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EDITOR: The Revd. Dr Robert Pope.

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Note: Conferences and events to mark the anniversaries of the Great War will be notified from time to time. The YMCA plans a day at the University of Birmingham on Saturday 11 October, when Clyde Binfield will be among the speakers. For further information, contact Margaret Thompson (see back cover of this issue or email mt212@cam.ac.uk).

EDITORIAL

In this issue of the *Journal*, the "local church" receives attention. Two articles reflect on Congregational views, though there is a sense in which they reflect both the "typical" and the "atypical" to which Congregational polity almost inevitably leads. Richard Westrope's efforts in Leeds to turn Belgrave Chapel into an "institutional church" were repeated in countless Nonconformist churches during the nineteenth century, and yet, as Gerard Charmley's article reveals, there is something particular – if not peculiar – about his story. Roger Ottewill offers an account of The Avenue Church in Southampton where distinct contributions were made to local economic, political and cultural life, but in a manner far removed from that of Belgrave. Different as the concerns, interests and approaches were, both Belgrave and The Avenue were unmistakably *Congregational* churches, their life and witness coloured, but not radically revised, by their place and setting. Presbyterianism has, on the surface, appeared supra-local, and yet its history has always included disagreement, schism and a stubborn determination not to be dictated to by Presbytery and General Assembly. And yet, in its own way, Presbyterianism too sought to be thoroughly *local*. This is all related in James Breslin's article which was also the History Society's Annual Lecture, delivered at Shepherd's Dene at Riding Mill, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne (so appropriately Presbyterian an area, if decidedly Anglican a setting), on 7 September 2013. The lecturer has spent much of his ministerial career in the North-East, and has served as Clerk to the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church.

I am grateful to the contributors for submitting such intriguing and fascinating articles to the *Journal*. We welcome Nick Wilde as reviewer.

RICHARD WESTROPE AND BELGRAVE CHAPEL[1]

The announcement in January 1896 that Richard Westrope (1856-1941), minister of Belgrave Chapel, a Congregational Church in central Leeds, had submitted his resignation, following a dispute with some of the church members, was greeted with dismay by the press and his many admirers.[2] Called to the church in 1889, Westrope had been tasked with reviving the flagging fortunes of the cause through a programme of outreach to the working classes. In the course of a six-year ministry, he had filled the chapel, pioneering the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon (P.S.A.) meeting for working men in Leeds. Westrope had been the subject of admiring profiles in Leeds, and further afield, held up as an example of one who had reached social classes rarely found inside a chapel. Despite these achievements, Westrope had been unable to prevent the growth of discontent with his methods within his church, to the extent that minister and members reached the parting of the ways in January 1896. In a period when the churches were increasingly aware of the need to draw the labouring classes, Richard Westrope had shown a talent in bringing the workers into the church. According to the wisdom of the period, which saw the ideal minister as a man of intense belief and indefatigable labour, Westrope was that ideal.[3] However, his sense of mission and his labours proved insufficient. To contemporary observers, it seemed that the Belgrave congregation was guilty of extraordinary folly, casting aside a man of proven achievement due to a minor disagreement over methods.[4] However, as the lengthy press correspondence which followed indicated, and an examination of the surviving records of the chapel confirms, Richard Westrope's resignation touched deeper issues.

Belgrave Chapel, off New Briggate, had been erected in 1836 to contain the large congregation drawn by the powerful preaching of Richard Winter Hamilton. Following Hamilton's death in 1848, G. W. Conder had succeeded in drawing many working men to his ministry, which addressed social, as well as personal evils.[5] However, Conder overtaxed his strength, and in 1864 left Belgrave for the more congenial surroundings of Cheetham Hill, Manchester.[6] The ministers who followed found maintaining the congregation increasingly taxing, as former worshippers removed to the suburbs, their places being taken

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1 I am grateful to Professor Clyde Binfield for advice received in preparing this article.
2 *Leeds Times*, *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* (25 January 1896).
3 R. Mudie-Smith, *The Religious Life of London* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), p. 9.
4 *Leeds Times* (25 January 1896).
5 J. W. Dixon, *Pledged to the People: A Brief Account of the Rev. Richard Westrope and Belgrave Congregational Chapel, Leeds* (Leeds: Privately Published, 1896), pp. 9-10.
6 B. Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity; of, Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of the Congregational and Old Presbyterian Churches in the County* (Manchester & London: J. Heywood, 1893), VI, p. 193.

by manual workers and a large number of Jewish immigrants,[7] the dismissal of several members to Newton Park Union Church on Chapeltown Road was a symptom of the changing fortunes of the chapel.[8] In an attempt to address the needs of the area, a modern lecture theatre and schoolroom had been constructed in 1887, but this had saddled the congregation with debt it could ill-afford. Its completion had been marked by the departure of John Pate, minister since 1881, for Newbury, Berkshire.[9] By 1889, church membership stood at 180, including some attached to the largely autonomous Sheepscar Mission. In its apparent success, the church turned to a young man made conspicuous by his advocacy of special methods to attract working people.

Richard Westrope was born on 23 September 1855, into a family of tenant farmers long connected to the Congregational church at Ashwell, Hertfordshire. His early love of scholarship drew the attention of Ashwell's minister, J. B. Millsom, who took a hand in his early education.[10] It was to Millsom that Westrope attributed the awakening of his social conscience; the minister telling Westrope he had at times "seen the people in this village so hungry that they have been almost ready to eat the dirt off the roads".[11] Westrope professed conversion while at school in Melbourn, Cambridgeshire, probably through the ministrations of the Wesleyan Methodists, given his move to Wesley College, Sheffield, where he showed academic promise.[12] In light of Westrope's entry to the Headingley theological college in 1877, it seems his studies at Sheffield included a preparatory course for the ministry. He completed two years of the course before concluding that his future lay in the denomination of his forefathers. Westrope felt "he would have more freedom in Congregationalism". He also believed that the itinerant system, under which ministers moved every three years, prevented the development of that bond between pastor and people which had so impressed Westrope in his childhood.[13] Westrope saw Congregationalism's emphasis on the gathered church as a counter to the individualism which characterised mid-nineteenth century Nonconformity, writing;

> Congregationalism attracted me . . . not only because of its greater freedom but also because, while it did not ignore the value of individual conversion, it emphasised the idea that it was not an end in itself, but

7 James Hanby, *Old and New at Brunswick* (Leeds: Privately Published, n.d.), p. 4.
8 Clyde Binfield, 'The Story of Button Hill', in Alistair Mason (ed.), *Religion in Leeds* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1994), p. 84.
9 W[est] Y[orkshire] A[rchive] S[ervice]: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel Records: Deacons' Minutes, 29 September 1888. Pate later returned to Yorkshire in 1895, spending over a decade at Cemetery Road, Sheffield.
10 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, pp. 3-4.
11 Richard Westrope, 'The New Day at Dawn', in F. H. Stead (ed.), *The Religion in the Labour Movement* (London: Holborn Press, 1919), p. 103.
12 *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* (21 December 1876).
13 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, pp. 5-6.

> only a means to an end – the building up of societies and nations on the lines of the Kingdom of God.[14]

In June 1879, Richard Westrope entered Airedale College, then under the charge of A. M. Fairbairn (later first Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford), to complete his training. During his three years at the College, Westrope became sufficiently close to Fairbairn to accompany the Principal on a visit to Russia in 1882.[15]

After completing his course, Westrope was invited to take charge of the newly-formed John Street Congregational Church, Wakefield. Attracted by the fact that the church membership was largely working class, Westrope set about his work with enthusiasm. Westrope soon placed himself in the forefront of "projects for the moral and religious improvement of the city". He organised a group known as the "Social Club", meeting in a Cocoa House to discuss social questions, a forum Westrope later called "the best college" he attended.[16] Westrope shared his experience at the 1889 spring meetings of the Yorkshire Congregational Union, in a paper on "Aggressive Work in Large Towns".[17] He returned to this topic in an address for the Leeds Congregational Council in September 1889, in which he advocated united and systematic effort to reach working people.[18]

Westrope's words fell on ready ears. Bryan Dale, General Secretary of the Yorkshire Congregational Union since 1886, had taken up his office determined to strengthen urban Congregationalism.[19] At the Brighouse Meetings of the Yorkshire Congregational Union in 1889, the chairman, Frederick Hall of Heckmondwicke, had called on Christians to take an active interest in combatting "the social problems that crowd upon us in our time".[20] With moves afoot to begin a county-wide "aggressive movement" for church extension in urban centres, Westrope seemed in the vanguard of a new evangelistic strategy.

On the strength of his ideas, Westrope was invited by the Belgrave deacons to "preach with a view". The invitation offered Westrope an opportunity to put his ideas into practice in central Leeds.[21] Following Westrope's second visit to the church, the church meeting "unanimously resolved to proceed to an election forthwith!"[22] A well-attended meeting on 9 November confirmed the

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14 Ibid., p. 6.
15 W. B. Selbie, *The Life of Andrew Martin Fairbairn* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), p. 101.
16 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, p. 7.
17 *Yorkshire Congregational Yearbook* (1889), p. 33; *Leeds Biographer*, I (March 1892), p. 10.
18 *Leeds Mercury* (11 September 1889).
19 Kenneth W. Wadsworth, *A Century of Service: The Yorkshire Congregational Union 1872-1972* (Low Row: Privately Published, 1972), p. 21.
20 Quoted in Leonard Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1993), p. 119.
21 Leeds was by no means a foreign city to Westrope. On 5 April, 1883, he married Alice Hobson of Leeds. See Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, pp. 7-8.
22 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Minutes, 29 October 1888.

overwhelming feeling in favour of Westrope, and a letter was forwarded to the John Street minister, extending a unanimous call.[23]

In reply, Westrope laid a number of conditions before the diaconate. The first, which he considered crucial to his plans for Belgrave, was:

> The adoption of the system of free and unappropriated sittings at all services for worship; and in order to carry this into effect it followed that the present system of Pew Rents be abolished; and in its place the method known as voluntary assessment be adopted, each individual worshipper to fill a printed form, declaring his or her intention to contribute a certain sum weekly, monthly, or quarterly for the support of public worship, numbered envelopes identifying and containing each individual offering to be collected at each service, thus affording to strangers the opportunity of also contributing by placing loose cash in the boxes.[24]

This stipulation, by no means unique, reflected a growing belief that the system of securing church income by asking worshippers to pay rent for a designated seat, favouring as it did those of means, was inappropriate in a church attempting to reach out to the masses.[25] When Wesley Chapel, Meadow Lane, had been transformed into a Central Mission earlier that year, the leadership had begun by abolishing pew rents.[26] It was, however, a step of faith, surrendering a guaranteed income for the uncertain proceeds of "voluntary assessment". Significantly, the church meeting which accepted this proposal made it conditional on Westrope's acceptance of the pastorate.[27]

Westrope's second condition was that the £250 salary offered by the church be considered a minimum, guaranteed for three years.[28] This was not put to the church meeting, the Church Secretary observing it would be considered once the impact of the change from pew rents had been ascertained.[29]

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23 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 9 November 1889.

24 WYAS: WYL777/112: Deacons' Minutes, Belgrave Chapel, 23 November 1889.

25 Alan Betteridge, *Deep Roots, Living Branches: A History of Baptists in the English Western Midlands* (Leicester: Matador, 2010), pp. 292-4; Faith Bowers, *A Bold Experiment: The Story of Bloomsbury Chapel and Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church 1848-1999* (London: Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 1999), pp. 204-5. This perspective has been ably challenged by S. D. J. Green, who views the pew rent system as a mechanism binding church members together by giving them a sense of shared financial interest, rather than importing notions of social class into churches. See his "The Death of Pew-Rents, The Rise of Bazaars, and the end of the Traditional Political Economy of Voluntary Religious Organisations: The Case of the West Riding of Yorkshire, *c.*1870-1914", *Northern History,* 27 (1991), pp. 198-235.

26 D. Colin Dews, *Oxford Place Methodist Centre 1835-1985* (Leeds: Oxford Place Methodist Centre, 1985), pp. 14-15.

27 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Special Church Meeting, 5 December 1889.

28 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 23 November 1889.

29 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Special Church Meeting, 5 December 1889.

The third condition was:

> Freedom in conducting the services by introducing new methods to be pursued also freedom in interchanging with other ministers of the town and neighbourhood & his choice not to be restricted to the Congregational body.[30]

This request was not uncommon for Congregational ministers invited to a mission situation. When Smith and Wrigley began their notable ministry at Salem, Leeds, in 1891, they would ask for a free hand in changing services, as would G. Borrow, called to Latimer Church, Hull, after financial crisis forced the Yorkshire Congregational Union to take over management of the cause.[31] Underlying this stipulation was the assumption that, as churches needed to change rapidly to appeal to the changing age, church meetings and deacons ought not to be able to veto techniques to win back the masses. A. M. Fairbairn, Westrope's Principal at Airedale, had warned of the dangers of "attempting to retain in a new world the organisation, methods, ideals that were made in an old".[32] At the special church meeting on 5 December, only one church member voted against the proposal to allow Westrope "freedom in conducting the pulpit services", although twenty-eight of the eighty-one members present abstained.[33]

Finally, Westrope requested the high pulpit be replaced "by a raised platform with room for reading desk & 2 or 3 chairs", reflecting the changing shape of Nonconformist worship.[34] Regardless of denominational colour, chapels built or refurbished from *c.*1870 onwards tended to have platforms, rather than pulpits, with seating for multiple speakers, space for props, and seating for soloists, a reflection of the increasing transformation of chapels into flexible performance spaces.[35] This proposal proved the most immediately contentious – unsurprising to anyone who has sat through a church meeting where décor is discussed – occupying almost the whole of one church meeting. The church

30 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 23 November 1889.

31 Frank Griffin, *Salem 1784-1984* (Leeds: Salem United Reformed Church, 1984), pp. 21-2; WYAS: WYL777/22: Yorkshire Congregational Union Aggressive Work Committee Minutes, 25 November 1895.

32 A. M. Fairbairn, *Religion in History and Life Together with an Essay on the Church and the Working Classes* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895), p. 22. This book is based on lectures given by Fairbairn during his time at Airedale College.

33 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Special Church Meeting, 5 December 1889.

34 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 23 November 1889.

35 Tom Williamson, "The Norfolk Chapels Survey: Some Preliminary Results", in Norma Virgoe and Tom Williamson (eds), *Religious Dissent in East Anglia* (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1993), p. 69; W. Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England Volume II: From Watts and Wesley to Martineau 1690-1900* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 347.

eventually endorsed the proposal, and a rostrum by local architect J. H. Thorpe, was installed in the chapel.[36]

Westrope's recognition service on 25 March was addressed by R. F. Horton, then in the early years of his notable ministry at Lyndhurst Road, Hampstead, and already one of the denomination's rising stars.[37] The reading was from Philippians, and included the exhortation "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:14-15, KJV).

At a well-attended evening meeting, Eustace Conder, veteran minister of East Parade Chapel, wished Westrope well, reminding all present of the gravity of the challenges facing Belgrave. Conder concluded with a prayer that Westrope might enjoy a long and successful ministry.[38] He was followed by George Paterson, a prosperous tradesman and senior deacon at Belgrave, who briefly outlined Westrope's call, and the changes already underway in the church, concluding on an optimistic note:

> [I]t had been almost unanimously agreed at a large meeting of the [church] members that the pew-rent system should be abolished and the church sustained solely by voluntary contributions. So far the new system had worked successfully, not a single member having been lost by the alteration. On behalf of the deacons and congregation, he wished Mr Westrope long life and health to carry on his new labours.[39]

Westrope delivered a short reply, praying he might be found worthy of the trust reposed in him:

> It was not with him a question of success or failure in his new office, but a matter of duty. He would do all in his power to do good – especially to working people – and if he received the love and sympathy of those with whom he laboured he had no fear of the future either for himself or for them.[40]

The recognition services were accounted successful, their expense reduced by Horton giving his services free of charge.[41]

Westrope initiated the first innovation in the church's life before his recognition services. "The Social Hour", a weekly meeting for young people

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36 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 4 January 1890.
37 *Leeds Mercury* (26 March 1890).
38 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, p. 12.
39 *Leeds Mercury* (26 March 1890).
40 Ibid.
41 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 27 March 1890. Horton's close friend, Rosa Oakes, lived at Halifax, giving him a particular love for West Yorkshire. See R. F. Horton, *Autobiography* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1917), pp. 73-4.

after the Sunday evening service, commenced on 9 February. It was aimed at young men and women living away from home in business houses, a number of which stood close to Belgrave, and provided a place where topics and problems of the day could be discussed.[42] These young people, separated from a home environment, were seen as particularly at risk of being drawn into bad habits; indeed the YMCA and YWCA had come into existence in response to these concerns among an earlier generation.[43] As the work among young people expanded, a schoolroom was adapted as a gymnasium, providing for their physical well-being in addition to their intellectual and spiritual health (if to the occasional annoyance of other users of the premises).[44]

In September 1890 some of the chapel's young men formed "The Belgrave Congregational Union", a fellowship aimed at "banding together … the young men connected with Belgrave for rational recreation & intellectual benefit, with the ultimate object of spiritual profit".[45] The Union was granted the use of a number of rooms in the chapel for activities, subject to the supervision of a "responsible person", and provided "no smoking or dancing [would] be allowed".[46] The union's social gatherings, held every Monday during winter, were crowded, including musical items, short talks on "improving" subjects and illustrated travelogues.[47] The establishment of a reading-room, under the auspices of the Union, would form the basis of an institute for young adults – an innovation later copied by other Leeds churches.[48]

There were teething problems; despite George Paterson's assertion at the recognition services that the abolition of pew rents had met no opposition, embarrassment for minister and deacons was caused when a church member asked two newcomers to leave a pew which he claimed as his. The monthly deacons' meeting, with Paterson in the chair, passed a resolution reminding members that the church:

> [W]ere pledged to free & unappropriated seats throughout the whole of the chapel, & that any violation of this was a breach of faith, both with the pastor & the public. After an explanation by the brother, & the expression of opinion by all the brethren present, it was agreed that under no circumstances whatever was anybody to be requested to leave a pew for any similar reason.[49]

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42 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, p. 12.
43 Clyde Binfield, *George Williams and the YMCA: A Study in Victorian Social Attitudes* (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp. 117-30; D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 120.
44 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 6 October 1891, 2 August 1892.
45 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 24 September 1890.
46 Ibid.
47 *Leeds Mercury* (11 February 1891).
48 Griffin, *Salem 1784-1984*, p. 22; Hanby, *Old and New at Brunswick*, p. 6.
49 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 22 April 1890.

