at Bartlett's was a young Henley Congregationalist, William Byles (1807-91), who was to become a power in the northern press as owner and editor of the *Bradford Observer*.³⁵ Bartlett's fired Byles's ambition, and he went on from them to Unwin's in London, the Congregational printers who later exploded into adventurous publishing. One of Byles's Henley cousins married an Unwin. Such relationships were not fortuitous.

They provided a bright young man from the provinces with a nationwide cousinhood.

The Aldens were brought into it in the next generation when Henry's son Edward Cox Alden married another cousin (once removed) of William Byles's, Esther Beuzeville Hewlett (1837-1916). This was certainly not fortuitous. Esther's extended family, luxuriating in their Huguenot ancestry, was a maze of frequent cousinly intermarriage, cross-country among Baptist and Congregationalists, with contrasting infusions of Evangelical Anglicans and Unitarians. There were distinguished and sometimes startling outliers.³⁶ Its New Road dimension had already been none too happily underlined by the second marriage of Esther's grandmother to William Copley, James Hinton's successor as minister at New Road.³⁷ That marriage, like Copley's pastorate, proved unsatisfactory.

The Alden tradition is that Henry Alden started on his own account in 1832, fortified by his father's legacy. A certificate survives, 'faint, blotted, stained and torn', from May 1833, noting the fact of his printing press, under the terms of the Seditious and Treasonable Societies Act of 1799.³⁸ In December 1834, on the same day and in the same church as his brother Thomas, he married for the first time. His bride, Sarah Shackleford, came from a well-established New Road family of coach-builders.³⁹ Henry's brother Isaac and his sister Rebekah had already married Shacklefords. Sarah died suddenly in childbirth. Henry's second wife was a Londoner whom he met at a Shackleford family wedding. By 1837 he had settled above the shop in Cornmarket Street. He had three apprentices. The marriages, the apprentices, and the address were the marks of a confident tradesman.

For his first dozen years in trade, Henry fired fitfully but hopefully on all fronts. The shop was an eclectic general store. It sold groceries and patent medicines (Blair's Gout and Rheumatic Pills, Dr Baillie's Family Aperient Pills), combs, pincushions, and razors. It had a cloth agency for a Stroud firm. All this was in addition to the stationery, the steel and

quill pens, the sheet music, and the opportunistic purchases of books at cheap prices. Henry Alden was a bargain bookseller, not a specialist.

The printing side was similarly variable. Alden built up what Hugh Williamson has described as 'a substantial printing business for a provincial town'. At its best his ink work 'was equal to that of the leading printers of Oxford and London', his printing 'was handsome enough', his types 'as well designed as any of their time'. Yet Williamson also describes one commission for Henry's pastor, Benjamin Godwin, as apparently 'designed by somebody who had forgotten everything that made printing types graceful, if he ever knew'.⁴⁰ In short, it is hard to discern any consistent business strategy although, with the benefit of hindsight, one might find some suggestive pointers.

Thus in 1837 Alden was involved in launching *The Oxford City and Council Chronicle*, an intrepidly moderate weekly which within three years had outstripped one of its two rivals, *The Oxford Herald*; the other, *The Oxford Journal*, remained well ahead. But Henry Alden was not to be to Oxford what William Byles was to Bradford. His involvement with the *Chronicle* was more to do with its advertising than its printing, let alone its editorial policy, and it steadily dwindled. On the other hand, he printed and was occasionally the publisher of a succession of awkward pamphlets: an attack on primogeniture, critical exposés of the misuse of college statutes at Trinity and Magdalen, protests against Puseyism (two of them preached by Benjamin Godwin). It was hard not to trespass on University matters. Then all was rudely halted by financial disaster.

In May 1844 Henry Alden's bankruptcy was announced. In June his retail stock, though not his printing equipment or his personal effects, was auctioned. Henry's butcher brother Isaac fell at the same time. In the words of the funeral sermon which William Allen preached nearly thirty years later, 'seduced by speculative tendencies of the day and the facilities of obtaining fictitious capital he, in common with many others, over traded,

and as a consequence was obliged to succumb to a commercial crisis'. That crisis lasted six months. In September 1844 Henry was discharged from bankruptcy. Friends and family rallied round. There was no discipline from New Road. He resumed business.

And his business prospered, especially when it came to publishing periodicals: *Alden's Illustrated Family Miscellany and Oxford Monthly Advertiser* (1854–66), or an annual which lasted from 1857 to the 1920s, *Alden's Illustrated Family Almanack*. There was no doubting their tone. In the words of a later Alden, 'when the established church, the government, slavery in America, and the medical neglect of the British troops in the Crimea no longer offended his conscience, he would turn to some local topic like that of the officious Oxford constable who ordered one of the newly invented perambulators off the pavement because it was a wheeled vehicle'.⁴¹

The last word, however, should be with William Allen, Henry Alden's last pastor. Allen spoke with the engaging candour of a man whose own health was under steady attack about an Alden whom none could accuse of muscular Christianity:

Few men have so sparingly partaken of the pleasures of the appetite and physical enjoyment: indeed, it is my belief that a more liberal indulgence in the comforts of life would have led to augmented energy and spirit in his commercial pursuits. Physical power is intimately connected with moral force, and feebleness in the animal life is frequently the cause of lassitude in daily duty. All this was intensified in the case of our friend by specific weakness of the digestive organs, producing in him as in others similarly distressed, some fretfulness of temper and timidity of enterprise.⁴²

So much for the pills which Henry had once advertised as 'the All-Sufficient Medicine for Mankind'.⁴³

The Aldens of New Road: A Baptist Continuity

The first and the third of Henry Alden's four sons became printers. The third, James Hinton Alden (1847-1919), left Oxford for Stow-on-the-Wold, which had its own bustling Baptist life. He set up there as a printer and stationer and married relatively late: his son, Raymond Alden (1890-1961), would reverse his footsteps. The eldest was Edward Cox Alden. It was Edward who launched *Alden's Oxford Guide* in 1874, which remained an Oxford classic for over a century, and who turned his business into a limited liability company in 1891, with himself as managing director. He modernised the printing machinery, turned his printing department into the Bocardo Press (the Cornmarket premises were on the site of the Bocardo prison), and wrote and printed, although the Baptist Union co-published it, *The Old Church at New Road*. He also turned steadily to publishing, with a University clientele in view. In 1894 he became the owner, printer and publisher of the undergraduate weekly, *The Isis*. Hilaire Belloc's *Bad Child's Book of Beasts* followed in 1896.⁴⁴

That this was a more assured and ambitious world than ever Henry's had been was confirmed by the careers of Edward's two sons. The elder, Herbert Alden (1867-1942), became managing director of Simpkin Marshall, the London publishers and book wholesalers, as well as proprietor of the Oxford booksellers, Slatter and Rose. Herbert's son, John Hewlett Alden (b. 1900), better known for his national reputation as an organist, briefly succeeded Herbert as chairman of Slatter's in the 1940s.⁴⁵ The younger, Henry James Cox Alden (1880-1948), 'known by his initials in business', succeeded his father at the family press, after nine years in Underhill's and Gillett's Banks in Oxford and Chipping Norton and eight with Alden & Co. in Cornmarket Street. It was H.J.C. Alden who transferred the printing department to Binsey Lane in 1926 where it became The Alden Press Ltd. Like his second cousin Leonard H. Alden, H.J.C. was a business activist: founding secretary of the Oxford and District Master Printers Association, and later its president; president too of Oxford's

Chamber of Trade and its Advertising Club; chairman of its Arts and Crafts Society. And if Leonard Alden's obituarists marked his progress from tradesman to businessman, so H.J.C. Alden's described him as 'one of Oxford's most prominent business men'.⁴⁶

Neither of his sons succeeded him as managing director, though John Edward (b. 1913) continued in the book trade as head of Blackwell's technical department. Instead the post went to Henry's cousin Raymond, whom he brought in from Stow-on-the-Wold in 1919 to head the printing side. It was Raymond who built up a clientele enthusiastic for quality printing, among them J.W. Robertson Scott's *The Countryman*, and it was Raymond who oversaw Alden's 'real entry into the world of book printing' when Herbert Alden of Simpkin Marshall introduced the firm to Wren Howard of Jonathan Cape. Howard wanted a printer 'with an eye for typography'. Alden's impressed him and for over twenty years The Alden Press was Cape's printer of choice, their partnership cemented by gratifying sales of the 1935 edition of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.⁴⁷

Raymond Alden was the last of Henry's descendants to head the business. His successor, John Frederick Alden (b. 1928), a director from 1955 and joint managing director from 1960, was the great-grandson of Henry's closest brother Thomas Amos. Under his direction there developed the sort of change that R.R. Alden & Co. would experience at Eastwyke and Abingdon. In 1960 he bought out the Cape shareholding and concentrated on printing medical and scientific books and journals rather than biography or fiction. In 1965 he moved the Press from Binsey Lane to Osney Mead, amalgamated it with A.R. Mowbray's printing department (in which he had worked as a trainee) to form Alden and Mowbray Ltd. and, at a time of trade changes fully as significant as any faced by Henry in the 1830s, he expanded beyond Oxford. Mowbray's was bought out. The business was reconstructed. The subsidiaries in London, Banbury and Northampton became The Alden

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Printing Group Ltd., the Osney Mead operation became once more the Alden Press Ltd., and in 1975 the purchase of a Northampton firm, E.W.C. Wilkins Ltd., led to another subsidiary, The Alden Press (London and Northampton) Ltd., 'one of Britain's foremost typesetters of scientific journals'.⁴⁸

In 1990 William John Alden (b. 1955) of the fifth Alden printing generation, succeeded his father as managing director. Five years later there was a further restructuring. It reflected the revolution in electronic publishing. What was now the Alden Group Ltd. emerged with six divisions. Two (Alden Multimedia and Alden Electronic Products) were in Northampton, and four (the Alden Press, Alden Colour, Alden Bookset, and Alden Translations) were in Osney Mead. Alden's had not been a Baptist-run firm since H.J.C. Alden's death in 1948, and the acquisition of Mowbray's and the Church Army Press brought a strong Church connection, which some might still regard as particularly appropriate for an Oxford firm. But if Aldens now printed for the Church Commissioners, they also continued to print for the Baptist Union.⁴⁹

If the Aldens were most easily pigeon-holed as butchers and printers, it goes almost without saying that there were other Alden trades. Among the actively Baptist Aldens, Frederick Heward Alden (b. 1841), printer Henry's second son, was a grocer. So was Edward Spencer Alden (1880-1951), butcher Robert Rhodes's fourth son. Edward Spencer's son Maurice (b. 1917) was a bank manager and his younger brother, William James Alden, Robert Rhodes's fifth son, worked in Customs and Excise. Thus did Baptist diaconates replenish their stock from the practical world of shop counters, drawing-boards, work-benches and desks. As has been noted, H.J.C. Alden brought banking experience to the printing firm and Leonard S. Alden was drafted into butchery from Morris Motors: his apprenticeship had been as a heating engineer. Leonard's uncle, Frederick George Alden (1884-1950), whose desertion of New Road for (fairly low) Anglicanism in the

1920s greatly shocked Robert Rhodes Alden (who would rather his son confess himself an agnostic than an Anglican), set up a firm of heating and lighting engineers in New Road, close to the chapel which he had left.⁵⁰ From the senior Alden branch's fifth generation, Eric Arthur Alden too became an electrical engineer, persuaded to take that direction rather than farming by Ralph Bodey who was his physics master at City of Oxford High School as well as his Sunday School teacher at New Road.⁵¹ This Alden became a radiation research engineer in Malmesbury (designing a radiation monitor for Harwell) before returning to Oxford as chief electrical engineer for British Leyland Cars. As a matter of course he took charge of the loudspeaker systems installed at Eastwyke for New Road's fêtes, and he made the amplifier for New Road's deaf aid system, the first in any Oxford church (1962).⁵² His elder half-brother, John Alden (1919-62), as Oxford Council's chief surveyor, was responsible for the city's relief and ring roads.

Henry Alden's fourth and youngest son, Ebenezer Wenham (1849-1913), took a different path. He became a surgeon, much admired for his work in the slums of St Ebbe's. S.B.P. Mais recalled the story that among his funeral tributes was a wreath 'to dear Dr Alden who attended me for thirty years and from whom I have never had a bill'. In February 1914 he was commemorated in the Radcliffe Infirmary's outpatients' department by a drinking fountain, 'defrayed by a number of his patients and friends, who desired to perpetuate the memory of a life singularly rich in the service of suffering humanity'. Ebenezer's son, John Wenham Alden (1890-1953), followed him into medicine, although like his engineering cousin F.G. Alden, he left New Road for Anglicanism in the 1920s.⁵³

Inevitably, there have been many teaching Aldens. This chapter opened with a letter from Ebenezer Alden's grandson, Robin Wenham Alden, formerly housemaster at Rugby. Reference has also already been made to Edward Cox Alden's grandson, John Hewlett Alden, briefly chairman of Slatter's,

who harnessed the Alden passion for music (he was organist at St Martin-in-the-Fields 1935–8) by directing it at Harrow, Eastbourne, Dartmouth, and Bradfield.⁵⁴ But perhaps the most representative teaching Alden was Winifred (1888–1972), on the staff of Oxford Central Girls' School from 1912 (her subjects were history and singing) and its headmistress from 1943 to 1949, 'well-known to generations of schoolgirls and as an active figure in the life of the city'.⁵⁵

Aldens tended to be 'active figures', as if taking to heart William Allen's gentle strictures at Henry's funeral. There were sportsmen and musicians, exemplary in voluntary service and dutifully prominent in local politics. New Road's webs of connection guided them in their careers, prompted their marriages and encouraged their recreations. To be wholesome, life must be whole. It is easy to forget the almost heady combination of enjoyment, security and opportunity which chapel life fostered. If for many that life was all-sufficient it was not necessarily because chapel boundaries were narrow. On the contrary, there was a great deal to suffice.

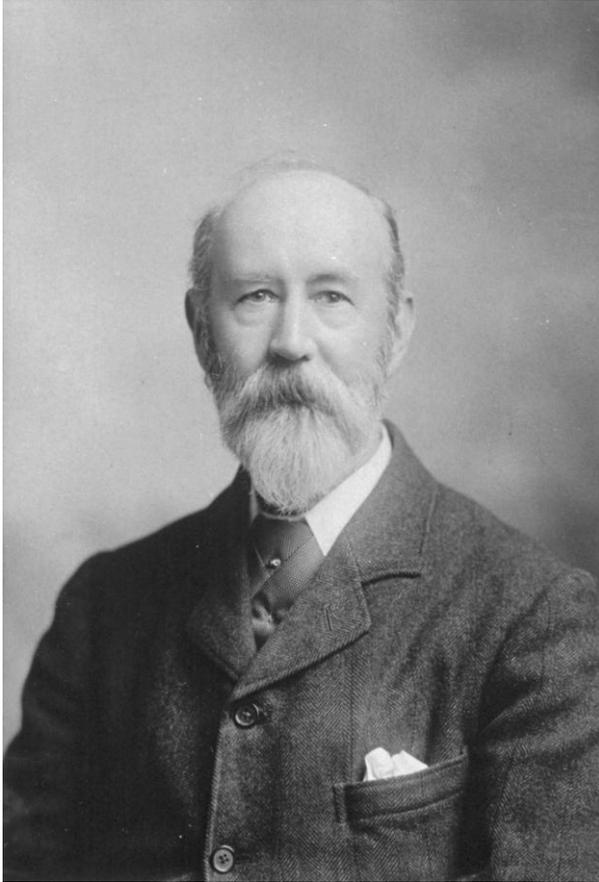
Thus if R.T. Alden (1877–1956) was 'one of the best-known men in the city', it was because he was as much of a sportsman as a butcher. As a boy he played cricket on Thursday afternoons outside the Market's entrance, the Carfax policeman willing. He was a swimmer, a rowing man and a tennis player, who never missed a University rugby match and was regularly at Twickenham and Queen's, but his abiding passion was bowls. He was president not just of Oxford but also of the English Bowling Association, 'the greatest honour of all in the bowling world', and representatives of ten bowling clubs were at New Road for his funeral.⁵⁶

If music took precedence over sport in Alden lives, it was because music made worship pleasurable. There were organs to be played, choirs to be joined, orchestras to be led, tunes to be set, hymns to be written, an imaginative witness to be made in the service of song. The senior and junior branches seem to have been particularly musical. Ernest Arthur Alden was both

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violinist and organist, his son Basil Arthur was also a violinist, and his son Eric Arthur was violinist, clarinettist and saxophonist, singing as a boy in the choir of Oxford City Church (and made first choir boy because he could reach top 'C') and later playing in orchestras and bands both classical and dance in Oxford, Abingdon, Chippenham and Malmesbury. In 1976 his wife gave Botley Baptist church its twin manual organ.⁵⁷

These had been butcher Aldens. The first of the printing Aldens, Henry, sold sheet music in his shop, held enjoyable musical evenings in the family quarters over the shop and on Sundays gave out the hymns at New Road: an Australian long remembered his sweet voice.⁵⁸ Henry's sons Edward Cox and Frederick Heward continued as their father had begun. Frederick became New Road's organist and his hymn tunes were loyally sung. Indeed, the tune set to 'It passeth knowledge' had 'quite superseded in our worship the tune given in Mr Sankey's book'.⁵⁹ Edward was a singer, and as a young boy he sang treble with the singers in the organ gallery: New Road in his youth had 'singers' not a choir, he recalled firmly, and 'singing meeting' not choir practice.⁶⁰ Whatever it called itself, he was a lifelong member of New Road's choir, forming the chapel's Choral Society in the 1860s, and arranging a performance of the *Messiah* in the old Town Hall in aid of Lancashire cotton distress. It was said that for over fifty years he never missed an Oxford performance of the *Messiah*. Certainly, it had pride of place in the Oxford Choral Society of which he was a founder member, and the Oxford Free Church Choir Union, of which he became vice-president. On the Sunday after his death there was a memorial service at New Road. The organ and pulpit were draped in black, the congregation included 'the leading Nonconformists in the city'. They sang a hymn which he had written twenty-one



Edward Cox Alden (1838–1912)

years earlier, 'In the Spirit on the Lord's Day'. Its praise was in bright June contrast to the platform black:

O'er the earth is breaking
This the day of days;
Come my soul, awaking
Sing thy Lord's high praise.⁶¹

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Edward Cox Alden was a devoted if conventional versifier. In January 1901 he greeted Queen Victoria's death with a sonnet, 'The Afterglow'. It ended thus:

And in an age-long afterglow of glory
Our Empire's sons shall read the splendid story
Of England's greatest, best and noblest Queen.⁶²

Those were the sentiments of a man in his nation's political mainstream. His generation was instinctively political. However conservative their prejudices, their voting habits remained Liberal, if not Radical. That Nonconformists should swim in the mainstream was a Victorian miracle. It was a prime success story. That they might be submerged was a prime danger. E.C. Alden's generation swam dangerously but strongly. They played their part in public life.

First they flexed their muscles through the voluntary sector, learning the art of executive responsibility in that major chapel commonwealth, the Sunday School. E.C. Alden promoted New Road's Young Men's Society. He sat on the Oxford Sunday School Union's first committee. His educational and business impulses then united: he was one of the founders of the Oxford School of Science and Art, a prime local stage in the development of technical education. His son H.J.C. Alden continued and extended these interests. Eighty years after its formation he was president of Oxford's Sunday School Union; he was on the committee of Oxford's YMCA; he was a school governor, a trustee of the Municipal Charities, and a JP. In such a world one commitment led inexorably to another. Thus he found himself on the Juvenile Court Panel, the Licensing Bench, the Probation Committee and the Judicial Authority for Mental Defectives. That last duty was reflected in his membership of the Berkshire Mental Hospitals Management Committee. It follows from all this that he was a Rotarian: president of Oxford Rotary in 1929, and at the time of his death one of four surviving founding members. They were



H.J.C. Alden (1880-1948)

all at his funeral - the Sons of Temperance, the YMCA, the probation officers, the Chief Constable, the Chamber of Trade, Rotary, and the Council of Social Service, whose representative, the Revd H.R. Moxley of Summertown Congregational Church, was one of the founders of Oxfam. The voluntary sector was thus more a world than a sector.⁶³

H.J.C. Alden was a founder of Oxford Rotary. In the next generation Dorothy Alden, that 'well-organised lady, smart of mind and smart of dress' the widow of his second cousin once-removed, Rodney Robert Alden, was secretary and later president of Oxford Inner Wheel.⁶⁴



Leonard Alden (1873–1937)

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This leaves municipal politics, then far more responsibly rewarding than it has since become. The butcher Aldens tended to be the municipal Aldens. H.J.C. Alden was on Headington Urban District Council at the time of its absorption into Oxford (1927–8), but the prominent municipal Aldens were his second cousins Leonard Henry and Reginald Thomas.

Reginald Thomas Alden (1877–1956) was on Oxford City Council from 1921 to 1952; he was an alderman from 1937. He served on the Finance Committee, he chaired the Watch Committee, but he declined to be nominated for either the shrievalty or the mayoralty.⁶⁵ It was his elder brother Leonard (1873–1937) who was the Alden mayor.

Leonard was not a recreational Alden. ‘At times he could be tempted and enticed to some form of amusement, but it was always a wonder to his friends if he sat the thing through.’ For him ‘recreation was a change of work’.⁶⁶ He had prepared for office with ten years on South Hinksey Parish Council (1898–1908). He was an Oxford city councillor from 1919 to 1930, sitting as a Liberal (and chairing Oxford’s Liberal Association in 1935). He became an alderman in the year of his mayoralty.⁶⁷ He was clearly that safest pair of hands, a natural born chairman. He had chaired South Hinksey’s parish council and now he chaired the Farm Committee, the Highways, Sewers and Lighting Committee (‘one of the most onerous and exacting posts’), and he vice-chaired the Watch Committee. ‘One of the thorns in his flesh ... was the education estimate. It was a form of extravagance about which it was a delight to wrangle with him ... it was not simply the veneer of a higher culture; it was ... a wider interest in affairs ... He knew the life of the city though and through.’

To be mayor in Coronation Year was the peak of civic honour. Fond of recalling when his earnings had been a mere thirty shillings a week, Leonard Alden refused now to use civic funds for his mayoral entertaining. Nonetheless, he was at the Coronation. He was presented to the new King at a levee. His mayoral Christmas card was a sketch of Eastwyke Farm, most

yeomanly vernacular of dignified residences, inscribed with a pardonable degree of licence as 'The Ancestral Home of the Alden Family in Oxford 1790-1936', and bearing the family crest of a bull prancing on the waves, to the motto 'Fortis est Veritas' ('The truth is strong').⁶⁸ As the Recorder of Oxford put it, Leonard Alden 'had every virtue a Mayor of Oxford should have'.

But it turned to ashes. Leonard's wife Emily died in late June 1937. She had long been ill, so his sister Winifred had stood in as mayoress. Then, on 21 July, he entertained the Mayor and Corporation of Luton. Together they had visited the Morris Motor Works. There had been bowls, followed by tea and a trip on the Thames. Then Leonard had driven from Eastwyke with two of his daughters to Robert's farm at Wheatley Bridge. He would wind down by inspecting some lambs.

A narrow road separated Wheatley Bridge Farmhouse from its yard. Leonard crossed it, then turned back on impulse. He was knocked down by a car driven by young Henderson of Studley Priory.⁶⁹ He died just before midnight in the Radcliffe Infirmary.

The last time an Oxford mayor had died in office had been in 1905. The headlines were to the point: 'Oxford's Great Loss' (*Oxford Monthly*), 'A City Bereaved' (*The Oxford Times*). The press coverage was extensive: 'Oxford was a City of mourning on Monday afternoon, when the Mayor ... passed through the streets for the last time'. There were crowds eight or nine deep at Carfax as the Carfax bell, 'which has signalled the passing of Oxford's Mayor for centuries', tolled. New Road was packed and at Wolvercote cemetery a thousand had gathered ahead of the cortège. Lord Nuffield stood among them but most 'were humble folks and many had come in from the country districts to say farewell to one whom they knew not as a City father but as a farmer and a friend'.

It was certainly a representative occasion. Six policemen (two inspectors, two sergeants, two constables) were

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pallbearers. At the cemetery the St John Ambulance Brigade provided a guard of honour and the Volunteer Fire Brigade and the Special Constabulary lined the path. At New Road eighty Alden employees had marched 'in a body to the Church', and the civic procession from the Town Hall had been led by the High Steward (the Duke of Marlborough), the High Sheriff (F.F. Cripps), the Mayors of Woodstock, Banbury, Cambridge, Luton, Wallingford and Abingdon, the Deputy Mayor of Chipping Norton, the Vice-Chancellor and the Senior Proctor. Lords Macclesfield, Roche and Saye and Sele were in the church. So was young Mr Henderson of Studley Priory. He had been exonerated from all blame.

There has been one parliamentary Alden. Sir Percy Alden (1865–1944), Liberal MP for Tottenham 1906–18, and Labour MP for Tottenham South, 1923–24. Percy Alden was the family's Renaissance man. His was the senior branch of the butcher Aldens. He was the great-grandson of the founding Isaac, second cousin, therefore of Aldermen Leonard and Reginald Alden, and of H.J.C. Alden. His marriage to the formidable Margaret Pearse (1868–1958), and that of his closest sibling Kate to his closest college contemporary, Will Reason (1864–1926), at once enlarged and confirmed the cousinhood. Percy had a good head for business. He was one of nature's trustees, the sort who 'tended to take over the administration of almost every movement with which he became connected'.⁷⁰ He possessed, said Will Reason, 'the powers of quickly grasping and applying other men's results', surely the supreme business gift.⁷¹ He was a born teacher (his knighthood was primarily for services to education), a compulsive social worker and a natural politician. Confessionally he began as a Baptist (he was baptized at New Road a month before his eleventh birthday, 3 May 1876, on the same day as his brother Ernest and his sisters Evelyn and Kate). On the roll of Congregational ministers from 1893–1901, he was thereafter most closely associated with the Quakers, although after his death a note was found, 'I die a reverent agnostic'.⁷² He was

both a muscular and a musical Alden. For him oratorio was transmuted to opera and he listed golf and yachting in his College Register. He was a communicator, lecturer, author, pamphleteer, and editor. He was also a strategist. He was, in short, that useful citizen, a constructive radical. And he united Oxford town (born and bred in Walton Street) with Oxford gown (Balliol 1884–1888 and Mansfield 1888–1890).

The agent in this latter day pilgrim's progress was 'a citizen to whose kindly wisdom and practical sympathy municipal life in Oxford owes more than it is easy to calculate', T.H. Green of Balliol.⁷³ Apparently the fifteen-year-old Alden was sent to Green's house on Oxford Local Examinations business: 'What a kind friend Green was to every young man who showed that he had a craving for something higher and better than the satisfaction of a few selfish desires!' Thus Alden met Green's friend Arnold Toynbee and eventually went to Green's college, Balliol.⁷⁴

Alden's was not an academically distinguished Oxford career. Will Reason was a London and Oxford first but Percy Alden mustered a third in Classical Mods and a third in Lit. Hum.⁷⁵ He was nonetheless a Balliol pioneer, since he wished to train for the Baptist ministry but to do so at that new star in the English Dissenting firmament, the Congregational Mansfield College. Mansfield debated and acquiesced. In the event Alden neither became a Baptist minister nor completed his Mansfield course. The reason was Mansfield House, which opened in Canning Town in May 1890 'to provide the conditions for a good life, economically, socially, aesthetically, intellectually, and spiritually, for all groups in society'.⁷⁶

Mansfield House was not a Christian *mission* to East London's docklands and marshlands; it was a Christian *settlement*, making a 'stand for the unity of society', on the lines of Toynbee Hall.⁷⁷ Toynbee and Green were its inspiration. Green's words stood above the settlement's entrance, his portrait hung in the warden's office. Alden was warden for its first ten years.

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He was indefatigable. Mansfield House took strong shape physically, socially and educationally in his time. He determined its future direction. Its initiatives ranged from Frank Tillyard's Poor Man's Lawyer to a dossers' lodging house. There were lectures, classes, reading circles, children's holidays, and picture lending schemes. There was a hymn-book which Alden compiled, full of social emphasis and which an admirer claimed influenced Percy Dearmer when he came to compile *Songs of Praise*.⁷⁸ The place 'stood for healthy houses, for education, for humane administration of the law, for a thorough and honest municipal policy generally'.⁷⁹ That was Will Reason's assessment. Alden was an unabashed activist. He joined the Fabian Society, supported Keir Hardie's candidature for West Ham, and was himself elected to West Ham's council; he became deputy mayor in 1898.⁸⁰ And he met his wife.

Margaret Pearse was the daughter of Congregational missionaries to Madagascar.⁸¹ Her formative years had been spent there. Her father had opened a dispensary at the mission, When she encountered a man under a mud wall, naked, putrid, and to all intents dying, her father built a shelter over him, cleaned him, tended him for months, and prayed for him. He recovered. Was that attributable to the power of prayer or the treatment? That atmosphere of common-sense medicine was reinforced by an uncommon sense of position. Before leaving for school in England Margaret was taken to meet Queen Ranavalona II; her abiding memory was of an awesomely tall, large, and dark woman, who produced a tin of Peek Frean biscuits from a corner cupboard.

School was Walthamstow Hall, founded for missionaries' daughters of the London Missionary Society but increasingly used by the Baptist Missionary Society and recently transplanted to Sevenoaks. There the girls' freedom to roam in Knole Park suggested what might be available to all.

Missionary families often married into other missionary families, giving rise to missionary dynasties. Margaret Pearse

had a Congregational minister brother (Mansfield trained) and a doctor brother. She also had a generous doctor uncle. One sister married a medical missionary in Madagascar and another married a medical missionary in China.⁸² One of Margaret's sisters apparently broke the mould; she married a miller in the Thames Valley. But her miller, William Soundy, had both missionary and Alden connections, for he was a kinsman of Mrs E.C. Alden and Mrs F.H. Alden.

Margaret Pearse's future lay neither in Madagascar nor North China, but it did lie in medicine. She was, as a protégée of Sophia Jex-Blake, one of Edinburgh's early women medical graduates and MD Berne. Her first practice was in Canning Town. There she was the driving force behind a new hospital for women and children and she was medical adviser to the Women's Settlement, informally linked to Mansfield House. Thus she met, and in 1899 married, Percy Alden.

The radicalism of Percy Alden, Will Reason and Margaret Pearse was palpable. Will Reason, Kate Alden's husband, was a thoroughgoing Christian Socialist. He was on the council of the Christian Social League while at Mansfield House, secretary of the Christian Socialist Fellowship a decade later, and corresponding secretary of the Christian Social Crusade (a forerunner and constituent of COPEC) in his last years.

Reason remained a Congregational minister in good standing, indeed he was the first secretary of the Congregational Union Social Service Committee. He 'knew the destiny of human life to be in the Kingdom of God'.⁸³ Alden, by contrast, slipped from the roll of ministers when he ceased to be Warden of Mansfield House. He had by then decided on a political career and with that in mind shortly after his marriage he took a house in Woburn Square. Later he moved to Bloomsbury Square with a suburban retreat in Loughton followed by The Outlook, Woodford Green. He became editor of *The Echo*, and he increasingly involved himself in Quaker affairs without, it seems, formally joining Friends. From 1903 to 1911 he was organizing secretary of the Friends Social Union

and when Arnold Rowntree became York's MP in 1910 he clearly regarded Percy Alden as one of a group of like-minded Quaker parliamentarians busily occupied in practical social politics.⁸⁴

Alden never achieved office but he was an effective backbencher. Outside Westminster he wrote on the unemployed, housing and social structure (and on *Hungary of Today*). He lectured in the States and the Commonwealth. He looked into factory conditions in Japan. His executive interests ranged from the British Institute of Social Service to the Council for the Study of International Relations and the Board of Sulgrave Manor. He became Chairman of the Save the Children Fund. A later generation would see in him the prototype think-tanker, quangocrat, and networker. He was, for example, a member of the radical Rainbow Circle. Two of his fellow members might be noted: the Mansfield Fabian, J.H. Harley (1865-1947), who like him left the Congregational ministry (but not Congregationalism) for politics and journalism, and became President of the National Union of Journalists, and an old radical parliamentary warhorse, Sir William Pollard Byles (1839-1917) son of Byles of the *Bradford Observer* and therefore a distant family connection.⁸⁵

There were few more consistent British exponents of the social gospel: 'we are not a collection of individuals, or atoms, or units, we are all members of one living organism, every member with its functions to discharge, the happiness of every member necessary to the whole'.⁸⁶ The executive realism with which Alden went about this task was more than replicated by his wife. Margaret Alden did not allow motherhood to edge out medicine. She worked with Belgian refugees in the Great War, for infant welfare clinics in East London and in research for Glaxo - she wrote Glaxo's first 'baby book', *Before Baby Comes*.

Yet, as a daughter reflected, 'it was not always easy to be the child of such a dedicated woman'. There was the occasion when the Christmas cake to outshine all Christmas cakes

appeared on the dining-room sideboard. Margaret Alden was in no doubt as to what should be done: "Wouldn't it be lovely if we took the cake to the children in the hospital"...That, of course, is what happened - however fiercely rebellion burned in one's breast'.⁸⁷

It was a household in which comfort marched with high-minded upper-middle-class austerity, a Quaker school for the four daughters (it vexed Margaret Alden that she had no sons), presents of chocolates from the Cadbury's and Rowntrees and freshly made lemonade for afternoon tea, a summer month by the sea, large gardens, literary friends, order, security, a Rover motor car, but no luxury and a mother with over-firm ideas about what her daughters should wear to school and why they should not be afraid of the dark: "Don't be foolish, darling. There's nothing to be afraid of, you know Mother is downstairs". 'This was little comfort when the dressing gown on the door looked like a burglar!'⁸⁸

Margaret Alden died in 1958, her ninety-first year, her Bible and the latest issue of the *British Medical Journal* by her bedside. Percy Alden had died fourteen years earlier, hit by masonry during an air raid in June 1944. That is why he is commemorated in the college chapel among the members of Mansfield who lost their lives in the two World Wars.

