

FAITH AND GOOD WORKS: CONGREGATIONALISM IN
EDWARDIAN HAMPSHIRE 1901-1914

by

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Abstract

Congregationalists were a major presence in the ecclesiastical landscape of Edwardian Hampshire. With a number of churches in the major urban centres of Southampton, Portsmouth and Bournemouth, and places of worship in most market towns and many villages they were much in evidence and their activities received extensive coverage in the local press. Their leaders, both clerical and lay, were often prominent figures in the local community as they sought to give expression to their Evangelical convictions tempered with a strong social conscience. From what they had to say about Congregational leadership, identity, doctrine and relations with the wider world and indeed their relative silence on the issue of gender relations, something of the essence of Edwardian Congregationalism emerges. In their discourses various tensions were to the fore, including those between faith and good works; the spiritual and secular impulses at the heart of the institutional principle; and the conflicting priorities of churches and society at large. These reflect the restlessness of the period and point to a possible 'turning of the tide'. They also call into question the suitability of constructs such as 'faith in crisis' or 'faith society' to characterise the church history of the Edwardian era.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of those Edwardian Congregationalists who faithfully served Hampshire churches between 1901 and 1914. Without them the history of this period would have been all the poorer.

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Abbreviations

CE = Christian Endeavour

CUEW = Congregational Union of England and Wales

CYB = Congregational Year Book

DHC = Dorset History Centre

HCU = Hampshire Congregational Union

HRO = Hampshire Record Office

MIS = Mutual Improvement Society

NUWSS = National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies

PSA = Pleasant Sunday Afternoon

PSE = Pleasant Saturday Evening

Congregational churches mentioned in main body of text

Abbey = Abbey Congregational Church, Romsey.

Above Bar = Above Bar Congregational Church, Southampton.

Albion = Albion Congregational Church, Southampton.

Avenue = Avenue Congregational Church, Southampton.

Bitterne = Bitterne Congregational Church, Southampton.

Boscombe = Boscombe Congregational Church, Bournemouth.

Buckland = Buckland Congregational Church, Portsmouth.

Charminster Road = Charminster Road Congregational Church, Bournemouth.

Christchurch = Christchurch Congregational Church.

Christ Church = Christchurch Congregational Church, Southsea.

East Cliff = East Cliff Congregational Church, Bournemouth.

East Street = East Street Congregational Church, Andover.

Freemantle = Freemantle Congregational Church, Southampton.

Jewry Street = Jewry Street Congregational Church, Winchester.

Kingsfield = Kingsfield Congregational Church, Southampton.

London Street = London Street Congregational Church, Basingstoke.

Northam = Northam Congregational Church, Southampton.

Peartree = Peartree Green Congregational Church, Southampton

Pokesdown = Pokesdown Congregational Church, Bournemouth.

Richmond Hill = Richmond Hill Congregational Church, Bournemouth.

Victoria Road = Victoria Road Congregational Church, Southsea.

West Street = West Street Congregational Church, Fareham.

Zion = Zion Congregational Church, Portsmouth

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1. PREPARING THE GROUND

Defining discourses

On the evening of Monday 27th September 1909 at the autumn gathering of the Hampshire Congregational Union [HCU], which was hosted by London Street Congregational Church in Basingstoke, Rev. Francis Sloper enlisted the support of no less an authority than Martin Luther in what was described as his ‘able discourse on “The Ethical Revival” ’.¹ He argued that ‘Luther, although so evangelical, was none the less ethical. “It is necessary”, he says, “that preachers should as diligently teach and urge the doctrine of good works as the doctrine of faith.” ‘ In his address Sloper sought to demonstrate how religion was becoming as much concerned with conduct as creed and maintained that since ‘Moses and the prophets aimed at social justice ... there was no contradiction between such Socialism and the Christianity of the Gospel.’²

The speaker, who had been minister of Boscombe Congregational Church from 1894 to 1909 and chairman of the HCU in 1907, was one of many Congregationalists who were seeking, at this time, to reconcile their Evangelical convictions with what they saw as the need for collective action to address societal ills such as poverty and inadequate housing. In other words, for them what was known as the ‘social gospel’, good works, was as legitimate a pursuit for the

¹ See Appendix A1 for the locations of all the HCU’s spring and autumn gatherings.

² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, October 2, 1909.

churches as the saving of souls through the promotion of the 'personal gospel', faith.³ Indeed, one of the most influential of the initial exponents of the 'social gospel', Walter Rauschenbusch, took the view that in responding to what he characterised as 'the social crisis', both were necessary.⁴ In the light of Sloper's pragmatic stance, it is perhaps not surprising that in his official obituary he was praised as someone 'who practised what he preached.'⁵

The Evangelical and the ethical, however, were not the only discourses infusing Congregational culture in Edwardian Hampshire and more widely. Another drew heavily on historical antecedents in seeking to rally the faithful and capture the essence of Congregationalism. At the 1908 spring gathering of the HCU, held in Fareham, the chairman, Henry March Gilbert, in an address entitled "Our Past and Present" reminded his audience that 'they had entered into a glorious heritage' and, in overly dramatic terms, that if their forefathers had been there they would have said: ' "We too with great sums of fines, persecutions, imprisonments, tortures, and even with giving up life itself obtained for you this freedom which is yours today" ' .⁶ This was a reference to the inspiration and legitimacy that Congregationalism derived from the Great Ejection of 1662 when as Timothy Larsen explains, '... some

³ For a discussion of the origins and subsequent usage of the phrase 'social gospel', see David Thompson, "The Emergence of the Nonconformist Social Gospel in England," in *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany and America, c.1750 – c.1950*, ed. Keith Robbins (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 255-80.

⁴ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907). David Bebbington distinguishes between the two by defining the 'social gospel' as 'an attempt to change human beings by transforming their environment rather than touching their hearts,' *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 211.

⁵ *Congregational Year Book* (hereafter CYB), 1913, 187.

⁶ *Hampshire Post*, May 1, 1908. For further details of the life and career of Gilbert see, Roger Ottewill, "Henry March Gilbert 1846-1931: 'Staunch Liberal and Nonconformist'," *Journal of the Southampton Local History Forum*, no.22 (2014): 11-18.

2,000 ministers were ejected from their livings because they could not swear their “unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed” in the new Prayer Book, or meet some of the other requirements of the new Act of Uniformity’.⁷ Many of those ejected attracted groups of followers who formed the nuclei of Independent congregations which by the Edwardian era had evolved into self-sustaining Congregational churches. For those in Hampshire that dated their origins to the Great Ejection, 1912 was a special year, marking as it did the 250th anniversary of what many Congregationalists regarded as their finest hour and providing a stimulus for ‘a new consecration of spirit and a new devotion to principle’ as well as opportunities for restating the genius of Congregationalism.⁸

In so doing, however, there was also a desire to demonstrate an embrace of modernity through, for example, a discourse associated with the institutional principle, which had originated in the second half of the nineteenth century and called for churches to meet social, educational and recreational needs alongside those of a more spiritual nature. This required ‘the establishment of a wide variety of subsidiary associations and activities’ which it was hoped ‘would help to attract

⁷ Timothy Larsen, “Victorian Nonconformity and the Memory of the Ejected Ministers: The Impact of the Bicentennial Commemorations of 1862,” in *Studies in Church History 33: The Church Retrospective* ed. R.N. Swanson (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997), 459. Since the ejection took place on the feast of St Bartholomew, it was generally referred to by Nonconformists as ‘Black Bartholomew’s Day’.

⁸ *Hampshire Independent*, November 23, 1912. Words used by Robert Murray Hyslop, Treasurer of the Congregational Union of England and Wales (hereafter CUEW), when speaking at the 250th anniversary celebrations of Above Bar Congregational Church in Southampton.

people' of many different backgrounds into the churches.⁹ In its report for 1904 the Executive Committee of the HCU ventured to say that:

... on modest lines some of our village churches, and those doing the most efficient work, may rightly be called institutional churches. The churches are hives of industry, open every day of the week, with their young men's institutes, ... winter programmes of lectures and entertainments, ... paying-in clubs, ... recreation and reading rooms, in addition to their more immediate spiritual services.¹⁰

Such remarks could be equally applied to many Congregational churches in urban areas.

The institutional principle or church can be seen as a rational response to the increasing amount of leisure time and proliferation of secular pastimes enjoyed by many in society at large. Churches felt they had to compete and offer their members and others within their sphere of influence something similar. As a result, activities which were intended to be more edifying than those offered by secular providers had become an established feature of the life of many Edwardian churches. While those who advocated such initiatives did so with the best of intentions, others, such as Rev. Phillip Rogers, minister of East Cliff Congregational Church in Bournemouth from 1908 to 1915, sounded a cautionary note. Invited to speak in 1912 at the anniversary of West Street Congregational Church in Fareham he argued that:

There was a danger of subordinate agencies ... all doing good work, ousting the Church from its premier position. All the[se] agencies were founded by man, but the Church was founded by Christ, "the man," and it was divine in both its origin and character. Christ was the Absolute and Christ was

⁹ Peter Yalden, "Association, Community and the Origins of Secularisation: English and Welsh Nonconformity, c.1850-1930," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 25, no.2 (2004): 310.

¹⁰ *HCU Annual Report, 1904, 16-7*, Hampshire Record Office (hereafter HRO) 127M94/62/49.

unique, and there was something of that character about the Church. It was of all institutions “The Institution”.¹¹

Thus, churches had to be on their guard, especially when replicating worldly pursuits, since these could easily distract them from their primary purpose of making Christian disciples.

In other words, there was a blurring of the boundary between the spiritual and secular, which was dangerous since they might well be in opposition to each other. This was evident in discourses associated with the notion of the church militant, in which combative tropes, such as conflicts and battlegrounds, fighting the good fight and knowing one’s enemies were to the fore. As Rev. Reginald Thompson, London Street’s minister from 1907 to 1911, put it when referring to the post of Sunday school superintendent: ‘They need not envy him his job, except in the sense that all Christian fighters ought to envy the man who was in the thick of the fight and doing his utmost for the Kingdom’.¹² While another speaker at the 1909 autumn gathering of the HCU, Rev. John Daniel [hereafter J.D.] Jones, the Congregational statesman and minister of the renowned Richmond Hill Congregational Church in Bournemouth between 1898 and 1937, asserted that if Congregationalism abandoned slum and rural areas ‘where the fight was thickest [it] did not deserve to live’. In his view, ‘country ministers were the Victoria Cross men of the Congregational ministry ... and he felt inclined to give his chief respect to [these] men who were bearing the

¹¹ *Hampshire Post*, October 25, 1912.

¹² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, April 3, 1909.

brunt of the fighting.’¹³ Although such language was not new it was especially evocative at a time when churches veered between optimism and pessimism in their dealings with a secular world that was more perplexing and predatory than had been the case fifty years earlier.

Collectively, these and cognate discourses offer revealing insights into the preoccupations of Hampshire Congregationalists at the beginning of the twentieth century and demonstrate that many elements of Christianity were, as they had always been, contested with each side attracting committed and effective apologists. They were also active discourses in the sense that they shaped behaviour, words informed deeds and vice versa. At the same time it is essential not to overlook what are characterised in this thesis as dormant discourses. These relate to topics, in particular gender relations, which might have been expected to generate debate but did not do so. Both active and dormant discourses helped to define Edwardian Congregationalism and characterise its relationship with other denominations and wider society. In so doing, they serve as a cautionary note for any historian seeking to reach unambiguous conclusions regarding the state of Congregationalism, and of religion more generally, in Edwardian Britain. Put a little differently, much can be lost in seeking to ‘smooth out the contours of the past ... [and in] brushing away its inconsistencies’.¹⁴ The landscape of Edwardian Congregationalism, as evidenced by

¹³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, October 2, 1909. At the time, Rev. J.D. Jones was Chairman of the CUEW. For a detailed account of his ministry, see Alan Argent, “The Pilot on the Bridge: John Daniel Jones 1865-1942,” *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 5, no.10 (1997): 592-622.

¹⁴ Jeremy Black and Donald MacRaild, *Studying History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 4.

the discourses, was more variegated and intricate than some existing narratives allow, a point that will be developed more fully in later chapters of this thesis.

Here, the term 'discourse' is used primarily to refer to, in the words of a standard dictionary definition, the 'serious spoken or written discussion of a particular subject'.¹⁵ That said, it is appreciated that the term has acquired various 'postmodernist' connotations, some of which have a limited bearing on what follows. The first concerns the notion of discourse being, in the words of Callum Brown, 'the major vehicle within knowledge for conveying meaning'.¹⁶ Applied to the Congregationalists of Edwardian Hampshire, this is taken to imply that in seeking to gain an understanding of ways in which they responded to what was happening in their world, it is necessary to take note of the discourses to which they contributed. In so doing, however, it is recognised that the picture which emerges is a partial one constrained by the selective nature of the language used, replete with its injunctions, emotive accretions and rhetorical potency, and the authorial viewpoint from which it has been interpreted. Thus, this thesis is in no sense the final word on the subject, but more an exploratory engagement with, and an initial exposition of, the primary source material.

Second, Brown argues that 'to the historian ... the culture that generates the discursive formation is far more potent than any single author'.¹⁷ However, while account needs to be taken of the values, norms and beliefs that infuse the discourses,

¹⁵ *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2002).

¹⁶ Callum Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005), 59.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 67.

here it is also felt appropriate to give attention to the 'authors' and the settings in which they expressed their views.

Last, in every discourse there is a duality - implicit in the positive construct of what is being said there is an opposite, negative side. Put another way, 'embedded in every discourse is a sense of "the other", even when it is not specifically mentioned'.¹⁸ Thus, in exploring Congregational discourses, especially those relating to the construction of identity, some recognition is given to 'the other', religious and secular groups from whom Congregationalists sought to differentiate and, perhaps, distance themselves.

As is well known, by the turn of the twentieth century they were just one of a rich array of Christian groupings, which included other Free Church or Nonconformist denominations, such as Baptists, Presbyterians and different branches of Methodism, as well as the Established Church of England and Roman Catholics.

The two names by which they were known ... [Independents or Congregationalists] reflected the two convictions concerning church order which gave them their identity. They were Independent congregations. Each chapel was self-governing and self-regulating. They financed themselves and they appointed their own ministers. They were also Congregational: absolute authority was not given to an individual officer of the congregation, including the minister: it was the congregation as a whole which governed, and all participated.¹⁹

The manner in which these convictions were expressed and applied in Edwardian Hampshire is considered in Chapter 5.

¹⁸ Ibid, 61.

¹⁹ Gerald Parsons, "From Dissenters to Free Churchmen: The Transitions of Victorian Nonconformity," *Religion in Victorian Britain. Volume 1: Traditions*, ed. Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 1988), 76.

The choice of Congregationalism as the denominational focus for this study was prompted, in part, by the evident readiness of leaders to reflect upon their past, present and future and their strengths and weaknesses at church events, such as HCU gatherings, church anniversaries and recognition meetings for newly appointed ministers.²⁰ It was also the largest of the Free Church denominations in mainland Hampshire, an area which has not previously attracted the attention of late modern church historians and for which the historiography is minimal. Above all, there was a desire to rise to the challenge implicit in Clyde Binfield's observation that: 'Congregationalists have appeared less attractive to the historian.'²¹

Primary source material

In seeking to reveal the authentic voices of the Congregationalists of Edwardian Hampshire, heavy reliance has been placed upon written records for primary source material, in particular minutes of church meetings; church magazines, the few that have survived; and especially reports of church events in local newspapers.²²

Although these have the potential to illuminate and indeed the substance of the discourses is drawn extensively from them, all have their limitations. Furthermore,

²⁰ For a discussion of the nature and purpose of recognition meetings, see Roger Ottewill, "'A Time of Joyful Anticipation': The Public Recognition of Congregational Pastors in Edwardian Hampshire," *Congregational History Society Magazine* 6, no.1 (2010): 6-19.

²¹ Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers. Studies in English Nonconformity, 1780-1920* (London: Dent, 1977), xi.

²² These have mainly been found in the record offices, local libraries and church archives, which are listed in the Acknowledgements section of the thesis. No relevant oral history testimony has come to light.

very few were likely to have been produced with the needs of future historians in mind. It is also recognised that the sources discussed here, coupled with a resort to obituaries considered more fully in Chapter 4, may well conceal more than they reveal, with tensions, conflicts, shortcomings and failures not always being brought out into the open. Consequently, the resulting narrative is more positive than might otherwise have been the case. That said caution needs to be exercised in seeking to redress the balance by viewing the material primarily through the prism of current sensibilities.

In the case of minutes, their content varies considerably with some being far more informative than others. Here convention played a part together with the predilections of the minute taker, usually the church secretary. For example, some very helpfully include the text of annual reports, whereas others simply record that a report was presented, and many only document decisions reached and provide little information about the preceding discussion.

While press reports can serve to put ‘flesh on the bones’ of issues that emerge from church records and, as Richard Sykes points out, newspapers ‘reflected and reinforced the sense that Christianity was part of the fabric of local cultural and social, as well as spiritual life’ of communities,²³ they still need to be treated with caution. This is partly because they may have been drafted by the churches themselves, thereby raising questions concerning their objectivity.

²³ Richard Sykes, “Popular Religion in Decline: A Study from the Black Country,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 26, no.2 (2005): 305.

Moreover, many newspapers had a particular politico-religious stance, even when they claimed to be independent and this could colour the way in which they treated different aspects of church life, especially controversial ones. It should be noted, however, that in the Edwardian era the local press was far more circumspect and deferential in dealing with delicate matters, such as the premature departure of a minister, than would be the case today.

Another limitation is that 'press reports are not necessarily comprehensive, consistent or entirely accurate, due to the vagaries of reporting and pressure on space ...'.²⁴ Although they might contain direct quotations, even assuming their accuracy, an element of choice was often involved. In the main, however, many are simply summaries or synopses of what happened and what was said.

Perhaps the closest one can get to hearing the actual 'voices' of Congregationalists is from a series of interviews with church leaders in Southampton 'concerning religious work in the community' that were carried out in 1905 by the *Hampshire Independent*.²⁵ Three Congregationalists were included: Rev. George Saunders, minister of Above Bar Congregational Church from 1904 to 1920; Rev. James Thompson, pastor of Northam Congregational Church from 1885 to 1908; and Rev. Vincett Cook, the minister of Bitterne Congregational Church from 1904 to 1924.²⁶ Although the material used in the subsequent articles was selective, in many instances both the questions asked and the responses obtained are, one can assume,

²⁴ Roger Ottewill, " 'Education, education, education': researching the 1902 Education Act," *Local Historian* 37, no.4 (2007): 269.

²⁵ *Hampshire Independent*, March 11, 1905.

²⁶ Bitterne is a suburb of Southampton. Between 1890 and 1904 Cook was minister of Kingsfield Congregational Church in Southampton's town centre.

faithfully reported. These covered both the local scene and broader issues, such as disestablishment and rationalist critics of Christianity. A flavour of their content can be gained from the following exchange between Saunders and his interviewer relating to doctrinal matters:

“[interviewer] Many of the Free Churches, I believe, are dispensing with a large number of restrictions upon membership?”

“[Saunders] I think the emphasis in our Church life is certainly shifting from the doctrinal to the ethical, although, at the same time, it is necessary for ethics to be rooted in religion and doctrine. The great need of the present day is for a restatement of the great Christian verities in terms of contemporary thought. That, I think, will be one of the chief results of the higher criticism.”

“[interviewer] You do not consider that the higher criticism has injured Christianity?”

“[Saunders] No; I think one of its main effects has been to reveal the strength of Christian defences. As Mr Chesterton said a little while ago, “We never knew how strong we were until these attacks had been made upon the Christian faith.” “

“[interviewer] I believe the rationalists have been trying to influence public opinion towards their views lately by publishing a large amount of cheap literature?”

“[Saunders] Yes, but Christianity has absolutely nothing to fear from critics. Criticism can only remove that which is extraneous to the Christian faith. It cannot destroy facts.”²⁷

In this exchange, the confidence and indeed optimism, which still sustained many Congregational ministers and congregations, are clearly evident.

A similar source is the “Voice of the Pulpit” series which appeared in the *Portsmouth Evening News* for a number of years during the first decade of the twentieth century. While the perspective is that of the reporters, the impression given is that they sought to be sympathetic and encouraging in what they observed and heard. Indeed, on occasions, the report almost reads as if it were a transcript of what was said by the preacher. Thus, an account of a sermon on “Doubt and Doubters”,

²⁷ *Hampshire Independent*, March 11, 1905.

preached by Rev. Robert Clegg, minister of Christ Church Congregational Church in Southsea between 1898 and 1906, begins:

[Saint] Thomas belonged to the class of serious, intelligent, and honest doubters ... If his unbelief concerning the Resurrection had been unreasonable, our Lord would not have gone out of his way to convince him. It is such men who, when they are convinced, often make the most ardent and stalwart disciples and their testimony, because of their doubt, is of exceptional value.²⁸

While it is not quite the same as hearing the preacher, something of his approach and style can be gauged from such reports, with newspapers being seen by some contemporaries, such as the leading Congregationalist Rev. Silvester Horne, as vehicles for communicating and proclaiming 'their understanding of the gospel, and its social implications, both to their church members and those outside the churches'.²⁹ A close friend and colleague of J.D. Jones, he was minister of the celebrated Whitefield's Tabernacle in Tottenham Court Road.³⁰

A further consideration is that in their reports newspapers made assumptions about the contemporary knowledge of their readers. Over time some of this is likely to be lost. Consequently, when reading newspapers, which are a hundred years old, one is at a distinct disadvantage in this respect. For example, background information about the business interests and political affiliations of the lay leadership of Congregational churches is sometimes omitted because this may well have been

²⁸ *Portsmouth Evening News*, February 8, 1904.

²⁹ Alan Argent, *The Transformation of Congregationalism 1900-2000* (Nottingham: Congregational Federation, 2013), 356.

³⁰ Described by Payne, as 'a gifted and radiant personality', Rev. Charles Silvester Horne was a dominant figure in the denomination until his untimely death in 1914 at the age of 49, which left 'a strangely personal sense of loss in the hearts of thousands'. Ernest Payne, *The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England* (London: SCM Press, 1944), 125-6.

known to the readers. Account also has to be taken of the fact that the nuances of key terms, such as 'Evangelical' and 'ethical', can change over time.

In placing considerable reliance on church records and local newspapers it is acknowledged that these are primarily 'elite sources' in the sense that they are far more likely to contain the views of leaders than the led and consequently they sustain an approach that can be described as 'history from above', albeit at local level. Ideally, it would have been desirable to combine these sources with those that provide a genuine 'history from below' perspective on the issues that lay at the heart of the discourses. In other words, in what ways and how far were those at the grass roots level, such as ordinary church members, Sunday school teachers and scholars, and others who came under the influence of Congregational churches, affected by them? In this respect, it is unfortunate that sources, such as diaries and correspondence that would have enabled such 'voices' to be heard, however faintly, have not been found. However, even if they had, there are always going to be far more traces of the views of ministers than their congregations and of deacons than the church members who elected them.

To complement and contextualise the material from these qualitative sources, use has also been made of statistical data. As will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, there is now a strong tradition of measurement in church history. Indeed, any aspect of church life that has been and can be quantified - membership, attendance at services, Sunday schools and rites of passage - affords the raw material for what has become a very influential approach to research in this field. Notwithstanding some of the critiques surrounding the role of statistics, clearly quantitative data are an

important source of historical evidence and it would be foolish to ignore them, especially with respect to delineating the presence of Congregationalists in Edwardian Hampshire and comparing their strength in the county with the position nationally.

The discourses which emerge from engagement with both qualitative and quantitative source material shed light on the beliefs, anxieties and sensibilities of Congregationalists at the local level where, as Robbins suggests, ‘ “church history” really comes to life’.³¹ However, while the study is primarily an exercise in local church history it is not entirely microscopic in its approach. Many of the ways in which Hampshire Congregationalists responded to the demands of the Edwardian era have microcosmic implications. In other words, they have the potential to inform broader historical narratives, rather than being solely ends in themselves.³²

The historical context

Although focusing on the ‘long’ Edwardian era from the accession of Edward VII in January 1901 to the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, it is recognised that some account has to be taken of what preceded it. Many charged with leading Hampshire churches had been socialised into the conventions of Congregationalism

³¹ Keith Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church 1900-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 22.

³² See Michael M. Postan, *Fact and Relevance, Essay on Historical Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 20-1. He makes a distinction between ‘microscopic’ and ‘microcosmic’ studies. The former are those which focus upon issues and concerns of purely local interest and significance either in terms of their substance or treatment. The latter seek to place the analysis of the local within a broader context.

during the mid-to-late Victorian era and inevitably this affected their frames of reference and modes of discourse. For some, particularly those of a conservative disposition, there was a strong sense of what was being lost and disquiet as to what was happening in wider society. They looked back nostalgically to a noble past and a period when 'in sheer numbers, in religious vitality, in its centrality to political debate, in its contribution to the social, cultural, and ethical mores of the era ... Nonconformity was an integral and inescapable ingredient in public life'.³³ In their view, the evangelistic zeal which had pervaded Congregationalism and many other Christian denominations, thereby facilitating their growth during much of the Victorian era, had to be recaptured. This was essential if what was perceived as a loss of momentum was to be reversed.

Indeed, having exhaustively reviewed the available statistical data relating to religious observance in Edwardian Britain, Clive Field concludes that the period 'exhibited secularising tendencies at the level of institutional belonging, in terms of declining churchgoing and passing the peak of church membership'.³⁴ Nevertheless, Christianity continued to play 'an important part in people's lives in a number of ways besides worship', including ceremonies associated with rites of passage and through the extensive provision of churches for the young.³⁵ This gave

³³ Parsons, "Dissenters to Free Churchmen," 68.

³⁴ Clive D. Field, "'The Faith Society'? Quantifying Religious Belonging in Edwardian Britain, 1901-1914," *Journal of Religious History* 37, no.1 (2013): 63. On the subject of churchgoing, More makes the point that, although comprehensive information is not available, 'the best guess is that there was some fall' in the late nineteenth century which continued into the twentieth, but it was 'very slow ... [and] contrary to what many people think there was no sudden lapse into atheism ...' Charles More, *Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), 91.

³⁵ More, *Britain in the Twentieth Century*, 92.

Congregationalists, with a more positive outlook, grounds for optimism as they sought to address the challenges to which the new century gave rise.

Some related to doctrinal issues, many of which emanated from the emergence and propagation of biblical criticism and scientific advances during the nineteenth century. As it was put by Rev. Edward Medley from Bristol, when speaking in 1902 at the tenth anniversary of Avenue Congregational Church in Southampton, they were living in 'an age of inquiry and criticism'. He went on to argue that some questioning 'caused many good people distress and perturbation, but there was no need for the least fear'. Although some beliefs might have to be jettisoned, he was confident that 'God's truth would stand whatever had to go.'³⁶ Precisely what he had in mind was not reported, but presumably it would have included a belief in the veracity of the Bible on all matters, temporal as well as doctrinal and ethical. While his remarks drew applause, they pointed to an underlying anxiety which seemed to intensify as the era progressed. Such concern serves as the backdrop to questions of doctrine examined in Chapter 6.

However, while inquiry might have been unsettling, for many, in the words of Rev. William Miles, minister of Buckland Congregational Church in Portsmouth from 1903 to 1921, one of the most 'depressing signs of the times was the prevailing indifference to the importance of the Christian Church'.³⁷ Indeed, disinterest in 'organised religion' on the part of many was perhaps the concern that most preoccupied speakers at church events, a subject to which particular attention is

³⁶ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, December 20, 1902.

³⁷ *Ibid*, November 19, 1904.

given in Chapter 7. This they often ascribed to a weakening of the extent to which religion was woven into the social and political fabric of the nation.³⁸ However, some Congregationalists went further and, in keeping with their Protestant heritage, blamed what they disparagingly referred to as the Romanising tendencies within parts of the Church of England. As explored in Chapter 5, this contributed to the re-envisioning of their identity for the new century.

Alongside indifference, others expressed unease at the increasing, and what they regarded as an unhealthy, preoccupation with material wellbeing, as exemplified by the growth of consumerism and proliferation of recreational pursuits.³⁹ By equating leisure with pleasure, they helped to perpetuate, perhaps inadvertently, puritanical stereotypes of the nineteenth century, especially with regard to such matters as Sunday observance and temperance. Thus, while 'the relationship of the churches with the material was ... [undoubtedly] complex',⁴⁰ this did not inhibit some ministers from fulminating against what they perceived as a dangerous drift away from spiritual priorities. Rev. Samuel Eldridge, for example, minister of Throop Congregational Church, in his presidential address to the spring gathering of the HCU in 1901, referred to "The evil of Materialism", which he saw as

³⁸ As François Bédarida contends, 'The new development at the end of the Victorian period and even more in the first years of the twentieth century was the gradual disruption of the traditional balance between religion and society.' *A Social History of England 1851-1990*, trans. by A.S. Forster and Geoffrey Hodgkinson (London: Routledge, 1991), 110.

³⁹ Within the context of 'Britain's evolution from a traditional rural economy to a modern industrial urban society characterised by an expanding economy ... the late Victorian and Edwardian periods witnessed a major transformation in the pace, nature and scale of Britain's leisure cultures ...' Peter Beck, "Leisure and Sport in Britain 1900-1939," in *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Wrigley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 455.

⁴⁰ Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1992), 173.

forming 'a terrible barrier to the progress of Christ's kingdom ... blinding men to the deeper needs and higher capacities of their nature ... [and] robbing human life of its dignity and significance'.⁴¹ Strong words, but they reflected a sense of foreboding which afflicted other Congregationalists during the Edwardian era and go some way towards explaining the combative discourses mentioned earlier.

There were, however, features of the Edwardian era that enabled some Congregationalists to view it in a more favourable light. As William Miles also observed, it was a democratic and a philanthropic age. Both of these characteristics chimed with values associated with Congregationalism and, as Denis Brogan has claimed, 'it is probable that Nonconformity ... was most representative of the temper of English people' at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴² Moreover, various legislative measures of the Liberal Government formed in December 1905 and soon followed by its landslide electoral victory, to which many Congregationalists contributed, coupled with the expansion of educational opportunities and a heightened commitment to tackling social deprivation gave hope for the future. Notwithstanding their later disillusionment with the performance of the Government, this was one of the considerations that moved Francis Sloper to speak of an ethical revival in which Congregationalists should 'be in the front rank'.⁴³ It was also implicit in what George Saunders had to say at the recognition of Rev. Henry Lucas as minister of Andover Congregational Church in October 1911:

⁴¹ *Hampshire Herald and Alton Gazette*, May 18, 1901.

⁴² Denis Brogan, *The English People: Impressions and Observations* (London: H. Hamilton, 1943), 121.

⁴³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, October 2, 1909.

People nowadays were inclined to look on the past days with envy, but he believed there were greater things in store in the future than in the past; there were greater opportunities opening out for the church. The question rather seemed to be would they be equal to the growing demands which were being made upon them for the hearts of men were simply yearning for the gospel.⁴⁴

Was this just a case of wishful thinking, prompted by the nature of the occasion, or a genuine belief that a golden age, in which the personal and social gospels would be mutually reinforcing, lay in the years ahead?

Whether adopting an optimistic or pessimistic stance, Hampshire's Edwardian Congregationalists still had to negotiate an increasingly complex socio-cultural milieu and, in political terms, one that historians now acknowledge was a particularly turbulent one.⁴⁵ An early indication of this was the aggressive campaign of passive resistance against what Nonconformists considered to be the pernicious provisions of the Education Act 1902. Given its timing this can be said to have set the tone for much of what was to follow. Although more muted in Hampshire than in other parts of the country, even here Congregationalists played a leading role in mobilising opposition to the legislation, thereby giving expression to their politico-religious convictions and perhaps reinforcing the recourse to belligerent language of the kind considered in Chapter 7. Another example of political turbulence was the increasing militancy and divisiveness of the campaign for women's suffrage. However, as will be evidenced in Chapter 8, notwithstanding its visibility and potency, in the main it did not result in much questioning of the status of women

⁴⁴ *Andover Advertiser*, October 20, 1911.

⁴⁵ See, for example, "Edward VII," in John Cannon, ed., *The Oxford Companion to British History* (Oxford: OUP, 2002). It also echoed Ian Sellers' characterisation of the period from 1886 to 1914 as 'the uneasy decades' in a chapter on Congregationalism in Liverpool. "Liverpool Nonconformity: 1786-1914" (PhD thesis, Keele University, 1969), 106-112.

within Congregationalism. Nonetheless, it provided a compelling reference point for any who were minded to do so.

Considered in the round, it would be reasonable to conclude that, as far as Congregationalists and their co-religionists were concerned, the signs of the Edwardian times were mixed, with perhaps the term 'unsettled' rather than 'turbulent' being a more appropriate description. It is with the ambiguities and tensions which this implied and the manner in which they were reflected in the discourses of Edwardian Congregationalists that this thesis is particularly concerned. Of course, what was not foreseen at the time was the trauma of the First World War which had such a profound and lasting impact, positive as well as negative, on the faith of many, coupled with the long-term decline in churchgoing and church membership over the succeeding century. These developments, however, do not detract from the worth of constructing a narrative derived primarily from the views and experiences of the Congregationalists of Edwardian Hampshire and one that is unaffected by the privilege of hindsight.

The unfolding narrative

In Chapter 2 various strands of historiography which have informed engagement with the primary source material are introduced and evaluated. These incorporate differing conclusions regarding the standing of Edwardian Christianity, in general, and Congregationalism and Nonconformity, in particular, both nationally and locally. They also furnish some of the conceptual markers for the study. The

Congregational presence in Edwardian Hampshire is reviewed in Chapter 3.

Drawing heavily on quantitative data, particular attention is given to the social and religious context; the distribution of Congregational churches; membership totals and benchmarks; and three churches where the membership has been studied in depth, with inspiration being drawn from the work of Rosemary Chadwick, in that considerable use is made of data from the 1901 and 1911 censuses.⁴⁶ The sensitivity of Edwardian Congregationalists towards statistics and their strengths and weaknesses as source material are also discussed.

Consideration is given in Chapter 4 to the leaders of Hampshire Congregational churches, both clerical and lay. In addition to being the major contributors to the substance of later chapters, leadership itself is the theme of a number of interrelated discourses. Thus, the chapter is essentially analytic in approach and sets the tone for the following three, the foci of which are further active discourses from which something of the essence of Edwardian Congregationalism can be distilled.

In Chapter 5 discourses illuminating the character, conventions and, especially, the identity of Edwardian Congregationalists are systematically examined. Here aspects of church history, governance and enterprise and outreach are to the fore. In Chapter 6 the tension between the Evangelical and ethical discourses is explored alongside the efforts that were made to blend the two. In Chapter 7 the use of militaristic metaphors is considered with a view to clarifying the

⁴⁶ Rosemary Chadwick, "Church and People in Bradford and District, 1880-1914: The Protestant Churches in an Urban Industrial Environment" (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1986), esp. ch.4.

nature of the battles in which Edwardian Congregationalists saw themselves as being engaged - enemies ranged from the specific, alcohol and gambling, to the more general, indifference and Mammon.

The dormant discourse of gender relations within Edwardian Congregationalism is the theme of Chapter 8. Although women constituted a majority of the membership of most churches and undertook many essential tasks, in the main they were excluded from leadership positions. Moreover, there is little evidence from Hampshire that their exclusion was questioned, notwithstanding what was happening in wider society.

In Chapter 9 the standing of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire is assessed in the light of the discourses and related evidence. While the overall picture might appear opaque, it is possible to identify, with some degree of accuracy, the strengths and weaknesses of Edwardian Congregationalism and various threats and opportunities evident in wider society. The implications of the findings from Hampshire for the historiography of Edwardian Christianity more generally are also discussed.

Throughout, it is intended to build, and elaborate, upon the existing church history of the Edwardian era. For Hampshire, however, it is more a case of laying foundations on which others can build.

2. STRANDS OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

Surveying the field

Engagement with the surviving traces of Congregationalism in Edwardian

Hampshire has been informed by various strands of historiography. Some of these reflect a more positive view of the standing of Edwardian religion, in general, and Nonconformity and Congregationalism, in particular, and others a more negative one. In keeping with the restricted geographical focus of this thesis, they also encompass local perspectives on church history as well as national. Five strands have been especially influential. They incorporate approaches where the underlying objective has been to (1) take the religious pulse; (2) evaluate Nonconformity and Evangelicalism; (3) appraise Congregationalism; (4) assess religion at the grass roots; and (5) construct micro-histories of Congregationalism.

Here a note of caution must be struck, for within much of the literature a particular issue is what might be termed 'spiritual objectivity'. By its very nature, church history is a field in which the religious inclinations of those involved may affect their interpretations and conclusions. Indeed, religion is a value-laden term with pejorative or laudatory connotations. For example, while there are major differences over the pace, timing and causes of the process of secularisation which is evident, to a greater or lesser extent, in much of the historiography, for historians who are antipathetic or hostile towards the claims of religion it may well be seen as

inevitable and, indeed, desirable. By contrast, for those of a religious disposition, including the present author, while acknowledging the influence of the secularisation narrative there may be a desire to find evidence with which to question the claims of those wedded to it.¹ Here the aim is to demonstrate that the invasion of the sacred sphere by the secular has not been as all-pervasive, inexorable or uniform as some would suggest. Thus, in constructing narratives of church history and more especially interpreting what has happened from the perspectives of those directly affected, self-awareness and the sublimation of personal predilections are required. Historians should make it clear where they stand in relation to what Clark describes as the 'bell curve' or 'normal distribution' of religiosity and their attitude towards religious practice and behaviour.²

Taking the religious pulse

This strand of historiography comprises works of church and social historians who seek to contextualise religion and contribute to the ongoing debate on the nature and pace of secularisation within British society and religion's increasingly tenuous hold on societal norms and values. Their aim is to take the religious pulse, often over

¹ In the literature secularisation is variously described as a 'grand', 'master' or 'meta' narrative.

² J.C.D. Clark, "Secularization and Modernisation: The Failure of a 'Grand Narrative'," *Historical Journal* 55, no.1 (2012): 180-1. Throughout this thesis the terms 'religion' and 'Christianity' are used interchangeably. This is not intended, of course, to imply that they are synonymous. It is simply for convenience. Other forms of religious expression, such as Judaism and Islam, are outside the scope of the research on which the thesis is based.

relatively long periods of time. Thus, for the purposes of this study, it is often necessary to extract conclusions which relate specifically to the Edwardian era.

One narrative which stresses the dominance of religion in the years leading up to the First World War is closely associated with Callum Brown's notion of a 'faith society'. This he contrasts with what happened during the 1960s when, in his view, secularisation really took hold, culminating in 'the death of Christian Britain'.³ For Brown, in 1900 'Britain was a highly religious society ... The Edwardian period ... was in many ways indistinguishable in its religious culture from the longer Victorian period ... that preceded it'.⁴ Christian values still prevailed and even non-churchgoers were affected by them through, for example, the treatment of Sunday as a day of rest and the parental desire for children to receive basic religious instruction through attendance at Sunday school. At the same time, however, he acknowledges that, although 'British people were accustomed to the intrusiveness of religion,' there were 'doubts in some quarters in Edwardian Britain ... [and] signs of a tide turning'.⁵ These included 'the beginnings of a numerical decline, an increase in anti-Christian literature and the emergence of new secular attractions – including cinema'.⁶ A crucial question is how much weight should be attached to these countervailing forces. Even Brown accepts that the 'Edwardian religious horizon was ... confused – outwardly optimistic, but inwardly clouded with doubts',⁷ a perspective which resonates with the reference in Chapter 1 to the unsettled nature of the Edwardian

³ Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁴ Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), 40.

⁵ *Ibid*, 47.

⁶ *Ibid*, 55.

⁷ *Ibid*, 48.

era characterised by a degree of restlessness and a sense of foreboding. This suggests that describing Edwardian Britain as a 'faith society' overstates the extent to which religion and its associated values retained their hold. Notwithstanding these qualifications, for Hampshire's Congregationalists Brown's contention affords a reference point for assessing how they viewed the influence of religion within society at large.

An alternative to Brown's view is evident in Alan Gilbert's assertion that religion in the Edwardian era was seriously handicapped, perhaps fatally flawed, by the Victorian 'crisis of faith'. This was triggered by a 'gradual divergence ... between religious and secular modes of interpreting reality'.⁸ For Gilbert a secular culture is one in which values and beliefs and 'the symbols and rituals which express and reinforce them, have been emancipated entirely from assumptions of human dependence on supernatural agencies or influences.'⁹ He argues that by the turn of the twentieth century such a culture was in the ascendant. It was reinforced by 'a crisis of plausibility', arising from the 'scientific spirit' and 'an emerging popular materialism' that seriously hindered churches in recruiting new members and undermined 'the religious *a priori*, not in any direct ideological sense, but by deadening what once had been a strong metaphysical element of popular consciousness'.¹⁰ Of course, 'materialism' has various meanings, with Gilbert suggesting a close link between the philosophical and more practical connotations of

⁸ Alan Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914* (London: Longman, 1976), 184.

⁹ Alan Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain* (London: Longman, 1980), 9.

¹⁰ Gilbert, *Church, Chapel and Social Change*, 186.

the term. As society lost its sense of another world beyond the material so it became increasingly preoccupied with physical and financial concerns which led inexorably to the marginalisation, and ultimately the exclusion, of spiritual matters. This in turn led to churches searching for what Gilbert labels a 'preachable gospel', which for many Congregationalists meant a modification of their traditional Evangelical message, as indicated in Chapter 1.¹¹

Keith Robbins also uses the term 'crisis' to depict, specifically, Edwardian Christianity. In a major work on the Christian Church in the United Kingdom during the twentieth century a chapter on the period 1900 to 1914 is entitled, "A Crisis of Christendom".¹² In it he refers to the Congregationalist Rev. R.F. Horton's claim from 1912, that although Christianity was very much alive, 'the churches seemed to be dying'.¹³

Likewise, Hugh McLeod in his study of religion and society in England between 1850 and 1914 devotes a chapter to 'the religious crisis'. He asserts that there was no single 'master-factor, which provides the key to the crisis ... indeed there was not one crisis, but a series of crises ... only loosely related to one another'. These were manifested in a rising tide of doubt and unbelief; declining church memberships and congregations; and a 'weakening of the social role of religion'.¹⁴

¹¹ See also Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of this topic.

¹² Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales*, 47-95. See also Keith Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993), 131.

¹³ R.F. Horton, *Great Issues* (London: 1912), 58-9, quoted in Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales*, 45.

¹⁴ Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 222-3.

In these works the Edwardian era is seen as a pivotal moment in the secularisation narrative. While the components and causes of the 'crisis' or 'crises' of religion might vary, churches were seen as facing a major, possibly catastrophic, decline arising from intense, not to say overwhelming, opposition from secular world views and interests. In short, the confidence of churches and their leaders was being seriously undermined by worldliness and what some characterised as 'disloyalty to Christ'.¹⁵ Strictly, of course, a 'crisis' might be a precursor to a recovery as much as a relapse. It is clear, however, that with respect to Edwardian religion it is the negative associations of the term which are to the fore.

Thus, it is legitimate to ask whether the situation actually constituted a 'crisis'. Was it a 'vitaly important or decisive stage ... [a] turning-point' in the religious history of Britain?¹⁶ From the viewpoint of this study, did Hampshire Congregationalists use such language in their discourses? If churches were facing catastrophe, describing the situation as a 'crisis' would be justified. If not, then less extreme language would seem to be more appropriate.

Stewart Brown, for example, is more even-handed in his assessment and concludes that:

Religion was in many respects, profoundly important in the United Kingdom of 1914. The overwhelming majority of the population still saw themselves as Christian, millions regularly attended church each Sunday and religious questions generated great passion. Of those who did not attend church, most

¹⁵ *Hampshire Herald and Alton Gazette*, May 18, 1901. Phrase used by the chairman, Rev. Samuel Eldridge, at the 1901 spring meeting of the HCU.

¹⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*. An alternative definition from this source is 'a state of affairs in which a decisive change for better or worse is imminent'.

professed a belief in God ... And yet there was also a sense that the role of religion in the life of the state was declining.¹⁷

In short religion remained a potent force, but there were signs that its grip was loosening.

For many historians, explanations for this state of affairs were to be found in developments within wider society. However, for Dominic Erdozain, the weakening of Christianity and, especially, the Evangelicalism which permeated much of Victorian Nonconformity, was due to a squeezing of the sacred by the secular within the churches. By embracing the institutional principle, introduced in Chapter 1, so wholeheartedly, churches undermined their primary rationale, the saving of souls.¹⁸ This, however, begs the question as to why churches went down this path, an issue considered more fully in Chapter 5.

In assessing the standing of religion in Edwardian society, and more broadly, historians frequently draw upon quantitative data to chart changes in religious affiliation, as indicated in the previous chapter. Those who do so are receptive to the positivist approaches of social scientists and take their lead from Currie *et al's* seminal work, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church growth in the British Isles since 1700*, which was published in 1977. One of their aims was 'to collect and compile hitherto unused and often little known numerical data on many aspects of church life'. In so doing, they 'attempted to demonstrate the reliability and value of the statistics analysed and to present them in a way that ... [would] make them of

¹⁷ Stewart J Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom, 1815-1914* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008), 454.

¹⁸ Dominic Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010).

use to other scholars interested in the study of organised religion'.¹⁹ With respect to Nonconformity these indicate that membership continued to increase until around 1906. While 'membership density', the number of members expressed as a percentage of the population, had been in decline since the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁰

However, for some historians religion is too complex a concept to be assessed by reference to numbers alone. They challenge simple dichotomies based on distinctions between members and non-members; religious and irreligious; churched and un-churched; sacred and secular; and other-worldliness and this-worldliness.²¹ For them religion is multifaceted and multi-layered and there is no simple divide between what is religious and what is not. Consequently, they have applied various adjectives to distinguish between meanings associated with the term 'religion'. Callum Brown, for example, argues that broadly speaking 'virtually all historical and sociological studies of religion and society have envisioned the "role" of religion in a variety of "forms".' These include 'institutional', signifying membership of a church and holding beliefs concerning, amongst other things, the meaning and purpose of life; 'intellectual', embracing the influence of religious values and norms, such as notions of good and evil and justice and injustice, on members of society,

¹⁹ Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). See also, Clive Field, "Zion's People: Who were the English Nonconformists? Part 3: Occupations (Methodists) and Conclusions," *Local Historian* 40, no.4 (2010): 292-308.

²⁰ For example, using Currie *et al's*, *Churches and Churchgoers*, estimate of a total English Congregational membership of 165,000 in 1851 and the official Congregational membership total of 258,434 in 1901 and adult (18+) population figures of approximately 8,600,000 in 1851 and 18,856,300 in 1901, the membership density for 1851 was 1.9 and for 1901, 1.4.

²¹ For a discussion of this distinction, see David Martin, *The Religious and the Secular* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 10-14.

individually and collectively; 'functional,' its contribution to 'civil society, especially local government, education and welfare'; 'diffusive', evangelistic and missionary endeavour to win converts; and 'discursive', based on cultural theory and indicating how individuals derive their identity from 'Christian expectations, or discourses, evident in their own time and place'.²² According to Brown, the last is the bedrock on which other forms rest, with the manner in which individuals engage with religious discourses of the kind discussed in later chapters of this thesis being the key.

A simpler analysis is that of Jeffrey Cox, who has appropriated the distinction between 'embodied' and 'diffusive' religion drawn by Bishop Talbot in his charge to the diocese of Rochester when first appointed to the see in 1903.²³ Embodied religion is exhibited by those who have internalised Christian formularies and creeds and seek to put their faith into practice through church membership and good works. Diffusive religion is something akin to Brown's intellectual religion. Drawing on the reflections of those he describes as 'religious professionals', Cox defines it as 'a general belief in God, a conviction that this God was both just and benevolent although remote from everyday concerns, a certain confidence that "good people" would be taken care of in the life to come, and a belief that the Bible was a uniquely worthwhile book and that children in particular should be exposed to its teachings'.²⁴ As Stuart Mews observes, Bishop Talbot 'drew comfort ... from the many signs that the English people did have elemental conceptions of right and wrong, a willingness

²² Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 12.