The failure of individual members to adapt quickly to "free and unappropriated" seating is hardly surprising, and was not uncommon. Silvester Horne, a prime mover in Congregational urban mission, called pew rents "[o]ne of the pet prejudices of Nonconformists".[50] In some chapels, members objected to newcomers taking "their" pews up to thirty years after the abolition of pew rents.[51] At the next meeting after this resolution was passed, the deacons took steps to formalise the new system of voluntary assessment, cards being posted in the lobbies to explain the new arrangements.[52] Congregations began to grow, significant numbers of working men and women among the newcomers.[53]

New methods of evangelism occupied a prominent place in the agenda of the 26 June meeting of minister and deacons. Westrope, supported by George Paterson and J. W. Dixon, a shopkeeper from Burley, suggested the church start a P.S.A. meeting for working men.[54] The inspiration for this idea came from J. Holden Byles, former minister at Headingley Hill, who had commenced a highly successful P.S.A. at Tabernacle, Hanley, and subsequently became a propagandist for the P.S.A. movement.[55]

The P.S.A. loomed large in contemporary discussions of how to reach working men, Hugh McLeod characterising the movement as representing "all that was original and fresh in Nonconformity".[56] Since the 1850s individual ministers had experimented with Sunday afternoon meetings, in which brief talks, often illustrated, alternated with musical items, as a means of attracting working men.[57] The P.S.A. movement itself, however, originated with John Blackham, a draper, who in 1875, had coined the title "Pleasant Sunday Afternoon" to describe the "brief, bright and brotherly" Bible class meeting he established for working men at Ebenezer Congregational Church, West Bromwich. Musical items, both solo and congregational, loomed large on the programme of the average P.S.A., the central item being a talk of no more than twenty minutes on a topical or moral subject.[58] Collections were not taken, and

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50 C. Silvester Horne, *Pulpit, Platform and Parliament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), p. 28.

51 John and Sheila Gibbs, *Trinity Methodist Church, Penarth: A Portrait* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1994), p. 71.

52 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 26 June 1890.

53 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, p. 13.

54 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 26 June 1890.

55 *Leeds Biographer*, p. 10; K. S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 81.

56 Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), p. 65.

57 Leonard Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour*, p. 67; Gervase Charmley, *The Hope in Hope Street: 200 Years in Hanley* (Hanley: Bethel Evangelical Free Church, 2012), p. 84. Richard Henry Smith of Hanley, a gifted artist, painted pictures illustrating the parables of Christ "to liven up the Bible studies". See Gervase Charmley, *Hope on Hope Street,* p. 85.

58 A. E. H. Gregory, *Romance and Revolution: The Story of the Brotherhood Movement 1875-1975* (London: Privately Published, 1975), pp. 1-3.

informality was the order of business.[59] These meetings had met with considerable success in attracting working men into the churches, and the Belgrave deacons resolved to commence meetings that winter.[60]

The winter and autumn programme at Belgrave was further strengthened by the establishment of a series of lectures, to be named after the chapel's first minister. These week-evening lectures, to be delivered by leading preachers, were designed to appeal to the Victorian spirit of self-improvement, providing mental uplift for the working classes.[61] In this work, Westrope drew his inspiration from A. M. Fairbairn, who had stepped out of the classroom at Bradford in order to lecture to Bradford working men on social and religious questions, believing that such work was necessary to prevent the more thoughtful among them being drawn away to movements not averse to flattering their intellects.[62]

Preparations for the launch of a "Forward Movement" at Belgrave continued through summer and early autumn. Called to address the autumn meetings of the Yorkshire Congregational Union at Knaresborough, Westrope publicised the work at Belgrave, calling on the churches to embrace "practical Christianity", at the same time stressing that "the great social problems could only find their solution in an intense Christian life".[63] Such utterances were not atypical of the period, reflecting the tension in Nonconformist churches between the conversionist ethos of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the growth of "Social Gospel Christianity".[64] Designed to render a radical social programme palatable to traditionalists, and reflecting the real commitment of many Social Gospel promoters to individual conversion, such rhetoric could become a vague and confusing mixture of diluted socialism and mysticism, highlighting problems without explaining how they were to be addressed.[65]

The Belgrave deacons established a committee to consider the organisation and finance of the P.S.A., including a conference to recruit workers and solicit contributions. The date for the first P.S.A. meeting was set for December.[66] The Hamilton Lectures began a month earlier, J. Guinness Rogers of Clapham speaking of Cardinal Newman's impact on religious life,[67] followed by Archibald

59 Dominic Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), p. 196.
60 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 26 June 1890.
61 Ibid.
62 Selbie, *Fairbairn*, p. 110.
63 *Leeds Mercury* (23 October 1890).
64 Peter d'Arcy Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 59-60.
65 D. Basil Martin, *An Impossible Parson* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1935), p. 88; T. Rhondda Williams, *How I Found My Faith: A Religious Pilgrimage* (London: Cassell and Co., 1938), p. 98; Erdozain, *Problem of Pleasure*, pp. 194-5.
66 WYAS: WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 28 October 1890.
67 *Leeds Mercury* (19 November 1890).

Duff, professor at Airedale College, in December.[68] John Hunter, formerly minister at York and Hull, then in the early years of what would prove to be a notable liberal Christian ministry in Glasgow, spoke on "the Cost of Progress"; the need for men and women to be prepared to sacrifice themselves that humanity might come to a larger conception of truth.[69]

The most widely-reported lecture was by John Clifford, minister of Westbourne Park Baptist Church, Paddington, on "the Latest Phases of the Social Gospel". A special invitation was extended to the members of the Leeds Trades Council, who were present in force.[70] Beginning his lecture, Clifford sought to allay the fears of old-fashioned evangelicals in the audience, remarking "that by the words social gospel he meant not the opposite but the complement of the individual gospel".[71] To applause, Clifford informed the gathered throng that the coming century would see a great social advance, men and women from the churches enlisting together under the banner of social progress.[72] He did not fight shy of speaking of Socialism, calling for the public ownership of the railways, in the light of a recent strike, broken by the owners through questionable tactics. Addressing masters and men, Clifford, who as a boy had worked seventeen hour days in Nottingham lace factories,[73] called for an improvement in working conditions, pointing out:

> It was to Jesus Christ whom we owed the discovery that man was man; that he was no mere "hand" but a soul, no mere tool – a cog in the great wheel of human industry – but a living being with a conscience, intellect, nature fashioned after the nature of God and not to be treated as a dog or slave.[74]

In the course of the speech, which was widely reported in the labour press,[75] Clifford called for a fair distribution of the national wealth, concluding with the exhortation "the social gospel must begin at home in the power of each individual".[76] Clifford's revivalist presentation of the social gospel met with emphatic expressions of approval from his audience. The impression left was that Westrope occupied the same ground as the Baptist leader.[77]

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68 Ibid., (12 December 1890).
69 Ibid., (10 January 1891).
70 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 28 October 1890.
71 *Leeds Mercury* (11 February 1891).
72 Ibid.
73 Sir James Marchant, *Dr. John Clifford, C.H, Life, Letters and Reminiscences* (London: Cassell and Co., 1924), pp. 11-12.
74 *Leeds Mercury* (11 February 1891).
75 D'Arcy Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877-1914*, pp. 341-2.
76 *Leeds Mercury* (11 February 1891).
77 Ibid.

The inaugural meeting of the Belgrave Pleasant Sunday Afternoon for men was on the first Sunday in December, 1890.[78] It was the first in the city, predating the famous Salem Brotherhood by three years.[79] The meeting took place at four o'clock, and was well attended despite thick fog. A brass band played musical items before the service commenced, and accompanied the hymns, sung by the congregation with enthusiasm. Westrope's address was applauded at intervals, as were the soloists, behaviour suggesting many present were unfamiliar with the etiquette of chapel. The service was accounted a success, 470 being enrolled in the Belgrave P.S.A. Society at its conclusion.[80] The church purchased additional hymnbooks to meet the demands of the new society, while its fame attracted the attention of P.S.A. founder John Blackham, who sent a gift of five guineas.[81]

By the end of Westrope's first year at Belgrave, the church appeared to have been lifted from its rut. There were additional activities for young people and working men, including a lecture series which brought additional publicity. Although the net increase in membership stood at only four, there was sufficient satisfaction at Westrope's performance to warrant a £50 increase in his stipend.[82] A four-page brochure, publicising the work of the church, was prepared and sent out to the Leeds churches.[83]

This was due to more than the desire to share good news. The work cost money, and finding it among church members was proving difficult. Mr Green, the church treasurer informed the April deacons' meeting that average monthly collections "did not reach £10".[84] Exhortations to the membership's generosity had little effect, and by June it had been decided that the deacons should visit those members who did not give regularly in order to persuade them to make a regular financial commitment to the cause.[85] Westrope suggested this could be addressed through the formation of a Congregational Council, on which the deacons would be joined by church members and representatives of the regular worshippers.[86] Several Congregational Churches in Yorkshire already had such councils, and at Greenfields, Bradford, this, rather than the diaconate, was the church's *de facto* governing body.[87] Although steps were taken to compile a list of regular worshippers, the idea eventually lapsed.

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78 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, p. 13.
79 H. J. S. Guntripp, *Smith & Wrigley of Leeds: The Story of a Great Pastorate* (London: Independent Press, 1944), p. 66.
80 *Leeds Mercury* (27 December 1890).
81 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 30 December 1890.
82 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 26 January 1891.
83 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 24 February 1891.
84 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 14 April 1891.
85 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 30 June 1891.
86 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 14 April 1891.
87 Rhondda Williams, *How I Found My Faith*, pp. 42-3.

The P.S.A. work, largely self-supporting, continued unabated, a thousand men joining within the first few months.[88] The chapel was well-filled, members being encouraged by the promise of prizes to bring along friends, many of whom joined the P.S.A.'s ranks.[89] The P.S.A. organised its own band, the practices of which became social occasions in themselves.[90] It was not all recreation; the P.S.A. gave birth to a "helping hand society", into which members paid subscriptions against unemployment or sickness.[91] A temperance branch of the P.S.A. was organised by Robert Duncan, one of the deacons, and a temperance conference, largely composed of working men, took place on the chapel premises, passing resolutions calling for greater controls over the sale of alcohol.[92] Belgrave's example inspired the creation of further P.S.A. branches in the area, and 1892 saw Westrope address the annual meetings of the Yorkshire Congregational Union on P.S.A. work, in addition to the formation of the Yorkshire Union of P.S.A. Societies, with Westrope as president.[93]

Attendance at normal services increased in 1891, additional cushions being ordered as once-deserted pews came into use.[94] Every day of the week saw activity at Belgrave Chapel, whether the reading room and gymnasium for young people, organised by the Belgrave Congregational Union, or lunches for men working on tramlines near the chapel.[95] The Hamilton Lectures, again taking place from October, attracted a good audience, and notable speakers, R. F. Horton delivering an address on "Revelation and the Bible", and John Brown of Bedford, Chairman of the Congregational Union, on Bunyan.[96] By the end of the year, the membership roll showed a net gain of twenty-nine.[97]

Westrope outlined ambitious schemes to draw the working classes in his 1891 address to the Yorkshire Congregational Union meetings, including the establishment of labour bureaux, day nurseries and nursing centres by churches.[98] Westrope attempted to open the chapel for the use of Trade Unions during the week, although the diaconate restricted such use to non-controversial activities.[99] Later in the year Westrope's status was enhanced by his appointment to the Leeds branch of the committee established by the Yorkshire Congregational Union to coordinate work in large towns.[100]

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88 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, p. 13.
89 *Leeds Mercury* (30 March 1891).
90 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 28 April 1891.
91 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, p. 14.
92 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 6 October 1891; *Leeds Mercury* (11 February 1892).
93 *Yorkshire Congregational Yearbook* (1892), pp. 35-6; Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, p. 14.
94 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 6 October 1891.
95 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 6, 27 October 1891.
96 *Leeds Mercury* (13 January 1891), (13 February 1891).
97 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 29 December 1891.
98 *Yorkshire Congregational Yearbook* (1891), p. 27.
99 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 18, 27 October 1891.
100 *Yorkshire Congregational Yearbook* (1892), p. 6.

In early 1892 Westrope asked the deacons to consider "additional help", to increase ministerial visiting and lift some of the burden of the week-night services.[101] The deacons could only suggest he use the funds provided for pulpit supplies, church expenditure having outstripped income. Publicity was scaled back and the Hamilton lecture programme curtailed.[102] Although not wholly successful in eliminating the deficit, the economies allowed the appointment of a pastoral assistant, George Buchanan Gray, a former student of Mansfield College, Oxford, with experience of labouring amongst the working classes at the Mansfield House Settlement, Canning Town.[103] Help also came from within the congregation, J. W. Dixon playing a leading role in the P.S.A.

Westrope was conspicuous, too, at the 1892 meetings of the Congregational Union of England and Wales at Bradford, drawing the attention of delegates to the conditions of labour in the West Riding, where long hours and poor wages worked to disrupt family life.[104] This was the conference where Keir Hardie, recently elected Labour MP for West Ham, had created a storm, accusing Congregationalists of "[p]reaching to the respectable people of their respectability", rather than calling for a fairer distribution of wealth, in reply to the accusation of one minister that Hardie was an atheist revolutionary.[105] The following month's Hamilton Lecture at Belgrave saw Charles Berry of Wolverhampton, speaking on "National Religion", present a vision of the church as an "association of redeemed men [which] ushered in the realisation of a redeemed nation" where poverty and inequality were unknown.[106]

The first deacons' meeting of 1893 provided the first signs of discontent. E. W. Wilkinson, proposed as church secretary, refused the office unless changes were made to limit the minister's freedom of innovation. A number of other deacons supported the idea of a diaconal veto over fresh innovations, which led Westrope to retort that "he would not sacrifice freedom of speech on any consideration".[107] Although Wilkinson did not take up the office of secretary at that meeting, he did so after a month's consideration, and the meeting passed into memory. Westrope continued to project the aura of a successful, innovative minister, who had revived an inner-city church. The band of workmen who saw

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101 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 2 February 1892.

102 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 29 February, 25 April 1892.

103 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 1 November 1892. Gray moved back to Oxford after his time in Leeds, becoming a tutor at Mansfield College, where he enjoyed a distinguished academic career. See Elaine Kaye, *Mansfield College, Oxford: Its Origins, History and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 122.

104 *Leeds Mercury* (15 October 1892).

105 *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* (12 October 1892). The minister, Charles Leach, subsequently retracted his statement, and was for a time a member of the ILP. See J. B. Williams, *Worstead to Westminster: The Extraordinary Life of the Rev Dr Charles Leach, MP* (Privately published, 2009), pp. 130-5.

106 *Leeds Mercury* (15 October 1892).

107 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 31 January 1893.

him home every Sunday seemed to underline his success in reaching people estranged from the churches.[108]

At a conference of the Yorkshire Union of P.S.A. Societies on 18 March, Westrope delivered a paper on "The P.S.A. Movement: How to Gather its Fruits". He argued that the churches should treat the P.S.As as an allied group, "autonomous in constitution", rather than agencies after the model of Sunday schools and Bible classes. In addition, Westrope suggested the creation of an inner group within the movement, committed to Christian service, although nothing came of this latter idea.[109] He argued that the P.S.A. represented a place where working men could shape their religious lives, free from the dictation and patronage of the middle classes, and was unwilling to see largely middle-class deacons placed over them.[110]

The year 1893 also saw an outside challenge to the work at Belgrave, as Bertram Smith and Francis Wrigley, joint ministers of Salem Chapel, Hunslet Lane, since 1891, launched their own "Forward Movement". The Salem P.S.A. held its first meeting in October and by December membership was over six hundred.[111] Although some members were new to the movement, it drew a number from Belgrave.[112] In contrast to Westrope's vision for the movement, Salem's P.S.A. aimed to draw members into the wider life of the church, and ultimately church membership.[113] Other Leeds churches organised P.S.As, and over the next two years Belgrave P.S.A. membership dropped to about six hundred.[114] In contrast, Salem's P.S.A. continued to grow until there was no room in the chapel.[115]

Belgrave seemed becalmed; church membership was almost static, a net increase of only four being reported during 1893, and the church's current account was in deficit.[116] However, the outward life of the church was lively enough for Westrope to be the subject of an admiring article in the denominational press, the *Independent and Nonconformist* declaring "many churches have much to learn from Belgrave Chapel and its pastor".[117] In fact, the church's finances were close to breaking-point, the Hamilton lectures ceased, and the deacons were forced to appeal to the P.S.A. for aid.[118] Plans for a Boys' Brigade troop were still-born, and a visitation scheme allowed to lapse.[119] The

108 Westrope, "The New Day at Dawn", p. 104.
109 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, pp. 14-15.
110 Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes*, pp. 115-7.
111 Guntripp, *Smith & Wrigley*, pp. 67-8.
112 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, pp. 13-14.
113 Guntripp, *Smith & Wrigley*, pp. 68-9.
114 Dixon, *Pledged to the People*, pp. 13-14.
115 Griffin, *Salem 1784-1984*, p. 23.
116 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 13 January 1894.
117 Quoted in *Leeds Mercury* (30 August 1894).
118 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 16 October 1894.
119 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 20 March, 2 October 1894.

annual report showed a net decrease in membership of one.[120] However, the church continued its activities, Westrope taking a prominent part in opposing the granting of further entertainment licences in the city, while the P.S.A. continued to draw a crowd, albeit a diminished one.[121] A grand bazaar in December 1895, lasting three days helped set the church on a sound financial footing.[122] There was no hint the church stood on the brink of crisis.