Will Reason's account of his brother-in-law's formation was bracing: 'The forces that moulded his early years were of the robust and progressive kind. The family tradition was strongly Free Church and Liberal, not merely in sentiment, but in action also'. He described how, 'when quite a lad', Percy superintended 'a rough-and-tumble Sunday-school into shape', and added that he 'was accustomed to engage in mission work with a vigour and frankness that brought his breadth of thought into collision with the narrower views of some of his co-workers'.⁸⁹ Thus, in 1887, while still a Balliol undergraduate, Percy superintended the hundred and fifty scholars and twelve teachers of Osney's Baptist Sunday School; his brother Ernest was Sunday School superintendent at Wolvercote, their

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father's first cousin Robert Rhodes Alden was superintendent at Hinksey and another cousin, Frederick Heward Alden, was superintendent at New Road's own school.⁹⁰ That quartet of Alden superintendencies is representative, it is not exceptional.

Percy Alden was a Baptist for less than a third of his life. His Congregationalism was largely a matter of where he happened to be in the 1890s. It reflected an intensifying of associations that had always been close to hand, helped by a congenial intellectual climate. It involved no change of churchmanship. His Quakerism was the sort which attracted many Congregationalists of his generation, some ministers among them. Whatever the label of the moment, Alden was an instinctive Nonconformist of the sort predicated by that essentially (and surprisingly recent) parliamentary concept, a loyal opposition. In all these respects he was a good Alden and a representative son of New Road, trained to accept, exercise, and voice responsibility.

New Road's history has been a long but sharply punctuated continuity: a promiscuous, indeed vulnerable, mix of Independents and Presbyterians with an ultimately decisive Baptist thread. Its Baptistness was clarified in 1780 by the church's re-formation. Even so, as an open communion, 'Protestant Catholic Church of Christ', New Road was arguably Oxford's main Congregational as well as its main Baptist Church and the relatively amicable secession of 1830 to form the stately Congregational George Street and the subsequent opening of Congregational causes at Summertown and Cowley Road, even the audacious opening of Mansfield College, did little to change the situation. A pastorate at George Street between 1830 and 1880 of the quality of James Hinton's or James Dann's would have altered the pattern of Oxford's Free Church development. That did not happen. New Road's remarkable numerical growth from 1882 was rooted in a century of already confident life.

Within seven years of the church's re-formation a major period of cumulative social and familial consolidation had set

in with James Hinton. That was not, of course, his prime intention but it was both the accompaniment and the consequence of his pastorate. The first Aldens appeared not long after his settlement. Martha Alden (as yet Curtis) was baptized on 24 April 1791 and Isaac Alden, shortly to become her husband, was baptized on 30 April 1793.⁹¹ Their minister, James Hinton, and most of his nineteenth-century successors – William Copley, William Alden, John Pyer Barnett, James Dann – were to be connected by marriage to New Road families. Throughout the nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth century New Road was a markedly family church, whatever its attractions as a preaching centre for the lively transients of a famous university city and a growing commercial hub. Its families married and moved to and from churches in Leamington, Cheltenham, Birmingham, Coventry, Bristol, as well as Bicester, Banbury, Chipping Norton, or Stow-on-the-Wold, or Abingdon, Wallingford, and Henley, or the south and south-east. Baptists were not a Connexion as Methodists understood the word but neither were they isolated units. They knew each other. New Road's Bartletts, Shackelfords, Steanes, Underhills, Davenportes, Ovenells, Hewletts, Collingwoods, Coopers, Gardiners, Wiblyns, Lasletts, now barely names but all resonant in their day, could be placed and connected without too much ingenuity and the Aldens could be threaded into all of them. They could also be linked to George Street's families, for that church provided an occasional Cave Adullam for disaffected Baptists. Thus Percy Alden's parents and grandparents, as well as the butcher Thomas Aldens and the printing Henry Aldens, all of them alarmed by Edward Bryan's ministry, were members at George Street in the 1850s.⁹²

New Road was at once stable and mobile and, as the complexity of its organization grew, notably encouraged at the century's beginning and end by those two outstanding ministers, James Hinton and James Dann, so its members were activated into organizing it as deacons, lay preachers, and

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Sunday School teachers, and as the officers of countless auxiliary societies.

There were Alden deacons at New Road in almost unbroken succession from 1813, when founding Isaac was 'Ordained Deacon', to 1972 when his great-granddaughter Winifred died. In 1885 five of New Road's ten deacons were Aldens, and Edward Cox Alden listed with understandable pride thirty-three Aldens, all of them Isaac's grandchildren and grandchildren-in-law and great-grandchildren, all of them members in good standing, in New Road's Church Register. They were encouragingly on the young side, still to set up on their own, amply filling a pew for each household: E.C. Alden accounted for nine Abbey Road Aldens; Robert Rhodes Alden for eight at Eastwyke Farm; Isaac Alden for five in Walton Street; and there were several more still to be baptized. Of course changes were afoot, Isaac's son Ernest had already set up on his own; Herbert, E.C. Alden's eldest son, though still a member, had moved to North London; and shortly before Christmas 1885 Constance Alden, who lived comfortably with two of her sisters on Banbury Road, was marked 'Joined Est.[ablished] Ch[urch]'.⁹³

That was no doubt suggestive, but it was not particularly indicative of any trend: thirty years later New Road's membership roll listed twenty-six Aldens, among them Constance's sister Annie Mary (d. 1920), still of Banbury Road, although she had moved further out, 'The last of her generation'.⁹⁴

These were not just Alden connections, they were Aldens by name. Thirty years further on, at the time of New Road's tercentenary, there were still three Alden deacons: Leonard S. Alden and his aunt Winifred, from the butchery side, and Leonard's third cousin, Gordon Alden, from the printing side. Gordon Alden was also church secretary and his wife was president of the New Road Baptist Women's League.⁹⁵ That invaluable representative role also needs to be stressed. It is reflected in the three Aldens (Robert Rhodes and his grandsons

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Leonard Stanley and Maurice) who were treasurers of the Oxfordshire and East Gloucestershire Baptist Association, or in Percy's father Isaac Alden who was New Road's treasurer for thirty-five years. It is reflected in L.S. Alden's membership of Baptist Union committees and of Regent's Park's college council; and it is visibly reflected in the Leonard Alden room at Regent's Park, and Alden House, the retirement home at Wolvercote named after Percy's brother Ernest Alden, and in the communion table and chairs dedicated at New Road on Whit Sunday 1950 'To The Glory of God and in grateful memory of the service rendered to this Church by the Alden Family through five generations, 1793-1947'.⁹⁶

It is easy to list the works. It is less easy to communicate the faith. For the founding Isaac's generation there is the story of the Christ Church prayer meetings and of such terrifying occasions as when James Hinton's preaching at Woodstock in 1794 led to riot and put lives at risk.⁹⁷ Do such pressures explain the newly-married Isaac's brief return to Chipping Sodbury? From the next generation there is the story of the six-year-old Henry found weeping in bed, burdened with sin and treasuring lifelong the Sunday School ticket given him as a comfort by his father: 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life'.⁹⁸ That story is echoed in a later generation: Henry's great-nephew, Leonard Henry, finding that his father, Robert Rhodes Alden, had been too generous to a good cause, told him so. Next morning Leonard Henry found a slip of paper on his desk: 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you'.⁹⁹ There are other glimpses: the comment in the Church Roll against the name of Henry's brother and Leonard Henry's grandfather, Thomas Alden, 'Died in triumph and greatly beloved, and deeply mourned by the Church'; or that against Leonard Henry's brother Arthur who died too young: 'adolescens dilectissimus'.¹⁰⁰

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That is a rare Oxford touch. Aldens had lively minds but they were not precious. Edward Cox Alden 'made it his business to be well-informed in all developments of modern critical thought'. For Leonard Henry, however, the 'intellectual approach to religion had no appeal'.¹⁰¹ For both of them faith was a matter of practical evangelism. That was a church member's duty. Preaching, Sunday School teaching, and mission superintendency were part of what it meant to be an Alden. The Oxfordshire and East Gloucestershire Association's memorial tribute to Leonard Stanley noted his role as moderator to the Cote group of churches. He chaired their deacons' and church meetings. He was also, as the association's treasurer (that 'vital link between the Baptist Union, the Association and the Churches'), 'zealous for the increase of the minimum stipend'. And as an employer too 'in a sense he exercised a pastoral ministry towards his people'.¹⁰² His father, Leonard Henry, would talk of his own faith 'as unaffectedly in the market as he could in the meetings of his Church'.¹⁰³

That attitude was well-grounded. One of James Dann's most notable early initiatives was the New Road Chapel Home Mission. Its scope and appointments were detailed in the *Monthly Visitor*. Thus, for the first quarter of 1889, in its first decade of operation, it had thirty preachers, eight auxiliaries, and a mission band of nine, responsible for nine mission stations. Five of its preachers were Aldens: Isaac of Walton Street and his son Ernest, Robert Rhodes of Eastwyke and his brother William Hayes, and Edward Cox. Between them they preached at eight stations (Charlton-on-Otmoor, Eynsham, Headington, Hinksey, Littlemore, Thrupp, Wolvercote, and Woodstock) on Sunday mornings, afternoons, and evenings; they presided at communion services; and they led week-evening meetings, usually on Wednesdays but at Hinksey on Tuesdays and at Thrupp on Thursdays. Ernest was a young man, appointed to preach only at Wolvercote where he was superintendent and had been active for at least five years. That

quarter he was committed to three Sunday morning and four Sunday evening services (one of them communion) and ten Wednesday evening meetings. The other Alden preachers were middle-aged men in their business prime, comfortably enough off but not with undue room for leisure. Ernest's father, Isaac, now in his mid-fifties, was planned for each station: twelve Sunday mornings, eleven Sunday evenings (four of them communion), three Sunday afternoons, three Tuesday evenings and seventeen Wednesday evenings. Robert Rhodes more than matched that. His prime responsibility was Hinksey but he visited seven of the nine stations: fifteen Sunday evening (six of them communion), seven Tuesday evening, twelve Wednesday evening, and four Thursday evening appointments. He can seldom have been in New Road's Eastwyke family pew. Edward Cox Alden preached at five stations (two Sunday morning and eleven Sunday evening appointments; six of the latter were communion). W.H. Alden, by contrast, was a week evening man: three Wednesdays at Headington and two Tuesdays at Hinksey.¹⁰⁴ All told it represents an astonishing commitment of time, energy, and faith. It adds a vital dimension to the moving family memory, over sixty years on, of the ninety-two year old Ernest, now quite blind, preaching for the last time at New Road itself. It was a half-hour sermon, its close greeted by a rare and palpable stillness, broken only by those who gently helped the preacher from the rostrum.¹⁰⁵

Aldens on the whole were laymen and laywomen, but they had suggestive ministerial connections. The printing Aldens' Hewlett, Byles, and Sargent relations are a case in point. At the time of H.J.C. Alden's death (1948), his second cousin, Alexander Sargent, was Archdeacon of Canterbury and his third cousin, Hewlett Johnson, was Dean of Canterbury, doubtless fortuitous facts which nonetheless help to colour, even explain, the winding spiritual tracks between New Road and those storied prayer meetings in Christ Church.¹⁰⁶ The 'Australian' Isaac Alden had a ministerial son-in-law as well as

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a ministerial son; so, as has been seen, did his nephew Isaac of Walton Street, whose other daughter married a son of James Dann's predecessor, John Pyer Barnett. Robert Rhodes Alden's daughter Grace married Charles (1867–1917), the second of James Dann's three ministerial sons; she died young, serving with her husband in Nassau, Bahamas. Her sister Evelyn also married a minister: G.H. Ruffell Laslett (1882–1963), from an Eynsham and New Road family, 'an impressive preacher and an amusing one too', with significant pastorates ahead of him.¹⁰⁷ Their brother Reginald had two ministerial sons-in-law, J.H.E. Pearse who was with the Baptist Missionary Society in India and then in London with the BMS and Bible Society, and Norman Renshaw whose pastorates were in England and Wales.

This tally brings the Aldens' active Baptist ministerial connection into the last decade of the twentieth century, which is when the formal Alden connection with New Road ceased. Today (2003) New Road's membership is lower than at any point since James Hinton's early years there. Numerical decline should not be confused with spiritual decline; members and spirituality can reflect quite different contexts. Nonetheless New Road's numerical decline has been pronounced, indeed swift, since 1972.¹⁰⁸ That was the last year which saw a significant formal Alden connection with New Road: there were ten Aldens by birth or marriage in membership, one of them, Winifred, a life deacon. She died that year. Two of the youngest Aldens shortly married and left Oxford and in 1974, in one of the pruning exercises that churches periodically undertake, the names of four more were deleted. Now the sole links are informal ones of memory, residual affection, and pride, quizzical, mystified, but justified too, in a distinctive past.

There should be two postscripts. If Percy Alden was the best known and most influential Alden, a not dissimilar case might be made – at least by a Cambridge man – for his second cousin-once-removed, Peter Laslett (1915–2001). Thomas Peter

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Ruffell Laslett was a son of the Revd Ruffell Laslett and a grandson of Robert Rhodes Alden. His brother, Keith Alden Laslett (d. 2000), was a lifelong Baptist, lay pastor for several years of Stevington Baptist Church in Bedfordshire, thereby maintaining one Alden tradition. Peter Laslett was not a Baptist but he had all the energy and fertility in ideas of Percy Alden harnessed to a disciplined, adventurous, and original intellect. He was a secular scholar evangelist. His was not an Oxford life. It was a Cambridge life. He was a man who helped make Cambridge in the 1950s and 1960s 'the most exciting place to study the history of political ideas'.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, one obituarist described him as 'the son of nonconformists who remembered vividly how his mother's Oxford family (the Aldens) looked northwards in horror from their farm towards the spires of Christ Church'.¹¹⁰ 'Horror' is too simple a word. It turns us from reality to myth. It directs our present gaze, however, back to Christ Church, where, perhaps, for the Aldens and New Road it began. And perhaps our knowledge of the Alden background to the exciting historian who rooted his scholarship in that Early Modern period which saw the emergence of New Road, allows us to read more into the arresting title of his best-known book, *The World We Have Lost* (1965).

The second postscript is the third stanza of 'For All-Den Saints'. It too is a product of the 1960s, encouraging several layers of interpretation:

They lived not only in ages past,
 There are hundreds of thousands still;
The church's life can't escape from the name,
 And I doubt if it ever will.
There are two of them deacons (and one's there for life!)
There are so many Aldens they're now running rife -
'You can't beat them, so join 'em' - it saves lots of strife -
 That's why I'll be an Alden too!

NOTES

¹ I owe a particular debt in the preparation of this chapter to Eric A. Alden, John F. Alden, Maurice R. Alden, Peter Alden, Robin W. Alden, Kenneth Bray, Raymond Brown, Rosie Chadwick, Marion Clark, Judith Curthoys, Elizabeth Gill, Jean Gill, Patricia Laslett, Elizabeth Lawrence, Annette Mates, Susan Mills, Chris Pond, Jennifer Thorp.

² I am indebted to Maurice R. Alden for a copy of the song, *For All-Den Saints*.

³ Robin Alden, 'Vote no for Clinton', letter, *The Independent*, 15 January 2003.

⁴ Cf. Matthew 10: 35-38.

⁵ 'The Late Mr E.C. Alden', *Oxford Journal Illustrated*, 12 June 1912.

⁶ *Edward Cox Alden. April 18th 1838 - June 5th 1912. An Appreciation* [privately printed, Oxford, 1912], pp. 5, 9.

⁷ Or of the tales imaginatively incorporating family lore prolifically published by his wife's grandmother, Esther Copley (formerly Hewlett, 1786-1851), and aunt (Emma Sargent, d. 1890), whose husband and one of whose sons were employed by the Religious Tract Society. I am indebted to Marion Clark for this information.

⁸ Hugh Williamson to Elizabeth Lawrence, 18 September 1991 (letter in possession of Elizabeth Lawrence). There were nonetheless Baptist Aldens in Norwich: in the 1960s J.C. Alden was secretary of Dereham Road Baptist Church. Though not Oxford Aldens, they can be connected by marriage to Baptist Oxford Aldens.

⁹ *Edward Cox Alden*, pp. 3, 9.

¹⁰ H. Williamson, 'Henry Alden in the Oxford Book Trade 1832-1844', Unpublished M.Ed. dissertation, University College, Cardiff, 1985, p. 18. The researches of Elizabeth Lawrence and of American descendants of the *Mayflower* Aldens have failed to find any family connection.

¹¹ Leonard Stanley Alden compiled a family tree which incorporated descent from John Alden of the *Mayflower*. See also S.P.B. Mais, 'Oxford Families: Aldens Have Been In City For 200 Years', *Oxford*

Mail, 25 October 1959; S. Carver, 'Dorothy Alden 1911-99', in church magazine, June 1999.

¹² *Edward Cox Alden*, p. 4.

¹³ *The Christian*, 25 April 1935, p. 18. A.S. Langley, Baptist minister and F.R.Hist.S., was the author of *Birmingham Baptists Past and Present* (London, 1939). Hugh Williamson attributes this story too to Henry Paintin, but where did Paintin get it from?

¹⁴ Genealogical details are from *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage, and Knightage*, 100th edn. (London, 1953), and 1999-2000: sub "Somerset".

¹⁵ *The Christian*, 25 April 1935, p. 18.

¹⁶ E.G.W. Bill, *Education at Christ Church, Oxford, 1660-1800*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 241 n. I am indebted for this reference and other information to Judith Curthoys, archivist, Christ Church, Oxford.

¹⁷ Church membership register (with entries from 1780) 1825-1836. New Road records (NRR) Box 8, Angus Library, Oxford; Williamson, 'Henry Alden', pp. 17-20; information from Elizabeth Lawrence.

¹⁸ It is tempting to see a confusion with the Duke of Beaufort whose surname was Somerset and whose estates are closer to Chipping Sodbury than the Duke of Somerset's; but the sixth Duke of Beaufort, who was an Oxford man, does not fit and none of his brothers was at Oxford.

¹⁹ *The Complete Peerage* provides two tantalising clues. In 1800 the eleventh duke married a duke's daughter. Alas, the new duchess was famously mean. When the local parson dined it was reported that 'on the table nothing was put but a leg of mutton at the top and a dish of potatoes at the bottom'. Could it have been Alden mutton? That duke's grandson died before succeeding to the dukedom but four months after siring an illegitimate grandson who in 1925 was a claimant to the title; he lived at Horton, Chipping Sodbury - the only Seymour link I have identified with that town. See G.H. White (ed), *The Complete Peerage*, By G.E.L., Vol XII, Part I (London, 1953,) pp. 82-9.

²⁰ The name was also spelt Aldin, Alding, Aldine, Aldyn. I am indebted to Elizabeth Lawrence for extensive family trees.

²¹ Isaac and Amos are in fact surnames; Aldens married into those families. The four children were registered between 1818 (about the time of the chapel's rebuilding) and 1827, and the Isaac Amos Aldens were buried there in 1852 and 1860. It is possible that Anne Alden, registered 25 May 1786, in 'Register of the Children of the Protestant Dissenters called Baptists in Chipping Sodbury, 1765', was Isaac's youngest sister, later baptized, aged ten, at the parish church. I am indebted to Elizabeth Lawrence for these details and for a copy of the Indenture of 11 March 1708.

²² Williamson, 'Henry Alden', pp. 20, 21, 22.

²³ I am greatly indebted to Eric A. Alden, of the fifth generation, for information about the Oxford 'butcher' descendants of John Alden.

²⁴ Mais, 'Oxford ... Aldens'.

²⁵ Church Book 1838-1866, 3 August 1844 (NRR Box 1), quoted in Williamson, 'Henry Alden', p. 97.

²⁶ J.H. Anderson, 'The History of the Alden Family [Australia]', undated typescript, pp. 1-7. S.I. Alden, a keen temperance worker, was hailed in his Methodist days as 'really ... the originator of the Blue Ribbon Movement in Queensland'.

²⁷ *Oxford Journal Illustrated*, 8 June 1927; Mais, 'Oxford ... Aldens'.

²⁸ For R.T. Alden see *Oxford Times*, 21 September 1956. For L.H. Alden see *Who's Who in Oxfordshire* (London, 1936), p. 5; *Oxford Times*, 23 July 1937, 30 July 1937.

²⁹ Typescript in Oxfordshire and East Gloucestershire Association Minutes, dated 19 September 1963, Angus Library 24.h.66.

³⁰ Carver, 'Dorothy Alden'.

³¹ This section is drawn from 'Alden's Food News', Issue No. 1, May 1977, a four-page supplement to *Oxford Journal*, 27 May 1977.

³² This section draws heavily from Williamson, 'Henry Alden', especially pp. x, xi.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

³⁴ Samuel Collingwood was Printer to the University 1802-38 and Oxford's largest employer. His grandson William (1819-1903) was a prominent Plymouth Brother. The family were related to the

Underhills and the Davenports (later to prosper in Australia) and like them were active in founding George Street Congregational Church 1830-32. J.M. Davenport was Clerk of the Peace in 1833.

³⁵ Byles had lodged in Oxford with Esther Beuzeville Hewlett whose second husband was the Revd William Copley. It was Copley's friendship with Benjamin Godwin, then principal of Rawdon Baptist College and shortly to succeed Copley at New Road, that introduced Byles to fame and fortune in Bradford. See [F.G. Byles], *William Byles by His Youngest Son* (priv. Weymouth, 1932), *passim*.

³⁶ *Ibid.* One of them was the poet Coventry Patmore's second wife, the successor, therefore, of the original Angel in the House.

³⁷ A.C. Miller, *Eythorne: The Story of a Village Baptist Church* (London, [1924]) p. 53. I am indebted to Marion Clark for further details.

³⁸ Williamson, 'Henry Alden', p. 24.

³⁹ The Shacklefords, like the Hewletts, also had East Kent Baptist and Congregational associations.

⁴⁰ Williamson, 'Henry Alden', pp. 62, 85, 80.

⁴¹ J.F. Alden, 'The Alden Press, 1832-1999, A Short History', Typescript 1999.

⁴² Quoted in Williamson, 'Henry Alden', p. 94.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴⁴ 'The Late Mr. E.C. Alden'; Alden 'The Alden Press'; E.C. Alden, *The Old Church at New Road. A Contribution to the History of Oxford Nonconformity* (Oxford, 1904).

⁴⁵ For Dr J.H. Alden see *Who's Who* (London, 1948).

⁴⁶ For H.J.C. Alden see Alden, 'The Alden Press', and undated newspaper cuttings, November 1948, in the possession of John F. Alden.

⁴⁷ Alden, 'The Alden Press'. I am indebted to John F. Alden for further details.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Ibid. F.G. Alden, though neither a butcher nor a printer and no longer a Baptist, linked the two branches: in 1926 he was an original shareholder in Alden Press (Oxford) Ltd., later becoming chairman. His son J.F. Alden entered the firm as a director in 1955.

⁵¹ I am indebted to Eric A. Alden for this information. The Bodey Baptist (and teaching) connection continues (2003) at Abingdon; Maurice Alden's daughter Gill married Stephen Bodey.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Mais, 'Oxford ... Aldens'. I am indebted to Robin W. Alden for details of the Alden fountain, restored to its original setting in 1998, although 'now used for floral display rather than as a drinking fountain for out patients'.

⁵⁴ *Who's Who*, 1948.

⁵⁵ *Oxford Times*, 22 September 1972.

⁵⁶ *Oxford Times*, 21 September 1956, 28 September 1956; Reginald's son Eric was chairman of the newly formed Oxford Rowing Club in 1947 (Cutting 22 May 1947) and his brother Harold (1879-1972) was described as 'a well-known Oxfordshire Sportsman' (*Oxford Times*, 22 September 1972).

⁵⁷ I am indebted to Eric A. Alden for this information.

⁵⁸ Alden, *Old Church at New Road*, p. 37; Williamson, 'Henry Alden', p.50.

⁵⁹ *Manual ... Church and Congregation, 1879; New Road Chapel Monthly Visitor (MV)*, December 1893, p. 177. F.H. Alden also composed a tune to E.A. Tydeman's hymn 'Renewal'.

⁶⁰ Alden, *Old Church at New Road*, p. 38.

⁶¹ *Edward Cox Alden*, pp. 6-7, 13.

⁶² Ibid., p. 14.

⁶³ Undated cuttings, November 1948; *Edward Cox Alden*.

⁶⁴ Carver, 'Dorothy Alden'.

⁶⁵ *Oxford Times*, 21 September 1956.

⁶⁶ Thus L.H. Alden's past minister Ronald Hobling and his last minister H.J. White (*Oxford Times*, 30 July 1937). He was, however, a

Freemason. Was that a recreation? This section is largely drawn from *Oxford Times*, 23 and 30 July 1937, and *Oxford Magazine* LVI, 14 October 1937.

⁶⁷ Councillors, representing wards, sat for three years; they elected (usually from their own ranks) aldermen who sat for six years. Since a councillor's elevation to alderman led to a by-election in the relevant ward, an aldermanic election was an important aspect of municipal political strategy as well as a recognition of honoured service.

⁶⁹ His father, Captain R.R. Henderson (1876-1932) had been MP for South Oxfordshire.

⁷⁰ P. d'A. Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877-1914* (Princeton, 1968), p. 335.

⁷¹ Reason called it 'a rarer gift than scholarship'. W. Reason, 'Prominent Social Reformers, Percy Alden MA (Warden of Mansfield House)', *The PSA Own Paper*, p. 23, undated cutting in possession of Eric A. Alden.

⁷² The family is recalled as worshipping at Woodford Green United Free Church in the 1920s and 1930s. Their daughter Elsa Harman, who became a senior figure in the nursing world, was an active Friend. I am indebted for much information about Percy and Margaret Alden to their daughter, Annette Mates, their grandson, Kenneth Bray, and their neighbour Jean Gill.

⁷³ Reason, 'Percy Alden'.

⁷⁴ *Mansfield House Magazine*, 1894, p. 49 quoted in Elaine Kaye, *Mansfield College Oxford* (Oxford, 1996), p. 135.

⁷⁵ E. Hilliard ed., *Balliol College Register 1832-1914* (priv. Oxford, 1914), p.5.

⁷⁶ Quoted Kaye, *Mansfield College*, p. 134.

⁷⁷ Canon S.A. Barnett, quoted *ibid.*, p. 141.

⁷⁸ F.J.G., 'A Great Public Servant', *The Friend*, 21 July 1944.

⁷⁹ Reason, 'Percy Alden'.

⁸⁰ Kaye, *Mansfield College*, p. 146; Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p. 335.

⁸¹ This section owes much to Annette Mates, 'A Victorian Lady doctor: Margaret Pearse (Lady Alden) 1868-1958', typescript 1991; and a typescript, untitled, undated, unascrbed, probably by Margaret Bray c. 1970s.

⁸² For Pearse, Peill, and Moss family connections see C.F.A. Moss, *A Missionary Pioneer, Joseph Pearse* (London, 1913), and J. Sibree (ed) *London Missionary Society. A Register of Missionaries, Deputations, Etc From 1796-1923*, 4th ed. (London, 1923), *passim*.

⁸³ For Will Reason see *Congregational Year Book, 1927*, pp. 150-1; Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, pp.334-5, 348; A. Peel, *These Hundred Years* (London, 1931), pp. 376, 404.

⁸⁴ Thus he figures in I. Packer (ed.) *The Letters of Arnold Stephenson Rowntree to Mary Katherine Rowntree 1910-1918*, Camden Fifth Series vol. 20 (Cambridge, 2002).

⁸⁵ See M. Freedon (ed.) *Minutes of the Rainbow Circle 1894-1924*, Camden 4th Ser. vol. 38 (London, 1989).

⁸⁶ Quoted in Kaye, *Mansfield College*, p. 142.

⁸⁷ Mates, "Lady Doctor"; Bray typescript.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* The school was Sidcot; the Aldens liked its coeducation. Margaret Alden called her youngest (twin) daughters, 'Insult and Injury'.

⁸⁹ Reason, 'Percy Alden'.

⁹⁰ *Manual ... Church and Congregation, 1887*, p. 12.

⁹¹ Church membership register, 1825-36 (NRR Box 8).

⁹² Henry and Elizabeth Alden were members at George Street 1853-4; the Thomas Aldens 1853-7; the John and Isaac Aldens 1853-66.

⁹³ Church membership register, 1885-1906 (NRR Box 8).

⁹⁴ Church membership revised register, 1915-27 (NRR Box 8).

⁹⁵ New Road Baptist Church, Oxford, 1653-1953, 300th Anniversary Tercentenary Booklet and Souvenir of Celebrations October 1953, pp. 6, 10.

⁹⁶ Order of Service, 28 May 1950.

⁹⁷ Alden, *Old Church at New Road*, pp. 20-4.

⁹⁸ Williamson comments that Henry 'seems never to have relinquished a sense of sin either', noting how, as an apprentice, Henry was shocked by the 'filthy conversation of the workmen, by whom continence was ridiculed, and the possibility of virtue in youth blasphemously denied'. Williamson, 'Henry Alden', pp. 20-1.

⁹⁹ *Oxford Times*, 30 July 1937.

¹⁰⁰ Church membership registers 1854-85 & 1885-1906 (NRR Box 8).

¹⁰¹ But L.H. Alden "did hold to the great evangelical truths with fervour'. 'The Late Mr. L.H. Alden', *Oxford Times*, 30 July 1937.

¹⁰² Angus Library 24. h. 66.

¹⁰³ *Oxford Times*, 30 July 1937.

¹⁰⁴ 'Plan of Services, January to April 1889', *MV*, 1889, p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ I am indebted to Eric A. Alden for this memory.

¹⁰⁶ The Hewletts had an incorrigibly Anglican streak. Their Sargent relations were East Kent and Sussex Baptists who turned Anglican: the Archdeacon's grandfather, G.E. Sargent, had as a young man been a member at New Road. Hewlett Johnson (1874-1966, see *DNB*), Canterbury's notorious yet fiercely loved 'Red Dean', was the grandson of the Revd Alfred Hewlett (d.1885), also of New Road provenance, who, though an Anglican, was called 'The Spurgeon of the North'.

¹⁰⁷ I am grateful to Maurice Alden and Patricia Laslett for information about the Lasletts. See also *Baptist Handbook*, 1965, pp. 358-9. Was there a connection with the Danns? Ruffell and Laslett are Oxfordshire Baptist names; James Dann had a minister son, Thomas Ruffell Dann (1868-1946).

¹⁰⁸ In 2002 New Road had 76 members (*Baptist Union Directory*, 2002-2003, p. 151); in 1972 it had 300 (*Baptist Handbook*, 1972, p. 175).

¹⁰⁹ Thus John Dunn, *The Independent*, 26 November 2001.

¹¹⁰ Thus Richard Smith, who called Laslett (Fellow of Trinity College Cambridge 1953-2001), 'internationally, the pioneer historical sociologist of the family'. R. Smith, 'Peter Laslett', *The Independent*, 26 November 2001.

'Great National Crisis': New Road and the World Wars

Ian M. Randall

On 7 September 1914 the deacons of New Road Baptist Church agreed that in view of 'the great national crisis' there would be prayer meetings at the church each evening during the following week. This was one of several ways in which the church, under the leadership of the minister, James Dann, responded to the war that had been declared a month before – which would last until 1918. A canteen for the use of the Forces and knitting or sewing parties to make warm clothes for people affected by the war also became regular features of New Road's practical activities in this period. During the Second World War, from 1939 to 1945, the church was also directly affected in a number of ways, one of the most significant among these being that Harry J. White, who was then the minister, became a full-time chaplain in the RAF. This chapter examines the different ways in which these two World Wars made an impact on the New Road congregation, and the responses of the congregation. It also seeks to set this examination within the wider context of developments in Baptist life during these periods of war. In 1910 the joint membership of New Road and its associated branch churches – of which there were eleven – was 752. New Road mirrored the Baptist denomination in England as a whole in seeing a period of gradual numerical decline set in after the first decade of the twentieth century, a decline to which the two World Wars

contributed. Yet this period, as will be seen, also saw creative developments at the church.

The impact of war

Before the First World War, there had been a number of important initiatives by English Baptist leaders to deepen Anglo-German links. J.H. Rushbrooke, for example, who was to undertake considerable inter-Baptist work in Europe and would become General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, was editor of *The Peacemaker*, which had a circulation of 67,000.¹ John Clifford, perhaps the best known Baptist of the period, told his Westbourne Park, London, congregation in January 1914: 'Militarism belongs to the dark ages'.² But a mere seven months later, following the outbreak of war, Clifford struck a very different note. 'The progress of humanity', he informed his hearers at Westbourne Park, 'in my judgement hinges upon this war'.³ The Baptist Union Council, in a manifesto in late September 1914, expressed delight that 'many of the young men of our Churches have dedicated themselves ... to the service of their country'.⁴ As Keith Clements comments: 'Pride stirred in the hearts of previously peace-loving Baptists as they watched their young men go'.⁵ Some Baptists were pacifists, but most were 'pacifists', believing that war was inhumane but sometimes necessary.⁶ For a number of Baptist ministers in the First and Second World Wars, wartime ministry meant becoming chaplains. As a result of determined representations made by J.H. Shakespeare, the Secretary of the Baptist Union, and R.J. Wells, Secretary of the Congregational Union, Baptist and Congregational pastors were accepted from 1914 as chaplains, under what was called a United Navy and Army Board.⁷ The impact of the war on New Road should be understood against a background in which most Baptists saw themselves as committed to justifiable war.