²³ Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1970-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 93-5.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 94.

to offer help to a needy neighbour, and appreciation of a warm community spirit'.²⁵

Rather optimistically, he saw this as providing the raw material for producing a greater number of embodied Christians.

With respect to churchgoing, Cox draws upon John Stuart Mill's distinction between the utility and truth of religion to categorise the motivations of churchgoers. He suggests that a majority of Victorian and, by extension, Edwardian churchgoers were motivated by a strong sense of the utility of religion as a source of morality without which society would collapse while their acceptance of the truth of religion was weaker.

In a similar manner to Cox, Matthew McKean contrasts religious behaviour, such as attendance at church services, with religious thought or religious consciousness. The latter embraces 'peoples' fundamental beliefs, values, or traditions' and thereby resonates with the concept of diffusive religion. In his view, 'the emergence of Christian nationalism, and the enduring observance of Christmas in England were cultural expressions of uninterrupted British religiousness' both before and after the Great War.²⁶ Sarah Williams takes this further in her study of Southwark by demonstrating that what she characterises as 'orthodox' and 'folk' religion have much in common.²⁷

²⁵ Stuart Mews, "Religion, 1900-1939" in *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Wrigley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 471.

²⁶ Matthew McKean, "'Onward Christian Soldiers': Cultural Expressions of an Evolving British Religious Consciousness before and after the First World War, 1850-1920," accessed June 1, 2008, <http://www.cshc.ubc.ca/papers/McKean-Matthew-87.pdf>.

²⁷ Sarah Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

What many of these broader and arguably richer interpretations share is a decoupling of religion from such readily quantifiable markers as church membership or attendance.²⁸ They are used to support claims that religiosity is more diverse, pervasive, resilient and compelling than statistical data alone would suggest. In the light of this David Nash argues that: 'What we should now do is look beyond the framework of secularization (or de-christianization) and instead further investigate the issue of narrative (evangelical or otherwise) as a force for religious organization and reorganization.'²⁹ He suggests that the themes of such narratives or 'stories of belief' would include pilgrims and Samaritans; remembrance; illness, death and dying; and the achievements and failings of faith groups and denominations. Collectively, they would constitute a compendium of accounts illustrating the adaptability of religious modes of expression, as opposed to a grand overarching narrative of secularisation and the retreat of religion. For those of a religious disposition some stories would be uplifting and affirming and others depressing and dispiriting. However, the aim would be to construct them objectively and eschew normative pronouncements which, he argues, have crept into and distorted the presentation of the secularisation thesis.

While from the perspectives of cultural and social history, a strong case can be made for incorporating notions of diffusion, discursiveness and sentiment when taking the religious pulse, the dangers need to be recognised. One is that by stretching the concept of religion to embrace anything that people use to make sense

²⁸ Gilbert, *Church, Chapel and Social Change*, ch.2.

²⁹ David Nash, "Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History: Secularization's Failure as a Master Narrative," *Cultural and Social History* 1 (2004): 320.

of their existence, it loses something of its cutting edge. Another is that it undervalues the strength of feeling and dedication of those who have embodied Christian commitment through active engagement with what is sometimes disparagingly referred to as 'organised religion' and which still retained considerable leverage in Edwardian Britain. In other words, it is important to ensure that full account is taken of the resilience of faith and belief, even when embodied religion appears to be in retreat, while giving due cognisance to those who take the view that 'you do not have to go to church to be a Christian'.³⁰

A further danger is that in attempting to challenge the veracity of the secularisation thesis, critics might well, either deliberately or inadvertently, disparage the contribution of statistics to the study of church history, with the result that 'the baby is thrown out with the bath water'. In advocating a narrative-based approach, the role of quantitative data is at best marginalised and at worst ignored. While statistics do not tell the whole story they do help to inform the plot, by indicating trends and serving as a basis for making comparisons. Moreover, the fact that by the Edwardian era the churches themselves were preoccupied with not only collecting, but also interpreting, statistics is another compelling reason for engaging with them, a point developed more fully in Chapter 3.

How far issues arising from the works considered above directly affected the Congregationalists of Edwardian Hampshire is a moot point. Nonetheless, they are of relevance for this study, since it is clear that they were not immune from, for example, what they regarded as the scourge of materialism; the weakening of

³⁰ A reminder of this phrase came from Hugh McLeod.

embodied religion; and the seductive power of statistics. Indeed their preoccupation with what was perceived as increasing indifference to the claims of the Christian gospel was palpable. At the same time, they personified the notion of a 'resilient faith' and continued to engage in what they considered to be a battle worth fighting, as demonstrated in Chapter 7. In other words, narratives of the changing relationship between religion and society were reflected in the heart searching of leading Hampshire Congregationalists. However, the conclusions reached lie somewhere between the extremes of a 'faith society' and a 'faith in crisis', with varying interpretations being placed on the relationship between 'embodied' and 'diffusive' religion.

Coming to terms with a more perplexing and possibly less favourable external environment affected all the major denominations, including those that constituted the core of Evangelical Nonconformity. Since Congregationalists were a key component of this constituency, the historiography of late-Victorian and Edwardian Nonconformity and of Evangelicalism more broadly also has a contribution to make to later chapters.

Evaluating Nonconformity and Evangelicalism

Of the many works on the history of Nonconformity, arguably one of most distinctive and influential is Binfield's *So Down to Prayers*.³¹ Covering the period from 1780 to 1920, he 'seeks to evoke atmosphere' by focusing on the personalities through

³¹ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*.

which Nonconformist mores, practices and beliefs were transmitted from one generation to the next and the separateness and continuity to which this gave rise. For this study, Binfield's observation that, 'Congregationalists ... [might] plausibly be regarded as the most representative of Nonconformity's opinion formers' is particularly apposite.³²

Also of relevance was the emergent ecumenical spirit amongst the Free Churches at the end of the nineteenth century, with 'the establishment of the National Free Church Council and its local units'.³³ This was partly in response to concerns over what Rev. Silvester Horne characterised as 'the Romanizing of the Anglican Church' and a consequent desire to ensure that an unequivocal Protestant voice continued to be heard.³⁴ As it was put in a report of the opening of Southampton's Avenue Congregational Church in 1898, 'of late there has been manifested a strong desire on the part of all [Free] churches to fall into line in the defence and zealous maintenance of the principle of Protestant Nonconformity'.³⁵ Hampshire Congregationalists enthusiastically embraced closer collaboration with other Free Church denominations, a topic considered in Chapter 5.

Another aspect concerns Nonconformity's impact on wider society. While there is recognition of this in Binfield's work, others, such as James Munson, have sought to develop it more fully. His aim is 'to show the influence Nonconformity had on English society, literature, education, architecture, religion and politics – the

³² *Ibid*, x-xi.

³³ Payne, *Free Church Tradition*, 122.

³⁴ C. Silvester Horne, *A Popular History of the Free Churches* (London: J. Clarke, 1903), 424.

³⁵ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, December 10, 1898.

culture behind the phrase, “the Nonconformist Conscience” ‘.³⁶ Of these spheres of influence the one which appears to have intrigued historians the most is that of politics, with an influential narrative being that of the advent of Nonconformity as a powerful political force during the mid- to late-Victorian period. As Bebbington points out, by the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth ‘... leading men in the chapels were commonly leading men in the affairs of the localities too as school board members, as councillors, as mayors, and they often ran the constituency Liberal organisations’.³⁷

This observation applies to ministers as well as lay leaders. As Kenneth Brown has shown, a sizeable minority engaged in political and philanthropic activities at this time, with Congregationalists and Baptists in the vanguard. Political activity embraced ‘membership of political parties and of overtly political pressure groups’ and philanthropic activity included writing about and participating ‘in welfare movements - temperance, hospitals, libraries ...’.³⁸ By the Edwardian era, such involvement was seen as an imperative of the social gospel, to which reference was made in Chapter 1 and which is considered more fully in Chapters 4 and 6, and as an expression of the principles of religious and political liberty to which Nonconformists had long subscribed. Both underlay the campaign against the Education Act 1902 and contributed to what appeared to be Nonconformity’s greatest political triumph, namely the Liberal landslide of 1906.

³⁶ James Munson, *The Nonconformists: in search of a lost culture* (London: SPCK, 1991), 5.

³⁷ David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 153.

³⁸ Kenneth Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales 1800-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 202-5.

Expectations, however, were soon thwarted, generating disillusionment as the impotence of the Liberal government in seeking to legislate for measures dear to the heart of Nonconformists became apparent and triggering a reassessment of their political role. Indeed, Stephen Koss in his work on Nonconformity in British politics entitles a chapter on the period 1908 to 1914, "Decline and Disenchantment"; David Thompson uses the phrase 'ebb tide' to describe the years between 1886 and 1914 from a Nonconformist perspective; and Payne in his work examining Free Church involvement in the life of England more broadly entitles his chapter on the years from 1900 to 1939, "Hesitancy".³⁹ Moreover, within Nonconformity there were those, such as the anonymous author of *Nonconformity and Politics*, who felt that an 'overconcentration on politics' was partly responsible for the fact that 'by 1909 secularisation had ... made deep and unnecessary inroads into the life of the chapels'.⁴⁰ This argument has close parallels with that of Erdozain, mentioned earlier, who asserts that churches contributed to their own downfall by 'taking their eye off the spiritual ball'. As the author of *Nonconformity and Politics* put it, the kingdom of God does not lie in the material realm but 'in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost' and it is the latter that should preoccupy the churches.⁴¹ As explored in Chapter 6, such a stance resonated with a number of Hampshire Congregationalists.

³⁹ Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (London: Batsford, 1975); David Thompson, *Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 226-73; and Payne, *Free Church Tradition*, ch. VIII, 121-39.

⁴⁰ *British Weekly*, March 25, 1909: 669, quoted in Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, 158. The author is thought to have been Rev. Henry William Clark, a Congregational minister who was teaching at a school in Harpenden.

⁴¹ *Nonconformity and Politics. By a Nonconformist Minister* (London: Pitman, 1909), 191.

A contingent narrative concerns the challenges for Nonconformists posed by the emergence of Socialism as a political creed. Broadly, there were three reactions to this development. One was antagonism on the grounds that the collectivist orientation of Socialism was the antithesis of the individualism inherent in the personal gospel. Another was co-operation, based on the mantra of the 'brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God', to secure a fairer society in which the working class would be more amenable to the claims of the gospel. Last was the view that, in the words of Hancock, 'Christianity subsumed socialism ... [since] the gospel would ultimately achieve socialist objectives and more besides.'⁴² Given the local economic and political setting, this was not a major issue for many Hampshire Congregationalists. However, it did have implications for those ministering in parts of Southampton and Portsmouth.

Intertwined with Nonconformist narratives are those focusing on the contribution of Evangelical tropes to the world view of many late-Victorian and Edwardian Christians. Here, a seminal work is Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*.⁴³ Although far broader in terms of the period covered, from the 1730s to the 1980s, than that on which this study is based and embracing all denominations, it serves to contextualise the Evangelical discourse of Hampshire Congregationalists considered in Chapter 6. In particular it points to the emergent fault lines within

⁴² W.C.R. Hancock, "English Nonconformity and the Rise of Labour Politics 1893-1914," *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 6, no.9 (2001): 688.

⁴³ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*. See also David Bebbington, "Evangelicalism and British Culture," in *Religion, Identity and Conflict in Britain: From the Restoration to the Twentieth Century. Essays in Honour of Keith Robbins*, ed. Stewart J. Brown, Frances Knight and John Morgan-Guy (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 105-19.

Evangelicalism between what were to become the conservative and liberal wings, with the latter adopting a more socially aware and interventionist stance. This theme is developed by Ian Randall, who examines how Nonconformist evangelicals engaged with the tenets of the social gospel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, giving particular attention to the Baptist, Rev. F.B. Meyer, 'the evangelical leader who became the foremost advocate of a gospel which bridged the main 'pietist' and activist streams'.⁴⁴ As will be highlighted in Chapter 6, his influence can be seen in the approach adopted by some Congregational leaders in Edwardian Hampshire.

Within many studies of Nonconformist history and of Free Church Evangelicalism in the years prior to the First World War there is a strong sense of something of consequence disappearing which was never going to be recovered. Seen in this light the Edwardian era represents the last flowering of a distinctive religious, social and political culture. In later chapters of this thesis insights are offered into a key denominational component of this 'lost world'.

Appraising Congregationalism

By contrast with the considerable volume of material constituting the first two strands of historiography, the third consists of a relatively modest number of works dealing with the history of Congregationalism. Here a distinction can again be made

⁴⁴ Ian M Randall, "The Social Gospel: A Case Study," in *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal*, ed. John Wolffe (London: SPCK, 1995), 156.

between narratives which emphasise the strength of the denomination and its continuing influence and those highlighting its increasing vulnerability during the Edwardian era. For instance, in a tribute to Clyde Binfield, Reg Ward describes the years 'between the middle of the nineteenth century and the First World War ... [as] the golden age of Congregationalism'.⁴⁵ During this period 'Congregationalists moved from the fringes of society into official culture, from backstreet Bethels into whopping Gothic masterpieces.'⁴⁶ To which he might have added that leading Congregationalists in many communities, including those in Hampshire, became an integral part of the local establishment.

A positive gloss on the Edwardian era can also be found in Argent's study of Congregationalism during the twentieth century. Adopting a 'top down' approach and from the perspective of 1918, he claims that: 'The Edwardian years had been full of hope for Congregationalists who had never before enjoyed such power and prestige. The political party which most supported, the Liberals, had been returned in triumph, and churches and chapels were full to overflowing.'⁴⁷ Moreover, '... many looked back on 1900-14 as an ideal age and saw its leaders as lost heroes'.⁴⁸ Elsewhere, he uses terms such as 'confidence', 'vibrant and growing', and 'pride' to characterise Edwardian Congregationalists,⁴⁹ and echoing Bebbington observes that: 'Those in the forefront of chapel life often were active in their communities – as

⁴⁵ Reg Ward, "Professor Clyde Binfield: A Critical Appreciation," in *Modern Christianity and Cultural Aspirations*, ed. David Bebbington and Timothy Larsen (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 16.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 17.

⁴⁷ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 79-80.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 81.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 105, 107, 142 & 525.

mayors, councillors, members of school boards and as Liberal party members.⁵⁰

Arguably Argent overstates their power and prestige, to dramatise the changes wrought by the First World War. That said, he does acknowledge that: 'For all its swagger ... beneath the surface of Edwardian Congregationalism lay a brittle vulnerability' and that 'Edwardian Congregationalists had basked in the warmth of a false dawn', thereby giving credence to the more even-handed stance adopted in this thesis.⁵¹

Unlike Ward and Argent, Robert Tudur Jones in his magisterial history of the first 300 years of Congregationalism uses the phrase 'darkening skies' to describe the last decade of the nineteenth century and the Edwardian era in a chapter entitled "The Beginning of Sorrows".⁵² Admittedly this covers the years from 1890 to 1930 and Jones regards the First World War as the most intense cause of sorrow, being 'a great spiritual tragedy'.⁵³ Nonetheless, the years immediately prior to 1914 were still marred by social problems, political unrest and 'theological unsettlement that characterized so much religious thinking', of which R.J. Campbell's New Theology was one of the prime examples.⁵⁴ However, Jones also stresses that during this period 'the Congregational ministry was still attracting men of great ability and power' and it saw the 'last great flowering of the age of the popular preacher', as reviewed in

⁵⁰ Ibid, 38.

⁵¹ Ibid, 56 & 105.

⁵² Robert Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962* (London: Independent Press Ltd, 1962), 334-42.

⁵³ Ibid, 355.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 349-50. See Chapter 6 for further discussion of the New Theology.

more detail in Chapter 4.⁵⁵ Moreover, at the opening of the twentieth century 'Congregationalism was still a growing power in the land.'⁵⁶ Many churches were creative both in organisational terms, with the concept of the institutional church reaching its apogee, and in modes of worship. Nonetheless, he concludes that 'all the activity, the hard thinking, the faithful preaching ... [and] the courageous self-sacrifice' could not hide 'the fact that Congregationalism was facing a grave crisis'.⁵⁷ Thus, once again, there is recourse to the term 'crisis'.

Thompson, in a paper on the decline of Congregationalism in the twentieth century, makes no apology for placing considerable emphasis on membership statistics, even though he introduces a number of caveats. With respect to growth and decline, these include regional variations. As he points out, although for Great Britain Congregational membership peaked in 1906 at 498,718, if figures for the component parts of Britain are disaggregated, 'English Congregationalism reached a maximum of 291,128 in 1915'.⁵⁸ He also raises questions such as:

Are there areas where the decline has been more rapid? Were there areas where the growth was slower? Has the change in the nature of certain areas (however defined, i.e. growth of or reduction in industry) been significant? And how would we compare such changes with the effect of a few disastrous ministers?⁵⁹

At the same time, he stresses the importance of knowing more about the gender mix, age structure and the dynamics of membership, topics examined in Chapter 3. A

⁵⁵ Ibid, 323.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 319.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 387.

⁵⁸ David M. Thompson, *The Decline of Congregationalism in the Twentieth-Century* (London: The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust, 2002), 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 11.

further consideration is his acknowledgement that 'there has always been a larger group of people who are associated with churches without being members'. This is followed by an assertion that: 'One of the great changes between the nineteenth century and the twentieth is that the average Sunday congregation in the nineteenth century tended (so far as can be judged) to be larger than the membership, whereas in the twentieth century it has tended be smaller.'⁶⁰ In the absence of reliable and extensive statistics much of the discussion on this point must remain speculative. It will be claimed in Chapter 3, however, that in this respect the Edwardian era was more akin to the nineteenth century than the twentieth with the size of congregations generally being in excess of memberships. Consequently, the numbers who identified with Congregational churches were greater than membership data alone would suggest. Whether this is more an indicator of the pervasiveness of diffusive than embodied religion is an open question, but it does suggest the need for caution when making claims regarding the size and particularly the reach of churches.

Although Thompson makes few specific references to the Edwardian era, he does observe that: 'The rate of growth of new congregations was slackening before the First World War.'⁶¹ In other words, Congregationalism was running out of steam as far as church extension was concerned. Nonetheless, as will be seen, in Hampshire Congregationalism proved to be remarkably tenacious in retaining and, to some extent, broadening its territorial base.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, 15.

A further study in which extensive use is made of membership data is that by Colin Baxter. In his socio-statistical investigation of the Congregational, Presbyterian and United Reformed Churches between the seventeenth century and 1981, he reaches the conclusion that, having reviewed all the arguments, 'membership is the best measurement of strength over long periods of time' by comparison with weekly attendance and adherence.⁶² As Baxter acknowledges, his research relies 'on the fact that memberships over long periods ... show a reality of trend and relative strength'.⁶³ Over shorter periods, however, distortions can easily occur and arguably, while still acknowledging the contribution of statistics, account also needs to be taken of qualitative indicators when appraising the fortunes of churches individually and collectively.

While the sources mentioned above afford insights into the nature of Edwardian Congregationalism, there are aspects where the existing historiography is almost silent. As will be highlighted in Chapter 8, one of the most notable is that of gender relations within the denomination. Although Tudur Jones acknowledges that 'one of the most striking developments during the period from 1916 to 1960 ... [was] the increasing part played by women in the organisations of the denomination' and refers to 'the emancipation of women in the early years of the twentieth century', he makes no reference to the trail-blazing activities of Frances Hallows in the last decade of the nineteenth century or the role of women prior to the First World War,

⁶² Colin B. Baxter, "A Study of Organisational Growth and Development of the Congregational, Presbyterian and United Reformed Churches" (PhD thesis, Brunel University, 1981), abstract, see also 58-9.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 81.

beyond a passing reference to 'Women's Guilds and Sisterhoods'.⁶⁴ Moreover, he only hints at the paradox of the increasing sound and fury regarding women's rights and status in the wider political sphere and the relative silence within Congregationalism. There is some discussion of the standing of Congregational women in Elaine Kaye's work, but little concrete evidence to back up her claims that in many churches 'women were already serving as deacons' and in a few instances actually leading churches prior to 1914.⁶⁵ Chapter 8 demonstrates the need for further work in this sphere and that the historiography of Congregationalism would be thereby strengthened.

Another theme warranting a higher profile is that of the changing nature of the provision for children and young people. Unlike gender relations, evidence from Hampshire indicates that this did preoccupy Edwardian Congregationalists in that it was frequently debated and subject to the application of new ideas. However, it has not figured to any great extent in the works on the history of Congregationalism. Argent, for example, makes virtually no mention of this key aspect of Congregational outreach. Tudur Jones quotes with approval Booth's finding that in the case of ten Congregational churches in 'middle-class suburbia ... all the appurtenances of the Institutional Church were to be seen, not excluding flourishing Sunday schools'.⁶⁶ He also mentions a few initiatives at national level concerning 'the conditions and

⁶⁴ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 408-9 and 381.

⁶⁵ Elaine Kaye, "A Turning-Point in the Ministry of Women: The Ordination of the First Woman to the Christian Ministry in England in September 1917," in *Studies in Church History 27: Women in the Church*, ed. W.J Shields and D. Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 507.

⁶⁶ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 321.

prospects of Sunday Schools'.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter 5, there is little sense of the fundamental rethink of the nature and purpose of Sunday schools; the ongoing challenge of finding ways of converting substantial numbers of Sunday school scholars into full church members, thereby securing the future of churches; and the experimentation with teaching methods that was taking place at local level.

Assessing religion at the grass roots

What the works on the history of Nonconformity, Evangelicalism and Congregationalism and those indicative of the first strand of historiography have in common is their breadth. This applies to not only the period covered, with the Edwardian era sometimes being regarded as a mere postscript to the mid-to-late Victorian era or as a precursor to what was to follow, but also geographical scope, with their focus being primarily a national one. Consequently, something of the complexity and richness of the lived experiences of those active at local level is lost. Although some recognition is given to this, the primary aim of 'top down' studies is to foreground general trends. Clearly this can help to contextualise what was happening within shorter time spans and more restricted geographical areas, but arguably something extra is required.

Hence a fourth strand of historiography comprises a number of regional and local studies in which authors, such as Stephen Yeo, Jeffrey Cox, Rosemary Chadwick, Jeremy Morris, Simon Green and Patricia Midgley, present more detailed

⁶⁷ Ibid, 381.

narratives of the situation in particular parts of the country. These cover a variety of denominations, Anglican as well as Nonconformist, and periods which include the Edwardian era.⁶⁸ Their primary purpose is to engage with national debates concerning the standing of religion and, although not always explicitly stated, there is often an underlying assumption that their findings and interpretations are applicable to the country as a whole. In other words, the authors aspire to be 'microcosmic' in their approach and their works are a form of what Herbert Finberg has called 'national history localised'.⁶⁹ Within them, however, the distinction between the microcosmic and microscopic is not always made clear.⁷⁰ In his review of Cox's study of churches in Lambeth between 1870 and 1930, Binfield distinguishes between its worth as a work of 'great general importance', notwithstanding the author being 'suddenly coy when faced with conversion, the transcendent, the supernatural', and its 'value as a local study'.⁷¹ The latter, however, is not something to which Cox himself appears to attach much significance.

Preoccupation with the microcosmic can also cause confusion. Midgley, for example, in the concluding chapter of her study of the missions of the churches of Leeds between 1870 and 1920, targeted at the working classes, claims at one point

⁶⁸ Stephen Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (London: Croom Helm, 1976); Jeffrey Cox, *English Churches*; Chadwick, "Church and People"; Jeremy Morris, *Religion and Urban Change: Croydon 1840-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992); Simon Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Patricia Midgley, *The Churches and the Working Classes: Leeds 1870-1920* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012).

⁶⁹ Herbert Finberg, *The Local Historian and his Theme*, Department of English Local History Occasional Papers, no.1 (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1952), 10.

⁷⁰ See Chapter 1, footnote 32, for an explanation of the distinction between 'microscopic' and 'microcosmic' studies.

⁷¹ Clyde Binfield, "Review of *The English Churches in Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930*, by Jeffrey Cox," *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 3, no.1 (1983): 30-2.

that 'the situation in Leeds can be generalised to the country as a whole' and in another that her generalisations only relate 'to other similar urban areas'.⁷² Hence, there is a lack of clarity regarding the geographical reach of her conclusions, a difficulty which afflicts many local studies.

Green's intention is to extrapolate from the experiences of the churches of Halifax, Keighley and Denholme between 1870 and 1920, when 'in the years leading up to the First World War informed local opinion invariably arrived at depressing conclusions' regarding 'vital questions of organisational advance and decline,' to elsewhere. He asserts that those directly involved 'began to contemplate the possible decline of religion; first in contemporary West Yorkshire, then more generally in modern Britain as a whole'.⁷³ Indeed, his final chapter is provocatively titled "The strange death of religious Britain", which he dates from the 1920s. Nonetheless, his perspective tends to shift, as in the following statement: '... even in the quintessence of religious experience, in the industrial towns of later Victorian Britain, or *at least* of later Victorian West Yorkshire more generally [my emphasis]' and it is not always clear whether his conclusions relate to West Yorkshire alone or Britain or both.⁷⁴

Arguably, Yeo's assertion that 'the distinctive nature of Reading during the second half of the nineteenth century and the critical changes taking place in Britain between 1890 and 1914, meant that the period and the place were peculiarly appropriate for working towards a contextual view of the situation and experience of

⁷² Midgley, *Churches and the Working Classes*, 250 and 254.

⁷³ Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, 351.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 384.

religious and other organisations' is even bolder.⁷⁵ While, in his study of the churches of Croydon between 1840 and 1914, Morris argues that: 'Attention to local issues does not neutralise generalisations about church growth [or decline?], because it is possible to construct general arguments and typologies of development on the assumption that despite the infinite variation in local circumstances from one area to another, underlying structural developments in the British economy and society conditioned the emergence of certain common strands in social relationships.'⁷⁶

The implication behind these contentions seems to be that in relating their findings to nationally focused debates and narratives, usually on the themes of secularisation, religious decline and the previously mentioned crises,⁷⁷ 'infinite' local variation is of little consequence. In other words, the microscopic is sacrificed on the altar of microcosmic ambition. Moreover, in view of its dominance, the secularisation narrative may have predisposed authors towards finding evidence to support and explain, rather than challenge, it.

Given the socio-geographic similarities between the areas covered by these studies, with West Yorkshire and London being to the fore, at the very least there ought to be some acknowledgement that there might well be differences with the situation elsewhere and until further comparable studies have been undertaken especially in more disparate parts of the country, such as Hampshire, any

⁷⁵ Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations*, 27.

⁷⁶ Morris, *Religion and Urban Change*, 12.

⁷⁷ For example, Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations*, has the word 'crisis' in the title of his book; the sub-title of the concluding chapter of Morris, *Religion and Urban Change*, is "A crisis in the church"; and 'crisis' appears in the title of the final chapter of Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*.

conclusions should be regarded as provisional. Indeed, it is telling that each of these locally focused studies posits different, albeit overlapping, explanations as to the causes of religious decline.

For Cox this is to be found in the social service role of churches which he suggests emerged 'not from a tradition of rural paternalism, but from the response of the churches to urban social conditions in the middle and late nineteenth century'.⁷⁸ As public bodies took over responsibility for this role, which had enabled churches to maintain close links with working people, their standing was undermined. Drawing on evidence from Lambeth, Cox contends that 'the real decline of churchgoing and its associated piety appears to have begun in the 1880s', leading to a 'crisis in morale' in the early twentieth century.⁷⁹ Midgley reaches similar conclusions: 'As well as losing their major role in primary education and striving to compete with other organisations and with each other, around the turn of the century the churches were losing what had been a key role in social welfare in all its aspects.'⁸⁰

By contrast, Yeo argues that religious decline resulted from an erosion of the spirit of voluntarism on which the churches in Reading, along with other voluntary organisations, depended. Here various factors were at work, including the nationalisation of local life, with increasing numbers of the population seeking

⁷⁸ Cox, *English Churches*, 269. The activities identified were direct poor relief; indirect relief; thrift societies; medical services; education; clubs; and popular recreation and entertainment.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 272-3.

⁸⁰ Midgley, *Churches and the Working Classes*, 256.

employment in London and therefore having less time and energy to devote to local affairs; the growth of the mass leisure industry; and the retreat into 'the home'.⁸¹

Green focuses on the organisational aspects of church life and what he describes as the 'associational ideal' that is 'the Christian faith ... [being] sustained in and through the Christian Church'.⁸² As organisations, over time churches faced challenges that most social institutions face, such as the provision, financing and maintenance of buildings; the recruitment and retention of members; and the articulation and renewal of practices, including worship and liturgy and outreach. According to Green, these preoccupations resulted in 'organisational stasis' that led to the arrested development of churches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, in a later work, covering the period from c.1920 to c.1960 and eschewing localism, he claims that a 'crisis of organisational dynamics ... confronted almost every mainstream religious organisation after around 1910'.⁸³ Although Green is reasonably comprehensive in his coverage of the institutional life of churches, he is taken to task by Erdozain for giving scant attention to 'their spiritual *raison d'être*' and 'the tensions between "associational life" and Christian belief as such' and for arguing that 'decline happens when the associational ideal falters'.⁸⁴ In short, when assessing the strength or otherwise of churches, something of significance is lost if insufficient account is taken of the spiritual dimension.

⁸¹ Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations*, ch.11.

⁸² Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, 181.

⁸³ Simon Green, *The Passing of Protestant England: secularisation and social change, c1920-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 310.

⁸⁴ Erdozain, *Problem of Pleasure*, 19-20.

Chadwick, in her study of the churches of Bradford and District between 1880 and 1914, also paints a negative picture of them struggling to retain their hold in challenging times. 'All too often, it proved difficult to adapt without offending the existing congregation and difficult to be relevant to the world without compromising the Christian message.' She considers two major responses of the churches to their predicament, the provision of recreational facilities and the tackling of social problems, and highlights their limitations.⁸⁵ She also challenges Cox's finding by pointing out that: 'The Bradford churches were losing middle class members well before their philanthropic functions were usurped by the state.'⁸⁶

Morris investigates the changing relationship which existed between leading figures in the churches of Victorian Croydon and the institutions of local governance.

As he puts it:

... this book is concerned as much with the structure and development of local political and social life as they affected the churches as with churches themselves; it seeks to analyse the changing role of the churches by relating directly what was happening in the churches to change in society at large, particularly through the points of contact which were the strongest, including action in welfare and politics, elite action in politics and the churches, and church efforts to reach out to the urban population.⁸⁷

He demonstrates that those members of the local elite who engaged in voluntary activities in mid-Victorian Britain derived their moral compass from religion. By the Edwardian era, however, the churches had lost some of their key middle-class adherents as they increasingly sought to give expression to their civic conscience solely through membership of local public bodies, as opposed to a blend of religious

⁸⁵ Chadwick, "Church and People," abstract and chs.8 and 9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 340.

⁸⁷ Morris, *Religion and Urban Change*, 14.

observance and public service. However, Morris, adopts a more measured position on the standing of the churches: 'Despite the apparent wealth of testimony which exists in this period about the 'crisis' in the churches, the situation was in fact a more complex and variegated one than the bald statements of contemporaries seem to imply.'⁸⁸ Clearly, this complexity injects a cautionary note when considering the conclusions of locally based studies.

Indeed, looked at in the round, while such studies suggest interesting lines of enquiry, they should not be seen as representing the final word on questions concerning the strength of the churches across the country during the Edwardian era. Of course, this qualification applies as much to the research reported here, since mainland Hampshire cannot be regarded as a microcosm of the country as a whole. Thus, as indicated in Chapter 1, this study is mainly, although not exclusively, microscopic in its orientation. Indeed, there is an expectation that as further research is undertaken at local level many regional variations and more nuanced explanations as to what was happening will emerge. In other words, overarching narratives of crisis and decline as well as buoyancy will require modification.

Although all the works considered in this section make reference, to a greater or lesser extent, to Congregationalism, their focus is primarily on churches and religion in general (except possibly Roman Catholicism) rather than specific denominations. Thus, care needs to be exercised in relating their findings to the experiences of Hampshire Congregationalists.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 180.

Constructing micro-histories of Congregationalism

A final strand of historiography encompasses a small number of micro-histories of Congregationalism covering the Edwardian period and, in a number of respects, it is with these that this thesis has the closest affinity. In considering them, however, the strictures concerning the distinction between the microscopic and microcosmic and the need to exercise caution when making statements regarding the influence of religion during the Edwardian period continue to apply.

The geographical locations of these studies are Leicestershire, Norwich and Halifax. The first two offer a more positive assessment of the position of pre-First World War Congregationalism. In his study of Leicester, Gerald Rimmington concludes that although Congregationalists failed 'to attract working-class people into their churches ... [they] maintained membership remarkably well,' albeit with a gradual shift from town centre to suburban churches.⁸⁹ While in other parts of Leicestershire and Rutland, 'statistical evidence suggests that rural Congregationalism was as strong in 1914 as it had been in later Victorian times, despite the depredations of secularism, agricultural depression and the depopulation of villages where there was no alternative to farming'.⁹⁰

Barry Doyle is equally affirmative in his conclusions about Edwardian Norwich which:

⁸⁹ Gerald Rimmington, "Congregationalism and Society in Leicester 1872-1914," *Local Historian* 37, no.1 (2007): 41.

⁹⁰ Gerald Rimmington, "Congregationalism in Rural Leicestershire and Rutland 1863-1914," *Midland History* 30, no.1 (2006): 101.

... was one of the strongholds of English Congregationalism with a substantial active membership, massed ranks of Sunday school scholars, and innumerable organisations providing everything from Bible study to bicycle rides ... this was a Congregationalism firmly rooted in the city it had helped to create, with suburban churches serving working-class, not middle-class Congregationalism.⁹¹

Moreover, 'through education, philanthropy, and leisure activities,

Congregationalism influenced the lives of many who were never church members'.⁹²

Of course, it is possible that Leicestershire and Norwich were exceptions as far as the standing of Edwardian Congregationalism was concerned. Nonetheless the work of Rimmington and Doyle serves as an antidote to studies that are more negative in tone, such as John Hargreaves' account of the situation in Halifax. As he comments: 'The second half of the nineteenth century was one of continuing expansion for Congregationalism ... but during the first decade of the twentieth century membership started to fall and did not recover before the outbreak of the First World War.'⁹³ In support of his stance, he quotes the reflections of Rev. James Hartley, pastor of the semi-rural Providence Congregational Church at Stainland, on the reasons for its decline, from the perspective of 1914:

What with losses by death and the changing conditions of modern life, it is no small task to hold one's own ... The general attitude to the Christian Church is not what it was fifty years ago. Christian institutions now receive a remnant of attention, whereas formerly they were the chief concern. The pleasures of life and the love of pleasure have pushed aside the more sacred things of the soul ... Our village does not offer great scope for young people of promising ability, and these naturally seek centres with larger powers ...

⁹¹ Barry Doyle, "Gender, Class and Congregational Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Norwich," *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 5, no.6 (1995): 334.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ John A. Hargreaves, "High-Victorian Expansion and Edwardian Decline: Baptists and Congregationalists in Halifax and its Hinterland, 1852-1914," *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society, New Series*, no.10 (2002): 102.

the population of Stainland ... has ... declined ... [and] though the truth be unpleasant ... parents are not as keen as formerly for the moral and spiritual training of children. The result is that a generation has risen with but a dim moral outlook and no spiritual attachments.⁹⁴

These are sentiments with which some, but not all, Congregational ministers in other parts of the country, including Hampshire, would have identified. They also suggest that claims made for the pervasiveness of diffusive religion might be greatly overstated.

Chadwick's comments on the Congregationalists of Bradford and district also suggest that the denomination was struggling:

By the mid 1890s denominational church building had almost ceased, the founding of new causes had come to a halt, and membership appears to have been stationary. Membership fell sharply from 1904, and some of the central churches were in dire financial straits. Once again, the lack of visible progress provoked a good deal of unease.⁹⁵

Thus, in West Yorkshire, as Chadwick and Hargreaves testify, the situation was by no means as buoyant as the findings for Leicestershire and Norwich would suggest.

Until the research on which this thesis is based was commenced in 2008, no equivalent studies had been undertaken in Hampshire. Indeed, the amount of published material on Congregationalism in the county is limited, in the main, to a handful of histories of individual churches.⁹⁶ These have often been written to celebrate an anniversary or enable authors to express their interest in the church

⁹⁴ Ibid, 103.

⁹⁵ Chadwick, "Church and People," 112.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Madeleine Brand, *There am I in the Midst: A Story of Faith, Loyalty and Commitment* (Fareham: Author, 1990); Dora Caton, *A Short History of the Avenue Congregational Church* (Southampton: Roy Davis, 1968); Ian Fleming, *The History of Boscombe Congregational Church 1886-1972* (Bournemouth: Boscombe Congregational Church, 1972); and Lewis Lasseter, *These Fifty Years 1891-1941 Some Reminiscences of Havant Congregational Church* (Havant: Havant United Reformed Church, 1991). Additional examples can be found in the bibliography.

concerned, with their tone usually reflecting the period in which they were produced. Although there is some variation in coverage, most tend to be relatively inward-looking, concentrating on chronologies of church events rather than considering the broader picture either locally, in terms of relations between the church and the wider community, or nationally with respect to issues confronting the denomination and the position of religion more generally. None are academic in style and consequently there is often a paucity of references, either to primary sources or historiography. However, their publication does reflect affection for some of the places of worship and congregations which feature in this thesis.⁹⁷

Apart from studies of individual churches, there is a short account of the HCU by Roy Weaver. Covering the period from its foundation in 1781 to the establishment of the United Reformed Church in 1972, for the Edwardian era Weaver provides a few statistics; comments on opposition to the Education Act 1902 and the licensing powers of magistrates; and summarises progress:

Suburban churches continued to increase in number ... metropolitan and city churches had begun to explore new avenues of outreach through community activities, with their premises open every day of the week. The Union encouraged ... churches to make their premises bright and helpful "spots in the drab life of the communities, not only on Sundays, but on weekdays too." "Focus on as much of village life in all its best interests, secular as well as spiritual." To make the secular sacred was the end in view.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ As mentioned in the Acknowledgements, a key component of the research strategy underpinning this study has been the publication of a number of articles on different aspects of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire in local and denominational history journals. These are referenced at appropriate points in the thesis.

⁹⁸ Roy Weaver, *"A Plenitude of Grace" or "No Priestly Shrine": the Story of the Hampshire Congregational Union 1781-1972* (Eastleigh: United Reformed Church Western Province, 1994).

However, he provides little of a critical nature and interesting lines of enquiry are left unexplored. For example, the activities of the HCU point to a gradual weakening of the Independency so beloved of Congregationalists as moves towards greater collaboration, especially in matters of finance, took hold. As a contributor to *The British Congregationalist* commented: 'The fact is Congregationalists seem as if they are trying to secure the benefits of Independency and Connexionalism at the same time.'⁹⁹ This is a topic to which Argent devotes particular attention and which is considered more fully in Chapter 5.¹⁰⁰

Arguably the principal contribution of micro-histories is what they reveal about the minutiae of church life and the consequent raising of questions concerning the robustness of narratives which seek to provide an overview of the pace, direction and causes of church growth and decline. By focusing on the local and, on occasions, the individual experiences of those directly affected, something of the socio-religious and cultural world they inhabited emerges, offering the possibility of fashioning more finely tuned accounts. They may also point to episodes, enthusiasms and enterprises on which to base more nuanced narratives which, as indicated earlier, Nash sees as the way forward for church history.¹⁰¹ While not going as far as him in completely rejecting secularisation and religious decline as organising concepts, not least because they were something to which many Congregationalists in Edwardian Hampshire could relate, albeit on their own terms, there is merit in moving away from over-dependence on them. This will undoubtedly enrich the historiography.

⁹⁹ *British Congregationalist*, August 8, 1912: 559.

¹⁰⁰ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, esp. chs.1 & 6.

¹⁰¹ Nash, "Reconnecting Religion".

Refining the narratives

Works from all five strands of historiography considered in this chapter have yielded empirical reference points and instructive concepts and served as a prism through which archival material has been viewed in distilling the essence, and reviewing the tensions which lay at the heart, of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire. They have also reinforced the argument that in pursuing these objectives full account needs to be taken of the various discourses which reveal the preoccupations, passions and priorities of Hampshire Congregationalists as they wrestled with internal pressures and a more disconcerting external environment. Thus, the primary intention of this study is not to refute existing narratives but to refine them.

From a methodological perspective, inherent in what follows is a belief that the most productive approach is one which combines measurement, narrative and localisation as exemplified, although not necessarily acknowledged, in the various strands of historiography. In so doing it enables due consideration to be given to the statistical record; perspectives and themes derived from the qualitative source material; and the microscopic as well as any microcosmic implications of the findings. In other words, nothing of consequence is overlooked or unduly privileged and the shortcomings of 'methodological absolutism' are avoided.¹⁰² As a further contribution to the contextualisation of the discourses, in the next chapter attention is given to the Congregational presence in Edwardian Hampshire, with measurement being to the fore.

¹⁰² Green, *Passing of Protestant England*, 14.

3. THE CONGREGATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDWARDIAN HAMPSHIRE

Statistics and Hampshire

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a statistical profile of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire. Drawing extensively on quantitative data, augmented with some qualitative material, consideration is given to the socio-economic and religious setting; the size and distribution of Congregational churches; the strength of Congregationalism relative to certain national measures; the dynamics and demographics of the memberships of three churches that have been studied in depth; and the sensitivity of Congregationalists towards statistics. The picture which emerges is a varied one, although, as cautioned in the previous chapter, it is unwise to base judgements of this kind solely on quantitative indicators. Nonetheless, if handled circumspectly and with appropriate caveats, statistical data can inject an element of objectivity into considerations of the fortunes of churches, both individually and collectively. They indicate what might be termed 'their direction of travel' and provide a basis for comparative analyses.

At this point, the geographical focus of what follows requires clarification. First, in Chapters 1 and 2 the phrase 'mainland Hampshire' was used. This was to acknowledge the fact that the historic county of Hampshire included the Isle of Wight. Although constituting the Southern district of the HCU, the research reported here is restricted to the mainland part of the county, comprising the Eastern, Middle,

Northern and Western districts. Second, in 1974 Bournemouth and Christchurch were transferred from Hampshire to Dorset, but for the purposes of this study the county boundaries are those that applied during the Edwardian period. Last, for administrative purposes, the three largest urban centres of Portsmouth, Southampton and Bournemouth had county status in their own right.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, they have been included in the ensuing analysis.

Socio-economic and religious setting

Unlike West Yorkshire, parts of London and even Reading, the focus of the studies by Chadwick, Green, Midgley, Cox, Morris and Yeo reviewed in Chapter 2,¹⁰⁴ much of Hampshire entered the twentieth century relatively undisturbed by the socio-economic upheavals of the Victorian era. As John Norwood observes: 'The essential character of Hampshire ... has always been quietly rural; so much so that ... [it has] long been regarded as an archetype of England [-] provincial, agricultural and conservative, a countryside for retreat and relaxation that in quietly going about its business avoided most of the pains and excitement of the booming nineteenth century.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ As county boroughs, they were 'independent' of the county as far as the provision of local services was concerned.

¹⁰⁴ Chadwick, "Church and People"; Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*; Midgley, *Churches and the Working Classes*; Cox, *English Churches*; Morris, *Religion and Urban Change*; and Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations*.

¹⁰⁵ John Norwood, *Victorian and Edwardian Hampshire & the Isle of Wight from Old Photographs* (London: Batsford, 1973), unpaginated.

One development, however, which Hampshire could not avoid was the coming of the railways, with 'the larger towns ... [benefiting from them] to a far greater extent than the smaller'.¹⁰⁶ This was especially true of the major urban centres of Portsmouth, which had a population of 188,928 in 1901 increasing to 231,141 in 1911, compared with only 32,166 in 1801; and Southampton, with a population of 104,824 in 1901 and 119,012 in 1911, compared with just 7,913 a hundred years earlier.¹⁰⁷ The growth in population of both ports reflected their increasingly important contribution to the naval and commercial supremacy of Britain during the nineteenth century and unlike most other parts of the county the impact of the Industrial Revolution was keenly felt. Portsmouth provided logistical support for the Royal Navy and at its height the dockyard was described as 'the largest industrial site in the world'.¹⁰⁸ In parallel, Southampton's docks were substantially extended to accommodate increases in both commercial and passenger traffic and by the Edwardian era the 'trade of Southampton ... [was] very considerable, embracing coastwise the Channel Islands, the continent, Northern Europe, and nearly every part of the world'.¹⁰⁹ There was also the special case of Bournemouth, which grew from a scattering of small hamlets located on heath land in the mid-nineteenth century¹¹⁰ to a major holiday resort, with populations of 47,003 in 1901 and 78,674 in 1911, thanks

¹⁰⁶ Jonathan Brown, "Market Towns and Downland in Hampshire 1780-1914," *Southern History* 28 (2006): 89.

¹⁰⁷ Southampton was connected to London by railway in 1840 and a direct rail link from Portsmouth to London was established in 1859.

¹⁰⁸ "Portsmouth: history," accessed January 6, 2014, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portsmouth#History>.

¹⁰⁹ *Kelly's Directory of Hampshire and Isle of Wight*, 1903 (London: Kelly's Directories, 1903), 435.

¹¹⁰ Bournemouth's population in 1851 was only 695.

mainly to the arrival of the railway in 1870 and a growing desire of middle-class families to take holidays by the sea.

Elsewhere in the county, there were eighteen medium-sized centres of population with urban status in 1901 (see Appendix B2 for a full list, together with their populations). Of these the largest was Aldershot, which was and still is the site of a 'great permanent military camp'.¹¹¹ The second largest, Gosport and Alverstoke was associated with the naval dockyards at Portsmouth. While the third, Winchester, was and remains the county's administrative and ecclesiastical centre.¹¹² Of the others, a number were free-standing market towns, such as Andover, Basingstoke, Petersfield and Romsey, or outgrowths of larger neighbours, such as Itchen, bordering Southampton, and Pokesdown, Bournemouth. Eastleigh was a late-Victorian new town developed to service the railway industry. Apart from the Eastleigh works, as a contemporary guide put it: 'The manufactures [outside of Portsmouth and Southampton] are of some importance but not great.'¹¹³

Apart from the urban centres, Hampshire remained a predominantly rural county. Even at the time of the 1901 census, 27.5 percent of Hampshire's population of 717,164 still lived in areas designated rural for administrative purposes compared with 21.1 percent for England as a whole.¹¹⁴ The rural population was spread over approximately 320 civil parishes, some of which, such as Ringwood (population

¹¹¹ *Kelly's Directory*, 1903, 2.

¹¹² It is also the location of a well-known public school.

¹¹³ *Kelly's Directory*, 1903, 2. Examples include the manufacture of clothing and agricultural machinery in Basingstoke; paper making, in particular that used in the production of bank notes, in Overton; and brewing in Ringwood and Romsey.

¹¹⁴ The equivalent figures for 1911 were 26.6 percent and 21.0 percent respectively.

4,629), Fordingbridge (3,162) and Whitchurch (2,227), were essentially small market towns.

Like the larger market towns, they enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with their rural hinterlands. As Diana Stanley puts it, somewhat elegiacally, in her description of Basingstoke:

It was a small compact town surrounded by farms and woodlands stretching for miles around, all mutually bound together by agricultural and forestry activities into a single entity. Town served country and the country supplied the town in an inseparable dependency.¹¹⁵

In the surrounding countryside much of the population was still engaged in agricultural pursuits and was predominantly 'conservative' in outlook. Tradition was firmly entrenched and in many villages the landowner or squire and vicar remained key figures. Here a spirit of deference and paternalism prevailed. Consequently, the following comments from Margaret Holt's history of Caigers Green, Curbridge and Curdrige can be applied to the situation in many other parts of the county:

This revered landowner [R.A. Burrell of Fairthorne Manor] was regarded by his/her [*sic*] employees as a protector of their community, safeguarding them from the changeable society. Taking on certain duties such as attending church with the villagers, he also supervised village affairs upholding an almost fatherly and benevolent attitude towards the working class where their welfare was concerned.¹¹⁶

It is therefore unsurprising that in party political terms the county was predominantly Conservative. Only Portsmouth and Southampton, each with two

¹¹⁵ Diana Stanley, *Within Living Memory* (Basingstoke: Skipper, 1968), unpaginated.