The first intimation something was seriously wrong was Westrope's decision to summon a special deacons' meeting on 2 January 1896. The cause was his receipt of two letters, one from George Paterson, criticising Westrope's conduct of services. The minister informed his deacons he intended to call a special church meeting to ascertain "if those letters reflected the feeling of the church".[123] Despite misgivings, the deacons reluctantly agreed:

> That the pastor's request for sanction to call a special church meeting on Thursday 16th January to ascertain the feeling of the church members on the subject of his Socialistic discourses &c. be acceded to.[124]

This meeting revealed a broad undercurrent of dissatisfaction with Westrope's ministry among the members who attended, approximately eighty in number. A number of those present objected to Westrope's decision occasionally to vary his sermons at the evening services by speaking about a recent news story or the social message of a novel, such as Hall Caine's *The Manxman*.[125] Feeling these comments undermined the "free hand" granted by the church in 1889, Westrope submitted his resignation the following day, and broke the news to his congregation at the close of the 19 January evening service.[126]

This was greeted with dismay, the secretary of the P.S.A. imploring the deacons to do all in their power to retain Westrope.[127] His letter was read to the 30 January church meeting, but despite an effort by some connected to the P.S.A., the members decided to accept Westrope's resignation by forty-eight votes to thirty-nine.[128]

Westrope's decision to speak occasionally on secular topics in the evening services was not the only reason for his resignation. Shortly after the news broke, the press stated that "the attitude of Mr Westrope to labour questions has also been a source of complaint".[129] Wesleyan minister H. W. Shrewsbury charged

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120 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 29 January 1895.
121 *Leeds Mercury* (11 December 1895).
122 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 31 December 1895.
123 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 2 January 1896.
124 Ibid.
125 *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* (25 January 1896).
126 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Richard Westrope to the Members and Deacons of Belgrave Chapel, 17 January 1896; *Yorkshire Evening Post* (20 January 1896).
127 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Deacons' Minutes, 28 January 1896.
128 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Church Minutes, 30 January 1896.
129 *Leeds Times* (25 January 1896).

Belgrave with driving out Westrope because "in the great struggle between labour and capital he has shown himself the uncompromising friend of labour".[130] One "Sorrowful Member" laid the blame for Westrope's resignation at the feet of a few businessmen, accustomed to getting their own way, who had disliked Westrope's views and methods, and used the financial woes of the church to force him out, despite the large number "of earnest men and women" Westrope had drawn to the chapel and its various activities.[131] Another Belgrave worshipper expressed the opinion that Westrope's "extreme views" ought to be pardoned, as they were "for the good of humanity", while others drew attention to the size of the church meeting in comparison with the congregations Westrope attracted.[132] Such correspondence came too late to affect the matter, however. Richard Westrope paid his last respects to the Belgrave P.S.A. on 1 March, exhorting them to maintain their commitment, "never to become absorbed in any church", but "to co-operate with progressive elements to awaken the churches to their social responsibilities".[133] His final sermon as minister of Belgrave was delivered on 29 March. Westrope confessed his regret at leaving, but asserted that the church, in seeking to restrict his freedom, had left him no choice.[134]

There was talk of finding Westrope a wider role in Leeds Congregationalism,[135] but it was not to be. Soon after leaving Belgrave, Westrope received a call to another city centre church suffering the effects of urban change: Westminster Chapel, London.[136] He attempted to transform the church along social gospel lines, establishing a labour bureau and providing free legal advice, in addition to establishing P.S.A. style meetings for men and women.[137] The initial momentum was not maintained, however, and the experiment ended in failure. After an initial increase, congregations declined, and the church finances were strained almost to bankruptcy. Westrope suffered serious illness, brought on by stress, leading to his resignation of the pastorate in 1902.[138] The congregation was left a shadow of its former self, services "attended by just a handful of faithful old saints ... young people ... absent almost

130 *Leeds Mercury* (6 February 1896).
131 'A Sorrowful Member', *Leeds Mercury* (13 February 1896).
132 'An Old Belgravite', *Leeds Mercury* (12 February 1896); 'G.R.E.', *Leeds Mercury* (11 February 1896).
133 *Leeds Mercury* (7 March 1896).
134 *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* (4 April 1896).
135 *Leeds Times* (25 January 1896); *Leeds Mercury* (14 February 1896).
136 *Northern Echo* (20 April 1896); *Yorkshire Herald* (6 June 1896).
137 *Leeds Mercury* (29 April 1896); Robert Pope, 'Congregationalism and Community', in Lesley Husselbee and Paul Ballard (eds), *Free Churches and Society: The Nonconformist Contribution to Social Welfare 1800-2010* (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 36.
138 C. D. T. James, *Westminster Chapel Buckingham Gate London SW1 1841-1998* (London: Westminster Chapel, 1998), p. 4.

entirely".[139] Disillusioned by the experience, Westrope joined the Quakers in 1906, becoming first warden of the Rowntree supported York Educational Settlement in 1909; a post he retained until 1921.[140]

Belgrave did not collapse after Westrope's resignation, despite a fall in membership.[141] The P.S.A. remained, playing its part in the invitation of George Watt Smith of Howard Street, Sheffield, to the pastorate in 1897.[142] Smith remained minister until 1904, aided by Dixon and others, while George Paterson removed to East Parade.[143] In the year Westrope left the Congregational ministry, the church called James Gunn Sutherland, a Scot ministering at Accrington.[144] Under his leadership, the chapel was transformed into a fully-fledged institutional church, preaching and practising "a Christianity keyed to every kind of human need, from the cradle to the grave".[145] The labour bureau, medical aid and nursery envisaged by Westrope came into being.[146] Post-war slum clearance brought an end to everything, however, and the church closed in 1954, with the profits from the sale of the buildings being used to erect a new chapel on the Moortown estate.[147]

The failure of Westrope's ministry was far from inevitable; not only was a successor able to implement his vision, but the reconstruction of several Leeds city churches as central missions further underlines the viability of the model in the context of late-nineteenth century Leeds. At the same time, it is important to stress there were also failures more conspicuous than Westrope's. East Parade Chapel inaugurated a "Forward Movement" in November 1895, during the pastorate of Charles Lemoine.[148] Four years later, Lemoine had resigned and the chapel had been sold for redevelopment, the congregation seeking new premises further from the city centre.[149] However, the movement at East Parade came five years after Westrope's move to the city, when Samuel Chadwick was transforming Oxford Place Chapel into a Methodist Mission, and Smith and Wrigley were creating a model institutional church at Salem. Belgrave Chapel, as the first Congregational Church in the city to make an appeal to working people on social gospel lines, faced no such competition.

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139 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "The Centenary of Westminster Chapel 1865-1965", in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions 1942-1977* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), pp. 232-3.

140 Ian Packer (ed.), *The Letters of Arnold Stephenson Rowntree to Mary Katherine Rowntree 1910-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 95n.

141 WYAS WYL777/112: Belgrave Chapel: Church Minutes, 22 December 1896.

142 *Leeds Mercury* (18 August 1896).

143 Ibid., (21 July 1900).

144 Ibid., (7 August 1909).

145 *Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 1922: Belgrave Central Institutional Church, Leeds* (Leeds: Belgrave Church, 1922), p. 6.

146 David Thornton, *Leeds: The Story of a City* (Ayr: Fort, 2002), p. 191.

147 WYAS WYL777/4162: Documentation relating to the sale of Belgrave Central Hall, 1954-69.

148 WYAS WYL861/29: East Parade Records: Deacons' Minutes, 7 November 1895.

149 WYAS WYL861/31: East Parade: Deacons' Minutes, 30 May 1900.

Richard Westrope was a pioneer within Congregationalism, winning early recognition for his efforts to reach the working classes. In bringing the P.S.A. movement to Belgrave, he prepared the way for its successful introduction at Salem, showing that men could be attracted to church by special services, and that their attendance at such meetings could be maintained for a prolonged period. The same may be said regarding the work at Belgrave among young shop and office workers, which took on a remarkable life of its own. The Hamilton Lectures, although not maintained, were a well-appreciated attempt to present original, intellectually stimulating material to the common people, and John Clifford's lecture on the Social Gospel stands as a classic of its type. Westrope, with his connections to rising denominational stars such as R. F. Horton and John Hunter, was an appealing figure and, it seemed, a leading representative of the coming generation of ministers.

Why, then, did Westrope's ministry fail? In part, attention must be drawn to the changing intellectual and political climate. When Westrope came to Belgrave, the debates of the Congregational Union, in Yorkshire and nationally, made frequent mention of the needs of the inner cities, and of reaching the working classes, including rhetoric verging on Socialism. The marches of the unemployed in 1886, the formation of the ILP and the emergence of the Labour Church movement presented apparently pressing challenges.[150] However, the failure of the ILP to break through at the 1895 General Election seemed to postpone that challenge. This lent boldness to those, such as George S. Barrett of Norwich, who felt that discussion of political questions, even the P.S.A. movement, risked converting Congregationalism into a social welfare agency, rather than a spiritual movement.[151] Among these were some members of Belgrave, such as George Paterson, not only men who felt threatened by Westrope's radical rhetoric, but those who, like Barrett, genuinely believed that the message of Christianity was more than simply "good wages, equal rights, and temporal good", but personal salvation from sin.[152] Social questions vanished from the agenda at denominational gatherings for the remainder of the century.[153]

At the same time, it is necessary to take seriously the dissatisfaction shown at the crucial 16 January church meeting. High on the list of complaints was Westrope's occasional preaching from extra-Biblical sources. Like the P.S.A. addresses, this practice was intended to appeal to those unused to church, and had been employed with success by R. F. Horton and others.[154] However, for those used to doctrinal preaching, such addresses seemed out of place in a

150 Horton, *Autobiography*, pp. 81-3.
151 Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour,* pp. 101-2, 115, 120, 168; George S. Barrett, "The Secularisation of the Church", *Congregational Yearbook* (1895), pp. 37-41.
152 George S. Barrett, "The Secularisation of the Pulpit", (1895), p. 23.
153 Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour*, pp. 117-20.
154 Horton, *Autobiography*, p. 50; D. R. Davies, *In Search of Myself* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1961), p. 82.

Sunday service.[155] As an innovation to the established pattern, rather than a new meeting, like the P.S.A., this change was more vulnerable to challenges from long-standing members. It could also stand in for the disapproval felt by some for the political and social content of Westrope's sermons, to challenge which would be to risk accusations of political bias. In some instances, "lack of spiritual life" could be a euphemism for "unacceptable political preaching".[156]

The crisis of dissatisfaction was by no means unique to Belgrave. Smith and Wrigley faced a similar rebellion over changes to evening services in May 1894. At Salem, however, the deacons who opposed change were forced to resign, their supporters a tiny, if vocal minority among the 150 who attended the crucial meeting.[157] This stands in vivid contrast to the closely divided 88 at Belgrave less than two years later. Although demographics may explain some of the difference, a crucial fact is that Belgrave had not seen an equivalent increase in membership to Salem, nor were members particularly engaged. From these figures, it is clear that, while Westrope had increased congregations, few of those attending the services troubled to make a personal commitment to the church community. Although people were coming into the chapel, they were not joining the church. There was no spectacular growth in membership, and average monthly collections remained under £10, forcing the church to fall back on special events such as bazaars to balance the books, a far cry from Westrope's optimistic predictions when he had accepted the church's call in 1889.

At times, it seems almost as if Westrope possessed a semi-detached attitude to the church. He saw the P.S.A. as separate from the church, its autonomy crucial to continued success. The result of this was that the working men brought into Belgrave Chapel by the "high interest, low commitment services" of the P.S.A.,[158] did not go on to church membership. The Belgrave P.S.A. was not part of the church, and, unlike its sister organisation at Salem, did not contribute regularly to the financial well-being of the church. While Salem's institutions fed into the church, the institutions created by Westrope did not, creating the epitome of those "increasingly impersonal and instrumental institutions" as one historian has described West Riding churches becoming during this period.[159] Where Smith and Wrigley could call almost 150 to their aid when challenged, Westrope's most ardent admirers were unable to attend the crucial meeting.

That Westrope could so far misread the temper of the church to seek a confrontation, despite the advice of his deacons further suggests that Westrope had become dangerously detached from the membership. Working men may

155 Guntripp, *Smith & Wrigley*, p. 75.

156 Ivor Thomas Rees, "Sledgehammer: Daniel Hughes, The Sledgehammer Pastor, 1875-1972", *National Library of Wales Journal*, 32 (2001), p. 155. Hughes, forced out of the pastorate of Crane Street Baptist Church, Pontypool, in 1912, was a member of the ILP, while the deacons were largely Liberal.

157 Guntripp, *Smith & Wrigley,* pp. 76-7.

158 Erdozain, *Problem of Pleasure*, p. 196.

159 Green, 'Death of Pew Rents', p. 235.

have escorted him home on Sunday nights, but that "honour guard" separated the minister from the largely middle-class church membership. In this respect, Westrope's experience at John Street, Wakefield, proved a weakness, and his prominence as an advocate of the P.S.A. movement and the Social Gospel seems only to have added to that fatal detachment between minister and membership, as Westrope spent more time on special events than church business.

Ultimately, the explanation of Westrope's failure lies not in his radical rhetoric, but his failure to weld the masses attracted by his message and methods into a church. For much of his pastorate, Belgrave was a chapel on whose premises a P.S.A. Society and young people's guild met, rather than a church family/community. There was a certain level of intercommunion between the groups, but little recognition of a common identity, a situation Westrope encouraged. The result was that a man able to bring a crowd into a chapel seating over 1,300 was forced to resign by a church meeting of 88 persons, slightly over half of whom felt someone else could do a better job of building up their fellowship, rather than simply filling seats on a Sunday.

GERARD CHARMLEY

THE AVENUE QUARTET: EXEMPLARS OF EDWARDIAN CONGREGATIONALISM[1]

On Sunday 15 June 1913, Henry Spencer formally commenced what would prove to be a long and eventful ministry at the Avenue Congregational Church in Southampton. In the morning, he preached on the "'something extra,' which distinguishes the Christian from the non-Christian". In the evening, "the idea of the Church in its relation to Mankind was further developed".[2]

It is probable that in the "crowded congregations" there would have been three distinguished members of the church, James Lemon, Edward Bance and Harold Butler Lankester, each of whom personified various features of Edwardian Congregationalism and represented various strands in the economic, political and cultural life of Southampton. How far "they were deeply impressed with … [Spencer's] eloquent and earnest utterances" is not recorded.[3] That said, it is almost certain that they would have been in sympathy with many, if not all, of the preacher's arguments and exhortations.

In this article, biographical sketches of Spencer and the three laymen are followed by an exploration of some of the values which they severally or jointly exemplified, particularly with regard to the "long" Edwardian period from 1901 to 1918. Collectively, they may be designated the "Avenue quartet". That they were all members of Avenue Congregational Church is unsurprising given that it offered a spiritual home to those moving into the area in which it was located, many of whom had gained material advantage from the town's economic expansion and they closely identified themselves with the most self-consciously middle-class branch of Nonconformity.

I: Setting

Southampton's prosperity rested primarily on its position as one of Britain's principal ports. It benefited greatly from the fact that there was an "ample depth of water in the harbour, and safe anchorage for the largest ships afloat, which ... [could] enter or leave at any time of tide".[4] During the nineteenth century Southampton's docks were substantially extended to accommodate increases in both trade and passenger traffic. Thus, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the "trade of Southampton … [was] very considerable, embracing coastwise the Channel Islands, the continent, Northern Europe, and nearly every part of the world".[5] Increasing

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1 I am grateful to Professor Clyde Binfield for his many helpful suggestions regarding the style and content of this article. He has also been extremely generous in providing biographical information.

2 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (21 June 1913).

3 Ibid.

4 *Kelly's Directory of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight 1903* (London: Kelly's Directories, 1903), p. 435.

5 Ibid.

economic activity, both in the docks and ancillary enterprises, was paralleled by a rapid growth in the population from 7,913 in 1801 to 104, 824 in 1901.[6]

In party political terms, during the second half of the nineteenth century Liberals and Conservatives were evenly balanced in the town. Nonetheless, by 1900 municipal Liberalism was in retreat. As Temple Patterson records:

> In Corporation politics during . . . [the period 1900-1914] the main features were the maintenance of the Conservative ascendancy, the decline of the Liberals and the slow increase in the number of Labour members of the Council until on the eve of the First World War they had supplanted the Liberals as the largest opposition element. Both together, however, were still outnumbered by the Conservatives.[7]

By contrast, at constituency level, the two parliamentary seats were gained by the Liberal candidates in the landslide of 1906 and, more surprisingly, retained in the two elections of 1910. As elsewhere, Southampton's "Nonconformists naturally voted solidly for" the Liberal candidates.[8] Almost certainly, a substantial majority of those who worshipped at Avenue Congregational Church would have been Liberal supporters and some might well have been party members.