The initial declaration of war in 1914 was no doubt referred to in sermons at New Road by James Dann, as was the case at Westbourne Park with John Clifford, but such

references have not survived. According to the minutes of the New Road deacons' meetings, the first war-related issue to arouse comment was a proposal to open the church premises for use by soldiers. On 30 November 1914 the deacons agreed in principle that the premises should be open each evening and that the provision of light entertainment, music and games should be encouraged for soldiers.⁸ A small committee was set up to make arrangements. This was at a time when there was considerable concern about soldiers being exposed to what one nationally-known Baptist leader, F.B. Meyer, called 'serious moral dangers'. From December 1914 Meyer was pressing Free Churches and other organizations such as YMCAs to utilize their premises for the benefit of soldiers.⁹ There was anxiety on the part of church leaders in Britain about the likely growth of prostitution during the war. The New Road deacons, with their desire to provide wholesome relaxation for soldiers, were in tune with a wider mood in the churches. In responding to the new situation, New Road was determined to open itself up to the immediate needs of the world around.

There was also a new impetus in evangelism, as churches recognized that the times were causing people to think seriously about life and death. New Road, under the leadership of the evangelistically-minded James Dann, took part with other Free Churches across the country in a 'Come to Church' campaign, during which 'those who have lost the habit of public worship' were 'specially invited by Christian people to resume their attendance', and urged to do so on specific Sundays. Two thousand invitation cards were printed and distributed by New Road at the end of 1914.¹⁰ Dann, as well as being an outstanding preacher, was known for his ability to involve the church members in active ministry. In February 1915 the *Oxford & District Free Churchman* reported that at the annual Christmas party of the 'Pleasant Sunday Afternoon' (a national movement for men), which had been held in the New Road schoolroom on 29 December 1914, there had been 'a large attendance, including 50 soldiers who had been invited by

members'.¹¹ This indicates the evangelistic outlook within the congregation. On Sunday afternoon, 18 April 1915, the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon, or PSA, was reportedly conducted by 'our soldier friends who have been billeted in Oxford during the winter'. Evangelism was accompanied by social action. The three Baptist churches in Oxford had 'sewing meetings' for the benefit of soldiers, sailors and refugees. These began in the autumn of 1914 and by the following May about four hundred new articles of clothing had been distributed. Those benefiting, it was noted, included 'over 50 men connected with the Oxfordshire Baptist Churches; refugees in Oxford and latterly at Folkestone', as well as 'needy soldiers on the front'.¹²

New Road also followed the lead being given throughout the country in praying for those caught up in the crisis. In London, monthly wartime meetings for prayer that attracted over 2,500 people were organized by the British Evangelical Alliance in the Queen's Hall.¹³ The General Secretary of the British Evangelical Alliance, Henry Martyn Gooch, was delighted to report in July 1915 that those present at united prayer meetings included those from the high and low sections of the Church of England and from the Free Churches.¹⁴ This prayer initiative among the churches led to a movement for the National Revival of Family Prayers. At New Road, 3 January 1915 was observed by the church as a 'Day of Intercession in common with all churches throughout the land'. This national observance had been suggested by the King. Meetings designed especially for prayer and also for discussion were held at New Road in July 1915. Baptists had good relationships with local Anglicans such as the Rector of St Ebbe's, and it is clear that New Road was open to pan-denominational co-operation. The war generated a new emphasis on people coming together for prayer.

Such new challenges, however, often required fresh vision and sometimes new leadership. In December 1915, after thirty-three years of ministry at New Road, James Dann announced his resignation as pastor. He had wanted to stay on as minister

with support from an assistant, but the deacons did not see this as practicable.¹⁵ Prior to making his announcement, Dann had been in consultation for two months with the deacons.¹⁶ In his statement to the church, Dann, who had seen the church grow considerably and had also seen many branch causes founded during his long ministry, said: 'It is not that I am tired of the work among you, nor – so far as I know – that you are tired of me. Nor has any trouble or dissention arisen among us.' In Dann's view, no church in Oxford was doing a better work. Without any trace of false humility, he claimed that it would be difficult to find a pastor with work as extensive as his, despite his age: he was nearly eighty. Throughout his whole ministry of half a century he had baptized upwards of two thousand converts.¹⁷ It was agreed that he would conclude his ministry at the end of June 1916. F.H. Alden, on behalf of the deacons, said that Dann's resignation was received with much regret. The church wanted to express appreciation and continuing friendship and (when Dann was out of the meeting) it was proposed that Dann should have a retirement allowance of £120 per annum, towards which the deacons had previously promised £90 per annum.¹⁸ Dann had sold his annuity in the 1890s, during a time of financial difficulty, and this pension enabled him to retire in some comfort. No central pension scheme for Baptist ministers was then in place.

By the time James Dann resigned, the war was having a more significant impact on the life of New Road, as on many other churches. The Headington branch cause alone, which had about fifty members, had no fewer than nineteen men associated with the congregation serving in the Forces in 1916. The New Road church meeting on 2 August 1916 heard reports on 'The Great War', as it was called, specifically news about casualties. Several church members and the sons of members died. The 2 August meeting heard from the deacons of the death in France of Vernon Cooper, son of Mrs G.H. Cooper and the late Councillor Cooper. Church members stood in tribute and a letter drafted by the deacons was sent to Mrs Cooper

conveying the sympathy of the church.¹⁹ Three months later, the members heard of the death of Arthur Wallis, the son of William Wallis, who had also been on active service in France. The tribute at the meeting to Arthur Wallis was dignified and restrained. It spoke about him 'carrying out what appeared to him to be the fulfillment of his duty to his King and country in a time of great stress and danger'. A similar letter was sent to William Wallis as had been sent to Mrs Cooper, and prayer for comfort was made. Members in associated branch causes were also remembered. A letter was sent to George Durham of Headington. He had lost two sons and a third was seriously injured. Another member, Mrs Sutton, mourned the loss of three of her sons. It was agreed that a memorial service be held for those who had died.²⁰ Like other churches, New Road was losing some of those who might have been its future leaders.

New developments

At the same time, the period of the First World War was one in which new developments took place at the church. For the first time, in May 1916, a woman was proposed for election to the diaconate. Five existing deacons, Isaac and Robert Alden, Francis Martin, John Harris and Alfred Wiblin, were all proposed and re-elected, but there was one vacancy for a new deacon. Mrs E.A. Hughes was one of those nominated for the vacancy. Born Lizzie Cooper, the daughter of George W. and sister of G.H. Cooper, and widowed in 1893 after only a year of marriage, Mrs Hughes was a moving force in New Road's Home Mission work, overseeing the mission station at St Thomas's from its beginnings in the late 1880s. A query was raised in the May 1916 church meeting about electing a woman, with one member suggesting that it would be better to wait and think about this new development. No-one agreed, however, and the election went ahead. It may be that a number of members who were uneasy about a woman deacon decided that the easy way to resolve the issue was to vote for an alternative nominee. In the event a male nominee, John Sadler,

not Mrs Hughes, was elected.²¹ A year later Mrs Hughes stood again and this time it was agreed that the 'executive of the church' needed to discuss the issue.²² New thinking about the role of women was fostered, with New Road women themselves taking a lead in putting the case for change, and in January 1918 a motion was put to the church meeting that there should be two women and nine men on the diaconate.²³ This was carried unanimously.²⁴ Soon two women, sisters-in-law Mrs G.H. Cooper and Mrs Hughes were elected. A decade later the diaconate included three female members, one a schoolmistress and another a music instructor. Change was taking place.

Another change was in the way the successor to James Dann was appointed. From 1916, Baptists in England and Wales were served by area superintendents, who (among many other duties) facilitated the settlement of Baptist ministers. It was at a meeting of the secretaries and treasurers of the Baptist Associations in November 1914 that reference was made to the 'division of the country into districts under the charge of general superintendents'.²⁵ The next mention of this was at a Baptist Union subcommittee on 18 January 1915 when, after considerable discussion, the six members present 'agreed to recommend that the country be divided into ... districts, with a general superintendent over each'.²⁶ The idea of superintendents was being promoted by J.H. Shakespeare, and in 1915 G.P. Gould, incoming President of the Union and the President of Regent's Park College, seconded a resolution in favour of superintendency at the spring Baptist Assembly.²⁷ The new office among Baptists was affirmed and the first conference of superintendents was in November 1915. The *Baptist Times* in March 1916 hoped that their work - 'settling disputes, arranging the removal and settlement of ministers, visiting, encouraging and advising rural Churches, exercising a sympathetic supervision and linking the whole Denomination together' - would be the 'most fruitful effort we have ever made'.²⁸

A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ

C.T. Byford, Superintendent for the Central Area, had been the Baptist World Alliance Commissioner in Europe. From early in 1917 he became involved with the settlement process at New Road. Prior to that there was apparently little progress. The diaconate began to look at a list of names of potential ministers and on 13 December 1916 a church meeting was held to discuss those who had already preached at the church. The chairman of the meeting on that occasion said there should be eighty-five members present in order to enable the meeting to make decisions. When the meeting began there were less than forty members present. There was a time of praise and prayer and by the end of that time a further twenty members had arrived, but since the figure of eighty-five was not achieved the meeting was closed.²⁹ Although there was a steady stream of people joining the church in this period the membership was, overall, in decline. In 1916, for example, 103 names were taken off the roll. The total membership, including members in the village causes, reduced to 628 half way through the war, of whom 347 were at New Road itself, with the remainder at the branches. Thus less than twenty per cent of the New Road members were at that point able and willing to attend a church meeting on the crucial subject of the future ministry.

When Byford became involved in the settlement process he strongly recommended to the search committee – the deacons plus ‘consultative’ members – that Ronald W. Hobling, BA, BD, pastor of the Free (Baptist) Church in Chorley Wood, Hertfordshire, who had already preached at New Road, be considered.³⁰ The deacons decided to follow Byford’s advice and to approach Hobling. There was, however, a rumour circulating among the deacons that Hobling’s wife, Margaret, was in the habit of attending the theatre, and this was causing worries. Opposition to the theatre had long been part of a wider evangelical avoidance of ‘the world’. It seems that some people at New Road still held to this view. Hobling had received some anonymous letters about the issue, presumably from members who had received leaked information from

someone on the search committee. It was agreed at a meeting of the search group on 20 June 1917 that one deacon would go to Chorley Wood to investigate further.³¹ Six days later the group met to hear the report of the deacon who had undertaken this mission. It seemed that the rumour was true, but the deacon was apparently satisfied with the case made by Hobling for Margaret's interest in the theatre. When the search group members voted on 26 June 1917 about whether or not to propose Hobling's name to the church, all were in favour of Hobling except one member, who abstained.³²

The proposal that was put to a special church meeting on the following evening, 27 June 1917, was that Ronald Hobling should become pastor, initially for five years but with the hope that his pastorate would continue beyond that period. His stipend was to be £260 per annum. This was at a time when the Baptist ministerial Sustentation Fund had recently been set up.³³ J.H. Shakespeare had launched a campaign which raised £250,000 (New Road had given £405), and the minimum stipend for a married Baptist minister was set at £130. Hobling was perceived by the New Road members as well suited to the work in Oxford. He had studied at Regent's Park College, graduating in Arts and Divinity at London University, had won a Baptist Union Exhibition in 1916, and had five years of experience as a pastor. Of the ninety-six members present on 27 June 1917, eighty-eight voted in favour of his call, seven were against, and there was one abstention.³⁴ Hobling accepted the call and was to continue at New Road until 1933, when he accepted an invitation to Anson Road, Cricklewood. He was, therefore, minister during the time when Regent's Park College moved to Oxford and when the Regent's Park Principal, H. Wheeler Robinson, and his wife and daughter, joined New Road. Wheeler Robinson became a deacon. Students from Regent's Park College began to serve the village churches in the 1930s. Hobling was a gifted preacher and dedicated pastor, and involved himself with Oxford University students through

the (Baptist) John Bunyan Society. He led New Road in a time of considerable development.

Another new initiative during the First World War was the appointment of a deaconess. In 1890 a Baptist Deaconesses' Home and Mission had been founded under the direction of F.B. Meyer and the London Baptist Association, and extensive medical, social and evangelistic work was undertaken.³⁵ In 1907 the Deaconess Order was a growing movement, attracting Baptist 'Sisters' to train under the superintendency of Sister Constance. At that time there were about twenty deaconesses working with Baptist churches, mostly in London.³⁶ Sister Muriel (Miss Swaby-Smith), who had been based at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London, which was the spiritual home of the deaconesses, was appointed to New Road in early 1918.³⁷ The deacons were delighted that she would be accompanied by Sister Constance, who was described to the New Road members as the 'mother superior' of the Deaconess Mission. Sister Constance, who had supervised the deaconesses' training, had been forced to leave London because of ill health. She had worked with the Wesleyan Central Mission in Leeds, and was now settling in Oxford.³⁸ Hobling was delighted at the addition to the staff at New Road.³⁹ Soon Sister Muriel was engaged in visiting in the neighbourhood and the church saw a period of growth. This was followed by some decline in the 1920s. In 1934, when the next New Road minister was called, the New Road membership, excluding the branches, was about 200, while the branches had 177 members. A Baptist 'circuit' had been formed, linking the city and village churches.⁴⁰ New Road, in the period after the war, was entering a new phase.

Jewish refugees

The New Road congregation did not forget the First World War. In 1919 a Memorial Pulpit to those who had died in battle was installed. There was a thanksgiving appeal, with part of the money going to reconstruction at the church. Attitudes to

war remained on the agenda of the Baptist denomination. A Baptist Union Council group chaired by Ernest Brown, MP, and later J.H. Rushbrooke, studied this question from 1933 and urged the surrender of a measure of national sovereignty to secure the formation of an appropriate World Organization to keep the peace.⁴¹ The early 1930s also saw M.E. Aubrey, the General Secretary of the Baptist Union, promoting a Discipleship Campaign, which included planting new churches.⁴² Harry White, pastor of Oldfield Park Baptist Church, Bath (who had trained at Regent's Park College after the First World War), was called as New Road minister in 1934, and he was in tune with the desire for Baptist advance. White was the driving force behind the commencement of a Baptist church in Cowley, where there was an increasing population due largely to the Morris and Pressed Steel Works. A site was secured for a building and a stone laying ceremony took place in December 1938.⁴³ By 1940 the church was being asked to sanction the second stage of building work at Cowley, helped by a gift from Lord Nuffield, and by the proceeds from the sale of the St Thomas's Mission.⁴⁴

By the time of these developments in Cowley Hitler's troops had taken Austria and Czechoslovakia. The Baptist response varied from church to church. A leading Midlands Baptist church, Queen's Road, Coventry, under the leadership of Ingli James, maintained a 'testimony for peace' of an explicitly pacifist nature.⁴⁵ At New Road, Harry White's response was to seek to help the victims of the Nazis. White had lost his own brother in the First World War and had himself volunteered for service while still underage, serving as a stretcher-bearer. He was awarded the Military Medal for conspicuous bravery in rescuing wounded comrades while under fierce fire.⁴⁶ This background and his continuing concern for those in the Forces, as we will see, were to determine his future ministry. In the meantime, he called on the church to respond to the immediate crisis in Europe.

At a New Road deacons' meeting on 29 November 1938 Harry White referred to the persecution of the Jews in Germany. He said that in his role as President of the Free Church Council for the city of Oxford he had attended several meetings to consider what steps could be taken to assist Jewish refugees from the Continent at this time of crisis. White explained to the deacons that the refugee work in Oxford was being co-ordinated by a committee, which was asking for offers of help in the accommodation of children and young people. It was anticipated that they would shortly be allowed to enter Britain in thousands so long as they definitely had somewhere to go. The deacons unanimously agreed to recommend to the church meeting that New Road make themselves responsible for two young refugees, for one year.⁴⁷ New Road's membership included a number of people who felt a civic responsibility for the wider life of Oxford. White himself served on the city's Education Committee. Leonard Alden had been Mayor in 1937, although his term of office was tragically cut short by a fatal road accident. Three other members of the Alden family sat on the diaconate, while Mrs Hughes was one of the first women elected to the Oxford City Council.⁴⁸ It is not surprising that the diaconate responded to White's appeal for help.

Harry White was able to report to the diaconate on 6 January 1939 that two refugee children, twin sisters, had been allocated to New Road and would arrive in due course. The plan was that they should be accommodated together in a suitable home, and this possibility was being explored with church members.⁴⁹ A month later the situation had changed somewhat. One refugee, Gitta Margoulies, aged twelve, had arrived from Vienna and was temporarily staying at the manse, 204 Woodstock Road, where Harry White's sister could speak German. Arrangements had been made for Gitta to attend the Girls' High School, which was described as 'the class of school thought most suitable and to which she was accustomed'. The boy had not yet arrived but was expected. It was agreed that

Gitta should stay with Mr and Mrs de la Mare at Cumnor Hill. Mrs de la Mare could also speak German. Her husband was at that time the New Road church's acting curator. One of the deacons, railway guard Charles Stevens, reported on the progress of the Refugee Fund, for which he had taken responsibility. The de la Mare family offered to relieve the Refugee Fund by covering half the expenses of Gitta's upkeep, and this offer was gladly accepted. At that point the New Road Refugee Fund, taking into account donations and promises, stood at £50.⁵⁰

Following the outbreak of war in August 1939 New Road, as had been previously agreed, took responsibility for another young refugee, Walter Fleishman. As with Gitta, Walter stayed initially at the manse.⁵¹ On 2 January 1940 the deacons considered a letter from the Oxford Refugees' Committee expressing gratitude to the church for carrying out its promise in respect of Gitta and Walter. The previous term of twelve months was nearly up and the Committee was tentatively exploring whether there was the possibility of a further term. The deacons commented that the case of Gitta was practically solved, although the solution was not minuted. It was also felt that, since Mr Stevens expected there to be a balance in hand in the Refugee Fund of about £30, Walter's period could be extended for perhaps another year, particularly if suitable accommodation could be found. Because of the generosity of the de la Mare family, relatively little of the Fund had been used for Gitta. Walter's period as part of New Road was extended throughout 1940. The deacons noted in February 1940 that he had accommodation with Miss Holliday in Buckingham Street and three months later a letter from one of Walter's family, expressing 'sincere and profuse' thanks to New Road, was received.⁵² The New Road deacons, having invested considerable energy in caring for Gitta and Walter, saw this as marking the end of their official involvement. Their attention was turning to other matters.



In connection with the Centenary Celebrations of the New-road Sunday School Society, some 400 children from Bayworth, Thrupp, Charlton, Eynsham, and several other places in the district, visited Oxford on Monday, when, after a sermon in the New-road Chapel by the Rev. D. J. Hiley, of Norwood, an excellent tea was served in the Corn Exchange. Above is a group of the children and members of the Society taken on the steps of the Old Clarendon Buildings previous to the tea.—(Photo, J. Soame, Oxford).

The New Road Chapel Sunday School Society centenary, 1913

A change of ministry

The Second World War, like the First, profoundly affected the life of the churches. Men and women were both conscripted into the armed services; the population was affected by evacuation programmes which emptied city churches and filled village chapels; church buildings were requisitioned and some church activities were cancelled because of inability to meet the 'black-out' requirements. All these changes were experienced either by New Road or by its associated village chapels.

The predominant mood in Britain at the beginning of the Second World War, by contrast with the First, was one of restraint. This was evident at New Road in the typically practical way in which the church responded to the conflict. As Adrian Hastings puts it: 'For the Church, as for the nation as a whole, war was seen by September 1939 as inevitable and just, but it was entered into soberly and rather sadly.'⁵³ Many Free Church ministers and Anglican clergymen became chaplains. There was some continuity between the experience of chaplaincy in the two wars. A Second World War chaplain like Maurice Wood, who was to become an evangelical Anglican leader in the post-war period as Bishop of Norwich, could speak of the way in which the example of Studdert Kennedy, a famous First World War chaplain, influenced his ministry.⁵⁴ Many ministries, including Baptist ministries, were shaped by war.

By the end of 1939 there were reports of considerable involvement in chaplaincy work by Baptist ministers; indeed by October 1939, thirty-six Baptist pastors had applied for Commissioned Chaplaincies under the United Navy and Army Board set up during World War I.⁵⁵ By December forty-nine Baptists were chaplains in the regular Army, ten in the RAF and two in the Navy.⁵⁶ Given his own experiences in the First World War, Harry White was keen to serve in this way. As early as 29 August 1939 he told the New Road deacons that he had accepted a chaplaincy under the United Board at the

nearby Cowley Barracks. He was also in touch with wider developments in Europe, and was invited to form part of a British Churches' delegation engaged in talks in Geneva.⁵⁷ It seems that the part-time chaplaincy at Cowley may not have lived up to White's expectations and at a deacons' meeting on 31 October 1939 he reported that he proposed to hand over the chaplaincy to the newly-appointed minister of the Cowley Congregational Church.⁵⁸ His sights, as would become apparent, were firmly set on full-time chaplaincy.

On 28 May 1940 White told the deacons that he had received an enquiry about whether his earlier offer of full-time chaplaincy to the Forces still stood. He had replied that this was the case and was now waiting to know more.⁵⁹ On 1 August 1940 the deacons heard from White that he had been accepted as a chaplain and appointed to the RAF. He would report for duty on 15 August. White was to serve in Canada, organizing the chaplaincy service there for RAF personnel. Only a year before the deacons had resolved that a change in the pastorate 'at the present juncture would be disastrous'.⁶⁰ Now they had no choice but to look for a temporary replacement minister. One idea was that a minister might be willing to move for a time from a coastal area that had been evacuated.⁶¹ However, soon the deacons were in touch with Walter Bottoms, who was in a different situation. Walter Bottoms had studied at Bristol Baptist College and at Regent's Park College (he had a BA and MA), had been minister at Glossop Road, Sheffield from 1934 to 1937, and had then moved to the Young People's Department of the Baptist Missionary Society. The deacons discovered that Bottoms was open to a move from the BMS and as part of the process of investigation by New Road and himself he preached at New Road on 1 September 1940. At a deacons' meeting on 3 September it was agreed that he should be recommended to the church as temporary minister. The church concurred and Walter Bottoms accepted. For the second time New Road welcomed a new minister during wartime.⁶²

Coping with a second war

There were other challenges with which the congregation had to cope. Young people from New Road joined up and in some cases were away for the whole of the war. In September 1945 twenty-one former members of the New Road Sunday School and Young People's Fellowship were still serving with the Forces.⁶³ In their thinking about the local church activities in a changed situation, with bombing as a possibility, church members agreed that as far as possible all the windows in the church premises should be made capable of being darkened so that evening gatherings could be carried on as usual. L.H. Brockington, a deacon and a lecturer at Regent's Park College, undertook the management of the blacking out scheme. At the deacons' meeting on 2 January 1940 there was discussion of air raid precautions. If an air raid warning occurred during a service on Sunday or during a weeknight meeting it was agreed to recommend that the congregation or the meeting should immediately but quietly disperse and take cover in the public air raid shelters in the immediate vicinity. Notices to this effect were to be exhibited on the notice boards. On 1 October 1940 the deacons returned to the topic of air raids. It was reported that an air raid shelter was now available next to the Sunday School premises, under the Central School in New Inn Hall Street. Brockington suggested, and it was agreed, that if a warning was in force at the time of the commencement of a service then the service would not be held, but if the 'all clear' came at least half an hour before the commencement of a service then the service would go ahead but would start fifteen minutes later.⁶⁴ The New Road deacons were seeking to deal with all eventualities.

From early in 1941 Walter Bottoms began to place his own stamp on New Road. He arranged a special service for the Forces on one Sunday in March, with Chaplain L. Atkins, a United Board Chaplain in Oxford, as the preacher. In the same month enquiries were made by the Oxford city authorities about the suitability of the New Road Sunday School premises

for use as a communal feeding centre. By June, Bottoms and the deacons had reached an agreement with the authorities that the church could be used six days a week. The payment to the church was to be £1 per week.⁶⁵ The centre, known as Municipal Restaurant No. 3, opened on 8 July 1941 and fed as many as five hundred people a day. The restaurant stayed open until 1947. Another New Road room was already being used by the authorities as an evening Rest Room and Canteen for the Forces, bringing in a further ten shillings per week. On Saturday evenings a New Road Club was started for soldiers, airmen and others who were stationed nearby.⁶⁶ Through his work with the BMS Bottoms knew the denominational leadership, and he was keen not only to be involved with the community but to support the wider Baptist denomination. In June 1941 the church agreed to send the proceeds of a forthcoming church garden-party to the Baptist Union War Emergency Fund. On 30 September 1941 Bottoms was asked to continue as pastor for another twelve months 'or for the duration of the war, whichever was the longer'. The deacons spoke unanimously of his 'exceptional gifts as a Pastor'.⁶⁷ Attendances were growing, with many evacuees becoming associate members and contributing to the life of the church.⁶⁸

Further support was given by New Road to Baptist chaplaincy work, principally under the United Board, during 1942. The Board was short of furniture for a rest room and New Road donated an easy chair from the upstairs vestry. This small gesture was indicative of a sustained concern for ministry to military personnel. By April 1942 there were one hundred and fifty commissioned Baptist and Congregational chaplains. Two had been killed in action, two had died in this country, one was reported missing and six were prisoners of war.⁶⁹ David Rigden Green, a Regent's Park College student who had commenced ministry in August 1939 (on the day war was declared) as assistant pastor of New Road and first minister of John Bunyan Baptist Church, Cowley, became a full-time commissioned chaplain in 1942. His place was taken

in both posts by S. C. Crowe, who moved from the Baptist church in Blockley.

There seems to have been little if any interest in the pacifist cause at New Road, and on 28 July 1942 a request from a pacifist group for the use of a room in New Road was turned down by the deacons. Throughout the country, membership of Christian pacifist groups such as the Fellowship of Reconciliation amounted at most to only 15,000.⁷⁰ On 1 September 1942 the deacons agreed that the Chaplain-in-Charge of the United States Forces in England, Colonel Blakeney, who was himself a Baptist, should be involved in a church parade at New Road incorporating American troops.⁷¹

Other war-related events impinged on New Road's life. Günter Müller, a German prisoner of war, met and later married May Crouch, an evacuee in Oxford, both becoming members of New Road.⁷² Earlier, in 1942, the deacons discussed joint services with other churches if fuel became scarce, agreed to oppose Sunday opening of theatres and music halls through representations to Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary, and investigated complaints about 'unpleasant odours' after the daily cooking on the premises. New Road's branch chapels were also brought into use for the war effort. Botley was used by the Berkshire Education Authority as a school for evacuees during 1942.⁷³ The arrangement at Botley came to an end in the summer of 1943 and the New Road deacons, with their usual practicality, appointed a committee to inspect the premises and make claims for any damage that was found.⁷⁴ The inspection was reassuring and when Berkshire asked for Bayworth chapel for the same purpose this was agreed. It was an arrangement that was deemed in 1944 to have worked well.⁷⁵ At New Road the church's black-out system was not always efficient. In June 1942 there was a cautionary letter from the Oxfordshire Chief Constable regarding unscreened lights that had been left on during the black-out. The Chief Constable warned that should a lapse occur again a fine would be imposed. The diaconate agreed

that all users of the premises would be reminded of their responsibilities and would be held responsible for any failures.⁷⁶ New fire-fighting equipment was purchased and a rota of fire-watchers was set up. Ruth Woodward, for example, a church member in her twenties, was on duty every fortnight while Beryl Murray, then a teenager, was one of a group from the Young People's Fellowship on the fire-watching rota.⁷⁷ Throughout the war New Road served the wider community, while also being concerned to safeguard its own interests.

Conclusion

The two World Wars were periods of great national upheaval and this inevitably affected Baptist churches. During the First World War there was huge loss of life. The Second World War saw the country dislocated by German bombing. Many Baptist churches, as well as the offices of the BMS and the Baptist Union, suffered bomb damage.⁷⁸ In the First World War, New Road had its share of tragic casualties. There was a reference in 1918 to New Road 'losing heavily in valued supporters in recent years'.⁷⁹ In the Second World War the church was affected by air raid and related precautions, although it was not bombed. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the New Road story during the two World Wars is that the leadership coped calmly during the crises. The deacons dealt firmly with matters they felt were important. Sometimes these were thrust upon them - in each war they had to seek a new pastor - and sometimes they took initiatives, for example in offering to help refugees.

Towards the end of the War the New Road deacons were prompted to look again at the future. In January 1944 a reconstruction subcommittee was appointed 'to consider and report on some measure of rebuilding'. A fund was opened for this purpose, the minutes noting that the matter was urgent, and that 'it behoved us to be ready for any eventuality'.⁸⁰ On 5 April 1944 the deacons discussed a resignation letter from Harry White, who said that he had been separated from the

church for so long that this was the right thing to do. His resignation was accepted. There was never any doubt about what would happen as a result. On 26 May 1944 the deacons unanimously agreed to recommend Walter Bottoms for the pastorate. This was the church's wish, and Bottoms' ministry was to continue until 1955. During a distinguished ministry he served as a University Chaplain through the John Bunyan Society, as Honorary Chaplain to the Military Hospital and as a member of the City of Oxford Education Committee. The outward-directed ministry of the war years continued. In 1956 he became editor of the *Baptist Times*. In 1948, under Bottoms, New Road could be described as 'the centre for Baptist life in the city and the county' and as 'a denominational key-point as the church to which many Baptist students look for a spiritual home ... and to which many Baptist visitors come from abroad'.⁸¹ New Road's practical and effective ministry, obvious during national crises, continued to be evident.

NOTES

¹ *Baptist Times (BT)*, 6 January 1914, p.24; K.W. Clements, 'Baptists and the Outbreak of the First World War', *Baptist Quarterly (BQ)* XXVI (1975), 80.

² *Christian World*, 8 January 1914, p. 7.

³ *British Weekly*, 20 August 1914, p. 525.

⁴ *BT*, 25 September 1914, p. 719.

⁵ Clements, 'Baptists and the Outbreak of the First World War', 76.

⁶ M. Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford, 1980), p. 3.

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⁸ Minutes of deacons' meetings, (DMM), 14 November 1914, New Road records (NRR), Box 3, Angus Library, Oxford.

- ⁹ Minutes of the National Free Church Council General Committee, 4 December 1914; *The Times*, 25 November 1915, p. 9.
- ¹⁰ *Oxford & District Free Churchman (ODFCM)* XVIII no. 217 (January 1915), 119.
- ¹¹ *ODFCM* XVIII no. 218 (February 1915), 123.
- ¹² *ODFCM* XVIII no. 221 (May 1915), 135, 137.
- ¹³ I. Randall and D. Hilborn, *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance* (Carlisle, 2001), p. 168.
- ¹⁴ *Evangelical Christendom*, July-August 1915, pp. 129-30.
- ¹⁵ For correspondence on this issue see Dann papers, NRR Box 27.
- ¹⁶ DMM, 8 October 1915, 5 November 1915.
- ¹⁷ Minutes of church meetings (CMM), 15 December 1915, NRR Box 1.
- ¹⁸ CMM, 15 December 1915.
- ¹⁹ CMM, 2 August 1916.
- ²⁰ CMM, 1 November 1916.
- ²¹ CMM, 10 May 1916.
- ²² CMM, 29 August 1917.
- ²³ CMM, 2 January 1918.
- ²⁴ CMM, 30 January 1918.
- ²⁵ D.C. Sparkes, *The Home Mission Story* (Didcot, 1995), pp. 57-8.
- ²⁶ Minutes of Sustentation Fund Subcommittee, 18 January 1915.
- ²⁷ *BT*, 30 April 1915, supplement, p. III.
- ²⁸ *BT*, 3 March 1916, p. 132.
- ²⁹ CMM, 13 December 1916.
- ³⁰ Minutes of Deacons' Meeting and Consultative Committee, 17 May 1917, NRR Box 3.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 20 June 1917.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 26 June 1917.

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- ³⁴ CMM, 27 June 1917.
- ³⁵ D.M. Rose, *Baptist Deaconesses* (London, 1954), p. 10; cf. N. Morris, *Sisters of the People: The Order of Baptist Deaconesses, 1890-1975* (Bristol, 2002).
- ³⁶ BT, 4 January 1907, supplement, p. v.
- ³⁷ BT, 7 November 1919, p. 650; F. Bowers, *A Bold Experiment: The Story of Bloomsbury Chapel and Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 1848-1999* (London, 1999), pp. 215, 248.
- ³⁸ ODFCM XIX no. 255 (March 1918), 293.
- ³⁹ DMM, 26 February 1918; CMM, 27 February 1918.
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- ⁴¹ E.A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London, 1958), p.207; *Attitude of the Baptist Denomination to War*, pamphlet, 1937.
- ⁴² BT, 26 April 1934, pp. 296, 303; 17 May 1934, p. 369.
- ⁴³ Stevens and Bottoms, *The Baptists of New Road*, p. 20.
- ⁴⁴ DMM, 2 April 1940.
- ⁴⁵ Clyde Binfield, *Pastors and People: The Biography of a Baptist Church: Queens Road, Coventry* (Coventry, 1984), pp. 247-55; P.R. Dekar, 'Twentieth-Century British Baptist Conscientious Objectors', *BQ XXXV* (1993), 39-40.
- ⁴⁶ Obituary in *The Baptist Union Directory, 1981-82* (London, 1982), p. 300.
- ⁴⁷ DMM, 29 November 1938.
- ⁴⁸ Stevens and Bottoms, *The Baptists of New Road*, p. 22.
- ⁴⁹ DMM, 6 January 1939.
- ⁵⁰ DMM, 8 February 1939; 28 February 1939.
- ⁵¹ DMM, 31 October 1939.