¹¹⁶ Margaret Holt, *Burridge — In Days Gone By: A Recollection of Hampshire Village Life* (Southampton: Margaret & Viv Holt, 1995), 18, quoted in Roger Ottewill, "The Establishment of Parish Councils in Hampshire", *Southern History* 30 (2008): 48. Holt's work is based on documentary and oral sources.

MPs, could be described as marginal. Here, between 1885 and 1914, the honours tended to be evenly divided between the Conservatives and their allies, the Liberal Unionists, and the Liberals. Of the other six constituencies, the only exceptions to the Conservative hegemony were Christchurch, which included Bournemouth, and the New Forest, both of which returned Liberals in their landslide election victory of 1906, but were lost, along with Portsmouth, at the January 1910 general election.¹¹⁷

Regarding the religious life of Edwardian Hampshire, there were many potent symbols of Anglicanism in the county. The most historic was, of course, Winchester cathedral, with the diocesan status of the city being 'reflected in the presence of church administration, such as the diocesan training board ... [and] several Christian charities, religious booksellers and publishers'.¹¹⁸ Two other Hampshire communities, well known for their religious heritage, were Christchurch with its priory and Romsey, its abbey.

More surprisingly, perhaps, most of the Free Churches were also well represented in Hampshire, even though the county was perceived as being unpromising territory for Nonconformity. As the Executive Committee of the HCU commented in its report for 1902:

Bearing in mind the peculiar characteristics of our County, a large agricultural area, a few country towns, its fashionable watering places, a growing seaport, a dockyard town with great naval and military interests, none of which present features ... favourable to Nonconformity, no manufacturing and no mining industries ... we may well recall the history of the last years with much gratitude ... ¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ The Liberal majority in the New Forest constituency was only 48.

¹¹⁸ Brown, "Market Towns," 83.

¹¹⁹ *HCU Annual Report, 1902*, 15, HRO 127M94/62/47.

Thus, Free Church, as well as Anglican, places of worship were notable features of the built environment in most parts of the county. Indeed during the Edwardian era additions were made to this with the erection of new churches and the renovation and extension of existing premises, often to facilitate work with children and young people. A notable example was the construction of a new church building by the Congregationalists of Victoria Road in Southsea. It replaced a 'tin tabernacle' and was completed at the end of 1911. Described at the time as 'handsome ... beautiful in architectural design, graceful and dignified in style', particular reference was made to its 100-foot 'graceful spire' which would 'be an outstanding feature in Southsea for many generations to come'. Referring to the new church as 'a structure worthy of our denomination', Rev. Felix Williams, minister from 1905 to 1914 and instigator of the building project, reflected something of the pride and optimism which could still be found within Congregationalism at the time.¹²⁰

More modestly, at the opening of additional premises in 1907, the Congregationalists of Basingstoke were:

... congratulated on the forward movement in the interests of young people of which the erection of a new Hall in May Place is the outward and visible sign; ... there is every reason to hope that this movement will not only meet the new demands created by the establishment of the Boys' Brigade, but that it will house important developments in future years.¹²¹

Indeed, its construction was a further reminder of Congregationalism's prominent position in the life of the town.¹²²

¹²⁰ *Hampshire Telegraph*, December 8, 1911.

¹²¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, May 4, 1907.

¹²² The Hall complex remained in use until the 1980s.

Notwithstanding building projects, there remained considerable variation in the percentage of the population that could be accommodated in the churches and chapels of all the denominations combined. Of the three major urban centres, the highest was 44.4 percent in Bournemouth and lowest 21.0 percent in Portsmouth. The equivalent figure for Southampton was 28.8 percent (see Appendix B1 for full details).¹²³ For the medium-sized urban centres, percentages ranged from 70.3 in Lymington to 12.7 in Farnborough and for a selection of small towns and large villages from 50.0 or more for communities with populations of up to 3,000 and under 50.0 for those with larger populations (see Appendices B2 and B3 for full details). The variability can be partly explained by the degree of competition between the denominations and their differing attitudes towards church-building during the Victorian era, coupled with the availability of resources, both human and financial, to maintain and extend the physical fabric of religious observance.

With respect to the relative strengths of the different denominations, data relating to church sittings suggest that Anglicans were in a majority in much of the south and east of the county and Nonconformists in much of the north and west. At the time, Roman Catholics were a small minority of the population, although they did have a place of worship in most of the larger urban centres.

Clearly, number of sittings is not the same as attendance or membership.

Although extensive attendance data are not available, in the early 1900s censuses of

¹²³ Towards the end of the Victorian era it was claimed, with a touch of hyperbole, that 'there are few towns where the spiritual needs of the population are provided for in such an ample manner as Bournemouth'. *Hampshire and Isle of Wight Illustrated: an historical guide to the pleasure resorts and places of interest in the county* (Southampton: Guide Printing and Publishing Company, 1893), 73.

churchgoing were undertaken by local newspapers in three Hampshire communities, Portsmouth, Basingstoke and Whitchurch.¹²⁴ They were prompted by the 1902/3 census, undertaken by the *Daily News* in the greater London area, the results of which aroused widespread interest in what was described as ‘the declining influence of the Churches upon the people’.¹²⁵

The survey in Portsmouth was carried out by the *Portsmouth Evening News* on Sunday 14th December 1902 and three days later the results were presented alongside those from a census taken in 1881, although little was made of this in the accompanying commentary. The key findings for 1902 are presented in Table 3.1 in a format designed to facilitate comparison with those for Basingstoke and Whitchurch. The detailed results can be found in Appendices C1-3.

Table 3.1: Church attendance in Portsmouth 1902

Denomination	Seating	Morning Total	Evening Total	Adjusted Totals ¹	% of Tot Pop ²
Anglican	27288 (50%)	11997(54%)	15482(50%)	23160(52%)	12.3
Nonconformist	25367 (47%)	7965(36%)	14227(46%)	19325(43%)	10.2
Roman Catholic	1800 (3%)	2137(10%)	1053(4%)	2421(5%)	1.3
Total	54455 (100%)	22099(100%)	30762(100%)	44906(100%)	23.8

Notes:

1. The adjusted totals have been calculated by applying Richard Mudie Smith’s estimate that 36% of those enumerated at morning services also attended in the evening.
2. Total population from 1901 census returns.

Source: *Portsmouth Evening News*, December 17, 1902.

After making adjustments to take account of factors, such as the under-fives; those who through illness or old age were prevented from attending; and afternoon

¹²⁴ Despite an extensive search, no further examples of Hampshire censuses of churchgoing during the Edwardian era have been found.

¹²⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 21, 1903.

services for children, the newspaper arrived 'at an attendance equal to one in four of the available population'.¹²⁶ This is very similar to the percentage shown in Table 3.1, which is based on the total population figure for 1901. Also of note is the fact that the results confirmed that Anglicans were in a majority in Portsmouth.

The Basingstoke census was undertaken by the *Hants and Berks Gazette* on Sunday 15th March 1903. In outlining the procedure for its conduct, the newspaper stressed that on census day there were no special services and could therefore be regarded as a typical Sunday. The results are summarised in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Church attendance in Basingstoke 1903

Denomination	Seating	Morning Total	Evening Total	Adjusted Totals ¹	% of Tot Pop ²
Anglican	2100 (43%)	733 (38%)	954 (37%)	1423 (38%)	14.5
Nonconformist	2725 (56%)	1126 (59%)	1548 (61%)	2279 (60%)	23.3
Roman Catholic	75 (2%)	54 (3%)	45 (2%)	80 (2%)	0.8
Total	4900 (100%)	1913(100%)	2547(100%)	3782 (100%)	38.6

Notes:

1. The adjusted totals have been calculated by applying Richard Mudie Smith's estimate that 36% of those enumerated at morning services also attended in the evening.
2. Total population from 1901 census returns.

Source: *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 21, 1903.

The figure of 38.6 percent of the population was substantially more than the 23.8 percent for Portsmouth and indicated that the socio-religious culture of market towns, such as Basingstoke, was more conducive to churchgoing. In commenting on the results, the newspaper chose to stress the fact that morning attendances

¹²⁶ *Portsmouth Evening News*, December 17, 1902.

represented '1 in every 5 of the inhabitants ... [and that] in the evening the attendance rose to 2547, or 1 in 4'.¹²⁷

However, while it was acknowledged that the figures for Basingstoke were 'considerably better than those of London boroughs ... [there were] some awkward facts that require[d] to be faced'. These were 'the exceedingly large non-churchgoing-population' and 'the large number of people who ... [were] to be seen in the streets during the hours of divine service'. Indeed, the number of people passing three locations between 7.00 and 7.15 in the evening were actually counted and reported. In conclusion, the newspaper offered 'to open ... [its] columns for the publication of suggestions from representative ministers and laymen for the solution of the problem as to how the absentees from public worship are to be reached and influenced'.¹²⁸

It would seem, however, that in the main ministers and laymen chose not to take up the newspaper's offer. Nonetheless, someone did draw attention to the fact that a similar census had been undertaken in 1882, the results of which were duly reproduced. Comparison of the two showed 'that while there ha[d] been a substantial increase in the attendance at the Established Churches the combined Nonconformist bodies show[ed] a decrease in the morning and only a very small

¹²⁷ Comparisons were also made with Newbury, which is just over the border in Berkshire, where a similar census had been undertaken on 2 February 1903. 'There, out of a population of 11,061 the morning attendance was 2578, or 23.3 per cent, which is distinctly better than Basingstoke; in the evening, however, the attendance was only slightly better than in the morning, viz., 2605, or 23.5 per cent, which is lower than the Basingstoke record.' *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 21, 1903.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, March 21, 1903.

increase in the evening'.¹²⁹ Thus, while the Nonconformist churches still retained their majority of the churchgoing population, there had been a shift in allegiance to the Anglicans.

Although there was no further mention of the census in the newspaper's correspondence columns, at least two clergymen referred to it in sermons. The minister of Immanuel Church [Countess of Huntingdon's Connection], Rev. Eustace Long, did so when preaching on the text, 'I have much people in this city', words from God to St Paul at Ephesus.¹³⁰ Although he found the 'result somewhat discouraging', certainly by comparison with 1882, he argued that since then 'the outward work done by the various Churches ... [had] in many ways greatly developed'.¹³¹ Presumably this was a reference to their philanthropic activities and the increasing number of associated organisations. Nevertheless, he also pointed out that the true people of God had 'always been few in comparison with the world'.¹³²

Another clergyman who responded to the census findings was Rev. Alfred Capes Tarbolton, the erudite and much respected minister of London Street Congregational Church in Basingstoke from 1887 to 1907. He devoted a whole sermon entitled "Is churchgoing out of date?" to the topic. Reported at length, Tarbolton placed the Basingstoke results in the broader context of the London census and the investigations of Charles Booth into, amongst other things, 'the religious

¹²⁹ Ibid, April 4, 1903.

¹³⁰ Acts 17: 10.

¹³¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, April 11, 1903.

¹³² Ibid, April 11, 1903.

influences at work among the people'.¹³³ He also rehearsed the various reasons why the census results might have understated the percentage of churchgoers, concluding that: 'I am fully persuaded that on any day you may choose to reckon the people in the churches and chapels you would not find more than half the people who more or less go there.' However, he was by no means complacent and devoted attention to various 'excuses' for non-attendance. These included: 'reasoned unbelief'; 'the increase of individual liberty'; 'the strain of modern life'; 'class prejudices'; 'the tremendous craze ... for amusements'; and dull sermons. Significantly, many resonate with explanations given by historians and sociologists, such as Gilbert and Robbins, mentioned in Chapter 2, to justify their claim that there was a 'crisis of faith' and reflected the perspicacity of ministers at the time.¹³⁴ However, while keenly aware of the challenges they faced, few were defeatist and many adopted a positive stance. Tarbolton, for example, ended his sermon by proclaiming some of the reasons for church attendance:

... to thank God for the benefits from Him, and for the full personal redemption through Jesus Christ, and to stand in the presence of Almighty God and hear the words from the far-off land brought near by His voice.¹³⁵

He also suggested that the churches should jointly undertake a house-to-house visitation designed to 'make the careless care'.¹³⁶

¹³³ Ibid, April 25, 1903.

¹³⁴ Gilbert, *Church, Chapel and Social Change*; and Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales*.

¹³⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, April 25, 1903.

¹³⁶ Ibid, April 25, 1903.

For the Whitchurch census, the *Hants and Berks Gazette* again took the lead. It was carried out on Sunday 22nd March 1903 (see Table 3.3. for a summary of the results).

Table 3.3: Church attendance in Whitchurch 1903

Denomination	Seating	Morning Total	Evening Total	Adjusted Totals ¹	% of Tot Pop ²
Anglican	410(27%)	263(46%)	291(37%)	459(40%)	20.6
Nonconformist	1124(73%)	307(54%)	487(63%)	683(60%)	30.7
Total ³	1534(100%)	570 (100%)	778 (100%)	1142(100%)	51.3

Notes:

1. The adjusted totals have been calculated using Richard Mudie Smith's estimate that 36% of those enumerated at morning services also attended in the evening.
2. Total population from 1901 census returns.
3. There was not a Roman Catholic Church in Whitchurch

Source: *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 28, 1903.

The findings indicate that just over 50 percent of Whitchurch's population of 2,227 attended a place of worship. Interestingly, the enumerators undertook a pub as well as a church count. This suggested that approximately one in eight of the population visited a pub on Sunday evening, a smaller percentage than that of those attending a church service. Although the results were highlighted in the newspaper, which described them as 'startling', they do not appear to have prompted any reactions, at least none that were reported.

Considered in the round, the censuses suggest that in smaller communities, such as Whitchurch, approximately half of the population were churchgoers, falling to under a quarter in the large urban centres, such as Portsmouth. Thus, within Hampshire, there was considerable variation in the embodied manifestation of religiosity. Although this conclusion should not be taken too far, given the limited

scope of the censuses, the findings do broadly conform to Paul Thompson's assertion that just over 25 percent of Edwardians attended at least one church service on any given Sunday. This ranged from 'only 20 per cent in large cities and industrial towns ... [to] 30 per cent or more in the countryside ... [and] as high as 50 per cent in resorts'.¹³⁷

Apart from the results, the censuses are of interest because, along with the extensive reporting of church life more generally, they illustrate the willingness of the local press to devote a relatively large amount of copy to religion. Moreover, even where local censuses were not undertaken, the London surveys prompted Hampshire ministers to consider the issues to which they gave rise. In Romsey, for example, the well-respected Congregational minister, Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson, who served from 1897 to 1904, preached a fully reported sermon on the 'empty church'. Indeed, the newspaper began its account with a hint of irony by highlighting the contrast between the subject matter of the sermon and the circumstances in which it was delivered:

It was not in an empty church that the Rev. H.R. Williamson preached on Sunday evening. Instead the gallery which runs around this fine Congregational Church was packed, and the body of the building was filled, so that there was room for no more. There must have been hundreds of Romsonians present to hear the popular pastor address himself to the subject – "Why are the churches empty?"¹³⁸

In his sermon, Williamson critically reviewed various explanations for empty churches taken from the correspondence columns of an unnamed national

¹³⁷ Thompson, *Edwardians*, 173-4. Although a census was not undertaken in Bournemouth, as will be discussed later, there are reasons for believing that rates of churchgoing in the town were relatively high.

¹³⁸ *Romsey Advertiser*, January 30, 1903.

newspaper. These included the view that 'the church was out of date'; insufficient attention was being given to the 'social gospel'; and one's reception in church was likely to be 'cold and unfriendly'. While others claimed 'that they were serving God just as much by being honest and fair in their everyday life as in church, and they got more good by walking abroad in the temple of nature than in all the houses made with hands'.¹³⁹ To each justification for non-attendance, Williamson delivered a heartfelt rejoinder.

While some of the issues raised by the censuses might suggest that the churches were facing a 'crisis', the fact that there was still considerable interest in religious affairs amongst readers of Edwardian newspapers gave some credence to Brown's notion of a 'faith society'.¹⁴⁰ Press coverage might also be seen as a manifestation of diffusive religion.

How then did Congregationalists fare in this setting? In which communities was their presence most in evidence? How strong was Hampshire Congregationalism relative to the denomination nationally? Such questions serve as the backdrop to the next two sections.

Distribution and size of Hampshire's Congregational churches

In his study of the geography of religion, John Gay identifies Hampshire as one of the counties 'with a long-established tradition of independency' and an above-

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Brown, *Religion and Society*.

average concentration of Congregationalists.¹⁴¹ To some extent, this is confirmed by the data in Appendices B1-3, which indicate that there was a Congregational place of worship in most centres of population. In 1901, the only sizeable communities without Congregational churches were Aldershot, Farnborough and Fleet in the north-east of the county and the railway town of Eastleigh in the south. By 1914, however, churches had been founded in Fleet and Eastleigh.¹⁴² Moreover, the process of church extension, a key feature of the Victorian era, saw new churches being established in the expanding suburbs of Bournemouth and Southampton.

The data in Appendices B1-3 also confirm that most Congregational places of worship had more sittings than those of other Free Churches. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that they had larger congregations. That said, the Basingstoke census of churchgoing confirmed that Congregationalists were the second largest denomination, after Anglicans, in terms of attendance at services and represented approximately five percent of the population (see Appendix C2). This compared with fewer than three percent in Whitchurch, where Congregationalists faced considerable competition from other Free Churches (see Appendix C3).¹⁴³

Congregationalism was also relatively weak in Portsmouth with the Baptists, Wesleyan Methodists and Bible Christians attracting larger congregations (see Appendix C1). As Nigel Yates has shown, between the religious censuses of 1851 and

¹⁴¹ John Gay, *The Geography of Religion in England* (London: Duckworth, 1971), 143.

¹⁴² The Congregational cause at Fleet was established in 1912, with support and encouragement from London Street Congregational Church in Basingstoke and the HCU. Purpose-built church premises were opened in 1914. In Eastleigh, the initial steps to found a Congregational church were taken in 1909 with the HCU playing a leading role. Here the Congregationalists took over Desborough Mission Hall which had been built in 1905.

¹⁴³ By common consent Whitchurch was 'overchurched.'

1881 attendances at Congregational churches in Portsmouth fell by 14.4 percent. The equivalent figure for Southampton was 6.8 percent.¹⁴⁴ The Portsmouth survey of 1902 recorded a further fall of 27 percent since 1882, with just 4.4 percent of those attending morning services being Congregationalists and 4.1 percent in the evening, which represented approximately 0.8 percent of the population. Whether there was a similar decline in Southampton is not known but given that it was also a port it seems likely. Equivalent information is not available for Bournemouth. However, in a series of reports on the British Sabbath published in *The Daily Telegraph* in 1905, it was noted that: 'With regard to the present aspect of Sunday at Bournemouth, it might be stated that numerous churches are filled to overflowing most Sundays, and the erection of new churches speedily secure (*sic*) crowded congregations.'¹⁴⁵

To extend the analysis, it is necessary to draw upon membership data which Congregational churches submitted on an annual basis to the HCU for onward transmission to the CUEW.¹⁴⁶ As indicated in Chapter 2, these are not without their limitations. In particular, membership is not necessarily an accurate guide to attendance at services and, as David Thompson observes, does not include those

¹⁴⁴ Nigel Yates, "Urban Church Attendance and the Use of Statistical Evidence, 1850-1900," in *Studies in Church History 16: The Church in Town and Countryside*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 392-3.

¹⁴⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, October 6, 1905. For details of Bournemouth's Congregational and other churches at this time, see Alfred Webb, *The churches of Bournemouth: the history of 56 churches in the Borough of Bournemouth with full page illustration of each* (Bournemouth: H & W, 1910).

¹⁴⁶ Probably due to their strong commitment to Independency, the Congregationalists were the last of the Free Church denominations to gather and publish national statistics, only doing so from 1898. All the quantitative data relating to the membership of Congregational churches have been taken from *HCU Annual Reports*, 1901 to 1914 inclusive, HRO 127M94/62/46 to 59.

generally labelled 'adherents' and others who identified with Congregationalism.¹⁴⁷ However, it does facilitate making comparisons between churches, locations and over time.

The basic data show that the Congregational church with the largest membership in Hampshire was Richmond Hill in Bournemouth. Known as 'the cathedral of Nonconformity in Hampshire',¹⁴⁸ this had a membership of 656 in 1901 and 701 in 1911. At the other extreme were a number of village chapels with fewer than 50 members (see Appendix D3).

In what follows, churches with memberships of 300 or more are designated 'very large'; between 200 and 299, 'large'; between 100 and 199, 'average'; between 50 and 99, 'small'; and under 50, 'very small'. Not surprisingly, the four very large churches in 1901 were located in the three major urban centres, the previously mentioned Richmond Hill; Albion (membership 525) and Above Bar (353) in Southampton; and Buckland (506) in Portsmouth. The situation was little different in 1911 with just one additional very large church, East Cliff (membership 361), which was located in Bournemouth. However, both Albion and Above Bar had suffered a net loss of members (110 and 48 respectively), although this was almost certainly due to the fact that they were town centre churches and were adversely affected by the process of suburbanisation.

¹⁴⁷ Thompson, *Decline of Congregationalism* (London: The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust, 2002), 5. For most of the churches where it is possible to compare membership figures with the results of a census of churchgoing, such as Basingstoke, it would seem that at least as many non-members as members attended services on the Sunday in question.

¹⁴⁸ *Bournemouth Graphic*, May 18, 1905.

Of the eight large churches in 1901, four were situated in the major urban centres. These were East Cliff (243) and Boscombe (203) in Bournemouth; Christ Church, Southsea (231) in Portsmouth; and Avenue (219) in Southampton. The other four were in the medium-sized urban centres of Christchurch (260); Gosport (256); Romsey (244); and Basingstoke (211). A number of these churches suffered a net loss of members in the decade 1901 to 1911 (see Appendix D2).

Average-sized churches were again found in the major urban centres (see Appendix D1). However, most were more particularly associated with market towns, such as Andover, Alton, Fareham and Lymington, where a few thrived and grew during the Edwardian era (see Appendix D2). This can be contrasted with Tudur Jones's comment concerning Congregationalism more broadly that 'at the beginning of the twentieth century ... [it was] a denomination of small churches ... [with] over sixty-one per cent ... [having] less than a hundred members each'. While acknowledging 'that there were some very large churches in the big towns and industrial areas', he gives the impression that between these two extremes there was little of note.¹⁴⁹ His assessment, however, does a disservice to those market town churches with memberships of between 100 and 199. Their promotion of Congregational values and contributions to the life of their communities deserve to be recognised. Indeed, drawing upon evidence from Hampshire, a strong case can be made for claiming that it was here that the genius of Edwardian Congregationalism was most fully realised. It is also noteworthy that such churches, along with their

¹⁴⁹ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 320-1.

larger counterparts, not only financed themselves but also contributed to the HCU fund which supported many smaller churches.

Not surprisingly, the small and very small churches tended to be concentrated in the rural parts of the county. Here there were approximately 60 communities where Congregationalists had been able to put down roots. Broadly speaking they fell into two categories. First, there were a number of small towns and large villages with what might be termed 'stand-alone' Congregational churches. They had no formal links with a church in a neighbouring market town, although there might have been close relations of an informal kind. Such churches might or might not have been in receipt of financial assistance from the HCU to help pay the pastor's stipend and/or meet their general expenses. Examples include Overton and Tadley in the Northern district of the HCU; Titchfield and Warsash in the Eastern; Burley and Fordingbridge in the Western; and Alresford and Stockbridge in the Middle (see Appendix D3 for a full list).¹⁵⁰

Second, there were villages with a Congregational place of worship which was overseen by a 'mother' church in the nearest market town with the minister acting as superintendent.¹⁵¹ This style of organisation reflected the belief of Rev. Alexander Mackennal in:

... the primitive Episcopal ideal, according to which a strong central community with its minister may take over the "oversight" of several smaller

¹⁵⁰ This also indicates whether or not a church was in receipt of financial support from the HCU.

¹⁵¹ They were variously described as branch churches, evangelistic or preaching stations, missions or simply the cause. Their members were often included in the total for the mother church, being designated 'country' as opposed to 'town'.

communities around it – each relatively independent – and may with those constitute one church.¹⁵²

Basingstoke had six such ‘communities’; Christchurch, three; and Romsey and Lymington, two each (see Appendix D3).¹⁵³

Notwithstanding a Congregational presence in many parts of rural Hampshire, the coverage was by no means comprehensive. Some areas were completely devoid of Congregational places of worship, such as villages to the north and west of Andover and many between Winchester and Basingstoke. In suggesting possible reasons for this, the work of Alan Everitt on rural Dissent provides a starting point. Although he focuses on the nineteenth century, given that most Congregational causes in rural Hampshire were founded during this period, some of his conclusions, despite their limitations, are worthy of consideration. He suggests that ‘at the risk of considerable oversimplification’ there were three common elements in the settlement types with which rural Nonconformity was associated. Arguably the most important of these was the ‘unusual degree of freedom’ as evidenced by such factors as property being ‘much sub-divided’, that is ‘open villages’, rather than being in one or a few hands, that is ‘closed villages’.¹⁵⁴

However, as the data in Appendices D4a and b illustrate, there were almost as many

¹⁵² Frederick Powicke, *A History of the Cheshire County Union of Congregational Churches* (Manchester, 1907), 92, quoted in Gerald Rimmington, “Congregationalism in Rural Leicestershire,” 97. Mackennal was the distinguished minister of Bowdon Downs Congregational Church in Altrincham from 1877 until his death in 1904.

¹⁵³ It is also worthy of note that a number of urban churches supported missions in their home town. During the Edwardian era, Avenue Congregational Church initiated the Portswood Mission in 1902; Andover, Harroway Road in 1908; and Basingstoke, May Street in 1913.

¹⁵⁴ Alan Everitt, *The Pattern of Rural Dissent: the Nineteenth Century*, Department of English Local History Occasional Papers, Second series, no.4 (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972), 44.

parishes in Hampshire with a Congregational place of worship where the property was in few hands as those where it was sub-divided.

While property ownership may have been a factor, as Everitt himself points out, other considerations, such as the 'social and familial structure' of communities and the churchmanship of the Anglican incumbent cannot be ignored.¹⁵⁵ For example, Nonconformity may have 'been forestalled by the timely arrival of an ardent Evangelical capable of meeting the new demand for a more "vital" religious life'.¹⁵⁶ In rural Hampshire what appears to have been of particular importance, apart from the presence or otherwise of another Free Church in a village, was the ability and willingness of Congregationalists in the nearest market town to promote and facilitate ministry in their 'spiritual hinterland'. Here church members played a critical role in establishing the cause, making donations and taking services and preaching.¹⁵⁷ In other words, motivation, money and manpower were essential considerations.

Many rural chapels were dependent on particular individuals, and the loss of such persons through removal or death was often keenly felt. As Mr A. Grigsby observed, at the spring gathering of the HCU in 1914, 'an enormous amount ... [was being] carried out in [the rural parts of] their county under the most difficult and discouraging circumstances'.¹⁵⁸ However, urban churches continued to recognise

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 12.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, Roger Ottewill, " 'A Perfect Little Paradise': A History of Winslade Congregational Chapel 1888-1935," *Hampshire Field Club Newsletter*, no.56 (2011): 3-6.

¹⁵⁸ *Portsmouth Evening News*, April 22, 1914.

their indebtedness to rural causes in nurturing future Congregationalists, many of whom subsequently moved to the towns to enhance their economic prospects.

During the Edwardian era, some rural causes, such as Overton, Titchfield and Rowlands Castle, were undoubtedly buoyant.¹⁵⁹ Others, however, including Whitchurch and Hurstbourne Tarrant, struggled to survive, although none appears to have closed prior to the First World War.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the state of Congregationalism in rural Hampshire at this time can best be described as mixed.

In addition to adult members, Congregational churches were required to collect statistics relating to their Sunday schools, specifically numbers of scholars and teachers, and these were published alongside the membership data. They tend to confirm the substantial contribution which Congregationalists made to the provision of Sunday schools at a time when it was unusual for children not to attend. As Thompson observes, during the second half of the Victorian era 'the popularity of Sunday schools continued to increase, as church attendance itself declined, to reach a peak of over 6 million pupils in 1906, well over 80 per cent' of the five to fourteen age group.¹⁶¹

Inevitably, the number of scholars varied between churches, reflecting not only their size and teaching strength but also their locations and priorities. Thus,

¹⁵⁹ For Overton, see Roger Ottewill, "James Richards of Overton 1892-1916: Congregational Pastor and Local Politician. Part 1 'Beloved by all members of the community'," *Hampshire Field Club Newsletter*, no.57 (2012): 17-9; "Part 2 'A workman who needeth not be ashamed'," *Hampshire Field Club Newsletter*, no.58 (2012): 2-5; "Part 3 'Leading them in the right way'," *Hampshire Field Club Newsletter*, no.59 (2013): 21-2.

¹⁶⁰ For Whitchurch, see Roger Ottewill, "'A Struggling Cause': Whitchurch Congregational Church in the Edwardian Era 1901-1914" (working paper, University of Birmingham, 2013).

¹⁶¹ F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (London: Fontana, 1988), 140.

Richmond Hill's Sunday school was relatively small, by comparison with some other churches. In 1901, it had 'only' 383 scholars on its books compared with 824 at Buckland in Portsmouth and 640 and 536 respectively at Albion and Above Bar in Southampton (see Appendix E1). Moreover, some churches in medium-sized urban centres had more scholars than Richmond Hill. Romsey, for example, had 467; Basingstoke, 446; and Gosport, 436 (see Appendix E2). One possible explanation for this is that Richmond Hill was principally an adult-orientated church with Rev. J.D. Jones' preaching skills being the major attraction. That said, Richmond Hill was instrumental in establishing and sustaining a number of suburban churches in the Bournemouth area, including Winton in 1894; Charminster Road in 1901; and Southbourne in 1911, all of which had relatively large and flourishing Sunday schools. Given that it was seen as a gospel imperative, even the smallest Congregational churches, in terms of members, sought to make provision for children and young people (see Appendix D3).

Notwithstanding variations in the strength of Congregational churches, as measured by memberships and Sunday school scholars, the spread of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire was impressive given the socio-religious characteristics of the county mentioned earlier. Moreover, churches situated in the suburbs, particularly those of Bournemouth, enjoyed considerable advantages.¹⁶² Not only was the population rapidly increasing, the resort 'remained

¹⁶² Membership of Southbourne Congregational Church grew from 63 in 1911 to 125 in 1914. At Charminster Road, there were 112 members in 1906, the year in which data were first shown separately. By 1914 membership had increased to 215. Charminster Road also had a sizeable Sunday school, with around 350 scholars in 1914. While at Bitterne Park in

more polite, refined, and sedate than anything the working classes fancied'.¹⁶³ There was also a very high ratio of women to men in the population. The female/male ratio for the urban areas of Hampshire in 1901 and 1911 was 51/49, while the equivalent ratio for Bournemouth was 63/37 in 1901 and 61/39 in 1911. Since women generally outnumbered men in the membership of Congregational churches by a margin of two to one, this undoubtedly helped to boost numbers. In addition, as indicated, Richmond Hill took its church extension responsibilities seriously and with J.D. Jones at the helm, large numbers of 'ecclesiastical tourists' were attracted to Bournemouth, thereby helping to enhance the prestige of Congregationalism and invigorate Congregationalists throughout the county.

Nonetheless, with respect to the overall position, various qualifications need to be made. First, membership of some churches was decreasing. Second, churches recording increases in their memberships often failed to keep up with the growth of population and thus there was a relative decline. Third, many rural causes needed external support to survive. Last, when the situation nationally is taken into account, the standing of Congregationalism in Hampshire does not appear as strong as that in other parts of the country. To explore this final qualification in greater depth, membership data, coupled with population statistics for the two census years of 1901 and 1911, are used in the next section as the basis for constructing national and local measures to facilitate making comparisons.

Southampton membership increased from 69 in 1903 to 140 in 1914, when it had approximately 125 Sunday school scholars.

¹⁶³ Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, 293.

Comparative measures

For comparative purposes, a key measure is 'membership density'.¹⁶⁴ However, as Currie *et al* (who first devised the measure) recognise, it is relatively crude, since it 'cannot provide an entirely precise indication of a church's success, or lack of success, in bringing into membership those who in practice constitute the stock of its potential recruits'.¹⁶⁵ This is particularly the case in large urban centres and some rural communities where it is difficult to know the precise boundaries of a church's 'catchment area'. Another complicating factor is that of the minimum age for church membership. As Baxter points out, church members had to be adult, 'but what is adult is ill defined'.¹⁶⁶ For Congregational churches it was relatively rare for someone under the age of 18 to have been a member. Thus, adjustments need to be made to the population figures to take account of this. Notwithstanding these caveats, membership density is of value. Thus, Table 3.4 shows the basic data and measures for England.

¹⁶⁴ Currie *et al*, *Churches and Churchgoers*. As explained in Chapter 2, 'membership density' is the number of members expressed as a percentage of the population or 'external constituency' from which a church recruits its members.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 64.

¹⁶⁶ Baxter, "Organisational Growth," 83.

Table 3.4: Membership and membership density of Congregational churches in England for 1901 and 1911

Item	1901	1911	Difference	
			No.	Percentage
Congregational Membership ¹	258434	288075	29641	+11.5%
Population	30514967	33649571	3134604	+10.3%
Population 18 plus	18856300	21538600 ²	2682300	+14.2%
Membership as % of pop	0.85%	0.86%	0.01%	+1.2%
Membership as % of 18+ pop	1.37%	1.34%	-0.03%	-2.4%

Notes:

1. Excluding Monmouthshire.
2. This figure is an estimate.

Source: *CYBs* and *Census Returns*.

While the population of England grew by 10.3 percent between 1901 and 1911, the total membership of Congregational churches increased by 11.5 percent; consequently there was a marginal increase of 1.2 percent, from 0.85 percent to 0.86 percent, in the membership density based on the population as a whole. However, since the 18 plus population grew at a faster rate than the total population, there was a decline of 2.4 percent in the membership density based on the adult population.

How then did the performance of Congregational churches in Hampshire compare with what was happening in England as a whole?

Table 3.5: Membership and membership density of Congregational churches in Hampshire and England 1901 and 1911

Item	1901	1911	Hampshire		England
			Difference		Difference
			No.	%	%
Congregational Membership	7629	8321	692	+9.1	+11.5
Population	717164	862393	145229	+20.3	+10.3
Population 18 plus	455147	573650	118503	+26.0	+14.2
Membership as a % of pop	1.06%	0.96%	-0.10%	-9.3	+1.1
Membership as % of 18+ pop	1.68%	1.45%	-0.23%	-13.5	-2.4

Source: CYBs and *Census Returns*.

The data in Table 3.5 show that Congregationalism in Hampshire appears to have performed less well than in the country as a whole. For example, the 9.1 percent increase in Congregational membership for Hampshire was less than the 11.5 percent increase for England. This, coupled with the fact that between 1901 and 1911 Hampshire's total and adult populations grew at substantially faster rates than those for England, meant that over this period there were even greater differences in the changes in their respective membership densities. Thus, while the national measure for the change in membership density based on the adult population is minus 2.4 percent the equivalent figure for Hampshire is minus 13.5 percent.

Given the overall picture of relative decline, it is not surprising that this is replicated for many towns in Hampshire. The position of the three major urban centres is shown in Table 3.6, with the membership data for the Congregational churches being aggregated since, as indicated earlier, it is not possible to delimit, with any degree of accuracy, the populations from which individual churches recruited their members.

Table 3.6: Changes in the membership and membership density of Congregational churches in England and Hampshire between 1901 and 1911

	Congre- gational Membership	Population	Population 18+	Membership as % of population	Membership as % of 18+ pop
England	+11.9%	+10.5%	+14.2%	+1.1%	-2.4%
Hampshire	+9.1%	+20.3%	+26.0%	-9.3%	-13.5%
Bournemouth (W) ¹	+42.4%	+31.8%	+40.4%	+7.9%	+1.3%
Portsmouth (E)	-8.3%	+22.9%	+28.6%	-25.4%	-28.7%
Southampton (M)	+1.5%	+13.5%	+16.4%	-10.6%	-12.8%

Note

1. The initial in brackets indicates the HCU district in which the town was located. E = Eastern; M = Middle; and W = Western.

Source: *CYBs* and *Census Returns*.

The data confirm a substantially better performance for Congregationalism in Bournemouth than in Portsmouth and Southampton. However, when compared with the national measures for the change in membership density, it does not look quite as impressive with an increase of just 1.3 percent compared with a decrease of 2.4 percent for England as a whole. The equivalent figures for Southampton, and particularly Portsmouth, of minus 12.8 percent and 28.7 percent respectively highlight the difficulties Congregationalism faced in maintaining its membership in large industrial centres of population.

Turning to the eleven medium-sized urban centres of population in Hampshire with Congregational memberships of 100 or more in both 1901 and 1911, equivalent data are provided in Table 3.7, together with those for England and Hampshire for comparative purposes.

Table 3.7: Changes in the membership and membership density of larger Congregational churches in Hampshire between 1901 and 1911

	Congregational Membership	Population	Population 18+	Membership as % of population	Membership as % of 18+ pop
England	+11.9%	+10.5%	+14.2%	+1.4%	-2.1%
Hampshire	+9.1%	+20.3%	+26.0%	-9.3%	-13.5%
Alton (N) ¹	+17.5%	+1.4%	+4.6%	+15.9%	+12.4%
Andover (N)	+21.8%	+16.7%	+19.9%	+4.4%	+1.6%
Basingstoke (N)	+16.6%	+17.8%	+21.2%	-1.1%	-3.8%
Christchurch (W)	0.0%	+21.4%	+25.3%	-17.6%	-20.2%
Fareham (E)	-24.3%	+17.3%	+22.8%	-35.5%	-38.3%
Gosport (E)	-0.8%	+15.3%	+22.9%	-13.9%	-19.3%
Havant (E)	-6.4%	+6.6%	+14.2%	-12.2%	-18.0%
Lymington (W)	0.0%	+3.9%	+5.9%	-3.8%	-5.5%
Petersfield (E)	2.9%	+20.9%	+29.6%	-14.9%	-20.6%
Romsey (M)	-5.3%	+7.0%	+9.0%	-11.5%	-13.1%
Winchester (M)	+6.0%	+11.7%	+15.6%	-5.1%	-8.3%

Note

1. The initial in brackets indicates the HCU district in which the town was located. E = Eastern; M = Middle; N = Northern; and W = Western.

Source: CYBs and *Census Returns*.

As the data show, only Alton and Andover were above the national measures for changes in membership density based on their total and adult populations, with figures of plus 15.9 percent and 4.4 percent and plus 12.4 percent and 1.6 percent respectively.¹⁶⁷ Elsewhere performance against national measures was substantially weaker, with only Basingstoke, Lymington and Winchester recording declines in membership density of less than ten percent.

Similar calculations have been made for a sample of small towns and large villages (See Table 3.8). However, these are less meaningful since the number of members is much smaller and therefore even slight changes can result in substantial

¹⁶⁷ Both of these towns were located in the Northern District of the HCU. After Bournemouth, this was the most fruitful part of the county for Congregationalists.

percentage increases or decreases. Furthermore, the census data do not show the age distribution of the population for rural communities so it has been necessary to estimate the percentage of the population aged 18 and over.

Table 3.8: Changes in the membership and membership density of a sample of smaller Congregational churches in Hampshire between 1901 and 1911

	Congregational Membership	Population	Population 18+	Membership as % of population	Membership as % of 18+ pop
England	+11.9%	+10.5%	+14.2%	+1.4%	-2.1%
Hampshire	+9.1%	+20.3%	+26.0%	-9.3%	-13.5%
Alresford (M)	-33.3%	+10.8%	+13.7%	-39.8%	-41.4%
Bishop's Waltham (E) ¹	+16.3%	+7.8%	+10.7%	+8.0%	+5.1%
Crandall (N)	-21.1%	-8.7%	-6.1%	-13.5%	-15.9%
East Meon (E)	-5.3%	-4.3%	+1.9%	-1.1%	-7.1%
Fordingbridge (W)	-12.3%	+9.3%	+12.1%	-19.8%	-21.8%
Odiham (N)	+26.6%	-0.9%	+1.9%	+27.7%	+24.2%
Overton (N)	+35.7%	+6.7%	+9.9%	+27.1%	+23.5%
Ringwood (W)	-14.3%	+9.2%	+12.0%	-21.5%	-23.5%
Stockbridge (M)	+28.6%	+6.4%	+9.1%	+20.8%	+17.8%
Tadley (N)	+11.6%	+8.5%	+11.6%	+2.9%	0.0%
Titchfield (E)	+93.3%	+2.5%	+9.2%	+88.6%	+77.1%
Whitchurch (N)	-15.0%	+6.4%	+9.4%	-20.1%	-22.3%

Note

1. The initial in brackets indicates the HCU district in which the town was located. E = Eastern; M = Middle; N = Northern; and W = Western.

Source: *CYBs* and *Census Returns*.

Once again there is considerable variation in the record of individual churches, with a number, such as Titchfield, Odiham and Overton, performing substantially better than others, such as Alresford and Whitchurch. Possible explanations for the differences include the variable preaching skills and pastoral sensitivity of ministers; the diligence with which churches sought to encourage adherents to become church

members; the attractiveness and range of church-sponsored organisations; and the intensity of the competition from other denominations. Establishing the precise combination of factors in any particular community is an exercise in micro-history.¹⁶⁸

Alongside the variations, what the statistical record reveals quite clearly is that Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire was not as strong as Congregationalism in the country as a whole. Put another way, the positive conclusions reached on Congregationalism in Edwardian Leicestershire and Norwich by Rimmington and Doyle respectively, to which reference was made in Chapter 2, cannot be applied, at least without some qualifications, to Hampshire.¹⁶⁹ In some respects this is surprising given the market town and rural character of much of the county and the presence of very high-profile Congregational churches in the large urban centres, such as Richmond Hill in Bournemouth and Above Bar in Southampton. Moreover, Hampshire's Congregationalists often made their presence felt not only in religious terms but also in contributing to community life more generally. Indeed, considered in isolation, Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire, despite various challenges, appeared to be fairly buoyant. However, putting its performance into a national context underlines the dangers of being overly parochial when making assessments of this kind.

That said, the figures for 1901 and 1911 are simply snapshots and for individual churches focusing on particular years can result in aberrations when

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, Ottewill, "James Richards. Parts 1, 2 and 3," and Roger Ottewill, "Promoting 'Spiritual Health': An Assessment of Alton Congregational Church during the Edwardian Era," *Alton Papers*, no. 14 (2010): 28-44.

¹⁶⁹ Rimmington, "Congregationalism in Leicester," 41; Rimmington, "Congregationalism in Rural Leicestershire," 101; and Doyle, "Congregational Culture," 317.

measuring their relative performances. Furthermore, they do not reveal the turnover of members nor their composition in terms of socio-demographic variables.¹⁷⁰ To investigate these aspects further and, as indicated in Chapter 1, taking a lead from Chadwick, data from the membership records of three churches have been combined with those from census returns. This has facilitated the production of a richer picture than one based on memberships and membership densities alone. While Chadwick only had access to census data for 1881, for this study it has been possible to consult enumerators' returns for the 1901 and 1911 censuses. However, she studied the memberships of nine churches, including five Congregational ones, compared with three considered here.¹⁷¹

Dynamics and demographics of church membership

In order to cross-reference material from church membership records with that from the census returns of 1901 and 1911 it was necessary to find churches where not only the names of members were available but also their addresses. There were three churches where the requisite information has survived, London Street in Basingstoke; Avenue in Southampton; and Victoria Road in Southsea (see Appendix G1a for details of the numbers involved).¹⁷² As it happens, there was some variation

¹⁷⁰ Such as gender, age, household structure and social class.

¹⁷¹ Chadwick, "Church and People," ch.4.

¹⁷² Much of the quantitative data relating to these three churches have been taken from *Avenue Congregational Church Southampton Record*, 1901 to 1911 inclusive, Avenue St Andrews URC Archive; *London Street Congregational Church Basingstoke Manual*, 1901 to 1911 inclusive,

between these churches in terms of their histories, locations and membership patterns.

Of the three, London Street was by far the oldest, tracing its origins back to the Great Ejection of 1662. Located in what was, at the turn of the twentieth century, a medium-sized market town with a population of 9,793 in 1901 and 11,540 in 1911, it recruited members from all sections of the community. In so doing, it was in competition with various Nonconformist churches as well as two Anglican churches (see Appendix C2). Avenue was the newest of the three, having been established in 1892 specifically to serve the needs of those moving from the centre of Southampton into one of its more salubrious suburbs.¹⁷³ Like Avenue, Victoria Road was a relatively new church dating from 1884. However, it drew its membership from an area that was more socially mixed and less permanent than that served by Avenue. After experiencing a number of initial difficulties, by 1901 Victoria Road was in a reasonably healthy state as far as the recruitment of members and attendance (see Appendix C1) were concerned and, as indicated earlier, was able to embark on an ambitious building project.

In terms of membership totals alone, Avenue was the most successful of the churches. Between 1901 and 1911, its resident membership grew by 76 (or 39 percent) compared with an increase of 18 (or 8 percent) at London Street and a decrease of 17 (or 11 percent) at Victoria Road. However, as the data in Table 3.9, which show the

London Street URC Basingstoke Archive; and Victoria Road Church Meetings Minute Books 1884 – 1902, 1902-1911 and 1911-1915, Portsmouth Archives, CHU95/1A/1-3.

¹⁷³ See Roger Ottewill, “ ‘A Splendid Prospect’?: Congregationalism in Edwardian Southampton 1901-1914,” *Journal of the Southampton Local History Forum*, no.15 (2009): 41.

flow of members from and to church rolls, indicate, all three lost a large number of members during this period and consequently recruited far more new members than the net increases or decreases would suggest. With a loss of 67 percent, that is 98 members out of 151, Victoria Road faced the biggest challenge in this respect. The equivalent figures for Avenue and London Street were 44 and 48 percent respectively.

Table 3.9: Losses and gains in Church membership

Description	Avenue		London Street		Victoria Road	
	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.
Total number of members 1901		197		229		151
members lost as a result of :						
death	19		28		11	
transfer to another church	41		35		26	
resignation	2					
lapse/removal	8		48		61	
classified as non-resident	3					
reason unknown	14	87		111		98
Total less members lost		110		118		53
members gained as a result of:						
profession of faith	59		81		28	
special vote	15					
transfer from another church	88		48		53	
not known	1	163		129		81
Total number of members 1911		273		247		134

Note

To ensure like-for-like comparisons, the data in this table and supporting commentary relate to resident members of the three churches. Non-resident members have been excluded, as have the country members of London Street.¹⁷⁴

To put it another way, in 1911 only 35 percent of Victoria Road's members had been on the church roll of 1901. This compared with 52 percent for London Street and 56 percent for Avenue. Clearly the turnover of members was substantial and is not

¹⁷⁴ As indicated earlier, country members were those attached to one of London Street's six satellite causes.

apparent if only annual totals are used in determining the relative fortunes of churches.¹⁷⁵

Members were lost for three main reasons. The first was death. The second was a formal transfer to another Congregational church or occasionally to a church of another denomination. The third was non-attendance, which was sometimes due to either an individual or family moving away and not seeking a formal transfer or, occasionally, resignation and consequently being struck off the church roll. It was common practice to read out the roll at the annual church meeting so that any lapsed members could be identified, although it is not clear how diligently this was undertaken.¹⁷⁶

The relative significance of the reasons for each church's loss of members is shown in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10: Reasons for the loss of members

Reason	Avenue		London Street		Victoria Road	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Death	19	22	28	25	11	11
Transfer to another church	41	47	35	32	26	27
Struck off, resignation and other	27	31	48	43	61	62
Totals	87	100	111	100	98	100

¹⁷⁵ As Field puts it: 'Some sense of the dynamics of Free Church membership, underlying the net figures, can be gauged ... [by] charting cumulative annual gains and losses in four denominations (three Presbyterian) between 1901 and 1914 ... [when] membership movements were thirty three times greater than net growth might suggest.' Field, "Quantifying Religious Belonging," 54.