From both a political and economic perspective, Avenue can be said to have reflected something of Southampton's drive and ambition and perhaps of the inexorable process of suburbanisation. By 1900 Southampton had four city centre Congregational churches. The foremost of these was the historic Above Bar, which dated its foundation to 1662. As it was remarked in a history of the church published in 1909, Above Bar regarded itself as "the Alma Mater of Congregationalism in Southampton".[9] Albion and Kingsfield were the product of splits during the nineteenth century, while the establishment of Northam, which served a predominantly working-class community, was a more harmonious affair.[10] Towards the end of the nineteenth century, new causes were established in the suburb of Freemantle in 1885, followed by Avenue a few years later.

One church historian, writing of Avenue's foundation, comments:

> Located in a "select suburb," near Winn and Westwood Roads, this was an area to which many of the more affluent members from mainly Albion [Congregational Church], described as Avenue's "Mother

6 Southampton was linked to London by railway in 1840, while a direct link to London from Portsmouth was not established until 1859.

7 A. Temple Patterson, *A History of Southampton 1700-1914: Vol. III: Setbacks and Recoveries, 1868-1914* (Southampton: Southampton University Press, 1975), p. 138.

8 Ibid., p. 134.

9 S. Stainer, *History of the Above Bar Congregational Church Southampton from 1662 to 1908* (Southampton: Southampton Times, 1909), p. 139.

10 The dates of foundation were Albion, 1844; Kingsfield, 1853; and Northam, 1863.

> Church", had moved. They wanted a church closer to where they now lived. In July 1892, a house was purchased at the corner of Alma Road and The Avenue. Initially, services were held in a portable tin church moved from Clifford Street and re-erected in the garden of the house. New church buildings were opened in 1898.[11]

Something of the Arcadian character of Avenue's location, can be gained from Temple Patterson's observation that:

> At the opening of the twentieth century Southampton, despite its population of nearly 105,000, still retained some characteristics of a country town that could be savoured, perhaps nostalgically, as one retreated from the waterfront towards the northern suburbs and the hillocks and fields they enclosed … On the other side of the Avenue Westwood Park, where agricultural shows and other entertainments … had been held, had given place to Westwood and Winn Roads … [12]

In this respect, Avenue was by no means unique, since there were a number of other examples of Congregational churches established throughout England during the second half of the nineteenth century to serve the burgeoning middle-class suburbs, such as Clarendon Park in Leicester, formed in 1886.[13] Here there are a number of qualified parallels that can be drawn with Avenue. First, it was located in an extremely salubrious part of Leicester and, in a similar manner to Avenue, on one of the main thoroughfares into the city, Clarendon Park Road. As Clyde Binfield has written: "Even the strongest imagination would find it hard to picture Clarendon Park as a centre of proletarian Christianity but even the unimaginative would be impressed by its assured air of civic culture",[14] words that could be equally applied to Avenue.

At the time of Clarendon Park's opening, the area served already had a population of 4,000, compared with the "4,500 people living within a few minutes walk" of Avenue. In both cases there was very little existing provision for Nonconformists. At the laying of Avenue's foundation stone, Mrs Mary Lankester, the widow of Alderman William Goddard Lankester, a leading Southampton businessman, Liberal and Congregationalist and one of the prime

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11 Roger Ottewill, "'A Splendid Prospect'?: Congregationalism in Edwardian Southampton 1901-1914", in *The Journal of the Southampton Local History Forum*, 15 (Summer 2009), pp. 38-64. Available online at: http://www.southampton.gov.uk/Images/lhf%20Journalsummer2009doc_tcm46-234321.pdf.

12 Patterson, *A History of Southampton*, III, p. 115.

13 Other examples include Redland Park in Bristol; Warwick Road in Coventry; and Headingly Hill and Roundhay in Leeds.

14 Clyde Binfield, "An East Midland Call: Its Context and Some Consequences. The Genesis of Clarendon Park Congregational Church", in *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society and Historical Society*, 79 (2005), p. 110.

movers behind the church's establishment, indicated that she shared with her late husband "a desire that a building should be erected there to the glory of God, to extend the principles of Protestantism and Congregationalism, and to be a source of blessing and usefulness to the neighbourhood (applause)".[15] On the occasion of the opening of Avenue's new premises, much was made of Nonconformist solidarity and the fact that "Free Churchmen generally showed that they regarded the cause of the Avenue Congregational Church as their own enterprise, and to the kindly feeling among all denominations which the occasion evoked".[16] It is perhaps significant that The Avenue was not to be the location for churches of other denominations, unlike Clarendon Park Road where Anglican, Baptist and Methodist churches all "large, confident buildings of considerable character and some quality" were constructed.[17] Indeed, in terms of the ecclesiastical landscape of The Avenue, the Congregational church reigned supreme and remains a dominant landmark as Southampton Common gives way to residential development.

A second parallel was the style and size of the buildings designed by distinguished architects, James Cubitt and James Tait respectively.[18] In contemporary newspaper reports, Avenue was described as being "English Gothic of a late 15th century type. The walls are of local red brick, with dressings of orange-coloured rubbed brick, and with tracery and moulding of Monk's Park and Ancaster stone". Soon after construction began, "it became doubtful whether" it would be large enough "to accommodate such a congregation as might reasonably be expected" and consequently provision was made for an additional 180 seats which increased the total to 730. In addition to the main body of the church, there were "vestries for the minister, the deacons, and the choir, also a 'church parlour' for small social meetings, two cloak-rooms, and other appurtenances".[19] Similarly Clarendon Park "was fifteenth century Gothic" and could accommodate 600 worshippers. "In addition to vestries for minister, deacons, and ladies, and what was described as 'a room for the curator', it had a parlour or library ... [and] a roomy chancel, big enough for another 200 adults".[20] Both churches were undoubtedly spacious and reflected an optimism regarding the potential for future growth in the size of their congregations. They also symbolised the importance and value of communal worship but, in keeping with the institutional principle, they pointed to a church life that extended well beyond the holding of services. In the words of Tudur Jones, by this time "the idea that

15 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (7 August 1897).
16 Ibid., (10 December 1898).
17 Binfield, "An East Midlands Call", p. 113. That said, a Roman Catholic Church had been erected at the town end of The Avenue in 1889.
18 Clyde Binfield, *The Contexting of a Chapel Architect* (London: The Chapels Society, 2001), esp. pp. 85-8; idem, "An East Midlands Call", p. 113.
19 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (17 December 1898).
20 Binfield, "An East Midlands Call", pp. 110-1.

the successful church … [was a] busy church … [had come] into its own".[21]

Lastly, the building committees of both churches were composed of leading figures from the business communities and political élites of Southampton and Leicester respectively. Indeed, all three lay members of the Avenue quartet served in this capacity. Among the occupations represented were those of shipping agent, coal merchant, consulting electrical engineer and stockbroker and accountant. Although not as many of Southampton's aldermen were directly involved as those of Leicester, the construction of Avenue was still seen as a manifestation of civic consciousness and pride. For example, the mayor was present at the laying of the foundation stone when he expressed "the hope that the new church would be the means of conferring mental, moral and spiritual benefits on thousands of Southamptonians".[22] Moreover, a civic service was held on the Sunday following the official opening.

In appointing their first ministers there were some differences between the churches. At Clarendon Park, after a succession of potential candidates, the members eventually called Peter Taylor Forsyth to be its first minister. A Scot and son of a postman, he was to achieve fame in ecclesiastical circles as an eminent Congregational theologian and principal of Hackney College, a post to which he was appointed in 1901.[23] As Clyde Binfield observes, at the time of his move to Leicester, he already had considerable experience as a minister having served for twelve years and "was meticulous, efficient, with a keen pastoral eye".[24] He was also known for his theological liberalism. At Avenue, the choice was made more speedily. Moreover, in appointing Arthur Davis Martin, who had just completed his training at Hackney College, the members were swayed by his obvious potential, as opposed to a proven record in preaching and pastoral ministries. However, his father, George Martin, was also a minister, so as a son of the manse he would have been well aware of the demands involved.[25] Martin was aged twenty-five at the time of his appointment, fifteen years younger than Forsyth. Taking his ministerial career as a whole, although Martin's reputation was by no means as great as that of Forsyth, as recorded in his official obituary he was known for "the gifts … of insight and intellectual power". Following his retirement from full-time ministry due to poor health in 1923, "he wrote strenuously and some six books came from his pen" with the first and last being "attempts to interpret Christ and to make Him known to others".[26]

Martin was keen to ensure that since Avenue was situated in a prosperous

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21 R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England, 1662-1962* (London: Independent Press, 1962), p. 297.

22 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (7 August 1897).

23 Gerald Rimmington, "Congregationalism and Society in Leicester 1872-1914", in *The Local Historian*, 37/1 (2007), p. 32.

24 Binfield, "An East Midlands Call", p. 124.

25 George Martin was minister of High Road Congregational Church when Arthur was born in 1869.

26 *Congregational Year Book* (1942), pp. 427-8.

part of Southampton, it was mindful of its responsibilities towards the more deprived areas of the town, in particular the neighbouring suburb of Portswood where it sought to apply the precepts of the Social Gospel. As he observed, outreach and philanthropic "work of this kind has seemed to me a real necessity laid upon us as a community of Christian people".[27] Thus, the Portswood Mission, as it was known, was seen as a gospel imperative for church members and very much in keeping with a dominant strand of Edwardian Congregationalism.

During the summer of 1905, although still relatively young, Martin became very ill and "after a period of 'sick leave' was compelled … to leave Avenue".[28] At a farewell gathering, presided over by Edward Bance, a number of contributors spoke highly of Martin's "work and services … [for Avenue] and local Nonconformity in general", with reference also being made to "the great support and assistance ... [he] had received from his beloved wife". In response, Martin "strongly urged upon the Church the importance of consolidated working, and of the efforts for the Portswood Mission not being relaxed".[29]

Unfortunately for Avenue the next two ministers only served for short periods. In the case of George Startup, who was minister from 1906 to 1909, this was due to a combination of ill-health and what the church's historian describes as "other difficulties".[30] These would appear to have been "considerable differences of opinion ... amongst members of ... [the] church with respect to the pastorate", which came to a head in 1908 and resulted in his resignation.[31] Startup's successor was Meredith Davies, like Martin an extremely promising student from Hackney College. His pastorate lasted from 1910 to 1912, when ill-health compelled him to resign. Thus, Henry Spencer was Avenue's fourth minister and with his appointment members were blessed with the lengthy and robust pastorate which they had desired since the departure of Martin.

II. Henry Spencer (1869-1929)

Spencer was born at Colchester in 1869. However, his father and mother, Henry and Ann, hailed from Halifax. Census returns indicate that Henry senior was a civil servant, employed in the Excise Branch of the Inland Revenue. From Essex the family moved to London.[32]

As to the initial fostering of Spencer's religious faith and interests little is

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27 *The Avenue Congregational Church Southampton Record* (1903), p. 5.

28 Dora Caton, *A Short History of the Avenue Congregational Church* (Southampton: Roy Davis, 1968), p. 12.

29 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (21 October 1905).

30 Caton, *A Short History of the Avenue Congregational Church*, p. 13.

31 Avenue Congregational Church Meeting Minute Book (held at Avenue St Andrews URC Archive).

32 In 1881 they were living in Wandsworth and in 1891 in Willesden, when Henry, aged 21 was described as a "student of theology".

known. The record is silent on the contributions that might have been made by his parents and siblings, (he had an older and younger sister), or by exposure to inspirational preaching or by personal reflection and a growing sense of vocation. His higher education included courses at Owens' College, Manchester, where he took the degrees of BA and BSc; at London and Victoria Universities, securing an MSc at the latter;[33] and Mansfield College in Oxford, at a time when Andrew Fairbairn was Principal, and where he was awarded degrees in Theology and Philosophy. Not surprisingly, throughout his career he was known as a scholar. However, as the Moderator observed at Spencer's funeral "he carried his weight of learning as modestly and lightly as a child".[34]

Spencer's first pastorate was at Wavertree in Liverpool and lasted from 1894 until 1900. While there, in 1897 he married Gertrude Mary Ramsey, the daughter of Revd Adam Averell Ramsey, who ministered for many years at Barry Road Congregational Church in Dulwich. Through his marriage Spencer acquired not only a Congregational and ministerial father-in-law but also an uncle-in-law and brother-in-law. There were also links with the Anglican ministry.[35] Family connections with Congregationalism continued into the next generation. In 1924, his daughter, Hilda Gertrude, married the Revd George Douglas Evans, who at the time was minister of Eignbrook Congregational Church in Hereford, while the eldest of his two sons, Frank Averill, was a well-respected headmaster of Silcoates School, near Wakefield, from 1943 to 1960.[36]

After Liverpool, Spencer spent ten years at Forest Gate Congregational Church in East Ham followed by three years in Grimsby, from where he received the call to Avenue. By this time he had already made his mark as an energetic minister, who saw public service as a form of home missionary work. As it was stated in his *Congregational Year Book* obituary: "A man of deep learning and great ability, with a wide view of the many ways in which the Kingdom of God can be advanced, he consecrated all his varied gifts and powers to this end and to taking an active part in public life".[37] At Spencer's public recognition in Southampton, William Miles, minister of Buckland Congregational Church in Portsmouth and Chairman of the Hampshire Congregational Union (HCU), commented that "he had heard Mr Spencer described as an able teacher, a capable minister, and an earnest Christian worker". Later in the proceedings, Spencer expressed:

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33 In 1880, following the grant of a Royal Charter, Owens' College became the first constituent college of the federal Victoria University of Manchester.

34 *Southampton Daily Echo* (18 June 1929).

35 One of Mrs Spencer's nephews was Michael Ramsey, who went on to become Archbishop of Canterbury. Her brother, Arthur, Fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge served as deacon and church secretary at Emmanuel Congregational Church in the town.

36 Silcoates had been founded in 1820 as the Northern Congregational School, providing board and education for the sons of Nonconformist ministers.

37 *Congregational Year Book* (1930), p. 236.

> his determination to put missions first. He hoped he might be useful in town and county. He knew what it was to be a member of the Education Committee and the Board of Guardians and to serve the town in various ways ... [that said] the Avenue and the mission at Portswood must come first. When those had been attended to, whatever time he had to spare would be given to town and district.[38]

In securing Spencer, following twenty-two months without a minister, during which period two invitations were made but not accepted,[39] expectations at Avenue were high and he did not disappoint. In the event, he "remained there in full activity", dying in harness sixteen years later.[40]

From the relatively few surviving traces of Spencer's sermons, it would seem that theologically he subscribed to the new orthodoxy in which, as Tudur Jones puts it: "Modernistic elements together with the Social Gospel were tempered by some measure of adherence to traditional Evangelical formulae".[41] In this mix, there was a growing acceptance of the humanitarian concepts of the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man, but a marked reluctance to cut adrift entirely from the Evangelicalism into which the vast majority of Edwardian Congregationalists had been socialised. In short, there was a desire to hold in creative tension the doctrines of the Atonement and the Incarnation. In this regard, Spencer was undoubtedly influenced by Principal Fairbairn whom Tudur Jones describes as the "father of Liberal Evangelicalism amongst Congregationalists".[42] Similarly, quoting from the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Alan Argent makes the point that, at Mansfield, Fairbairn "was noted for his 'wide learning and liberal spirit'".[43]

Notwithstanding his intellectual credentials, Spencer placed considerable emphasis on practical aspects of the Christian faith. For example, he took a lofty view of the demands of Christian discipleship both at the level of the individual and collectively. As he put it in the very first sermon he preached at Avenue, mentioned at the beginning of this article:

> Christ taught that there was to be a very great and real difference between His followers and others. Any man might love his friends, but the Christian was to love his enemies. Anyone whose spirit was not utterly warped might be expected to do good to the benevolent and beneficent, but the Christian was to do good irrespective of their goodness.

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38 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (19 July 1913).

39 These were Dr Oliver Huckel of Baltimore in the USA and Bernard Uffen of Market Harborough.

40 *Congregational Year Book* (1930), p. 236.

41 Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England*, p. 354.

42 Ibid., p. 269.

43 Argent, *The Transformation of Congregationalism, 1900-2000* (Nottingham: Congregational Federation, 2013), p. 35.

Equally, the Church needed to be "strong, perfect, well-nourished, and thoroughly exercised" if it was to witness effectively to the world at large.[44]

Spencer was also possessed of an innate optimistic temperament and in the difficult years just before the First World War he was keen to take issue with those Congregationalists who adopted a gloomy prognosis of the situation in which they found themselves. This can be seen very clearly in comments made as a guest speaker at Above Bar's 251st anniversary celebrations in 1913:

> What was their present position, he asked, in regard to the criticism that was indulged in by some people? Every church should admit its faults, but it was not right for them to constantly remain on the stool of repentance. Outsiders who knew no better might criticize, but he appealed that their denominational organs should stop their funeral dirges . . . [concerning their temporary unsatisfactory statistics and finances], and that pessimism should be flung aside. They had the knowledge that the spiritual church would always be successful, but the assurance of that tone was lacking, and the result would enfeeble them. They seemed to have forgotten their past achievements, which had been accomplished in the face of great difficulties.[45]

In other words, they should hold their nerve. They had nothing to be pessimistic about apart from pessimism itself. Even in the dark days of May 1915, in a sermon on "the beginning of travail" he argued that although "travail is sorrowful enough … it is necessary to, and results inevitably in, new joyous, glorious birth".[46]

Alongside his positive outlook, Spencer had a heightened sense of responsibility for the spiritual well-being of his congregation, in general, and young people, for whom he was asked to preach special sermons each month, in particular. Indeed, in his first letter to appear in the church magazine, he wrote: "Especially do I ask all the young people to let me be their friend and helper in every possible way".[47] Of course, he was by no means unique in this respect, but the theme of responsibility was apparent throughout his ministry. In June 1914, for example, he preached on the topic of the responsibility of God to us and for us, which served as an example for both minister and congregation.[48] Spencer undoubtedly hoped and expected that by demonstrating his care and concern for members of his congregation it would be reciprocated by commitment and service on their part. In his eyes, partnership was the key to effective ministry.