- ⁵² DMM, 6 February 1940; 28 May 1940.
- ⁵³ A Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990* (London, 1991), p. 373.
- ⁵⁴ A Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?: War, Peace and the English Churches, 1900-1945* (London, 1986), p. 293.
- ⁵⁵ Minutes of the United Navy, Army and Air Force Board, 13 October 1939.
- ⁵⁶ Minutes of Baptist Union War Services Committee, 4 December 1939.
- ⁵⁷ DMM, 29 August 1939.
- ⁵⁸ DMM, 31 October 1939.
- ⁵⁹ DMM, 28 May 1940.
- ⁶⁰ DMM, 28 February 1939.
- ⁶¹ DMM, 1 August 1940.
- ⁶² DMM, 3 September 1940; CMM, 26 September 1940.
- ⁶³ Cutting from an unidentified newspaper, NRR Box 59.
- ⁶⁴ DMM, 1 October 1940.
- ⁶⁵ DMM, 1 April 1941; 2 June 1941.
- ⁶⁶ Ruth Woodward, interviewed by Margaret Hughes; cutting from the *Oxford Mail*, 8 July 1947, NRR Box 59.
- ⁶⁷ DMM, 30 September 1941.
- ⁶⁸ Stevens and Bottoms, *The Baptists of New Road*, p. 20.
- ⁶⁹ *BT*, 30 April 1942, p. 211.
- ⁷⁰ M. Ceadel, 'Christian Pacifism in the Era of two World Wars', in W J Sheils, ed, *The Church and War* (Oxford, 1983), p. 404.
- ⁷¹ DMM, 1 September 1942.
- ⁷² See unpublished manuscript by Günter Müller (2002).
- ⁷³ DMM, 26 January 1942; 27 July 1942.
- ⁷⁴ DMM, 14 September 1943.
- ⁷⁵ DMM, 30 November 1943; 1 February 1944.

⁷⁶ DMM, 23 June 1942.

⁷⁷ Beryl Murray, interviewed by Margaret Hughes, October 2002.

⁷⁸ Payne, *The Baptist Union*, pp. 214-15.

⁷⁹ *ODFCM* XX no. 258 (June 1918), 306.

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Alfred George Palmer

David J. Jeremy and others

Alfred George Palmer MBE, JP, MA (Oxon) (1912–1997) was a leading member of New Road Baptist Church.¹ He was church treasurer between 1937 and 1981, a period spanning the difficult war years and the church redevelopment of the 1970s. In his chosen profession, he rose to become general manager of the Oxford Trustee Savings Bank. In the life of the city of Oxford, he engaged in voluntary social work and served as a Justice of the Peace. This chapter offers a micro-study of a New Road member in the twentieth century.

Origins and education

Alfred George Palmer (hereafter AG) was an Oxford man through and through. His grandfather, George Palmer (1860–1927), was head gardener at Worcester College, Oxford. His father George Richard Palmer (1884–1962), born at South Hinksey, Oxford, was a painter and glazier with Salter Bros who were well known in the Thames Valley for their summer steamer cruises. AG's parents had a deep Christian belief. His mother, born Esther Mary Taylor in 1887 in Charlton-on-Otmoor, was a Baptist. His father was originally a Wesleyan, but some years before their marriage in 1909 he joined Esther at the local Baptist chapel (presumed to be the one at South Hinksey, Oxford). George Richard was equally devout and strict in his beliefs and after he died Esther's youngest brother Frank wrote to tell her that 'George was a man who lived his life truly at peace with his God'.² For over thirty years from the

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late 1920s, George Richard was a deacon (and latterly a life deacon) at New Road Baptist Church, where he was remembered for his quiet dedication as a 'doorkeeper in the house of the Lord', welcoming worshippers week by week.³

AG was born at Summerfield, Oxford, on 15 June 1912. 'His mother was a strong character and had very definite ideas how she wanted her only child to be brought up. He was probably rather lonely as a small boy as he wasn't allowed to play with other children in the street. He went to chapel and Sunday School three times every Sunday.' Whether he first attended the chapel at South Hinksey is unknown; certainly he worshipped at New Road in his teens. 'It is little wonder that he was immersed in the chapel before he was immersed at Baptism.'⁴

Keith, AG's elder son, recalls what he knows about his father's school career:

He attended New Hinksey School (an all boys' school at that time) until he won a scholarship to the City of Oxford High School for Boys. Academically he was not only bright but also conscientious and hard-working. He gained distinctions in Mathematics and Advanced Mathematics in the Higher School Certificate at the age of eighteen, having changed to Maths from Classics in the sixth form. A personal letter from his Head Master, W. Parkinson, congratulated him on his eight grade 'A's' out of eight and in gaining a State Scholarship on the results of the Higher School Certificate - better results than anyone in living memory from that school. Mr Parkinson added, 'Please tell your parents how well satisfied I am with your work and with your whole conduct as a schoolboy'.⁵

Besides a State Scholarship, he also won an Open Postmastership for Mathematics at Merton College, the Ewelme Exhibition for Mathematics, and an Oxford Municipal Charities Exhibition. This outstanding record was completed

Alfred George Palmer

at Merton College where he graduated with a First Class BA degree in 1933. H.O. Newbould, Fellow and Tutor of Merton, then wrote the following testimonial:

Mr A.G. Palmer was my pupil for the three years he was in residence at this College. His ability as a mathematician is far above that of the average scholar, and in Finals (in which I was an examiner) he obtained one of the best firsts in his year. He is extremely industrious, and showed an unusual talent for being able to work on his own. I have never had a pupil who needed so little teaching. His mental alertness, industry and initiative will ensure his success in whatever occupation he takes up, as he has wide interests outside Mathematics.⁶

From Merton College AG immediately joined the infant Oxford Savings Bank at £3 a week.⁷ Why he opted for a career in financial services rather than academia, research, or science-based industry can only be guessed. In the midst of economic depression, the year 1933 was not a good one for most people trying to enter the labour market. As an 'all-rounder', AG plainly had no intention of being boxed into work narrowly focused on his mathematical skills. These would remain one of his strengths, however.

Working life

Doubtless one appeal of the Trustee Savings Bank movement (of which the Oxford Savings Bank was a part) was its ethical foundation, dedicated as it was to the Puritan-Nonconformist virtue of thrift. Savings banks began in 1810 when the first, the Ruthwell Parish Bank, was established by the Revd Henry Duncan, a Church of Scotland minister in Dumfries. The objective was to attract 'the uncertain savings of the poor' and lodge them as long-term deposits.⁸ Under Rose's Act of 1817, all the deposits of the savings banks in England and Wales were placed with the Commissioners of the

National Debt who held them in a special account at the Bank of England. This made them a sound financial institution, though not of course immune from local fraud. The interest rate, at first just over 4.5 per cent per annum (then higher than the Government's Consolidated Stock), was fixed by the National Debt Commissioners, and was so when AG joined the Oxford Savings Bank. In contrast, the high street banks offered a range of rates and risks.

Just before AG joined the Oxford Savings Bank, the Savings Banks Act of 1929 was passed, greatly advancing the prospects of Trustee Savings Banks. First, they were brought more fully into the Savings Movement. In the competition to attract small savers, three rivals had emerged after the First World War: the Post Office Savings Bank, established by the Government in 1861 and operating through the national network of local post offices; the wartime National Savings Committee (formed 1917) which, through local committees and over 25,000 associations, tapped the savings of those in schools, churches, commercial offices, factories, and the armed forces; and the Trustee Savings Banks. At a national level, the three were co-ordinated in what Michael Moss and Iain Russell, the historians of the TSB, have called the 'Trinity of Thrift'. No special encouragement was given to municipal savings banks, controversially regarded as agents of irresponsible lending policies or vehicles of socialism.⁹

Second, the National Debt Commissioners were empowered by the Act to release the funds accumulated when over two hundred savings banks closed in the 1860s, following the arrival of the Post Office Savings Bank. With this fresh investment, new Trustee Savings Banks could be opened. One of them was the Oxford Savings Bank. Third, Trustee Savings Banks could set up or extend both Ordinary and Special Investment Departments. Last, they were empowered to offer 'ancillary services' to the public, meaning any service offered by a high street bank and designed to encourage thrift.¹⁰

The first Oxford Savings Bank had been forced to close in 1865, unable to compete against both the joint-stock banks and the new Post Office Savings Banks.¹¹ A new Oxford Savings Bank was inaugurated in July 1933. It was 'supported by a "very representative body" comprising the Mayor, several city councillors, a clergyman, several well-known tradesmen, members of the University teaching staff, and a Labour JP (the local secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen)'.¹² AG was joining a new institution very much in the eye of both town and gown.

In short, in joining the Oxford Savings Bank, AG imaginably felt a plurality of attractions that might have stirred any wide-horizoned Nonconformist. It was dedicated to thrift. It was a new financial institution, with the potential for career acceleration. The wider movement in which it was set had just received a new lease of life: here was an opportunity to pursue innovations, both in financial and marketing devices. Though it was not a municipal savings bank, Oxford Savings Bank was dedicated to the working class saver, in contrast to the building societies which then catered for the middle classes. The work utilized Alfred Palmer's mathematical virtuosity. In addition, it kept him in Oxford.

In 1934, about a year after joining the bank, AG applied for and was successful in getting the post of 'Actuary', or 'Manager'. David Miles, a former subordinate and colleague, recalls AG, 'known affectionately as 'AG' to all his friends and acquaintances', in the workplace:

When I joined the Oxford Savings Bank, as it was then known, in 1941, AG was the Actuary with a wartime staff of himself, two girls and myself. In those days the Bank was housed in a small office at 40 George Street next to the old Fire Station. AG must have been still under thirty years of age and probably one of the youngest Savings Bank Actuaries in the country. The Banking Hall was all of twenty-five feet square with a boardroom above and a

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cellar below. AG acted as manager, cashier and everything else besides. He was unable to leave the Banking Hall for any length of time and I remember that my interview had to be conducted over the counter! His right-hand man, Jim Higgs, an old Reading Savings Bank man, was in the Forces as were two other clerks.

At that time 40 George Street was the only office in Oxford, but there was an evening Bank in the front room of a private house at Headington operating from 5 to 7 p.m. on Mondays and Fridays. After closing the Oxford office, AG would cycle to Headington with one of the clerks with ledger and cash in a canvas bag on his handlebars to open the evening office.

Although everything was done in the name of the Trustees, AG was the driving force behind the expansion of the Bank and worked tirelessly to that end. He soon found premises in Headington to open the Headington Branch, at first in the afternoons only and later full-time. He also negotiated with the Pressed Steel Company at Cowley to operate a Bank during the lunch-hour and one evening a week during the night shift's break.¹³

Marketing appeals that must have had AG's approval, if he did not originate the text itself, were recorded in a passage quoted by the TSB historians. When the Cowley branch was opened, in July 1942, the Oxford Savings Bank declared 'Many employees prefer an account in the Trustee Savings Bank to other forms of National Savings as they appreciate the opportunity to save in privacy, the friendly help and service which the Bank gives, and the facilities for speedy withdrawals when necessary'.¹⁴

David Miles continues:

The Savings Banks were part of the National Savings Movement in those days and AG was a prominent member of the Oxford Savings Committee and helped organise special Savings weeks such as 'War Weapons Week' to persuade the public to invest money in National Savings to help the war effort.

The Bank soon outgrew its premises in George Street and AG was instrumental in moving into the centre of Oxford to the old Martins Bank premises on Carfax.

I left to join the Forces in 1944 and when I returned in 1947 the Bank had opened branches in Banbury and Witney. The Savings Banks had become known as Trustee Savings Banks and under AG's guidance further branches were opened over the years, locally in Cowley, Cowley Road, Summertown and Botley and further afield in Abingdon and Brackley.¹⁵ AG's title, in common with all the Savings Bank Actuaries, had been changed to General Manager. Finally, when the Bank had outgrown its Carfax premises, his greatest achievement was to persuade the Trustees to purchase an old pub in Market Street, have it demolished and build a brand new Head Office. It was rather a joke - AG, the absolute teetotaller, working on the site of an old pub! The Bank even outgrew the Market Street offices in time and he moved the Administration Department to premises in St Michael's Street.

Up to the 1960s when the Bank had grown large enough for AG to appoint its own internal inspector, he acted as Inspector and used to surprise Branch Managers by appearing early in the morning or at closing time to carry out a 'spot check' of the cash and inspect the books!

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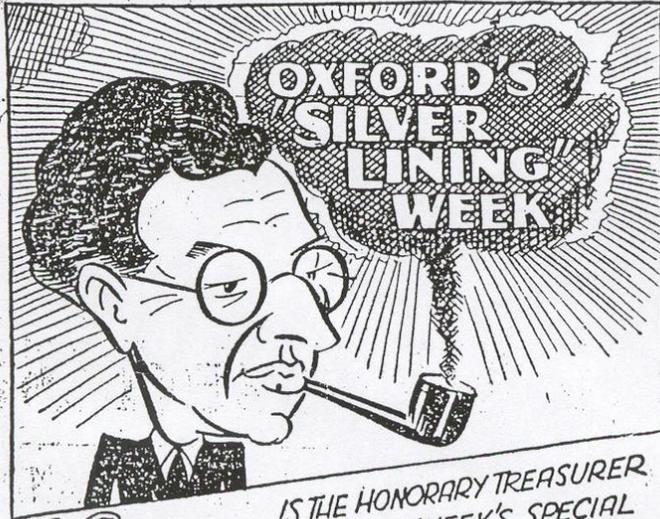
AG was always very forward-looking and introduced new mechanised bookkeeping methods. Certainly up to the early 1950's, when I left Head Office to manage a branch, he was still very much 'hands on', in addition to his administrative role. He always helped with the annual and quarterly balance work and would often burst into song with a few verses of one or other of the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas. This usually signified that he had balanced a ledger! Gradually AG's role became almost entirely administrative, although if he came down into the Banking Hall and saw queues at lunchtime he would still open a till to help out.¹⁶

AG was not the only link between the Oxford Savings Bank and the Baptists at New Road. Cumnor farmer Robert de la Mare, at one time the church curator or property steward, was vice-chairman of the Bank by 1947.¹⁷ Jim Higgs, AG's deputy, was also a member at the church. AG's son Keith offers further glimpses of his father's working life:

He worked long hours but he did usually manage to cycle home for dinner, grab a short nap and then go back for the long afternoon/evening shift. Then he usually brought work home. For some years the bank had a half-day on Thursdays but worked until seven or eight o'clock on Saturday evenings. Long hours - a good thing Lucy [AG's wife] was a hard-working homemaker.¹⁸

In addition to his role in the Oxford Trustee Savings Bank, AG took a great interest and played a large part in the work of the Trustee Savings Bank movement generally. He served on various committees in London and also helped organise Summer Schools, which took place annually in various Universities under the auspices of the Savings Banks Institute, often in Worcester College, Oxford. (The SBI was a professional and examining body, similar to the

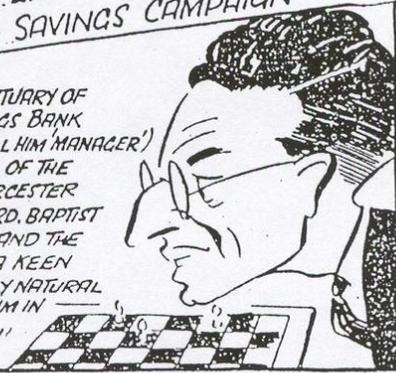
OXFORD GALLERY *by ALAN COURSE*



**A.G.
PALMER**

IS THE HONORARY TREASURER
FOR NEXT WEEK'S SPECIAL
EFFORT IN THE NATIONAL
SAVINGS CAMPAIGN

HE IS, BY PROFESSION, THE ACTUARY OF THE OXFORD TRUSTEE SAVINGS BANK (ANY OTHER BANK WOULD CALL HIM MANAGER) — BUT HE IS ALSO HON. TREAS. OF THE ROTARY CLUB, OXFORD & WORCESTER COLLEGE BOYS CLUB, NEW RD. BAPTIST CHURCH, GORING TRUSTEES AND THE HUGHES TRUST. HE IS ALSO A KEEN CHESS PLAYER, SO IT'S ONLY NATURAL THAT THEY SHOULD ROPE HIM IN AS HON. TREAS. OF THE OXON. CHESS ASSOCIATION!!



Cartoon of 'AG', in the Oxford Mail, February 1948

much older Institute of Bankers, and was established in 1945.¹⁹) He went to Sweden to attend an international savings bank conference in the late 1940s.²⁰

In 1950 he organised the first Summer School of the International Thrift Institute (founded in 1910) at Worcester College, Oxford during 10-15 June. There followed other international savings conferences which he organised at Worcester College every two years or so until the early 1960s.²¹

AG was a great believer in the Savings Bank movement and (as David Miles surmises) 'he must have been very sad at the changes which took place after his retirement - the amalgamation of the individual banks, the Oxford Bank becoming part of the TSB South East and later the TSB of England and Wales. I feel sure that he would have been horrified to know that the TSBs are now part of Lloyds Bank!'

'Generally speaking,' recalls David, 'AG was always very good humoured, but he did not suffer fools gladly and, if anything displeased him, he could have a very sharp tongue. His pet aversion was unpunctuality'.²² Keith, AG's son, adds, 'He had a temper but showed it only on very few occasions'.²³

In 1959 AG was awarded an MBE in recognition of his work for the Savings Bank Movement. He retired in October 1972, when he was honoured at a dinner in the Eastgate Hotel, Oxford, given by the trustees of the Oxford TSB. It was noted then that when AG was appointed general manager on 21 September 1934 the Oxford Bank had 427 accounts with balances totalling £22,500. When he retired it had 156,000 depositors, whose balances stood at £33,680,640.²⁴

The measure of AG's achievement can be readily tested by comparing the growth of the Oxford Trustees Savings Bank with that of the TSB as a whole. The results are in Table 1. AG's bank grew seventy to eighty times faster than the whole TSB. Of course the Oxford TSB was starting from scratch, whereas the TSB as a whole was well over a century old. And many other factors besides AG were at work on the Oxford

scene. Nevertheless, business leadership, such as AG exerted, invariably plays a critical part in any record of commercial institutional growth.

Table 1

Growth of Oxford Trustee Savings Bank compared to growth of total TSB accounts, 1934-1972.

	Oxford Savings Bank		TSB as a whole	
	No. of a/cs	Depositors' balances	No. of a/cs (ordinary)	Depositors' balances (ord'y & special investment)
		£		£
1934	427	22,500	2,076,791	175,933,078
1972	156,000	33,680,640	10,603,000	3,132,200,000
Growth multiple 1934-72	365	1,497	5	18
OSB/TSB Rate	72	84.08		

Sources

Oxford Mail 9 October 1972, p.3; Michael Moss and Iain Russell, *An Invaluable Treasure: A History of the TSB* (London, 1994), pp. 324-7.

In the community

At various times AG was involved with a number of charities as their honorary treasurer. These included the Goring and Hughes Trusts, ancient charities established for the benefit of Baptist ministers; the Oxford & Worcester College Boys'

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Club; the Oxford Rotary Club; the Oxfordshire Chess Association; and various 'Savings Weeks'.

He was deeply involved with the League of Friends of Littlemore, Warneford and Park Hospitals and the associated Oxford Group Homes organization, not least as honorary treasurer, over his last twenty years or so. In a similar capacity he also served the Ley Community (an addiction rehabilitation organisation), at Yarnton, just north of Oxford. In these directions he again demonstrated 'his talents for marshalling the funds to enable expansion by building new facilities and acquiring premises for conversion'.²⁵ Derek, AG's other son, recalls many occasions on which building plans were being studied at home:

Alfred took a keen interest in the detail of all the plans in which he was involved: the Bank offices, of which we know there were many new and redeveloped sites; New Road's redevelopment; Ley Community accommodation buildings; and shortly before he died, Oxford Group Homes Organization administrative offices which happily he was able to see completed.

AG's contributions were recognized by naming new buildings or facilities after him, and during his lifetime, which was a rare honour. The Ley Community opened their 'Palmer House' on 26 November 1993. The Littlemore, Warneford and Park Hospitals opened their 'A.G. Palmer House' on 15 April 1997.

AG also dealt with many peoples' individual financial and tax affairs. He helped people make their wills; acted as executor for many individuals' estates; and did not normally (perhaps never) make any charge for this time consuming work. Finally, AG served as a Justice of the Peace. He was appointed to the Oxford Bench on 29 March 1961 and resigned on 19 December 1979 when he gave 'pressure of work' as the reason for his retirement.²⁶ This was the very time when he

took on a duty of supervision in the New Road redevelopment scheme, clearly demonstrating how highly he regarded his church commitments and his fitness to discharge them.

In church

Given his Baptist upbringing it was not surprising, but certainly not inevitable, that AG continued his church involvement into adulthood. His musical abilities reinforced these influences. At some point, while young, he had music lessons and became competent on the piano, discovering a love of music and not least of hymns. As a teenager, he played the organ at South Hinksey Baptist Chapel and, like generations of other church-goers, he found in hymns some of the most resonant expressions of Christian faith and experience.

As far as is known, AG had no sudden conversion experience. He grew into the faith his parents demonstrated. With his upbringing:

it was totally natural for Alfred to live his own life around his central Christian beliefs quietly and without fuss ... AG's beliefs seemed to be an integral part of his life, work and personality, not an addition or afterthought. It would not have occurred to him knowingly to act contrary to his beliefs. I cannot say whether he was primarily a Baptist or a Christian. He was clearly at the liberal end of Baptist thinking with positive views on ecumenical ideas. New Road's generally open attitudes suited him. If I were asked to label him (which I don't wish to do) it would be Free Church (Baptist). He believed that if he had talents they should naturally be used for the benefit of those who might need help.²⁷

AG was received into church membership at New Road in 1928, when he was sixteen, his father already being a deacon there at that time. He became church treasurer at the age of twenty-five in sad circumstances in 1937. The previous

treasurer, Alderman Leonard Henry Alden JP, then Mayor of Oxford, was knocked down and fatally injured on 21 July 1937. At the church meeting on 1 September following, the minister, the Revd Harry J. White, brought the unanimous recommendation of the deacons that AG be appointed church treasurer. The meeting agreed. AG was not then a deacon but became one *ex officio*.²⁸

By no measure was AG a typical 1930s Baptist church deacon. For example, in *The Baptist Who's Who* of 1933, which listed about 5,300 Baptist lay officials, a one in ten sample showed that only 2.9 per cent held degrees.²⁹ Again, if the occupations of the New Road deacons are sampled, retail tradesmen, skilled employees, and married ladies (who then probably did not go out to work) outnumbered professionals before the Second World War.³⁰

At New Road about a dozen individuals sat on the diaconate, guiding the affairs of the church in almost monthly meetings. The pattern of AG's attendances at the deacons' meetings emerges from a sampling of deacons' meetings. From this the impact of war is clear: in 1939 he managed to get to only half the dozen meetings. In 1940 the proportion went down to less than a third. By 1950 he was attending two thirds and in 1960 and 1970 he missed only a couple in each year.³¹

As treasurer, AG made notable contributions to managing the church finances. Soon after he took over, at the January 1938 deacons' meeting, he reported that the church's total indebtedness 'was in the neighbourhood of £125'. [In mid-1990s money this was the equivalent of £4,750.] It was decided to call a meeting of the church and congregation for a week or so later to explain the position, presumably AG doing the explaining, 'and to recommend the holding of a two days' bazaar on April 20 and 21 and aim at raising £200 which would free us from our present debt and also provide a balance to meet further necessary expenditure'.³² In May AG reported that the bazaar raised £180 which the pastor, Revd White,

described as a 'wonderful success'. AG had got off to a good start.

Annually the church seemed to be in deficit for sums around £100 and during the year efforts were made to raise funds to reduce this sum. A garden-party, held at Eastwyke Farm, home of Mr and Mrs R.R. Alden, farmers and butchers, in July 1940 raised about £28 and a church gift day on 11-12 December following another £58.³³

AG's good start continued. In June 1942 the church finances were pronounced to be 'in very satisfactory state', and in February 1944 the treasurer was thanked for his services, the deacons noting that 'Our church is particularly blessed in the manner in which our Finances are managed'.³⁴ In February 1950 the draft accounts again 'revealed a healthy financial position'. This healthy situation positioned the church to sanction a rise of £20 in the salary of the Revd S.C. Crowe, minister of the off-shoot John Bunyan Church, Cowley; agree a temporary loan of £195 15s to the Littlemore Baptist Church; and relocate the manse.³⁵

AG's skills were also brought to bear in the church's property ventures. In November 1954, on hearing that the commercial premises at 3 New Inn Hall Street might shortly be on the market, the deacons asked AG to open negotiations with a view to purchase. When, nearly a year later, the premises came up for auction, the deacons agreed 'to entrust the treasurer with the responsibility of representing the church at the sale'.³⁶ Discussion apparently ensued as to whether he should go to the auction incognito. However this was resolved, AG reported two months later that the purchase was close to completion. So far he had expended £5,302 10s, against a ceiling set of £6,500. A Loan Fund had been raised and forty-eight members had sent or promised loans, amounting in all to £5,560. The annual charge in interest and insurance would be £203 1s, offset by a rent of £205. Barely a year later, astute leasing arrangements were yielding a total rent of £305 per annum.³⁷

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'AG' with the four ministers of New Road during his time as church treasurer. From left to right: Robert Brown, Eric Sharpe, 'AG', Harry White and Walter Bottoms.

Within a few months of acquiring 3 New Inn Hall Street there was talk of No. 1 becoming available. AG 'asked whether the purchase of the site should be regarded as necessary to the church and commented on the fact that possession of the whole site would give more scope for future business development'.

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Later he seconded a proposal to seek to obtain No. 1 'if it can be secured on advantageous terms'. In the event, terms could not be agreed. However, in this and other property ventures AG's role was that of the shrewd financial adviser. Others on the diaconate had business experience and presumably made some input in New Road's decision-making, but to AG fell the task of translating these decisions into action, acting as the deacons' trusted agent. Income from these properties was not insubstantial, and some of this was used to support New Road's daughter churches at Bayworth, Botley, and Cowley. Here again, AG could be found putting schemes together. In May 1957, at an extraordinary deacons' meeting:

Mr Palmer, as treasurer, outlined a scheme whereby the income derived from New Rd's commercial properties, after repayment of our own loan, might be used to help Cowley and Botley to meet obligatory payments on their loans.³⁸

A committee was set up under the chairmanship of the New Road treasurer to work out the details of a joint loan fund appeal.

The church redevelopment scheme

Not until the mid-1970s, by which time AG was retired from the Oxford TSB, did the really big property development at New Road occur. Associates at the time recall AG's central role in the redevelopment, a fuller account of which is given elsewhere in this volume. Robin Kemp senior, chartered surveyor, recalls that:

With Peter Reynolds as architect ... I was working on a redevelopment scheme for the Baptist Tabernacle site in Swindon. We met with Alfred in 1975 and I explained to him what we were trying to achieve in Swindon. This involved the redevelopment of the site of the former

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Tabernacle which would provide a new church and community facilities with the intention of widening its activities for the future. The other essential element was the provision of an income to service the running of the Church facilities in the future. He [AG] said that if we could do a similar exercise in Oxford then the Church would welcome the opportunity to consider such a proposal.

After several years a development company was persuaded to consider a scheme:

Negotiations took some time and regular meetings were held with Alfred to try to reconcile the commercial requirements of the developer and the pastoral needs of the Church ... Throughout the initial design period and particularly the time when the building work was taking place I found Alfred to be very quick to latch on to what was needed and at no time did you have to explain anything to him twice. He was also a firm believer in letting us get on with our job which certainly formed a good basis for the working relationship which was needed in order to bring to fruition what was a complex and somewhat unusual scheme.³⁹

Church work beyond New Road

Beyond New Road, AG used his financial expertise and musical gifts in other church-related directions. He was honorary treasurer of John Bunyan Baptist Church, Cowley for many years. In addition, he played the organ at Bayworth Chapel (once per month until he was well into his 70s). Keith recalls that, 'he was very knowledgeable about hymn tunes and was involved in some way with the revising of the Baptist Hymnal'.⁴⁰

Last, in church-related service, AG sat on the Council of Regent's Park College, a college in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and an integral part of the

University of Oxford as a Permanent Private Hall. As honorary treasurer from 1972 he put to good use the adding machine that he had asked for as a retirement present from the TSB. He was *ex officio* member of Council and of the College Executive before being elected in his own right to the Council and the Executive in 1982. The following year he retired as treasurer and was elected honorary life member of Council. 'For more than a decade after this, until the year before he died, AG came into the College office, month after month, to process claims to the Inland Revenue for donations made to the College under covenant.'⁴¹

Paul Fiddes, current Principal of Regent's Park, recalls AG's contribution:

AG played a major part in two developments which completed the buildings on the college site. First he was Treasurer during the building of flats for married students (Gould and Angus Houses), steering the college through what was a complex period financially; this was recognized in a motion of thanks by the College Council in 1983, stating that "all had known they could rely completely on Mr Palmer's financial guidance, and this had been of endless benefit to the College". Second, when no longer Treasurer, he was a key member of the steering group for the development of the South-East Corner of the quadrangle (now Wheeler Robinson House).

In a speech at a lunch in 1995 in AG's honour, Dr Fiddes remarked on the highly encouraging and positive attitude that AG constantly adopted, recalling that 'his own memory of him as Treasurer was 'that he always said "yes". His reaction to some imaginative venture, usually hatched in the fertile mind of the Principal, was to say "How can we finance this and make it work?"' Nor should another aspect of his contribution to college life be forgotten. In the Council minutes for June 1977 the following can be read: 'Mr. K. Clifton had taken over

care of the College quadrangle, with the advice of Mr. Palmer who had again provided bedding plants'.⁴²

Within his own family

AG married Lucy Elizabeth Hancox at St Matthew's Parish Church, Marlborough Road, Oxford in May 1936. Keith (born in 1939) recalls that his parents met in the following way ('at least this is what Lucy told us!'):

AG lived at home after gaining his degree. Summerfield was in south Oxford as was Lincoln Road where Lucy lived with her parents. Both cycled to work up Abingdon Road and St Aldates to reach their respective workplaces. Apparently one day as AG was about to enter Abingdon Road he saw Lucy, whom he did not then know (but I have a feeling might have seen before somewhere), cycling past. I believe that he then tried to be there to meet her on subsequent days at the same time but Lucy was late that first day so it was some time before AG managed to make contact. From then on they cycled to work together, went to theatre, cinema, concerts etc. as one would expect. This was probably autumn 1933 as Lucy kept a diary for the whole of 1934 and AG appears in this from the outset.⁴³

Keith recalls scenes from home life:

In New Road/Baptist circles he was known as 'Alfred'. At home he was known as 'Pa', which started as a joke from 'Life with the Lyons' with Bebe Daniels & Ben Lyon, a comedy show on the radio, in which the parents were always referred to as 'Ma' & 'Pa' by the children.⁴⁴

From letters, diary entries etc. it is clear that they were very much in love and that Lucy and Esther (AG's mother) got on pretty well - perhaps because Lucy's mother died when Lucy was aged three and Esther had not had a daughter.

Anyhow, from my own experience these good and loving relationships continued until Lucy died in 1967 after a very long, painful and difficult battle with cancer. The fact that Lucy was C. of E. did not seem to cause problems although she was slightly disappointed that I had not given the C. of E. much chance – although my younger brother, Derek, was confirmed into the C. of E.⁴⁵

Perhaps it is of interest that both our parents' families came from village backgrounds with bakers, millers, wheelwrights, shopkeeper, on my mother's side matched with college head gardener, blacksmiths and glazier on AG's side. AG always seemed proud of his grandparents having been a college gardener and a blacksmith but he usually preferred to talk about the present doings and future plans of both Derek (born in 1943) and myself and even more so perhaps of his four grandchildren. He was very proud of all of us (even if he didn't necessarily approve of what we decided to do) – although we could only guess his opinions unless we asked.⁴⁶

AG's relationship with his parents was difficult to divine. They all seemed to get on but I don't remember seeing much outward show of affection. I don't remember any tension in the atmosphere but most of the contacts seemed to take place when Lucy was around.⁴⁷

Music infused family life. He was a good singer (bass or baritone) who could sight-read most mainstream choral works, hymns, opera/operetta and music-hall, folk song etc. He had a strong voice with a good, rounded tone. He also loved nonsense songs and anything with a sense of fun. He could hold a part in hymns or 'barber-shop' harmony with no trouble at all. This love of singing he shared with Lucy who was blessed with a beautiful and powerful alto voice (which didn't need to warble!).

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He played hymns well and I think these are what he used to learn to play, partly self-taught probably with an occasional lesson. When we had a piano at home he sometimes practised for his Bayworth hymns but in later years he seemed quite content just to go along and play. At home he played mainly hymns or folk, traditional or music-hall music, a lot of which needed to rush along. This was when a few wrong notes would sometimes creep in as he would be sight-reading, singing and keeping the time and rhythm going (most important) and often turning over his own pages!⁴⁸

As well as a vehicle of faith, music in the Palmer home meant fun.