¹⁷⁶ Numbers struck off varied considerably from year to year, which suggests that the process was not as systematic as it might have been. It also depended on the vagaries of who was in attendance at the annual meeting and their knowledge of the churchgoing habits of fellow members and whether or not they still lived in the area.

Death had the greatest impact on the membership of London Street and the least on Victoria Road. Transfers were most in evidence at Avenue and striking off posed the greatest proportionate challenge for Victoria Road. The overall picture is one of diversity. Clearly, the loss of members through striking off was the one circumstance where a church could intervene. It is not known, however, whether any of the churches had a strategy in place for seeking to recover 'lost sheep' who were still within their catchment area.

Turning to recruitment, there were two principal ways in which churches gained new members. These were through either transfers from other churches or the making of a profession of faith followed by a formal vote of the membership. Arguably, the second was the best indicator of the success or otherwise of a church's evangelistic endeavour. In Table 3.11 the relative importance of the two modes of recruitment for each church is shown.

Table 3.11: Means of gaining new members

Reason	Avenue ¹		London Street		Victoria Road	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Transfer from another church	104	64	48	37	53	65
Profession of faith	59	36	81	63	28	35
Totals	163	100	129	100	81	100

Note

1. For Avenue the special vote category (see Table 3.9) has been included with transfers since it was used where someone had previously been a member of another church, although not necessarily a Congregational one, but was unable to obtain a formal letter of transfer.

A noteworthy feature of the data in this table is the similarity between Avenue and Victoria Road, with transfers being far more significant than professions of faith in

the recruitment process. By contrast, the percentages are almost exactly reversed for London Street, which suggests that it was more active and/or successful in seeking new members through outreach initiatives. A possible explanation may be found in the location of churches, with Avenue and Victoria Road both providing a spiritual home for those migrating, for social or economic reasons, into the areas from which they recruited. The catchment area for London Street was more stable and consequently it had a greater opportunity to engage with potential church members and this may have assisted its outreach.

Alongside the dynamics of church membership, there are the demographic aspects and the related question of whether there were any changes between 1901 and 1911.¹⁷⁷ With respect to gender, notwithstanding the substantial turnover, in all three churches there was considerable stability in the ratio which for both years was approximately two female members for every male (see Appendices G1a and b for full details).¹⁷⁸

For the age profile of memberships, the analysis is restricted to those who have been identified in the census.¹⁷⁹ Consequently, there is a slight bias towards the older members, since the group most under-represented in this respect is young single women. Even so, the average age of members, both male and female, was in the forties (see Table 3.12).

¹⁷⁷ Much the demographic data in this part of the chapter are taken from *Census Returns*, 1901 and 1911.

¹⁷⁸ The implications of this for gender relations within Congregational churches are discussed in Chapter 8.

¹⁷⁹ This is because church rolls do not usually contain the requisite information.

Table 3.12: Average ages of resident members identified in census

	Avenue		London Street		Victoria Road	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1901	44	41	47	43	43	44
1911	48	47	46	45	49	44

This could be regarded as reasonably healthy since it afforded churches a pool of mature members with experience and expertise on which they could draw. However, there were signs of an upward drift in the average age, foreshadowing potential problems in the future (see Appendix G2 for further details).

In terms of marital status, as the data in Table 3.13 confirm, the largest category in all three churches was, not surprisingly, couples where both husband and wife were church members.

Table 3.13: Distribution of residential church members identified in the census by marital status

		Avenue			London Street			Victoria Road		
		1901	1911		1901	1911		1901	1911	
		No.	No.	%	No.	No.	%	No.	No.	%
1	Married couples ¹	78	104	44	120	114	50	44	42	43
2	Married couples ²	4	7	3	10	12	5	5	6	6
3	Married couples ³	14	19	8	11	17	8	6	5	5
4	Widowers	1	2	1	4	5	2	1	4	4
5	Widows	12	19	8	14	16	7	12	8	8
6	Single men	10	15	6	7	19	8	5	6	6
7	Single women	58	71	30	44	44	19	30	26	27
	Total	177	237	100	210	227	100	103	97	100

Notes

1. Married couples where both husband and wife were church members.
2. Married couples where the husband was a church member but not the wife.
3. Married couples where the wife was a church member but not the husband.

In 1901, they constituted 57 percent of the membership of London Street, compared with 46 percent at Avenue and 43 percent at Victoria Road. Comparable figures for

1911 were 50 percent, 44 percent and 43 percent respectively (see Table 3.13). A substantial majority of these married couples had children living with them. Very few were in extended family households comprising either parents or siblings (see Table 3.14).

Table 3.14: Married church members by type of family grouping

Category	Avenue			London Street			Victoria Road		
	1901	1911	diff	1901	1911	diff	1901	1911	diff
3a	5	12	+7	6	10	+4	3	9	+6
3b	31	32	+1	37	35	-2	11	7	-4
4	2	8	+6	17	11	-6	8	5	-3
Other	1	0	-1	0	1	+1	0	0	0
Total	39	52	+13	60	57	-3	22	21	-1

Key

3a. Married couples with no children living at home.

3b. Married couples with child(ren) still living at home.

4. Extended family households.

Source of Classification Scheme: Peter Laslett, ed., *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 28-32.

A number of the couples in category 3a had offspring, but by the time of the census they had left the family home.¹⁸⁰

Churches generally regarded married couples with children as the key component of their membership because it offered, amongst other things, the potential for 'autogenous growth'. That is the family was seen as the perfect recruiting ground for the next generation of church members. How far this occurred in practice is assessed in Table 3.15, which shows the total number of children aged

¹⁸⁰ This is confirmed by additional data collected for the 1911 census, which included the length of time a couple had been married (see Appendix G3a) together with the number of their children who had been born alive and those still living.

18 and over who were still living at home with their parents at the time of the censuses and the number and percentage of these who were church members.

Table 3.15: Autogenous growth

Year	Avenue			London Street			Victoria Road		
	Total	Mems	%	Total	Mems	%	Total	Mems	%
1901									
Male	6	2	33	14	3	21	2	0	0
Female	19	16	84	33	11	33	5	4	80
Total	25	18	72	47	14	30	7	4	57
1911									
Male	15	3	20	11	4	36	9	6	67
Female	27	17	63	25	10	40	4	2	50
Total	42	20	48	36	14	39	13	8	62

Note

The data in this table relate only to the children of those parents who were both church members. For those children where only one parent was a church member, see Appendices G3b and G3c.

Although the picture is a varied one, from the perspective of the churches, especially London Street, the percentages can be regarded as disappointing. Indeed, the findings suggest that the claims made for the contribution of 'autogenous growth' to church membership by Currie *et al* have been overstated.¹⁸¹ That said, it is possible that, in some instances, children may have attended and joined different churches from their parents to either exert their independence or follow the preferences of their peer group.¹⁸²

In cases where only the husband or wife was a member, this did not necessarily mean that the other spouse was a non-churchgoer or a non-believer. Some may have been adherents who did not want to take the ultimate step of

¹⁸¹ Currie *et al*, *Churches and Churchgoers*.

¹⁸² The available data do not enable this line of enquiry to be pursued.

making a profession of faith, while others may have been a member of another church. Since the religious affiliations and practices in households of this kind are not known, one can only speculate on the extent to which religious harmony or friction was a feature of family life.

After married couples the next largest category of member in terms of marital status was single women. Here there was considerable variation between the churches, with them representing only 19 percent of the total at London Street in 1911 compared with nearly double that percentage at Avenue. In every church the number of single women members far outnumbered that of single men, thereby reducing the potential for marriages between members.

In the case of widows and widowers the pattern was very similar to that for single women and men. In other words, the number of widows greatly exceeded that of widowers. Together, however, they constituted a relatively small percentage of the overall membership.

One particularly intriguing aspect of church membership is social class composition, with Congregationalists generally considered to have been the most middle-class of the Free Church denominations.¹⁸³ However, like all generalisations, there were exceptions, such as Northam Congregational Church in Southampton and Zion Congregational Church in Portsmouth, which had members drawn exclusively or predominantly from the working class.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, in churches, where those with

¹⁸³ Brown, *Religion and Society*, 18.

¹⁸⁴ For further details of Northam Congregational Church, see Ottewill, "Congregationalism in Edwardian Southampton," 55-7. This includes a quote from the minister, Rev. James

middle-class backgrounds were in a majority, there were still members of a lower social status. Indeed, churches should have been settings in which those from the middle and working classes could interact and mix, if not on equal terms then at least with mutual respect. As it was put in November 1901 at the recognition of Rev. David Beynon, as the new minister of Freemantle Congregational Church, by Rev. Elwyn Thomas, a representative of his previous church in Newport (Monmouthshire), 'whatever social distinctions might be necessary outside the walls of Christ's Church once they were inside the sanctuary they stood on the same level (applause)'.¹⁸⁵ While in his presidential address to the HCU at its spring gathering in 1906, James Thomas observed that: 'They had been looked upon too long as the denomination more especially for the middle class, and it was time that that notion was obliterated and blotted out (hear, hear). There should be no divisions of class in the House of God (applause)'.¹⁸⁶

Nevertheless despite an ongoing concern with social class, unlike gender, age and marital status, it is a more difficult variable to measure. Here guidance comes from the pioneering work of W.A. Armstrong, with the occupation of the heads of households being used as the principal basis for allocating husbands, wives and their offspring to a particular class.¹⁸⁷ Having reviewed a range of possibilities he came to the conclusion that the Registrar General's scheme of classification was the most

Thompson, to the effect that Northam was 'attended exclusively by the working classes', *Hampshire Independent*, March 25, 1905.

¹⁸⁵ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 9, 1901. Beynon was minister at Freemantle until 1916.

¹⁸⁶ *Hampshire Chronicle*, April 28, 1906.

¹⁸⁷ W.A. Armstrong, "The use of information about occupation," in *Nineteenth-century Society. Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data*, ed. E.A. Wrigley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 191-310.

appropriate for this purpose. Consisting of five broad categories (see Table 3.16), the first two equate unambiguously to the middle class and the last two to the working class. Class III includes those who would have regarded themselves as either lower middle class or upper working class. To assign occupations to these classes Armstrong adopted a slightly modified version of the 1951 census classification.¹⁸⁸ Although his approach has been criticised, not least because Class III is regarded as being too broad and diverse, including both non-manual and manual workers, it is felt that for the purpose of this study it provides a suitably robust starting point for making comparisons between churches.¹⁸⁹ However, to add some refinement to the classification, within Class III a distinction has been made between those in white collar occupations generally deemed to have been of a lower middle-class character, such as clerical work, commercial travelling and assisting in certain kinds of shop (IIIa), and those in blue collar, skilled manual jobs, including carpentry and tailoring, associated with the working class (IIIb).¹⁹⁰

The findings for the three churches from the two Edwardian era censuses are presented in Table 3.16. These relate only to households where both the husband and wife were church members.

¹⁸⁸ This was an adaptation of versions developed for the 1911 and 1921 censuses. On the basis of a study of occupational data from the 1841 and 1851 censuses for mid-nineteenth century York, Armstrong reached the conclusion that this was 'a reasonably flexible tool ... [for] render[ing] order and meaning into empirical data.' Armstrong, "Information about occupation," 214.

¹⁸⁹ For criticisms see, for example, Stephen. A. Royle, "Social stratification from early census returns: a new approach," *Area* 9, no.3 (1977): 215-8. However, nearly all of the occupational descriptions from the 1901 and 1911 census returns have been found in the requisite reference work, General Register Office, *Classification of Occupations, 1950* (London: HMSO, 1951).

¹⁹⁰ For a detailed discussion of this issue in the context of religious observance, see Hugh McLeod, "White Collar Values and the Role of Religion," in *The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914*, ed. Geoffrey Crossick (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 61-88.

Table 3.16: Classification of households by occupation

Description	Avenue		London Street		Victoria Road	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1901						
Class I. professional occupations	5	13	8	13	0	0
Class II. intermediate occupations	23	58	21	35	10	45
Class III. skilled occupations						
<i>a. white collar</i>	9	23	6	10	6	27
<i>b. blue collar</i>	2	5	14	23	3	14
total	11	28	20	33	9	41
Class IV. partly skilled occupations	0	0	7	12	2	9
Class V. unskilled occupations	0	0	3	5	1	5
Not known	0	0	1	2	0	0
Total	39	100	60	100	22	100
1911						
Class I. professional occupations	9	17	6	11	2	10
Class II. intermediate occupations	25	48	18	32	5	24
Class III. skilled occupations						
<i>a. white collar</i>	14	27	6	10	9	43
<i>b. blue collar</i>	2	4	17	30	4	19
total	16	31	23	40	13	62
Class IV. partly skilled occupations	1	2	4	7	1	5
Class V. unskilled occupations	1	2	6	11	0	0
Not known	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	52	100	57	100	21	100

The data confirm the relatively high social status of Avenue's members and its role as a spiritual home for upwardly mobile Congregationalists of Edwardian Southampton. They also illustrate the more socially mixed composition of London Street's membership and to a lesser extent that of Victoria Road. London Street clearly drew support from all sections of the community and in social terms its membership was, to a degree, a microcosm of the population from which it recruited. It is worthy of note that a substantial majority of those in Class III were in manual occupations, whereas at Avenue and less so at Victoria Road they were primarily in white collar jobs. As McLeod explains, for the lower middle class, churches were the

most important of the ‘protected environments outside the home ... [within which] to meet old friends or make new ones’.¹⁹¹

Not surprisingly, many specific occupations reflected the mainstays of the local economy, with clothing manufacture and engineering being to the fore in Basingstoke and shipping in Southampton and Portsmouth. Retail trades, such as grocery and drapery, were also well represented. Thus, there was a degree of congruence between the membership of churches and the economic life of the communities in which they were situated.

Alongside occupation, a supplementary criterion for determining social class is the number of live-in domestic servants. Indeed, Armstrong recommends that this should be taken into account when applying the occupational classification scheme.¹⁹² The results of using it as a stand-alone criterion are shown in Table 3.17.

Table 3.17: Number of households with live-in domestic servants

Category	Avenue			London Street			Victoria Road		
	1901	1911	diff	1901	1911	diff	1901	1911	diff
No servants	19	30	+11	44	39	-5	17	21	+4
One servant	14	17	+3	12	12	0	3	0	-3
Two servants	5	4	-1	2	3	+1	2	0	-2
Three+ servants	1	1	0	3	3	0	0	0	0
Total	39	52	+13	61	57	-4	22	21	-1
% with servants	51	42	---	28	32	---	23	0	---

These reinforce the findings of the preceding analysis with Avenue having a much larger percentage of households with servants in both 1901 and 1911 compared with London Street and especially Victoria Road. Interestingly, however, between 1901 and 1911 the percentage of Avenue households with servants decreased from 51

¹⁹¹ McLeod, “White Collar Values,” 72.

¹⁹² Armstrong, “Information about occupation,” 211.

percent to 42 percent. During the same period, Victoria Road lost all of its households with servants. This might suggest that there was a lessening of the bias towards middle-class families at both churches. At London Street, however, the percentage of households with live-in servants remained relatively stable at around 30 percent.

Another measure of social status is the number of single women members in paid employment, including students training for a career in teaching. It can be hypothesised that single women in middle-class families would be less likely to work than those with working-class backgrounds. As the figures in Table 3.18 testify, a smaller percentage was in paid employment at Avenue than at the other two churches.

Table 3.18: Number of single women members in paid employment

Year	Avenue			London Street			Victoria Road		
	No. ¹	emp ²	% ³	No. ¹	emp ²	% ³	No. ¹	emp ²	% ³
1901	58	26	45	44	24	55	30	15	50
1911	71	29	41	44	29	66	26	14	54

Key

1. Number of single women members.
2. Number of single women members in employment.
3. Number in employment as a percentage of the total.

It is also the case that more of Avenue's single women were employed in education than either those at London Street or Victoria Road, where manual occupations, such as tailoring, were to the fore.

Considered in the round the findings on occupation and class indicate that, at the very least, there were differences between the churches and consequently, as mentioned previously, generalisations need to be treated with care. While a

substantial number of Congregationalists came from households where the head was in a white collar occupation, this by no means represents the complete picture. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that congregations were not solely composed of the 'middle class at prayer' and those who sought to denote their 'respectability' through attendance at church. Although data of the kind reviewed here cannot fully reveal the intricacies and nuances of social standing and church affiliation and the motivations of those involved, they do confirm that those in manual occupations were not entirely conspicuous by their absence.

Again, however, it is important to stress that members were only one part of the populace which coalesced around a particular church. Although membership serves as a proxy for this broader group and there is little reason to doubt its representative character, this cannot be confirmed categorically. Similarly, while statistical data have a contribution to make, they cannot of themselves provide a complete picture of the Congregational presence in Edwardian Hampshire. What they offer is an outline, with other material being required to fill in the detail.

Sensitive to statistics

Although statistics have their shortcomings, since for Edwardian Congregationalists they were a crucial ingredient in assessing their standing, this alone is a powerful justification for incorporating them in historical analyses of the period. They contributed to the monitoring of, and commentaries on, what was happening and informed their concerns. By the early twentieth century Congregationalists were, in

words used of Methodists by Currie, as 'sensitive to', one might say, as seduced by, statistics, as other Nonconformists.¹⁹³ As Yalden observes, 'it is clear that numbers came to represent a new power for the Churches, especially the Nonconformist ones.'¹⁹⁴

As indicated earlier, the findings of the censuses of churchgoing undertaken in 1902/03 gave rise to a degree of introspection at local level. In their report for 1902, the Executive Committee of the HCU commented:

In the light ...[of] the results ... of the religious census in London, the returns of attendance at public worship in our County can but be regarded as fairly satisfactory. In numbers attending our public services, in Church membership, in scholars and teachers in our Sunday Schools, and in the growth of organizations connected with our Churches we can almost everywhere report an advance. ... [however,] the expansion is not such as we could desire, nor we venture to think as we have a right to look for.¹⁹⁵

An apt summary of the HCU's position might be 'could do better'. Overall, however, the assessment was a positive one.

Two years later an optimistic gloss can again be detected in what the Executive Committee had to say regarding the statistical record for Hampshire churches:

The year that has closed, although not one of great or rapid progress, has been distinctly a year of advance. With few exceptions the returns of the Churches show a growth in attendances at public worship, an increase in membership and a larger number of children in the Schools ...¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: a Study on the Sociology of Ecumenism* (London: Faber, 1968), 13.

¹⁹⁴ Peter Yalden, "Origins of Secularisation," 303.

¹⁹⁵ *HCU Annual Report, 1902*, 16-7, HRO 127M94/62/47. It is assumed that the reference to 'returns of attendance' relates to those submitted by churches in receipt of financial support from the HCU.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 1904, 15, HRO 127M94/62/49.

However, by the end of the decade the mood was more sombre, as the following extracts from the Executive Committee's report for 1910 show:

One cannot but note ... the spirit of restlessness and disquietude which has made itself felt during the past year, in view of the seemingly arrested progress of the Church – not simply our own Church, but of all the Churches. We need, however, to guard against unnecessary panic; still more of uttering hasty generalisations which are never very successful in indicating the real disease, if disease there be.

Some there are who think they detect a slackening of the note of conviction, an apparent weakening of the tide of spiritual enthusiasm. *Statistics show a decline in Church membership.*

... Behind and beneath the statistics are reports that there is a flowing tide of social and spiritual ministries which are making real the presence and power of Christ, and which only a passionate devotion to the great head of the Church could have made possible (emphasis added).¹⁹⁷

Not surprisingly, in seeking to counteract the negativity associated with the statistical record, attention was drawn to aspects of church activity that were more difficult, if not impossible, to quantify.

As Rev. David John, Jewry Street's minister between 1901 and 1906, had argued at Avenue's 1901 anniversary celebrations:

... in looking back upon the past and trying to relate the results of the work accomplished they ought to remember that no one could sum up the work of a Christian Church in terms of a multiplication table. They could not solve the problem of what was being done by figures and statistics.¹⁹⁸

He continued with a variant of a familiar adage 'that there were three kinds of lies - black, white, and the greatest of all, statistics'.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 1910, 18-9, HRO 127M94/62/55.

¹⁹⁸ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, December 14, 1901.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. This remark elicited the intended laughter.

A similar point was made by the Mayor of Bournemouth and leading Congregationalist, Alderman Beale, at East Cliff's anniversary celebrations in 1903:

They had ... heard a great deal about church statistics and records of church attendance on Sunday after Sunday as though that was the thermometer of the church. He did not think the growth and progress of a church could be gauged by mere statistics, nor the vitality of a church. There were many deeds of love and triumph, and acts of charity, and victories won which could not be tabulated, and if they wanted to learn the real position of the church, they must get to know the position of the church members and the love and tenderness they showed for that church.²⁰⁰

Taking this argument a little further, in using membership to measure the health or otherwise of a church, there is an underlying assumption that the units being aggregated are identical. However, this is unlikely since church members are not necessarily the same in terms of their involvement and commitment. Thus, like is not being aggregated with like. Put simply, a church with 50 highly committed members might well be a more effective exemplar of faith, good works and sacrificial giving than one with 100 less committed or apathetic members. Yet taking the figures at face value, the church with 100 members would be considered twice as strong as the one with only 50. As Beale indicated, consideration of what might be called spiritual growth and maturity, which are essentially unquantifiable, should not be overlooked.

For Rev. Joseph Cliffe, Lymington's Congregational minister between 1894 and 1903, when speaking at Pokesdown Congregational Church's anniversary celebrations in 1903, the first of the 'modern needs of church life ... was that they should remember that "quality" was always better than "quantity", and it was better

²⁰⁰ *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, December 19, 1903.

to get ten men and women consecrated to God than that the church should be filled with 500 of the other sort'.²⁰¹ What he meant by the phrase 'other sort' was not reported, but presumably it referred to those who attended services but were not prepared to devote their time and talents to the life of the church.

As a final example, in 1913 Rev. John Stevenson from Beckenham, a guest speaker at Avenue's anniversary celebrations, took issue with the manner in which the 'spirit of the world' had permeated the Church with the result that 'the Church judged things by secular standards and tabulated matters too much after the commercial manner.' He sought to get his point across in a relatively light-hearted manner:

Observe, the first question they would be asked when they got home was, "How many were there?" (laughter). But the real question should be, "Was God with you in the meeting, and was the power of the Spirit amongst the people?" And the second question would be "Have they got that £60?" (laughter). What did that mean? It meant that unless they set a watch on their attitude they were inclined to judge the church in the spirit of finance. What was that but bringing the gods of the market-place into the temple?²⁰²

While 'finance, numbers and external suggestions' had a part to play, they needed to be subordinate to spiritual considerations.²⁰³

Notwithstanding these strictures, throughout the Edwardian period it continued to be the norm for church secretaries to present statistical data at annual meetings and church anniversaries, thereby giving additional credence to their role as a measure of success or failure. Furthermore, the collection of, and references to, quantitative data also extended to the affiliated organisations of Congregational

²⁰¹ Ibid, February 21, 1903.

²⁰² *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, December 6, 1913.

²⁰³ Ibid, December 6, 1913.

churches (see Chapter 5).²⁰⁴ Surviving examples are merely the tip of a very large iceberg of statistics amassed by these organisations during the Edwardian era and illustrate the pervasive influence of what might be described as ‘the cult of number’ and a manifestation of the increasing bureaucratisation of churches and what Yalden has characterised as institutional secularisation.²⁰⁵

Clearly statistics were a double-edged sword that needed to be handled with a degree of care. As Ian Jones observes for a later period: ‘Perceptions of growth and decline were often as significant to congregational mood as actual numbers.’²⁰⁶ Nonetheless, given that statistics were used to celebrate the growth of churches, it was perhaps disingenuous, albeit understandable, to begin qualifying them when the tide turned.

A mixed picture

Looked at positively, Congregationalism was, in the early years of the twentieth century, a conspicuous feature of the ecclesiastical landscape of mainland Hampshire. With churches in most centres of population and many rural locations its

²⁰⁴ For example, in the minutes of Christchurch’s Congregational MIS it was recorded that at a book party and musical evening held in October 1903: ‘There was an attendance of about 130, 92 of those present ... [were] members of the Society, the remainder being visitors.’ Christchurch Congregational Mutual Improvement Society Minutes 1901-1909, Dorset History Centre (hereafter DHC) NP4/SO3/1/1. In its foundation year 1905, the Romsey branch of the Men’s Own Brotherhood Movement had 275 registered members, falling to 167 in 1913, when the highest average weekly attendance was 83 in November. *Romsey Advertiser*, November 7, 1913.

²⁰⁵ Yalden, “Origins of Secularisation”.

²⁰⁶ Ian Jones, *The Local Church and Generational Change in Birmingham 1945-2000* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press for The Royal Historical Society, 2012), 55.

reach was impressive and its presence was felt both physically and spiritually. The statistical evidence indicates that the denomination had a substantial number of members. Many were of high social standing and, as will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, they played important roles in the economic and political, as well as religious, life of their communities, thereby enabling Congregationalists to, in the language of today, 'punch above their weight'. It was also the case that adherents and others who identified with, and attended, Congregational churches for special services and rites of passage, such as weddings and funerals, swelled congregations. The numerical and financial strength of many urban churches also enabled them, through individual effort and collective enterprise mediated by the HCU, to support the smaller and less well-endowed Congregational causes and initiate the founding of new ones. It was also the case that members of the working class were not entirely absent from the ranks of Hampshire Congregationalists, thereby calling into question a common perception of Congregationalism as being an exclusively middle-class denomination.

Yet at the time the statistical record indicated that all was not well in both absolute and relative terms. Between 1901 and 1911, most churches experienced a net loss of members and the decline in membership density was generally greater in Hampshire than in the country as a whole. There was also a slight increase in the average age of the membership of individual churches and the age profiles of church members pointed to a decline in the number of young adults. While recognising that quantitative data only told part of the story of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire, statistics had acquired a status and profile which made them difficult to

ignore. That said, statistics did not speak for themselves and as John Wolffe points out, while useful, 'quantitative evidence ... is ultimately something of a blunt and potentially treacherous instrument'.²⁰⁷ They require interpretation and this can give rise to differences of view as to their meaning and the importance that should be attached to them.

Thus, for some Hampshire Congregationalists, the Edwardian era was a period of consolidation, for others it represented a worrying termination of the growth enjoyed in previous decades. A plateau had been reached: for pessimists this marked the limit of their advance, with the way ahead being one of retrenchment and contraction; for optimists it represented a pause to be followed by further expansion. J.D. Jones, for example, when speaking in 1909 at Richmond Hill's anniversary on the 'arrest of the Christian Church', expressed his belief that 'they were on the eve of great developments'.²⁰⁸ While a year later a guest speaker at the same event, Sir Arthur Nicholson, referred to the fact that 'a good many churches were "marking time." That was to say, there was movement without progress'.²⁰⁹

What those who adopted a positive stance might also have mentioned is that a concentration on static or falling annual totals could give the impression that churches were no longer able to recruit new members. Yet, where the evidence has survived, it is clear that this was not the case and there were continuing gains for churches from those making a profession of faith and not simply transferring from

²⁰⁷ John Wolffe, "Religion and Secularisation," in *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change*, ed. Paul Johnson (London: Longman, 1994), 431.

²⁰⁸ *Bournemouth Visitor's Directory*, November 20, 1909.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, November 26, 1910.

other churches. Moreover, many new members were not the offspring of existing church members, as the literature on 'autogenous growth' suggests. Admittedly, such gains were not always sufficient to offset losses but they did demonstrate the ongoing commitment of churches to outreach initiatives and from a theological perspective the continuing power of the personal gospel to motivate and convict. However, given the variable experiences of Hampshire Congregational churches, it is unwise to be too dogmatic in this regard.

In getting to grips with what lay behind the statistics, Congregationalists inevitably looked to their leaders, both ministerial and lay, for explanations, guidance and, where necessary, reassurance. Thus, ministers and deacons were called upon to interpret the quantitative data and how these related to what was happening more broadly. Their varied reactions helped to enrich the discourses mentioned in Chapter 1. They can be seen, in part, as attempts to address questions to which the statistical record inevitably gave rise. 'Did Congregationalism have anything distinctive to offer as a response to numerical decline?' 'To what extent and in what ways did the traditional Evangelical message need to be modified in order to retrieve the situation?' And, most stridently, 'Should churches adopt a more aggressive stance in their dealings with the secular world?'

In the next chapter consideration is given to discourses concerning the backgrounds and qualities of Congregational leaders in Edwardian Hampshire. It was on their shoulders that seeking answers and finding a coherent way forward primarily rested.

4. MINISTERS AND DEACONS: DISCOURSES OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership

A pivotal role in addressing concerns which arose from the statistical trends highlighted in the previous chapter was played by ministers, who provided clerical and deacons, lay, leadership, of Hampshire's Congregational churches. They were in the vanguard when it came to exhorting, assuring and, above all, interpreting the signs of the times for, their congregations. Put another way, they were the principal contributors to the discourses associated with the challenges that Edwardian Congregationalists faced and were expected to draw upon their worldly experience, as well as theological insights and knowledge of what was happening elsewhere, to inform their pronouncements. It was also assumed that leadership would be evident in not only what they said but also how they behaved. Moreover, many of the normative assertions and evaluative statements concerning leaders, both individually and collectively, considered in this chapter contributed to what are characterised here as discourses of leadership.

Given the emphasis in the historiography on the difficulties churches faced during the Edwardian era it is surprising that relatively little consideration is given to leadership. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Alan Argent and Tudur Jones do acknowledge the strength of the Congregational ministry at this time. In the words of Jones:

... [churches] were led by ... energetic ministers, most of whom did their work quietly but none the less efficiently ... some ... were national and international figures. As ... older leaders died, their work was taken up by a younger generation which gave every evidence of being animated with high conceptions of Christian service.¹

Furthermore, during the nineteenth century, the ministry had become increasingly professionalised, with a proliferation of training colleges. There was also 'an eagerness to become ministers in spite of great difficulties ... [with] the readiness to leave other work in order to be ordained result[ing] in an ample supply of ministerial recruits'.² However, while extolling the quality of Congregational ministers, Jones and Argent have little, if anything, to say about deacons or leadership, more generally, at the local level.

In locally focused studies, although reference is made to those occupying positions of responsibility, especially the clergy, this has not included an assessment of leadership more broadly. For example, it might have been expected that Green with his concern for the organisational aspects of church life would have devoted considerable attention to the topic, but this is not the case.³ Underlying this chapter and indeed the thesis as a whole is the contention that leadership was critical as churches sought to navigate the stormy waters epitomised by the worsening statistical record and unquantifiable hazards.

In researching those who had charge of Hampshire churches during the Edwardian era, some use has been made of *Congregational Year Book* obituaries. As far as is known, they were written by fellow ministers. Thus, they incorporate

¹ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 327-8. See also, Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 80.

² Jones, *Congregationalism*, 324.

³ Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*.

ministerial rather than lay perspectives on the lives of their subjects. It is also appreciated that obituaries are not the most objective of historical sources, with a tendency for them to eulogise their subjects. Moreover, their language reflects that of the time when they were written rather than the Edwardian era.⁴ Nevertheless, they do afford insights into the qualities that were especially valued in Congregational ministers and, in this light, can be seen as contributions to the discourses of leadership. Here a lead is taken from Pierre Bourdieu, who based his study of deceased academics on obituaries and claimed that: 'The system of adjectives used maps out the *world of professorial virtues* [emphasis in the original].'⁵ Such an approach is well suited for ministers since, above all, they were expected to exemplify various 'virtues' - fidelity, empathy, courtesy and humility - in both their public and private lives.

Complementary sources include church records and newspaper reports, particularly those recording the arrival and departure of ministers when attention was often focused on their personalities and their involvement in church life and that of the community more generally. Again, however, these tend to be valedictory in nature. That said, they frequently incorporate a lay outlook mediated through members of the diaconate.

In revealing the traits of deacons, reliance has also been placed on obituaries, with a similar cautionary note needing to be struck. Like ministers, there was an assumption that they would behave with integrity and embody Congregational, Free

⁴ Although a few of the ministers to whom reference is made in this chapter died during the Edwardian era, most lived well beyond the period.

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 215.

Church and Christian principles. This applied to both their conduct of church affairs and secular pursuits.

As indicated in Chapter 1, a majority of those in leadership positions during the Edwardian era had been socialised into religious norms and practices of the mid-to late-Victorian era, which inevitably influenced their view of contemporary developments. On occasions the more immediate past was refracted through the prism of Congregationalism's longer-term legacy and historical antecedents, with notions of liberty and Independency being much to the fore. As Rev. John Binney, a guest speaker at the 1902 anniversary celebrations of Abbey Congregational Church, commented:

... [they met] in connection with a church that had historical associations, that was linked with an inspiring past, a past that was full of voices to the present generation ... It recalled the heroic age of English Nonconformity, when men and women valued freedom more than gold, and joyfully took the spoiling of their goods that they might hand on to us the priceless heritage of civil and religious liberty (applause).⁶

Although many Congregational churches did not have the 'historical associations' of Abbey, their leaders were still attuned to the 'voices' mentioned by Binney, a theme explored more fully in Chapter 5.

For those who responded to the call to become ministers there were many role models from the past. At national level, these included distinguished preachers, such as Rev. Henry Allon and Rev. Joseph Parker, and eminent theologians, including Rev. R.W. Dale and Rev. A.M. Fairbairn. Locally, past ministers were

⁶ *Romsey Advertiser*, May 2, 1902.

sometimes commended at church events as, for example, at Above Bar's 1901 anniversary when the chairman, Mr R.S. Griffith, observed:

The last ninety years had been covered by a succession of four Pastors ... Thomas Adkins, a minister clothed with authority as with a garment ... Herman Carlisle, a man who it was not, perhaps, easy to get to the inner heart of, but once having got there they could not help loving him ... there lay behind his pale and scholarly brow an enthusiasm which at times broke out in fervid eloquence ... Thomas Nicholson, one of the invading army from the principality of Wales ... his high spiritual tone, mixed with an almost boyish buoyancy, made him a splendid companion ... As regards their present Pastor, the Rev W.F. Clarkson ... it was his misfortune to know him only by repute ... but he was convinced that to know Mr Clarkson was to love him (applause).⁷

Such accolades heightened expectations regarding the qualities of current and future ministers and demonstrated that the Congregational ministry remained a worthy vocation.

As leaders, ministers and deacons possessed authority which emanated from the positions they occupied; their wisdom and understanding; and their personality.⁸ The last of these equates to Weber's concept of 'charismatic authority'⁹ that derived from 'the possession of exceptional personal qualities that cause a person to be accepted as a leader'.¹⁰ Related to the Greek word *charisma*, used in the New Testament to signify the gift of divine grace, what might be termed 'spiritual authority' not only buttressed the veracity of what ministers and deacons had to say but also sanctified it.

⁷ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 23, 1901.

⁸ Here a helpful distinction can be drawn between being 'in authority' and 'an authority'. Arguably, ministers and deacons were both.

⁹ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1964), ch.3.

¹⁰ D.D. Raphael, *Problems of Political Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Humanity Books, 1990), 170.

As William Sutton, a deacon at Abbey, said of Rev. Alexander Grieve, minister from 1905 to 1909: 'During ... his ministry amongst them he had ever upheld truth and righteousness ... [and] preached faithful instructive sermons without fear or favour.'¹¹ However flawed in practice, it was the pursuit of 'truth and righteousness' and the ability to speak without 'fear or favour' that characterised church leaders. If Congregational churches, both individually and collectively, were to negotiate the more demanding and perplexing environment of the Edwardian era, principled and authoritative leadership was crucial.

In what follows consideration is given to the backgrounds and attributes of ministers and deacons and relations with those they led. Throughout both the 'being' and 'doing' aspects of leadership are evident in the discourses.

'God's good men': ministers and pastorates

During the Edwardian era approximately 150 ministers and pastors served Hampshire's Congregational churches. About three quarters were fully ordained ministers and appeared on List A of the CUEW. The remainder, who were generally deployed in the more rural parts of the county, were non-ordained pastors and evangelists and were on List B.¹²

For those on List A, a call to the ministry involved training at theological college. In the main, this followed on from secondary or university education, but in

¹¹ *Romsey Advertiser*, July 23, 1909.

¹² For a full list of these ministers and pastors see Appendix H. Details of their Hampshire pastorates are also provided.

a number of cases the person concerned had worked in another occupation before entering the ministry.¹³ Thus, they brought to their training and subsequent pastorates experience of the 'real world', thereby adding to the pool of wisdom on which they could draw when faced with the demands of ministerial leadership.

Amongst Hampshire ministers there were alumni of most of the Congregational theological colleges.¹⁴ The largest number, 21 had studied at New College in London.¹⁵ Located in Hampstead, it 'belonged in the first rank of influence'.¹⁶ Its entry qualifications required candidates to demonstrate both spiritual acumen and academic competence. Thirteen ministers had attended the Congregational Institute in Nottingham, popularly known as Paton College after its distinguished principal emeritus and established to provide for less well-qualified applicants. Eleven had studied at Hackney College, also located in Hampstead, and ten at Western College in Bristol.¹⁷

It would seem that most, if not all, colleges espoused a flexible form of Evangelicalism.¹⁸ Consequently, as various obituaries indicate, in making their choice prospective ministers seem to have been influenced more by the reputation of the

¹³ Examples include teaching, printing, engineering and business.

¹⁴ All had been established during the Victorian era. For a detailed discussion of the colleges, see Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, ch.10.

¹⁵ New College had been founded in 1850 and combined five separate institutions, one of which, the Congregational Fund Board, traced its origins back to 1696.

¹⁶ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 293. The other first rank colleges were Mansfield College, Oxford; Hackney College; Lancashire Independent College; and Yorkshire United College.

¹⁷ The remainder had attended either Yorkshire United College; Cheshunt College; Lancashire Independent College; Mansfield College; or Brecon Memorial College.

¹⁸ The precise theological stance of a particular college is a subject on which even Kenneth Brown in his pioneering work on the Nonconformist ministry has little, if anything, to say. Brown, *Nonconformist Ministry*.

principal than anything else. For example, Rev. Henry Howell ‘proceeded to Cheshunt College, where Dr. Reynolds was at the height of his powers, and the young student was profoundly influenced by the principal’s magnetic personality’.¹⁹ In the case of Rev. Humphrey Davies, who trained at Western College, it was ‘Dr Chapman who wielded his spell over the students’²⁰ and for Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson, mentioned in Chapter 3, it was ‘admiration for Dr J.B. Paton that brought him to Nottingham’.²¹ Given the standing of college principals this is not really surprising. As Argent points out:

In a small institution, the teachers had more impact than in a large university and supreme among them was the principal ... [who] set “the general tone”, exercised pastoral oversight and had the last word in these mostly male communities.²²

Elsewhere, he refers to the ‘almost unrivalled authority’ which college principals exercised within Congregationalism during the 1900s.²³

Following their training at theological college, many ministers retained a commitment to scholarship and what today would be called ‘lifelong learning’. Thus, ‘up till the last ... [Rev. Richard Baldwin Brindley] remained a cultured, painstaking and accurate student’;²⁴ Rev. William Rowlands ‘remained to the end a keen student of the Word’;²⁵ and all that Rev. Frederick Hern did ‘revealed a studious mind ... [and] intellectual integrity’.²⁶ However, only one of Hampshire’s ministers returned

¹⁹ CYB, 1941, 403.

²⁰ Ibid, 1933, 228.

²¹ Ibid, 1945, 444.

²² Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 296.

²³ Ibid, 323.

²⁴ CYB, 1920, 94.

²⁵ Ibid, 1957, 522.

²⁶ Ibid, 1958, 420.

to academia. This was the previously mentioned Alexander Grieve, the most academically qualified.²⁷ After ten years in India with the London Missionary Society, followed by four years at Abbey, in 1909 he was appointed to the Chair of New Testament and Church History at the Yorkshire United College in Bradford, where he had trained.²⁸ Whatever else, most Congregational ministers serving in Edwardian Hampshire were well read and refined and far removed from the stereotypical 'uncultured roughness supposedly characteristic of the Nonconformist ministry'.²⁹

This also applied to those on List B. Although not as well educated as those on List A, they had opportunities for increasing their knowledge and honing their skills at summer schools. In Hampshire, Grieve's interest in education was instrumental in establishing a facility of this kind. At his farewell soirée, the evangelists presented him with an illuminated address in which they expressed their 'sincere appreciation' of his 'sympathy and kindness' with them in their work and

²⁷ 'Local board and secondary school education was followed by terms at University College, Aberystwyth (1891-94), Mansfield College, Oxford, under Dr. A.M. Fairbairn (1894-97), and then a year in Berlin under von Harnack. Triple First Class Honours-in English at London B.A. (1894), in Theology at Oxford (1897), and in History at London B.D. (1912), led on to a London Doctorate in Divinity (1915) awarded for a thesis on Early Christianity in Spain.' *Ibid*, 1953, 508.

²⁸ *Romsey Advertiser*, May 7, 1909. After Bradford he became 'Principal of the Scottish Congregational College, Edinburgh (1917-21); President of Lancashire Independent College (1922-43); and Lecturer in Early Church History at the University of Manchester for the same period, where he was also Dean of the Faculty of Theology. A member of the Senate of the University of London, he was also External Examiner to most of the British Universities at various times.' *CYB*, 1953, 508.

²⁹ Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity*, 125.

especially 'the arrangements for the summer school which .. [had] proved to be so great a help and stimulus'.³⁰

Whether on List A or B, as church leaders, ministers and pastors required a particular combination of skills and attributes to meet a multiplicity of demands. From the pulpit to home visits and from the needs of their church and its members to those of the community at large, they were required, using present-day language, to both 'talk the talk' and 'walk the walk'. That said, for Argent:

Congregational ministers were generally understood as serving their own churches, not as embodying those churches. They were pastors to their own covenanted people, not priests to the community at large.³¹

Against this, however, must be set the point that, as will be illustrated later, Congregational ministers were often respected figures in their local community and collectively, they were expected to be, in words from the obituary of Rev. Alexander Gibson, 'God's good men'.³²

A handful of these 'good men' had charge of a Hampshire church throughout the Edwardian period and well beyond with the most striking example being the redoubtable Rev. John Watkin Davies, whose 'only charge during a long ministerial life' of over fifty years from 1888 to 1940, was Edinburgh Road in Portsmouth.³³ He was closely followed in ministerial longevity in a single church by J.D. Jones, who

³⁰ *Romsey Advertiser*, July 23, 1909. Individual evangelists were fulsome in their praise of his practical assistance and guidance on reading.

³¹ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 106.

³² *CYB*, 1948, 494.

³³ There was a short break in service between 1891 and 1894 due to ill health. One other minister in a similar position was Rev. Robert Howarth, whose only pastorate was Ripley Congregational Church.

was minister of Richmond Hill for nearly 40 years.³⁴ For most, however, the average length of pastorates was between five and ten years. This relatively rapid turnover of ministers could be seen as a disadvantage, giving rise to instability. However, it offered frequent opportunities for renewal with incoming ministers stimulating innovation, setting up new organisations and boosting membership.

Many ministers moving to Hampshire between 1901 and 1914 had experience of leading at least one other church in another part of the country or in a number of cases, like Grieve, missionary work overseas.³⁵ In a few instances, however, a Hampshire church was a minister's first charge. Arriving straight from theological college, this necessitated an ordination service in place of, or alongside, the usual recognition events. Following their Hampshire pastorate, most ministers left the county in response to a call from a church elsewhere in the country. A handful, however, retired, often due to ill health sometimes exacerbated by the stresses and strains of leadership, and a small number died 'in harness'.³⁶ Leaving a church was frequently marked by sadness coupled with anticipation for both minister and congregation with it sometimes being an occasion when thoughts turned to the challenges facing churches as well as what had been achieved during the pastorate.

³⁴ Prior to his arrival at Richmond Hill, Jones had been minister of Newland Congregational Church in Lincoln, *CYB*, 1942, 415. Others who had charge of a Hampshire church throughout the Edwardian era were Rev. David Beynon, at Freemantle; Rev. Frederick Hern, at Rowlands Castle; Rev. Samuel Longmore, at Bishops Waltham; Rev. James Richards at Overton; Rev. Thomas Robilliard at Tadley; and Rev. Harry Schofield at Pokesdown.

³⁵ Two examples are Rev. Willie Lawrence at Lymington, who had spent 10 years with the London Missionary Society at Bangalore in South India from 1890 to 1900; and Rev. Ernest Franks, at Gosport, who had been engaged in educational work at the Bhowanipur Institution in Calcutta between 1898 and 1904.

³⁶ These included Rev. William Moncrieff, at East Cliff, who was only 34 when he died; Rev. Henry Coley, at Christchurch; Rev. William Miles at Buckland; and Rev. Henry Spencer, at Avenue.

In a few instances ministers were effectively 'head-hunted'. In 1905, for example, Havant Congregationalists bid a reluctant farewell to Rev. Richard Wells, their beloved minister, who had served them faithfully for over 23 years. His departure, however, was also 'tinged with pride because he had been appointed to the key post of Secretary to the ... CUEW, a testament to his commitment to Congregationalism as well as his skill as an administrator'.³⁷

A second example is Rev. Reginald Thompson, who was mentioned in Chapter 1. Having made a very favourable impression during his first pastorate at London Street, not least through his oratorical skills and willingness to speak forcefully on issues facing the Church locally and more widely,³⁸ after only four years he received a call from the larger Queen's Street Congregational Church in Wolverhampton. As he explained at a gathering to mark his departure:

It was not because of any difficulty in the work, it was not because he was weary of the town, it was not because he wanted to seek fresh fields and pastures new, it was not because he did not like the people that he had decided to go. Nor was it because he had sought his own advantage ... if they counted peace, contentment of mind, a happy ministry, and work that was comparatively easy, he was not so sure that it was to his advantage to go on an untried voyage to a large manufacturing town ... He was glad to have had this period of character forming and this experience of Basingstoke. He was out of time now. Apprenticeships were being shortened.³⁹

One undoubted worldly advantage of the move would have been a larger stipend and manse. However, it is striking that, although Thompson felt obliged to accept the

³⁷ Roger Ottewill, *"Loveability, Sympathy and Liberality": Havant Congregationalists in the Edwardian Era 1901-1914* (Havant: Havant United Reformed Church, 2013), 3.

³⁸ As he put it, when speaking at the fourth anniversary of Rev. Ebenezer Hitchcock's settlement in Andover: 'They, as ministers, must carry out the duty of the Christian pastorate more faithfully, more humbly, more loyally, and more courageously, and must preach to their people to strive after a higher moral and spiritual tone (applause).' *Andover Advertiser*, February 14, 1908.

³⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, February 25, 1911.

call to Wolverhampton, there was some reluctance on his part and that, in human terms, continuing to serve as London Street's minister for a few more years would have been the preferable option.⁴⁰

While in Thompson's case Basingstoke's loss was Wolverhampton's gain, there were instances where the Hampshire church was perceived as the beneficiary of a move. For example, speaking at Rev. David Beynon's recognition as Freemantle's Congregational minister, the church secretary observed that: 'There was only one thing that cast a shadow, and that was that their gain meant a great loss to Newport.'⁴¹ Similarly, in 1911 at the recognition of Rev. Henry Lucas as Andover's Congregational minister, there was 'very positive testimony from his previous church at Cwm in Monmouthshire where he had doubled the membership' and was described as 'the best preacher they had ever had'. Furthermore, even 'his enemies' in the town 'were sorry to hear that he was going, because he was a man'.⁴²

Although Congregationalists prided themselves on the non-hierarchical character of their denomination, distinctions can still be drawn between those ministers who were content to remain quietly in the background and others who, by virtue of their personalities and abilities, stood out, with their reputations extending well beyond the church they served. More precisely, ministers can be located on a

⁴⁰ Ministers who received calls to serve elsewhere but chose to remain at their Hampshire church, included Rev. Francis Sloper and Rev. J.D. Jones.