This was seen to best effect in the role that Avenue played during the First World War, when its hall served as a venue for "the comfort and welfare of the

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44 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (21 June 1913).
45 *Hampshire Independent* (22 November 1913); *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (22 November 1913).
46 *The Avenue Free Churchman*, 18/6 (June 1915), p. 2.
47 Ibid., 16/7 (July 1913), p. 3.
48 Ibid., 17/7 (July 1914), p. 3.

soldiers and sailors who in great numbers passed through" Southampton to and from their way to the Front. From May 1916 until the end of the War Spencer also wrote a monthly letter to "our own men at the front" for the church magazine, copies of which were sent to the troops. In recognition of his contribution to the War effort, Spencer was appointed OBE.[49]

A man of considerable energy, Spencer did find time to engage in public service through membership of the Southampton Education Committee. As it was put in a short newspaper article written at the time of his death: "In the educational field he had made his mark in the administrative sense, for he knew and understood the schoolmaster's point of view as well as that of the administrator". It says something for his character that in the same article it was noted that "he did not know the way to make an enemy". [50]

In the magazine of his *alma mater*, Mansfield College, Spencer was remembered as "the soul of courtesy, gentle, thoughtful for others … [a] virile personality … the kind of man that shouldered burdens instinctively … [one] greatly beloved because he was so loving".[51] It was almost certainly his willingness to go the extra mile that hastened his death at the relatively young age, even by inter-war standards, of sixty. His leadership of Avenue Congregational Church had been "marked by a deep sincerity and a profound spirituality".[52] Following his death a tablet in his memory was unveiled by his wife which included the words: "A devoted follower of Christ, he was the friend of all sorts and conditions of men, and spent himself in their service".

III. James Lemon (1833-1923)

Lemon was born at Lambeth in January 1833, the son of James Lemon a builder, and he died at Southampton ninety years later in May 1923. According to biographical information published in 1905, he was "educated privately at Westminster".[53] "'At the age of twenty-six he was chosen from a large number of candidates … [to assist] Sir Joseph Bazalgette and thus helped in the design and construction of the Thames Embankment and the London main drainage".[54] This appointment suggests that his family were reasonably well-connected.

In 1859 he married Maria Victoria Cocks, who was six years younger than he was.[55] It was his wife who initially brought the advertisement for the post of Borough Engineer and Surveyor of Southampton to his attention in 1866. Apparently, when he had first visited the town, at some point in his early

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49 *Congregational Year Book* (1930), p. 236.
50 *Hampshire Advertiser and Southampton Times* (22 June 1929).
51 *Mansfield College Magazine*, XII/16 (July 1929), p. 398.
52 *Hampshire Advertiser and Southampton Times* (22 June 1929).
53 W. H. Jacob, *Hampshire at the Opening of the Twentieth Century* (Brighton: Pike, 1905), p. 261.
54 *The Times* (12 May 1923).
55 The 1901 census returns show him as living at 11 The Avenue with his wife, then aged 62; his widowed sister-in-law, Elizabeth Cocks; and a servant, Helen Harwood, aged 24.

twenties, he had not been impressed. Thus it says something of his wife's powers of persuasion that he applied for the post, thereby setting in train a sequence of events that were to have considerable implications for the remainder of his life. Needless to say, as he subsequently put it, "my second visit [to Southampton] removed the wrong impressions I had formed during my first visit".[56]

Out of a field of sixty-two candidates, Lemon's application was successful by twenty-two votes to eleven. He was to hold the post of Borough Engineer and Surveyor for twelve years. In 1878 he became a Consulting Engineer to the Corporation, before entering private practice in 1881. After ceasing to be an employee of the Corporation he was able to stand for election as a councillor and this he was encouraged to do in 1883. He served as a Liberal councillor until 1898 and then as an alderman until 1900, holding the office of mayor from 1891 to 1893. On retiring from municipal life in July 1900, he gave as his reasons the "constant disputes and personal attacks made by certain members" and his failing health. Much is known of the years from 1866 to 1900, at least from Lemon's perspective, since two volumes of his reminiscences were published in 1911. However, as it was put in an obituary, "being based on newspaper records rather too much, they are somewhat stodgy".[57]

Throughout the years before 1900, both as a local government officer and council member, Lemon was a great campaigner for improvements in public heath as far as sanitation and the water supply were concerned; for a re-warding and an extension of the borough; and for the acquisition by the corporation of the electricity undertaking and the tramways. During his mayoralty the foundation stones of a new post office and Southampton's first public library were laid. Very often he was involved in battles with parsimonious council members who opposed schemes that would add to the burden on the ratepayers. Consequently, a word frequently used in Lemon's obituaries was that of "fighter". In one he was described as "ever a fighter", with the obituarist, "Anton", going on to comment that he "formed the impression that by this time [i.e. later in his administrative and political career] … [he] rather liked fighting for its own sake … [although] he had to fight at first … it became a habit with him".[58] At Lemon's funeral even Henry Spencer felt moved to describe him as "a straight, clean fighter".[59]

Lemon was knighted in 1909, which he claimed was more in recognition of "his efforts to improve the status of the professions of civil engineering and surveying" than his services to Southampton.[60] He had been President and Honorary Treasurer

56 Sir James Lemon, *Reminiscences of Public Life in Southampton from 1866 to 1900* (Southampton: H. M. Gilbert, 1911), p. 5.
57 *Southampton Times* (19 May 1923).
58 *Hampshire Independent* (11 May 1923).
59 *Southampton Times* (19 May 1923).
60 *Hampshire Independent* (18 May 1923). In an obituary published in *The Times* (9 November 1909), it is simply recorded that he had "been three times Mayor of Southampton [in fact he was only twice mayor in 1891-2 and 1892-3] and … [had] taken an active part in the public life of the town".

of the Institute of Municipal and County Engineers. He was also a Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers, a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects [RIBA], a Fellow of the Institute of Surveyors and a Fellow of the Royal Sanitary Institute. Alongside his professional interests, Lemon was active in Freemasonry. He played bowls and supported various philanthropic enterprises, such as the Southampton Seaman's Orphanage for Boys; Royal Southampton Hospital; and the Old Age Pensions Committee. He was also a magistrate.

For much of his life in Southampton Lemon lived with Maria at "Stockwell Lodge", or more prosaically 11 The Avenue, a property he had built in about 1870.[61] His wife died in February 1906. Her funeral was at Avenue Congregational Church, and the address was given by Ieuan Maldwyn Jones, the new minister of Albion Congregational Church. Since Lemon lived for another seventeen years he spent a long period as a widower. James and Maria had no children.

Lemon's religious sensibilities and affiliations are far less in evidence than other aspects of his career. None of the limited biographical material makes any mention of Christianity or Congregationalism and in his *Reminiscences* there are only one or two passing references to church events.[62] These include the opening of Above Bar's Watts Memorial Hall in 1876, with Lemon describing Revd Llewellyn David Bevan's sermon at the public service in the evening as "appropriate", which indicates that he was in the congregation.[63] There is also what may be described as a statement of belief at the very end of Part II of his *Reminiscences*:

> Step by step engineering progress and scientific research are bringing us face to face with the grand generalisation that nature is only another term for God, that nature's laws are His thoughts and that everywhere, from the infinitely great to the infinitely little, the stars in their courses and the bacteria in their operations follow one fixed and settled design.
>
> "One God, one law, one element
> And one far off divine event,
> To which the whole creation moves".[64]

These remarks can be said to confirm his belief in a creator God, although they leave open his views on the person of Jesus Christ.

Notwithstanding the paucity of religious references in his *Reminiscences*, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Lemon was well attuned to the precepts of the Social Gospel and subscribed to the tenets of political Nonconformity. It is

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61 It is probable that the name of his house was a reference to the area in which he had spent his childhood.

62 Interestingly, when Lemon became a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects [FRIBA] in 1873, two of his three proposers, Thomas Roger Smith and Rowland Plumbe, were Congregationalists.

63 Lemon, *Reminiscences of Public Life in Southampton*, p. 82.

64 Ibid., p. 284.

also clear that he was associated with Above Bar for a number of years.[65] During this period he was instrumental in securing the land for a new church in the developing suburb of Bitterne Park, a church extension project promoted by Above Bar. As recorded in a short history of the Bitterne Park Church: "About this time [i.e. mid 1897] Sir (then Mr) James Lemon expressed his willingness to give a site for some public use, and eventually agreed that it should be reserved for a Congregational Church".[66] In recognition of this, he was invited to lay the foundation stone of the new church in November 1905. At the ceremony he made passing reference to his earlier involvement:

> He happened to be connected professionally with that estate [i.e. Bitterne Park] some few years ago, and when he saw what it was likely to become he thought "we ought to have a Free Church upon it," and he took steps to procure the site upon which they were now standing . .. He hoped the building would enhance the reputation of the architect (laughter) and builder, and that everyone would feel when he laid a brick in that building that he was doing the same to the honour and glory of God.[67]

The architect was John Henry Blizard and the builder Mr Jupe. Blizard was based in Southampton and, not surprisingly, was closely associated with Lemon. From 1879 to 1890 he was Lemon's assistant and then went into partnership with him until 1906. In that year, Lemon was one of the proposers for Blizard's fellowship of the RIBA. Following an amicable dissolution of the partnership Blizard carried on alone under the same style.

Lemon's close involvement with Bitterne Park undoubtedly reflected his sensitivity towards the spiritual needs of the residents of a new suburb of Southampton and his desire for them to have ready access to a Nonconformist place of worship. It was probably around this time that he fully transferred his allegiance from Above Bar to Avenue. Apart from his membership of the building committee mentioned earlier, the first extant reference to him in the records of Avenue is from March 1905, when he was listed as a member of a committee formed to consider how to liquidate "the whole Debt on the Church". This was a legacy of the impressive Church buildings which cost more than twice the anticipated sum and proved to be an ongoing challenge for Avenue during the whole of the Edwardian era. At the time he was not a church member, but it is probable that he was a seat-holder. He is listed as such in 1906 when this information was provided for the first time in the *Church Record of Services, Finances & Membership*, which was published annually.

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65 Since the records of Above Bar were badly damaged during the Second World War it is not possible to inspect them for references to Lemon.

66 D. Hill, *Bitterne Park United Reformed Church Southampton 1899-1999, Pocket History* (Southampton: The Church, 1999), unpaginated.

67 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (11 November 1905).

Lemon formally became a member by Special Vote in 1908. As explained by Arthur Martin this procedure applied to:

> Those who have been members of other Protestant Churches, but whose membership had lapsed, or who for some other valid reason are unable to obtain any letter of transfer … [They] may be admitted by *Special Vote*, that is without a previous nomination, if the Minister and Deacons are satisfied and agreed to recommend them.[68]

It may well be that his membership of Above Bar had lapsed and there was no one at the Church who was in a position to write a letter of transfer.

Not long after he became a member, he played a leading role in seeking to resolve the difficulties associated with the pastorate of George Startup, to which reference has been made previously. He was a member of a committee set up in 1908 "to confer with the Minister and deacons with a view to consider and recommend the adoption of such measures as they may be deemed most likely to promote the highest and best interests of the Church".[69] Although the ultimate outcome was Startup's resignation, in the circumstances this appears to have been managed in a reasonably amicable manner. Since he was no stranger to controversy himself, it is interesting that Lemon was asked to make the presentation at Startup's farewell gathering in February 1909. In what he had to say, he clearly demonstrated his admiration for him:

> If … [a Nonconformist minister] were "all things to all men" – and women, he could get along peaceably enough, but if he dared to preach upon questions upon which there was some difference of opinion he might stir up hostile criticism. Mr Startup was a man who had strong convictions; he was not a mere time server, and he had the courage to say that which he honestly believed to be true ... When he was misunderstood he maintained ... a dignified silence ... In the last two sermons he showed he was not only a man of culture, but was willing to meet those who differed from him in a kindly and even generous way.[70]

Although in his own career Lemon had not been one to maintain a "dignified silence", perhaps he still saw Startup as a kindred spirit.

Another example of Lemon's allegiance and contribution to Congregationalism is evident from a report of a bazaar organised by the Middle District of the HCU in 1910 and hosted by Above Bar to raise funds for "village work". Lemon opened the second day of the bazaar and "generously handed in a cheque".[71]

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68 *Avenue Congregational Church Record for 1902*, pp. 5-6.
69 Avenue Congregational Church Meeting Minute Book.
70 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (27 February 1909).
71 *Hampshire Independent* (7 May 1910).

In the years that Lemon was a member of Avenue, he was plagued by bouts of ill health which must have restricted his participation in church activities. At his funeral service in 1923 Henry Spencer preached on the text, "David, after he had served his day and generation by the will of God fell in sleep", and made direct reference to Lemon's faith:

> … their friend had been amongst his fellows as one who served … For many years … he was connected with Above Bar Congregational Church, and later came to this church. I have seen much of him during the last ten years … I have been intimate with him in many serious illnesses, and can testify to the simplicity and earnestness of his Christian faith and his interest in all forms of Christian activity.[72]

Given that one of these interests was Bitterne Park, it is not surprising that in his will he bequeathed a property to serve as a manse and a sum of £200 for Church funds.

IV. Edward Bance (1842-1925)

A native of Southampton, Bance was born in May 1842, the youngest son of John Bance from Newbury. "In early life [he] joined the Computing and Surveying Department, Ordnance Survey" which was based in Southampton. In 1866, Bance retired from the Ordnance Office and "commenced practice … as auctioneer, valuer, surveyor and estate agent".[73] He eventually became senior partner in the firm of Bance, Hunt and Giller. His occupation in the 1901 census returns is shown as that of "estate agent" and in the 1911 census returns as "house and estate agent & valuer". These descriptions, however, do not do justice to his extensive array of interests.

For thirty-three years he served in the First Hants Volunteer Artillery, rising to the rank of colonel and playing a key role in increasing the size of the corps to 800 gunners. He was the first officer in the country to receive the Volunteer Decoration.[74] As a result, he was generally referred to as Colonel Bance.

Alongside his military interests, Bance was active in many other spheres of public and business life holding such offices as those of magistrate, Chairman of Southampton Harbour Board in 1891, 1905 and 1911; member of the Board of Guardians; President of the Chamber of Commerce 1891-92; Governor of Hartley University College and director of a number of companies, including Southampton Times Newspapers, of which he was chairman; the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway; Dixon and Cardus Ltd (seed crushers); Royal Insurance Company; and W. G. Lankester and Son Ltd (ironfounders).

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72 *Southampton Times* (19 May 1923).
73 Jacob, *Hampshire at the Opening of the Twentieth Century*, p. 209.
74 *Hampshire Advertiser* (10 July 1925).

The latter afforded a business link with the fourth member of the Avenue quartet, Harold Butler Lankester.

In the political realm, Bance was a Liberal councillor from 1874 to 1889 and then served on the aldermanic bench until 1913. He was mayor in 1890, 1904 and 1910 and in the latter two years civic services were held at Avenue, thereby symbolising the fusion of the municipal with Bance's denominational affiliation. As a Liberal member of the council he was a close political associate of Lemon. In 1895 "he declined an invitation to stand for parliament".[75]

At the time of the 1901 census he is shown as living with his wife Mary at Oakmount, Brookvale Road. They had six daughters, all of whom were members of Avenue, and in the church records were shown as living at home. Bance and his wife also had one son Arthur, who had joined the family business. In 1895 Arthur had married Gertrude Lankester, the youngest daughter of Augustus Lankester. He was a member of another branch of the Lankester family; a "warm supporter and adherent of Congregationalism";[76] and senior partner in the firm of Lankester and Crook, "The County Supply Stores". As it was put in a newspaper report of the wedding, the Bances and Lankesters were "well-known and highly respected families in the town".[77] Fittingly, Arthur and Gertrude's marriage was the first at Avenue. As reported: "There was an overflow attendance, every seat available being occupied. Crowds thronged the porch and aisles, whilst large numbers were unable to gain admission".[78] The interest shown in the wedding was a clear indication of the standing of the two families. By 1901 the couple had one daughter, Enid, aged four and were living at Haslemere, Furzedown Road. Avenue was but a short walk from both the family homes.