As a family when we were children growing up we remember AG being happy – he whistled a lot and loved singing – often comic songs. Which reminds me he was always involved in organizing the end of [Trustee Savings Bank] conference concert, usually writing amusing and/or satirical songs commenting on recent events. I remember one year one song he wrote was entitled “Macmillan’s prizewinning bonds” – the year “SuperMac” introduced premium bonds as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Another year’s international conference he wrote a parody on ‘Van Tromp (... was an admiral brave and bold ... ‘ etc.) – there were always Dutch delegates! Both our parents had good voices, sang in choirs and loved singing. They both took part in lots of concert parties and oratorios, and the like, in their younger days before we were born. We remember standing round the piano and having a good sing-song on a number of occasions – AG playing the piano well enough to keep us all having fun and in tempo even if not all the notes would always be accurate all the time. Sometimes visitors to New Road would be invited to Sunday dinner and later hymn singing, from all sorts of hymnals which

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lived on top of the piano (including Sankey & Moody for visiting US Baptist airmen).⁴⁹

This reminds me, AG listened to the radio quite a lot. During the war the news and comedy programmes were always turned on (for example ITMA, Much Binding in the Marsh etc.). In later years Radios 3 & 4 were favourites.⁵⁰

A good chess player, AG belonged to the Oxford City Chess Club, taking part in postal matches. Derek adds:

I can remember the bank premises at Carfax playing host on at least two occasions for the annual Oxford-Cambridge telephone chess match. I acted as one of the tellers, recording the Oxford player's moves and passing these to the telephonist who in turn would give me the opposing Cambridge player's response which I made on his behalf on the Oxford player's board.⁵¹

We also remember him teaching us about crossword puzzles, and teaching us to play some of chess, swimming, tennis etc. We also played lots of card games - speed, cribbage, canasta, strip-jack-naked, sevens, and so forth - but NEVER for money.

AG smoked cigarettes in his younger days as well as a pipe which he carried on smoking to a lesser extent most of his life. Both his sons are total non-smokers. He was teetotal and was a member of the Band of Hope earlier on, but he did not forbid us alcohol. In later years there were always a few bottles on the sideboard (sherries, whisky, gin) with a cloth covering them discreetly. But he never drank - this was strictly for visitors only.⁵²

Both our parents loved outdoor activities, such as gardening, walking, cycling etc. AG grew all the vegetables

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the family ate (and we ate a lot of vegetables). He also particularly liked dahlias and some other flowers for cutting. Flowers were always brightening up the house. There were family days out on our bikes; taking bikes on the train to places further afield; days out on the bus then walking to the top of a hill in the Chilterns or Cotswolds or Berkshire Downs. AG was very interested in English history and the ancient sites, tracks and monuments as well as church architecture. I often thought he felt he belonged naturally to the local landscape. We did occasionally spend a week away from home on holiday but more often than not holidays were planned as a series of days out. He did not like to be away from home for very long. He never took all the holidays from work that he should have each year.⁵³

'After Alfred learnt to drive he and Lucy would go out on drives into country. They both shared a love of the countryside and in this way they could revisit the places they had enjoyed when they were younger and also explore new places.'⁵⁴

'Outward show or fashion were an irrelevance to him.'⁵⁵ For the office he wore the obligatory pin-striped suit. For church, of course, he was smartly dressed. At home, open-necked shirt and grey flannels was his preference, if not gardening (which wasn't often!); more often he was to be found in old flannels, shirt, and sweater, his gardening clothes.

'AG was extremely lucky to have a very supportive, intelligent and loving wife (who, before marriage, had been secretary to the first female mayor of Oxford) without whom he could not have managed to take on all the activities he did.'⁵⁶

Life alone

Keith reflects on AG's life after Lucy's death:

AG suffered very little ill health. Lucy's long illness and subsequent death from cancer in 1967 (when she was fifty-six and he was fifty-four) were a severe blow. He would talk very little till many years later about this and then not at any length. I think it still hurt too much. He immersed himself in work of various sorts after Lucy died: his way of coping. He was brilliant in later years, supporting his grandchildren in various major and minor crises. He was always ready with helpful advice but only when asked. Whatever decision the family took afterwards he was always supportive and never criticized when he might have thought we were being unwise! When we were young we tended to take our problems to Lucy. After we left home we would talk to him much more and kept in frequent contact. His grandchildren and he kept in close touch for as long as he lived, even when our daughter was travelling round the world or living in Australia.⁵⁷

Alfred took up the role of housekeeper. These were new skills and he adopted them so completely that it was very difficult if not impossible for the family to find ways of helping him even right to the end. It was a joke in the family that Isobel, my younger daughter, was the only one allowed in the kitchen. Was it because she was as untidy as Alfred?⁵⁸

AG was not the tidiest of people – papers from all sorts of organisations tended to spread in all directions: many of the older ones were filed not always by category but by the 'sedimentary' system, i.e., "1970s? that'll be about six inches from the bottom of the pile!"⁵⁹

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He cared about others, often going out of his way to encourage them to do whatever they were agonising about. AG was a regular blood donor, stopping only when told he was too old.⁶⁰

In old age

Recent church members add their recollections of AG:

AG's flowers were often (perhaps more often than not at one time) used to decorate the chapel for Sunday services. In later years he shared this interest with Gladys Nixey, another member at New Road.

Alfred was most wonderfully patient, humorous and diligent in caring for members of New Road. He never considered himself as old. He was extremely valuable in offering practical help in various projects in the church up until his death. Alfred was a faithful volunteer, driving guests to various summer tea parties which were held annually. He always picked up his passengers early and took them for a drive around the countryside before arriving for tea. As long as his eyesight held out, he performed his duty but would never come as a guest to such parties. Alfred also looked after Dr Ted Ironmonger when he became ill (due to a stroke) and was a stalwart supporter to his wife, Olive, when Ted died after his prolonged illness. As he was Olive's close neighbour, Alfred made daily visits and assisted her very greatly. He provided transport to chapel, shops and hospitals for many after his official retirement.

Alfred's physical strength was amazing for his age. He much preferred to walk into Oxford from his home on Yarnell's Hill, a distance of two miles, using the old route through fields and along the river.

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He was a great source of information about almost everyone at New Road. He and Beryl Murray sometimes used to come to tea and I was always amazed by their knowledge of New Road's history and members.

When I first came to New Road (nearly twenty-five years ago), Alfred was very much the mastermind behind the church finances. Only he seemed to have a full grasp of how the finances for the redevelopment would work, and everyone seemed to be quite content that this was the way it should be! Alfred always had the air of being totally relaxed and in complete control of the finances – and the twinkle in his eye always suggested that there were a good few rabbits available to be pulled out of the hat if ever needed. No wonder everyone was happy that finances were left to Alfred.

As he gradually 'retired' from his many duties over the years he remained the wise counsellor to many – always keeping a watchful eye, never interfering, but happy to advise if asked. Often a word of encouragement, such as 'nicely handled, lad' was his style (even if not deserved!).

Journey's end

Alfred Palmer died on 8 September 1997 at 41 Yarnell's Hill, Botley, Oxford, aged eighty-five. At his memorial service, his minister the Revd Simon Carver ended his eulogy thus:

In the week following his death I spoke to a number of people about Alfred and one phrase stuck in my mind. It is an understatement, but I rather think that Alfred preferred understatement. He was a bright boy and did well. He was a bright boy and he did do well. He was a good man and we shall miss him.⁶¹

NOTES

¹ Besides all those mentioned in the footnotes, the editor of this chapter is indebted to Professor Michael Moss of Glasgow University, for comments on AG's TSB record, and to Mrs Sue Mills, Archivist at Regent's Park College, for assistance with the New Road Baptist Church records.

² Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001.

³ New Road Baptist Church Monthly News Bulletin, no. 58, March 1962.

⁴ Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001.

⁵ Letter from W. Parkinson dated 3 September 1930, in the possession of Keith Palmer.

⁶ Testimonial letter (no addressee) by H. A. Newbould, 31 August 1933.

⁷ Revd Simon Carver, 'Appreciation of Alfred George Palmer MBE, JP MA (Oxon), (1912-1997)'.

⁸ Michael Moss and Iain Russell, *An Invaluable Treasure: A History of the TSB* (London, 1994), pp. 25-6.

⁹ Moss and Russell, *Invaluable Treasure*, pp. 155-60.

¹⁰ For the 1929 Act see Moss and Russell, *Invaluable Treasure*, pp. 156-60; A.R.B. Haldane, *One Hundred and Fifty Years of Trustee Savings Banks* (TSB Association, 1960), p. 40.

¹¹ Moss and Russell, *Invaluable Treasure*, p. 81.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.171.

¹³ David Miles, TSB employee 1941-1986, e-mail to David Jeremy, 25 September 2002.

¹⁴ Moss and Russell, *Invaluable Treasure*, p. 193.

¹⁵ Following the Trustee Savings Bank Act of 1947.

¹⁶ David Miles to David Jeremy, 25 September 2002.

¹⁷ Moss and Russell, *Invaluable Treasure*, p. 205. Robert de la Mare, who farmed at Cumnor and became chairman of the Oxford TSB,

died in 1985 (*Oxford Times*, 12 July 1985). Thanks to Rosie Chadwick for this reference and to David Miles for further information.

¹⁸ Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001.

¹⁹ Moss and Russell, *Invaluable Treasure*, pp. 183, 202–4.

²⁰ Keith Palmer, notes of 16 November 2001.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² David Miles to David Jeremy, 25 Sept 2002.

²³ Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001.

²⁴ *Oxford Mail*, 9 October 1972, p. 3.

²⁵ Keith Palmer, notes of 22 October 2002.

²⁶ Telephone information from Mr Malcolm Leeding, Secretary of the Advisory Committee on the Appointment of Magistrates.

²⁷ Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001.

²⁸ Information from Liz Gill.

²⁹ David J. Jeremy, 'Measures of Baptist Involvement with Business in the Twentieth Century' (paper given at the Baptist Historical Society Summer School, Northern Baptist College, Manchester, 11–14 July 2002). I am grateful to Harriet Knox, my step-daughter, for help with this sampling exercise.

³⁰ List of diaconates and their occupations at ten year intervals kindly assembled by Liz Gill.

³¹ Deacons' Minutes, New Road records (NRR), Box 3, Angus Library, Oxford, for the years 1938, 1939, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970. [Hereafter DMM and identified by date of meeting.] Unfortunately the volume covering 1980 was missing when I worked on the minutes.

³² DMM, 4 January 1938.

³³ DMM, 2 July, 31 December 1940.

³⁴ DMM, 2 June 1942; 22 February 1944.

³⁵ DMM, 4 October 1960.

³⁶ DMM, 22 Nov 1955.

³⁷ DMM, 19 Feb 1957.

³⁸ DMM, 19 Feb 1957.

³⁹ Robin Kemp Sr, notes of 12 November 2002.

⁴⁰ Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001.

⁴¹ Paul Fiddes to David Jeremy, e-mail, 9 October 2002.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Keith Palmer, notes, 22 Oct 2002.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Keith Palmer, notes of 22 Oct 2002

⁴⁹ Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001.

⁵⁰ Keith Palmer, notes of 22 Oct 2002.

⁵¹ Derek Palmer, notes of 7 Oct 2002.

⁵² Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Derek Palmer, notes of 7 Oct 2002.

⁵⁵ Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001

⁵⁸ Derek Palmer, notes of 7 Oct 2002.

⁵⁹ Keith Palmer, notes of 16 Nov 2001.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Revd Simon Carver, 'Eulogy on Alfred George Palmer MBE JP MA (Oxon)', 16 September 1997.

The Hey Day of Sunday School: Nursery of the Church, Social Control Mechanism or Self-help Educational Agencies?

J.H.Y. Briggs

No aspect of Baptist life and work has been less well served by its historians than the story of its Sunday Schools. Yet during the nineteenth century they were second to none in the churches' outreach. With the other young peoples' organizations (mutual improvement societies, brigades, guilds, Christian Endeavour etc.) that they spawned, they enabled Baptist churches to make a larger impact on society than could have been achieved by churches working without them. True, the contribution of Baptist Sunday Schools as measured by the 1851 census, when some 155,400 scholars were recorded as enrolled, was rather less than other denominations, but as the century progressed that figure was to multiply by just under four-fold.¹

What were Sunday Schools for?

The American historian, Tom Laqueur identifies three sets of ideas as influential in the founding and development of the modern Sunday School movement:

For some, the new institution was an instrument for the moral rescue of poor children from their corrupt parents, thereby at one stroke insuring the happiness of the little ones and the regeneration of society. Others saw in the schools primarily a means of spreading the Word of God, an end valuable for its own sake. Thirdly, a new soft, kind,

more optimistic and sentimental view of children and childhood induced benevolent men and women to direct their attentions to the young.²

Others have seen such schools as a middle-class mechanism of social control.³ Such arguments receive short shrift from John Ferguson. The promoters of Sunday Schools:

were not the chosen representatives of the comfortable upper classes getting the people away from revolution with promise of pie in the sky when they died. On the contrary, education for the poor was associated with Tom Paine and the American and French Revolutions. The farmers thought that education would be the ruin of agriculture and said so. The *Imperial Magazine* stated "Religion will neither fill our bellies nor clothe our bodies, and as to reading, it only serves to render poor folks proud and idle".⁴

Sunday Schools could both offer a critique of society and, at the same time, be a means of securing its stability. Laqueur himself champions the view that Sunday Schools were a critical aspect of working-class culture, offering mutual support, improvement of skills and knowledge, together with opportunities for rational recreation, aiding the process of social mobility.

Sunday Schools were certainly an important part of the history of the nineteenth century. Reg Ward is confident about his assessment of them as 'the only religious institution which the nineteenth-century public in the mass had any intention of using. The schools were the great triumph of municipal Christianity'.⁵ That was as true of Oxford as it was of Stockport or Macclesfield or Burslem, though clearly the context was very different. Spawned by the church, in due course Sunday Schools made their impact on ecclesiology. Reg Ward once more: 'the Sunday School open to all rather than

the covenanted meeting of baptized saints was the sign of the times. Evangelism rather than sanctification was the church's business, and the more the slogan of 'the missionary church' caught on, the more the kingdom of God seemed delivered over to associational principles'.⁶

Some Baptist views of Sunday Schools: Daniel Turner of Abingdon

Daniel Turner, for half a century minister in Abingdon, had much to do with the re-establishment of the Baptist cause in Oxford. In two sermons in favour of Sunday Schools, published as *Hints on Religious Education* some four years before his death in 1798, Turner provides a vivid insight into the mind-set of those who saw the need to set up Sunday Schools to educate the nation's youth in all that pertained to virtue.⁷ Turner's exposition was founded on Genesis 18:19, and the critical role played by Abraham in educating his progeny. In it, he reveals a psychology of childhood and parental duty reflecting a contextual reading of Scripture in the light of late eighteenth-century thought. Thus, a prime focus of parental energies should be the education of their children, on which the orientation of their adult lives so greatly depends. Such a function is directly delegated to parents by God himself, who will hold them responsible for the stewardship of such a vital charge.⁸ Parental accountability necessarily extends to care for the souls of the young, as much as their bodies. In this respect how parents live their lives was every bit as important as verbal counsel, which could so easily be negated by lifestyle, especially given an inbuilt bias towards wrong-doing.⁹

Children, however, do not exist just for their parents: 'they are the children of the people, they are the hope and strength of the body politic'. Once spoilt 'it is too late to correct them', once unworthy of employment 'it is insignificant to exclude them'. Better by far 'to prevent the mischief, than be forced to punish it'.¹⁰ On the other hand, there was a progression in vice: 'Idle and undisciplined boys, commonly prove loose and

vicious young men; and often fall a sacrifice to the severity of the law before they reach old age.’¹¹ Part of the problem was what Turner designated ‘a criminal indulgence’: ‘You acted the part of the father in loving, without discharging the duty of a father in restraining them.’¹² Such neglect also embraced the failure specifically to instruct the young in the truths of the Gospel, especially when so much attention was given to securing their worldly well-being. That said, he was wary of ‘surfeiting them with the language of religion’ especially ‘if a father’s piety be morose, rigorous and tinged with melancholy’: better the positive example of virtuous living enjoining all the good things that God had provided for his children.¹³

Turner’s language, reflecting the language and concepts of the Enlightenment, offers a strange argument from the pen of even a liberal Baptist divine. ‘Children’, he asserted:

soon discover the capacity of reasoning, at least in a certain degree, and sound reasoning is the foundation of virtuous conduct. Since the Supreme Being hath not bestowed their mental powers in vain, he expects they should be taught to know, love and worship him. This in baptism has been promised in their name; nor can they too soon be acquainted with it.¹⁴

Turner must have been almost unique among Baptist ministers in putting so much positive weight on promises associated with the service of infant baptism. He was severe on those parents who failed to instruct the young in the fear of the Lord. Again reflecting knowledge of enlightened thought, he counselled: ‘Urge not the old absurd pretext, so strongly maintained by the ingenuity of the late philosopher, Rousseau, that you dread to bias their judgment, where it ought to have the freest scope, and therefore you say nothing on the topic, but leave it to them to chuse in riper years.’ Scripture taught the reverse.¹⁵

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Concluding his appeal on behalf of Sunday Schools, Turner pointed to the prevailing ignorance of the lower classes, children running riot on the Sabbath, the needs of orphans and the destitute:

Owing to this generous and god-like plan, they may on the sabbath alone, be taught to read the word of God, which instructs them in their duty to their Maker, their neighbour and themselves. Here they learn that to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God, is the only sure and certain way to present peace and future glory.

Already Turner has identified two target groups for Sunday School work: the children of church members and the working-class young. Meeting the needs of both was to be a fundamental problem for the Sunday School movement. The kind of Sunday School that Turner had in mind was an institution, established 'on the most liberal footing' not 'confined to any particular church or denomination'.¹⁶ The substance of the curriculum was to be the fundamentals of Christianity. The truths thereby learnt would both be a spur to industry and 'help to keep them honest in spite of every solicitation to the contrary'. Those who had been blessed with only modest means – even such as older Christians, widows, and hard-working mechanics – were encouraged to make provision for those who, through distress, could not provide for their children. Sunday Schools required more of church members than subscriptions, however; there was a need to secure teachers of integrity, and for the officers of the church to superintend the enterprise to ensure it met the objectives for which it had been established. In this way, supporting Christians could become 'god-fathers and god-mothers indeed'.¹⁷

Early Sunday Schools in Oxford

Rumours abound as to the existence of early Sunday Schools in Oxford. Harry Paintin, author of the *Centenary History* of the New Road Sunday Schools, claims that when the Presbyterian and Baptists rebuilt their new chapel on the New Road site in 1721, the house previously used for Baptist worship was refurbished to accommodate what was possibly the earliest Sunday School in England, anticipating Robert Raikes' initiative by almost sixty years.¹⁸ Such a claim is difficult to sustain, for no evidence is offered. There were many schools which pre-dated Robert Raikes' famous endeavours in Gloucester. Some were probably extensions of charity school work, but others more genuinely Sunday Schools. As early as the 1660s, Joseph Alleine, ejected curate of Taunton, was in the habit in Bath of 'gathering the children together on Sundays for religious instruction' and for his pains was reported to the bishop. Fowler's Sunday School Trust, a Presbyterian charity, was set up in Walsall in 1699.¹⁹

At any event, New Road seems to have inaugurated a Sunday School by 1785.²⁰ This innovation took place during the short pastorate of Edward Prowitt, ordained to the pastorate of New Road in 1784 after some twelve months of probationary ministry. However, Prowitt left Oxford two years later because he had developed heterodox views. To a congregation in a state of confusion, James Hinton arrived as student supply in June 1787, accepting a call to the pastorate early in 1788. At the beginning of Hinton's pastorate, three Sunday Schools were said to exist in Oxford, one for the Church, one for Mr Wesley's people, and one for other Dissenters which can be identified with New Road.²¹

It is no surprise therefore to learn that New Road members took the lead, under Hinton's instigation, in establishing the 'Oxford United Charity and Sunday Schools'. This body seems to have offered federal guidance to the three Sunday Schools already existing and four new day schools now established, three of which catered for children of Church families and one

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for the children of Dissenters. New Road played its part not only in the establishment of Sunday Schools but also in the provision of secular elementary education in Oxford. In this respect its members were scrupulous in not trying to entice the children of Church families to chapel on Sundays. Instead they were encouraged to attend their own parish churches.²² This respect for conscience made the actions of certain Anglican incumbents against Dissenting children later in the century particularly difficult to accept. This scheme seems to have depended very much on the energies of New Road members. Listed as promoters of this scheme were the following members of New Road: Charles Jones, John Whessole, Samuel Steane, Samuel Collingwood, Benjamin Hile or Hill, Charles Talmadge, Paul Hicks, John Bartlett, John Symonds, Jonathan Fiske, the first Superintendent, and Hinton himself.²³

An attempt three years later to establish a county-wide Sunday School Union was less successful. The New Road Society report for 1813 made the suggestion 'that an Union of all the Sunday Schools in Oxfordshire and some of the neighbouring towns would very greatly aid their individual operation'. The London-founded Sunday School Union, founded in 1803, with one of its principal promoters, W.B. Gurney, a deacon at Walworth Baptist Church and treasurer at different times of Stepney College, the Baptist Missionary Society and the Particular Baptist Fund, had held its first public meeting in the previous year. The county and other towns were slow to take up the suggestion, 'which depended not so much upon the wishes of the [New Road] Society as upon the feelings and inclinations of others'.²⁴ The report for the following year indicates that the New Road teachers had been thwarted in their ambitions 'as the minds of the Teachers in the neighbouring towns do not appear prepared for such a measure'.²⁵ Forty-six years later Edward Cox Alden was the chief instrument in the founding of the Oxford Sunday School Union.

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As early as 1813 the United Sunday Schools Society seems to have given way to a more limited Baptist Society, the Oxford and Littlemore Sunday School Society. At an unknown date this became the New Road Chapel Sunday School Society. Accounts for the year 1813 provide insight into the way in which the Society was funded; almost £10 had been received in donations at the beginning of the year to which was added £4 of subscriptions, just over £6 collected at a charity sermon preached by Hinton, together with almost fourteen shillings from the sale of Testaments at reduced prices. These were obtained through the good office of Mr W.F. Lloyd from the Sunday School Society of London, founded by William Fox in 1785.²⁶

The cost of simply opening the two schools - that in Oxford and that at Littlemore, which had opened in the summer of 1810 - amounted to some £5 6s 0d. Hinton says that his second son and a son of Samuel Pearce pioneered the work at Littlemore. This, in its turn, led to the forming of the 'society for the promotion of Sunday Schools in Oxford and the surrounding villages'. Hinton also observed that the Oxford environment had hitherto inhibited lay leadership in the churches, 'and this was long a matter of deep regret, since it materially diminished the agency which could be directed to its cultivation. The influence of the Sunday Schools, however, gradually removed this difficulty'.²⁷

The location of the Oxford school is a little uncertain. It seems unlikely that the premises in St Ebbe's were still in Baptist possession by this date. The minute-book for the Charity and Sunday Schools for 1812 records that on 19 October it was 'resolved that Mr Talmadge be requested to confer with Mr John Smith, the proprietor of some houses in Gloucester Green for the purpose of ascertaining whether he has any house to let that would do for the schools' with a report to be made to the next meeting. On 16 November, Talmadge was 'given full powers to negotiate with Mr Smith for the use of Tubbs' Tenement, and in the building a room for

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the accommodation of the schools'.²⁸ It seems likely that both Sunday and Day Schools used these premises till 1824.

Reward books in 1812 cost just over £7 6s 0d, the largest expenditure in this small budget, in fact almost half the money expended, indicating how important incentives were deemed to be. The rent and coals for heating an Adult School came to £0 14s 6d, whilst providing printed instructions for teaching amounted to £1 11s 6d. This left the Society a comfortable balance of almost £4 5s 0d. Accounts for much of the century reveal only modest overt expenditure with many years balancing income and expenditure around £10. By 1861 this had risen to just over £25, the largest single expenditure in a single year since 1813.²⁹

Motivation and methods

The purpose of the schools, as also the social milieu in which they operated, is made clear in a very revealing paragraph in the report for the first year, which confesses:

The Teachers have laboured under a considerable difficulty, as the Tuition must all be of a religious nature. Religious instruction might indeed be afforded in great abundance, but the depraved and uncultivated minds of the children are highly disgusted with what openly appears to be religious, and are very inattentive to what would improve their minds. It is needful therefore to clothe their instruction with such garb as will be most likely to engage the attention.³⁰

Addressing the debate as to the relationship between secular and religious purposes, as also the subject matter to be covered by Sunday Schools, the New Road answer in 1854 was clear. The Sunday School movement was a religious institution 'and that which so vigorously ensures its progress, was and is the offspring of religious zeal'.³¹ But by its own witness these could be difficult to disentangle. In 1856, 'Out of an average

attendance of eighty scholars, no less than thirty were quite unable to read'. Consequently 'these spent part of the afternoon learning to read, while the remaining five classes received religious instruction only'.³²

Incentives were also provided in terms of rewarding the learning of memory texts. Each text successfully committed to memory was rewarded with a ticket, the collection of twelve of which secured the award of a halfpenny. One girl became very successful at working the system. Over a period of eight Sundays she memorised 538 verses of scripture, 75 answers to questions posed in Watts' Catechism, and 35 hymns!³³ It was commented that she had not only committed these to memory but 'understood them better than we could have expected'. Another scholar in 1814 memorised the number of the year in 1814 scriptural texts together with 143 hymns. A 'Class of Honour' was established for those scholars 'who had distinguished themselves by diligence and good conduct', and proved to be a goal to which many scholars aspired.³⁴

It is not surprising that, in a denomination which set such store by Scripture as the very Word of God, the memorising of Scripture continued to be deployed in the schools as a method of inculcating wisdom throughout the century and beyond. The report for 1850 argues that it was beneficial 'in storing youthful minds direct from the sacred volume which is able to make wise the simple, and the only safeguard against the pernicious error and vain tradition of man, which has spread to such a fearful extent'.³⁵

The carrot was to be supplemented by the stick. The 1814 report testifies, 'The Teachers endeavour to excite the scholars to diligence by a great variety of rewards, and to deter them from ill behaviour by serious reproof and affectionate persuasion'. The report adds that the teachers 'feel happy in stating that they have rarely been compelled to have recourse to corporal punishment'.³⁶ Action within classes was supplemented by what the teachers believed to be remedial pastoral tactics. A Visitation Committee was established to

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pursue those who were less than regular in attendance. Some reports were encouraging, such as the testimony of the mother who indicated that both she and her husband were benefiting from what her daughter was being taught, as the daughter relayed lessons to her mother and the wife to her husband.³⁷ A nice balance in reporting had always to be made between difficulties and achievements. In 1850 Ann Bartlett confessed:

We might, indeed, refer to some few cases of perverseness or inattention, but it is better perhaps to make them the special objects of patient instruction and earnest prayer, which we are assured cannot be lost. It is ours to cultivate diligently the barren soil, and to pray fervently and constantly for the blessing which can come from God alone.³⁸

By 1813 the schools had seventy-seven scholars on the books, underlining the need to recruit more teachers, especially those able to capture the attention of the whole school when all the children were addressed together at the conclusion of their classes. The teachers were very conscious that they were novices at this all important task. They were quite prepared to confess their want of professional expertise, but asked God to bless their deficiencies. More practically, they acknowledged the help they had received from the Southampton Sunday School Society, who shared with their colleagues in Oxford 'accurate information of their system and operations'. Locally it was most important that as many teachers as possible attended the preparatory meetings held every Thursday evening at 8 p.m. 'to regulate the concerns of the society and to maintain the fervour and unity of spirit without which they cannot prosper'.³⁹ Oxford also shared its experience with others.

The *Baptist Magazine* for February 1815 contains a review of a teacher's guide, *The Sunday School Teacher's Assistant in the Work of Religious Instruction, to which is added An Account of a Sunday School Library, on a Plan entirely new* published by

Bartlett and Newman, Oxford. Part of the document reprinted a text originally printed in Edinburgh in 1800 which had a proven track record in successfully preparing teachers for their task. The notion of a Sunday School Library was more innovative and was commended as an excellent way of encouraging reading.⁴⁰ The Oxford teachers returned to the subject in 1852. Making an appeal for books for the Library, it was argued, perhaps in rather a siege mind-set, that it was vital that Christian churches should counteract the vain traditions of men. To do this it was of vital importance that the youth of the denomination's Sunday Schools, especially in Oxford, should be supplied with 'such books as may tend to lead their minds in the path of virtue and confront that insidious and demoralizing literature everywhere abounding'.⁴¹ It is also claimed that the earliest magazine produced especially for Sunday School scholars was produced in Oxford, printed by one of James Hinton's sons specifically for the New Road scholars. It was in that journal that Jane Taylor, a relative of the Hintons, first published many of her children's hymns.⁴²

Without subscribing to a code of middle-class morality, the teachers were concerned about both what their charges read and how they spoke. In 1856 at the suggestion of the pastor there was a competition in which scholars were prompted to send in papers on 'Reasons against profane swearing', which achieved a considerable response. The contributions were printed and a copy given to every scholar.⁴³ Literature and language were of crucial importance in Christian nurture, and their careful use needed to be sensitively fostered.

By 1813 some thirty-six teachers were recruited, a few serving every week but others on a fortnightly or a monthly rota. Even the superintendents served on a three months on, three months off, basis. Special difficulties were experienced in finding sufficient teachers to staff the branch Sunday Schools, because of the sacrifice of Sunday worship involved. The 1814 report for Littlemore poses the question how much 'personal benefit' were the teachers in that school called upon 'to

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sacrifice to the public good', hoping for the fulfilment of the promise that 'he that watereth others shall be watered himself'. E.B. Underhill and his father were both teachers in this school.⁴⁴ Headington made similar appeals: were more teachers from Oxford to be available, then the work could expand greatly.⁴⁵ Likewise the Appleton School suffered from a severe lack of teachers over a number of years. Notwithstanding the fact that the accounts include frequent references to horse hire, most often the teachers had to walk six miles each way to fulfil their duties. In 1850, it was reported, 'Often the Superintendent is pained at seeing three or four classes without a teacher'.⁴⁶

Scholars were expected to attend worship, and provision was made for their seating at Sunday morning services. A minute for 7 January 1813 reads:

that the seats under the gallery lately occupied by the Sunday School children, with the two pews in their front be prepared without delay for the accommodation of the boys, also that the girls be permitted until some other place be provided for them to occupy the two back seats of the right hand gallery from the pulpit, facing the front gallery.

This would seem to indicate a growing school and possibly a resolution of some disciplinary problems by the separation of boys and girls.⁴⁷

New ventures

Undeterred by the scale of the task they had engaged upon, at the beginning of 1814 the New Road enthusiasts added an Adult School in Middle Cowley. The youngest scholar in this venture was aged twenty-three, but the rest of the eight members who made up the class were between thirty-six and fifty-eight. Unfortunately only a single annual report survives for this venture, which seems to have helped in reconciling families and encouraging those who had long

absented themselves from worship to seek in worship 'that mercy which they had do long slighted'.⁴⁸ The venture seems to have been successful enough because in 1814 an Adult School for females was added at Cowley. Initially, 'none of the scholars could distinguish a single letter ... now all are able to read with ease'.⁴⁹

Other extension work was also taking place. John Bartlett had personally been responsible for establishing a school in a nearby village in which a hundred children enrolled, and where previously no such institution had existed.⁵⁰ During Hinton's pastorate, in addition to the schools at Littlemore and Headington, work was started at Woodstock, Charlton-on-Otmoor, Eynsham and South Hinksey, though not all of these had a continuous existence.⁵¹ South Hinksey, which dated back to 1817, and where Edward Steane first began in Christian service as superintendent, had little problem in dealing with the 'writing issue'. In 1817 some of the senior boys 'expressed a desire to learn to write ... and the Teachers rejoice that they have it within their power to instruct them in an art so truly valuable'.⁵² The pastorate of James Dann (1882-1916) saw the revival of some schools which had decayed and new schools established at Wolvercote, St Thomas, Botley and Bayworth. In due course a number of these branch schools were to give birth to independent churches. The New Road Chapel Sunday School Society became the vehicle for organising the annual treat, bringing the different schools together. In 1892 this took the form of organised games and activities in Mr Isaac Alden's field at Hinksey, together with a demonstration by two trapeze artists. More than six hundred scholars, teachers and visitors took part in a most enjoyable day. A month later, the Young Women's Bible Classes hired two steamers down the Thames to Day's Lock, near to Dorchester. In an age innocent of cinema or television, such simple events were often highlights of entertainment in otherwise drab lives.⁵³

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The Penson's Gardens school, St Ebbe's

Purpose-built school buildings

The work in Oxford was strengthened by the building of purposely-designed premises in Penson's Gardens. The capital for this development was provided by Samuel Collingwood who was to receive, as rent, five per cent of his outlay, in the sum of £25 per annum, indicating that his investment had been of the order of £500. After Collingwood's death the rent was paid to his trustees until another New Road deacon, William Plater Bartlett bought the premises at auction for £210 and reduced the rent to £5 per annum. In due course, at Bartlett's death, the freehold of the premises were transferred to New Road for £110. In 1896 the premises were sold and the proceeds devoted to funding the schools that were built next to the chapel on a site made available by the demise of New Inn Hall, then in the ownership of Balliol College.

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This site had been purchased by certain New Road members in 1895 at a cost of £1380. The appeal for funds – a thousand pounds was suggested – to build on the new site, was eloquent. After speaking of the constrictions on the chapel itself which could be freed up by this purchase, the appeal identifies the ways in which the church needs to re-equip itself to face the challenges of a new century. It continues:

Added to this, the room in which the Sunday School (one of the first established) is conducted is situated at a considerable distance from the place of worship; and owing to this difference in locality it has been difficult to cultivate among the scholars attachment to the church and attendance on services. The School-room, too, is far behind the times, possessing no Class-rooms or other appointments of a modern character. Indeed, the large Infant Class after the opening services, have to walk, in all weathers, nearly a quarter of a mile to their hired Class-room. Moreover in the present day when so many other attractions compete for the interest of our young people, the need of 'Church Parlours' and Lecture-rooms in conjunction with our place of worship is strongly and increasingly felt.