⁴¹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 9, 1901. He had been minister of Tabernacle Church in Newport for the previous 10 years.

⁴² *Andover Advertiser*, October 20, 1911, quoted in Roger Ottewill, "'Strong and Blessed'? An Assessment of East Street Congregational Church during the Edwardian era,' *Lookback at Andover* 3, no, 2 (2011): 76-7. For further examples see Ottewill, "Public Recognition," 12.

continuum with 'local ministers' at one end and 'cosmopolitans' at the other.⁴³

'While the stage on which a local minister served his denomination was narrow and familiar and, it has to be acknowledged, somewhat inward looking and parochial, that for cosmopolitans was broad and outward facing.'⁴⁴ Amongst the cosmopolitans was the previously mentioned J.D. Jones, one of the 'big beasts' of Edwardian Congregationalism, and a number who would make their greatest impact later in their careers, such as Alexander Grieve and Reginald Thompson, both of whom served as chairmen of the CUEW. Indeed, Hampshire confirms Tudur Jones' claims made earlier concerning the vibrancy, vigour and high ideals associated with the Congregational ministry at this time.⁴⁵ It was by no means a Congregational backwater, with 'cosmopolitans' from elsewhere in the country speaking at events in the county on a regular basis. Examples include Rev. Silvester Horne, mentioned in earlier chapters;⁴⁶ Rev. John Henry Jowett from Carrs Lane Congregational Church in Birmingham;⁴⁷ Rev. Peter Taylor Forsyth, Principal of Hackney College;⁴⁸ and William Melville Harris, Secretary of the Young People's Department of the CUEW from 1908 to 1918.⁴⁹

⁴³ Albert Goldberg, "The Relevance of Cosmopolitan/Local Orientations to Professional Values and Behaviour," *Work and Occupations* 3, no.3 (1976): 332. For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Roger Ottewill, "Locals and Cosmopolitans: Congregational Pastors in Edwardian Hampshire 1901-1914," *Congregational History Society Magazine* 6, no.3 (2011): 124-37.

⁴⁴ Ottewill, "Locals and Cosmopolitans," 130.

⁴⁵ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 323.

⁴⁶ He preached and/or spoke at Richmond Hill's anniversary services and meetings in 1901, 1903, 1906, 1908 and 1911.

⁴⁷ He preached and/or spoke at Richmond Hill's anniversary services and meetings in 1902, 1905, 1907 and 1910 and at Albion's anniversary services in 1908.

⁴⁸ He preached at East Cliff's anniversary services in 1901 and at Albion's anniversary services in 1903.

⁴⁹ For an example, see pages 253-4.

A notable feature of the Congregational ministry was the extent to which these grandees were willing to act collegially by speaking at gatherings in smaller churches and chapels and taking an active interest in their well-being and that of their pastors. J.D. Jones, for example, was a leading figure in the national campaign, launched in 1910/11, to establish a 'Central Fund of £250,000 for bringing ministerial stipends up to a minimum figure' of £120 per annum.⁵⁰

Moreover, most ministers of the larger town churches in Hampshire responded positively to requests to preach at special services in smaller churches and often took advantage of such opportunities to speak on a matter of topical interest. Conceptualised as 'cosmo-locals', in addition to guest preaching they were often post-holders within the HCU, thereby securing another platform from which to address contemporary concerns.⁵¹ The most prominent post was that of chairman, with the occupant being chosen annually.⁵² Between 1901 and 1914 seven ministers served in this capacity (see Table 4.1).

⁵⁰ CYB, 1943, 417.

⁵¹ Ottewill, "Locals and Cosmopolitans," 133-5.

⁵² It was the custom to alternate between a minister and a layman.

Table 4.1: Ministerial chairmen of the Hampshire Congregational Union 1901-1914

Year	Name	Church
1901/2	Samuel Eldridge ¹	Throop
1903/4	John Daniel Jones	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth
1905/6	Vincett Cook	Bitterne
1907	Francis Sloper	Boscombe
1909	Henry Coley	Christchurch
1911	David Morgan Bynner	Sandown
1913	William Miles	Buckland, Portsmouth

Note

1. Eldridge died before completing his term of office. A layman, Mr J.A Hunt of Southampton, filled the vacancy for the remainder of the year.

Although many ministers restricted their office-holding to posts within Congregationalism, others demonstrated their ecumenical credentials by filling various offices associated with Free Church Councils. For example, Rev. Vincett Cook, was not only Bitterne's minister,⁵³ but also 'secretary of the Southampton Free Church Council for twenty-one years, being twice elected President'. In this role 'his painstaking devotion and brotherly spirit promoted efficiency and unity'. He also served as 'secretary and lecturer for the Hants Free Church Federation' for 20 years.⁵⁴

Although every minister was, to some degree, a public figure, a number felt the need to demonstrate their Christian commitment through active engagement with secular organisations, thereby serving the wider community. Examples include Rev. William Miles at Buckland for whom 'civic, social, political ... matters were all within the range of his manifold activities';⁵⁵ Rev. George Charrett, who was 'a great

⁵³ See Chapter 1.

⁵⁴ *CYB*, 1931, 226.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 1922, 108.

and lasting influence for good in the town and neighbourhood' of Emsworth;⁵⁶ Rev. James Richards of Overton, who was for many years a parish councillor, poor law guardian and rural district councillor;⁵⁷ Rev. David John, Jewry Street's minister, who had an 'active life ... [that] was ... rich in helpful service';⁵⁸ and Rev. Frederick Hern, who took 'an active interest in local affairs ... [serving] on the District Council and its Guardian's Committee, and ... [as] chairman of the Parish Council.'⁵⁹ Similarly, Rev. Ebenezer Hitchcock's seven years at Andover 'were marked by faithful and devoted labours, both in the *town* and the church [emphasis added]'.⁶⁰ The ability to coalesce the sacred with the secular was also a hallmark of the ministry of Rev. Capes Tarbolton, Reginald Thompson's predecessor, at London Street.⁶¹ In a press report which appeared at the time of an initial resignation letter it was observed that:

During his residence amongst us the reverend gentleman has served the town with diligence and singular capacity in the offices of guardian of the poor and member of the School Board; while his services to his own denomination as well as to the cause of the Free Churches, both at Basingstoke and in the county at large, have been highly valued and will not soon be forgotten. Doubtless an opportunity will arise ... for publicly assuring him of the high regard and respect which men of various creeds and opinions feel for him, and for recognising the fairness of mind and the well informed judgment with which he has illuminated the many matters, sacred and secular, with

⁵⁶ CYB, 1933, 250.

⁵⁷ Ottewill, "James Richards. Parts 1, 2 and 3."

⁵⁸ CYB, 1912, 150.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 1958, 419. Two further examples were Rev. Thomas Robilliard, who was one of Tadley's two representatives on Kingsclere Board of Guardians and District Council for twelve years from 1895 to 1907 and chairman of the Parish Council during the first decade of the twentieth century; and Rev. Samuel Longmore, a Bishop's Waltham parish councillor from 1897 to 1919, a member of the school board until its demise and subsequently 'the first chairman of the Managers of the Council School ... until he retired'. Peter Watkins, *Bishop's Waltham: Parish, Town and Church* (Swanmore: Swanmore Books, 2007), 148.

⁶⁰ CYB, 1959, 421.

⁶¹ Reference was made to one of Tarbolton's sermons in Chapter 3.

which he has been called upon to deal as a minister in holy things and as a public man.⁶²

Being a 'public man' frequently meant a willingness 'to nail one's colours' to a party political mast. For Congregational ministers this was almost invariably a Liberal one. William Miles, for example, 'was a staunch Liberal, ... [who] championed on public platforms the policy of Free Trade when that policy and Tariff Reform were the question of the day';⁶³ Rev. William Moncrieff at East Cliff was 'an ardent Radical and an eager student of the work of social reformers, ... [who] took his full share in the political and civic affairs of Bournemouth';⁶⁴ and Rev. Enoch Hunt was 'a keen Liberal ... [who] suffered as a passive resister' in the campaign against the Education Act 1902.⁶⁵ Such examples confirm Argent's observation that: 'The temper of many Congregational ministers ... was ... Liberal in politics and in ... attitudes to social need.'⁶⁶

Engagement in public affairs provided ministers with additional opportunities for exemplifying some of the virtues associated with Christian leadership and giving practical expression to their beliefs, which frequently incorporated aspects of the social gospel. That said, obituary writers were rather coy about commenting to any great extent on the doctrinal stance of their subjects. This may have been because it was well known or because most ministers adopted a

⁶² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, September 5, 1903. On this occasion Tarbolton was persuaded to withdraw his resignation letter and he remained in Basingstoke for another four years.

⁶³ *Hampshire Telegraph*, August 26, 1921.

⁶⁴ *CYB*, 1908, 188.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 1947, 463.

⁶⁶ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 27.

similar position to that outlined at the beginning of Chapter 1, namely a blending of faith with good works or the Evangelical with the ethical.

Where reference was made to a minister's theological views, it can be quite revealing. For example, in the case of Rev. Ernest Dudley, who was Peartree Green's Congregational minister from 1899 to 1911, it was noted that:

... his views and convictions were many years ahead of the opinions and convictions prevalent in that church at the time. Despite this, he continued throughout his life to preach the progressive doctrines in which he firmly believed ...⁶⁷

Notwithstanding this apparent disparity between minister and congregation, Peartree Green's historian was still able to describe the Church as 'a power house of Christian endeavour' during the Edwardian era.⁶⁸ However, it was under Dudley's successor, Rev. Reuben Drew, that the Church secured a substantial increase in its membership. Another minister described as having 'very progressive views on theology' was Rev. Walter Vine, Lymington's Congregational minister from 1910 to 1917.⁶⁹ His obituary, however, records that: 'Few men of our time have more faithfully preached Christ', a form of words which suggests an adherence to more traditional beliefs.⁷⁰

In contrast to Dudley and possibly Vine, James Grant, pastor of Zion Congregational Church in Portsmouth from 1910 to 1914, 'held firmly to the older

⁶⁷ CYB, 1946, 440.

⁶⁸ John Beer, *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Story of a Church Fellowship* (Southampton: Peartree Green United Reformed Church, 1984).

⁶⁹ Alexander Douglass, *The Story of Lymington United Reformed Church* (Lymington: Author, c.1983).

⁷⁰ CYB, 1947, 477.

ways of thought'.⁷¹ Still others sought to combine the new with the old or, as it was expressed in the obituary of Rev. Samuel Eldridge:

He rejoiced in the modern thoughts of the fatherhood of God and welcomed all the grander views of God's love. But he never minimised sin, nor did he find the new light in any way hurt the old Gospel.⁷²

Here the term 'old Gospel' almost certainly equates to the more frequently used 'Evangelical'. Rev. Albert Bage, for example, was characterised as a 'man of deep faith, with a strong evangelical outlook'⁷³ and Rev. Ernest Franks as 'an evangelical preacher'.⁷⁴ A particularly compelling statement of an Evangelical minister's theological stance is found in John Baines' obituary, for whom 'the Bible was the inspired Word of God, and to the last he proclaimed full salvation in Jesus Christ'.⁷⁵ It seems that ministers in rural areas were more likely to adhere to the traditional tenets of Evangelicalism than their colleagues in urban churches who adopted a more nuanced stance. Further consideration is given to this topic in Chapter 6.

Whatever their theological orientation, one quality that ministers especially needed was an ability to work closely with their deacons in the interests of ensuring harmony within their churches. This did not necessarily mean unanimity, but it did require mutual respect. As it was put by Reginald Thompson in an address at the recognition of his successor, Rev. Rocliffe Mackintosh in 1912:

... he had come to a Church that trusted its officers. It did not always agree with them. It sometimes ventured to strongly disagree with them; but in the spirit of love they trusted their leaders. He could not say how much he owed

⁷¹ Ibid, 1947, 478.

⁷² Ibid, 1902, 171.

⁷³ Ibid, 1945, 424.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 1954, 510.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 1952, 527.

to the wisdom, the geniality and the strength of character of the leading men and women of this Church. For real Christian piety they would not easily better the men whom this Church has elected to serve in a special capacity

...⁷⁶

Anticipating the theme of Chapter 8 it is noteworthy that Thompson refers to leading women as well as men. However, leadership was still predominantly a male preserve and it is clear that the all male diaconate was held in high regard by the minister and indeed the congregation, a pattern repeated elsewhere. At Albion, for example, Rev. Ieuan Maldwyn Jones was able to state at the anniversary celebrations in 1905 that: 'The deacons, to a man, had been true to him, and he felt he had their sympathy.'⁷⁷ While at Titchfield Congregational Church, on the ninth anniversary of Rev. Walter Hogben's settlement in 1911, the church secretary spoke of the 'harmonious relations existing between the Pastor and the officers and members of the church'.⁷⁸

The lay contribution: deacons and diaconates

With ministers taking the lead in attending to the spiritual aspects of church life, deacons ensured that administrative and financial matters received appropriate attention.⁷⁹ Almost invariably the key posts of church secretary and church treasurer were held by deacons. They also played a crucial role when churches were without a

⁷⁶ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, June 8, 1912.

⁷⁷ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 25, 1905.

⁷⁸ *Hampshire Post*, September 8, 1911.

⁷⁹ The point is made by Argent that '... local churches, in the nineteenth century, came to rely upon such voluntary lay officers, called church secretaries, who performed administrative tasks'. Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 146.

minister, which could be for many months and sometimes for over a year or more.⁸⁰ Throughout this period deacons ensured that the pulpit was 'supplied' and took soundings as to who to invite 'with a view' to the pastorate. It is a tribute to their competence in this regard that membership seldom suffered, although there was a sense in which churches were marking time pending the arrival of a new minister.

Some deacons were involved in the preaching ministry of the church, especially when it had responsibility for a number of smaller causes.⁸¹ As it was said of Alfred Peach, one of Richmond Hill's deacons, at the time of his death in 1920:

By no means ... were ... [his] activities confined to ... Richmond Hill, for he was one of a zealous body of active workers in connection with the group of Mission churches of which Richmond Hill is the head. It is, indeed, in his work on behalf of Congregational Churches in the surrounding countryside that his loss will be most keenly felt. He was a regular occupant of the pulpit at all of the group churches referred to ...⁸²

Peach was by no means exceptional in this respect.

The number of deacons reflected the size of the church, with the average being about six. Although voting arrangements varied, candidates often required the support of at least two-thirds of those exercising their right to vote to secure election, thereby enhancing their legitimacy. The term of office was usually three years with many frequently securing re-election. While this ensured a valuable degree of continuity, in most churches the need for the injection of new blood at intervals was generally recognised.

⁸⁰ For example, Avenue Congregational Church in Southampton was without a minister for approximately 18 months from early 1912 to the middle of 1913.

⁸¹ See Chapter 3 for some examples.

⁸² *Bournemouth Times and Directory*, February 28, 1920.

In most of the Congregational churches of Edwardian Hampshire, either formally or by convention, only men could be elected to the diaconate.⁸³ The one exception was Miss Edith Sharp, who was elected unanimously to the diaconate of Lymington Congregational Church in December 1910. At her memorial service in 1930 the minister observed that she:

... was a good and faithful Christian woman, and it was her love for her Lord which was the source of inspiration for all her activities ... She had many friends in the Anglican Church, but they knew she was a staunch and stalwart Nonconformist, and a most faithful Congregationalist.⁸⁴

Sharp's attributes also characterised many male deacons who sought to give expression to their ideals more widely.

Some were well known in their communities as local businessmen and/or local politicians. In this regard, two outstanding deacons from Edwardian Hampshire were John Elmes Beale of Richmond Hill and Edward Bance of Avenue. Beale was a leading figure in Bournemouth's business community, founding a well-known chain of department stores. He also served for many years as councillor and alderman and held the office of mayor from 1902 to 1905. At his funeral in 1928, adopting exuberant language, J.D. Jones said of him:

Mr Beale's business career was a triumph; he ... had judgment, initiative and courage, but above all character ... [He] was a Christian in business. Here in the midst of the business life of Bournemouth he stood wearing the white flower of a blameless life, and who can tell how much his example has contributed to the cleansing and sweetening of the commercial life of our

⁸³ The rules of a number of churches stipulated that only male members could serve as deacons. At Petersfield, for example, when the church rules were revised in July 1914, this restriction remained in place. Petersfield Congregational Church Rules, Revised July 1st 1914, Petersfield Museum, 2004.167, File 211.

⁸⁴ *Lymington Chronicle*, August 21, 1930, quoted in Roger Ottewill, "Edith Lucy Sharp 1853-1930: Lymington's proto-feminist," *Hampshire Field Club Newsletter*, no.61, Spring 2014: 5.

town ... He was not one of those who thought when he paid his assistants he had discharged his duty towards them. There was a human touch in the relationship between him and them ... During his three years mayoralty he added much to the happiness of the community ... Mr Beale was not only ... successful ... and ... able ... he was a good man. Religion was the deepest thing in him ... His life was just a bloom of which a great love for Christ was the root.⁸⁵

Beale epitomised a synthesis of the spiritual and the entrepreneurial and civic.

Bance was a prominent Southampton estate agent.⁸⁶ He was also a Liberal councillor from 1874 to 1889 and then an alderman until 1913.⁸⁷ Like Beale, he served as mayor for three years, but on separate occasions in 1890, 1904 and 1910 respectively. At his funeral in 1925 Rev. Henry Spencer, Avenue's long-serving minister, highlighted 'the example he set of generous and sacrificial giving to the Church' and his regular attendance at Sunday services. While his closing words echoed those of St Paul: 'Edward Bance, farewell: Thou has fought the good fight, hast finished the course, and kept the faith.'⁸⁸

It was not only in larger churches that examples of well-respected deacons can be found, but also in many market town churches. Edwin Tutte, for example, a carpenter and builder and deacon of Fareham Congregational Church, 'possessed a quiet strength of character, and was so upright and honest in all his dealings that the

⁸⁵ *Bournemouth Times and Directory*, July 6, 1928.

⁸⁶ For further details of Bance, including his business interests, see Roger Ottewill, "The Avenue Quartet: Exemplars of Edwardian Congregationalism," *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 9, no.4 (2014): 241-3.

⁸⁷ Another of Avenue's deacons, James Hamilton, was a Liberal councillor from 1889 to 1893 and from 1904 to 1910 when he was defeated by 10 votes. He was also a member of Southampton School Board until its demise in 1903.

⁸⁸ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, July 11, 1925.

inhabitants of ... [the town] held him in much esteem'.⁸⁹ When Thomas Fryer, a boot maker and one of Abbey's deacons, died in 1903, mention was made in his obituary of him being 'an old and esteemed member' of the Congregational church who 'was associated with the public life of the town ... being a member of the Corporation ... and that in politics he was a staunch Liberal'. He was also described as 'one of the most respected and popular men in the town, a favourite with all classes and shades of opinion ... quiet and unassuming in manner he impressed one as being the ideal of a Christian man'.⁹⁰ While at Andover, the church treasurer, Thomas Webb was 'a saddler and local entrepreneur, who served as mayor on a record number of six occasions'.⁹¹

The occupational and social backgrounds of deacons were, not surprisingly, very much in keeping with the middle-class ambience of Congregationalism. There were, of course, deacons in blue collar occupations but the majority were employers running their own small businesses, frequently shops.⁹²

Thus, deacons often brought to the role business, organisational and, indeed, political skills honed in the secular realm. They also needed to be diligent and generous and in words used of William Lusby, another of Fareham's deacons, to

⁸⁹ Roger Ottewill, " 'That Worthy Church': West Street Congregational Church in the Edwardian Era 1901-1914," *Fareham Past and Present* X, no. VII (2011): 12.

⁹⁰ *Romsey Advertiser*, July 24, 1903.

⁹¹ Roger Ottewill, "Strong and Blessed," 77. In Basingstoke, there were always at least three deacons serving as members of the borough council, comprising twelve councillors and four aldermen, throughout the Edwardian era. In 1911 they were Herbert Kingdon, an ironmonger and manufacturer; John Mussellwhite, a building contractor; and William Tigwell, a builder.

⁹² See, for example, Ottewill, "Loveability, Sympathy and Liberality," Tables 3 and 4; and Roger Ottewill, " 'Upholding Truth and Righteousness': Congregationalism in Edwardian Romsey 1901-1914", *Romsey History Papers* 1, no.1 (2013), Tables 3 and 4.

combine 'business ability ... [with a] brotherly heart'.⁹³ This was undoubtedly a trait of Benjamin Nicholson, a ship builder and deacon of Gosport Congregational Church, who died in 1906. As his obituary records, 'no one was more highly respected at Gosport' and alongside his business interests and involvement with the public life of the town, he was particularly associated 'with religious and philanthropic work'. Not long before his death, he contributed a substantial sum for the 'building of the Congregational Church at Lock's Heath, near Titchfield'.⁹⁴ His reputation was such that, at the 1906 autumn gathering of the HCU, due recognition was given to 'his high probity, his genial personality, his unflagging interest in the welfare of churches and his free handed generosity in contributing to the needs of struggling churches'.⁹⁵ Later, in 1910, he was honoured by Gosport Congregationalists in the erection of the Nicholson Memorial Hall and as someone who 'strove to live worthily – to leave to the men that come after a remembrance of him in good works'.⁹⁶ Such qualities led to him, like Beale, being held in high regard as an employer. As five employees wrote on the occasion of his golden wedding anniversary:

... you have always been the kindest, the most amiable and considerate of Employers ... we are only voicing the feelings of the whole Firm when we say that it has been a servitude of pleasure, your sterling qualities, helpful advice at all times and admirable leadership having ... endeared you to the hearts of everyone.⁹⁷

⁹³ Ottewill, "That Worthy Church," 12.

⁹⁴ *Hampshire Telegraph*, August 11, 1906.

⁹⁵ *Hampshire Independent*, November 3, 1906.

⁹⁶ *Hampshire Telegraph*, September 30, 1910. Words taken from a tablet unveiled at the Hall's opening.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Ian Dear, *Camper and Nicholson: Two Centuries of Yacht Building* (London: Quiller Press, 2001), 31.

In short, he was a model employer who sought to apply Christian principles in the workplace.

Although the largesse of Nicholson and other wealthy deacons can be equated with the 'industrial patronage' of the Crossley family in Halifax to which Hargreaves draws attention, it was not of the same magnitude. Thus, there was less danger of churches suffering financially when the involvement of local captains of industry waned.⁹⁸ That said, throughout the Edwardian era, there were few signs in Hampshire of business leaders with Congregational backgrounds deserting the Church.

Like Nicholson, a handful of deacons were well known beyond the confines of their local communities. Of these, a few were held in sufficiently high regard amongst Congregationalists to be elected to the chairmanship of the HCU (see Table 4.2).

⁹⁸ Hargreaves, "High-Victorian Expansion," 106-7.

Table 4.2: Lay chairmen of the Hampshire Congregational Union 1901-1914

Year	Name	Church	Occupation ¹
1902/3	John R. Ridley	Avenue, Southampton	Ironmonger
1904/5	Ernest L. Lane	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth	Estate agent
1906/7	James Thomas	Lower St James Street, Newport, Isle of Wight	Flour miller and corn merchant
1908	Henry March Gilbert	Jewry Street, Winchester	Bookseller
1910	Ernest W. Chaplin	Albion, Southampton	Managing director of grocery supply stores
1912	Alfred Peach	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth	Managing director of drapery business
1914	Percy Mayor Randall	Above Bar, Southampton	Solicitor

Notes

1. Description taken from either the 1901 or 1911 census returns.

Holding such a post was a considerable honour for both the person concerned and his church.⁹⁹ Of greater significance for this study, however, was the fact that it provided well-publicised, county-wide opportunities for the holder to highlight matters of broader concern, with one of the most high profile being his presidential address to the spring gathering of the HCU.

One address of particular relevance for the discourses considered in this section was that of John Ridley, during which he commented *inter alia* on the role of deacons, arguing that in the interests of the efficiency and effectiveness of churches,

⁹⁹ Also of note is John Blake, another of Gosport's deacons and one of the few Nonconformists to serve on Hampshire County Council. He was Treasurer of the HCU for seventeen years. For further details of John Blake and Benjamin Nicholson, see Roger Ottewill, "Congregationalism in Edwardian Gosport 1901-1914: Character and Personalities," accessed January 6, 2014, <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/library/gdc/gosport-dc-local-studies/local-history-online/congregationalism.htm>.

they 'should be looking out for every means of helping the Minister and the Church and feel it to be so imperative a duty as to call for the exercise of self-denial in giving up social engagements and private pleasures'.¹⁰⁰ It is, of course, impossible to know how far individuals responded to such a demand, but Ridley's remarks reflected something of the high expectations associated with the post of deacon.

For deacons and ministers alike, maintaining the confidence and respect of church members and the wider church community was crucial. It was undoubtedly a sign of churches at ease with themselves if deacons were regularly re-elected and ministers could echo the sentiments of Reginald Thompson, expressed earlier, on the importance of collaborative working.

A marriage made in heaven? Leaders and led

The effective functioning of Congregational churches depended, like other social organisations, on the manner in which leaders and led interacted with each other and consequently it was one of the critical discourses of leadership. For Congregationalists the sensitivity of the relationship was heightened by the fact that church members played an important part in selecting both ministers and deacons.

Indeed, choosing a minister was the most sensitive of the decisions that members were called upon to make and was certainly the one with the most far-reaching consequences. Once those preaching 'with a view' had been heard, votes were often taken, with candidates needing to receive far more than a simple majority

¹⁰⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 28, 1903.

to be offered the pastorate. Generally speaking, actual or near unanimity was the desired goal.

Interestingly, and in recognition of the fact that ministers had to engage with those outside of the membership, in a few instances the process was made more participatory by involving non-members. For example, at Jewry Street in 1906, the views of the congregation, including those who were not members, were taken into account in choosing David John's successor. As it was put by Arnold Tebbutt, a leading member of the Church:

... as he understood the matter the congregation had really no *locus standi* in the matter of selecting a pastor unless the deacons and members of the church extended to them the privilege of expressing an opinion. In this instance the deacons had been wise enough to consult the congregation as well as the church members, and he was sure they appreciated it very much (hear, hear).¹⁰¹

This, however, was a relatively rare occurrence and in the main participation in the choice of minister was confined to the membership. Nonetheless, the wider constituency who looked to a church for support and fellowship and constituted, along with the members, the core audience for the expositions and exhortations of ministers and deacons still needed to be considered.

Whoever was involved in the choice of minister, a principal criterion was performance in the pulpit. While congregations might vary in their preferences regarding preaching style, ability with the spoken word was of key importance. Thus, not surprisingly, it was this aspect of a minister's capabilities to which reference was frequently made in obituaries and at recognition and farewell

¹⁰¹ *Hampshire Chronicle*, September 7, 1907.

meetings. Examples of phrases used include: 'exceptional preaching gifts';¹⁰² 'a faithful preacher of the Gospel';¹⁰³ a 'thoughtful preacher';¹⁰⁴ 'an effective and helpful preacher';¹⁰⁵ 'an earnest preacher';¹⁰⁶ 'a convincing and fearless preacher';¹⁰⁷ 'a sincere, sympathetic and impressive preacher';¹⁰⁸ 'a preacher of outstanding ability';¹⁰⁹ 'a persuasive preacher';¹¹⁰ 'a preacher of compelling power';¹¹¹ and 'a preacher of no mean order'.¹¹² Some ministers were described as evangelistic in their approach, perhaps reflecting their backgrounds as evangelists. This was regarded by many as a highly desirable trait, with Rev. Francis Sloper, in his presidential address to the HCU in 1907, arguing that 'greater vitality in the pulpit' was an essential prerequisite for 'greater vitality in the pew'.¹¹³

To complement the pithy summaries of preaching style, few detailed accounts of the pulpit presence of ministers from Edwardian Hampshire have survived. One exception is a press report of an initial sermon delivered by Rev. I. Maldwyn Jones at Albion just prior to completing his training at New College and

¹⁰² *CYB*, 1950, 527. Obituary of Rev. George Saunders.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 1944, 439. Obituary of Rev. Gilbert Roberts.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 1931, 226. Obituary of Rev. Vincett Cook.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 1929, 221. Obituary of Rev. Willie Lawrence.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 1926, 170. Obituary of Rev. Arthur Marler.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 1938, 656. Obituary of Rev. William Cuthbertson.

¹⁰⁸ *Andover Advertiser*, December 10, 1909. Reference to Rev. Ebenezer Hitchcock.

¹⁰⁹ *CYB*, 1938, 675. Obituary of Rev. John Wills.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 1908, 188.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 1971/2, 437. Obituary of Rev. Phillip Rogers. As reported in the local newspaper: 'Mr Rogers is endowed with pulpit abilities very much above the ordinary; he has a pleasing presence, a popular style, is intensely earnest, is a graphic word painter, occasionally dramatic, is breezy, fresh and up-to-date.' *Bournemouth Graphic*, September 10, 1908.

¹¹² *Hampshire Independent*, April 4, 1903. Words used of Rev. Joseph Cliffe at a farewell event held prior to his departure from Lymington for Natal in 1903.

¹¹³ *Bournemouth Guardian*, April 13, 1907.

commencing his pastorate in 1904. Describing him as 'a rising young Welsh preacher ... [hailing] from the land where preachers are born not made', the report continued:

As we listened we were reminded of what was said concerning the great French Statesman Dupanloup: "He sought minds to convince rather than enemies to fight, his nervous words went straight to this aim without detours or artifices, for he did not know them or disdained them. He had what art does not give: he soared towards regions where nothing troubles the sincerity of thought. He had the vivacity of feeling, the strength of emotion, the authority and courage and sincerity which are the secret of oratory." Mr Jones does not read his sermons, nor does he adopt that other course affected by some young preachers, who wish their hearers to believe they preach purely extemporaneously, while in reality they are delivering their sermons memoriter ... another name for reading from an invisible paper. Mr Jones has a carefully prepared outline before him which ensures order and method, and an occasional glance at the notes is all he requires.¹¹⁴

I. Maldwyn Jones had charge of Albion for 13 years, which suggests that his congregation were well satisfied with his preaching style. Indeed, according to his obituary, while at Albion 'he won the hearts of young and old' alike. In speaking at the recognition of a fellow Southampton minister, Rev. Robert Ashenhurst, Jones observed that there needed to be 'a touch of perfect sympathy between ... [the preacher] and his hearers.'¹¹⁵

Another minister whose manner of preaching received some comment was Rev. Robert Clegg, who had charge of Christ Church in Southsea from 1898 to 1907. His obituarist commented that he would not have been 'classed as one of the "popular" preachers of his day ... [nonetheless] in the pulpit his voice had a fine range of tone and volume, yet it was those softer passages which perhaps held the

¹¹⁴ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, February 20, 1904. It is assumed that the quotation refers to Félix-Antoine-Philibert Dupanloup (1802 -1878), Bishop of Orléans, who was a renowned writer and educationalist.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, September 16, 1905.

deeper attention of his hearers'.¹¹⁶ Thus, passionate gestures and histrionics, particularly associated with evangelistic approaches, were not necessarily the only means of getting the message across. As Binfield remarks, preaching required 'a delicate balance between artistry and integrity'.¹¹⁷

The preoccupation with preaching ability, however, was not without its shortcomings when considering the leadership potential of prospective ministers. As James Hamilton, one of Avenue's deacons, observed at Henry Spencer's recognition in 1913:

... their method of choosing a minister had its attendant dangers. They were apt to judge the man by the sermons they heard, whereas they ought to take into account the whole consideration which governed the ministry, but he thought in Mr Spencer they had one who would bring the connecting link between minister and people, and between people and people, which was so essential if a church was to be carried to its right end.¹¹⁸

In other words, leadership also embraced what today would be called 'people skills', that is an ability to relate to others in a caring and constructive manner.

Given the importance of relationships within a church, it is unsurprising that at recognition events speakers, especially deacons, stressed the need for mutual understanding and co-operation between all concerned. Charles Holloway, for example, Andover's senior deacon, commented at Henry Lucas' recognition in 1911 that 'above all the minister must not be left to himself, but they must co-operate with him in every way'.¹¹⁹ On occasions, the analogy of marriage was used, with a fervently implied hope that it would indeed be one made in heaven. For example, at

¹¹⁶ CYB, 1959, 417.

¹¹⁷ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, 189.

¹¹⁸ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, July 19, 1913.

¹¹⁹ *Andover Advertiser*, October 20, 1911.

a meeting held in 1892 to welcome James Richards at the start of his long and effective ministry in Overton, he 'illustrated his association with that church by means of a marriage – they fell in love with him and he with them, after which came marriage and a happy honeymoon'.¹²⁰

In a similar vein, Henry Gilbert said of Alexander Grieve at Abbey's anniversary in 1908, 'in him they had a good leader and a lovable man'¹²¹ and urged his audience 'to cherish high ideals of the relationship between themselves and their pastor'.¹²² While William Miles from Buckland, speaking at Albion's anniversary celebrations in 1912, observed that: 'The success of a minister did not altogether depend on himself ... it depended very largely upon the spirit of sympathy prevailing amongst the people to whom he ministered.'¹²³ As the church secretary commented at Above Bar's anniversary in 1903:

... they found ... hope in the fact that they were a united church ... They did not ... look at everything in the same light: but in all the essentials that made for a church's welfare ... at no time in its history ... had there been such deep rooted ... unity of desire, aim and service (applause). The spirit of comradeship of the journey and the fight were upon them all.¹²⁴

It is perhaps a testament to the seriousness with which all parties approached the relationship that there were relatively few obvious breakdowns, arising from either doctrinal issues of the kind reported by Binfield and McLeod from the late nineteenth century or organisational matters, leading to 'divorce' and the premature

¹²⁰ Ibid, July 1, 1892, quoted in Ottewill, "James Richards. Part 1". Henry Gilbert also used the analogy of a marriage, when chairing the recognition meeting for Rev. Henry Coley at the start of his ministry in Christchurch. *Christchurch Times*, February 8, 1908.

¹²¹ *Hampshire Independent*, May 2, 1908.

¹²² *Romsey Advertiser*, May 1, 1908.

¹²³ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, October 26, 1912.

¹²⁴ Ibid, November 21, 1903.

departure of a minister.¹²⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 1, there was, at this time, a marked reluctance, even on the part of the press, to speculate when this did occur. Arguably, such reticence helped churches weather the storm and enabled a new minister to restore the situation.

In some instances a minister may simply have been unsuited, in terms of his personality, for the church in which he found himself. One particularly dramatic example concerns Winton Congregational Church in Bournemouth. During Rev. Ben Evans' pastorate membership fell from 100 in 1902 to 72 in 1908, the year in which he resigned for reasons which remain unclear and Richmond Hill resumed responsibility for the Church. Under Evans' successor, Rev. Howard Page James, membership rapidly increased and stood at 210 in 1914, a turnaround which suggests that Evans had not been the most appropriate choice for Winton.

Arguably, the most successful ministers were those who combined oratorical skills with pastoral sensitivity in helping members of their flock deal with the problems they encountered in their everyday lives. For the noted Congregationalist R.W. Dale, ministers 'had only two functions, namely providing pastoral care and

¹²⁵ Clyde Binfield, "Chapels in Crisis," *Transactions of the Congregational History Society*, 20 (1968); and McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 190-1. Examples of ministers where there appears to have been a breakdown include Rev. John Draper at Andover in 1903, see Ottewill, "Strong and Blessed," 75; Rev. Henry Weatherhead at Alton in 1903, see Ottewill, "Promoting Spiritual Health," 35-6; Rev. William Daniel at Victoria Road in Southsea in 1903, see Roger Ottewill, "A Profile of the Membership of Victoria Road Congregational Church in Southsea: 1901-1911" (working paper, University of Birmingham, 2011), 13-15; and Rev. George Startup at Avenue in Southampton in 1908/9, see Roger Ottewill, "Avenue Congregational Church Members and Ministers: 1901-1914" (working paper, Avenue St Andrews URC Archive, 2013), 19-21. Rev. James Learmount at Christchurch also left prematurely in 1906 due to 'injurious reports' circulating in the town. In this instance he retained the support of his deacons. Christchurch Congregational Church Book 1902-1919, DHC NP4/CM/1/3.

preaching'.¹²⁶ While this oversimplifies the position, it was through the latter that ministers made their contributions to the defining discourses of Edwardian Congregationalism and through the former that they often confronted some of the issues that informed them. Indeed, it was Rev. George Field's belief 'that the minister's best work was done in the homes of his people'.¹²⁷ Frequently, home visits were required in cases of illness. Thus, Rev. Robert Howarth was described as 'an assiduous and welcome visitor of the sick and infirm';¹²⁸ Rev. Harry Schofield was praised for 'his warm and helpful words in time of sickness and bereavement';¹²⁹ and Rev. Henry Perkins' 'visitations to the sick were like healing balm'.¹³⁰

Of the occasions when relations between leaders and led more broadly were to the fore, anniversaries took pride of place.¹³¹ As expressed in the colourful language of William Haslam Mills: 'But in the highway of our ecclesiastical year ... the Anniversary was a stopping place where the waters gushed forth. On this day the annual sermons were preached by someone eminent.'¹³² As indicated earlier, for Hampshire Congregationalists this might well be a figure of national standing. Anniversaries were pre-eminently occasions for fostering fellowship. At an event celebrating four years of Rev. Joseph Curson's ministry at Bitterne, the chairman, John Beeston, one of Albion's deacons:

¹²⁶ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 112.

¹²⁷ CYB, 1951, 511.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 1941, 402.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 1935, 288.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 1913, 183.

¹³¹ Roger Ottewill, " 'Evoking the Spirit of the Past': Romsey's Abbey Congregational Church Anniversaries 1901-1912," *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 8, no.9 (2011): 541-557. They included the anniversary of the founding of the church, the opening of new church buildings and the settlement of the current minister.

¹³² W. Haslam Mills, *Grey Pastures*, 2nd ed. (London: The Chapels Society, 2003), 48.

... sometimes wondered how their Church [of England] friends got on with so few anniversaries, and had come to the conclusion that the atmosphere of the established church was not favourable. He held that the Free Church members composed one big family, and at such gatherings other churches were always represented, recognising that they were brothers in the good work that was common to them all.¹³³

In addition to fostering collegiality within Congregationalism and ecumenism within the Free Church community, anniversaries were opportunities for celebrating the achievements of churches. These were often associated with particular ministers who through their vision and sincerity were able to secure the enthusiastic support of deacons and the wider church family. If they were to leave legacies for which they would be remembered long after their departure, ministers needed to exhort, work hard and lead by example. Thus, the phrase 'a memorial of ... devoted and untiring energy' which appears in the obituary of John Watkin Davies could be applied to many others.¹³⁴

Seeking to evaluate ministers by their achievements is a problematic, not to say invidious, undertaking. Using tangible measures undervalues the spiritual aspects of their role.¹³⁵ Nonetheless, in assessing ministerial leadership the temptation to focus on the visible is understandable and consequently measures such as increased membership, new organisations and, more prosaically, raising money and clearing debts are to the fore.¹³⁶ Thus, during Francis Sloper's 15-year pastorate at Boscombe:

¹³³ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, May 11, 1901.

¹³⁴ *CYB*, 1942, 415.

¹³⁵ As it was said of Rev. Harry Schofield, the 'full results of his long ministry at Pokesdown cannot be measured'. *Ibid*, 1935, 288.

¹³⁶ The issue of finance is considered in Chapter 5.

... everything was slowly transformed: a new lecture hall with class-rooms and vestries was erected, the interior of the church building was beautified; organ, galleries, pulpit, seating accommodation, heating apparatus, electric light – practically all except the bare walls and roof – were added during his ministry.¹³⁷

Similarly, James Richards at Overton ‘was successful in greatly increasing the membership. A schoolroom was enlarged and a lecture-hall added’.¹³⁸ What perhaps is frequently missing from these accounts is the crucial support ministers received from deacons and others in successfully bringing projects to fruition.

Sometimes the achievements are less specific. Thus, Rev. Walter Talbot’s pastorate at Buckland from 1888 to 1902 ‘was characterised as “the halcyon days of the church’s history” ‘;¹³⁹ and Rev. Humphrey Davies’ ministry at Alton was simply ‘remembered with gratitude’.¹⁴⁰ For many ministers much of their pastoral work was unseen and, as Argent asserts, its ‘value ... was insufficiently realized, if not taken for granted. Yet such work was the backbone of the churches’.¹⁴¹

For some ministers it was their work with young people that was particularly remembered. Thus, Rev. Francis Cooper, who had been a teacher before entering the ministry, retained ‘his interest in the young ... to the end, and both to the Young People’s Committee of the HCU, and the LMS [London Missionary Society] Auxiliary ... he rendered valuable service’.¹⁴² While Rev. Robert Skinner, although Ringwood’s Congregational minister for only three years from 1912 to 1915, made his

¹³⁷ CYB, 1913, 187.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 1920, 109. For a full assessment of Richard’s ministry at Overton see Ottewill, “James Richards. Parts 1, 2 and 3”.

¹³⁹ CYB, 1943, 439. Quotation from an obituary notice in the magazine of Buckland Congregational Church in Portsmouth,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 1933, 238.

¹⁴¹ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 145.

¹⁴² CYB, 1918, 126.

mark by instituting for children 'a special week-evening meeting in the Church';¹⁴³ and Rev. William Cuthbertson 'gave himself devotedly in his various spheres of service to work amongst the young who warmly appreciated and reciprocated these efforts to his great encouragement'.¹⁴⁴

Part of the legacy of a handful of ministers was their contribution to the wider ministry of the Church through writing and publication. Accordingly, Rev. Arthur Martin, the first minister of Avenue, 'wrote strenuously and six books came from his pen ... his first and last books were attempts to interpret Christ and make Him known to others'.¹⁴⁵ While the aforementioned Ben Evans 'was a prolific writer, judging by letters, pamphlets and lectures which he delivered in various parts of England and Wales';¹⁴⁶ and Rev. James Learmount 'possessed literary gifts that greatly widened his ministry', through newspaper articles on religious topics and books of talks for children.¹⁴⁷

In leaving behind something of value, many ministers would have been conscious of the effect that they, as leaders, had on those with whom they came into contact. Thus, in what they said but more especially in how they behaved, they had to uphold the tenets of their faith. Indeed, it was expected that ministers would

¹⁴³ *Ringwood Congregational Church 1866-1966* (c1966), 7, HRO TOP263/1/6. 'The Ringwood Children's League, founded in the autumn of 1912, has reached a membership of no less than 350. We congratulate the Rev. R.O. Skinner, B.D., and his friends on this remarkable achievement. It can be partly traced to the organiser's shrewd regard to the fact that girls and boys like colours, badges, activity and responsibility, and partly, perhaps, to what lies behind his remark, "It is my most promising and most loved work." ' *HCU Annual Report*, 1914, 34, HRO 127M94/62/59.

¹⁴⁴ *CYB*, 1938, 655.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 1942, 427-8. These books were *Aspects of the Way* and *A Plain Man's Life of Christ*.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 1932, 220.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 1934, 267.

model what it meant to live a Christian life. Thus, the previously mentioned John Baines was 'an inspiring example to others' and served as 'a shining witness to power given by faith in Jesus Christ'.¹⁴⁸ Similar sentiments were expressed in Rev. Walter Hogben's obituary with a quote from a friend: 'he was "a fine Christian gentleman whose life was an example of what he taught" ';¹⁴⁹ while Rev. Harry Schofield's 'life and example ... [were] an inspiring influence for all that is noble and best'.¹⁵⁰ Serving as a role model also involved inspiring others to consider becoming ministers. Thus, 'numbers of young people gathered about' Howard Page James, during his pastorates at Winton, Christchurch and Southampton, 'and some of them entered the ministry'.¹⁵¹ Here there is a sense of the ministerial baton being passed on to the next generation.

In so doing, most, if not all, Congregational ministers sought to project, either explicitly or implicitly, an image of muscular Christianity, with leadership being equated with manliness and, as previously mentioned, the contribution of women being subservient to that of men. They were also distancing themselves from what was happening in the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Anglican church, where the behaviour of ritualists was seen by some of the more extreme Protestants as 'unwholesome, fetid [and above all] unmanly'.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 1952, 527.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 1943, 431.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 1935, 288.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 1959, 421.

¹⁵² Brown, *Providence and Empire*, 406.

Such sentiments were shared by deacons and other lay men. For example, in welcoming Rev. Nicholas Richards as minister of Jewry Street in 1907, Arnold

Tebbutt:

... had formed the opinion that ... [he] was a man with a considerable amount of grit in him. He liked a minister who was not only a minister but a man also (hear, hear). He had no admiration for a person who was a namby pamby kind of man because he happened to be a minister (hear, hear). He understood Mr Richards was a bit of an athlete and sportsman ... he hoped he would stick to any sporting proclivities he might have, and they would not think the less of him for it (applause).¹⁵³

Judging by the interjections of the audience it is clear that Tebbutt was not alone in his views. One consequence of this bias towards masculinity was that in setting parameters for the defining discourses of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire it was essentially a male perspective which prevailed. Furthermore, it may have contributed to the belligerent mode of discourse discussed in Chapter 7.

A daunting task

From the available evidence, it would be reasonable to conclude that, notwithstanding the daunting nature of the task they were called upon to perform, Congregational churches in Hampshire were, in general, well led by ministers and deacons who had charge of them during the Edwardian era. Most enjoyed the respect and esteem of their congregations and there were frequent references to their leadership qualities. Henry Perkins at Albion, for example, was praised for his

¹⁵³ *Hampshire Chronicle*, September 7, 1907.

‘indefatigable labours and vigilant oversight’,¹⁵⁴ and Reuben Drew at Peartree Green for his ‘true organising ability’.¹⁵⁵ While William Fuller, a long-serving deacon of Petersfield Congregational Church, was described as ‘a Christian Gentleman much respected as a Citizen of this town, and beloved by all the Fellowship of the Church’.¹⁵⁶ For Rev. John Harrison Milnes a fuller picture emerges in the form of a note from Richard Wells, as Secretary of the CUEW, to the members of Westbourne Congregational Church. This lists his credentials and can be regarded, from a modern-day human resource management perspective, as a ‘person specification’ for an ideal Congregational minister:

Age 33. Total abstainer. Mr Milnes is a Minister who possesses in the highest degree the confidence & esteem of all his brethren. He is cultured, a good student, & a powerful, popular preacher ... those who know him admire his tact, patience, persistence & faith. He loves children & gets on well with young people, & is a good leader & organiser, energetic & enthusiastic.¹⁵⁷

For these and earlier examples, however, it is recognised that the source material is skewed towards more positive evaluations of ministers and deacons. Moreover, as Argent observes: ‘Given the independent nature of Congregationalism, arguably a typical minister never existed ... although doubtless many ... exercised a faithful, if unspectacular ministry to the benefit of their people.’¹⁵⁸ Some would have been mediocre in the leadership they provided and their achievements modest, simply keeping ‘the show on the road’. It may also have been the case that, as Kenneth

¹⁵⁴ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 1, 1902.

¹⁵⁵ *Hampshire Independent*, December 16, 1911.

¹⁵⁶ Notes on W.J. Fuller, deacon of Petersfield Congregational Church who died 18 Aug 1944, HRO 91A02/D7.

¹⁵⁷ Westbourne Congregational Church Minute Book 1902-1914, DHC NP33/Accession 8165d.

¹⁵⁸ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 114.

Brown asserts, at this time 'nonconformists were living largely off their accumulated ministerial fat'.¹⁵⁹ This overly negative view, however, can be said to jar with the sense of calling and dedication displayed by many ministers mentioned in this chapter, especially those in demand as speakers at events in churches other than their own and with reputations which made them stand out as effective spokesmen for, and leaders of, the denomination in Hampshire.

Most ministers and deacons seem to have combined the strength of character needed to embolden their congregations with the sensitivity and empathy required to help individuals cope with the stresses and strains of not only their spiritual but also their material lives. This conclusion echoes those of both Doyle and Rimmington. For Doyle: 'Much of the success of Norwich Congregationalism can be traced to the calibre of its ministers.'¹⁶⁰ While Rimmington observes that Leicester's Congregational churches 'were served by well-educated and well-paid ministers ... [who] were ably supported by congregations which were ... principally middle class'.¹⁶¹ In Hampshire there was little sign, as yet, of a concern identified by Chadwick in Bradford of '... central churches ... lament[ing] the fact that removals had robbed them of many to whom, because of their business capacity or social position, they had been accustomed to look for leadership'.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Brown, *Nonconformist Ministry*, 223.