Bance's commitment to Congregationalism was seen in his earlier association with one of the town centre Congregational churches, Albion, in which he took "an active part",[79] as well as Avenue, of which he was a founding member, along with Augustus and William Goddard Lankester.[80] Given his standing, it is not surprising that he was one of the first three deacons to be elected in 1893 and served in this capacity until 1910, apart from a short break in 1908-9. This was a consequence of his resignation at the height of the controversy surrounding George Startup. From the surviving evidence it is not entirely clear whether he had fallen out with Startup or whether his departure from the diaconate was due to other factors. It is worth recording that none of the other deacons resigned during the Startup pastorate and at the last church meeting attended by the

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75 Alan Leonard, *The Story of Tudor House* (Southampton: Cave Publications, 1987), p. 18.
76 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (11 January 1895).
77 Ibid., (22 June 1895).
78 *Hampshire Advertiser* (19 June 1895).
79 *The Southern Reformer*, 8 (7 July 1880), p. 2.
80 Augustus and William Goddard Lankester were first cousins. Their fathers Robert (1801-1864) and William (1798-1875) respectively were the sons of Henry Blomfield Lankester (1773-1837), who moved with his family from Needham Market to Southampton at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

beleaguered minister, Bance "seconded a resolution of sympathy with Mr Startup with an expression of the church's hope that he would soon find a sphere of usefulness where he would be able to carry on the work he had done at the Avenue during the past 3 years".[81]

Bance was also church treasurer from 1893 until 1908. Moreover, he remained treasurer of the Church Building Fund until the final extinction of the debt in 1921. In view of the ongoing challenge of raising the sums involved, it was a particularly demanding post. Reference was made to this in a piece which appeared in the church magazine at the time of his death: "It would be impossible to exaggerate this church's obligation to him for his sound financial oversight, and for the example he set of generous and sacrificial giving".[82]

At Bance's funeral in 1925, Henry Spencer praised him as someone:

> who did very much more than his share of the business of the town. Who gave great intelligence, devoted zeal and unstinted labour to its development and government, who became an acknowledged leader in two of its important churches, and one who, moreover, was not absorbed in those multifarious activities to the detriment of the sanctity of home life nor the amenities of wide and deep friendship.[83]

He went on to highlight again his generosity and his regular attendance at Sunday services and in his closing words echoed St Paul: "Edward Bance, farewell: Thou has fought the good fight, hast finished the course, and kept the faith".[84]

V. Harold Butler Lankester (1872-1944)

Harold was born in 1872, the youngest son of William Goddard and Mary Malyn Lankester.[85] As mentioned previously, they were key figures in the founding of Avenue and it is William Goddard's name that appears on the foundation stone dated 4 August 1897. Harold's father was described in one source as "the inheritor of a name which . . . [had] always stood high in the estimation of the inhabitants of this town".[86] He was a consummate businessman and staunch Liberal. He died in September 1895 having been, in the words of his obituary: "The representative of a well-known and highly respected Southampton family . . . [who] had grown with the growth of the town".[87] Harold's mother hailed from Royston in Cambridgeshire, the daughter of

81 Avenue Congregational Church Meeting Minute Book.
82 *The Avenue Free Churchman*, 28/8 (August 1925), p. 2.
83 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (11 July 1925).
84 Ibid.
85 The Lankesters had six sons, although only two survived to adulthood, and one daughter.
86 *The Southern Reformer*, 4 (19 June 1880).
87 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (21 September 1895).

William Field Butler, a draper. Mary and her husband were active temperance campaigners and philanthropically minded.

From his parents and wider family, including Augustus his first cousin once removed, Harold inherited his social standing, business acumen and denominational affiliation. Indeed, he had an impeccable Congregational pedigree. For fifty-seven years he was involved with the family firm of Messrs Lankester and Sons Ltd., engineers, ironmongers and electricians of Holyrood, Southampton, which had been bought by his great grandfather in 1799. In 1938 he became chairman and managing director following the death of his elder brother Leonard.[88]

Although both of William Goddard Lankester's two surviving sons were closely connected with Avenue it was Harold who played the more active role. Early glimpses of his involvement with the church and related activities can be found in newspaper reports. For example, in April 1900 he was one of the secretaries, "on whom the larger portion of work fell", of an Avenue church bazaar with a Stonehenge theme.[89] Later in the year, he "had an interesting and extensive natural history collection on view" at the Southampton Temperance Bazaar,[90] while for Avenue's sixteenth anniversary celebrations in 1909 he arranged "the musical programme" which followed the speech-making.[91] Something of his musical ability can be gauged from a report of his contribution, as bass soloist, to a performance of Rossini's *Stabat Mater* at an Easter musical service held in 1913:

> Mr H. B. Lankester's robust voice was heard to advantage in that gem of a bass solo "Pro peccatis," which he sang in his usual refined manner, and he gave with good effect the recitative "Eja Mater" with accompanying chorus.[92]

Harold was also a joint secretary of Avenue's Lectures and Entertainments committee. Its principal task was to organise the very popular and well received annual programme of Avenue lectures. Held monthly from September to March, the lectures were intended to be generally educational, rather than specifically religious. There was an entrance fee and the committee sought to include some distinguished individuals in the programme. An idea of the standing of some of the speakers and the eclectic nature of topics covered can be gained from the programme for 1909-10:

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88 The 1901 census returns show Harold, aged 29, living at Bassett Lodge with his widowed mother, aged 71; his sister Edith, aged 36; aunt, Frances Butler, aged 72; and three servants. Harold's occupation is shown as that of 'ironmonger, shopkeeper'.

89 *Hampshire Advertiser* (28 April 1900).

90 Ibid., (8 December 1900).

91 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (27 November 1909).

92 *Hampshire Independent* (22 March 1913).

> Sir George Robertson – "The Buddhist Cave Temples of India".
> Gambier Bolton – "Queer Beasts and Birds".
> Professor Sir Hubert von Herkomer – "The Philistine in Art".
> Frank Ormiston Smith – "Tirol and the Dolomites" (the most difficult climbing in the world).
> Ernest Denny – Shakespearian and Miscellaneous Recital.
> Dr H. S. Hele-Shaw – "Aerial Navigation – Past, Present & Future".
> Professor Sir Frederick Bridge – "Milton and Music".

During the First World War Harold was closely associated with the group that assisted Henry Spencer in the Church's mission to the troops. It is clear from these indicative examples that Avenue played an indispensable part in Harold's life. For many years, however, he declined to stand for the office of deacon even though he was frequently invited to do so.

Perhaps out of respect for his late father, it is Harold Butler's name which is engraved on the foundation stone of Avenue's distinctive, purpose-built, church hall, dated 26 July 1933. This replaced the original tin church building which had served as a hall following the opening of the new church buildings in 1898 and played such an important role during the First World War.

Since he was the youngest member of the quartet it is not surprising that he was the last to die. At the time of his death in 1944 he was aged seventy-two. He had never married. His close involvement with Avenue was recorded in a newspaper obituary:

> For many years Mr Lankester was actively associated with Avenue Congregational Church of which he was appointed a deacon quite recently. He was a member of the church choir and was secretary of the Reconstruction Fund. During the last war he did very fine work for Servicemen when the old Avenue Hall . . . was used as a recreation centre. Previously he was a mainstay of the Avenue Lecture society, of which he was hon. Secretary.

Harold also had a wide range of other interests. As indicated earlier, these included music, he was one of the founders of the Southampton Competitive Musical Festival; education, he was a Governor of University College, Southampton; the welfare of sailors, he was chairman of the Southampton branch of the inter-denominational British Sailors Society for twenty-five years; and local history. Over the years he built up "the largest collection of prints and paintings of Southampton ever made".[93] He had intended the collection, which also included maps, photographs and etchings, to be on public display. However, before the arrangements could be completed, they were all destroyed in an air raid in 1940, which was clearly a great blow to the town in general and Harold in particular.

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93 *Southern Daily Echo* (21 February 1944).

VI. Shared Values?

What then linked Spencer, Lemon, Bance and Lankester in terms of shared values? One very pronounced relationship within the quartet was undoubtedly that between Bance and Lemon. They were allies in many political causes and Lemon was described as a "lifelong friend" of Bance.[94] Both were staunch Liberals and personified the tenets of political Nonconformity. As members of the borough council, they pursued some at least of the goals of the "civic gospel" as promulgated by R. W. Dale who, in the light of Romans 13, asserted that civil authority, not only national but more particularly local, was "a Divine institution".[95] They were committed to improvements in the town's infrastructure and to promoting the welfare of Sotonians. They also epitomised the values of public service, which were similarly evident in Spencer's background. Although he made clear at the start of his pastorate at Avenue that his priority would be the church and Portswood Mission, he did find time to serve on Southampton Education Committee. Thus, all three knew something of the cut and thrust of political life. For Lankester, service in the public arena was less overt but through his involvement with University College Southampton, membership of Southampton Rotary Club and charitable work he was in a position to contribute to the community at large. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the quartet were firm believers in John Stuart Mill's concept of the "active citizen … [and] of politics as a 'school of public spirit' tending to elevate the life of the community as a whole".[96]

All appear to have embraced an instrumental view of Christianity and to have accepted the claims of the Social Gospel. This can be seen in their active involvement in "good works", whether through public service or participation in voluntary initiatives, such as the provision made for troops during the First World War, to which Lankester made an invaluable contribution as one of Spencer's diligent helpers.

It also seems likely that all four were committed to the institutional principle, whereby churches provided a cradle to the grave experience to meet social, educational and recreational needs alongside those of a more spiritual nature. For example, in his capacity as deacon, Bance was a member of the Avenue Lectures and Entertainments committee and thereby shared with Lankester responsibility for the lecture series mentioned earlier. Whether or not churches should have expended time and energy on such activities is debateable. However, it seems reasonable to conjecture that all four members of the Quartet would have argued in favour of a holistic approach to Christian ministry and would

94 *Hampshire Advertiser* (25 March 1933).

95 See E. P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), esp. Chapter 6 for a full discussion of the contribution of R. W. Dale to ideas concerning municipal government in Victorian Britain.

96 H. J. Hanham, *The Reformed Electoral System in Great Britain, 1832-1914* (London: The Historical Association, 1918), p. 8.

have greatly enjoyed attending the lectures and other educational and social events organised by Avenue. In a similar manner to Congregationalists more generally, they exhibited a particular bias towards educational activities.

Another contribution made by the three laymen to the cause of Congregationalism was their close involvement with church building projects at Avenue and elsewhere. Encouraged by Henry Spencer and other ministers, some of the Congregationalists of Edwardian Southampton continued to display an entrepreneurial spirit and to exude confidence. Indeed at Avenue's anniversary celebrations, the generally accepted view seems to have been that "the best was yet to be", with some of those attending "cherishing the hope that they would have a hall and a series of class rooms worthy of the Avenue Church" in the near future.[97] As it happened, they had to wait for over twenty years before such a provision materialised.

One remaining question concerns the extent to which Christian values and principles influenced the manner in which Lemon, Bance and Lankester conducted their business affairs. Here, there is little direct evidence. There are, however, examples of Congregational businessmen from other parts of Hampshire, who sought to be model employers. It would be intriguing to know how far Lemon, Bance, and Lankester emulated, for example, William Light a deacon of Abbey Congregational Church in Romsey of whom it was said, "he always studied the interests of those who worked for him. The employment of others was for him a responsible and sacred stewardship".[98]

VII. Conclusion

In their different yet complementary ways the Avenue Quartet exemplify many of the attributes of Edwardian Congregationalism. They all possessed prodigious energy and found time to engage in a multiplicity of pursuits, both secular and religious. Indeed, it is probable that they made very little distinction between the two. Words used of Spencer at his funeral service could have been applied to all four since their "ministry and influence extended far beyond … [the] walls [of the Church]".[99] Their contributions to the well-being of others were such that they played their part in sustaining the reputation of Edwardian Congregationalists as outgoing, generous and socially aware.

ROGER OTTEWILL

97 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* (26 November 1910).
98 *Romsey Advertiser* (19 January 1934).
99 *Southampton Daily Echo* (18 June 1929).

PRESBYTERY IN NORTHUMBERLAND: FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OF DISSENT: A PAPER TO MARK THE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF ENGLAND

In a paper of this kind, it is extremely difficult to decide how best to begin: an apology, an explanation or a tribute? All three might be suitable and all three will be needed at some point. So perhaps it is best to begin with the tribute. Anybody wishing to say anything about the history of that part of the Church in England which traces its roots from, or self-defines as Presbyterian, must begin with the work of the Revd Arthur Drysdale whose *History of the Presbyterians in England*,[1] although now over 100 years old, was for many years the only serious history of that church. Drysdale's book, while covering the whole of England in part reflects his involvement with our northern churches in that the book was written while he was minister of the Presbyterian Church in Morpeth.

The explanation is that the purpose of this paper is to try and identify some of the distinctive elements of wider English Presbyterianism by looking at it in one small section of the country, albeit the most Presbyterian of the English counties. Here distinctive elements from the past which have continued to influence the church, though often unconsciously, survived and are recorded in ways not available in areas where the Presbyterian Church was less remote, less venerable and it must be said, less bloody-minded. I should also say that Northumberland is being interpreted fairly loosely. Just as for some purposes it is not unknown for the nineteenth century to have ended in 1914 rather than in 1901, so for the purposes of this paper Northumberland has to include Newcastle, but also to spread across the river Tyne into that part of the greater Tyneside conurbation found south of the river. Perhaps the geographical historian will claim that it is true of all places, but Northumberland has, I believe, of all English counties suffered the greatest changes in its boundaries. In Berwick it has gained a bit of Scotland, in Bedlington and Norhamshire bits of County Durham while in the south it has lost bits to Newcastle and to Durham.

And the apology is that I am not a historian and this paper does not pretend to meet the rigorous standards set by proper academic historians. There will be no references to probate registers, tax rolls or many of the hard evidentiary documents so beloved of the modern academic historian, although there may be some lists of churches. Nor will it meet the somewhat idealistic criteria laid down by several ecclesiastical historians who argue that we cannot gain any true insight into the doings of our ancestors and the divisions of today until we are able to produce a clear, unbiased denominationally, neutral account. It is not unknown for such high aspirations to be followed by a highly tendentious and

1 Arthur H. Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England: Their Rise, Decline and Revival* (London: Presbyterian Church of England Publications Committee, 1889).

biased account of a particular event or incident.

I might also add, perhaps unwisely in the company of members of the United Reformed Church History Society, that one of the problems of history is that all historians are liars – from the days of Tacitus, who managed to present the battle of Mons Graupius as a great Roman victory rather than a fairly definite defeat, and succeeded because all who might contradict him were either dead or a long way away, through to the present day whose historians have had to edit and select from incomplete and often contradictory accounts. Most irritating of all are those accounts that refer to events but never explain them. In dealing with the history of our church in this part of the world I have from time to time come across references to difficulties or disputes that are then never explained further. In several places I have found reference to the "troubles that afflicted the Northumberland Presbytery in the 1830s" but nowhere is this expanded upon. It is in situations like this that historians have to use their judgement as to the truth behind conflicting stories and there bias, prejudice and other factors come in to play. The result of this can be a false account. For years I would explain my belief that historians are economical with the truth by presenting the story of the Disruption in London where two contemporary accounts of the meeting of the Scots Presbytery of London at which the Disruption took effect agree only that there was a tussle over the Minute Book where only its solid brass bindings prevented it from being torn in two.[2] I have held that very book in my hands and sturdy though it is, it is not now and never was brass bound. However, as we are gathered here in the North-East, I can offer a more local example. The infamous Judge Jeffreys was sent to Newcastle to try twenty young men who had been charged with breaching the Act of Uniformity and the Conventicle Acts. According to R. S. Robson, all twenty were imprisoned after an exchange where Jeffreys had asked one of the young men to prove that he could read by having him handed a Latin Testament, the which the young man opened at random and read Matthew 7:1-2, "*Ne judicate, ne judicemini*". Seeking to intimidate the young man, Jeffreys demanded that he "construe" to which he responded "judge not lest ye be judged, for with what judgement ye judge ye shall be judged".[3] According to Charleton's *Newcastle Town*, in telling the same story, the father of one of the young men had arranged to wine and dine Jeffreys the night before the trial, with a particular emphasis on the wine, so that when Jeffreys came upon his name on the list, he said that he would not believe him to be a lying rogue of a Presbyterian and discharged him.[4]

In discussing the Presbyterians of the North it is advisable to tread carefully around the question of who are the Presbyterians? At different times and in

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2 T. Brown, *Annals of the Disruption: with extracts from the narratives of ministers who left the Scottish establishment in 1843* (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1893), p. 529 gives an account by James C. Burns, in which he writes, "Its brazen clasps saved it".

3 R. S. Robson*, Presbytery in Newcastle-on-Tyne, from the Reformation till the Revolution* (Manchester: R. Aikman and Sons, 1939), pp. 14-15.

4 R. J. Charleton, *Newcastle Town: An Account of its Rise and Progress* (London: W. Scott, 1885).

different places it was possible to find Old English Presbyterians, Church of Scotland. Pre-Breach Secession Congregations, post Breach Secession Congregations, both Burgher and Anti-Burgher, Relief, United Presbyterian, United Free, United Free Continuing and even Unitarian Congregations all of which can or could lay claim to being Presbyterians. Additionally there are a number of former Congregational Churches, now part of the United Reformed Church (URC), which at some time in their history were Presbyterian.

A quarter of a century or so ago when I was Minister in Berwick upon Tweed, I ran into Robin Gill, now a Reverend Professor, but then Vicar of Etal, who told me that he had been working on the pre-twentieth century Returns from the parishes of Northumberland to the Bishop, and that he had been struck by the frequency of references to, and indeed complaints about, these dreadful Presbyterians. Were there any equivalent Presbyterian documents, did they have corresponding complaints about Anglicans and how could he get hold of them? I told him that the nearest equivalent would be the Presbytery Minutes, that as far as I could remember they also had lots of complaints about Presbyterians – i.e., other Presbyterians – but never mentioned anything to do with the Church of England. However, he was welcome to check for himself as the Berwick Presbytery Minutes at that point resided in the dining room of my Manse. (I should add they now reside in the Northumberland Country Record Office, Berwick Annex).

In stating this I subsequently discovered, arguably, that I was in error, depending on whether or not John Wesley is to be considered an Anglican. On 23 May 1788, Wesley's journals tell us he visited Berwick, for the last time, and the Town Hall not being available, he writes, "Mr Atcheson [*sic*] offered me the use of his Chapel".[5] From other sources we discover that the weather was inclement and Berwick Low Meeting, the largest of the Presbyterian Churches in the town stood only yards from the Town Hall. This generous action by the minister taking pity on a revered and venerable visitor, appears in the Presbytery Minutes, but in a form that would not necessarily be recognised immediately as referring to the same event. The Presbytery Minute simply recorded that "Mr Aitchinson was reprimanded for allowing his pulpit to be occupied by an unlicensed preacher".[6]

Anyhow, from all of this Dr Gill gathered sufficient materials to begin the thinking that led eventually to *The Myth of the Empty Church*,[7] although I never felt that he fully understood the significance of the distinctions to be drawn between the different branches of Presbyterianism in the various towns and villages. Dr Gill's constant question was "why in a place like Wooler should there be three Presbyterian Churches with a combined seating well in excess of the total population?" and I could never make him see that when these churches were built they represented not a wild overestimation of the population and its

5 N. Curnock (ed.), *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, AM* , Vol. VII (London: Charles H Kelly, 1909), p. 391.