The appeal played Oxford's special features to advantage:

In a University and Cathedral city like Oxford, the position of Nonconformity has always been one of difficulty. Yet in face of many obstacles the Church at New Road has been enabled not only to hold its own, but to accomplish much evangelical work beyond its own borders. At the present time some ten or twelve Village Stations, with Branch Sunday Schools are maintained at a cost which, though considerable, is cheerfully contributed by our own people, who also support the Foreign Mission and other objects with a liberality proportioned to their means. Nevertheless,

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being convinced of the urgent need for better equipment at head-quarters, they are heartily engaged in this effort to provide such additional accommodation as may fit our Church buildings to become a worthy home of religious and social life and a centre and a rallying point for all departments of Christian work.⁵⁴

The appeal reveals the extension of the church's ministry into a wider range of activities now deemed necessary for effectiveness in mission.

Church and chapel

Church-chapel rivalry, particularly in the context of the impact of the rise of the new High Churchmanship, was an ongoing theme of the earlier history of the schools, and appears to have been particularly acute in an Oxford context. Some responses to the visitors sent out by the Visitation Committee were negative, such as that of the woman who in 1813 saw all Dissenting Sunday Schools as a device for seducing children away from the parish churches. In 1844 the institution of parochial schools caused concern: 'Our School suffered much from the undue influence of the Parochial Schools, but after a short time many of the children came back.' In 1845, 'We have again to complain of the way in which we have lost some of our children by the Parochial Ministers exerting an undue influence over the minds of the parents and threatening their temporary (temporal) assistance unless their children were sent to the Parochial Schools'. In 1848 the reporter argues, 'we have now to contend against the influence of men of holy exterior, whose increasing vigilance and activity demand an equal share of energy and zeal from all who love the simple gospel of peace'.⁵⁵

Similarly in 1857 a new school was opened at New Osney, where the Revd Thomas Chamberlain, an advanced and pioneering ritualist, was the vicar. The situation was very promising with most of the inhabitants being railway servants

and so 'free from the dominion of both landlords and customers'. In the early years so successful was the work that frequently children had to be sent away for want of accommodation. In 1858 the 'Puseyite party' responded by opening a school of their own in the same area, but with a note, which is not perhaps wholly the best expression of Christian charity: 'since then they have closed their school, and the scholars most of them have returned'.⁵⁶ At South Hinksey, a closed village, the teachers faced immense opposition from both the local vicar and from Lord Abingdon, the principal landowner in the area who 'were determined to close the school, and threatened with eviction (which in some cases was carried into effect) any person who allowed a Sunday School to be located on any premises in the village'.⁵⁷

At the Jubilee celebrations in 1864, E.B. Underhill, with his early life spent within the ministry of New Road, alluded to a number of statements by Oxford scholars on the deficiencies of Dissent. Normally a man of irenic sentiments, and whose family had provided a bishop to the diocese, Underhill concluded by citing Archdeacon Sandford's Bampton Lecture, 'Dissent has wrought, and is working vast and extensive evil, and imperilling to a painful extent the faith and the loyalty and the moral and religious life of our people'. Including this material in his later history, Paintin explained that he was interested not only in reminding his readers of the difficulties that Dissenters encountered in Oxford in the mid-nineteenth century, but also in drawing attention to 'the vital and far reaching changes that have taken place in the relations which now [1913] obtain in the various sections of the Christian Church'.

The attacks of churchmen on Dissenting schools were not confined to rhetoric. The 1864 report declares:

Lately the attendance (of children) has not been quite so full, through the strenuous efforts of clergymen, the judicious appointment of Christmas gifts, the formation of

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Sunday clubs, and the almost refusal of day instruction to those who do not attend the Church Sunday School. It is not surprising that the pressure of these means brought to bear on the parents – mostly working people – is greater than they can resist.

Not all of the impact of church competition was negative, however. Because parochial schools declined to instruct, on Sundays, those under the age of seven, there was a great influx of younger children into the Baptist schools, prompting the need to establish 'an Infant Sunday School'.

The reports for the years 1815–43 were already missing at the time that Paintin wrote his history. Fifteen extracts from Sunday School reports were apparently deposited in a cavity beneath the pulpit when the chapel was remodelled in 1864, and came to light during further remodelling in 1896. Paintin sees a mild allusion to the Oxford Movement, then in its infancy, when H.H. Haynes as superintendent, a master plumber by trade, E. Bennett as secretary and Mrs Bartlett for the Girls' Afternoon School referred in 1844 to the strange nature of the times. 'Our fathers during the last sixty years lived in the midst of a pleasure-seeking, slothful and careless clergy who were indifferent to the moral and spiritual condition of the young and rising race but a different spirit is now abroad.' There is a note of regret at the withdrawal of some scholars, as also some teachers, but generally the tone was optimistic for others had taken their places.

Some achievements

In 1845, the report credited the Baptist Sunday School in Oxford with a history of more than fifty years and offered this comment:

Their results have not merely realised but far exceeded the most sanguine expectations of their highly honoured and benevolent founder. Many were the fears entertained, and

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obstacles thrown in the way by the contracted and narrow minds of some so-called professors of religion, thinking they would prove curses instead of blessings to the heavenly cause they were designed to promote, but these were fears we think have for ever vanished.

This was written in the context of a total school accommodation for some 325 scholars and 50 teachers at the three schools in Oxford, and village schools at Headington and Appleton.⁵⁸

By 1850 the number of scholars had increased but a problem was emerging in that the number of teachers had declined to thirty-six. One outcome of the shortage of teachers was to begin to employ women teachers in the boys' department. This had other helpful consequences: 'This circumstance has introduced quite a new feature into our Boy's School, and has made a manifest improvement in the order and regularity of the Schools.'⁵⁹ Problems in staffing remained. The report for 1862 indicates for the New Road School, on its own, the number of teachers had fallen to twelve with only seven present on any given Sunday.⁶⁰

Sunday School scholars were encouraged to share the same commitments and vision as church members. Thus in 1850 a School Missionary Society was established, the report noting that, 'a missionary spirit has been excited in the minds of some of our elder boys'. In 1892, the Young Women's Bible Class organized the collection of a boxful of gifts to assist BMS missionaries in their work in India.⁶¹

From time to time the chronicler of the New Road Sunday School comments on its graduands. Some had been prepared for domestic service at home, whilst others had sought their fortunes far from Oxford: 'What a vast number who are now teachers in our schools or occupying fields of usefulness as ministers in the church at home or missionaries in the church abroad have been first enrolled in the Sunday School register.'⁶² In 1859 the same issue was contemplated

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prospectively, 'Here is trained the generation that will shortly take our places in civil, political and religious society, and the bias here given, the impression here made, the habits here formed, will affect the destinies of generations yet to come'.⁶³

The extent to which Sunday Schools have been successful in recruiting new members into church membership has been much debated. It would be dangerous to try and apply any too simplistic measure for testing this. At the Jubilee of the New Road Schools, James Townshend, school secretary and a teacher by profession, confessed:

It is impossible to estimate with anything like accuracy the results of labours on mind and heart. No arithmetic can compute their efficiency, and no language can describe their value. In thousands of young minds this society has sown the imperishable seed of the Word of Truth, and has for its labours the large majority of those who would probably have grown up in ignorance of the very first principles of religion. No statistics record the number of those who were kept from evil courses and spared bitter sorrows by the restraining influence of the Sunday School, but we are sure that in many instances the Word of Life, which was stored in the memory, had a higher development, and was made powerful to mould the heart and guide the steps, to purify the life and save the soul.⁶⁴

Certainly the number of baptisms taking place during James Dann's pastorate pays tribute to effective work having been undertaken among young people. The Young Women's Bible Class in August 1892 reported a further member of the class as a candidate for church membership and three class members undergoing baptism. However, in discussion of the Sunday School report for 1894, Mr Bacon referred to the small percentage of scholars who, during the past year, had joined the church, indicating the need for even more commitment on the part of teachers. Mr Jones referred to the leakage of

scholars from Sunday School before the age at which they might be expected to consider church membership.

The Sunday School and social issues

The Sunday School could not help but become involved in social issues. From some time in the 1840s there existed a Children's Benefit Club associated with the schools, a contribution from the child of a halfpenny a week securing a benefit of two shillings a week in case of illness. In 1850, it was recounted that 'during the year several have received this sum, and have expressed great thankfulness for the timely aid thus afforded'. The operation of such a society indicates not only the breadth of the Sunday School's concern but also the social status of its clientele. It may be compared with advice that appeared in the *Baptist Magazine* for 1834, which argued that every Sunday School should have a Benefit Society. Here, it was suggested that contributions be a penny a week to provide benefits from a shilling to eighteen pence a week in case of sickness and fifteen shillings in the event of a funeral.⁶⁵ It is no surprise therefore that when the report for 1849 recorded the last visitation of the cholera to Oxford, it should focus on the pathetic image of the little girl whose Bible and hymn-book were her constant companions. In the latter, 'most carefully she marked as her favourites all the hymns which spake of the Saviour's compassion to little children'.⁶⁶

In addition to the Benefit Society, which was contributory, there was a Teachers' Benevolent Society which made grants to some 'twenty-five cases of distress - more than one family left suddenly orphans have been supplied with food till means could be found to provide for them'.⁶⁷ Again 1858 witnessed 'desolating prevalence of illness all around us, fatal especially among children'.⁶⁸ In such circumstances it was not surprising that thoughts about heaven and the afterlife were frequently under contemplation. Nor was philanthropy confined to local needs. In 1862, in common with a wide spectrum of Nonconformist congregations, collections were made on behalf

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of the Lancashire spinners in their distress during the disruption to the cotton trade during the American Civil War.⁶⁹ An initial collection raised more than £4 with ongoing collections promised.

In February 1864 the Schools celebrated their Jubilee with a typical diet of sermons, special singing and tea parties. Addresses were delivered by the Revd John Aldis of Reading, Sir Morton Peto, MP, the Revd Charles Vince of Birmingham, the Revd N. Haycroft of Bristol. E.B. Underhill, himself a graduate of the Sunday School and past member of the church, came from the Missionary Society, and the pastor and other Oxford Nonconformist clergy also spoke. At the Monday tea meeting for the children of all the associated Sunday Schools the drum and fife band of the Headington school entertained with a selection of music and as a souvenir every child received an engraving of New Road Chapel. The occasion was taken for Mrs Bartlett to lay the foundation stone of the New Osney School on Tuesday when Sir Morton Peto spoke of the value and importance of Sunday Schools in general terms, but in particular 'attributed the noble attitude of the people of Lancashire during the sufferings and privations of the last two years mainly to the instruction which they had so extensively enjoyed in their Sunday Schools'.⁷⁰ This was followed by 'the largest tea meeting ever held in this City' in the Corn Exchange. Church-chapel competition was clearly still an issue. Sir Morton quoted from a recent charge given by the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, in which Wilberforce declared that the 'three great obstacles to the work of the Church were, first, the public house; secondly, bad cottages; and thirdly, the presence and progress of Dissent'.⁷¹ During the year C.H. Spurgeon also visited Oxford and preached in the Corn Exchange to the benefit of Sunday School funds.⁷²

NEW ROAD CHAPEL
Mutual Improvement Society.

Programme, October to December, 1893.

October

19. Annual Business Meeting.
26. Impromptu Speaking.

November

2. Debate.—“Should St. Giles’s Fair be Abolished?”
Affirmative, Mr. F. Herring.
Negative, Mr. G. H. Cooper.
9. Evening with Shakespeare (Julius Cæsar).
16. Discussion.—“The best method of settling Trade Disputes.”
Introduced by Mr. Buy.
23. Anonymous Papers for Criticism.
30. Debate.—“Should Bicycles be Taxed?”
Affirmative, Mr. F. Rawlins.
Negative, Mr. C. W. Strange.

December

7. Alliteration and Parody.
14. Musical Evening. Kindly filled by Mr. A. Wiblin.
21. Discussion.—“Socialism.”
Opened by Mr. R. S. Underhill.
28. Sharp-shooting on current topics.

The Meetings are held in the Vestry on Thursday Evenings at 8.

Mutual Improvement Society programme

New methods for a new century

The later nineteenth century witnessed a number of changes seeking to update the utility of the Sunday Schools. Following on the 1870 Education Act and subsequent legislation, elementary secular education became established nation-wide, and Sunday Schools, to remain competitive, had to develop a new professionalism, and new more attractive activities. In 1891 a Mutual Improvement Society was founded, giving New Road young people opportunity to test out their rhetorical skills in debating issues of contemporary concern. Some sixty-five young people and their patrons were present at the first meeting, and the society soon became an effective means of self-education. The very language of mutual improvement of itself spelt out new educational opportunities of great significance.⁷³

The Association report for 1912 recounted, 'In some of our schools the most modern methods have been applied' with the implication that this had been of advantage to work in the schools. It also reported that 'Special work on behalf of the elder scholars has been undertaken by the conduct of Bible classes on somewhat unconventional lines on Sundays' with 'lectures and discussions on subjects of general interest'. Not every new method, however, was deemed to be desirable by New Road stalwarts. Evan Newell was among those suspicious of the fashion for wanting to entertain with popular science, concerts and the like, and confessed himself a little suspicious of 'the modern notion of a "pleasant Sunday afternoon"'. Faith rather than fun was what was needed. More than any technique he believed the success of the school depended on a team of teachers who were converted men and women, loyal to the superintendent, willing to discipline their time and energies to the good of the school, prayerful in their preparation for their work, and of kindly and affectionate disposition to their scholars. Lady teachers, instructing boys, were advised, (in a note suggesting class differentials between teachers and taught), to leave their best dresses at home 'so

that you need not fear your boys' dirty boots, but be ready to receive the demonstrations of affection they will surely give to a kind and loving teacher'. A glimpse of the clients of Sunday School can be seen in Newell's comment on the composition of afternoon school when 'many children present ... seem to come from almost every motive but the right one; and yet their presence and our knowledge of their need, urge us to do our best to instil some good lesson into their minds'.⁷⁴

Some found the material produced by the International Lessons Council extremely useful, but others thought that its continued use could lead to a dependency that led to a second-hand presentation by the teacher. Arguments for the continued usefulness of Sunday Schools at the end of the century suggest that there was serious questioning of their utility. New Road teachers responded by pointing to the capacity of Sunday Schools to adjust their practice to changing situations. Initially, they had given high priority to secular education with paid teachers, but from that base they had moved to focus on moral and spiritual training delivered by an army of volunteer teachers 'toiling for the love of Christ' in class teaching to the benefit of successive generations of children.⁷⁵

When, on the eve of the First World War, Harry Paintin concluded his account, the Sunday Schools associated with New Road had some 879 scholars enrolled, serviced by 124 teachers. A decade earlier, in 1904 those figures had been 1235 scholars serviced by 130 teachers.⁷⁶ Basic motivation did not waver. Evan Newell, addressing a Sunday School Conference in 1891, closely reflected concern for Sunday School work, articulated almost a hundred years earlier by leading Baptist theologians, namely to lead the scholars 'to the feet of the Saviour, to acknowledge their need of Him, to obtain pardon from him, and to receive strength whereby they may faithfully serve Him'.

The title to this article posed a question, and now, having reviewed a hundred years of Sunday School activity, it is time to clarify the answer. The Sunday School was certainly for

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some the 'nursery of the church' for it was there that many church members came to faith. In the nineteenth century there was, moreover, a larger group of persons who were regular in church attendance, but who stopped short of taking on the responsibilities of membership, at least until their latter years. Beyond them there were also those who had been to Sunday School and who would identify a certain chapel as their chapel, though not regular in attendance. They would very often be second to none in ensuring that their own children went to Sunday School. Such people provided a penumbra to chapel membership and activity, which was the natural locus for ongoing evangelistic activities. When later it ceased to exist this provoked a very different situation for ongoing evangelism.

The notion of Sunday School as a middle-class conspiracy to keep the working classes in their place and school them to be submissive pawns to the needs of capitalist society has been shown to be false. There was too much working-class participation in the teaching whilst the working classes, for their part, were more perceptive than to be taken in by such a manipulative purpose. That is not to deny that in the New Road story certain middle-class families were extremely active in promoting Sunday Schools. Even though the discipline of a child by its father may serve to procure social stability, it does not preclude fatherly love for his offspring. Thus whilst Sunday Schools may have helped to discipline a youthful generation, that does not mean that those who organized Sunday Schools were not working to higher and nobler motivation.

Certainly many a youngster had reason to be grateful for the mutual improvement and social skills which they secured from association with the churches' several youth agencies as they went out into the wider world. The Methodist minister, Charles Shaw, in his autobiography, *When I was a Child*, writes, 'the Sunday School was the most powerful factor in giving any education to the poor', citing in particular the importance of the Sunday School Library, Sunday School entertainments, and

the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society: 'These institutions in England's educational barrenness were as oases in the desert'.⁷⁷ It ill-behoves a later generation to underestimate their importance.

Wider forms of service

The church's concern with education cannot, however, be confined to the running of Sunday Schools. Of wider forms of service, two examples must suffice. Esther [Hewlett] Copley, a member of Hinton's congregation, married his successor, the Revd William Copley, pastor at New Road, 1825-34, who was some ten years her junior. By the time of this marriage, which was her second, Esther was already well-established as an authoress. A keen proponent of the abolition of slavery, in addition to sacred history she compiled pious biographies. More particularly she wrote improving domestic tracts, with titles such as *A Catechism of Domestic Economy, Cottage Comforts* - by 1864 in its 24th edition - *Hints for Happy Homes, Kind Words from the Kitchen*, and *The Young Servants' Friendly Instructor*, useful, down-to-earth practical manuals helping 'the deserving poor' to lift themselves above the brute masses. Many of these titles were published by the Religious Tract Society. She also wrote volumes on how to prevent the spread of cholera.

More formally, various New Road members were to serve on the city's educational governing bodies. Councillor Isaac Alden, a superintendent of the Sunday School was for some years a member of the Education Committee. Minister James Dann also served with distinction on the Oxford School Board and Education Committee.⁷⁸ Others were to take a leading role in opposing that national educational legislation which appeared hostile to the Free Church interest. This was the concern nationally of the Passive Resistance movement under the leadership of John Clifford. The opposition locally was led by Councillor George Cooper. Described as 'a Passive Resister from the outset of the movement', and a leading light in the formation of the local Passive Resisters' Association, Cooper

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was one of a number of New Road members to appear before the courts in 1903 for non-payment of rates.⁷⁹ His leading role in the campaign led to him being deprived of the mayoralty, the Conservatives 'upsetting' the arrangement whereby the office alternated between the parties.⁸⁰

Postlude

Attendance at Baptist Sunday Schools in England and Wales peaked in 1906 at an enrolment of just under 570,000. Church membership also peaked in the same year at almost 411,000 in 2,811 churches.⁸¹ About this time the Baptist Union, with the new confidence inspired by J.H. Shakespeare's leadership, began to departmentalize its work. In 1904 a Young People's Union was established and in 1911 the Sunday Schools of the denomination acquired the services of Miss Annie Skemp, who was appointed Organizing Secretary and Educational Director.⁸² But by then the great days of Sunday Schools were over. From 1876 elementary education had become compulsory for all children. Soon the secularising impact of the First World War was to be felt. There were fluctuations in the birth rate whilst changing patterns of leisure, which both increased the appetite of the senses and affected the way in which people used the weekend, impacted both on scholars and on the church's ability to recruit a sufficiency of teachers. The retention of scholars into the years of later adolescence became increasingly difficult.

As day schools became more professional so Sunday Schools had to raise their standards. This prompted the development of the graded school to secure an education appropriate to the needs of a particular cohort of students. With its introduction came the urgent requirement to improve the training given to volunteer teachers, with a new emphasis on child-centred education, and the need to exploit his/her imagination as much as to work through the intellect.

By 2002 the figure for children and young people associated with Baptist churches in England and Wales had

A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ

declined to under 140,000 within a membership of some 144,000. By that time it had long been realized that the divorce of school from church, with separate funding and separate buildings, involved fundamental theological error. Sunday Schools did not so much represent the nursery of the church as a vital part of the living church of the present. Accordingly, the language of 'Family Church' came to replace that of 'Sunday School'. This was not simply a question of moving Sunday School from the afternoon to the morning: rather it involved reconstructing the pattern of worship so that the whole family of the church could worship together as one community. All that was positive, but in the process there was unfortunately in all too many places a loss of outreach into the local community.

Statistical Appendix

New Road Chapel Sunday School Society, March, 1913

School	Teachers	Children
Bayworth	4	12
Botley	8	44
Charlton	3	26
Eynsham	18	118
Headington	18	98
Hinksey	3	26
Littlemore	11	105
New Road	26	166
Osney	9	50
St Thomas's	6	74
Thrupp	4	19
Wolvercote	12	129
Woodstock	2	12
	124	879



In connection with the Centenary Celebrations of the New-road Sunday School Society, some 400 children from Bayworth, Thrupp, Charlton, Eynsham, and several other places in the district, visited Oxford on Monday, when, after a sermon in the New-road Chapel by the Rev. D. J. Hiley, of Norwood, an excellent tea was served in the Corn Exchange. Above is a group of the children and members of the Society taken on the steps of the Old Clarendon Buildings previous to the tea.—(Photo, J. Soame, Oxford).

The New Road Chapel Sunday School Society centenary, 1913

NOTES

¹ T. W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780–1850* (New Haven, 1976), p. 48 where the following analysis of Sunday School enrolments is offered: C of E: 42%; Methodists of all kinds: 30%; Congregationalists: 13.3%; Baptists: 7.4%; RC: 1.6%, with all other groups scoring less than 1%.

² Laqueur, *Religion & Respectability*, p. 4.

³ cf R.J. White, 'It required many schools, and particularly Sunday Schools, with their lessoning on the industrial virtues of diligence, thrift and especially 'regularity' to turn the people of the fields and cottages into the people of the factories and back-streets', as cited in John Briggs et al, *Crime and Punishment in England* (London, 1996), p. 106–7.

⁴ J. Ferguson, 'In Honour of Robert Raikes', *Baptist Quarterly* (BQ) XXVIII (1980), 353.

⁵ W.R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England, 1790–1850* (London, 1972), p. 13.

⁶ W.R. Ward, 'The Baptists and the Transformation of the Church, 1780–1830', *BQ* XXV (1973), 172.

⁷ D. Turner, *Hints on Religious Education, being Two Sermons in Favour of Sunday Schools* (London, 1794). In fact it was delivered as a single sermon but was divided into two when published in expanded form.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–2. Turner again appeals to the practice of family/infant baptism later in the sermon: 'You presented your offspring to him in baptism; tell them, that all on whom the name of Christ is named, ought to depart from iniquity; and that

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notwithstanding what has been done for them, or by them, if they have not the Spirit of Christ they are none of his.' p. 30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-7.

¹⁸ H. Paintin, *New Road Chapel Sunday School Society, 1813-1913, Centenary Souvenir Booklet* (Oxford, 1913), p. 2.

¹⁹ P.B. Cliff, *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England, 1780-1980* (Redhill, 1986), Chapter 3, 'Forerunners of the Sunday School Movement' especially pp. 20-1.

²⁰ Cliff, *Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement*, p. 29.

²¹ Philip Hayden, 'The Baptists in Oxford, 1656-1819', *BQ XXIX* (1981), 130, and Walter Stevens and Walter W. Bottoms, *The Baptists of New Road, Oxford* (Oxford, 1948), p. 14.

²² John Howard Hinton, *A Biographical Portraiture of ... James Hinton* (Oxford, 1824), pp. 234-6.

²³ These names include some important Baptist dynasties. The Steane family was to produce Edward Steane who was to serve as both Secretary of the Union and of the infant Evangelical Alliance. Samuel Collingwood, comptroller of the University Press, was to become father-in-law to Dr E. B. Underhill, distinguished lay secretary of the BMS. One of Collingwood's grandsons, William, a friend of both John Ruskin and George Muller became a Plymouth Brother. His grandson was R.G. Collingwood, the philosopher and historian.

²⁴ Paintin, *New Road Sunday School Society*, pp. 5-6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5 and J. Ivimey, *Memoir of William Fox* (London, 1831). Fox had grown up in the Bourton-on-the-Water Church before removing to Oxford, where he was apprenticed as a mercer and draper. Ivimey tells the remarkable story of how Fox was apprenticed to a Mr 'R', 'a respectable draper and mercer' who notwithstanding his differences with Fox over Sabbath observance and other matters gave him his house, shop and stock, valued at some three to four thousand pounds and put him in charge of his whole business. Fox bemoaned the lack

of an evangelical dissenting ministry in Oxford, attending in its place on that of Dr Haweis. In 1764 he transferred to London and became a very successful wholesaler, almost immediately becoming a deacon at Prescott Street Baptist Chapel [pp. 10–14].

²⁷ Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, pp. 282–3.

²⁸ Paintin, *New Road Sunday School Society*, pp. 7–8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³³ The use of Catechisms was a contentious issue. The Sunday School Society affirmed, 'That the Bible should be the only school book, given by the Society excluding all catechisms.' J. Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, vol. IV (London, 1830), p. 83.

³⁴ Paintin, *New Road Sunday School Society*, p. 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ *Baptist Magazine*, VII (1815), 76–7. The two names of the publishers link this publication to the New Road story. Bartlett and Newman were both respected deacons at New Road and close associates of James Hinton.

⁴¹ Paintin, *New Road Sunday School Society*, p. 12.

⁴² Edward C. Alden, *The Old Church at New Road. A Contribution to the History of Oxford Nonconformity* (Oxford, 1904), p. 29.

⁴³ Paintin, *New Road Sunday School Society*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 6–7.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 23–4.

⁵² Ibid., p. 32.

⁵³ *New Road Chapel Monthly Visitor (MV)*, August 1892, p. 113.

⁵⁴ Paintin, *New Road Sunday School Society*, p. 25.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 13. Other Branch schools faced similar difficulties, e.g. Headington in 1848/49 when children were coerced to attend the church schools. *ibid* p. 33.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 9 and 11 where the schools are identified as the ‘Garden School’ that is the school for boys housed in Penson’s Gardens, the Girls School which lodged in Paradise Square, and the Oxford Girls’ School for which no location was provided. The Headington School had a continuous existence from the 1820s and Appleton from the 1830s. In 1852 the numbers on the roll had risen to 340 with 40 teachers to service them.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶¹ *MV*, (August 1892), p. 113.

⁶² Paintin, *New Road Sunday School Society*, pp. 12–13.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁵ *Baptist Magazine* (1834) 145, cited by Laqueur p. 173.

⁶⁶ Paintin, *New Road Sunday School Society*, p. 10.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

⁶⁹ See J.H.Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot, 1994), p. 391.

⁷⁰ Paintin, *New Road Sunday School Society*, p. 16.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁷³ *MV*, December 1891, pp. 177–8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *MV*, March 1895.

⁷⁶ Alden, *Old Church at New Road*, p. 41.

⁷⁷ An Old Potter [Charles Shaw]. *When I was a Child* (London, 1903), p. 218 and 221, but the whole of chapters XVI, 'The Sunday School and My Young Life' and XXIII, 'The Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties' are foundation documents for Sunday School history.

⁷⁸ Stevens and Bottoms, *Baptists of New Road*, p. 19.

⁷⁹ *The late Councillor G. H. Cooper. His Public Life and Work*. Reprinted from the *Oxford Chronicle*, January 1911.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 254–5.

⁸² E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London, 1959), p. 164, and p. 176.

Giving and Receiving: New Road and the Baptist Missionary Society

Basil Amey

In 1795 the Committee of the fledgling BMS was facing a complaint that has been made against the Society continually. The complaint was that while the Society was seeking the good of heathens abroad it did not show the same concern for the heathen at home.¹

The Committee responded by producing, 'A proposal for extending the assistance of the Society to the encouragement of village preaching in England', and immediately clarified what was meant by village: 'That which is here called village preaching, is not intended to be confined to village in distinction from large towns; but rather to extend to any or all places, where people are destitute of what we account evangelical preaching.'²

At a general meeting of the Society at Birmingham on 16 September 1795 it was decided to publish the proposal to see if supporters, who had given money for work overseas, agreed with the new policy. The response must have been positive because at its meeting on 28 July 1796 the Committee received an application for support for village preaching in the neighbourhood of Oxford, 'and it was agreed to allow Mr Hinton £6 6s for that purpose, requesting him at the same time to furnish the Society with a particular account of his labours and success'.³ James Hinton had already been preaching in several villages but in his report to the Society after the grant, which was intended for travelling expenses and hire of rooms,

he described the work he had done, without much success, in Wheatley and Oddington.⁴

If New Road and its minister first received from the BMS then in future years they were to give, and James Hinton was among the first to offer his money and service. The Committee of the BMS remained a small, and it seems self-appointing, group for some years and at its meeting on 7 August 1799 it was 'Resolved that Mr Hinton of Oxford be added to the Committee and requested to take a part in collecting for the Society'. In the accounts for the year 1 October 1799 to 1 October 1800, Hinton's name appears for a subscription of 10s 6d. There were three others from Oxford subscribing the half guinea, Mr Hays, Mr T. Mayers and Mrs Scolman, and there was a collection of £23 3s 8d. How far this was the result of Hinton's influence cannot be judged but for the year 1804-5, when the practice began of listing subscribers under the name of the collector, there were twenty-four names and a collection under the heading, Oxford &. By Mr Hinton.

A pattern of work develops

Different churches provided venues for the meetings of the Society and Hinton's growing involvement with the work gave him the opportunity to invite the Society to his church for a valediction service in 1806 at which two probationer missionaries, William Robinson and James Chater, would be commissioned for work overseas with the BMS. A full account of the preparations and the service is given in the *Periodical Accounts* (the BMS magazine which preceded the *Missionary Herald*). To read a brief extract and to recall some of the experiences of the two couples enables us to learn about the early nineteenth-century BMS, of which New Road would become a consistent supporter. The Captain Wickes mentioned was a Presbyterian elder from Philadelphia.⁵ He was captain of the *Criterion*, the ship on which four missionaries and their families, including Joshua Marshman and William Ward, sailed to India in 1799. He had stood by the missionaries and

seen them safely to the Danish colony of Serampore when the officials of the East India Company had tried to deport them.

In November last, the secretary received a letter from Mr Ralston, informing him that Capt. Wickes would shortly sail in a vessel of his for Holland; after which he would touch at England, on his way to Bengal, and that if we had any persons or goods to send by him, he would take them free of charge to the Society as to passage or freightage. The Society having two young men on probation, Mr Chater and Mr Robinson, the Committee thought it right to avail themselves of so favourable an opportunity of sending them out.

On Wednesday 12th March, a public meeting was held at Mr Hinton's place of worship at Oxford, for the solemn designation of our young friends to the work. Mr Page of Bristol preached on Tuesday evening. Next morning, after a prayer meeting, public worship began a little before eleven. Mr Sutcliff delivered the introductory discourse, and received a short account from each of the candidates, of his motives for engaging in this work, and the leading principles which he intended to inculcate. He then descended from the pulpit, and by prayer and imposition of the hands, in which the other brethren joined, solemnly set them apart to the work, and committed them to God. Our venerable friend, Capt. Wickes, with many ministers and others in the neighbourhood, were present. After this meeting each of our young friends were married. Mrs Chater is a member of the Baptist church at Cirencester and Mrs Robinson a fellow member with her husband at Olney. On April 12, they set sail for India.⁶

An event in India between the sailing of the young couples and their arrival in India on 23 August threw all their plans into confusion. Indian troops mutinied and attacked the

European garrison of Vellore, South India, at two in the morning of 10 July 1806. Asleep and unarmed over a hundred died.⁷ The immediate reaction of some was to blame the influence of missionaries. This was the worst time for new missionaries to arrive in India and Chater and Robinson were told they must leave on the ship that brought them. Again Captain Wickes refused to be browbeaten by the officials, and after some delay was able to leave without the missionaries.

Gradually, out of the confusion, opportunities for growth were taken and Robinson and his family, after some years of attempting to settle in Bhutan, left for Java and later moved to Sumatra. Chater went first to Burma to begin the mission there, and then after a few years he and his family became the pioneer missionaries in Sri Lanka.

To catalogue William Robinson's wives, two of whom were widows, is to recount the health hazards. Elizabeth Walker who he married a few days after the Oxford service died in Dinajpur on 29 July 1810. He married Margaret Gordon on 13 January 1812 and she died in Sumatra on 25 May 1822. Mrs Knaggs who he married on 9 June 1823 died on 27 June 1826 and Mrs Lish who he married on 11 April 1827 died on 16 May 1838, both in Calcutta. Finally he married Miss Sturgeon on 4 July 1839, who survived him. Robinson died on 2 September 1853.⁸

After three years in Sri Lanka the Chaters decided to send their two eldest boys home to be educated in England. Both were lost at sea when the ship struck a rock off the coast of South Africa. In 1820 Mrs Chater needed to return to England for health reasons and took the children with her. She died giving birth to twins on St Helena, leaving all the children to the care of strangers. Chater began the journey home in 1829 but died, and was buried, at sea.⁹

Hinton's purpose in arranging for the valediction service to be at his church had been 'to excite greater interest'.¹⁰ If he had hoped that one result would be that young people from New Road would offer to serve overseas with the BMS then he

would have been disappointed. In nearly two hundred years only two who 'grew up' in the church, namely Grace Alden, who married Charles Dann, and Joan Greenaway, have served overseas with the BMS. Their story will be told, but the story also needs to be told of some who came into membership and later offered for service and of others who were members of New Road but had moved elsewhere before serving with the Society, at home or overseas. Students who shared in the work at New Road while in Oxford are also part of the story.