¹⁶⁰ Doyle, "Congregational Culture," 321.

¹⁶¹ Rimmington, "Congregationalism in Leicester," 31 and 33.

¹⁶² Chadwick, "Church and People," 116.

Nonetheless Hampshire's Congregational leaders did face challenges. Consequently, they needed a 'strong faith and undaunted spirit'¹⁶³ and, in words used of Rev. George Saunders at the beginning of his ministry at Above Bar, 'fire, enthusiasm and holy passion' to motivate those they led.¹⁶⁴ Many ministers would have 'felt deeply', like Rev. Edward Kirby, 'the joys and disappointments of the Ministry'¹⁶⁵ and deacons would have been equally affected by the successes and failures of their contributions to the well-being of their churches.

Perhaps the most succinct description of a minister and, by extension, deacon well suited to the task they faced comes from that of David Beynon on commencing his ministry at Freemantle: 'hard worker, faithful teacher, and friend'.¹⁶⁶ However, it is legitimate to ask whether anything further was required if leaders were to help their churches cope with numerical decline; increasing competition from secular pursuits; the erosion of their standing within society; and what J.D. Jones characterised as 'the callous, heedless, and stubborn temper of the age'.¹⁶⁷

For some this meant adopting a more aggressive stance. At Robert Ashenhurst's recognition a college friend William Moncrieff, East Cliff's minister, commented that if the church members 'were prepared to launch out for aggressive work they had made a very wise choice in selecting Mr Ashenhurst as their leader'.¹⁶⁸ While this might sound rather bellicose it was in keeping with the previously

¹⁶³ CYB, 1949, 510. Obituary of Rev. Noah Brewer.

¹⁶⁴ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 26, 1904.

¹⁶⁵ CYB, 1972, 361.

¹⁶⁶ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 9, 1901.

¹⁶⁷ *Bournemouth Guardian*, September 10, 1910.

¹⁶⁸ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, September 16, 1905.

mentioned principle of 'muscular Christianity' and the more combative discourses reviewed in Chapter 7. It also indicated the need for strong proactive leadership to enable churches to confront the problems they faced. This embraced the ability to preach assertively and present the Christian message in ways that resonated with the concerns of the 'un-churched'. As John Cleden, one of Andover's deacons, said of Ebenezer Hitchcock at the third anniversary of his settlement:

... [he] was well respected by the general public outside the church; he believed the working men especially esteemed him, because he knew how to touch them with his straight talks, and it was something when a minister could touch the hearts as well as the heads of the working men (applause).¹⁶⁹

It was also necessary for ministers and deacons to 'practise what they preached'. For deacons this meant in their business and/or political lives as well as within the confines of their church. If they did not, charges of hypocrisy could easily surface.

As indicated, many Congregational deacons and ministers were active in public service where their behaviour was subject to additional scrutiny. However, it was also a source of pride. Hence James Thomas in his presidential address to the HCU in 1906 asserted that:

As Congregationalists they could congratulate themselves on the number of citizens they had trained for public positions; he thought that there was no body of men that had more impressed upon its members the duties and responsibilities of civic life than Congregational ministers (applause).¹⁷⁰

Similarly, at the laying of the foundation stone for a new church in the Southbourne district of Bournemouth, J.D. Jones commented that: 'Pro rata to population

¹⁶⁹ *Andover Advertiser*, January 25, 1907.

¹⁷⁰ *Hampshire Chronicle*, April 28, 1906.

Congregationalists had produced more men who took a prominent part in the public affairs of the land than perhaps any other Christian Church.¹⁷¹

In responding to the demands placed upon them, for church leaders getting the balance right was imperative. Devoting too much attention to one aspect of their role could result in others being neglected. Moreover, for some, a balance also had to be struck between faith and intellect. As J.D. Jones put it in an address to the autumn meeting of the HCU in 1909:

The Christian ministry was the most arduous and exacting task to which a man could put his hand; and ... to accomplish that work he must be adequately equipped. It was high time to get rid of the notion that piety plus a certain glibness of speech constituted a sufficient equipment for the Christian ministry. A minister in these days must have brains ... a stored mind ... be acquainted with the mighty history of the Church and with the main lines of theological thought ... [and] with all modern intellectual developments ... in addition to piety, plus certain natural gifts, a minister must study and work hard ... to be equal to his task.¹⁷²

Although Jones was referring to the clergy, similar considerations applied to the many deacons and indeed others involved in the lay ministry of churches as preachers and teachers.

Moreover, when speaking they needed to remember the ultimate source of their authority. Thus, in his presidential address at the 1901 spring gathering of the HCU, Samuel Eldridge, in the context of remarks concerning the Kingship of Christ, reminded his audience that:

... we are "His ambassadors", our authority is delegated authority. We have no right to speak our own words, nor guide our people according to our own

¹⁷¹ *Bournemouth Guardian*, April 16, 1910.

¹⁷² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, October 2, 1909.

wisdom. It is for us to wait upon our King, receive our message from Him, and deliver it intact to our hearers.¹⁷³

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, spiritual authority lay at the heart of Congregational leadership and was a key consideration when articulating responses to the issues churches faced. This must have weighed heavily upon ministers since they were communicating what they believed to be divinely inspired words of wisdom. Although for deacons it may not have been such an overriding concern, nonetheless most possessed a sense of calling and therefore prepared what they had to say not only diligently but also prayerfully.

With respect to the sacred nature of the tasks they were called upon to perform, the evidence confirms that the stance of those charged with leading Hampshire's Congregational churches 'arose from a complex interaction of past experience, present context and future expectation'.¹⁷⁴ A key aspect of this was the question of what, at the turn of the twentieth century, did it mean to be a Congregationalist. What did Congregationalism have to offer Nonconformity and the wider Christian world as it sought to respond to the challenges arising from what was perceived as a more taxing social milieu? Which aspects of Congregational custom and practice were particularly in tune with the spirit of the age? The discourses within which responses to these questions were embedded are the theme of the next chapter.

¹⁷³ *Hampshire Herald*, May 18, 1901.

¹⁷⁴ Jones, *Local Church*, 51. Words used of a different period and perspective on church history, but still apposite.

5. CONGREGATIONALISM RE-ENVISIONED: DISCOURSES OF IDENTITY¹

A time for reflection

A particularly striking feature of the early years of the twentieth century was the extent to which leading Hampshire Congregationalists sought to come to terms with what was happening around them by refining and restating the meaning of Congregationalism for the Edwardian age. What might explain this?

First, the emergence of an ecumenical spirit within the Free Church constituency prompted Congregationalists to review what distinguished them from other Nonconformist denominations, thereby justifying the retention of their separate identity. 'The desire to create a closer and richer fellowship' had begun with the establishment of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 and was revitalised with the creation of local Free Church councils in the closing years of the nineteenth century.² Whether this indicated incipient weakness rather than strength is a moot point. Most Congregationalists, however, regarded it as progress and during the Edwardian era were keen to play their full part and build on the foundations laid during the Victorian period. They were ecumenically minded and keen to collaborate with fellow Nonconformists. However, in the words of Rev. J.H. Jowett, Free Church

¹ This chapter develops, to some extent, ideas presented in Roger Ottewill, "Representations of Congregational Identity in Edwardian Hampshire," *Local Historian* 41, no.2 (2011): 149-60.

² Jones, *Congregationalism*, 328.

councils were essentially federations 'of dissimilarities'.³ In other words, although the Free Churches had much in common, as J.D. Jones observed, when speaking at East Cliff's anniversary celebrations in 1910:

Every Church had its own distinctive work, and if all the churches were united ... he did not think the religious life of England would be enriched at the present moment. The distinctive notes of the various denominations together made up the full and rich harmony of Christian truth upon which the nation was nurtured today.⁴

Thus, Congregationalists were as anxious to declare what distinguished them from, as what enabled them to make common cause with, other Nonconformists.

Second, Congregationalists were concerned about developments within the Church of England and anxious to distance themselves from these by re-asserting their Protestant credentials. As Rev. I. Maldwyn Jones, Albion's minister, commented in 1904: 'Priestism was making rapid strides, and its advance was to be seen in the adoption of ritualistic forms, and ... [associated] doctrines which could only culminate in Popery.'⁵ This enabled Congregationalists, together with fellow Nonconformists, to claim that they were the true heirs of Britain's Protestant heritage, since many Anglicans had lost their way in this respect.⁶ In effect, they were questioning the patriotic credentials of the Established Church. As Wolffe points out, the identification of Protestantism with patriotism had been a 'potent legacy' of the

³ *Midland Free Churchman*, March 1900, quoted in Meegan Griffin, "The Ministry of J.H. Jowett at Carrs Lane Congregational Church. Birmingham, 1896-1911" (MPhil diss., University of Birmingham, 2012), 65.

⁴ *Bournemouth Guardian*, December 17, 1910.

⁵ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, October 1, 1904.

⁶ As it was put in a report of the opening of Southampton's Avenue Congregational Church in 1898: 'Of late there has been manifested a strong desire on the part of all [Free] churches to fall into line in the defence and zealous maintenance of the principle of Protestant Nonconformity.' *Ibid*, December 17, 1898.

eighteenth century for the Victorian age.⁷ Although the potency had diminished to a degree by the Edwardian era, most of the population remained committed to Protestant values, a loyalty which Congregationalists and other Nonconformists could exploit.

Third, moves to reform Congregationalism nationally prompted greater soul-searching at local level. In the early years of the twentieth century, the most far-reaching was the concept of the “United Congregational Church” promulgated by Dr Joseph Parker, Chairman of the CUEW for 1901. Although this ‘grandiose scheme’ was rejected by the county unions it stimulated debate throughout the denomination as to the efficacy of its structure and governance and, indeed, relations with Baptists, the denomination with which Congregationalism had greatest affinity.⁸ As Argent observes, it posed a critical question: ‘Should the Congregational churches continue as autonomous local units, linked by faith, fellowship, respect for each other’s independence and shared history?’⁹

Fourth, the dawn of a new century, coupled with the death of Queen Victoria, was seen as an opportune moment for reflecting upon the character and relevance of Congregationalism. As mentioned in an editorial of the Congregationalists’ national newspaper: ‘The New Year is always a time for mental stock-taking, and when the new year means also a new century it is natural that the process should be more than

⁷ John Wolffe, “Introduction: Victorian Religion in Context,” in *Religion in Victorian Britain: Part V Culture and Empire*, ed. John Wolffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 1997), 15.

⁸ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 376. See also, Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, ch.1.

⁹ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 4.

usually searching and prolonged.¹⁰ Thus, Congregationalists were encouraged to assess, *inter alia*, how far the values they espoused were in tune with the spirit of the age. No longer a beleaguered minority, they displayed a confidence commensurate with their enhanced standing in society.

Last, introspection was a notable feature of church anniversaries to which Congregationalists continued to attach considerable importance.¹¹ Moreover, in the years leading up to, and including, the 250th anniversary of the Great Ejection in 1912 there was increased awareness of Congregationalism's distinctive history. In view of the publicity that anniversaries received, there is a danger of exaggerating the extent to which self-examination was to the fore. This does not, however, detract from the need to give it due attention.

Themes associated with self-analysis, including identity, renewal and what today are called 'fresh expressions', do not feature to any great extent in the secondary material on Edwardian Congregationalism. Although Tudur Jones touches on certain aspects considered in this chapter he neither foregrounds, nor relates them to, the issue of Congregational identity. Moreover, historians wedded to the secularisation narrative and associated 'crises' in the Edwardian Church tend to emphasise how far society had become disengaged from Christianity by this time and fail to give sufficient weight to any signs of revitalisation.¹² Yet evidence from

¹⁰ *Examiner*, January 3, 1901, 193.

¹¹ For a discussion of the nature and purpose of church anniversary celebrations, see Ottewill, "Evoking the Spirit of the Past".

¹² Gilbert, *Church, Chapel and Social Change*; and Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*.

Edwardian Hampshire indicates that Congregationalists addressed the challenges they faced resourcefully and confidently.

For the historically minded, this involved drawing inspiration from the roots of their denomination in the seventeenth century and its subsequent development. Indeed, over the years, the attributes of Congregationalism evolved in response to changes in the ecclesiastical, intellectual and social climate. Thus, by the Edwardian era, discourses relating to church governance, modes of worship and forms of outreach and enterprise complemented those of a historical nature. Each contributed to the resilience displayed by Congregationalists and, as mentioned in Chapter 1, served as the basis for distinguishing themselves from significant 'others', whether benign, fellow Christians, or malign, those who rejected or were indifferent to the claims of religion. That said, in ecclesiastical terms none of the aspects considered below were unique to Congregationalists; collectively, however, they provide the *sine qua non* of Edwardian Congregationalism.

1662 and all that followed: Congregational history

As highlighted in the opening chapter, Congregationalists were intensely proud of their historical legacy, especially the behaviour of those ministers who, depending on one's point of view, left or were ejected from the Established Church in 1662. Thus, in any re-envisioning of Congregationalism for the Edwardian era, it was natural to

draw strength and encouragement from what was regarded as its glorious birth.¹³ Such a contention had a particular resonance in Hampshire, where a large number of churches could trace their origins back to the time of the Great Ejection.¹⁴ Although the evidence on which such claims were based might be a little flimsy, the intention here is not to question their accuracy. Rather it is to note the potency of 1662 in constructing the foundation narratives of Congregational churches with respect to both year and ejection credentials of their first minister. The desire for such a pedigree was a powerful one. For Congregationalists attached to these churches it provided a rationale for their separate identity and self-esteem.

In Hampshire there were frequent reminders that Congregationalism had grown 'out of the Independent Church movement which developed after the post-Restoration ejection of non-conforming ministers,' many of whom were identified with the Puritan cause.¹⁵ A component of the 'Old Dissent', it was allied with other Protestant groups who were alienated, for various reasons, from the Established Church, including Presbyterians, Baptists and Quakers.¹⁶ Although the term 'Dissent' was superseded by 'Nonconformist' and later 'Free Church', Congregationalists and other 'Dissenters' saw them as inextricably linked. At the 1902 annual meeting of the

¹³ For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Rosalind Johnson and Roger Ottewill, "Memorialising 1662: Hampshire Congregationalists and the 250th Anniversary of the Great Ejection," in *Studies in Church History 49: The Church on its Past*, ed. Peter Clarke and Charlotte Methuen (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 236-247.

¹⁴ These were Above Bar in Southampton (founded 1662), Alton (1662), Andover (1662), Basingstoke (1662), Christchurch (1660), Fordingbridge (1662), Gosport (1663), Odiham (1662), Ringwood (1662), Romsey (1662), Tadley (1662), Whitchurch (1658) and Winchester (1662).

¹⁵ Rimmington, "Congregationalism in Leicester," 29.

¹⁶ The 'New Dissent' consisted of Methodists and other groups that dated their origins to the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century.

Romsey and District Free Church Council, of which Abbey Congregational Church was a leading member, one contributor, Rev. Benjamin Gibbon, explained that:

The names of Dissenter and Nonconformist were once words of scorn and contumely ... and once meant suffering to those who bore them ... [however they] were ever honourable ... because they were attached to such suffering saints as Richard Baxter and John Bunyan (applause). They were ... [also] terms not sufficiently descriptive of them and were negative in character ... They described not what they did but what they refused to do, and, worse still, they described by their attitude of negation to the Church as by law established ... Yonder was the State Established Church of England, but they were the Free Churches of England (loud applause). They were built on the eternal foundation of liberty ... for the individual man ... for the individual Church, whether the unit, a community, or an entire denomination ... they maintained the accountability of every man to his Maker, the right of every man of immediate approach to God.¹⁷

Gibbon was a Baptist, but Congregationalists would have identified closely with everything he said, especially the emphasis on religious liberty.¹⁸

While the dissenting traditions of the seventeenth century were an influential source of identity for Edwardian Congregationalists, there were others. As Binfield argues, the Evangelical revival and 'New Dissent' of the eighteenth century 'renewed their evangelicalism'.¹⁹ They re-energised Congregationalism and contributed markedly to its expansion during the nineteenth century. Speaking at East Cliff's 33rd anniversary celebrations in 1910, J.D. Jones claimed that: 'Congregationalism ... was born in evangelicalism ... it was the evangelical position in the hearts of the early Congregationalists that formed the Church. Congregationalists were nurtured

¹⁷ *Romsey Advertiser*, January 24, 1902.

¹⁸ He was minister of Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church in London from 1897 to 1903, an indication that the Free Churches of Romsey were able to attract some leading figures in the Nonconformist world to speak at their events.

¹⁹ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, 7.

in evangelicalism.²⁰ While at Winchester Congregational Church's 251st anniversary celebrations in 1913 the guest speaker Rev. Henry Spencer, Avenue's minister, referred to both the 'precious heritage' of 1662 which was 'an inspiration for all who valued freedom of religion' and:

... the glorious days of revival when John Wesley and Whitfield [*sic*] went through the land firing people with the love of God ... [and] to the ... years which saw the founding of those great societies – the Bible Society, the Religious Tract Society ... [and] the London Missionary Society.²¹

Thus, the Evangelical revival was as much part of the heritage of Congregationalism as that of Methodism and reflected a shift within Congregational theology from Calvinism to one that was essentially Arminian. It also indicated that Congregationalists were not entirely fixated on the heroes of 1662. Indeed, many Edwardian Congregationalists revered notable ministers of the nineteenth century, such as Rev. Thomas Adkins and Rev. Thomas Nicholson of Above Bar, mentioned in Chapter 4, and Rev. John Griffin, minister of the first Independent church in Portsmouth from 1793 until his death in 1834.²²

Consequently, by 1901 Hampshire Congregationalists had a vibrant history stretching back well over 200 years, which they were happy to enlist when seeking to illuminate the present and mobilise the faithful. Thus, at a young people's meeting held as part of the HCU's autumn gathering in 1904, James Mitchell, the Secretary of the CUEW, asserted that:

²⁰ *Bournemouth Guardian*, December 17, 1910.

²¹ *Hampshire Chronicle*, November 29, 1913.

²² As recorded: 'With his advent there began a period of such great prosperity as has made the name of the church and its pastor historic and memorable in the annals of the town and district.' *Hampshire Telegraph*, August 25, 1900.

The history of early Congregationalism was a history rich with stories of noble, strenuous, unselfish, and heroic endeavour; and not only had they a heritage of marked heroism, but a heritage of brilliant illumination in regard to Christian duty, personal service, and Church efficiency.²³

Such evocations of the past increased in intensity with the approach of 1912. As it was put by Rev. George Saunders, Above Bar's minister, at the HCU's spring gathering in 1911, 'next year would be a great year in the history of their Congregational Churches'.²⁴

However, in making frequent references to the past, Congregationalists were aware that they must not do so at the expense of addressing contemporary needs and challenges. Hence, Rev. Francis Sloper, when speaking at Lymington Congregational Church's 201st anniversary in 1901, warned that:

... [while] theirs was a church with a history ... they could not live on a history of the past, proud and thankful as they were for the deeds of their ancestors, - they must take heed to the present and see that they had the Living Presence, and ... showed how this was to be achieved by attention, attraction, and aggression.²⁵

Likewise at Andover Congregational Church's 242nd anniversary in 1904, Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson from Abbey commented that:

... there were a great many lessons they could learn from the past, but while they spoke of the good old days let them not forget to make the present the best days of all. Let them use the past as a means of inspiration and a warning for the future.²⁶

Similarly, at Petersfield Congregational Church's 112th anniversary celebrations in 1911, Rev. John Watkin Davies from Edinburgh Road in Portsmouth, pointed out

²³ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, October 15, 1904, quoted in Ottewill "Congregational Identity," 151.

²⁴ *Ibid*, April 8, 1911.

²⁵ *Lymington Chronicle*, October 31, 1901.

²⁶ *Andover Advertiser*, June 10, 1904.

that 'in inheriting the legacy left to them by the founders of the church ... they were also inheriting the responsibilities' and trusted they were 'going to pass on to others in increased measure the blessings into which they had entered'.²⁷

J.D. Jones went further at Richmond Hill's anniversary in 1906:

... they must beware lest their great traditions became snares to them. It was better to have no traditions at all than be weighted and cumbered by them, better to have no traditions than allow those traditions to fasten their eyes on the past to the neglect of the future, better to have no traditions than be led by their very splendour to think that their ... best work was done.²⁸

Tradition should be the servant of the present not its master.

Various efforts were therefore made to ensure that due recognition was given to current challenges in the discourse associated with the 250th anniversary celebrations. One was to interlink past, present and future. At Gosport, a past minister, Rev. Robert Teasdale, who returned to give the anniversary address, expressed the link in personal terms: 'The future had its roots in the past and a man's past life should always be his critic, his censor, and his guide.'²⁹ While Rev. Frank Leggatt from Manchester contended at the HCU's autumn gathering in 1912 that they could 'best show ... [the ejected ministers] honour by becoming good churchmen and churchwomen as Congregationalists'.³⁰ To demonstrate respect for the past, they should live in a manner worthy of their predecessors.

²⁷ *Hants and Sussex News*, May 31, 1911. One of these responsibilities was to ensure that every minister had a 'living wage of £120 per year'.

²⁸ *Bournemouth Visitor's Directory*, November 24, 1906.

²⁹ *Hampshire Telegraph*, October 24, 1913.

³⁰ *Ibid*, October 4, 1912.

A contrast was also drawn between the previously mentioned religious liberty and enlightenment and religious constraint and obscurantism. As Rev. Vincett Cook from Bitterne claimed at Above Bar's celebrations in 1912:

... two great landmarks in the history of the nation were Romanism and Puritanism. In 1662 these two great forces came into dire conflict. It was a struggle between conscience and custom, truth and error, bondage and freedom, and it was Puritanism that won.³¹

Clearly this was a partisan summary of the religious history of the period and failed to acknowledge the complexity of what had happened since the Great Ejection. Its purpose was simply to reinforce the divide between what were perceived as the tolerant Free Church denominations, of which Congregationalism was the 'jewel in the crown', and the hide-bound Established Church. There was no recognition of, for example, cross-cutting cleavages between the Free and Established Churches. Nonetheless, polemically, it served as a rallying cry for the Nonconformist constituency and helped to portray Anglicanism as a manifestation of 'the other'.

Although often understated, the religious liberty acclaimed by Congregationalists was seen as being more attuned to the spirit of the Edwardian age and therefore better suited to sustaining a robust Christian witness than the theological constraints under which Anglicans laboured. Indeed, 'many Congregationalists prided themselves as forward thinking and flexible, more in touch with popular attitudes than the established Church'.³² As James Thomas from Newport, Isle of Wight, argued, in his address to the HCU's autumn gathering of 1906, amongst Nonconformists: 'There was no denomination ... better suited to

³¹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 23, 1912.

³² Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 27.

preach a free gospel and to carry out in its entirety a Free Church than the Congregationalist order.’³³ In short, Congregationalists were the freest of Free Churchmen.³⁴

Also associated with the 1912 celebrations was the theme of struggle and sacrifice. Again at Above Bar’s commemoration Robert Murray Hyslop observed that there was ‘no jewel in the diadem of Christian liberty which they [i.e. Congregationalists] had not had to battle for’.³⁵ In other words, liberty came at a price and similar tenacity was required if churches were to thrive and indeed survive. During the Edwardian era something of this resolve was seen in the passive resistance campaign against the Education Act 1902, to which attention was drawn in Chapter 1 and which encapsulated the fighting spirit of Congregationalists.³⁶

In the historiography of Edwardian Congregationalism relatively little account is taken of the manner in which the past informed engagement with the present. As champions of religious liberty, Congregationalists saw themselves as playing a key role in determining the future direction of Protestantism. On this there were few, if any, dissenting voices. Indeed, many hoped that the principles they espoused would heighten the regard in which they were held. One such principle was the autonomy of the local church, which was generally regarded as the defining

³³ *Romsey Advertiser*, November 3, 1906.

³⁴ At East Cliff’s anniversary celebrations in 1902, Joseph Compton Rickett described Congregationalism as ‘the freest of Free Churches’. *Bournemouth Visitor’s Directory*, December 21, 1901.

³⁵ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 23, 1912. As indicated in Chapter 1, Hyslop was Treasurer of the CUEW.

³⁶ See Roger Ottewill, “Discord and Concord: Education and Religion in Hampshire Communities c.1900 to c.1905” (MRes diss., University of Southampton, 2007).

feature of Congregationalism, with some going further and seeing it as the denomination's sole rationale.

Democracy v theocracy: Congregational governance

In the years following the Great Ejection, Congregationalists came to adopt an approach to governance based on the primacy of the local church.³⁷ This was seen as coming closest to the New Testament model or as it was put by Rev. Capes Tarbolton, London Street's minister, 'they laid claim to the primitive form of church government'.³⁸ It was also underpinned by a belief that 'the spiritual vitality of the Church could only be sustained by separation from the State'.³⁹ As asserted by Professor Bartlet, at the recognition of Rev. Alexander Grieve as Abbey's minister in 1905, a 'church ... should be free from outside control, in order that it may more perfectly obey the will of its head Jesus Christ, as that will may be revealed to each church in question'.⁴⁰ Being self-governing, Congregational churches were considered more adaptable and better suited than the 'state controlled' Established Church for a society in which many were challenging aspects of the status quo.

Indeed, some Congregationalists argued that if the Church of England was true to its own ordinances it would itself be 'congregational' in form. Speaking at

³⁷ This principle was shared with other denominations, in particular Baptists.

³⁸ *Andover Advertiser*, July 5, 1901.

³⁹ *Romsey Advertiser*, June 26, 1903.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, June 30, 1905.

Albion's 58th anniversary in 1902, Rev. Herbert Arnold, a Congregational minister from Exeter, commented that:

... he accepted the 19th Article of Religion in the Prayer Book – “the visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same,” &c. – as an absolute and satisfactory definition of the Congregational Church, and if the Church of England were content with its own definition of itself he would be an Anglican, because an Anglican would be a Congregationalist.⁴¹

Closely associated with this view was the concept of the 'gathered' church, which meant that 'in any area or district, where there ... [were] like minded people who ... [were] prepared to start and organise a church one ... [was] formed, maintained and continue[d] there as long as there ... [was] sufficient support'.⁴² Membership was based on the principle of 'opting in' through making, as mentioned in Chapter 3, a profession of faith. As argued by Dr Albert Goodrich, a guest speaker at East Cliff's 25th anniversary celebrations in 1902: 'They believed the Church was constituted not ... of baptised persons and parishioners of any single parish, but ... of Christian believers.'⁴³ Congregationalists felt that the positive choice involved in becoming a member of a gathered church was more in keeping with the prevailing culture than the passivity associated with membership of the Church of England.

Similarly the participatory nature of decision-making within Congregational churches, with church meetings being 'the most significant symbol of ... Church

⁴¹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 1, 1902.

⁴² Baxter, "Organisational Growth," 43.

⁴³ *Bournemouth Visitor's Directory*, December 20, 1902.

polity, the most appropriate expression of ... ecclesiastical faith',⁴⁴ reflected the temper of the times - a democratic church for a democratic age. Nonetheless, for Congregational apologists this constituted a dilemma since in their eyes churches were not democracies but theocracies. To get round this, they often adopted a Janus-like stance. As Rev. William Clarkson from Above Bar put it at the HCU's spring gathering in 1901:

In outward form our Assemblies are democratic all being on an equality, with the same right of speaking and voting, and the pastor and deacons being not rulers, but brethren and servants of the church. But looking beneath the outward we may see that in reality the government of our churches is an absolute monarchy. Christ himself being president of our meetings, Governor of our own church life, Master of our speech and action.⁴⁵

In short: 'Christ's will is known through the Spirit's guidance of the local church meeting.'⁴⁶

Likewise, J.D. Jones argued that Congregationalism 'was not built upon the political doctrines of the equality of man, but upon the reality of the presence of Christ'⁴⁷ and described a church meeting as a 'Christocracy'. He contended that it 'was not a place where one came to say what one thought or to push one's way ... it was a place where only Christ was heard to speak and where Jesus reigned alone'.⁴⁸

In the words of Kaye:

⁴⁴ Revs Bertram Smith and Francis Wrigley, "The Church's Week-Night Programme: II The Monthly Church Meeting," *Examiner*, June 13, 1901, 206.

⁴⁵ *Hampshire Herald and Alton Gazette*, May 18, 1901.

⁴⁶ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 473.

⁴⁷ *Hampshire Independent*, June 20, 1903.

⁴⁸ *Bournemouth Guardian*, December 17, 1910

The church meeting ... seeks ... to discern the mind of Christ ... [it] seeks to achieve a common mind ... [this] takes time, it depends on skilled guidance from the minister, and a deep sense of responsibility on the part of the members, who need to be educated and inducted into "the ways of God with his people". It is not about power, it is about discernment.⁴⁹

From a theological perspective this might seem incontrovertible, but in practical terms following Christ's lead in decision-making was problematic, especially where there were strongly held differences of view. Moreover, as indicated in Chapter 4, the position of ministers was undoubtedly more privileged than that of ordinary church members.

Notwithstanding these caveats, church meetings remained 'a distinctive principle of Congregationalism',⁵⁰ 'the place for gaining new life, for developing the generosity, and for organising and directing the energies of the Church',⁵¹ or as J.D. Jones eloquently put it, 'the beating heart of their system'.⁵² Moreover, they were seen as being more compatible with Biblical principles than the hierarchical structures and clericalism of Anglicanism.

Nevertheless, Rev. David John from Jewry Street, when speaking at Avenue's ninth anniversary in 1901, posed various questions concerning the spiritual health of churches which suggest that they were not experiencing 'the sense of the living Christ in their midst' at church meetings.⁵³ Similarly in an 'instructive address' given

⁴⁹ Elaine Kaye, *'A Way of Gospel Obedience': The Church Meeting in Congregational Tradition and Practice* (London: Congregational Memorial Hall Trust, 2008), 15-6.

⁵⁰ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, April 8, 1911. Comment made by Rev. Phillip Rogers, East Cliff's minister, at the 1911 spring gathering of the HCU.

⁵¹ Thomas Hooper, *The Story of English Congregationalism* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1907), 138.

⁵² *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, November 29, 1902. Comment made at Richmond Hill's anniversary meeting.

⁵³ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, December 14, 1901.

in 1907, Samuel Whitty Chandler, one of Boscombe's deacons, 'pleaded that the Church Meeting should be kept as far as possible for dealing with the spiritual side of the church's work'.⁵⁴

It would seem that many church members failed to appreciate the positive and negative freedoms and associated rights and responsibilities that church meetings encapsulated. Attendance was often poor, unless something of major importance, such as choosing a new minister, was on the agenda, with decisions being taken by the few rather than the many and consequently something of the participatory character of Congregationalism was undermined. As it was put by the *Examiner's* editorial writer: 'Most of our Churches are Congregational only in name. They are practically governed by the minister and deacons, and of the membership only a comparatively small fraction ... really takes any interest in the Church's affairs.'⁵⁵ Avenue's first minister, Rev. Arthur Martin, echoed these sentiments by claiming that 'churches were "run" by a minority of members'.⁵⁶ While J.D. Jones argued that, since church meetings were 'the "raison d'être" of their existence ... he could see no reason for their separate existence as Congregationalists if they allowed [them] to fall into neglect'.⁵⁷

With respect to the principle of 'local autonomy', this retained its hold within Congregationalism, despite a gradual modification during the nineteenth century with increasing interdependency between churches becoming the norm. Institutional

⁵⁴ Boscombe Congregational Church Meetings 1905-1918, DHC NP10/CM/1/3.

⁵⁵ *Examiner*, April 11, 1901, 26.

⁵⁶ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 30, 1912.

⁵⁷ *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, November 29, 1902.

markers of this trend were the formation of county unions, some dating back to the end of the eighteenth century, as in the case of Hampshire, and the establishment of the Congregationalist Home Missionary Society in 1819 and the CUEW in 1831.⁵⁸ At local level cooperation in the form of pulpit exchanges; speaking at each other's anniversary and recognition events; and supporting weaker churches financially, became a key feature of Congregationalism. By the Edwardian era, although the centre of gravity remained the local church, it was generally accepted that if Congregationalists 'really wanted to do their work in the coming generation, isolation would have to give way to co-operation, and exaggerated independency would have to give way to fellowship'.⁵⁹ As Ernest Chaplin, in an address at the HCU's autumn conference in 1910 argued:

... if they were going to stand for independence to the very last they would be making a great mistake, and would find they were building on sandy soil ... They should learn to know and understand one another better by these conferences, and gather such inspiration and encouragement and enthusiasm that when they returned to their own churches they would not only accomplish better work, but be better men and women, because they ... had learned to understand and appreciate one another more.⁶⁰

Thus, although Parker's plan for a "United Congregational Church" mentioned earlier was a step too far, adherence to a strictly 'independent' stance was no longer

⁵⁸ The Association of Protestant Dissenting Ministers, which evolved into the HCU, was established in 1781 for 'mutual fellowship and encouragement'.

⁵⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, October 2, 1909. Comment made by Rev. J.D. Jones at the autumn gathering of the HCU. At the 1908 spring gathering, the Temperance Committee of the HCU asserted in a report that 'whilst still preserving with all their might the spiritual independency of individual churches ... [they] were manifesting the true spirit of Jesus Christ in helpful and brotherly consociation with each for the glory of God and for the help and service of all'. *Hampshire Post*, May 1, 1908.

⁶⁰ *Hampshire Independent*, October 8, 1910.

tenable.⁶¹ Here a key driver was finance, with the principle of self-sufficiency for smaller, often rural, churches gradually giving way to that of the cross-subsidisation of poorer by richer churches.

Through their conversations on church governance, Congregationalists in Edwardian Hampshire endeavoured to present themselves as the denomination which best reflected contemporary values. Notwithstanding a mismatch between rhetoric and reality with respect to, for example, the participatory nature of church meetings, their advocacy of the principles of independency and self-government, tempered by the benefits of collegiality, lent credibility to their position in this respect. Such principles also extended to modes of worship with Congregationalists adopting forms which appealed to those who eschewed the ritual and formality that characterised services in many Anglican churches and were regarded by some as un-British and a deterrent to church-going.

Beauty in simplicity: Congregational worship

Congregational worship had long been characterised by its simplicity, informality and the centrality of the Word. As Watts points out, Congregationalists inherited from Separatism a belief in the efficacy of extempore prayer and a distrust of set prayers and from Puritanism the conviction that the 'sermon was the crucial point of

⁶¹ As Rev. David Morgan Bynner, Sandown's Congregational minister and Chairman of the HCU, put it, when speaking at the 112th anniversary of Petersfield Congregational Church: 'Independency ought not to mean isolation.' *Hants and Sussex News*, May 31, 1911.

the service'.⁶² During the nineteenth century, however, various forms of embellishment, in particular music, were introduced. While by 1901, as Tudur Jones observes: 'Revival of interest in the principles of Congregational churchmanship implied a reconsideration of the ways in which the public worship of the churches should be conducted' with an increasing desire for 'more order and dignity'.⁶³ However, Argent argues that, although 'from the middle of the nineteenth century Congregationalists attempted to enrich their worship ... [nonetheless] free prayer, Spirit-led worship and resistance to a fixed liturgy predominated within Congregationalism in the early twentieth century'.⁶⁴ Doyle, quoting from a local newspaper article of January 1920, highlights the 'balanced services' in Congregational churches constituting 'an acceptable middle way, between the extremes of sacerdotalism and the raw conventicles'.⁶⁵

Although services might have become more refined, they continued to be engaging, as this newspaper report from 1905 testifies.

There was something inexpressibly simple, yet at the same time interesting and impressive, in the evening at ... Gosport Congregational Church on Sunday. Whether it was the winning earnestness of the Pastor ... or whether it could be ascribed to the heartiness with which the congregation vied with the choir in the singing, it would be difficult to explain. Even the veriest stranger could scarcely regard himself as such, while ... members of the congregation showed by their presence in large numbers on so wet an evening that rain was no deterrent to their observances of the Sabbath.⁶⁶

⁶² Michael Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 305-6.

⁶³ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 369.

⁶⁴ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 219.

⁶⁵ *Eastern Evening Mercury*, January 13, 1920, quoted in Doyle, "Congregational Culture," 317. The article was written under the pseudonym of "The Pagan".

⁶⁶ *Portsmouth Evening News*, April 10, 1905, quoted in Ottewill, "Congregationalism in Edwardian Gosport".

Another hallmark of Congregational worship is evident in this account of a service at Whitchurch in 1903:

... it is quite refreshing ... to come into the midst of a congregation ... where the preacher extols the gospel in all its pristine purity and loveliness ... [his] preaching as is the case in the majority of Congregational churches, is evangelical and Protestant, and is therefore dear to the hearts of the hearers.⁶⁷

Thus, Congregational worship exemplified what McLeod characterises as the three positive features of popular Protestantism: 'the centrality of preaching, Bible-reading and hymn singing'.⁶⁸

In setting the tone of services, much of the responsibility lay with ministers as did that of communicating effectively from the pulpit, a point stressed in Chapter 4. Ministers expected to preach without restraint. Indeed, references to a 'free pulpit' were a frequent refrain at recognition and leaving events. In the vivid words of Rev. Alexander Grieve at his 'farewell soirée' in 1910:

He thanked them from the bottom of his heart for the free pulpit which they had given him. No church could give a greater gift ... (applause). That was their glory after all, that though they paid the piper – and paid him handsomely – yet they did not call the tune, and they never must, for God calls the tune (applause).⁶⁹

In exercising this freedom many ministers sought to ensure a congruence of outlook with their congregations for, as Argent puts it: 'Late Victorian and Edwardian

⁶⁷ *Andover Advertiser*, April 10, 1903.

⁶⁸ Hugh McLeod, "Dissent and the Peculiarities of the English, c.1870-1914" in *Culture and the Nonconformist Tradition*, ed. Jane Shaw and Alan Kreider (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 133. These features applied to both regular services and those for special purposes, such as the celebration of church and Sunday school anniversaries, harvest thanksgiving and hospital Sunday.

⁶⁹ *Romsey Advertiser*, July 23, 1909.

ministers often refrained from preaching on modern Biblical scholarship, not wishing to disturb their people.⁷⁰

With respect to the format of services, the non-liturgical character of Congregationalism fostered creativity. Thus, some churches held popular services targeted at young people and/or outsiders, during which an evangelistic message was preached. As explained by George Saunders, at Above Bar: 'On the last Sunday in the month a people's service is held. At these meetings the whole service is printed, and the intention is to secure the attendance of those who are not usually in attendance at a place of worship.'⁷¹ Similarly at Havant special services were planned for early 1914 'which would quicken the zeal and spiritual life of all, would help to gather in those who are almost persuaded – also to plead with those who are living in darkness'.⁷² While in seeking to appeal to as many as possible, Rev. James Richards at Overton experimented with a wide variety of modes of worship, including open air services, lantern (slide) services, services of song and a spring flower service.⁷³ As the local newspaper commented, he was the 'most inventive of ministers in the inception and carrying out of new features in the work of his church'.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 36.

⁷¹ *Hampshire Independent*, March 11, 1905.

⁷² Havant Congregational Church Meeting Minutes Nov 1910-Mar 1933, HRO 10A05/B1/1, quoted in Ottewill, *Loveability, Sympathy and Liberality*, 20.

⁷³ In 1907 he replaced open air services with 'Sunday afternoon meetings in the Chapel after the style of a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon'. *HCU Annual Report, 1907*, 26-7, HRO 127/M94/62/52. This meant that they were 'Bright, Brief & Brotherly.' Overton Congregational Church Minute Book, September 2, 1907, HRO 159/M85/1. See later in chapter for a discussion of the PSA Movement.

⁷⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, April 19, 1902, quoted in Ottewill, "James Richards. Part 2," 4.

Although keen to experiment, Congregationalists stressed that in standing for 'creedless Christianity' and simplicity they still recognised the importance of reverence in acts of worship. Indeed, they did not consider accessible and unpretentious worship to be the antithesis of the awe and wonder associated with more liturgically based and embellished services. William Moncrieff, from East Cliff, put it like this at Rev. Robert Ashenhurst's recognition as Kingsfield's minister:

They ... did not ignore the need for reverence ... [or] minimise the need for devoutness. They stood ... for a simple form of Christian worship, and ... could obtain reverence without any form ... If people wanted elaborate forms and ceremonies they could obtain them in the church of Rome, and even in the church of England (hear, hear).⁷⁵

The contrast between simplicity and embellishment was also highlighted in a report of a civic service at Buckland: 'No doubt there were members of the Corporation who missed the ornate ritual of the State Church, but the Free Church has dignity of its own, which to a very large proportion of the Christian community more than compensates for the absence of ritual.'⁷⁶

While Congregational worship might appeal, some felt that it remained too sombre, thereby serving as a deterrent to evangelism. For them, the atmosphere within churches needed to be more joyous and welcoming. As Francis Sloper, speaking at Kingsfield's fiftieth anniversary in 1903, reminded his audience:

... the Christian religion was a religion of joy. Although ... the fruit of the spirit was joy, yet some people's religion gave them no joy; in fact they were very melancholy over it. And while such a spirit pervaded the churches the outside world would never be attracted to their religion.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, September 16, 1905.

⁷⁶ *Portsmouth Evening News*, March 27, 1905.

⁷⁷ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, October 24, 1903.

Similarly, Alderman Beale, speaking at East Cliff's anniversary in 1902, argued that the laity 'must bring sunshine into the pew'.⁷⁸ While at equivalent celebrations in 1910, Rev. Alfred Clegg, Boscombe's newly appointed minister, claimed that: 'Their Gospel ... was [one] of bright-heartedness through and through, it was a Gospel of joy, hope and optimism ... There was too much sombreness about their Christian life ... The world was not going to be saved by sadness, for whatever was going to save the world must have a spirit of joy as its central motive.'⁷⁹

To what extent was the simplicity in worship extolled by many Edwardian Congregationalists aligned with broader cultural trends? Arguably it had more in common with the 'reality', vernacular and domesticity associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement than the 'romance' and flamboyance of other artistic styles.⁸⁰ Congregationalists certainly hoped that in seeking to counteract the perceived indifference of the population at large, their approach to worship was more appealing than the extravagance which they considered reinforced the sense of 'otherness' of high-church Anglicans.

Fellowship and outreach: Congregational enterprise

The resourcefulness shown by churches in worship was also evident in fostering fellowship; outreach initiatives; and community engagement more generally. For most this meant embracing and embellishing the concept of the 'institutional church',

⁷⁸ *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, December 20, 1902.

⁷⁹ *Bournemouth Guardian*, December 17, 1910.

⁸⁰ Roy Hattersley, *The Edwardians* (London: Abacus, 2004), 354.

introduced in Chapter 1, and no one could accuse Congregationalists of being less than whole-hearted in this respect. As Yalden points out, one of its foremost champions, Silvester Horne, believed that they should aim to 'help people develop all their capabilities, not only the soul but the mind and body as well.'⁸¹ For Richard Mudie Smith, the 'institutional church' was 'the centre of active, aggressive, social work. Open seven days a week, it ... aim[ed] at the redemption and development of body, mind and soul, and while seeking to transform the lives of men, women, and children ... [it was] equally anxious to transform their environment.'⁸²

To some degree it embodied the pragmatism which, as Bebbington argues, was one feature of the Enlightenment which profoundly influenced Evangelicals. It was a 'significant expression ... of their pragmatic temper',⁸³ involving extensive lay participation in establishing and maintaining a plethora of subsidiary organisations focusing on educational, social and recreational provision. They were designed to cement the loyalty of members, by meeting most if not all of their needs, from 'the cradle to the grave', within the confines of the church community, and draw in outsiders, thereby contributing to the evangelistic mission of churches.

As Tudur Jones observes, application of the institutional principle grew 'in popularity during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and reached its high-water mark in the early years of the twentieth'.⁸⁴ During this period, 'the idea that

⁸¹ Yalden, "Origins of Secularisation," 310.

⁸² Richard Mudie Smith, ed., *The Religious Life of London* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904), 9.

⁸³ Bebbington, "Evangelicalism and British Culture," 108.

⁸⁴ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 315.

the successful church ... [was] the busy church ... came into its own'.⁸⁵ Advocates argued that it was 'the Church's duty to teach by practice as well as by precept, that religion covers the whole of life'.⁸⁶ Such a holistic approach inevitably led to a weakening of traditional dichotomies, such as body and soul, and a blurring of the boundary between the sacred and the secular.

The rise of the institutional church counterbalanced the decline in appeal of aggressive evangelistic campaigns which had characterised the first half of the nineteenth century; those modelled on those of Moody and Sankey in the 1870s; and the simultaneous Free Church missions, held in many towns and villages, during the first half of 1901.⁸⁷ It was seen as a form of outreach that was more in keeping with the less emotional and more cerebral spirit of the age symbolised by the establishment of a universal system of elementary education. Thus, Nonconformity 'started to lose one of its distinguishing features, its determination to save souls through fervent evangelism'.⁸⁸ Presentations of the personal gospel, followed by appeals to repentance were now seen as less effective in reaching out to increasingly sceptical and easily distracted audiences than ongoing activities which over time

⁸⁵ Ibid, 297.

⁸⁶ Revs Bertram Smith and Francis Wrigley, "The Church's Week-Night Programme: I. A Defence of Church Activity," *Examiner*, June 6, 1901, 190. In a later article, they expressed the view that: 'The week-night Programme should be designed primarily not to attract outsiders to religion, but to provide for those already within the Church's sphere of influence ... It would be a fatal error to attempt to substitute the concert for the Cross.' *Examiner*, June 20, 1910, 222.

⁸⁷ A typical example was a mission held in the village of Crondall during March of that year, with missionaries from the neighbouring towns of Farnham and Aldershot. As reported, 'All were impressed by the services, and a number, mostly young people, professed decision for Christ in response to the very earnest appeals made by the missionaries.' *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 23, 1901.

⁸⁸ Yalden, "Origins of Secularisation," 304

might result in some becoming church members. As Pokesdown's secretary indicated in his report for 1904: 'At the beginning of the year this Church was with others interested in the mission of Gypsy Smith, and some were added to our membership as a result but we are forced to the conclusion that it will not do to depend upon organized missions, but upon the individual efforts of the members of each church.'⁸⁹ Thus, while still recognising the importance of securing converts, Congregationalists sought alternative methods of doing so, of which the institutional church was the most important.

A long-established mode of outreach was work with children and young people through Sunday schools and cognate organisations.⁹⁰ As indicated in Chapter 3, this was a major undertaking for Congregationalists. It involved instilling in both middle- and working-class children 'the values of orderliness, punctuality, industry and cleanliness' as well as equipping them with a basic knowledge of the Bible.⁹¹ For churches this was undoubtedly rewarding. However, more negatively, few Sunday school scholars went on to become full church members. At East Cliff's 1910 anniversary celebrations, Alderman Charles Hunt, lamented 'that they could not keep [older] boys and girls ... in their [Sunday] schools' and argued that classes needed to be made 'more interesting'.⁹² While in his report for 1911, Pokesdown's secretary expressed his 'sadness ... and great regret ... that ... young people who had

⁸⁹ Pokesdown Congregational Church Meeting Minute Book 1893-1908, DHC NP14/CM/1/2.

⁹⁰ For a full discussion of the nature and purpose of Sunday schools and the challenges faced by Congregational churches in their ministry to children and young people, see Roger Ottewill, "Congregationalism and the Young in the Edwardian Era: A Hampshire Perspective," *Congregational History Society Magazine* 7, no.1 (2013): 17-37.

⁹¹ Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, 141.