6 North Northumberland Class Minute Book, Berwick upon Tweed Record Office, BUR/P/11/1.

7 (London: SPCK, 1993).

growth, but rather competition between three different Presbyterian denominations. It was not that our ancestors hoped to see all three full to overflowing, but that each wanted to see one of the three full and the other two standing empty. Sadly we live in a world where in some of the communities once possessed of two, three or even more Presbyterian Churches there is no longer a dissenting presence of any kind. Yet even in 1970, Northumberland held the whole of two English Presbyterian Presbyteries, Berwick and Northumberland, a considerable part of a third, Newcastle, and a tiny fraction of a fourth, Carlisle. Additionally it held five congregations of the Church of Scotland, four in the Presbytery of England and one in the Presbytery of Duns. But that is by way of being "the end of an auld story".

It makes more sense to begin at the beginning. In this context the beginning must be 1547 when one John Rough was appointed by Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset and the nine-year-old Edward VI's Lord Protector, as preacher in Carlisle, Berwick and Newcastle. His stay in the North was not long as he moved first to Hull and then briefly became one of the Marian Exiles in the Netherlands before returning to martyrdom in London. For our purposes the fact that Rough had married a Newcastle girl is perhaps the more significant. In addition, both in St Andrews where he was Chaplain to the Garrison and in Newcastle where he was preacher, he served, in our terms as "Interim Moderator" facilitating the call, in St Andrews, and appointment, in Newcastle, of one John Knox. Technically Knox remained as Preacher in St Nicholas from 1550 to 1554, although part of that time saw him in London as Chaplain to the King. Edward's death and the accession of Mary Tudor led to an interruption, as far as we can tell, of Presbyterian ministry in the town, as the next clearly identified Presbyterian minister was John Macbray who was appointed to St Nicholas's in 1568. During the occupation of Newcastle by the Scots army from 1640 onwards Newcastle was most definitely a Presbyterian town, with most of the great names of the Scots Kirk preaching in its five pulpits. One might take leave to doubt the veracity of the story that it was while in prison in Newcastle that King Charles was sorely tried by a preacher, who sought to close a service by calling the congregation to sing the Old Version Psalm 52 "Why dost thou, tyrant, boast thyself, Thy wicked works to praise?" (verse 1). Charles rose from his place and called instead for Psalm 56, "Have mercy, Lord, on me I pray, when men would me devour" (verse 1). I note that it is found in several versions each with a different geographical location, ranging from Newcastle through Oxford to the Isle of Wight, and, with different protagonists, Boston Massachusetts.[8] Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly the case that it was during the imprisonment of Charles in Newcastle that one of the town's most eminent lay Presbyterians first came to prominence. Ambrose Barnes, later Mayor and Alderman was one of the tellers who counted the money paid for the king by the Parliamentary forces.

8 Robson, *Presbytery in Newcastle-on-Tyne,* p. 12; C. V. Wedgwood, *The King's War* (London: Collins Fontana, 1966), p. 657 cites Newcastle.

Under the Commonwealth, Newcastle and Northumberland were heavily Presbyterian and one William Morton, who was Vicar of St Nicholas's, was a member of the Westminster Assembly. At the Ejectment in 1662 from Berwick on the North Bank of the Tweed through Cornhill, a parish from which it is possible to travel south into Scotland, down to Newcastle and along the Tyne, ministers were ejected in huge numbers. In Berwick, Luke Ogle lost the Parish Church, despite various pleas from the Town Council who offered to provide a church and stipend, if he might be permitted to remain. However this permission being refused Ogle transferred to the Grammar School from whence he was eventually removed by the combined pressure of the Governor and the Privy Council. Even then Presbyterianism remained active in the town. Several ministers are recorded as preaching in the town and teaching in the school with the active support of the Town Council. Twice the Privy Council instructed the Freemen to remove the Presbyterians from the school. On the first occasion the Freemen said that they could do nothing as the minister was the only man available to teach their sons Latin. On the second occasion when presented with the names of three Presbyterian ministers supposedly preaching in the town they said that two, one of whom was Ogle, had been preaching in the town but had now left and with regard to the third, they denied all knowledge of the man – an unlikely story as the minister in question was the son of one of the Freemen. In Cornhill, ten miles or so higher up the river, the ejected minister was one Henry Erskine the father of the rather more famous Ebenezer and Ralph, founders of the Secession Church and a direct ancestor of a recent Moderator of our own General Assembly. Of the four Parish Churches in Newcastle, only the minister of All Saints, one Richard Prideaux, conformed and a high proportion of his congregation did not.

Although only one of the ejected ministers of Newcastle stayed in the town, several of those ejected from parishes elsewhere in the county removed to Newcastle and there was a lively if somewhat disorganised group of Presbyterian and Independent Meetings across the city. Records tell of attempts made to enforce the Act of Uniformity being somewhat lackadaisical unless the council was coerced by outside forces. This may be partly explained by the record of the raids in July 1669 on the two largest conventicles in the town, carried out at the insistence of the Bishop of Durham. The Independent Meeting under William Durant was in Pilgrim Street and the Presbyterian Meeting under Richard Gilpin in White Friars. The sergeant charged with dispersing the meetings and taking the names of those present recorded the presence of five former sheriffs, four ex-mayors, eight town councillors, the town physician, the town surveyor and thirty wealthy merchants. Outside the major boroughs most of the county families maintained private chapels and engaged Presbyterian chaplains to serve them. One of these the Ogles of Kirkley continued so to do even when the head of the family was serving as Dean of Winchester. Keeping a foot in both camps was not restricted to the Ogles. The Duke of Northumberland in 1875 built and worshipped in the Presbyterian Church in Kielder near his Kielder hunting lodge, while at much the same time building an Anglican Church in Alnwick and

a Catholic Apostolic (Irvingite) Church in his southern estate in Albury.[9]

But during the time of persecution and into the period of Toleration that followed the Royal Indulgence of 1672, Northumbrian and Novocastrian Presbyterians were clearly English Presbyterians. Presbytery membership seems to have been somewhat fluid with ministers and congregations floating between several such bodies, but they clearly saw themselves as one church. The number of Presbyterian congregations at this time is uncertain. The Presbytery lists, such as they are, rarely record the same churches in every list and some churches seem to have managed to appear simultaneously on the roll of more than one Presbytery.

Three things occurred to change this. First, the union of the Parliaments occurred in 1707 leading to a large influx of Scots into England. Secondly, in 1718, the Salters Hall Controversy and its aftermath saw the drift of many English Presbyterian congregations into Unitarianism. While the North remained orthodox – only two Presbyterian congregations north of the Tyne, North Shields and Newcastle Close Gate, became Unitarian – the supply of orthodox Presbyterian ministers was greatly reduced and recourse was made to Scotland to supply the need. And thirdly, in 1733 there occurred the first of the great splits in the Church of Scotland. The creation of the Associate Synod was to have far-reaching consequences for English and particularly for Northumbrian Presbyterianism. Of the two Unitarian congregations, the Close Gate Meeting survives as the Church of the Divine Unity in Ellison Place, Newcastle, while the North Shields Meeting ceased to exist in 1811 and it is recorded that Charles Thomson, who was the minister of Howard Street Presbyterian Church (which had been founded by that part of the Old North Shields Meeting which remained orthodox) would visit its last minister in the Tynemouth Workhouse.[10] The orthodox remnant of the Close Gate Meeting left and became Trinity Presbyterian Church and, at the Disruption in 1843, that congregation also split with one part forming the nucleus of what is now St Andrew's Church of Scotland.

With regard to the older English congregations, gradually the Classes became Presbyteries. The Classis of North Northumberland became the Presbytery of Berwick, the Classis of Newcastle that of Newcastle, the Classis of Morpeth, the Presbytery of Northumberland, and there was also formed the Presbytery of North West Northumberland. All of these had overlapping memberships and congregations will appear in one year as being in one Presbytery and then a year or so later in a different Presbytery. The one constant feature was that until finally resolved by act of Synod after the union of 1876, the congregation in Spittal, a suburb of the walled town of Berwick upon Tweed, (founded in 1745 as a result of the then governor being so frightened of the Jacobite Rebellion, that he kept the town gates shut from sunset on Saturday to dawn on Monday), refused ever to be in the same Presbytery as the Low Meeting congregation from

9 Robson, *Presbytery in Newcastle-on-Tyne*, *passim*.

10 E.S. Wood, "Biographical sketch of the Rev. Charles Thomson (1794-1871)", manuscript account, p. 15, n.d., in the *Fasti* file for Charles Thomson, held by the URC History Society.

which it had sprung. The strangest of these Presbyteries, at least in terms of geography was the Presbytery of North West Northumberland if only because, the shape of Northumberland is such that it does not have a North-West. However, old English Presbyterians gradually adopted Scottish practices and amended their trust deeds to require their ministers to have received ordination from the Church of Scotland. This took time and was not easily argued. The earliest surviving minute of the Presbytery of Berwick, records strong objection to the practice of Scots Presbyteries ordaining ministers to serve in English congregations, but gradually new congregations were founded in connection with the Church of Scotland and older English congregations amended their Trust Deeds and Constitutions to require not merely adherence to the Westminster Confession, as had previously been the case, but adherence to the Confession of Faith of the Church of Scotland, its laws and constitution. Not every congregation did this, and some that did came to regret it. The Revd Israel Craig of Lowick[11] was inducted into his pastorate by the Classis of North Northumberland and during his ministry a new church was built under Trust Deeds requiring the minister to be of the Church of Scotland. He died in 1843 and was buried by the Presbyterian Church in England, Presbytery of Berwick. The next time the Presbytery attempted to meet in the church it was denied access and that building remains with the Church of Scotland to this day. The English Presbyterians however kept the school, and in consequence Lowick was one of several villages with something of a superfluity of churches, having until fairly recently, two Presbyterian churches, one Anglican, one Roman Catholic and one Methodist. And the congregation of Bankhill Church in Berwick had the dubious distinction of having been ejected twice, once in 1662 when they were driven from the Parish Church by officers of the reconstituted Church of England and again in 1843 when they were ejected from the Low Meeting House by the Church of Scotland.[12]

But before we come to the Disruption, we must first address the Secession and the Breach. In 1733, the Erskine brothers left the Church of Scotland to found the Secession Church, or to use its proper name, the Associate Presbytery. In 1747 the Associate Synod split over the Burgess Oath, and became the Burghers and the Anti-Burghers, or again more properly, the Associate Synod and the General Associate Synod. Jesmond United Reformed Church in Newcastle, founded 1744, has the distinction of being the only English congregation from what was eventually to become the United Presbyterian Church to have been founded before the Breach. There was a second congregation also in Newcastle which, though originally English Presbyterian, had in 1743 ordained and inducted a Church of Scotland minister, Thomas Somerville, but in 1744 he broke connexion with the Church of Scotland to join the Associate Presbytery. In 1747 that congregation joined the Anti-Burgher

11 *Fasti* file for Israel Craig, held by the URC History Society, gives the background.

12 K. G. White, *Bankhill Church, Berwick-upon-Tweed 1835-1960* (Berwick-on-Tweed, Tweedale Press Ltd, 1960), pp. 5, 7-10.

Synod, and in 1750 transferred to the Burgher Synod, and perhaps to nobody's great surprise, in 1753 Mr Somerville was cited before the Synod to answer accusations levied by his elders. He refused to respond and was removed from the roll. The congregation was eventually to split and from that split Newcastle's first Relief Congregation was to be founded. The original congregation, based initially in the Sallyport, was to move from there to Carliol Street, adjacent to the prison where an earlier generation of Presbyterians had been detained. It moved again to a site on Barras Bridge now occupied by the Newcastle Playhouse and it was in that congregation that the late Arthur Macarthur grew up. The Relief Congregation, previously mentioned did not survive for very long but it was responsible for the building of a chapel, which although demolished with the coming of the railway, figures extensively in the history of Newcastle Nonconformity. The Postern chapel was, of all the Nonconformist chapels of Newcastle, the most uncomfortable and inconvenient. Several congregations both Presbyterian and Congregational occupied it, in each case only until they could find the money to build, buy or rent somewhere better. The final occupant was a Congregational church which left there to unite with the congregation of St James's in its new buildings in Blackett Street and which was sufficiently large to tilt the balance in that congregation so that it ceased to be a part of the Presbytery of Newcastle and became a Congregational church. This was despite the fact that it had been in St James's that the first abortive attempt to create an English Presbyterian Synod had been held.

The period between 1748 and 1876 – at which point the United Presbyterian congregations in England, with one exception, became part of the Presbyterian Church of England – was a period of considerable growth and expansion. Assisted greatly by the fact that from the very beginning the Secession and Relief Congregations were part of a national organisation while the English congregations were only in membership of frequently loosely organised Presbyteries, the Secession Movement made great strides in the North. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the term English Presbyterian had become virtually synonymous with Unitarian thought, with the result that orthodox Presbyterians, once proud of their English heritage, were mostly describing themselves as Scots. Attempts were made to revitalise the old Classes under the new name of Presbyteries, and for the first time, in the case of some of the Presbyteries they began to contain both ministers and elders. While the Newcastle Classis had admitted Elders to its membership in 1783, it was not until 1820 that the Northumberland and North West Northumberland Presbyteries followed this example and in most cases it is from this point that the term Presbytery replaces Classis, Newcastle being the exception. It is generally a reasonable assumption that Newcastle, whether Classis or Presbytery, will either have been the first to do something, or the last. Change was either pioneered or strenuously resisted. For example, Newcastle Presbytery was the last to adopt the practice of electing its Moderator annually. In terms of activity Newcastle appears to have been diligent, meeting several times a year and engaging in correspondence on a variety of subjects. In contrast, the Presbytery of North West Northumberland is

recorded as having met on 8 August 1826 and then not again until 14 December 1835. The Berwick Presbytery during that period appears to have met at least once a year and more often as needed, but there are years when the only business recorded is the arranging of an annual dinner.

Nevertheless attempts were made to bring the various English Presbyteries together. In September 1826 a meeting was held in Newcastle attended by representatives of several of the Northern Presbyteries and a Synod was formed. This body struggled to obtain recognition and support even within the Presbyteries represented at that meeting and in July 1831 it was wound up. However, 1836 saw a second and more successful attempt at union, with the Presbyteries of Lancashire and North West England formally constituting a Synod which would be joined in 1839 by the Newcastle and London Presbyteries, in 1840 by the Berwick Presbytery and in 1842 by the Presbyteries of Northumberland and North West Northumberland.

What was to become the United Presbyterian Presbytery of Newcastle was inaugurated in 1820 when the United Secession Church came into being and created two wholly English Presbyteries, Newcastle and London. Subsequent unions which created the United Presbyterian Church led to the creation of Presbyteries of Carlisle, Lancashire and Berwick, only the last of which need concern us, but in 1863 the United Presbyterian Church formed its English Synod. From 1876 fifteen English Presbyterian congregations and twelve former United Presbyterian congregations made up the Presbytery of Northumberland.[13] Discrepancies exist. David Cornick in his account of the Presbyterian Union[14] gives the United Presbyterian Church as possessing 104 Congregations in England. William McKelvie in his United Presbyterian *Annals*,[15] lists 97. English Presbyterians at that time had 153 (Cornick) although ten years earlier the official tally was 106, one third of which lay within our area of concern. The United Presbyterians had about 50 Congregations in the same area. Of those, most represented that wing of the Secession Church which is known as the Anti-Burgher Church with a sizeable contingent from the Burgher Church and only a very small number from the Relief Church. Lisburn Street, Alnwick; Chapel Street, Berwick; Cheviot Street, Wooler, and a handful of fairly short lived congregations in and around Newcastle seem to have been the totality of its presence, although there was for a short time a second Relief Congregation in Berwick. In 1835 the Relief Congregation meeting in Chapel Street split over the call of a minister and the Second Relief Congregation was founded. Taking the name of Bankhill, they built the church which was subsequently to be sold in 1853 to the English Presbyterian Congregation which had left the Low

13 *Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of England*, Vol. I, 1876-1879 (London: Presbyterian Church of England), p.19.

14 David Cornick, *Under God's Good Hand* (London: United Reformed Church, 1998), p.130, p.128.

15 William MacKelvie, *Annals and Statistics of the United Presbyterian Church… Issued under the superintendence of a Committee of the United Presbyterian Synod* (Edinburgh, 1873).

Meeting in 1843. Documentary evidence is in short supply as to the relationship between the two congregations, even MacKelvie's United Presbyterian *Annals* which often reports old scandals and tittle tattle, is silent, but local sources would suggest that they were not particularly good, as they record a case before the Relief Presbytery where an Elder in the Second Congregation was compelled to respond to a charge that he had called an elder in the First Congregation a "black hearted loon". The case was remembered because he offered a defence in two parts, the first being that he had not said it, and the second that it was true.