This rich variety of links must have added to the understanding of aspects of overseas missionary work that began at the service of 12 March 1806 and grew as the work and experiences of those who were valedicted that day became known at New Road. This story will show the lessons in mission that New Road learnt. There was the need for money and recruits. Recruits needed training, equipping and transporting at a time when travel was long and hazardous. There was the need to accept disease and death as possible, even probable, overseas and to be ready to have life influenced by, and seek to influence, political moods and decisions. Parallel with these needs was the need to rally support through prayer, giving and practical assistance.

Challenging political interference

The members at New Road had their first lesson in politics and mission when their minister was summoned to London. The power of the East India Company to refuse missionaries entry to India had been a hindrance to the work of the BMS. That power needed to be challenged and the opportunity came with the Charter Renewal Bill of 1813, by which the charter of the East India Company was to be renewed for a further twenty years.

William Wilberforce took the lead in Parliament with a three hour speech in defence of a clause supporting 'the introduction among them of useful knowledge, and of religious and moral improvement. That in furtherance of the

above objects sufficient facilities shall be afforded by law to persons desirous of going to and remaining in India for the purpose of accomplishing these benevolent designs'.¹¹ The Bill, with the necessary 'missionary clause', passed its third reading on 13 July and India was open to the Gospel.

James Hinton had played a significant part in the long struggle, inside and outside of Parliament, that had stretched over many months. When a deputation was required in London Fuller wrote to him 'I shall hope to meet Ryland, Sutcliff and yourself. Not only come up, but bring with you all the matured thought you can work up between now and then, and I will do the same'. Hinton responded and was in London for several days and, it is conjectured, drew up the memorial addressed to the Prime Minister.¹²

Hinton remained a member of the BMS Committee until his death in 1823. In 1818 he was appointed to the nine member Subcommittee of Finance and Consultation and at the annual meeting of 7 October 1819, in Cambridge, he was appointed a member of the newly formed Central Committee, which had twenty-one members from a General Committee which had risen in numbers to over fifty.

For two years (1815-17) during his time on the Committee Hinton served as joint secretary with Dr Ryland following the death, in 1815, of Andrew Fuller, the minister who had guided the affairs of the BMS from its beginnings in 1792. In 1822 Hinton was joined on the General Committee by his son, John Howard Hinton, who had been born three years into his ministry at New Road, and was then Baptist minister in Reading. In 1823 John followed his father as a member of the Central Committee. He was secretary of the Baptist Union from 1841-66, but remained a strong advocate for the BMS and in 1847 wrote a comprehensive biography of William Knibb published as the *Memoir of William Knibb, Missionary in Jamaica*.

One of those able to go to India as a result of the 'missionary clause' was William Pearce. He did not 'go out' from New Road but the church did play a part in his

pilgrimage. He was born in Birmingham on 14 January 1794 and after the death of his father, Samuel Pearce, was brought up by the Nichols family in Nottingham. Later he was placed under the care of Ryland at Bristol but he did not feel equipped for the ministry so accepted an offer to be apprenticed to Mr Collingwood, printer to the University of Oxford. In Oxford Pearce came under the pastoral care and guidance of Hinton. He came to faith, was accepted as a church member at a meeting on Friday 22 October 1813 and, it is believed, was baptized, with six others, on Sunday 24 October. He shared in Sunday School work: 'At that time (1813) Edward Steane, William Pearce (afterwards a devoted missionary to India) Michael Underhill and others constituted the little band of young men who went about establishing and carrying on Sunday Schools in the neighbouring villages.'¹³

Pearce had for some time thought of working in India but, with no clear call and with his apprenticeship complete and no opening for work in Oxford, he returned to Birmingham and began his own business and joined the church where his father had been minister. It was there he married Martha Blakemore on 3 April 1817 and from there they set out for Serampore, leaving England on 7 May. The details of their journey are a reminder of the time factor that needs to be remembered when considering the problem of communication. After the Pearces set sail on 7 May 1817 nothing more was heard of them until a letter 'from a friend in Liverpool dated Jan 23 1818' gave the news that they had arrived 'at the entrance to the River Ganges on the 19th August ... They had had a very fine and remarkably short passage'.¹⁴

The Serampore Controversy

It was the difficulty in communication that was leading to serious misunderstanding between the Serampore missionaries, Carey, Marshman and Ward, and the home committee, now containing many members who had not known them before they left for India. The Serampore Trio, as

they became known, had guided the affairs in India, raising large sums of money and acquiring property. They were not willing to allow the home committee to take control of this or have the final decision in the location of missionaries.¹⁵ Newly-appointed missionaries to India, willing to accept the home committee's control, split from the Serampore group and formed a Union in Calcutta. After some months with William Ward at Serampore, Pearce left to join the group in Calcutta. He was responsible for establishing the Baptist Mission Press, where he worked until his death from cholera in March 1840.

The Serampore Controversy lasted nearly twenty years with a complete severance from 1827–37. Local associations were formed in support of Serampore, and in early 1837 the Revd Benjamin Godwin was appointed as secretary by the Liverpool Association but with national responsibility. In September Godwin was in Oxford encouraging support for Serampore, but he writes that he had little success. Was this because of Oxford's link with Pearce? Soon after that visit some of the Serampore supporters discussed the possibility of reunion. An approach was made to the BMS and a meeting held in London on 7 December 1837, when resolutions were agreed committing both parties to reunion. This meant Godwin was redundant but he had received an invitation from New Road to serve the church as minister for a month from Sunday 24 December. That temporary appointment led to a call to become minister which Godwin accepted.¹⁶ Again, New Road felt the effects of BMS decisions.

New Road provides a leader

In 1813, the year that William Pearce was baptized, Edward Underhill was born. This was not their only link. Samuel Collingwood who provided Pearce with an apprenticeship was the father of Underhill's first wife: Sophia Collingwood and Edward Underhill were married in 1836. Yet another link was through the Sunday School work in which Pearce had shared with Underhill's father. In 1849 Underhill

accepted the invitation to become joint secretary of the BMS and moved to London. In 1852 Emily Benham, a founder member of Bloomsbury Baptist Church, became his second wife, and from 1884 until his death in 1901 Underhill was a deacon at Heath Street, Hampstead where he undertook much of the pastoral work during the minister's absence.¹⁸

Underhill established new relationships with people and churches but his relationship with New Road and Oxford remained strong:

Dr Underhill, a representative of a family that has been connected with Oxford for nearly four centuries, and has also given a Bishop to the Diocese, was a noble and notable figure. His great work as secretary of the BMS, in which capacity he visited the Society's missions in the East and West sheds an abiding lustre not only on his family but on the city from which he sprang.¹⁹

When Underhill carried through his 'great work as secretary of the BMS', he was no longer a member of New Road but some reference needs to be made to his life and influence.

More political involvement

From 5 November 1859 to 9 April 1860, Underhill and Revd J.T. Brown, from Northampton, travelled as a BMS deputation in the West Indies and visited Jamaica. With this background Underhill understood the reports he received from Jamaica in the early sixties of the decay of the sugar plantations, unemployment, poverty and sickness. Encouraged by Sir Morton Peto, a leading Baptist layman, he wrote to Rt. Hon. E. Cardwell, Secretary of State for the Colonies, describing the problems, referring to the failure of the Jamaican legislature and suggesting 'a searching inquiry into the legislature of the island since emancipation'. Cardwell sent Underhill's letter to the Governor of Jamaica, Governor Eyre, asking for his comments. The letter was 'leaked' to the press



Edward Bean Underhill

and meetings, soon called 'Underhill Meetings' were held, giving support to the points made in Underhill's letter and seeking remedial action from the Governor. A meeting held in Morant Bay under the chairmanship of G.W. Gordon, the representative of the parish on the Assembly, who had been baptized by the BMS missionary, J.M. Phillippo, decided to take a resolution to the Governor. The deputation walked the forty miles to Spanish Town only to be met by the refusal of the Governor to see them. This and other incidents led to disturbances and quickly the Governor imposed martial law. Over four hundred people, many of them innocent, were executed, others were flogged and Gordon was tried and executed.

In his despatch, published by the English press at the end of 1865, Governor Eyre blamed Underhill, 'this most wicked and widespread rebellion was due to his letter'. As other reports reached England questions were asked, Eyre was replaced and a Commission left for Jamaica. The report of the Commission approved Eyre's dismissal and cleared Underhill. The Jamaica House of Assembly was dismissed and Jamaica became a Crown Colony. Just as the East India Company lost its powers after the India Mutiny so the House of Assembly lost its powers after Morant Bay. The BMS influence on tragedies and consequences remains undefinable.²⁰

In Jamaica, Underhill's name was linked with meetings. In Congo it became a place: 'Underhill, the new mission station founded in 1882 at the end of Lower Congo navigability, near the present town of Matadi'.²¹ Brian Stanley rates Underhill 'the most learned and most widely influential secretary ever to serve the Society, with the possible exception of Andrew Fuller himself'.²² It is interesting to note that Underhill was followed by another layman, Alfred Baynes 1876-1906, so for nearly sixty years, and probably the most important sixty years of its life, the BMS had laymen in the position of General Secretary.

Prayer and practical support

While Underhill bestrode the world stage the ministers and members of New Road continued their loyal support of the BMS. The year after Underhill was appointed as BMS secretary the New Road School Mission Society was formed, in 1850. It was reported that a missionary spirit had excited the minds of some of the elder boys and they made their first contribution, of seven shillings, to help send the gospel to the heathen.

The ladies had their Sewing Society and sent regular contributions for 'Our Indian Sisters', and some subscribed to the Quarterly of the Zenana Mission, entitled *Our Indian Sisters*, until it ceased publication in 1892. The Baptist Zenana Mission was formed on 22 May 1867 on the proposition, 'That an Association be formed in connection with the BMS to aid its operation among the female population of the east'.²³ A record of some of its work, from 1867-1927, was written by Emily Kemp with the title, *There Followed Him Women*. Emily will appear again in this chapter. Among the other women who followed in later years was Mary Dann, first wife of minister James Dann. The *Zenana Missionary Herald* of October 1901 notes Mrs Dann's death on 4 September and adds, 'Since becoming a Member of our Committee in 1900, she has thrown herself with much enthusiasm into the work of bringing the claims of the Society before the Baptist churches in Oxfordshire'.

There were a number of attempts to form a BMS Auxiliary for Oxford but the most successful seems to be the formation of a Congregational Auxiliary. At a meeting on 10 August 1859 it was 'Resolved. That an Auxiliary be formed in connexion with the New Road church and congregation, and that all persons subscribing to the amount of one halfpenny per week be entitled to membership'.²⁴ The minister, William Allen, served as chairman. He was also corresponding secretary for Oxford until his death in 1874.

The Cameroons controversy

The minutes of the Auxiliary meetings show continuing links with Underhill. The speaker at the annual Public Missionary Service in November 1863 was 'Rev Alfred Saker of Cameroons, W. Africa'. The Cameroons mission, begun in 1848, was significant not only in its own success but also as the harbinger of the continuing BMS work in the whole of Congo. The pioneer and driving force in the work was Alfred Saker. Underhill gave him his support and became the author of his biography. Like the Serampore Trio, Saker outlived those who had begun the work with him and a new generation became critical of his work and methods.

They 'complained that Saker's work lacked 'spirituality': that he devoted his life so enthusiastically to printing, translating, language study, brick making, carpentry, agriculture and secular instruction that very little time was left for preaching and theology'.²⁵ Saker was distressed by the accusations and provided a powerful defence of his work and clear explanation of his understanding of 'spiritual', but the BMS Committee decided that an on the spot investigation was necessary and gave Underhill the responsibility. He and his wife left for the Cameroons in the autumn of 1869.

After weeks of travel and consultation there was success, 'The main object of my visit was accomplished, and I had the pleasure of seeing relations of friendships and co-operation re-established and harmony restored'. There was vindication, 'I should be unfaithful to my convictions if I were not to anew commend Mr Saker to the fullest confidence of the Committee, or to speak of him as among the greatest of modern missionaries of the Cross'. There was sorrow. After a two day journey in an open boat, 'On the morning of the day following our return to Bethel my dear wife was suddenly called away to her heavenly home'.²⁶

In December 1866 Underhill was the preacher at two services on the Sunday and at the public meeting on the Monday evening, all at New Road. This was in the immediate

aftermath of the Morant Bay incident. On the Monday evening Mr Goldwin Smith, Regius Professor of Modern History and Revd J.E.T. Rogers, Professor of Political Economy, shared the platform with Underhill. Both gave support to Underhill and Rogers 'expressed the warmest sympathy with Dr Underhill and the BMS: attributing the origin of Indian civilization to the labours of the "learned Baptist Missionaries at Serampore"'.²⁷

The pattern of mission changes

Underhill returned to New Road on a number of occasions and although he retired in 1876 he remained as honorary secretary of the BMS and in 1882 served as secretary for six months while Baynes was visiting in India and Ceylon.²⁸ It was in 1882 also that James Dann became minister at New Road and several new links with the BMS were made. Dann had been elected a member of the BMS Committee, representing Bradford, Yorkshire, in 1875. On leaving Bradford he lost membership and was not reappointed until 1908. He then continued as a member until his death in 1924, being elected an honorary life member of the Committee in 1921, for services rendered. While minister at New Road he served as corresponding secretary for Oxford from 1888 to 1915.

In the course of its history the BMS has been prepared to review its work and, if required, make significant changes. Such changes have often related to a particular country or area, for example the decision to withdraw from France in 1885, or Norway in 1891 or Trinidad in 1899 or the decision to establish new work as in Brazil in 1956.²⁹ The occasions when a change in policy has affected countries as far apart as India and the Bahamas must be few and, perhaps unique, the occasion when such a change has affected two brothers serving in different countries yet linked to the same church through their father who is the minister. Again, as in 1806 and 1837, New Road knew at first hand the results of a change in BMS policy.

BMS policy in India was reviewed in the light of a report by a deputation that had visited in 1890 and one result was the

withdrawal of support from Anglo-Indian churches, 'it being the judgment of the Committee that it will be to the advantage of these churches that they should increasingly be thrown upon their own resources'.³⁰ Two years later:

The Committee are glad to announce that arrangements have been completed for the withdrawal of all pecuniary assistance from the Nassau and Bahamas Churches at the end of two years. In the truest interests of these churches it now appears wisest and best to cast them upon their own resources, so that they may become self-supporting, and independent of foreign money.³¹

The results of the decisions regarding Anglo-Indian churches and the churches of the Bahamas can be seen in the ministries of George and Charles Dann respectively. Neither George nor his wife became members at New Road but when George applied to the BMS, Edward Alden gave a reference. Another referee was C.H. Spurgeon. Following his training at Pastors (Spurgeon's) College George Dann was minister at Peckham, 1881-1884, where he was not settled. Alluding to this in his reference Spurgeon wrote, 'He has done well but not so well as I expected and I lay the blame to the soil rather than the ploughman'.³²

Offers of service

The BMS report for 1885 noted that twenty-two candidates had been accepted, the largest number in the history of the Society and continued, 'The Committee have also used their good offices on behalf of the Allahabad Baptist Church by securing the services of Rev. G.J. Dann, late of Peckham, for the pastorate and by helping the church to maintain the ministry in this important North Western centre of India'.³³ Dann's ministry at Allahabad ended when the change of policy by the BMS caused the withdrawal of support from the Anglo-Indian Allahabad Baptist Church. He served in Delhi from 1892-96

and then at Bankipur from 1896–1922, where he worked on revisions of the New Testament in Hindi and Urdu. The BMS policy of withdrawal to encourage reliance on local resources became the policy of missionary societies during the twentieth century as they wrestled with the implications of the donor - recipient relationship. To those who argue that giving inhibits local initiatives a comment in one of George's reports following the assurance of continuing BMS support for the Bankipur Boarding School is significant: 'This liberal policy has resulted in increased local support.'³⁴

George kept in touch with New Road through correspondence and there are reports in the *New Road Chapel Monthly Visitor* of the church's support for a Bible Woman in Allahabad and commitment 'to pay for the board and lodging of a native Medical Mission student during her four years training at one of the 'Lady Dufferin' training institutions in India'. George also shared in the life of the church when on furlough. He was home at the time of the BMS centenary in 1892 and shared the services with his father when collections were taken for the Centenary Fund. He was present at the New Year social and took the sixty-seventh church anniversary services at Woodstock in May.

Death and ill health overseas

Charles Dann became a member at New Road in 1886 and his first link with the Bahamas was when he went for a year, 1889–90, to assist Rev D. Wilshere in his work.³⁵ Back in England he was inducted as minister of Blockley on 7 May 1891. He left in 1892 when he accepted the pastorate of Zion Church, Nassau and the superintendence of out-island Bahamas churches on the understanding that BMS support would continue for two years.³⁶ When he returned to the Bahamas in 1892 Dann took with him as his newly-married wife Grace Alden, eldest daughter of Robert and Hannah Alden, a long-established New Road family. Eynsham, one of New Road's village stations, held a 'Social Tea Meeting' to say

farewell in recognition of all the service Grace had given. The report in the November 1892 *New Road Chapel Monthly Visitor* includes the tribute, 'Her unceasing devotion to the spiritual welfare of the people, manifest in unsparing and self denying efforts both on the Lord's day and in the week, and almost day and night, endeared her to both young and old'.

These words are hauntingly echoed by the *BMS Annual Report* for 1894 which, recording Grace's death after only a few months of married life, described her as, 'One who had endeared herself greatly to all with whom she had been brought into association in Nassau and whose sympathetic nature and wholehearted consecration to Christian service was an inspiration and strength to her like minded husband'.

Following his wife's death Charles Dann's sister, Florence, was sent to assist him. 'My sister's sweet readiness to come to my help, her whole-hearted devotion to the work here, and her way of working, have won the hearts of the people, and done much under God to solace me.'³⁷ Brother and sister continued to work together with BMS support beyond the stipulated two years and it was not until 1897 that Dann wrote, 'We look forward, indeed, to being entirely free by the end of 1897 from pecuniary help from the parent Society; though we shall always rejoice in the thought that we shall never cease to be bound to the Society by other and better ties'.³⁸ The brother and sister partnership ended in 1898 with the return to England of Florence on account of ill health.³⁹ Soon after that Charles Dann must have remarried, for the *BMS Report* for 1900 noted that the Revd C.A. and Mrs Dann were on furlough in England. Charles Dann was home from 1905-6 when he served again as minister at Blockley. He then returned to Nassau but after 1905 no reports from the Bahamas appear in the *Annual Reports* of the BMS. The 'other and better ties' to which Dann had referred did not warrant recognition in the *Annual Report* once the pecuniary giver/receiver relationship no longer existed.

Gains and losses

For some years the Revd Alfred and Mrs Couldrey were members of New Road when Mr Couldrey was assistant to the minister, as pastor-evangelist with responsibility for work in the villages. Their daughter Helliger, also a member, became another link with the BMS when she married Revd Percy Jones, in 1915. The 'Missionary Roll of the Year' in the 1916 BMS report has as a subheading 'Six ladies have gone out as brides of missionaries' and heading the list, H.E. Couldrey to Percy H. Jones, India. In 1932 he is reporting from Rangamati on 'a new plan for dealing with this vast district and to encourage the formation of regular churches'.⁴⁰ He would not have seen the results of any plan, for the following year the list of those who 'have retired from services on the field' contain the names of 'Rev P.H. Jones after twenty-seven years' service in the Chittagong Hills; and Mrs Jones'.

A link was made with the BMS when, in retirement, the Revd Hubert and Mrs Gladys Parris came to live at 29 Bartlemas Road, Oxford. They had served since 1922 in the Yakusu area of Congo and on retirement had lived at Blockley where Hubert had been minister, as Charles Dann had nearly fifty years before. The pastorate lasted three years when they moved to Oxford. Hubert Parris died on 20 September 1956 and Mrs Parris moved to South Lodge, Worthing, the BMS home for retired missionaries, in 1970.

Brief but meaningful links between the BMS and New Road were made by students, among them Moir Duncan, Jennie Beckingsale, Ernest Burt and Emily Kemp. Moir Duncan was a graduate of Glasgow University who came to Oxford in 1887 to study classical Chinese under Dr Legge and Theology under Principal Fairbairn at Mansfield College. It was during his year in Oxford that he was for a time a teacher at the Wolvercote Sunday School. He left for China in 1888 and wrote in detail about evangelistic work, the problems of famine and the fearfulness of the Boxer massacres of 1900 when many missionaries and national Christians were killed. It was those

massacres that led to Duncan's final appointment. There were long discussions between the representatives of the missionary societies and Chinese officials about suitable compensation. The BMS decided that it would not push for compensation for lives lost and property destroyed. Timothy Richard, veteran BMS missionary, suggested that, as the people's support of the Boxers was due largely to ignorance, provision should be made for a university in T'ai-Yuan-Fu comprising separate Chinese and Western Departments.⁴¹ Duncan was invited to be the first Principal and when he took up the appointment in 1903 he resigned his formal connection with the BMS. He only held the principalship for three years before his death, at forty-four, in 1906.⁴²

Jennie Beckingsale was a member of Salem, Cheltenham. She graduated B.Sc. at London University and obtained the Clothworkers' Company's Scholarship to Somerville College for 1891, where she specialised in higher mathematics and science. Her first appointment was as science mistress at Gateshead High and from there she applied to the Baptist Zenana Mission in 1897. She was accepted and went to China where her work was among women and children.

Jennie was caught in two 'uprisings'. She was working at the girls' school in Hsi-An-Fu at the time of the Boxer crisis and was among a party of missionaries led to safety under escort on the initiative of a sympathetic Chinese Governor. Jennie spoke about this adventure when visiting New Road in 1901 for the annual missionary meetings. The *Oxford and District Free Church Magazine* for April 1901 records that:

Miss Beckingsale (who was warmly welcomed as having been, while a student at Somerville Hall, an active worker in our Sunday School) gave a remarkably lucid and thrilling narrative of the providential escape of her fellow missionaries and herself from imminent peril of death, and their hazardous journey by land and water until they reached the coast in health and safety.

She was back at work in Hsi-An-Fu, Shensi, when the revolution of 22 October 1911 occurred. She and other missionaries were maltreated and threatened but were saved by more moderate members of the revolutionary party. Despite the disturbances, 'Remarkable progress was made in women's work for which a special centre was established in the city, where Miss M.E. Shekleton, Miss Jennie Beckingsale and other single women of like mind and spirit conducted a busy and enterprising programme of visitation, Bible-classes and services of various kinds'. The sudden death of Jennie, from peritonitis, on 22 June 1913 was described by her colleagues as an irreparable loss.⁴³

In contrast to Moir and Jennie, who died in China in their forties, Ernest Burt served for forty years in China. A student at Bristol before Oxford, his name appears regularly on the New Road Chapel Home Mission Plan. From July to September 1890 he took all the services at Woodstock. Burt was in China from 1892 to 1932 and on returning home was appointed an honorary life member of the BMS Committee in 1934. He wrote two books on China, *Fifty Years in China* and then *After Sixty Years*. He died at Worthing in April 1951.

Support through three generations

Emily Kemp helped in the Sunday School when at Somerville for the two years 1881-83. Her parents George and Emily were, like Emily Benham, Underhill's second wife, founder members of Bloomsbury Baptist Church. Her mother's sister, Sarah, was married to Sir Morton Peto. The two sisters, Emily and Sarah, were daughters of Mr & Mrs Henry Kelsall, a wealthy manufacturing family in Rochdale, members of the West Street Baptist Church and generous supporters of the BMS. Henry Kelsall was among the group of Serampore supporters at the meeting of 7 December 1837 when the resolutions on reunion were agreed. Soon after Emily's birth the Kemps moved to Rochdale. Later Emily renewed her links with Bloomsbury and died in London at Christmas 1939.⁴⁴ She

had made visits to China and India and, like her parents and grandparents, was a generous giver.

Probably her most enduring gift in terms of bricks and mortar is the one that still stands in Weoley Park Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham. A group of women from the BMS, London Missionary Society and English Presbyterian Union met to consider the proposal for a joint womens' missionary training college. A small committee was formed and Emily was appointed treasurer. A fine old manor house in Selly Oak, close to Kingsmead and Westhill colleges, was viewed and was considered to be ideal both in its own attractiveness and for the possibilities of co-operation with other colleges which it offered. In January 1912 Emily Kemp bought the house and presented it to the BMS.⁴⁵ Carey Hall became St Andrews and now IMC has entered into the inheritance.

Two of Emily's sisters married and served with their husbands as missionaries in China, with the BMS but at their own expense. In 1923 Emily was in T'ai-Yuan-Fu for the opening of the Edwards Memorial Institute by the wife of the Shansi governor. This was to be the centre for work among women and girls and it had been given by Emily as a memorial to her sister.⁴⁶ Another sister had married Revd T.W. Piggott and both of them, with their twelve-year-old son, Wellesley, were killed in the Boxer massacre on 9 July 1900. A memorial service for the Piggotts was held in the West Street Baptist Church, Rochdale in 1901 when the challenge was sounded, 'who will fill the gap'? A seventeen-year-old rose in his seat and declared himself ready to do so.⁴⁷ That young man was H.R. Williamson who served with the BMS in China from 1908-38 and then as BMS Foreign Secretary from 1939-51. In 1949 Williamson came to the church where the sister of the Boxer martyrs who had inspired his own missionary service had helped in the Sunday School nearly seventy years before. He came to New Road to represent the BMS at the valedictory service of Joan Greenaway, the next link between New Road and the BMS.

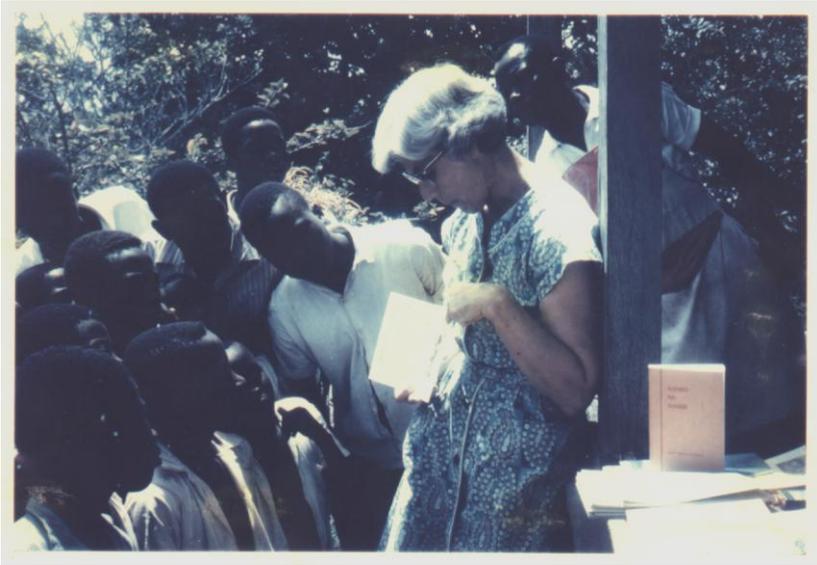
A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ

We saw how, at its beginning, the relationship between New Road and the BMS was built on receiving and giving. That is how the relationship continued. For some, service with the BMS took them away from New Road. Others who came to the church already had links with the BMS, and those links were strengthened. So New Road gave and received and the life of the church was enriched.

Joan Greenaway has had a lifelong link with the church during which she served with the BMS for thirty years. That service was noted with typical BMS brevity in its *Annual Report* of 1979/80 but as it will rarely, if ever, be read there it is fitting for it to be recorded in this history of the church that nourished and supported Joan:

Margaret Joan Greenaway

Joan Greenaway, a member of New Road Church, Oxford, was accepted by the Society for missionary service in 1948. After training at Carfax Commercial College, and business experience, she served for six years with the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Following a year's study at Carey Hall, she sailed for the Belgian Congo (Zaire) in November 1949. For seven years she served in the office of the Field Secretary in Kinshasa, giving valuable secretarial assistance and also being responsible for keeping many of the Society's accounts. During this period, she helped with women's work in the churches in the capital, and that work she was to make her main occupation when she moved to Upoto in November 1956. Within the Upoto area she travelled extensively, initiating and encouraging women's work. Through seminars and the preparation of literature, leaders were trained and given help with the conduct of their meetings. At Upoto, she was instrumental in getting a women's centre erected. As regional secretary for women's work for some years she was able to help women over a very large area of the Upper River. Within



Joan Greenaway, selling books and giving away tracts at Pimu

the Upoto church she served as a deacon and also helped evangelists' school. We record the Society's thanks to her for over 30 years of devoted service, and wish her well in her retirement with her adopted daughter, Miriam, in Oxford.

Politics and the church

If the record was filled out it would contain details of thousands of miles travelled on itineration in the Upoto district and of countless lives influenced for good. It would also show how this work was done at a time of political turbulence and radical change in church/mission relationships. We have noticed the interplay between political decisions and the BMS, affecting the lives of missionaries in Jamaica, India and China, and Joan experienced first hand the consequences of such interplay in Belgian Congo.

A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ

In his address to the South African Parliament in Capetown on 3 February 1960, Harold Macmillan, British Prime Minister, used words that were prophetic and descriptive of Africa in the sixties, 'The wind of change is blowing through this continent and, whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact'. Expanding on the speech, Macmillan's biographer adds, 'Even while he was actually in South Africa a conference in Belgium was deciding to give independence to the Congo in four month's time, with all the whirlwind that that was to unleash'.⁴⁸

The whirlwind came to Congo, with Independence, at the beginning of July 1960 and as fighting broke out between Congolese and Belgian troops some missionaries were moved for safety. Having left Upoto, 'Miss Greenaway stepped off a plane at Leopoldville where she did very useful work at the Secretariat until able to return to Upoto'.⁴⁹ There was a similar experience in August 1964 when rebels moved into the Upoto area and the church advised the missionaries, including Joan, to leave for their own safety. They left on an American plane for Leopoldville but within a month some, including Joan, had returned to help the church rebuild, for the mission had been looted and property damaged.

The physical dangers and uncertainties that accompanied Independence gradually passed, but the process of Africanization continued. This required the integration of church and mission and new names adopted in 1961 stressed the centrality of the Congolese Church rather than the BMS. The General Councils of the Lower/Middle/Upper River in which the BMS was dominant became the Baptist Church of the Lower/Middle/Upper River, and it was to these three churches that BMS missionaries were appointed, after consultation. In 1972 the three became one in the Baptist Community of the River Zaire (CBFZ), for by that time Congo had become the Republic of Zaire, by Presidential decree in October 1971.

Giving and Receiving: New Road and the BMS

A change in name meant a change in working relationships and this is seen in the annual reports where the introduction on Upoto, 'Miss Joan Greenaway continued to supervise ...' was replaced by 'Womens work has continued through the year under the leadership of Mrs Koli and Miss J. Greenaway' or 'Womens work in the Upoto area is organised by a central committee with Mrs Mondengo as chairman...' Whatever the changes that Africanization required, the Annual Reports record that Joan Greenaway continued to serve, as she always had, the work of the women in Upoto and the whole of the region.

Joan still continues to serve, now as missionary secretary and treasurer for New Road. Joan has been joined at New Road by others who served overseas with the BMS. Margaret Hughes worked in Zaire for twenty years and Michael and Stella Hambleton served for a time in Sri Lanka. So New Road remains giver and receiver, as it continues to share in the ongoing life of the BMS.

NOTES

¹ My thanks to those who have helped in discovering information for this chapter, particularly Jennifer Thorp, Susan Mills and Joan Greenaway.

² BMS, *Periodical Accounts*, vol. 1, 153. Note: The Periodical Accounts, (PA), published by the BMS were bound at different times by different people so contents and page numbers are not necessarily the same.

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⁵ George Smith, *The Life of William Carey - shoemaker and Missionary*, 2nd edn. (London, 1887), p. 102.

⁶ BMS, *PA*, vol. 3, 123f.

- ⁷ John C. Marshman, *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward*, vol. 1 (London, 1859), p. 263.
- ⁸ E.S. Wenger, *The Story of Lall Bazar Church Calcutta* (Calcutta, 1908), pp. 196–7.
- ⁹ H.J. Charter, *Ceylon Advancing* (London, 1955), p. 54.
- ¹⁰ John Howard Hinton, *A Biographical Portraiture of ... James Hinton* (Oxford, 1824), p. 312.
- ¹¹ Marshman, *Carey, Marshman and Ward*, vol. 2, p. 21.
- ¹² Hinton, *Biographical Portraiture*, p. 313f.
- ¹³ Edward C. Alden, *The Old Church at New Road. A Contribution to the History of Oxford Nonconformity* (Oxford, 1904), p. 30.
- ¹⁴ BMS, *PA*, vol. 6, 247.
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- ¹⁶ Marshman, *Carey, Marshman and Ward*, vol. 2, p. 508f. See also C. Mitchell (ed.), *The Godwin Memorials: An Autobiography by The Reverend Benjamin Godwin D.D. 1785–1871* [1991, 1993], Angus Library, Oxford.
- ¹⁸ Faith Bowers, *A Bold Experiment, The Story of Bloomsbury Chapel and Bloomsbury Baptist Church 1848–1999* (London, 1999), p. 101. William Brock, *Heath Street Baptist Church Hampstead, 1861–1911* ([Hampstead], 1911), p. 19.
- ¹⁹ H. Paintin, *New Road Chapel Sunday School Society, 1813–1913, Centenary Souvenir Booklet* (Oxford, 1913), p. 19.
- ²⁰ Edward B. Underhill, *The Tragedy of Morant Bay Disturbances in the Island of Jamaica in 1865* (London, 1895). See also: Basil Amey, *The Unfinished Story: A Study Guide History of the BMS* (Baptist Union, 1991), pp. 52–3; Stanley, *History of the BMS*, pp. 97–9.
- ²¹ Sir Harry Johnston, *George Grenfell and the Congo*, vol. 1 (London, 1908), p. 98.
- ²² Stanley, *History of the BMS*, p. 217.
- ²³ E.G. Kemp *There Followed Him Women* (London, n.d.), p. 15.
- ²⁴ New Road Chapel Auxiliary to the Baptist Missionary Society. New Road records (NRR) Box 42, Angus Library, Oxford.