⁹² *Bournemouth Guardian*, December 17, 1910.

passed through Sunday School, or were now engaged in Sunday Schools, had not expressed any desire to become members of the Church and thus become professing Christians'.⁹³

To address such concerns churches adopted more creative teaching methods and, as Midgley observes, where possible 'children and young people were ... offered a complete lifestyle centred around the Sunday school'.⁹⁴ To foster the discipleship of older children, churches supplemented their Sunday schools with other organisations, such as Christian Endeavour (CE), Young People's Institutes, Boys' Brigades and Girls' Guilds. The aim of CE was 'to train young people for active service in the life of a church and ... was essentially a devotional organisation with the emphasis on efficient evangelism'.⁹⁵ It also introduced them to the notion of good works and stimulated interest in missionary enterprises.⁹⁶ Something of the earnestness associated with CE is seen in remarks made in 1906 by Rev. Ernest Thompson, Petersfield's Congregational minister from 1903 to 1909 and President of the town's CE Union. What they needed, he argued, were 'young men and women

⁹³ Ibid, February 17, 1912.

⁹⁴ Midgley, *Churches and the Working Classes*, 213.

⁹⁵ Yalden, "Origins of Secularisation," 310.

⁹⁶ For example, in 1912 at the 50th anniversary of the Bournemouth and District CE Union, held at Boscombe Congregational Church, it was reported that: 'All societies paid weekly visits to the sick, the hospitals, and cripple homes ... and most societies provided Christmas hampers ... [and coal] for the poor of the church and the neighbourhood. Furthermore, bath chairs were kept by several societies, and all were in frequent use for invalids ... [while] several societies [were] working on behalf of the poor of London ... [with] over 300 garments being sent to the Ragged School Union and kindred missions ... During the year the work of the Floating Endeavour Society had been taken up by the union, and 388 letters had been written to sailor Endeavourers, and 48 New Testaments and several knitted items ... had been forwarded to London, besides several cases of books being sent to Southampton to be placed on ships there.' *Bournemouth Guardian*, February 24, 1912.

who sought not to be entertained and amused, but who had a mighty desire to work for Christ and His church'.⁹⁷

Another strand in outreach to young people was the concept of the Institute - a particular application of the institutional principle. As Herbert Kingdon, a deacon of London Street and Secretary of the Sunday school, reminded his audience at its annual meeting in 1908:

I have, as you know, advocated institutional Churches for some time past, and I still believe ... that the Institute is one of the ways, if not the best way of solving the problem [of retention]; but before branching out on these lines the Church must have a sincere conviction that it is the right thing to do, and if it is to be truly successful we must have religion as the very centre of our work. This, I think, is where the usefulness and helpfulness of organizations such as the Boys' Brigades and Girls' Guilds come in.⁹⁸

While in 1912 at the opening of an Institute linked to Charminster Road

Congregational Church, Percy Bright, a Richmond Hill deacon, justified the initiative in the following terms:

Young men needed recreation, and they would have it somewhere. By perforce of circumstances they were sometimes driven to take it in places that were injurious to them, and the sole aim of the promoters of that institute was to provide such recreation as the young men of their [Sunday] schools and Bible classes needed in surroundings that would be bright and helpful to them.⁹⁹

It is a moot point whether Institutes achieved their objectives, but they did at least demonstrate the willingness of Congregational churches to experiment.

⁹⁷ *Hants and Sussex News*, February 21, 1906.

⁹⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, April 11, 1908.

⁹⁹ *Bournemouth Guardian*, January 20, 1912. Earlier in the proceedings Rev. J.D. Jones explained that it had been established 'with the purpose of retaining a stronger hold on the young men in their leisure hours during the week'.

The challenge of holding on to young people continued to preoccupy church leaders throughout the Edwardian era. Thus, while Sunday schools and related organisations served the needs of wider society, they were not necessarily very effective recruiting grounds for the churches themselves. That said, they did contribute to the embedding of ‘diffusive religion’ thereby facilitating the transition of those who in later life became church members and embraced the notion of ‘embodied religion’.¹⁰⁰

Not surprisingly, in their teens some young men were attracted to an organisation that was specifically designed for adult males, namely the Men’s Own Brotherhood or Pleasant Sunday Afternoon (PSA) Movement.¹⁰¹ Indeed there was often rivalry between the Sunday school and PSA with respect to securing the support of older scholars. The PSA Movement was one of the largest and most influential of the applications of the institutional principle during the Edwardian era and most medium-sized and large churches had what Payne describes as ‘one of the characteristic organisations of the time’ with meetings that were designed to be ‘brief, bright and brotherly’.¹⁰² Although linked through regional federations,¹⁰³ branches were autonomous and depended upon local initiative for their establishment and continuance. At Abbey, for example, Brotherhood meetings were started by Alexander Grieve on his arrival in 1905 and were enthusiastically

¹⁰⁰ Cox, *English Churches*, 93-5.

¹⁰¹ For details of the origins and early history of the PSA Movement, see David Killingray, “The Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Movement: Revival in the West Midlands, 1875-90?” in *Studies in Church History 44: Revival and Resurgence in Christian History*, ed. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), 262-274.

¹⁰² Payne, *Free Church Tradition*, 127.

¹⁰³ Most Hampshire Congregational PSAs belonged to the “Wilts, Hants, Dorset, & I.O.W. Federation of Brotherhoods, P.S.A.’s & Kindred Societies”.

continued by his successor Rev. Albert Bage, who explained at the fifth anniversary gathering that:

... [The Movement] existed primarily ... for the spiritual welfare of ... men. They were not a social club or a political society, and they certainly did not exist ... for the purpose of advancing political partisanship or for the sake of teaching political principles. If occasionally they did see the necessity of emphasising some political principle it was only because they were driven to the one single purpose of accomplishing the best for every man in the best way which was at hand.¹⁰⁴

As evidenced in other chapters, the tension between religion and politics was an ongoing preoccupation of Edwardian Congregationalists. However, in keeping with the Brotherhood's emphasis on spiritual matters, Sunday afternoon meetings included Bible readings, prayer, devotional exercises and sacred music. There were also inspirational addresses, often by visiting speakers, on topics from which would be drawn a religious message, such as Christian courage,¹⁰⁵ exhortation¹⁰⁶ and why people did not go to church.¹⁰⁷ As Grieve asserted, meetings 'were meant to bring something more than pleasure into ... [the] lives' of those who attended.¹⁰⁸ Although primarily an organisation for men, on occasions open meetings were held to which women were invited. For example, at Romsey's first open meeting held in 1906 it was reported that there were 150 women in addition to 300 men in attendance.¹⁰⁹

The PSA Movement was an Edwardian success story and indicated the willingness of churches to innovate with formats that appealed to sections of the

¹⁰⁴ *Romsey Advertiser*, November 11, 1910.

¹⁰⁵ *Hampshire Independent*, November 3, 1906.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, January 5, 1907.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, January 19, 1907.

¹⁰⁸ *Romsey Advertiser*, October 26, 1906.

¹⁰⁹ *Hampshire Independent*, February 3, 1906.

population that were difficult, if not impossible, to reach by more traditional means.

Accordingly, Rev. Reginald Thompson, London Street's minister and President of the PSA, could claim that:

... [it] had thoroughly justified its position in the town. They had striven to show that religion was not unmanly, but that with religion a man's life was crowned. They had tried to show that a religious service was not unattractive to men if it was kept away from all that was namby-pamby and sensational. They had striven to put their religion into their daily life, and to redeem it from the taint of being hypocritical.¹¹⁰

In providing a robust mode of outreach to men, the PSA Movement had no rivals and few dissenting voices.

With their regular book distributions, PSA branches also reflected the commitment of Congregational churches to fostering, in the language of today, 'lifelong learning'. Other means of doing so included mutual improvement societies [MIS], literary and debating societies and programmes of public lectures. At London Street, the MIS provided its members with opportunities for enhancing their knowledge of a wide range of subjects, both religious and secular, such as the life struggles of John Bunyan, votes for women and tariff reform. Its meetings incorporated talks, debates, discussions and mock parliaments. As it was put in the church magazine: 'One hundred and sixty-three persons of both sexes have been candid and true enough to come out boldly and say they mutually desire to be improved!'¹¹¹ In early 1910 it was reported that the Society had 'well sustained its

¹¹⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, July 16, 1910.

¹¹¹ *Basingstoke Congregational Magazine*, January 1908, unpaginated. Membership in 1909 was 130. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, April 3, 1909.

reputation during the past few weeks in the variety and interest of its meetings'.¹¹² To supplement these, the MIS organised socials, rambles and cycling trips. Its importance for the life of London Street was symbolised by the fact that the minister was president and often took an active part in meetings.

In Lymington adults could pursue their intellectual interests through membership of the Congregational Literary and Debating Society. This received extensive coverage in the press and provided a forum for discussing issues of the day. Typical subjects from 1908/09 were women's suffrage; war and Christianity; unemployment; tariff reform versus free trade; and the province of the press.¹¹³

One of the highly regarded offerings by Congregationalists of an educational nature was the annual programme of lectures organised by Avenue Congregational Church. Held monthly from September to March, there was an entrance fee and the organising committee sought to include distinguished individuals in the programme (see Appendix I). The lectures, while not specifically religious in the subjects covered, were well supported and undoubtedly helped to raise the profile of Avenue.

Apart from gatherings of an educational nature, Congregational churches were renowned for organising a wide range of social events. London Street, for example, arranged Pleasant Saturday Evening (PSE) entertainments. Held during the winter months, they provided 'a healthy, enjoyable and attractive programme for those who otherwise might find it difficult to profitably and pleasantly spend the

¹¹² *Basingstoke Congregational Magazine*, January 1910, 8.

¹¹³ *Lymington Chronicle*, March 12, 1908. For details of the equivalent organisation in Ringwood, see Ringwood Congregational Social Union Session Cards for 1904/05, 1908 and 1910-11, HRO 57M83/67.

evening after the week's toil is over'.¹¹⁴ Details of the organisers and performers were regularly reported in the local newspaper, with the PSE described as offering 'a refined and high class programme'.¹¹⁵

For the Congregationalists of Edwardian Hampshire, educational and social activities appear to have had a higher profile than sporting ones. Nonetheless, some churches did recognise the value of sport as a means of attracting and cementing the loyalty of potential members. East Cliff, for example, sponsored gymnastics classes and a swimming and a cricket club.

Closely linked to the institutional principle was another more worldly form of enterprise, namely fund raising. To preserve their cherished independence Congregational churches were faced with the constant challenge of ensuring that expenditure on such items as ministers' stipends and upkeep of premises, as well as the costs of new building projects, were covered by their income. Thus, regular sources of funds frequently needed to be supplemented with bazaars and sales of work. In positive terms, these afforded churches with opportunities for fellowship and even a mode of outreach. As Green acknowledges, they 'were self-consciously communal and festive events'.¹¹⁶ Thus, the Grand "Reformation Times" Bazaar organised by London Street in 1903 'was indicative of the Church's energy and entrepreneurial spirit and can be seen as a synthesis of "embodied" and "diffusive"

¹¹⁴ *Basingstoke Congregational Magazine*, January 1908.

¹¹⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, January 30, 1909.

¹¹⁶ S.J.D. Green, "The Death of Pew-Rents, the Rise of Bazaars and the End of the Traditional Economy of Voluntary Religious Organisations: The Case of the West Riding of Yorkshire, c1870-1914," *Northern History* 27 (1991): 223.

Christianity, with its Reformation theme; secular location in the Drill Hall; and various entertainments'.¹¹⁷

Although justifications for bazaars were generally regarded as self-evident, in 1909 Rev. Ebenezer Hitchcock at Andover felt moved to explain why one was necessary:

... their church premises were somewhat extensive, they had the church itself, a school hall, with seven classrooms, two cottages and a manse. Much of that property was very old, and to keep it in repair entailed a heavy expenditure. The spiritual and philanthropic work of the church was sustained absolutely by the free-will offerings of those who worshipped with them, and there was no need to make any appeal outside their own community ... But as they were now compelled to face a considerable outlay in the ... renovation and repair of their property they felt more than justified in undertaking the enterprise in which they were all engaged that day ... [they were grateful for] the very sacrificing service and willing generosity which had gone to furnish those stalls (hear, hear). That bazaar was consecrated by the generous motives which had prompted those who had given. Therefore, they felt that the work ... was in fullest harmony with those high ideals and noble endeavours which were characteristic of the Church of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁸

Understandably, in his exegesis, Christian values, such as sacrifice and generosity, were to the fore. Moreover, his reference to the philanthropic work of the church suggests that Chadwick's observation concerning the debilitating effects of debt was not universally applicable.¹¹⁹ While debt did preoccupy Hampshire churches, there was little indication that it inhibited their ability to engage in evangelistic and charitable enterprises. Nonetheless, there was a hint, perhaps, that the material nature of bazaars sat uneasily with the core spiritual mission of churches.

¹¹⁷ Roger Ottewill, "Basingstoke's Grand "Reformation Times" Bazaar 1903: Aspiring Congregationalism", *Congregational History Society Magazine* 5, no.4 (2009): 316.

¹¹⁸ *Andover Advertiser*, December 3, 1909, quoted in Ottewill, "Strong and Blessed," 81.

¹¹⁹ Chadwick, "Church and People," 209.

This anxiety also surfaced with respect to the institutional principle more generally. Notwithstanding its many advocates and the persuasiveness of their arguments, as indicated in Chapter 1 there were those who were unnerved by the associated risks. For example, in comments made at Rev. David Beynon's recognition as Freemantle's Congregational minister in 1901, Eynon Davies, a friend from college days, 'contended that the church should not be looked upon as a social club and an amusement provider, but they should remember that the Church's duty was to save the lost'.¹²⁰ Likewise, during an address at Avenue's ninth anniversary celebrations, David John suggested that an emphasis on social activities might be a sign of weakness rather than strength. He challenged his audience with the question: 'When the Church was weak did it not go to social life to make up for it?' In his view they were in danger of losing the distinctive spiritual and supernatural 'notes from their church life and fellowship'.¹²¹ Similarly, Rev. William Justin Evans, minister of Bromley Congregational Church, argued at East Cliff's anniversary celebrations in 1903, that:

The chief object of the churches was salvation rather than mere philanthropy, but there were some people who would turn their churches ... into soup kitchens and gymnasiums ... they were all very well in their proper place - but it must be clearly understood that they were after the souls of men, and they must not be satisfied with anything less.¹²²

Such concerns resonated with those of Rev. Phillip Rogers quoted in Chapter 1 and with Erdozain's strictures regarding the dangers churches faced when they embraced the pursuit of pleasure. As he puts it: 'A practical, this-worldly theology of salvation-

¹²⁰ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 9, 1901.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, December 14, 1901.

¹²² *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, December 19, 1903.

by-recreation quietly occluded the classical and explicit soteriology (doctrine of salvation) of the “parent” organisations.¹²³ Moreover, there is little evidence from Edwardian Hampshire to mount a challenge to Hugh McLeod’s assertion that ‘the attempt to use leisure facilities as a recruiting ground for the church seems never to have been very successful’.¹²⁴

Doyle, however, emphasises the exceptional reach of Congregational churches through their embrace of the institutional principle. His conclusion that ‘Congregationalism influenced the lives of many who were never church members’, along with positive remarks about Sunday schools, can be applied to most Congregational churches in Hampshire without qualification.¹²⁵ Moreover, although Tudur Jones suggests that ‘the massive men’s meetings and the highly organised Institutional Church were only possible where there were great concentrations of population’, as examples from the market towns, and indeed villages, of Hampshire indicate, a broader view of its impact is required.

During the Edwardian era the dominant note in the discourse surrounding the institutional principle was a laudatory one. There was also a tendency for Congregational enterprise to imitate the cultural manifestations of contemporary society, such as the desire for self-improvement and an emergent veneration of leisure, as opposed to regarding them with suspicion.

¹²³ Erdozain, *Problem of Pleasure*, 38.

¹²⁴ McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 89.

¹²⁵ Doyle, “Congregational Culture,” 323.

New wine in old bottles?

Congregationalists were a creative force in the ecclesiastical firmament of Edwardian Hampshire and not simply a prominent one as evidenced by the quantitative data. It would be an exaggeration to claim that they reinvented themselves but in reconstituting their identity for the new century they drew upon an eclectic mix of attributes which overlapped with those of fellow Christians in other Free Church denominations and indeed some Anglicans – a case perhaps of ‘new wine in old bottles’. These included a historical legacy, which synthesised the tropes of the Great Ejection of 1662 with those of the Evangelical revival of the eighteenth century; a form of church governance based on the principle of the self-governing local church, moderated by the collegiality enshrined in the HCU; a mode of worship combining simplicity with a concern for reverence; and a willing application of the institutional principle driven by the need to retain and recruit members and incorporating enthusiastic advocacy of work with the young.

Congregationalists also embraced the evolving ecumenism within Nonconformity as symbolised by Free Church councils and their sponsorship of various collaborative initiatives. In some communities, such as Andover and Lymington, even relations with Anglicans could be warm and friendly, notwithstanding their differences on politico-religious issues, such as education and

disestablishment.¹²⁶ Indeed, Congregationalists were generally respected for their willingness to co-operate with fellow Christians. Their faith was resolutely non-sectarian. That said, they continued to keep at arm's length those who subscribed to doctrines which they regarded as the antithesis of the religious liberty they espoused.

In general, however, Congregationalists were keen to adapt and accommodate differences, a willingness that can be said to have exacerbated an emergent tension that lay at the heart of their doctrinal stance. In language used at the beginning of Chapter 1, was theirs a doctrine of faith or a doctrine of good works? Was it Evangelical or ethical? Were these beliefs antithetical or reconcilable? Ways in which Hampshire Congregationalists engaged with these questions are explored in the next chapter.

¹²⁶ For Andover, see Ottewill, "Strong and Blessed," 78-80; and for Lymington, see Roger Ottewill, " 'A Unanimity of Feeling': Lymington Congregational Church in the Edwardian Era 1901-14," *Congregational History Society Magazine* 7, no.5 (2015): 207, 211 and 220.

6. EVANGELICAL AND ETHICAL: DISCOURSES OF DOCTRINE

Belief and behaviour

In the opening paragraphs of this thesis attention was drawn to the distinction between the doctrine of faith encapsulated in the term 'Evangelical' and that of good works in the term 'ethical'. For Rev. Francis Sloper these represented two sides of the same Christian coin. He argued that it was not a case of being either Evangelical *or* ethical but of being both Evangelical *and* ethical. Put a little differently, Congregationalists ought to give equal attention to belief and behaviour or, in his words, 'creed and conduct'.¹

As mentioned in Chapter 5, initially Independency, from which Congregationalism evolved, was essentially Calvinist in its doctrine with an emphasis on 'the sovereignty of God and the predestination of man either to salvation or to reprobation'.² However, under the influence of the Evangelical revival, seeking converts with the promise of salvation for all who believed and not just the elect became the major goal. Moreover, most Congregationalists remained true to their Trinitarian roots and did not succumb, as happened within Presbyterianism, to the attractions of rational dissent which ultimately led to Unitarianism.

¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, October 2, 1909.

² Watts, *Dissenters*, 7.

During the nineteenth century, in Hampshire as elsewhere, Congregationalists demonstrated their Evangelical credentials by vigorous evangelism, thereby substantially increasing membership and the number of churches. It was generally assumed that converts would, in gratitude, pursue a righteous life characterised by altruism. As John Wesley had argued ‘good works were the fruit not the cause of redemption’.³ However, faced with growing competition from secular creeds many late-Victorian Congregationalists came to place greater emphasis on activities of an ethical nature. Although they continued to subscribe to the tenets of Evangelicalism out of respect for their doctrinal roots and to demonstrate their awareness of the principles it embodied, there were subtle shifts towards a stance that was regarded as being more in tune with the temper of the time. With this came the potential danger that ultimately ethics would take precedence over conversion. Consequently, during the Edwardian era leading Hampshire Congregationalists were keen to address some of the underlying issues to which a growing tension between faith and good works gave rise. Indeed, it was another facet of reconfiguring their identity and defining themselves in relation to ‘the other’.⁴

In this chapter, consideration is given, in turn, to the essential features of what continued to be two distinctive, albeit complementary, discourses. At the heart of Evangelicalism were the concept of the personal gospel and the primacy of the conversion experience. While central to the ethical discourse was the social gospel

³ Roy Hattersley, *John Wesley: A Brand from the Burning* (London: Little, Brown, 2002), 328.

⁴ In a similar manner to Chapter 5, some of the material in this chapter elaborates on points originally made in Ottewill, “Congregational Identity”.

which served as a spur to philanthropy and, for some, as a justification for engagement in political activity. Indeed, as Thompson observes, 'the concern for social righteousness was ... one of the forces behind the various ecumenical moves in the late 1880s and 1890s' mentioned in the previous chapter.⁵ Alongside their religious activities, Free Church councils acted as pressure groups making their views known on various political issues. Within Nonconformity, however, 'opinion was divided between those who eschewed any involvement that threatened to divert attention and limited resources from the service of Christ, and those who remonstrated no less eloquently that spiritual vitality could be best measured, and indeed stimulated, by its application to public affairs'.⁶

Later in the chapter, ways in which Congregationalists sought to reconcile the personal with the social are examined. What did it mean to be both Evangelical *and* ethical? How far was it possible to blend faith with good works and, as Argent writes, to combine 'openness to social questions with a conventional attitude to scriptural authority'??⁷

As mentioned in Chapter 2, such questions were being addressed at a time of what Tudur Jones describes as 'theological unsettlement'.⁸ Hampshire Congregationalists were not immune from doctrinal controversies within the wider Church, not least those triggered by the biblical criticism of the nineteenth century and the New Theology and pantheistic views, associated with Rev. R.J. Campbell, of

⁵ Thompson, "Nonconformist Social Gospel," 275.

⁶ Koss, *Nonconformity*, 21.

⁷ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 28.

⁸ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 349-50.

the first decade of the twentieth. While it is probable that as Joseph Compton Rickett, the CUEW chairman, judged in October 1907, the latter 'had no impact on the average Congregational church', this did not mean that it was totally ignored.⁹ One Hampshire minister, in sympathy with Campbell's position, was Rev. David Beynon of Freemantle. In 1909 at a meeting to celebrate Rev. Vincett Cook's fifth anniversary as Bitterne's Congregational minister, the chairman referred to Campbell's views which he considered undermined 'the glorious truth that Christ came into the world to save sinners'. As a guest speaker, Beynon lamented the fact that such a controversial subject had been introduced, but argued that:

While he held no brief for ... Campbell he ... regarded ... [him] as one of the most devout men he knew, and was personally glad he had taken the stand he had, believing that by so doing the Christian faith had been given the biggest impetus possible.¹⁰

He also appealed for 'broad tolerance and sweet reasonableness in the consideration of theological subjects'.¹¹

By contrast, shortly before his untimely death in 1907, Rev. William Moncrieff, East Cliff's minister, preached a forceful rejoinder to Campbell, but more in sorrow than anger. He juxtaposed the New Theology with what he labelled the 'Old facts' which he equated with Evangelicalism. These included the facts 'of sin'; of human nature which craved 'for atonement and mediation'; and 'the Supreme fact of Christ'. For Moncrieff, Christianity was not simply 'a philosophy or a mere theory of

⁹ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 71.

¹⁰ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 6, 1909.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

... life ... it ... [was] a Religion of Redemption, the good news of deliverance from sin'.¹²

Similarly at Rev. Henry Coley's recognition as Christchurch's Congregational minister in 1908, J.D. Jones made clear his antipathy towards Campbell's views:

His hearers, he was sure were not willing to accept the New Theology; but were convinced of the reality of sin and ... that there was no remedy for sin but faith in Jesus Christ ... If they took away the Divinity of Christ ... they would have no gospel left ... [but] they must be prepared to accept the newer lights and revelations as they came.¹³

Although his rejection of the New Theology was clear, the final caveat concerning 'newer lights and revelations' indicated that although the traditional Evangelical stance on the gravity of sin was still a necessary imperative for Congregationalists it was no longer regarded as a sufficient one. Later, he argued that 'they were bound to consider social questions with a view to bringing religion to bear upon their settlement' and ended with a plea to emulate the 'passion and enthusiasm' displayed by socialists.¹⁴

Overall the evidence suggests that in Hampshire, most Congregational ministers conformed to a 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.'¹⁵ In this mix, there was a growing acceptance of the humanitarian concepts of the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man. This David Bebbington links to the increasing influence of

¹² Rev. Wm. Moncrieff, "The New Theology and the Old Facts, Parts I and II", *East Cliff Congregational Magazine*, March and April 1907, unpaginated and 5-7.

¹³ *Christchurch Times*, February 8, 1908.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 354.

Romanticism on the Evangelical doctrine of God, 'theologians who had written under the sway of Enlightenment had understood the Almighty primarily as the creator and just governor of the universe. A younger generation falling under Romantic influences, by contrast, saw him primarily as father.'¹⁶ However, there remained a marked reluctance to jettison many Evangelical tropes, which meant, in effect, balancing the doctrines of the Atonement and the Incarnation.

The willingness of Congregational leaders to review their doctrinal stance can be interpreted, in positive terms, as a constructive and assured response to a changing intellectual climate and social milieu or, more negatively, as a loss of confidence in the sufficiency of the time-honoured Evangelical message. Either way, references to doctrine were regular features of addresses at Congregational church events in Hampshire, with much of the language being tailored to meet the expectations of audiences, and it is these which occupy centre stage in what follows.

Justification by faith alone: Evangelical

During the Edwardian era most Hampshire Congregationalists appear to have retained considerable reverence for, and fidelity to, their Evangelical heritage. In the absence of surveys it is not, of course, possible to measure precisely how far this was the case. Nonetheless, audience reactions, in the form of applause and 'hear hears', suggest strong support for traditional Evangelicalism.

¹⁶ Bebbington, "Evangelicalism and British Culture," 110.

In practice this meant that Congregationalists continued to subscribe to those precepts of Evangelicalism summarised in Bebbington's quadrilateral as '*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and ... *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross [emphases in the original]'.¹⁷ Here it is the mix that is crucial since arguably two, activism and biblicism, are not exclusively Evangelical. With this qualification in mind, since many Edwardian Congregationalists acquired their Christian faith at a time when these precepts were particularly influential, it is unsurprising that they were reluctant to modify, let alone abandon, them. Such beliefs had motivated them and their spiritual forebears for over a century and were a tried and trusted part of their birthright. They also helped to differentiate Congregationalists from non-Evangelical Christians – 'the other' in doctrinal terms.

Thus, Hampshire Congregationalists continued to embrace the potent language of Evangelicalism and, as illustrated in Chapter 4, it was sometimes used in obituaries and other eulogies for ministers. Moreover, evidence from these sources suggests that many ministers of smaller churches, in particular, regarded long-standing Evangelical principles as sacrosanct. In words used of Rev. Thomas Grant, pastor of Zion Congregational Church in Portsmouth from 1910 to 1914, they 'held firmly to the older ways of thought' in their preaching.¹⁸ The Reverend Frederick Hern combined an 'evangelical spirit and personal devotion' with 'intellectual

¹⁷ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 3.

¹⁸ CYB, 1947, 478.

integrity';¹⁹ and 'evangelical fervour ... characterized ... [Rev. Ernest Franks] all through his life'.²⁰

It is also noteworthy that Congregationalists and fellow Nonconformists were notably proprietorial in their use of the word 'Evangelical' and its synonyms. For example, at Albion's 1906 anniversary, Rev. I. Maldwyn Jones, the minister, commented that: 'The district in which the church was situated needed their help and sympathy, and the old gospel that had been preached in the past was the gospel that was needed to-day, and which he would continue to preach.'²¹ Here the term 'old gospel' was used instead of 'Evangelical', but had exactly the same connotations. Later in the proceedings, the visiting speaker, Rev. William Hardy Harwood from the Union Chapel in Islington, claimed that 'the real exposition of the meaning of the word evangelicalism' was for Free Churchmen one of the privileges they held in trust.²² Indeed, at the time, the adjective 'Evangelical' was frequently used in conjunction with 'free church' as in the phrase 'Evangelical Free Church Council'. According to Harwood: 'A living Church *must* be evangelical ... and must be ever ready to learn and obey, not statutes prescribed by men, but the will of God as taught by Christ in the scriptures (emphasis added).'²³ Although they acknowledged that some Anglicans were Evangelicals, many Nonconformists felt that their position had been compromised by 'State bonds' and the ritualism which tainted the Church of England as a whole.

¹⁹ Ibid, 1958, 419.

²⁰ *Mansfield College Magazine* 14 (1954): 192.

²¹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, October 27, 1906.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Congregational engagement with the central doctrines of Evangelicalism can also be seen in attempts to deal with theological issues arising from the work of German scholars in the previous century. On the subject of Biblical criticism, Rev. Samuel Eldridge, in his presidential address to the HCU's spring gathering in 1901, concluded:

Many of our traditional conceptions about the Bible may have to be modified, some relinquished altogether, but of this we may be confident, when the higher critics have done their worst, when their conflicting theories have corrected one another, and the final results are reached, the grand old Book shall emerge from the fires of criticism arrayed in its glory, and fraught with new preciousness (applause).²⁴

Likewise, at Avenue's 1913 anniversary, in remarks concerning the desirability of constructive criticism in doctrinal matters, Rev. John Stevenson from Beckenham asserted that 'the old theory of the infallibility of the Bible had to go so that in place of the wooden cathedral might be built a more noble stone cathedral of truth'. This had resulted not in the destruction of the Bible but 'the destruction of a particular theory of the Bible'.²⁵

Eldridge also argued that while they held as tenaciously as their Puritan ancestors to the 'sinful tendencies of the human heart, the awful retribution that must hereafter face the impenitent', they felt that:

Christ's teaching concerning the "Fatherhood of God" places these doctrines in a fresh light, and constrains us to give them new form and expression. "Back to Christ" we cry for we would receive our Christianity directly from his lips and not as paraphrased, or ... parodied, by councils and creeds and catechisms.²⁶

²⁴ *Hampshire Herald and Alton Gazette*, May 18, 1901.

²⁵ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, December 6, 1913.

²⁶ *Hampshire Herald and Alton Gazette*, May 18, 1901.

This indicated a shift towards a more benign and inclusive view of the nature of salvation, combined with a reluctance to let go of the traditional belief in the seriousness of sin and the plight of the unrepentant sinner.

One consequence of these developments was that, arguably, by the Edwardian era for perhaps most Hampshire Congregationalists, the emotive power of the term 'Evangelical' had become of greater consequence than its descriptive content. Emotionally it retained its laudatory connotations.²⁷ However, for definitional purposes, its traditional meanings were being stretched and modified. This is evident in the use of terms to qualify what 'Evangelical' signified, with 'progressive' being a favourite. For example, Jewry Street's newly ordained minister, Rev. Nicholas Richards, speaking at the start of his pastorate in 1907, indicated that 'his own theology ... [was a] vexed question' and went on to explain that:

... he had experienced the love of Jesus Christ, and knew him to be his Saviour, and this knowledge was his starting point. He had a firm hold on the first principles of Christianity, but he had not yet drawn up a whole programme setting out a defined position. Theological thought must be *progressive*, and based upon individual experience, and as their experiences varied so would their theological impressions vary. It was not necessary for a man to have any ready made theology in order to be a Christian [emphasis added].²⁸

Later he stressed the need for church members to be characterised by their 'absolute love and loyalty to Jesus Christ'.²⁹ Thus, while alluding to the Evangelical principle of personal salvation through faith in Christ, Richards equated being progressive

²⁷ Put more colloquially, for Congregationalists it was still regarded as a 'hurrah' word.

²⁸ *Hampshire Chronicle*, September 7, 1907.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

with adjusting one's theological position in the light of personal experience, thereby modifying a traditional Evangelical stance of an immutable gospel.

Another minister who frequently used the term 'progressive' was J.D. Jones. At Abbey's anniversary celebrations in 1901 he argued that for 'a true revival of religion ... their ministry must be Protestant, evangelical *and* progressive'. To be progressive meant accepting new truths while remaining 'loyal to Christ'.³⁰ What these new truths might be were not spelt out in the press report, which simply stated that Jones 'gave some ideas on higher criticism and fresh revelations of truth'.³¹ At Kingsfield's anniversary celebrations in 1902 he used slightly different language in speaking of the principles for which Nonconformity stood, namely 'the open door, the open Bible, and the open mind'. The last meant that: 'Congregationalists, unlike the Roman Church, were not bound by mandate or creed, but were at liberty to receive new aspects and revelations of the truth through whichever quarter they came to them in God's providence.'³²

Nearly eight years later, at the recognition service for Rev. Alfred Clegg, J.D. Jones expressed the hope that his ministry at Boscombe would be both progressive and 'evangelical to the core, and that the members would help their minister to preach Jesus Christ as the only saviour of souls'. Nobody 'had a right to be in the ministry of the Congregational Church who was not evangelical'.³³

³⁰ *Romsey Advertiser*, May 3, 1901.

³¹ *Hampshire Independent*, May 4, 1901.

³² *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 8, 1902.

³³ *Bournemouth Guardian*, September 10, 1910.

At Rev. Baldwin Brindley's recognition as minister of Immanuel Congregational Church in 1912, J.D. Jones referred to the Evangelical gospel in addressing issues preachers faced in 'an age of indifference ... [when] people had not the taste for religious things'. He argued that it was the soil and not the seed that was at fault. Consequently, 'he wanted to register his protest against the taunt ... that if ministers would only preach the Gospel they would have their churches full'. This was untrue because ministers always preached the 'old Gospel' and many churches were not full. Nonetheless, although preachers 'must have some sort of gospel to proclaim ... he did not want any narrow interpretation put upon the word evangelical'.³⁴ In other words, the seed did require attention if it was to germinate. However, while Jones wanted the meaning of Evangelical to be broadened, its retention was required as a bulwark against the lack of concern amongst the population at large for 'religious things'.

A contrast can be drawn between those who saw the gospel as something that was evolving and those for whom it was immutable. At David Beynon's recognition in 1901, his predecessor, Rev. Henry Howell, expressed the view that regrettably 'nowadays ... many Congregational ministers preached anything but the Gospel', by which he presumably meant that they did not adhere to traditional Evangelicalism and the need for conversion.³⁵ Beynon, however, indicated that 'his theology seemed to be passing from the theoretical to the clinical and experimental' and 'he was not so dogmatical as his predecessor'. Probably in deference to Howell he proclaimed his

³⁴ Ibid, February 10, 1912.

³⁵ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 9, 1901.

loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ of whom he was 'passionately fond'. That said: 'God had still more principles to break forth in order to meet the deep needs of every successive age.'³⁶ In short, the gospel was maturing.

Thus, for some leading Hampshire Congregationalists, Evangelicalism had morphed into a doctrinal stance that was less hard-edged and more flexible than had been the case fifty years earlier. In this respect, it foreshadowed a dominant narrative of Evangelicalism, namely the divergence between conservative and liberal wings, mentioned in Chapter 2, which developed in a more pronounced manner after the First World War.³⁷ Although there is little evidence from Edwardian Hampshire of the terms 'conservative' and 'liberal' or their American counterparts 'fundamentalist' and 'modernist' forming part of the Evangelical discourse between 1901 and 1914, it can be argued that the fault lines which they represented were just beneath the surface and this was essentially a transitional phase.

In some respects, moves to reshape traditional Evangelical beliefs in response to theological challenges and what was described as 'something in the atmosphere that hardened the hearts of the people so that the Spirit of God did not get a chance' are understandable.³⁸ At the very least, they demonstrated an awareness that the world in which Congregationalists sought to witness was changing and, for some, it was a question of adapt or die. Arguably, however, the full implications of what

³⁶ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 9, 1901.

³⁷ See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, esp. Ch 6; and Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, ch.2. Elsewhere Argent writes: 'The prevailing theological climate within Congregationalism 1900-1930 was that of liberal evangelicalism, although "liberal" in this respect did not mean modernist.' Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 303.

³⁸ *Bournemouth Guardian*, February 10, 1912.

those who sought to move the doctrinal debate forward were advocating and to where it might lead were not fully appreciated and the use of terms and phrases, such as 'progressive' and 'loyalty to Christ', were simply rhetorical devices intended to reassure and gloss over differences. What is clear is that many Congregationalists saw a more adaptable form of Evangelicalism as embracing some, at least, of the imperatives of the emergent social gospel with its emphasis on good works and ethical initiatives through collective action and political campaigning.

The allure of good works: Ethical

By the Edwardian era many Hampshire Congregationalists gave as much attention to good works as to personal salvation. For them, Christian witness in the form of practical action was deemed to be of equal worth to that of securing conversions. This was partly a response to the gospel imperative of loving one's neighbour as exemplified, for example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and partly an expression of the philanthropic temper of the times.³⁹ It was also a manifestation of the holistic nature of ministry, thereby resonating with principles underpinning the institutional church considered in Chapter 5. As Richard Mudie Smith argued: 'That gospel which does not concern itself with a man's body, mind, and environment, as well as his soul, is a contradiction in terms, a travesty of truth, a mockery of religion,

³⁹ The parable is one of the narrative themes that Nash suggests should replace that of secularisation. Nash, "Reconnecting Religion," 312.

it is no “good news” and usurps a title to which it has no claim.’⁴⁰ Another interpretation was evident in remarks made by Rev. William Griffith Jenkins, from Princes Street Congregational Church in Norwich, at celebrations to mark the opening of the newly enlarged Winton Congregational Church in 1913. Referring to contemporary movements for social reform:

... he said that Christianity did imply a social gospel, and when there was a revival of the true spirit and faith ... of the Christian Church, then, he believed, there would be better work, better housing, less drinking, less gambling, less sensualism, a larger world, and a fuller life.⁴¹

If Christians took their obligations seriously then social improvements would surely follow.

Another reason for social concern was highlighted by Ernest Chaplin at a session on “The Church and Social Righteousness” held during the HCU’s spring gathering in 1912:

... people were now calling for justice and fair play, and they were realising their great strength in these matters and if the churches were not willing to show them some of the things they were seeking for, no one could be surprised if they turned to some other body (hear, hear). They must help the people and bring sunlight and good cheer to them, and be like One who said, “I am among you as one who serveth.”⁴²

Although not explicitly mentioned, Chaplin presumably had in mind trade unions and the Labour party, which were seen as rivals of the churches in seeking socio-economic improvements. In other words, as James Thomas had argued at the HCU’s spring gathering in 1906: ‘No one could pretend that the churches had real hold of the working classes of the county. It was not because working-men had a distaste for

⁴⁰ Mudie Smith, *Religious Life of London*, 13.

⁴¹ *Bournemouth Guardian*, June 28, 1913.

⁴² *Hampshire Post*, April 26, 1912.

religion. But no church which was true to its mission could stand aloof from social amelioration.⁴³ Whether being more socially active and demonstrating sympathy towards the plight of the poor would make them look more favourably on churches was clearly debatable. Many Congregationalists, however, felt that regardless of any additional support they might secure, social goals should be pursued as a gospel imperative.

Another speaker at the 1912 spring gathering, Will Reason, Secretary of the Social Service Committee of the CUEW, referred to problems of hunger, overcrowding and homelessness and urged every church to set up study circles dedicated to pray and 'seek for the will of God and his truth' on these matters. These would energise the social initiatives in which most Congregational churches were already engaged, including traditional pastoral care undertaken within the framework of a church visiting scheme and practical assistance to meet human need and relieve suffering, such as thrift societies, soup kitchens, clothing clubs and other forms of 'home philanthropic' activity.⁴⁴

As Vincett Cook responded when asked whether 'social work should go hand in hand with purely religious work', during his interview for the Southampton local religious leaders' series mentioned in Chapter 1: 'Why Not? Social work is religious work. Our great founder, Jesus Christ, fed the hungry, as well as preached his

⁴³ *Hampshire Chronicle*, April 28, 1906.

⁴⁴ Amongst the 'home philanthropic institutions' attached to Above Bar in the early 1900s were a coal and clothing club; visitation society; loan and reference libraries and a sick room mission. S. Stanier, *History of the Above Bar Congregational Church Southampton from 1662 to 1908* (Southampton: Southampton Times, 1909).

evangel [good news]. Indeed the relief of physical distress was part of that evangel.⁴⁵ In his view, social work was an essential ingredient of Christian witness which, if ignored, would seriously, perhaps fatally, damage the gospel.

Such considerations were evident in the establishment of the Portswood Mission, an initiative of Avenue Congregational Church. Being located in a prosperous part of Southampton, Avenue was acutely aware of its responsibilities towards more deprived areas, especially the neighbouring suburb of Portswood. As a preparation for the Mission, John Aldridge (a leading deacon) in an article entitled "Has Christianity Any Remedy for Our Social Ills?" argued that Christ 'perfected Brotherly kindness' and he encouraged his readers to think about the poor 'tenderly' and 'help them as well as we can'. The motivation for doing so was both idealistic, an expression of love in action, and pragmatic since 'in the eyes of the poor' churches were 'more associated with social selfishness and fashionable pride than with the love of Christ,' thereby inhibiting their witness to the poorest in society.⁴⁶

Such sentiments were shared by Avenue's first minister, Rev. Arthur Martin, with the Mission seeming to him 'a real necessity laid upon us as a community of Christian people'.⁴⁷ In 1904, at the church anniversary, he indicated that 'no work had given greater happiness':

They needed contact with the poor and those whose circumstances were not so bright as their own that they might keep in fullest sympathy with those who were as near to our Heavenly Father as they themselves were ... While they hoped the time would come when the privations and sufferings of the

⁴⁵ *Hampshire Independent*, April 15, 1905.

⁴⁶ *Avenue Congregational Church Southampton Record*, 1902, 10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 1903, 5.

poor would be dealt with by legislation ... [in the meantime] they had their work to do ...⁴⁸

James Hamilton, another deacon, elaborated at Avenue's anniversary celebrations in 1907:

He thought ... they had brought home to the people ... [of Portswood] that they were not a selfish church, looking after comfortable seats on Sunday and enjoying a musical service with an excellent sermon, but ... recognised that the church had a mission in the social reformation of the people ... there was nothing to bring [this] about ... unless it was by Christianising those they desired to serve.⁴⁹

Thus the Mission incorporated a wide variety of activities to meet both spiritual and social needs, including a Sunday school; services on Sunday evenings; the provision, jointly with the local Anglican and Methodist churches, of a free soup kitchen during the week; a Girls' Bible Class; a Young Men's Recreation Class; a Band of Hope; a Girls' Guild; a Mothers' Meeting; and a Guild of Help.

The last was modelled on a scheme developed in Bradford, the object being to:

... try and help ... people ... raise themselves when through misfortune or sickness they are in a condition of poverty and distress; to establish friendly relations with them, so that by personal contact and influence they may be encouraged to rely on their own efforts for their support, and where possible to procure work for those who are in need of it.⁵⁰

To provide church members with insights into the plight of those helped by the Guild, examples were published in the church magazine (see Appendix J). It was hoped that these would inspire more to become involved and persuade the sceptical of the need for an initiative of this kind. In 1909, Avenue's second minister, Rev.

⁴⁸ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 19, 1904.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, November 30, 1907.

⁵⁰ *Avenue Congregational Church Southampton Record*, 1906, 37.

George Startup, at the end of his relatively brief pastorate, claimed that the worth of the Portswood Mission for the life of the Church was 'quite incapable of exaggeration'.⁵¹

While most Congregationalists accepted social action, exemplified by the Portswood Mission, as a key component of the Gospel, a few warned that it could lead to churches losing sight of their primary rationale - the saving of souls. In 1901, Rev. William Justin Evans from Bromley and guest speaker at Albion's fifty-seventh anniversary, argued:

... some people would turn the chapel into a soup kitchen or gymnasium. It should be understood, however, that the Church sought men to save them, and they should not be satisfied with merely altering the circumstances and conditions under which men lived ... [they should] not seek to cheapen the Gospel, widen the narrow path and smooth away the ruggedness of the cross ...⁵²

Although this might be considered a little disingenuous, not to say discourteous, since Albion had societies which sought to bring comfort to the poor and sick, it did reflect something of the tension inherent in so doing.⁵³

Such strictures were rarely expressed in Edwardian Hampshire, at least not in the public domain. Nonetheless, they cannot be dismissed as a mere aberration. They were essentially a plea for a return to a purer form of Evangelicalism and reflected a fear that once embarked on the slippery slope of social action, the primacy of the personal gospel would be irrevocably compromised. Churches only had so much

⁵¹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, February 27, 1909.

⁵² *Ibid*, October 26, 1901. As quoted in Chapter 5, Evans used similar language when speaking at East Cliff's anniversary celebrations in 1903.

⁵³ Ironically, during the following winter, Albion added a soup kitchen to its range of social welfare initiatives, which 'was greatly appreciated by large numbers living in the immediate neighbourhood'. *Ibid*, November 1, 1902.

time and energy at their disposal and a concentration on social matters could easily distract them from their key tasks of expounding the scriptures and seeking converts.

Their anxiety was compounded by the fact that, alongside philanthropic initiatives, some advocates of the social gospel went further and argued that it involved political campaigning to shape public policy, both nationally and locally. As it was put by Abbey's minister, Rev. Albert Bage, in the discussion following Will Reason's address mentioned earlier: 'The problem that confronted them was whether they were going to deal with the causes of social distress or the results. It was a matter of whether they should clothe the naked, and help the homeless or fight the causes from which those evils originated.'⁵⁴ Was it sufficient to concentrate only on the symptoms or should churches also seek to tackle the underlying causes of social ills? The latter meant participation in politics and raised the question of how far churches should go in this respect and, more starkly, whether they should become involved at all.

Blending faith with political action

As has been emphasised, many Hampshire Congregationalists did not consider that a choice had to be made between the Evangelical and the ethical. In their view it was not a question of either/or but of embodying both. Thus, even those who held tenaciously to the precepts of the personal gospel were prepared to take steps to

⁵⁴ *Hampshire Post*, April 26, 1912.

implement the social gospel through practical initiatives of the kind considered in the previous section and, in certain instances, by acting politically in the pursuit of a moral welfare agenda embodying Christian principles. Adapting a phrase that was to be popularised nearly a century later, their stance was to be 'tough on sin and tough on the causes of sin'. They sought through political action to remove, in the words of Bebbington, 'obstacles to the gospel'; 'substitutes for the gospel' and 'infringements of the gospel code of living'⁵⁵ and had in their sights not only the evils of alcohol, gambling and prostitution, but also those of poverty, malnutrition and inadequate housing. Such concerns and the responses to them reflected the full flowering of the 'civic gospel' and Nonconformist conscience which had both emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century as key strands of 'political Nonconformity'.

Although the genesis of the civic gospel is particularly associated with Rev. George Dawson, a Baptist minister, a key role in its subsequent development was played by Rev. R.W. Dale, minister of the centrally located Carrs Lane Congregational Church in Birmingham from 1854 until his death in 1895.⁵⁶ As Catherine Hall observes: 'Dale unlike Dawson, held to the faith of the evangelicals and his particular contribution in later years to the civic gospel was his articulation of municipalism with a living faith.'⁵⁷ Indeed, in the light of Romans, Chapter 13, he asserted that civil authority, not only national but more particularly local, was 'a

⁵⁵ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 133-4.

⁵⁶ Dale was co-minister with Rev. John Angell Jones until the latter's death in 1859.

⁵⁷ Catherine Hall, "'From Greenland's Icy Mountains ... to Africa's Golden Sand': Ethnicity, Race and Nation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England," *Gender & History* 5, no.2 (1993): 223.

Divine institution'.⁵⁸ While the 'civic gospel' appears to have been little discussed in Edwardian Hampshire, as mentioned in Chapter 4, by serving on local public bodies ministers and deacons demonstrated, at the very least, a tacit commitment to it - they practised what Dale preached. Like him they 'believed in the dignity as well as ... the duty of municipal life'.⁵⁹ Indeed, there was little sign of the erosion of the link between Christian commitment and public service in Edwardian Hampshire, as Jeremy Morris detected in Croydon.⁶⁰

Thus, Rev. Capes Tarbolton, London Street's minister and one of Dale's Hampshire disciples, in praising '... [the] robust type of ... Christian piety', observed that it meant not abstention from, but engagement with, civic life.⁶¹ Likewise, one of his successors, Rev. Rocliffe Mackintosh, commented at the mayor's banquet in November 1912, that:

The clergy were especially interested in the condition of the people, and Councils had a great deal to do with the conditions in which people lived; so in that way the clergy and public men might be workers together for the betterment of the people and for the extension of the power of religion. They should encourage the best men in connection with their churches to enter public life and to do what they could to raise its ideals, for while our public life stood high in comparison with that of other countries, there was still a great deal that might be changed for the better (applause).⁶²

⁵⁸ For a full discussion of the contribution of R.W. Dale to ideas concerning municipal government in Victorian Britain, see E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), esp. Ch.6.