Mention has been made already of the Disruption and to some of its effects. The churches of Northumberland were hit hard by the events of 1843. Brown's *Annals of the Disruption* contains a fairly flowery description of the visit of the Irish Deputies to the 1843 Assembly in Edinburgh. Arriving late, they found not one Assembly meeting but two and, having decided that the true Church of Scotland was that meeting in the Free Assembly, they presented their credentials to that body, where they were received with acclaim. To quote Professor Killen, the head of the deputation: "It is true you have not the representative of earthly royalty among you. We do not hear your meetings announced by the sound of martial music, or the tramp of soldiery; but what we see is the distinct recognition of Christ as King and Head of His Church".[16]

The English Deputies under the Revd Alexander Murdoch of Berwick had no such flowery phrases to quote for they had received their instructions that, should the Disruption occur, they were to come home. However, the Synod of the Presbyterian Church in England in connexion with the Church of Scotland, clearly sympathised with the Free Church. Meeting in Berwick in 1844 it resolved to drop the phrase "in connection with the Church of Scotland" from its title, and to associate itself henceforth with the Free Church as a sister Church. The consequences were considerable. Across the country churches and Presbyteries split. Sometimes the split was fairly amicable. Trinity Church in Newcastle seems to have divided roughly fifty-fifty and while the English Presbyterian congregation retained the building, the communion vessels were shared equally between them and the departing Church of Scotland congregation. But this was not always so happy a split. In Berwick the Low Meeting congregation, together with its minister, lost its building and worshipped in a public house until it acquired the Bankhill Church from the Relief Congregation. In Lowick the attempt by the English Presbytery to induct a minister was met by violence. In Belford, Tweedmouth, and elsewhere across the county churches divided. Ministers and congregations left buildings. Ministers sympathetic to the Church of Scotland sought pastorates among the hundreds of vacant charges left north of the border. In 1843 there were seventy-two ministers in pastoral charge in the English Synod, thirty-six moved north to parishes made vacant by disruption and two to new Free Church Congregations. The Presbytery of Newcastle was reduced to two ministers, John Paterson in Sunderland and Charles Toshach in South Shields, and Dr Toshach was at that

16 T. Brown, *Annals*, p. 544.

point aged ninety-two. Berwick fared better. The Berwick ministers sided solidly with the Disruption, with one exception: the minister of the Berwick High Meeting was in process of being tried by the Presbytery accused of being "Drunk both in and out of the pulpit", and he alone, understandably, refused to accede to the decision to abandon the connexion with the Church of Scotland. Slowly the many vacancies in England began to fill with far more English and Irish ministers than had been the case before. Here a distinctively English voice, never wholly lost in the church of the North, began to be heard across the whole of English Presbyterianism. In 1850 Dr Burns, one time minister of London Wall Church, but in Liverpool at the time of the Synod, on his return from America, was given the chance to speak, and commented that the voices heard were "not so Scotch as when I was one of you."[17] His brother was of course, William Chalmers Burns, appointed by the Synod meeting in Sunderland in 1847 to be the first missionary of the new church.

It was more than a generation later that the North was to provide another first in the world of Missions when at the end of the nineteenth century a Miss Maclagan and a Miss Macarthur were commissioned among the first women missionaries of the Presbyterian Church of England. Both of these redoubtable ladies came from families whose names crop up more than once in the history of the Church. Miss Macarthur's brother was the father of the Revd Arthur Macarthur, Moderator, Clerk and General Secretary of the URC, and Miss Maclagan's family included several Presbyterian Ministers and Elders both north and south of the border, as well as an Archbishop of York.

Disruption moves were of course not all in one direction. Ministers came south as well. The church in Morpeth had the distinction of calling the first post-Disruption minister from north of the border. In 1843 James Anderson was called from St Fergus in Aberdeenshire to the Presbyterian Church in Morpeth, which had become vacant as a result of the move of the Revd Matthew Brown to be minister in Kinkardine O'Neil, a Church of Scotland church rendered vacant by the Disruption. James Anderson was clearly a man of considerable energy. He built the Presbyterian School in Morpeth and the new church, he chaired the Board of Guardians of the Workhouse and was a member of the committee which brought into being the English Presbyterian College in London. In 1847 he served as Moderator of the English Synod and in 1876 he was the first Moderator of the Synod of the newly created Presbyterian Church of England. Drysdale's history of English Presbyterianism describes his part in that meeting in the following terms: "After the union had been thus formally consummated, the Synod was constituted in the usual manner by the Venerable and Reverend Dr James Anderson, of Morpeth, its newly elected first Moderator who proceeded to deliver an eloquent and memorable Address".[18] What

17 *English Presbyterian Messenger*, Vol. II, New Series, 1849-50 (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., James Nisbet & Co.), p. 342.

18 Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England*, p. 626.

Drysdale does not mention in his fulsome tribute is that not only was Dr Anderson his predecessor in Morpeth, but he was also his father-in-law.

What difference would it have made to the average church-goer which form of Presbyterianism was represented by the church he or she attended on Sunday? For most of the time, not a lot. Although old English, new Scots and churches of the Secession had liturgical differences they were not great, particularly in the rather conservative congregations of Northumberland. Sometimes the objections to innovation were theological and sometimes they were financial. The introduction of hymnody is a case in point. It was in 1857 that the first official English Presbyterian hymn book was introduced. The Relief Church had produced its first hymn book in 1794 and the United Presbyterians had authorised the use of hymnody in 1812, although no official hymn book was produced until forty years later. Despite this, most of Northumberland remained wedded to Psalmody until well after the 1876 union. Horatius Bonar, the author of over 100 hymns while Free Church minister in Kelso was a regular visitor to the Presbyterian Church in England congregation in Horncliffe, just on the English side of the border. When I was their Interim Moderator I would sometimes say to them, as we sang one of the many Bonar hymns in the old *Revised Church Hymnary*, "You may well have sung this under Bonar himself". However, I subsequently discovered that the Revd Peter Valance, then minister of Horncliffe, the baptism of whose latest child was the usual reason for Bonar's visit, was an adherent of exclusive Psalmody.

Equally the introduction of organs was slow to make any impact in the North. United Presbyterian Churches were in this matter more liberal than Presbyterian Church in England Congregations. The Presbyterian Church in England Presbytery of Newcastle as late as 1876 passed a resolution forbidding the use of organs, but poverty rather than piety prevented many congregations of either wing from adopting instrumental music, in some cases until after the First World War. When eventually organs were introduced, this generally occurred with little or no fuss. The only reference in the records of the village church in Embleton to the introduction of an organ occurs in the treasurer's book where the entry for one quarter records a payment to the "Leader of Praise" and in the next the same sum as paid to the organist. St Columba's in North Shields and Jesmond, both large churches representative of the United Presbyterian tradition, were originally devoid of an organ and indeed, when first proposed, St Columba's refused to allow instrumental music. As to the mode of worship, sitting to sing and standing to pray was, until well into the nineteenth century, universal. The big difference that would be noted in churches of the different Presbyterian traditions was Communion. The old English practice was for the congregation to remain in the pew and for the Elders to distribute the elements from a Communion Table, the pattern we know today. The Scottish practice, which we know was followed in some places, both United Presbyterian and Scots, was the long table. Only after 1843 did the English practice cross the border and, under the influence of the Free Church which encouraged this mode, reach the Church of Scotland, and back south to those English congregations which saw

themselves as primarily Scots. Ironically, if you want to meet long table communion today it is to the remnant Free Church that you must look.

A far greater difference would be found not in worship but in governance. As already mentioned, elders were admitted to the classical Presbyteries in slow stages but eventually uniformity reigned there. How the congregation was governed was a different matter. In 1880, The Presbyterian Synod received an overture from the Presbytery of Newcastle concerning the government of the local congregation in which it expressed unhappiness in the fact that there were two different modes of governance in congregations and proposed to solve this problem by offering a third model. As was customary at that time, the Newcastle overture was somewhat lengthy, but the opening sentence to the supporting argument is worth noting: "It is surely undesirable to have two distinct systems of Management perpetuated in Congregations under the jurisdiction of the Synod, without any provision being made for leading the Congregations to act in harmony in deference to this matter if they felt so inclined".[19] The Presbytery position was if anything disingenuous as there were more than two systems in place even in 1880, which may explain why, when the question was sent down for consideration, six Presbyteries responded, three (Birmingham, Carlisle and Newcastle) were in favour and three (London, Manchester and Northumberland) against. That proposal was abandoned but further attempts were made in 1888 and 1893, by which time it was recognised that there were some five different systems. A few congregations still had Elders and Trustees, a system inherited from the English Presbyterians prior to the repeal of the Test Acts. Some had Deacons' Courts, consisting of Elders and Deacons, a system inherited from the Free Church and from the Presbyterian Church in England. In some congregations the Deacons were elected for life and were ordained. In others they were elected for fixed periods and were commissioned. In some congregations there were Congregational Boards consisting of Elders and Managers, the Managers being elected for three years, and in others there was a Board of Managers entirely elected from the congregation. This complexity continued until the URC came into being, the Church having accepted that while no congregation would be required to adopt a new system of government, new foundations had to use the current system and any congregation changing to the latest system could not then revert. In the early years there was a carrot attached to attempts to persuade congregations to adopt the model constitution, in that grants from the central church were dependent on accepting the said model constitution. For this reason it was mainly in the North that elements of governance dating from before the repeal of the penal laws survived. They did not need the grants and they did not trust change.

The old Coat of Arms of the Presbyterian Church of England reflects the different elements that came together to form the Presbyterian Church of England. The Burning Bush from the Church of Scotland, both Established and Free; the

19 *Minutes of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of England*, Vol. II, 1880-1882 (London: Presbyterian Church of England), pp. 282-84.

Laurel wreath, a symbol used during the Commonwealth on Presbyterian Ordination Certificates; and the Dove, a symbol used by the United Presbyterian Church but also intended as a mark of the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing together this disparate group of Presbyterians. From this complex grouping of different types of Presbyterian came at least some of the distinguishing marks of the Presbyterian Church of England and I think of the United Reformed Church: a respect for, but not necessarily obedience to, duly appointed Authority; a willingness to try new ideas but only after careful persuasion; a Church capable of being radical and conservative simultaneously. These are strong characteristics of Northern Presbyterianism which communicated themselves to the wider Presbyterianism of England and into the URC.

And lastly, a complete picture requires a mention of the ones that got away. In 1827 the Presbytery of Newcastle expelled the Spring Gardens Church which had refused to repudiate Unitarian ideas. In the 1830s and 1840s the ten years' conflict and the Disruption emptied pulpits across England. Congregations in Newcastle, Amble and Rothbury called Congregational ministers and became Congregational. In 1876 the United Presbyterian Congregation in Chapel Street, Berwick, remained with the United Presbyterian Church when every other congregation in the English Synod became part of the Presbyterian Church of England. Chapel Street survived long enough to become a congregation of the United Free Church, finally closing in 1918 when most of the members crossed the road to join Church Street Presbyterian Church of England, under the new name of St Aidan's. In the 1930s the congregation of Bridge Street, Blyth, one of two congregations in the town, seceded from the Presbyterian Church of England and joined the United Free Church Continuing. That Congregation eventually closed and the members joined the Waterloo Road Church.

Then finally and most painfully there was Wallace Green. The congregation of Wallace Green, at least in the person of its minister, was deeply and vocally opposed to the creation of the United Reformed Church. A fairly protracted series of arguments and meetings took place between the congregation and representatives of the Presbyterian Church of England and the Church of Scotland ending just before the Union with the secession of Wallace Green to the Church of Scotland. This was not an easy parting and the correspondence between the two Presbytery Clerks reflects this. The initial round begins "Dear Frank" and "Dear Peter" and contains commiserations about two country ministers having to dig through the snow to reach their respective post boxes. The final round in each case begins, "Reverend Sir, I am instructed".[20] The late Stanley Ross, who later ministered in one of the other Berwick Churches and who was not generally inclined to take secessions lightly or indeed anything else that cost the church money, once commented, "It was worth losing Wallace Green to have heard J. M. Ross tell the Church of Scotland exactly what he thought of it!" I do not know what he said, but a copy of the first draft of the

20 Correspondence file re: Wallace Green Church, Berwick, Berwick upon Tweed Record Office, BUR/P/11/16.

resolution of the Assembly Commission complete with deletions and waterings down in Arthur Macarthur's handwriting survives in the Archive of the Presbytery of Berwick.[21] Stanley Ross, Convenor of the URC Assembly Business Committee and first Clerk of the Northern Synod, also took a slightly malicious delight in the fact that in receiving Wallace Green the Church of Scotland broke one of its own rules in placing it in the Presbytery of Duns, while retaining St Andrew's, Berwick, the union of the former High and Low Meetings, in the Presbytery of England.

And with that sad episode we come almost to the end of the story of Northumbrian Presbyterianism. It remains only to say that the Resolution to create the United Reformed Church was passed, after a long debate at a meeting of the General Assembly held in Newcastle. In 1826 Presbyterians had met in Newcastle in the first attempt to create a united church in England; in 1844 they met in Berwick to declare themselves English; and it was again in Newcastle that they voted to create a united church that brought them together with Congregationalists. Perhaps considered by some to be the end of a long story, it may be better understood as the end of one chapter in a long, long story. Here you meet firsts and lasts, names that echo through the history of our church from John Rough and John Knox to men and women of the present day. Indeed we might without undue pride sum up the history of Presbyterianism in this part of the country by using the oldest Presbyterian motto "*Nec Tamen Consumebatur*".[22]

JAMES BRESLIN

21 Ibid.

22 The motto of the Church of Scotland: "Yet it was not consumed", *cf.* Exodus 3:2.

REVIEWS

***Bedford's Victorian Pilgrim: William Hale White in Context*. By Michael Brealey. Studies in Christian History and Thought. Paternoster: Milton Keynes, 2012. Pp. 429. £25.00. ISBN 978-1-84227-734-8.**

As a librarian at Bedford Central Library in the late 1970s I came across two battered suitcases containing material on William Hale White (Mark Rutherford). These letters, newspaper cuttings, books and pamphlets became the basis of the Mark Rutherford Collection which I built up in subsequent years, developing an enthusiasm for the author which has grown over the decades.

William Hale White was born in Bedford High Street above his father's bookshop in 1831 and died in Groombridge, Kent, in 1913. Under the pseudonym Mark Rutherford he wrote six novels. The first two, appearing in 1881 and 1885, were based on his life and show his spiritual development. None of the novels use his real name and all are edited by "Reuben Shapcott" who supposedly found them in a drawer and decided to publish them. Rutherford himself dies at the end of the second volume, but four more unpublished novels turn up. In reality these were written between 1887 and 1896.

Michael Brealey has produced the most comprehensive study of William Hale White to have appeared since Catherine Harland's book (*Mark Rutherford: The Mind and Art of William Hale White*) in 1988. His meticulous research will make it a reference source for years to come. Brealey is, of course, much concerned with the religious aspects of Hale White's life and work and how they relate to Hale White the novelist. He does, however, bring these two aspects of Hale White together as he traces the theological themes within the novels and other writings. It is, therefore, the nature of Hale White the thinker, translator of Spinoza, literary critic, and journalist which are contrasted with the fictional Mark Rutherford of the Autobiography and Deliverance. A linking motif is the Early Life which Hale White wrote at the age of 78 as a memoir for his children but was published after his death. Brealey sees more in this than many since it is a slim volume of ninety-one fairly small pages. As a point of reference to Hale White's autobiografiction, though, it does represent the "truth" as opposed to what was made up in the novels.

Necessarily, and inevitably, the most traumatic religious experience of Hale White's life is dealt with in great detail. At the age of 21 Hale White and two others were expelled from New College, London, for coming into conflict with the Principal over the doctrine of biblical inspiration. White's father, William White published in his defence a marvellously titled and brilliantly written pamphlet "To think or not to Think?" which is analysed in detail here.

As well as a study of Spinoza, whose *Ethics* he translated and published in 1883, and regular reading of the Bible, Hale White was profoundly moved by Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. These influences on his thought and writings are studied in depth by Brealey.

Another section relates to Hale White's second marriage to Dorothy Vernon

Smith. This took place in 1911 when he was 79 and she 34. The effect of this on his relationships with his children and other friends is explored and the impression is that these were strained. Dorothy comes over as over-protective of her new husband. After his death two years later she devoted herself to promoting his memory.

Brealey's book is essential reading for those interested in the history of Dissent in Victorian Britain. The useful bibliography will act as a source of further study.

NICK WILDE

***Henry Richard: Apostle of Peace and Welsh Patriot*. By Gwyn Griffiths. London: Francis Boutle, 2012. Pp. 350. £14.99. ISBN 978-1-90342-733-0.**

I first encountered Henry Richard when writing about the laity in Congregationalism, for his claim to fame here is as the first lay Chairman of the Congregational Union in 1876. Not all Congregationalists welcomed the distinction of clergy and laity and in Richard's case it was misleading for he was ordained as a Congregational Minister and served as such for fifteen years before feeling called to devote all his energies to the Peace Society that flourished in the 1830s and 1840s until subdued by what we would call the "Falklands factor", wild enthusiasm for the Crimean War. Later, and as a proud native of the village of Tregaron, near Aberystwyth, he felt called to be an MP. At the time almost all Welsh MPs were Anglicans and had little sympathy for the Welsh, the vast majority of whom were then Nonconformists. Henry Richard, the "Apostle of Peace", made his mark as "the Member for Wales".

This well researched biography can also serve as a refresher course in nineteenth century Welsh, English, European and American History. Name any major event and Richard (1812-88) seems to have been involved in it and was in close contact with many of the protagonists. On the Anti-Slavery campaign in Lincoln's America he knew and supported Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and on other issues was in close touch with Cobden and Bright. Gladstone praised him for changing his mind about Wales. So read on. And if you wish to see a fine statue of the man himself, visit Tregaron. He is there, just outside the public house, and in those Nonconformist Temperance days probably had no wish to go in.

DONALD NORWOOD