- ²⁵ Johnston, *George Grenfell*, vol. 1, p. 41.
- ²⁶ Edward B. Underhill, *Alfred Saker, Missionary to Africa* (London, 1884), pp. 138-40, 142.
- ²⁷ New Road Chapel Auxiliary (NRR Box 42).
- ²⁸ *Report of the Baptist Missionary Society* (1882) 11.
- ²⁹ Amey, *The Unfinished Story*. See Ch.4, 'Doors That Closed'.
- ³⁰ *Report of the BMS* (1891), 20.
- ³¹ *Report of the BMS* (1893), 77-8.
- ³² BMS Candidate Papers c\ p 57.
- ³³ *Report of the BMS* (1885), 5.
- ³⁴ *Report of the BMS* (1902), 32.
- ³⁵ *Report of the BMS* (1890), 45.
- ³⁶ *Report of the BMS* (1893), 77.
- ³⁷ *Report of the BMS* (1894), 76.
- ³⁸ *Report of the BMS* (1897) , 86.
- ³⁹ *Report of the BMS* (1898), 102.
- ⁴⁰ *Report of the BMS* (1932), 14.
- ⁴¹ H.R. Williamson, *British Baptists in China 1845-1952* (London, 1957), pp. 79-80.
- ⁴² Jessie Duncan & Doreen Raymer, *Lives Lived-of Moir and Jessie Duncan* (Toronto, 2000). Note: Doreen Raymer is the granddaughter of Moir and Jessie and has given a copy of the book to the BMS Archives at Regent's Park College.
- ⁴³ Williamson, *British Baptists*, pp. 85, 116, 113.
- ⁴⁴ Bowers, *A Bold Experiment*, p. 365.
- ⁴⁵ Hugh Martin, *Fifty Years of Carey Hall, 1912-1962* (Council of Carey Hall, 1962), p. 14.
- ⁴⁶ Williamson, *British Baptists*, p. 105.
- ⁴⁷ J.B. Middlebrook, *Memoir of H.R. Williamson: In Journeyings Of* (London, 1969), p. 6.

⁴⁸ Alistair Horne, *Macmillan 1957-1986*, vol. 2 (London, 1991), p. 198.

⁴⁹ *Report of the BMS (1960/61)*, xxvii.

‘This many-sided ministry’:
Diary of a Redevelopment, 1945–1982

Colin Saunders and Rosie Chadwick

Visitors to New Road today often remark on the church’s airy, tranquil worship space and well-appointed buildings, equipping it well for mission at the heart of the city. It has not always been this way. This chapter charts several decades of uncertainty – and at times debate – about the church’s place and role within the city centre. For much of this time church life went on as usual, but questions about the church’s future lay unresolved. Finally, the redevelopment of the late 1970s paved the way for a new phase of ‘many-sided ministry’.

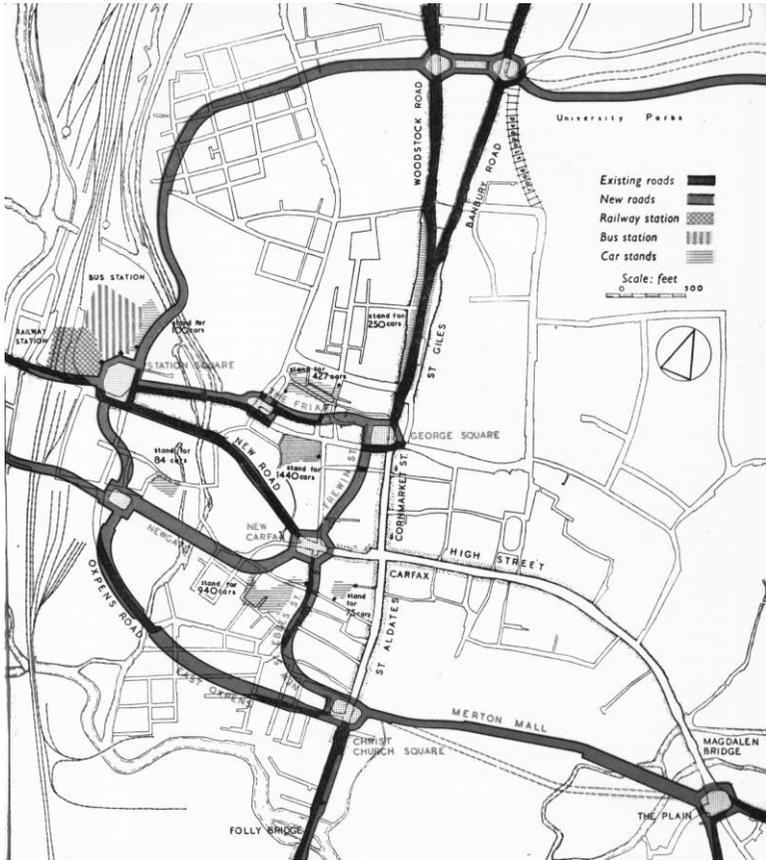
May 1945

Oxford City Council commissions a report from planning consultant Thomas Sharp. This follows two decades of debate about the city’s planning needs, not least how to reduce the traffic choking Oxford’s historic High Street (the High) and other central roads.

March 1947

Thomas Sharp produces his report, later published as *Oxford Replanned*.¹ He acknowledges that ‘some of the suggestions I will make will rouse bitter opposition in some quarters’. Most attention focuses on his proposal for an inner relief road – dubbed Merton Mall – running across the northern edge of Christ Church Meadow and on to the western end of Queen Street. Sharp sees this as a necessary ‘piece of surgery’ to relieve traffic along the High, the city’s ‘spinal column’. In his

A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ



New roads in central Oxford proposed by Thomas Sharp

view, the line the road should take 'stands out as plain as a hundred pikestaffs'. Sharp's plans include a roundabout at 'New Carfax', on or close to the site of the church where Queen Street meets New Road. What this means for the church is far from clear.

December 1953

The Minister of Housing and Local Government, Duncan Sandys, approves Oxford's Development Plan. However, the Plan lacks proposals for relief roads. The Minister seeks an

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assurance that the Council will soon submit separate proposals for such roads to reduce congestion on the High.²

1955 - 1956

Discussions rage about possible routes for relief roads, with proposals and counter-proposals put forward; the rejection of one scheme following a Public Inquiry; and controversial interventions by Mr Sandys.

October 1955

Eric Sharpe becomes minister at New Road. Formerly an undergraduate at Jesus College and ministerial student at Regent's Park College, Eric relishes the prospect of this, his third stay in Oxford. A distinguished hymnologist, his ministry of thirteen years will be marked by dignity and thoughtfulness in worship, extensive hospitality to students and others, and regular stewardship campaigns. It will also see a growth in ecumenical relations, and (with wife Gwen acting as producer) the advent of a flourishing drama group, 'The Tidmarsh Players'.

November 1955

Already owners of the shop at 5 New Inn Hall Street, the church buys No. 3 at auction, 'with a view to the future needs of rebuilding New Rd church'.³

April 1957

The latest road plans revive expectations of a roundabout at the junction of Queen Street and New Road. A report in the *Oxford Mail* suggests that 'The Baptist Chapel could perhaps be preserved on the central island'.⁴

1959

The Council again considers plans for a 'Meadow Road'. One scheme, approved by councillors in principle in December 1959, would indeed position the church in the centre of a roundabout, with other church buildings being demolished.⁵

Anxious for a firm decision, the Council seeks an Inquiry at Large to look into *all* suggested schemes. In all, twenty-two different plans are submitted, most of these variants on three schemes.

December 1960

The Inquiry opens. Representing the church, Eric Sharpe argues that, by depriving the church of its ancillary buildings and isolating the church on a roundabout, the second scheme (Scheme B) would leave the church's work 'disastrously impaired'.⁶ On behalf of the Baptist Union, Ernest Payne writes to the Inquiry supporting the church's objections.⁷

March 1961

The Inquiry Inspector, Sir Frederick Armer, presents his report. He finds that 'a road across Christ Church Meadow is inescapable'. His favoured route would mean the demolition of New Road's schoolrooms, but omits a roundabout. Eric Sharpe voices relief that 'under such a scheme as is now recommended, the life of our church on its present site would not be threatened'.⁸

March 1962

The then Minister for Housing and Local Government accepts Sir Frederick's findings but urges some extensions to the scheme. Their impact on the church is not yet clear.

February 1964

The updated Development Plan, adopted by the City Council by a vote of 56-3, promises 'Spectacular Changes in St Ebbe's'.⁹ If carried out, the road changes involved would mean demolishing the church, schoolroom and shops owned by the church in New Inn Hall Street. The news prompts a headline in the *Baptist Times* on 20 February, *Historic Church to Come Down?*

The church considers its position. Minister Eric Sharpe is encouraged that 'in the case of such organisations as ours ...

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The Tidmarsh Players in 'Jonah'

sympathetic consideration will be given to schemes for replacing them in the centre'.¹⁰ He has no doubt that the church should remain in central Oxford: 'It is vital that there should always be a strong Baptist church in the centre of Oxford, with the extensive premises and resources necessary to perform this many-sided ministry.'

March 1964

A different view surfaces in letters to the *Baptist Times*. In the first of these, published on 5 March, church member Don Bodey maintains, 'there is a considerable body of opinion here in Oxford which considers that the rebuilding of the church in the centre of Oxford would be the worst incident in its long and exciting history', adding that 'there appears to be very little justification for rebuilding in the centre but considerable justification for doing a great deal more with the money'.

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As Bodey sees it, the centre of Oxford is 'virtually dead as far as any permanent residential population goes', whilst 'there are already far too many churches of all denominations within a stone's throw of each other in the centre'. The chapel at Regent's Park College (soon to be altered and extended) could easily be made suitable for those wishing to worship in the centre; compensation money received by New Road might indeed help to finance the chapel alterations. Students wishing to worship in a local Baptist church could – and did – reach two other churches by bicycle or bus. What is more, many new estates around the city outskirts lacked a single church, and 'at least three small Baptist churches are longing to move out to these estates but cannot raise the money to build'. New Road 'is at the moment drawing in Baptists from the outskirts of the city to the centre, away from the areas in which they are most needed ... Therefore, I submit that not only would it be a scandal, but a complete failure of duty to build a new church in the centre where it is not needed'.

Responding, Eric Sharpe contests Don Bodey's arguments point by point. A concentration of churches in the centre is, he believes, 'inevitable in a compact University city like Oxford'. Nor are these churches dead or dying, but 'vigorous and well-attended'. Far from there being many 'unchurched' estates, New Road itself 'has accepted very heavy responsibility for extension work' in Cowley, Botley and Kidlington. Congregationalists are leading work on Blackbird Leys on behalf of all the Free Churches, while there is an Anglican presence on 'most if not all' the city's estates.

The experience of the Congregationalists (who had moved from central Oxford in the 1930s) showed that a college chapel was no substitute for a family church. Indeed 'there are still Congregationalists who prefer to make their spiritual home at New-road for this reason'. As for the centre being dead, the redevelopment plans would bring residents back into St Ebbe's

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(with St Clement's, also being developed with hostels for undergraduates).

October 1964

The city architect (D. Murray) confirms that, on present plans, both church and halls will need to be demolished. Murray asks if the church will withdraw its objection to the plans in return for an undertaking by the Planning Committee to make an alternative site available in the central area. He is confident that a suitable site can be found, but cannot say where this might be.

Eric Sharpe strongly opposes the church withdrawing its objection in return for such a 'vague promise'. Church secretary (Cyril Jones) replies that, as minimum requirements, the church would wish for:

- A definite site acceptable to us
- An undertaking that the new church would be available before the old one was required to vacated
- In addition to the normal basis of compensation, adequate financial compensation for the loss of the commercial value of the present site - at least that part of it now occupied by shops etc. This requirement might be waived if the church was allowed to include shops or offices in its new premises and the rents obtained were comparable.¹¹

December 1964

Murray confirms that the Planning Committee will undertake to provide an alternative site for replacement buildings, though he still cannot say where. The church declines to withdraw its objection because Murray's undertaking does not address the other points made in Cyril Jones's letter.

January 1965

New Road is among around a hundred objectors giving evidence at a second Inquiry. A letter of support from the Baptist Union is again sought and sent. In his written statement, Eric Sharpe stresses the church's long history; its influence over the years in the city and university; its role as 'the hub of Baptist activity ... not only throughout the city boundaries but throughout the county and even further afield; its role within the Association and among local Free Churches; the many visitors coming from abroad; and the potential for the church to have 'an important ministry to the proposed residential development in the central area of the city'.

July 1965

The Inspector recommends against the road proposals on the grounds that the Council has failed to consider their impact on Oxford's wider traffic system. He also shares a growing view that the convenience of motorists should not be the sole, or main, determinant in planning decisions.

January 1966

Anxious to see some progress, the Minister of Housing decrees 'an interim course'. Plans for a Meadow Road, while not ruled out, are put on hold 'until the possible routes have been examined within the context of a comprehensive plan for a road and traffic system for central Oxford'.¹² In the meantime, the St Ebbe's redevelopment, plus part of the relief road through St Ebbe's, is to go ahead. It still seems likely that the church will need to relocate as part of the central area redevelopment, but the timescale is uncertain. Writing at the end of 1966, the church secretary describes a new church building as 'a far-off dream', noting that 'in the meantime the present premises are crumbling at an alarming rate'.¹³

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May 1967

A revised Development Plan, under which the church would be demolished, is issued then effectively put on hold pending reports from planning consultants.

July 1968

Eric Sharpe announces that he is to leave New Road, becoming minister of St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich. Recalling the happy years he and Gwen have spent at the church, Eric's letter to the church touches on the threat of demolition that has hung over the church for years, and on the prospect of rebuilding as part of the city's redevelopment:

Whenever that time comes – and it looks like being several years yet – the church will need a younger man than I will be then, to cope with such a task and establish it in the new situation that will then face it, and lead it through the next great phase of its history. It seems clear to me, therefore, that at this present moment God is calling me to hand over the leadership of the work at New Road to someone else of His choosing.¹⁴

December 1968

A consultants' report, the *Oxford Central Area Study*, recommends pedestrianisation and much stricter traffic controls within the city centre.¹⁵ Future planning decisions build in much of this thinking.

New Road's deacons consider how to deal with the deteriorating condition of the church premises, including the repairs and redecoration needed to restore the rooms over the shops on the New Inn Hall Street frontage. These rooms are used for church activities, including Scouts and Brownies, but not by 'outside' organisations. It is clear that the repairs will be costly, without in themselves modernising the premises. Renovations should also include altering the interior of the sanctuary to make it more attractive and welcoming. The cost

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The chapel before the redevelopment

of modernisation is well beyond the church's limited capital resources. However, through its trustees, (the Baptist Union Corporation), the church owns the freehold of a valuable central Oxford site, extending onto New Inn Hall Street. Acquired in stages over the previous two hundred and fifty years, this site represents a very considerable inheritance provided by previous generations within the church.

January 1969

A subcommittee is appointed to review the options, with advice from church member and architect Peter Reynolds and valuer and planner Robin Kemp. Possibilities looked at are to:

- a. leave the buildings as they are
- b. rebuild on the existing site
- c. sell the site and rebuild elsewhere

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- d. redevelop the site in conjunction with neighbouring owners, but include in the rebuilding new premises for the church.¹⁶

September 1969

Robert (Bob) Brown becomes the minister, moving to Oxford from Coventry with wife Audrey and their young family. Bob will play a vital role in leading the church through a period of uncertainty to eventual redevelopment, articulating a vision of the church's role in the heart of Oxford. "'All things are possible" says the Gospel', proclaims a later New Road 'Prospect-Us': 'When we open ourselves to the WIDE vision of human concern, we discover afresh the reality of Christ'.¹⁷

February 1970

Bob Brown submits a paper: 'Mission in the 1970s, A Plan for the Church', part of a process of challenging the church's thinking about its place and ministry in the fast-changing city centre. The paper takes as its starting point 'engagement with the life of the community ... the natural and normal purpose for which the churches exist'. Contemplating redevelopment, it offers a vision of 'a building of distinction and excellence fitting to the centre of Oxford ... open to expressing the missionary purpose of the People of God who are always in pilgrimage'.¹⁸

The rebuilding subcommittee's preference for the commercial redevelopment of the church site and adjoining land receives general approval. The clear determination and purpose of church members is to remain a worshipping and witnessing congregation in a strategic position in the city centre.

Discussions begin with city planning officers and with the owners of adjoining property. Prompted by deacon Dr Ted Ironmonger, tentative discussions also begin with the YMCA about a possible joint venture.¹⁹ The hope is that, with qualified leadership provided by the YMCA, it will be possible jointly to

staff and run 'a community (city-centre) orientated programme of activities'.

December 1970

Peter Reynolds outlines proposals for a comprehensive development, stretching from the Probate Office to the Girls' Central School, comprising 'shops for letting, a pub, a number of study bedrooms ... a restaurant, the Sports Hall complex and church which would be on the first floor'.²⁰

January 1972

After twelve months of stop-go negotiations, church representatives meet with St Peter's to consider the college's proposals for a combined project with shopping precinct. Bob Brown describes the scheme as 'very tentative'.

March 1972

Exploratory discussions begin with representatives of Wesley Memorial Methodist Church and St Columba's United Reformed Church. While there is no clear indication to any of the churches that a possible joint scheme is the way to proceed, the discussions help to establish closer contacts between the three churches.

September 1972

Church members strongly support 'active steps ... to establish a scheme in co-operation with the YMCA'.

December 1972

With other interested parties, the church seeks outline planning permission for a comprehensive scheme, to include a ground floor shopping centre linking the new Westgate centre with the Cornmarket shops via Shoe Lane. Accommodation for the church, and any additional accommodation needed for a joint project with the YMCA, would be on the first and second floors.

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June 1973

After six months of discussions with city planners on issues including conservation, demand for shops, office space and parking, the church and the college agree to resubmit their outline planning application.

December 1973

The city's Planning Committee asks that further consideration be given to a scheme retaining the structure of the existing sanctuary.²¹

March 1974

It becomes clear than any redevelopment will need to take place independent of St Peter's College. Work on revised plans begins.

March 1975

The Planning Committee recommends the revised plans to the Department of the Environment for approval.

July 1975

The Department of the Environment calls for a public inquiry on the preservation issues for 5 and 7 New Inn Hall Street. Anxious to avoid the uncertainty, expense and delay that an inquiry would involve, the church modifies its proposals.

October 1975

After more negotiations, the church is granted outline planning permission for the redevelopment of the site adjoining the chapel. The deacons are advised that, if satisfactory terms can be agreed with a developer, the church's contribution to the scheme will be about £65,000, the developer paying the balance. Peter Reynolds produces several layouts for discussion with the church. Acknowledging that 'notions of ministry must be kept flexible to meet changing needs', a later appeal brochure outlines several aspects of future ministry, 'in

the light of which decisions have been taken about the design of the buildings', namely:

- housing the 'internal' concerns of the church, including worship, midweek study, social and fellowship events, women's work and youth groups
- amenities for the city centre (a coffee house, church garden, room lettings, cultural and other events), designed to create 'a sense of community', and 'improve the quality of life and work' in Oxford's centre, within the setting of a Christian community
- community education, augmenting existing lunch-time lectures with classes, exhibitions and a reading area
- witness to Christian faith and Christian lifestyle, through varied opportunities for direct witness, including regular Sunday worship
- counselling and the offer of Christian friendship, 'one of the most important contributions that a Christian community can make in the setting of a city centre'.²²

January 1976

The deacons start to plan for the period of 'exile' while the building work is carried out. This proves rather premature, as in the event rebuilding does not start until November 1979. Meanwhile, there are many problems to be faced and anxieties addressed by the development committee, including Alfred Palmer, Peter Reynolds and Colin Saunders. A continuing concern is that, coupled with the scheme's unusual nature, increasing building costs and uncertainty about future rentals will discourage developers or make a scheme unaffordable.

Robin Kemp junior persuades Greytown Estates Limited, a development company who have undertaken several successful developments in Oxford, to consider the scheme. Negotiations take some time, and involve reconciling the

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commercial requirements of the developer and the pastoral needs of the church. The development agreement allows for the total refurbishment of the existing church along with the rebuilding of facilities to the rear. Also included is the total refurbishment of No. 1 New Inn Hall Street, acquired as part of the redevelopment on a long lease from the council. Along with the revenue from the redevelopment, the rents from No. 1 will provide a base for future income for the church.

March 1976

Discussions with the YMCA reach the stage of a draft Agreement.

June 1977

Oxford Council agrees a five-year contribution towards the running costs of a joint YMCA-New Road Christian Community Centre. However, it soon becomes clear that the developers' requirements rule out a 'mixed site', including the sports hall wanted by the YMCA for its community activities. Joint plans with the YMCA have to be abandoned.

May 1978

A revised planning application seeks approval for a block of offices on the first, second, and third floors behind the shops on New Inn Hall Street.

Peter Reynolds presents imaginative plans for the new interior of the chapel, with a light and simple feel, new pulpit and communion table and an open baptistery. In place of the nineteenth-century pews, movable chairs allow for greater flexibility whilst 'returning the seating plan to the arrangement of the eighteenth century meeting house'. A larger glass vestibule will enable the interior of the chapel to be seen from the entrance in Bonn Square.

Behind the sanctuary lie a new kitchen, minister's vestry, and toilets. Stairs and a lift give access to a hall on the first floor

across the width of the building. The second floor comprises a group of small rooms with, above this, a second large hall. A fourth floor is planned but later has to be abandoned because of cost. To the right of the chapel entrance, the acquisition of 1 New Inn Hall Street enables the architect to create a lobby area with a coffee house above. A small flat is planned on the second floor of 1 New Inn Hall Street for a caretaker or warden. The scheme as a whole combines an eighteenth-century chapel, nineteenth-century shops and twentieth-century offices in what is described as 'an adventurous blend of innovation and preservation'.

October 1978

The developers agree not to insist on the shops and offices being pre-let; a major hurdle overcome. Their offer of £555,000 towards the total cost of the scheme, (later raised to £620,000), with the church also to receive a set proportion of the rents from the office accommodation and the three shops in New Inn Hall Street is reported to a special church meeting on 24 October. With the meeting's unanimous approval, the Baptist Union Corporation is asked for, and later gives, its consent.

November 1978

A trip is arranged to other 'new' churches in Banbury and Birmingham to gather ideas for interior refurbishment.

January 1979

Church members agree to seek advice on the most effective and suitable symbol to be displayed on the large wall behind the pulpit, currently taken up by the organ. Arrangements for the period of 'exile' during rebuilding are also considered. Builders' tenders are anxiously awaited.

May 1979

The developers set a ceiling on their capital contribution, with any building costs above this falling to the church. It is realised that if the church's contribution exceeds the expected amount it

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will probably be necessary to cut back on part of the scheme. The deacons spend time discussing two short papers prepared by Bob Brown, on 'Symbolism in the Church' and 'Notes towards defining the use of our new buildings'.²³

September 1979

Contracts are exchanged with the developers. Builders' tenders are still awaited, but with the developers anxious to start work as soon as tenders have been received and the best accepted, the church meeting agrees to vacate the premises at the end of October.

With costs rising, the development committee negotiate an upper limit of £100,000 for the church's liability. As a result, the developers insist on some reductions in the exterior work and the removal of the fourth floor from behind the chapel. The church's share of the commercial rents is also reduced. These concessions enable the builders, Hinkins Ltd of Oxford, to start work on site by the end of 1979, avoiding the risk of further delays and escalating costs.

November 1979

The congregation meets for worship in the chapel of St Peter's College. Chilly temperatures cause some initial discomfort. The church bulletin early in 1980 notes that, besides extra heaters, 'two or three blankets are also being provided by a church member to be available for anyone who wants one'. With loans worth £40,000 secured from the Baptist Union Corporation and the Baptist Building Fund, an appeal is launched for the balance.

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The renovated chapel

December 1980

Discussions by different groups within the church, over many months, identify 'Six Challenges that Face the Community in the Centre of Oxford', and that will shape the church's future programme. In order of importance, these are:

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- To make the centre of Oxford a physically more convenient place for people.
- To build up a greater sense of community identity amongst all who live in and use the city centre.
- To increase the co-operation of all the caring agencies and individuals.
- To establish a welcoming attitude to visitors and a positive concern for the wider world.
- To improve the sense of responsibility and service to the public in the centre.
- To involve citizens in the planning and decision making process for the city and county.²⁴

September 1981

Sculptor Heather Harms attends a church meeting to discuss her design for a substantial wooden cross, surmounted by a crown of thorns, to be displayed on the wall behind the pulpit. A decision on this is delayed until after the congregation has returned to the chapel, so that members can visualise more clearly the proposed design. Work is also underway on a glass engraving for the sliding doors inside the chapel. Designed by Meinrad Craighead, a former Benedictine nun, this will symbolise the world and the human needs brought to God in prayer.

October 1981

The £60,000 fund-raising target is reached as a result of much generous giving by church members and friends, coupled with hard work by the finance committee and assorted fund-raising initiatives. These range from the sale of roses from the church garden to a 'Grand Tandem Tour' by Bob and Daniel Brown of all thirty-eight churches in the local Association. Separate negotiations and fund-raising for a replacement organ is

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underway. Committees meet to consider the furnishings for the redesigned interior of the chapel and to prepare for the new coffee house.

November 1981

The main building work is completed. However, delays in the final stages of refurbishment dash hopes of returning to the buildings before Christmas.

December 1981

An Evening of Prayer is held, 'in preparation for our return to New Road'.²⁵

January 1982

Church members return from 'exile' amid much rejoicing, with the first service in the newly-decorated chapel held on 17 January: a service of great thanksgiving to God to mark the end of ten years of detailed planning and decisions.

April 1982

A large congregation attends a service for the rededication of the chapel with the Bishop of Oxford as preacher.

June 1982

A week long festival of music, drama, debates and displays further marks the re-opening and redevelopment of the church buildings. Discussions continue about how the church can best respond to the problems and possibilities of Bonn Square.

It is soon possible to open the coffee house, which quickly proves a popular meeting point in peaceful surroundings in the middle of a crowded city. Groups ranging from Alcoholics Anonymous to Weightwatchers also start to use the premises, marking a new phase in a 'many-sided ministry'.

'This many-sided ministry'

NOTES

- ¹ T. Sharp, *Oxford Replanned* (London, 1948).
- ² R. Newman, *The Road and Christ Church Meadow* (Minster Lovell, 1988).
- ³ Minutes of deacons' meetings, (DMM), 25 October 1955, New Road records (NRR), Box 3, Angus Library, Oxford.
- ⁴ *Oxford Mail*, 18 April 1957.
- ⁵ *Oxford Times*, 18 December 1959.
- ⁶ *Oxford Mail*, 14 December 1960.
- ⁷ Letter dated 2 December 1960, NRR Box 27.
- ⁸ Monthly News Bulletin, No. 49, June 1961.
- ⁹ Supplement to the *Oxford Mail*, 13 February 1964.
- ¹⁰ Monthly News Bulletin, No. 81, March 1964.
- ¹¹ Letter from Cyril Jones dated 29 October 1964, NRR Box 27.
- ¹² Letter from T.D. Wickenden dated 26 January 1966, NRR Box 27.
- ¹³ *New Road Baptist Church Yearbook*, 1967.
- ¹⁴ Monthly News Bulletin, No. 134, August 1968.
- ¹⁵ *Oxford Mail*, 4 December 1968.
- ¹⁶ Statement to Church Meeting, 2 December 1970, Minutes of church meetings (CMM), NRR Box 1.
- ¹⁷ New Road Prospect-Us, October 1973.
- ¹⁸ 'Mission in the 1970's. A Plan for the Church', February 1970.
- ¹⁹ Statement to Church Meeting, 2 December 1970.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ DMM, 11 Dec 1973.
- ²² Appeal for Renovation and New Buildings [January 1980].
- ²³ Spectrum, No. 39, June 1979.
- ²⁴ Spectrum, No. 57, December 1980.
- ²⁵ Spectrum, No. 69, December 1981.

The Church Covenant of 1780

We, whose names are hereunder written, usually assembling for Divine Worship at the Meeting House in St. Peter-le-Bailey, in the City of Oxford, being Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England, receiving the Books of the Old and New Testament as the Word of GOD and the only infallible external rule of our religion, faith, and practice; having solemnly devoted ourselves first to the LORD, and professed to each other our repentance towards GOD, faith in the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and the hope of eternal life through His atoning Blood and sanctifying Spirit, to our mutual satisfaction:

Do hereby solemnly covenant and agree to receive one another in the peculiar fellowship, form, and order of the Church of JESUS CHRIST; mutually granting to each other an equal right and title to, and interest in, all the privileges and emoluments of this our sacred confederation, and promising conscientiously to perform all the respective duties thence arising.

And, particularly, we promise and oblige ourselves (nothing extraordinary preventing) to meet together at all appointed seasons at His Table in devout remembrance of His sufferings and Death; and on the LORD's Days (Providence permitting) and on all other occasional opportunities, to attend the Public Worship of GOD in prayers and praises, and hearing His Holy Word.

And also promise to watch over and admonish one another, as occasion requires, in the spirit of Christian love and

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meekness, and to live and walk together in unity and peace and the fear of GOD, according to His Word.

We also further promise and declare, that we will, so far as we conscientiously can, consent to and obey all such rules and resolutions of good order and discipline as the majority of the Church shall agree upon and regularly appoint.

And whereas some of us do verily believe that the sprinkling of the infant children of believing parents in the name of the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY SPIRIT, is true Christian Baptism; and others of us do believe that true Christian Baptism is that which is administered to adults upon the profession of their repentance, faith, and experience of the grace of GOD, by Immersion in the Name of the Sacred Three; yet, notwithstanding this difference of sentiment, we promise and agree to receive one another into the same affection and love; and for this, among other many reasons: because we can find no warrant in the Word of GOD to make such difference of sentiment any bar to Communion at the LORD's Table in particular, or to Church fellowship in general; and because the LORD JESUS receiving and owning them on both sides of the question, we think we ought to do so too.

We also further declare that we are willing and ready to admit to our Church fellowship and communion all that are desirous of it and will give us such an account of their Christian faith and hope as shall satisfy us that they are partakers of the saving grace of GOD, and that their conversation in the world is such as becomes the Gospel, notwithstanding any difference of opinion as to the subject and mode of Baptism; and also all such as are recommended to us from any of the Churches of different denominations on that head as sincere Christians in full communion with them.

We therefore denominate ourselves a PROTESTANT CATHOLIC CHURCH OF CHRIST, desirous to live in Christian peace and love with all men, and to hold the Communion of Saints with all Protestant Churches and such as love our LORD JESUS CHRIST in sincerity.

The Church Covenant

In testimony of these things, and in the sincerity of our hearts, we have, as in the presence of the Eternal GOD, and of our brethren in the Ministry now attending with us in our solemn meeting for this purpose and to assist us with their advice and prayers, set our respective names, this sixteenth day of November, in the year of OUR LORD One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty.

MATTHEW BANBURY.
THOMAS PLATER.
E.H. ROOKE.
SUSANNA WILLIAMS.
SUSANNA NEWMAN.
THOMAS PASCO.

THOS. NEWMAN.
JOHN BARTLETT.
JANE BARTLETT.
ELIZABETH COXETER.
M. PECK.
ELIZABETH PECK.

MARY PLATER.

[Witnessed by the Ministers present:-]

D. TURNER, Abingdon
S. BROWNE, Henley.
JOHN LAKE, Abingdon.

T. DUNSCOMBE, Coate
HUGH GILES, Chenies.
WM. MILLER, Oxford.

In the New Road church covenant of 1780, still read to this day, members of the church term themselves:

a PROTESTANT CATHOLIC CHURCH OF CHRIST, desirous to live in Christian peace and love with all men, and to hold the Communion of Saints with all Protestant Churches and such as love our LORD JESUS CHRIST in sincerity

In this collection of essays, commissioned to mark 350 years of Baptist witness in Oxford, historians and theologians reflect on different aspects of the church's history, including what it has meant to be a 'Protestant Catholic Church of Christ'.

Contributors include: Basil Amey, Clyde Binfield, John Briggs, Raymond Brown, Rosie Chadwick, Paul Fiddes, Tim Grass, Roger Hayden, David Jeremy, Larry Kreitzer, Ian Randall, Colin Saunders and Barrie White.

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In the New Road church covenant of 1780, still read to this day, members of the church term themselves:

a PROTESTANT CATHOLIC CHURCH OF CHRIST, desirous to live in Christian peace and love with all men, and to hold the Communion of Saints with all Protestant Churches and such as love our LORD JESUS CHRIST in sincerity

In this collection of essays, commissioned to mark 350 years of Baptist witness in Oxford, historians and theologians reflect on different aspects of the church's history, including what it has meant to be a 'Protestant Catholic Church of Christ'.

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