⁵⁹ A.W.W. Dale, *The Life of R.W.Dale of Birmingham* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), 406.

⁶⁰ Morris, *Religion and Urban Change*.

⁶¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, February 2, 1907.

⁶² *Ibid*, November 16, 1912.

A particular interest of Mackintosh was education and the mayor referred to his involvement in the establishment of a high school for girls, which had provided him with an early opportunity 'of connecting himself with the civic life of the town'.⁶³

Complementing the civic gospel was the Nonconformist conscience embracing 'a conviction that there ... [was] no strict boundary between religion and politics; an insistence that politicians should be men of the highest character; and a belief that the state should promote the moral welfare of its citizens'.⁶⁴ Living in the world Christians should be 'a force to leaven and purify,' a principle that applied as much to politics as to literature and commerce.⁶⁵

In this regard, many Hampshire Congregationalists were particularly influenced by the views of Rev. F.B. Meyer, mentioned in Chapter 2, who epitomised 'an evangelical social gospel moulded by both conservative and progressive evangelical thought'.⁶⁶ His ideal was, as Randall points out, social action to promote 'human dignity, equality and freedom of conscience'.⁶⁷ Meyer spoke in Hampshire on a number of occasions. Addressing the Romsey and District Free Church Council in 1903 he argued, somewhat apocalyptically, that:

The one hope for England ... was that ... godly men and women should exert themselves as they had never done before, to bring the Kingdom of God amongst men by their own vote and personal influence in everything which concerned the social redemption of mankind ... If England did not mend her

⁶³ Ibid, November 16, 1912. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this was a town in which there was a strong tradition of leading members of the Congregational Church serving on the borough council.

⁶⁴ Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, 11.

⁶⁵ Dale, *Life of R.W.Dale*, 398.

⁶⁶ Randall, "Social Gospel," 156.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 167.

ways ... [it would] go the way of all great nations of the past and drive a wreck upon the shores of history.⁶⁸

If those who had accepted Christ as their personal saviour did not act to bring about a change in the moral climate, disaster would surely follow. Speaking at Petersfield in 1908, Meyer expressed his great belief in the need to link 'the spiritual force to the machinery of ... social and political life'.⁶⁹

Amongst Hampshire's Congregational leaders, a blending of the message of personal salvation with a political awareness, or the individualism of the nineteenth century with the emerging collectivism of the twentieth, can be seen in remarks made by Rev. George Saunders on commencing his pastorate at Above Bar in 1904. After stressing that his preaching would have an authentic 'Evangelical note', including the proclamation that Jesus Christ 'saves man from sin, through the power of His Cross,' he went on to say that:

It is by the application of the teaching of Jesus to the manifold life of today that we shall find the solution of all the problems which are pressing so heavily upon us. Hence you will not expect me to be silent in reference to the great social, political and national questions which affect for good or ill the welfare of our town and country.⁷⁰

In 1913, as a guest speaker at Avenue's anniversary celebrations, he argued that one of the major challenges facing the Church 'came with tragic force ... from the "lapsed masses," those ... living below the line of poverty ... in an environment that was a real challenge to their Christian faith' and ended with a rhetorical flourish:

⁶⁸ *Romsey Advertiser*, November 6, 1903.

⁶⁹ *Hants and Sussex News*, March 4, 1908. He was there at the invitation of the Petersfield and District Free Church Council.

⁷⁰ Stanier, *Above Bar Congregational Church*, 281.

Social conditions to-day menaced lives and made them simply a slavery from the cradle to the grave. They had to do something, not to take the place of economics, but to carry the spirit of Christ into touch with an environment unworthy of the traditions of the great empire and of its belief in the Gospel of Christ.⁷¹

This reflected his heartfelt conviction that the contribution of Christians lay not so much in skilful political manoeuvring, although this was sometimes required, but in the supernatural or as he put it in 'possessing a deeper sensitiveness of the Divine Presence and in the coming into closer fellowship with the eternal'.⁷²

At his recognition as Petersfield's Congregational minister in 1903, Rev.

Ernest Thompson also linked the personal with the political.

He was there to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He hoped that preaching would never lack the wooing notes, the notes of strength, of boldness ... he would never get far away from preaching ... the abounding grace of God ... [However, he also] felt he must take an interest in public affairs. As the minister of Jesus Christ the necessity was laid upon him to rebuke unrighteousness wherever he found it, and to clamour for the application of Christian principles to all social and political matters.

At the time, the controversy over the Education Act 1902 was at its height and Thompson felt it necessary, as a passive resister, to make it clear that 'he could not pay for the teaching of doctrines which he believed to be thoroughly unsound and unscriptural'.⁷³ It is noteworthy that a guest speaker at the recognition, Rev. Arthur John Summerhill, the Wesleyan Methodist minister, welcomed Thompson on behalf of his members 'all the more heartily because they understood that he was essentially and thoroughly evangelical, and there never was a time in the history of Petersfield and the entire district when a man of that description was needed more than to-

⁷¹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, December 6, 1913.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Hants and Sussex News*, July 15, 1903.

day'.⁷⁴ Why this should have been the case is not entirely clear. Perhaps it was simply that the local Evangelical free churches were in need of new blood. It does indicate, however, that being seen as an Evangelical was no impediment to making one's position clear on the political issues of the day.

Another example of a blended approach to the personal and social manifestations of the Christian gospel comes from Avenue's 13th anniversary celebrations in 1906. A visiting speaker, Rev. Albert Swift from Westminster Chapel, claimed that to overcome 'all the ills and evils that so multiplied in their midst' equal attention had to be given to 'bringing man into union with God once more, and ... [to] bringing man into perfect relationship with man'. This meant that 'they needed to be at one and the same time evangelists and social reformers ... [since] there ought not to be a great distance between those who sought to make men more worthy and those who sought to make human life clean and civic life pure'.⁷⁵

However, in seeking to integrate faith and politics some wanted to retain the primacy of the former. As Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson, Abbey's minister, explained:

His Christ was a social reformer; but he was more than that; he was a redeemer, and redemption was the clearest note in the Church's song. If we silenced that note we might as well close our churches.⁷⁶

These comments were made in the context of the sermon on the empty church, mentioned in Chapter 3, and specifically in response to the charge that one reason for churches being empty was that they 'had neglected to deal with social problems and preach a social gospel' and that doctrines such as the 'forgiveness of sin, and the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 3, 1906.

⁷⁶ *Romsey Advertiser*, January 30, 1903.

atonement of Christ had no practical value to the average lives of men'.⁷⁷ For Williamson, however, the latter were, in the language of today, Christianity's 'unique selling point' and on them there could be no compromise.

Similar views were expressed by Rev. Reginald Thompson at London Street:

Ministers were open to a great temptation ... to leave their pulpits and throw themselves into the arms of social reformers. They quite realised the need for social reform, and were ... concerned for the welfare of the men and women around them. They thought they read things somewhat more clearly and deeply than those who asked them to leave their pulpits and go out as social reformers ... [but] he did not believe all these social evils ... were going to be cured by Act of Parliament ... It was Christianity that had raised them to their present standard, and they must increase the moral tone of employers and employed before the social conditions of this country would be ameliorated.⁷⁸

Those who took their cue from Meyer continued to stress the centrality of the individual's relationship with God even while giving increased attention to the need for collective action in the pursuit of social justice.⁷⁹

With respect to the latter, some ministers were prepared to comment on current issues from the pulpit. A particularly dramatic example comes from Basingstoke where there was a serious outbreak of typhoid in 1905. In response to the disquiet surrounding the epidemic, Capes Tarbolton preached a sermon entitled: "Is the Typhoid a judgment on the town?" After indicating that Jesus warned 'against thinking that physical catastrophes are always to be interpreted as judgments upon sin', he contended that typhoid was 'a matter traceable both to sewage *and* to sin'. He was highly critical of past failures by the civic authorities to

⁷⁷ *Romsey Advertiser*, January 30, 1903.

⁷⁸ *Andover Advertiser*, February 14, 1908. He was speaking at the fourth anniversary of Rev. Ebenezer Hitchcock's settlement in Andover.

⁷⁹ Randall, "Social Gospel," 163.

attend to the town's infrastructure insofar as it affected the health of the community.

He ended with this appeal:

... if as a town, we ... view public questions with a broader and more impartial eye and a more just and generous estimate and show ourselves worthy of a new prosperity by having a new spirit within us, then indeed Mercy will be seen behind Judgment, and we shall say "Righteous and just art Thou, O God of love!"⁸⁰

Reported at length in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*, his thought-provoking sermon gave readers a Christian perspective on a matter of intense local interest.

A second example comes from Christchurch. In the febrile atmosphere of the 1906 general election campaign, Rev. James Learmount, the Congregational minister since 1900, preached a sermon on the relationship between Christianity and politics based on the text: "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God".⁸¹ Reported verbatim in the sympathetic *Christchurch Times*, he argued that:

To escape from hell and get to heaven is not the great business of life. The great business of every Christian is to do what Christ would do today ... with our freedom and ... our circumstances around Him ... good people who take ... no part in politics are wrong ... God demands from us justice, humanity, integrity, rectitude in every department of life ... It is the duty of religious people to ... lay down great Christian principles for the guidance and government and well-being of the nation ... to cry aloud when the leaders of the State make grave moral mistakes, seek to set up class distinctions, and to raise barriers which prevent all men from realising the solidarity of mankind growing out of the fact of the Fatherhood of God.⁸²

Reference was also made to specific issues, including free trade, which 'should not merely be a means ... of getting more wealth; it should be a measure of social justice', and, temperance, which 'ought not to be a matter of opinion; ... [but] a question

⁸⁰ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, November 4, 1905.

⁸¹ 1 Cor. 10: 21.

⁸² *Christchurch Times*, January 6, 1906.

affecting the people's life, a question of heaven or hell for them'. Publicans and brewers were portrayed as purveyors of evil. In his peroration, he referred to politics as 'applied religion' while acknowledging that 'bitter politics' were 'of the devil'.⁸³

Learmount was subsequently taken to task by the Conservative-supporting *Observer and Chronicle*, which described his sermon as an 'illustration of how certain pulpits are used for party politics at election time'.⁸⁴ He defended himself in a letter published a week later in the *Christchurch Times* by maintaining that the thrust of his argument was not party politics but righteousness. However, as mentioned in Chapter 4, Congregational ministers were far more likely to be Liberal supporters than Conservative and there can have been few in the congregation who would not have interpreted his remarks in this light. What ministers, who argued that Christianity and politics were inextricably linked, were essentially advocating was a more militant stance and, when necessary, direct action to right what they saw as morally reprehensible wrongs - themes which are explored more fully in Chapter 7.

Notwithstanding the social gospel's impact, towards the end of the Edwardian era enthusiasm for politics began to wane. Although the evidence from Edwardian Hampshire is not clear-cut, something of the reaction against politics can be seen in the stance of J.D. Jones. In a sermon on "Christianity and Politics", preached in 1906, he went as far as to suggest that engagement in political activities was 'as religious as leading a prayer-meeting ... [and] teaching in the Sunday

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *Observer and Chronicle for Hants and Dorset*, January 20, 1906.

School'.⁸⁵ In 1909, however, as Bebbington records, he 'devoted two sermons to endorsing the ... argument' of *Nonconformity and Politics*, in which, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the author forcefully argued against the involvement of the Church in politics.⁸⁶ Moreover, in early 1910 he defended himself against the charge that he had preached a political sermon during the first general election campaign of that year:

I claim as a citizen the right to take part in national affairs. I claim the right of *speaking* with my fellow citizens about national affairs. That right I have exercised during the recent election, and shall exercise again whenever occasion calls for it. But as a minister and a preacher I regard the realm of party politics as entirely barred against me. I detest and abhor political sermons, and have never preached one ... in God's house men of varied and conflicting opinion ought to feel equally at home ...⁸⁷

A further example of what might be deemed a reassessment of priorities comes from an address by Rev. William Miles, Buckland's minister and chairman of the HCU for the year 1913. At the spring gathering, in the context of observations concerning the function of the Christian Church he claimed that:

The work of the Church was first, not politics. He felt that the less the Church had to do with politics the better it would be for the Church and the better for politics, too. Mr. Balfour had said a wise thing when he remarked that the Christian Church had never interfered in politics without losing more for herself than she had gained for politics. It would be a great advantage ... if every Christian minister would assume such an attitude towards politics that men of all political parties could feel at home among them.⁸⁸

Here it would seem that by politics Miles meant party politics. Indeed, he later acknowledged that it was not 'possible for a man to stand in the pulpit and proclaim

⁸⁵ "'Christianity and Politics', A Sermon Preached at Richmond Hill Congregational Church by the Pastor, Rev J.D. Jones, M.A., B.D.," *Richmond Hill Magazine and Congregational Record*, New Series VII, no.5 (1906): 37-8.

⁸⁶ Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, 158.

⁸⁷ *Bournemouth Guardian*, February 12, 1910.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, April 19, 1913.

all the doctrines of the Word of God without coming into contact, now and again, with political prejudice and vested interest'. Alongside the drink trade and Sabbath breakers, he referred to 'every political institution which ground the face of the poor and enriched the few at the expense of the many'.⁸⁹ Thus, it was not as simple as some might have claimed to draw a clear distinction between politics and party politics.

Various other factors also need to be taken into account. One was disillusionment with the Liberal government which had aroused such high expectations following its landslide victory in the general election of 1906. Something of this can be seen in comments about the 'drink traffic' made by Ernest Thompson, in his role as President of Petersfield Free Church Council at its annual general meeting in 1909: 'During the year their hopes had been shattered. They had not succeeded in securing a measure ... to-day they had to recognise that the drink traffic abides as the great cause of our social misery ...' At the same time, efforts to secure a compromise on the vexed issue of religious instruction in day schools thereby 'gaining educational peace had been shattered'.⁹⁰ Although it was appreciated that opposition from the House of Lords limited the government's room for manoeuvre, there was a growing awareness that political action was not the complete answer to the problems of contemporary society.

There was also increasing concern that the resources of churches, both individually and collectively, were insufficient to enable them to pursue both

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, April 19, 1913.

⁹⁰ *Hants and Sussex News*, March 17, 1909.

worldly and spiritual goals. A deteriorating financial situation,⁹¹ coupled with the numerical decline recorded in Chapter 3, indicated that priority had to be given to recruiting new members through evangelistic endeavour.

While they did not want to turn their back entirely on the problems of the world at large, many Congregationalists came to recognise that in addressing them their contribution had to be primarily a non-material one. As the Executive Committee of the HCU observed in its report for 1912:

Both at home and abroad there is being manifested a spirit of grave restlessness which some are interpreting as birth throes of a people struggling for a fuller life. This unrest has its economic side, but it has also its moral and spiritual appeal. This striving for a fuller life can be met in all abiding sufficiency by One Who said He came to give life, and to give it more abundantly.⁹²

Thus, the Church's primary role was to address the spiritual dimensions of the malaise afflicting wider society, leaving the political and economic aspects to others. For many leading Congregationalists, only the churches were able to provide ethical direction and personal fulfilment. If they failed to give sufficient attention to these, society would lose its moral compass and agitation would further increase.

For Miles, this meant taking issue with those who monopolised the word "Socialism" and treated it as a purely secular creed. In an address on "Christianity

⁹¹ As the Executive Committee of the HCU reported in 1912: 'With reference to the financial outlook, matters are not so satisfactory as the Committee could wish; in fact, so serious did the Committee feel was a condition of affairs at the end of the year that a special resolution was ordered to be sent to all the Churches with an appeal for a considerable advance in their contributions, failing which, grants would have to be seriously cut down in future.' *HCU Annual Report, 1912*, 23, HRO 127/M94/62/57.

⁹² *Ibid*, 1911, 24, HRO 127/M94/62/56.

and Socialism” at Kingsfield’s anniversary celebrations in 1907, he claimed that he was a Socialist insofar as the message of the Word of God was socialistic, and that:

... the only true basis for the Socialist’s ideal was in the teachings of Jesus Christ ... He believed the Word of God had a message applicable to all the social evils and problems of our times. He did not say that the principal business of the Church was either that of political reform or social reconstruction; it was rather that of bringing the souls of men and women to Christ; but, on the other hand, if they held themselves aloof from the great movements of philanthropy and brotherhood, they would fail entirely to make any impression on the age in which they were living.⁹³

In short, for Miles and others, faith needed to be combined with social concern.

However, they did not minimise the challenges involved in getting the ingredients and balance right or the dangers arising from too close an identification with political doctrines.

Engagement with the wider world

In their different ways both the Evangelical and ethical discourses concerned the manner in which churches engaged with the wider world. The question posed by Arthur Martin, when he returned to speak at Avenue’s anniversary celebrations in 1912, “What should be the attitude of Christian people towards the world?”, was an ongoing and pressing one, especially given the rapidly changing socio-political milieu that confronted Hampshire Congregationalists. He argued that: ‘They must be active ... [and] were not only to have the joy of meeting in worship, but also to make

⁹³ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 2, 1907.

some contribution to the sum of human happiness.' In short, if faith was genuine good works would naturally follow. 'Apathy was the confession of unbelief.'⁹⁴

Yet, the predicament of how to be *in* the world but not *of* it was particularly difficult to resolve. As Rosemary Chadwick points out, Bradford churches were heavily criticised for not paying sufficient attention to the problems of the real world but when they did so they risked losing their *raison d'être*.⁹⁵ They were on the horns of a dilemma, not always knowing which way to turn. The danger was ecclesiastical atrophy.

In Edwardian Hampshire, many Congregationalists thought that it was possible to reconcile the pietism inherent in the personal gospel with the activism of the social gospel. When applied to philanthropic initiatives, this was relatively unproblematic, since many of the values they espoused - earnestness, brotherhood and service - were seen as being congruent with the prevailing culture and reflecting a supportive approach to those in difficulty. Their ultimate reference point was the example set by Jesus Christ and what John Aldridge referred to as 'true love' based upon 'the sacredness of humanity'.⁹⁶ Underlying a commitment to good works was a desire to demonstrate the power of love in action. Obsessive preoccupation with personal salvation was seen as militating against the command to love one's neighbour as oneself. As James Learmount observed, 'religion cannot be really spiritual luxury or selfishness'.⁹⁷ By blending the Evangelical with the ethical it was

⁹⁴ Ibid, November 30, 1912.

⁹⁵ Chadwick, "Church and People," 173.

⁹⁶ *Avenue Congregational Church Southampton Record*, 1902, 10.

⁹⁷ *Christchurch Times*, January 6, 1906.

hoped to show what a difference faith could make. Difficulties arose, however, when it came to political activity. Although theoretically a distinction could be made between politics and party politics, in practice this was often difficult to sustain.

Activism also meant that Congregationalists did not always adopt a pacific view of the wider world and interact with it in a benign manner. In the words of Rev. Ebenezer Hitchcock, Andover's minister: 'The Church of Christ existed for aggression, not to pat men on the back and not to make them comfortable or amuse them.'⁹⁸ Likewise, J.D. Jones described the Church as 'an aggressive agency',⁹⁹ while Ernest Thompson, on commencing his ministry in Petersfield, used the phrase 'aggressive spirit'.¹⁰⁰ Thus, belligerence was as much a feature of Edwardian Congregationalism as love and compassion and is examined further in the next chapter where consideration is given to the language of combat as the medium for expressing engagement with contemporary society.

⁹⁸ *Romsey Advertiser*, January 22, 1904. He was speaking at the sixth annual meeting of Romsey's Sunday School Union.

⁹⁹ *Bournemouth Guardian*, February 10, 1912. Comment made at the annual meeting of Richmond Hill in 1912.

¹⁰⁰ *Hants and Sussex News*, July 15, 1903.

7. FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT: DISCOURSES OF COMBAT

A belligerent spirit?

Given that Edwardian Congregationalists, along with Christians of other denominations, were encouraged to endorse values and behave in ways that could be at odds, as well as resonate, with societal norms, a degree of tension was inevitable. In these circumstances, it is unsurprising that speakers at church events frequently adopted militaristic metaphors and terminology, such as warfare, fighting, conflict, enemy and battlegrounds, when elaborating on a key element of Evangelicalism, namely the ongoing struggle between good and evil, and giving their views on contemporary issues, especially where the Church's stance clashed with that adopted by many in wider society. As indicated in the concluding section of Chapter 6, many Congregational leaders used the term 'aggressive' in referring to their denomination's work. When exposed to language of this kind, the reported audience reactions of 'applause' and 'hear hears' would suggest that they did not regard it as inappropriate or excessive. Indeed, it is probable that they expected and welcomed it.

Here there is something of a paradox, since some Congregationalists were relatively pacific in their views on international affairs. Some, for example, spoke of the Boer War in disparaging terms. At the HCU's spring meeting in 1901, the Chairman, Rev. Samuel Eldridge, observed:

... one of the saddest proofs of the limited authority Christ has in our land is the war spirit that has extensively prevailed. The dark clouds that now overshadow, the appalling losses we have sustained, the financial difficulty ... are ... a grave warning, a divine chastisement ... Instead of winning glory among the nations we have won shame and humiliation and ... have brought discredit on our Christian name, and hindered progress to our Redeemer's kingdom ... whether you share these fears ... whether you regard the South African campaign as a righteous war ... you must all admit that it has been a most calamitous one, and deplore the flippant tone and wretched Jingoism that has prevailed in our newspapers and popular songs as diametrically opposed to the spirit of Christ, the Prince of Peace.¹

Yet, notwithstanding these strictures, there was still a willingness to appropriate the language of militarism and foster a 'Jingo spirit' when fulminating against aspects of the relationship between the Church and the 'World'.

Such belligerency, of course, was not unique to Hampshire Congregationalists. The Salvation Army, for example, with its ranks, uniforms and discipline was at the forefront of Christian organisations that drew inspiration from the military. Moreover, as Rev. Benjamin Gibbon observed in an address to the Romsey and District Free Church Council in 1902, although 'they still wore the old names of Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist ... these were only different badges of the different regiments belonging to the one great host and marching under one flag'.² While in proposing a toast to "Ministers of other denominations and Visitors" at the HCU's autumn meeting in 1901 Rev. William Moncrieff, East Cliff's minister, 'compared the church to a mighty army, split up into different sects and factions yet subservient to the same head'.³ Similarly, Rev. George Saunders, Above Bar's minister, said of Rev. George Startup, who had a Methodist

¹ *Hampshire Herald and Alton Gazette*, May 18, 1901.

² *Romsey Advertiser*, January 24, 1902.

³ *Bournemouth Guardian*, November 2, 1901.

background, at the start of his ministry at Avenue in 1906, 'although ... [he] came from another wing of the great Free Church army there ... [were] great fundamental truths on which they could heartily agree'.⁴ About eighteen months earlier, at Saunders' own recognition, Brigadier R. Ewins of the Southampton Division of the Salvation Army, wrote that 'it had been a joy to know that although they belonged to different regiments they worked under the same great Leader and they fought for the same glorious ends'.⁵

These ends were, as Rosemary Chadwick records, encapsulated in:

... a vision of a Christian, church-going society which they still believed to be attainable, ... They sought to realise their ideal by aggressive evangelism, typified by military sayings and images ... The lesson was: 'The Church which takes no part in aggressive warfare is doomed, and deserves to fail.'⁶

There was, as Binfield observes, 'nothing new for Nonconformists about such [combative] language. Their hymns were all of war. Protestant life was one of perpetual conflict with the world.'⁷ Throughout the nineteenth century they had been in an almost permanent struggle to secure their civic rights, with the belligerency that this engendered spilling over into the twentieth. Here, it is not being argued that such aggression increased during the Edwardian era simply that it retained its salience.

An underlying reason was, as Mews points out, 'a process of differentiation, in which having formally been integrated with other aspects of life, the religious sphere became increasingly separated out, and consequently lost relevance to

⁴ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, May 5, 1906.

⁵ *Ibid*, December 12, 1904.

⁶ *Yorkshire Congregational Yearbook* 1894, 26, quoted in Chadwick, "Church and People," 211.

⁷ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, 233.

national social and political life'.⁸ The gradual decoupling of the religious from the secular was accompanied by what were regarded as negative developments in society at large. As Tudur Jones comments: 'The complexity of modern industrial life, the bitterness of international rivalry, the vexatious social problems of big cities and the emergence of militant Socialism all contributed to the bewilderment of Nonconformist leaders.'⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 1, to these can be added the more challenging intellectual climate driven by the scientific discoveries of the Victorian era and the more rigorous questioning of the veracity of the Bible, together with a perceived indifference towards spiritual concerns on the part of many or, in the words of Bédarida, 'the retreat of religious faith'.¹⁰ In addition, as Parsons claims, churches were faced with the daunting task of 'meeting the growing challenge of the secular and materialist entertainment culture which increasingly emerged from the 1880s onwards'.¹¹ A prominent feature of this was 'the commercialization of popular entertainment and leisure',¹² with churches having to confront what McLeod has labelled a 'leisure revolution'.¹³ Resort to belligerent language also echoed increasing militancy within Edwardian society over votes for women, reform of the House of Lords, industrial affairs and Ireland. Thus, it did not seem out of place at a time when many secular voices were increasingly strident in advancing their cause.

⁸ Mews, "Religion," 492.

⁹ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 334.

¹⁰ Bédarida, *Social History*, 110.

¹¹ Parsons, "Dissenters to Free Churchmen," 109.

¹² Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, 288.

¹³ McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 196-201.

However, the estrangement between religion and society in Edwardian Britain should not be overstated, since there were countervailing influences at work. These included a shared belief in the values of altruism and philanthropy and the worth of Sunday schools with respect to moral and civic education, which served to mitigate some of the hostility.

Understandably, the language of belligerency could be dismissed as mere rhetorical exuberance designed to stir up audiences emotionally and motivate the lethargic. Here, however, it is taken at face value since it chimed with the Free Church *Zeitgeist*, with many Congregationalists continuing to believe that they were engaged in an ongoing battle between good and evil which manifested itself in many different guises. As it was put by Rev. Thomas S. Neal, a United Methodist minister from Shanklin, when speaking at the eighth anniversary meeting of Petersfield's Congregational P.S.A., 'life was a battle and a stern conflict in which the warrior to achieve success must be characterised by invincible determination, a large amount of energy and a strong faith in the Lord Jesus Christ'.¹⁴

Alongside their use at church events, military metaphors are to be found in the obituaries of ministers. For example, Rev. Reginald Thompson 'fought with the joyous spirit of a crusader' for his two great "'external" enthusiasms', temperance and missionary work;¹⁵ Rev. Alfred Riceman was 'a faithful servant and soldier of Jesus Christ';¹⁶ Rev. Robert Skinner, 'was a courageous and fearless fighter where

¹⁴ *Hants and Sussex News*, November 15, 1911.

¹⁵ *CYB*, 1954, 523.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 1960, 434.

moral issues were involved’;¹⁷ and Rev. Henry Perkins ‘died a Christian warrior’s death; the weapons of his warfare unsheathed’.¹⁸ Congregationalists expected their ministers, and indeed deacons, to be resolute and forceful in promoting and protecting the interests of churches and the denomination more widely. Although the use of combative language does not distinguish Congregationalists from members of other denominations, it contributes towards establishing their Edwardian persona and differentiates them from those who constituted the secular ‘other’, whether overtly, atheists and agnostics, or covertly, those indifferent to religion.

In this chapter, particular attention is given to the settings in which speakers had recourse to fighting talk; the identity and nature of the enemy; and the tactics used by churches in their struggle to defend their interests and attempt to gain the upper hand. As might be expected, aggressive language was often closely associated with political action considered in the previous chapter. Yet there were occasions when militancy was seen in relation to less worldly targets, such as the enslaving and destructive power of sin in the lives of individuals and the attendant need for improvements in character and morals to bring about behaviour that was, in ethical terms, above reproach. There was also a close identification with St Paul’s words: “For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities,

¹⁷ Ibid, 1961, 450.

¹⁸ Ibid, 1913, 182.

against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places.”¹⁹

In highlighting the recourse to belligerent language, it is not intended to privilege it over the terminology explored in earlier chapters. There is, however, a danger that it can be marginalised, since Christianity is often perceived as a religion of forbearance and love as opposed to one in which indignation, anger and hostility have a part to play, with churches being engaged in bitter conflicts.

Fighting talk

Evidence of the use of fighting talk comes from various settings. Unsurprisingly, it could be employed at the beginning of a pastorate to motivate the audience for the task ahead. At Rev. Ernest Thompson’s recognition as Petersfield’s Congregational minister in 1903, the guest preacher, J.D. Jones, took as his text, “But where sin abounded grace did abound more exceedingly”:²⁰

... [which] suggested to him a battle field. It spoke of a conflict that had been going on ... since time began, that was going on everywhere ... in every heart. It mentioned the combatants. They were sin on the one side and grace upon the other, and the prize for which they contended was the human soul ... Sin ... was a ruthless and deadly foe, always working for the ruin and destruction of men ... opposing it stood grace ... [which] stood for the love of God ... a force ... working always for the healing and the purifying and the redemption of man ... of these two forces grace was the stronger.²¹

¹⁹ Eph. 6: 12.

²⁰ Rom. 5: 20.

²¹ *Hants and Sussex News*, July 15, 1903.

He expressed the hope that Thompson would preach the Gospel of abounding grace. In so doing, however, he would face difficulties since 'the vested interests of wickedness seemed so appallingly strong at times', yet through the application of grace these could be overcome.²²

At George Startup's recognition, to which reference has already been made, Richard Beck, chairman of Southampton Free Church Council, quoted Canon Wilberforce's 'trite saying ... [that] there were three great I.'s [or evils] – intemperance, infidelity and impurity'. These existed in Southampton as elsewhere and in fighting them churches had 'the great weapon[s] ... [of] the Sword, of the Spirit and the Word of God'.²³

Departing ministers also felt moved to draw upon military imagery. In 1907 after twenty years as London Street's minister, Rev. Capes Tarbolton, preached at the morning service of his last Sunday on the same text that he had used for his very first sermon: "Put on the whole armour of God."²⁴ As it was put in the local newspaper his 'farewell message ... was intended to stimulate his people to active, courageous warfare upon the legions of evil'.²⁵

At the end of his influential seven-and-a-half-year ministry in Romsey, Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson based one of his final sermons on the words: "Wherefore ye shall know them by their fruits",²⁶ and argued that:

²² Ibid.

²³ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, May 5, 1906.

²⁴ Eph. 6: 11.

²⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, February 2, 1907.

²⁶ Matt. 7: 20.

The only real defence of the Christian faith was the saintly, heroic and self-sacrificing lives it produced ... The church that can show its credentials in healed men and women, and in a high, courageous, chivalrous type of manhood and womanhood, is the church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.²⁷

Although his congregation would have been familiar with the analogies and allusions, given the heightened emotion of the occasion it is probable that his exhortations would have had a considerable impact. Amongst other things he, like Tarbolton, clearly wanted to be remembered for enabling his congregation to resist what were perceived as threats to both the Christian faith and Congregationalism and stiffen their resolve for when he was no longer there.

In view of the challenges involved, another setting in which the language of combat was often to the fore was work with children and young people. As quoted in Chapter 1, Reginald Thompson referred to the Sunday school superintendent as being in the 'thick of the fight'.²⁸ Indeed, the Sunday school was viewed as a battleground in the sense that many scholars came from 'non-Christian homes' and teachers were faced with the task of helping them resist secular influences at work in their lives.²⁹

This theme was developed at the HCU's autumn meeting in 1906 by William Melville Harris. Speaking on "The church and the child" he argued, in the context of

²⁷ *Romsey Advertiser*, September 23, 1904.

²⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, April 3, 1909.

²⁹ For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Roger Ottewill, "Congregational Sunday Schools and Scholars from Non-Christian Homes 1901-14: A Hampshire Perspective" (paper presented at the annual conference of the Ecclesiastical History Society, University of Bangor, July 18-21, 2012).

remarks concerning 'the welfare of youths and maidens passing out of ... childhood', that:

... teachers should make them desire to win higher victories than the world offered, and attain that abundance of life that Jesus our Lord came to offer. When a child was ready and spirited for battle they must not reprove the fighting spirit within him; it was rather their duty to show him the field where he might win everlasting and eternal victories.³⁰

In a similar vein, Rev. Henry Lucas, Andover's Congregational minister, claimed that the 'Christian Endeavour organisation fitted its members to take their part in the forefront of the battle, so let them rise to the occasion'.³¹

Clearly the young needed to be specially armed if they were to resist worldly temptations and, as they got older, become fully fledged members of the Lord's army. As Rev. Albert Bage, at Abbey, commented when speaking at the twelfth annual meeting of the Romsey Sunday School Union:

Another thing they had to teach [were] Christian principles ... Those boys and girls who went through the school had to face the world, and somebody would have to tell them of the perils of the world, and they should not let them find them out in the music hall or on postcards, or in penny novelettes ... it would be better to tell the children about the temptations of the world, and they would then bless God for their frankness and their kindness (hear hear and applause).³²

Bage did not spell out the perils and temptations of the world, since his audience would have been well aware of them. They also knew the challenges churches faced in retaining their young people once they reached their teenage years, a problem mentioned in Chapter 5. There was a constant fear that in the struggle for their hearts and minds the young would be won over by the seemingly more exciting offerings of

³⁰ *Romsey Advertiser*, November 3, 1906.

³¹ *Andover Advertiser*, July 26, 1912. See Chapter 5 for further details of CE.

³² *Hampshire Independent*, February 19, 1910.

the secular domain, such as public houses, sports clubs and the emergent cinema. Churches should be open and frank about these rather than ignore them in the hope that this would lessen their attractiveness. In the battle with secular diversions churches should go on the offensive and, in doing so, co-opt pastimes, such as sport, which could be regarded as beneficial.

If young people were to remain loyal to the Church then they needed to be prepared for the fight. Thus, at Avenue's eleventh anniversary in 1903 a visiting speaker, Rev. Edward Medley from Bristol, directed much of what he had to say 'to young people with the object of fighting the good fight'. Character he claimed was the greatest need. He then 'drove home his remaining points: that all truth was of God: the great need of holding truth in due perspective: and ... cheerfulness of spirit, which ... was of far greater value than many a shining quality'. Application of these principles would enable them 'to steer a straight course to the great Kingdom of God'.³³

By implication this would also assist in resisting trends which were seen as undermining not only the hold of the church on the young but also family life. At London Street's Sunday School anniversary in 1907, Rev. H. Oakley a Baptist minister from Upper Tooting, spoke:

...of the imperative necessity of Sunday School work owing to the changing conditions of commerce, the pressure of competition and other forces which were warring against family life, and especially family religious life these days.

³³ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, December 19, 1903.

Presumably he had in mind developments, such as fathers working further from home, which reduced opportunities for family prayers and bible reading. He went on to argue that the 'quicken intelligence of ... children ... meant a great swiftness to seize the good and a greater swiftness to seize the evil'. In this contest, the role of the Sunday school was to utilise the quickened intelligence 'on the side of Jesus'.³⁴

As illustrated in Chapter 1, combative language was also in evidence when referring to the difficulties faced by churches located in slum and rural areas, with J.D. Jones arguing that he did 'not want to belong to a Congregationalism that could live in a suburb but not in a slum ... and that if they were there to fight the world, the flesh and the devil ... [churches in poorer areas] were more urgently needed than ever'. He also praised those country ministers, of whom there were a considerable number in Hampshire, 'who were bearing the brunt of the fighting'.³⁵

One of these was the redoubtable Rev. James Richards, Overton's Congregational pastor. At celebrations to mark the eleventh anniversary of his settlement, John Pyle, the church treasurer, used military imagery:

The thought had come to him ... "Hold the fort". That place was their fort, the deacons - the officers, the members - the soldiers, and Mr Richards was their great cannon ... As they knew it cost money to keep a fort going and to find the ammunition. It cost them 17s. a week for their cannon, and it cost them another 17s. a week for the wear and tear and repairs of their fort ... They wanted the young men and women to join the forces in the fort, and help fight, under the leadership of Mr Richards, the evils outside.³⁶

³⁴ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 23, 1907.

³⁵ *Ibid*, October 2, 1909. At the time, Rev. J.D. Jones was Chairman of the CUEW and, as mentioned in Chapter 4, he was closely associated with the cause of securing a minimum ministerial stipend of £120.

³⁶ *Andover Advertiser*, May 22, 1903.

Fighting was a costly business and new recruits were constantly needed. In Richards they had not only a 'great cannon' but also an inspirational recruiting officer, who was particularly effective in enlisting young people.³⁷ Rural causes also needed allies and the HCU, in its annual report for 1913, made the point that: 'Members of ... [the] larger Churches might do very much to encourage and help ... village Churches in the uphill battle they have to fight.'³⁸

A further example of fighting talk comes from celebrations to mark Avenue's thirteenth anniversary in 1906. On this occasion, Rev. Albert Swift from Westminster Chapel added to the suggestion of Rev. Alexander Grieve, Abbey's minister, that successful churches needed servants, stewards and shepherds of God, all relatively peaceful images – and a fourth, 'soldiers of God'. Three years later, Grieve, wrote in his church magazine:

The army of Jesus Christ continually needs recruits to replace those who are called to higher service or drafted off to other regiments. The Commander-in-Chief calls for more soldiers not for more camp followers. Secret discipleship is not the most effectual form of service in these days ...³⁹

This was a call to arms directed at those associated with a church but who had not yet nailed their colours to the mast by making a 'profession of faith' and becoming committed members of 'the army of Jesus Christ'.

When encouraging more to enlist and rallying the faithful, many ministers linked recourse to belligerent rhetoric with an expectation of favourable results.

Thus, George Saunders, just prior to commencing his ministry at Above Bar,

³⁷ See Ottewill, "James Richards. Part 2," 3-4.

³⁸ *HCU Annual Report*, 1913, 19, HRO 127M94/62/58.

³⁹ *Abbey Congregational Church Home Messenger*, October 1909, unpaginated.

reminded his audience that: 'If they were to reap the victories, which it was God's will they should reap, they must seek to live up to the full measure of the strength which God had imparted to them.'⁴⁰ Likewise, at his recognition in 1911, Rev. Harry Lewis, Alton's new Congregational minister, rallied his congregation with the words: 'They went forward to new work, to new difficulties, and ... he hoped to new victories.'⁴¹

Similar sentiments were also evident when, in keeping with Congregationalism's historical legacy explored in Chapter 5, inspiration was fostered by drawing upon antecedents from the past. For example, Henry Gilbert in his address, as chairman, to the HCU's spring gathering in 1908 argued that:

Although they did not live in times of bitter persecution and were not beset with restrictions which had to be endured in the past, yet there was room even at the present day to manifest the same spirit and fight and win glorious victories for truth and righteousness.⁴²

While Rev. David John, Jewry Street's minister, at his church's anniversary in 1904, injected a similar note as a response to those who 'lamented that the good old-fashioned days had passed away':

... [they] were the days of heroism, when men of faith endured hardships and persecutions for their religion. We need to revive our sense of spiritual kinship with them. There is a call to-day for use of the same spiritual temper – to fight, to suffer for a pure faith and a free church.⁴³

In short, conflicts of the past called for displays of courage which needed to be replicated in the present age.

⁴⁰ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 26, 1904.

⁴¹ *Hampshire Herald and Alton Gazette*, December 2, 1911.

⁴² *Hampshire Post*, May 1, 1908.

⁴³ *Hampshire Chronicle*, October 29, 1904.

As suggested earlier, such language could be disregarded on the grounds that it was simply hyperbole. There were, however, occasions when its use reflected a real sense of danger. At Above Bar's 250th anniversary celebrations, R. Murray Hyslop claimed that 'to-day it was not their religious liberty that was at stake ... it was ... religion itself'. There followed a plea for 'a new consecration of spirit and a new devotion to principle'.⁴⁴ Many Hampshire Congregationalists were, like Murray Hyslop, anxious to combat external forces that were seen as presenting concrete threats to the well-being and ultimate survival of the Church. This raises the question: "With whom or what were they contending?"

The enemy

In many evocations of the conflicts in which Hampshire Congregationalists felt they were engaged there was often a lack of precision when referring to their adversaries. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that, as previously mentioned, audiences would have usually known to what speakers were alluding. Thus, it was possible for broader, all-embracing, terms to be used when making reference to the enemy.

One of these was 'indifference' which almost serves as a *leitmotif* for the discourses of combat. For example, in Titchfield Congregational Church's report to the HCU for 1907 the comment was made that 'we have still to fight the deadly enemy of indifference among the people'.⁴⁵ In other words, what characterised those

⁴⁴ *Hampshire Advertiser*, November 23, 1912.

⁴⁵ *HCU Annual Report*, 1907, 27, HRO 127/M94/62/52.

outside of the Church, especially, but by no means exclusively, the working classes, was not so much hostility as a complete lack of interest and even disdain regarding matters of faith. This made it an intractable rival with which to engage.

An élitist take on an 'indifferent world' was offered by J.D. Jones at the opening of the rebuilt Winton Congregational Church in 1913. He concluded his address by contending that:

It was not scholarship that was going to create the revival of faith they all longed to see, for an indifferent world did not read books. If the world was to be convinced it must be by what they saw in the lives of Christian people ...⁴⁶

Of course, book reading was by no means the exclusive preserve of churchgoers and he seems to have been striving for effect and highlighting the need for evangelism by example. The antidote to indifference was welcoming congregations who would attract outsiders and encourage them to cross the threshold of their church.

The frequent references to indifference suggest that many Hampshire Congregationalists would have taken issue with Callum Brown's concept of a 'faith society' in which the claims of the Christian gospel were respected and embedded in everyday life. In their eyes, society was characterised by a lack of faith. As it was put by Rev. Professor James Bartlet, at Alexander Grieve's recognition in 1905, 'the very hold of the gospel ... upon the large masses of the people in this country, is a very feeble hold'. For society to become more truly Christian, churches would have to become 'centres of light, influence, power and vitality for those who ... [were] outside their powers at present'.⁴⁷ England would only be saved in a 'deeper and

⁴⁶ *Bournemouth Guardian*, June 28, 1913.

⁴⁷ *Romsey Advertiser*, June 30, 1905.

truer sense' through 'the ministry of all Christian people ... made deep, pure and strong by the fellowship of the Christian church, in which the life of each ... [was] to be quickened and consistent'.⁴⁸ In short, solidarity and dedication were the keys to success in a 'faithless society'.

This led to concerns over the indifference exhibited by many within the Church. In the autumn of 1910, the retiring lay chairman of the HCU, Ernest Chaplin, spoke of 'the indifference that existed with regard to attending church at the present day, and pointed out that as long as the church showed apathy it had no right to charge the masses with indifference'.⁴⁹ Two years later, Murray Hyslop warned that 'the danger of the present day was not hostility from without, but rather indifference from within'.⁵⁰ Too often church members were insufficiently aware of external threats and needed to be roused if these were to be effectively resisted. Many lacked the fighting spirit to mount a successful campaign.

Another term often invoked to characterise the enemy was 'mammon'. In 1908, at Avenue's anniversary celebrations, the minister, George Startup, argued that:

It behoved ... all ... Christians, to be united in the fight against mammon – mammon in a thousand forms and in a great many ugly guises, in their commerce and politics, and even in their church life. Mammon was the common enemy of them all, and they had to fight against it (applause).⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, June 30, 1905.

⁴⁹ *Hampshire Independent*, October 8, 1910.

⁵⁰ *Hampshire Advertiser*, November 23, 1912.

⁵¹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 21, 1908. The celebrations were attended by ministers from a number of Free Churches and the local Anglican Church.

Such sentiments resonate with Robbins' colourful phrase that during the Edwardian era 'Mammon was rampant'.⁵²

Closely linked to 'mammon' was 'materialism'. In a sermon delivered to young people at Charminster Road in 1903 and entitled, "Why are our churches empty?" the minister, Rev. Alexander Gibson, expressed his fears in the following terms:

Materialism was the great magnet of the present day; men and women were engrossed in the scramble for wealth, and those who were not spurred on by ambition to that ... were content to lie in the lap of ease and avoid any work which would annoy or disturb the conscience. Consequently they neglected the Church ...⁵³

In other words, a preoccupation with material well-being was seen as the antithesis of a productive spiritual life.

Such a view was echoed by Rev. Phillip Rogers in his first sermon as East Cliff's minister:

This was a materialistic age ... when there was much self-reliance and confidence in man, spelt with the big "M", and little confidence in God, and the remedy for this peril lay in the recovery of the spiritual. Thank God, the spiritual was not lost, but this was a note that needed continual re-emphasis.⁵⁴

Likewise, Reginald Thompson when speaking on "The Outlook" at the HCU's spring gathering in 1911, having argued that the Church was 'not hated, nor feared, nor despised today, although she might be bitterly criticised', went on to outline some of the changes with which it now had to contend:

The present day was a day of intense pursuit of social and material interests, and the question was, could the human spirit live and do its work in the

⁵² Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity*, 123.

⁵³ *Bournemouth Guardian*, February 28, 1903.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, August 1, 1908.

world apart from God? If so, the church would be forgotten, but if man could not live without God it was for the church to proclaim that vital and fundamental truth and not to be too much discouraged because this was an age in which, despite their best efforts, the world was not quick to see it.⁵⁵

A particularly dramatic expression of the tension between the material and the spiritual comes from comments made by Rev. Thomas Yates, at Richmond Hill's anniversary celebrations in 1905: 'He prayed them to declare their part in the new battle that was fast moving up to an Armageddon – the battle of the spiritual against the material.'⁵⁶

Such views lend support to Gilbert's observations concerning an emergent 'popular materialism' to which attention was drawn in Chapter 2.⁵⁷ Although this was not necessarily a new phenomenon, Edwardian Congregationalists were much taxed by it and felt that they had a fight on their hands if they were to re-establish the need for God in people's lives.

On occasions, the enemies of materialism and indifference were linked as, for example, at a CE rally held in Romsey in June 1905, when 'fine speeches were given on "Christian Endeavour Work as an Aggressive Force, A Movement to Fight Materialism, Sacerdotalism and Indifferentism"'.⁵⁸ The bracketing of materialism and indifference with sacerdotalism reflected the belief of most, if not all, Congregationalists, mentioned in Chapter 5, that the embrace of Roman Catholic practices by some Anglicans was seen as hindering rather than helping Protestant

⁵⁵ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, April 8, 1911.

⁵⁶ *Bournemouth Visitor's Directory*, November 25, 1905.

⁵⁷ Gilbert, *Church, Chapel and Social Change*, 186.

⁵⁸ *Hampshire Independent*, June 17, 1905.

Christians counter the growing lack of interest in spiritual matters, and as contributing to the increasing alienation of the population at large from the Church.

Complementing references to indifference and materialism were those to more specific enemies. For example, John Ridley, at the HCU's spring meeting in 1902 argued that one of the 'great objects' of the Church was to produce:

... strong men of good courage who will go out into the world and really fight the giant evils of the day: giants of commercial life – trickery, dishonesty, selfishness; giants of social life – impurity, drunkenness; giants of Church life – jealousy, envy, bitterness, unforgiveness.⁵⁹

Significantly he highlighted evils inside, as well as outside, the churches, further recognition that Congregationalists needed to put their own house in order if they were to be sufficiently well prepared to take on external foes.

Thus, at the HCU's spring gathering in 1913, Buckland's minister, Rev.

William Miles, as chairman asserted that:

... Christian ministers had to deal with those evil spirits that worked within and which were poisoning the roots from which all social disorder was coming. (Hear, hear) ... The things that were most coveted amongst the people of their congregations were the luxurious in living, the material in wealth, and the animal in pleasure. Sensualism, callousness, and viciousness were the evil spirits they had to fight against. (Hear, hear).⁶⁰

He also claimed that the Church was 'keeping England from sinking into the turbid waves of materialism', a comment that elicited considerable applause.⁶¹

Of the explicit evils, not surprisingly, one that received particular attention was alcohol. Thus, at a Band of Hope meeting in Alton, boys were exhorted to 'fight

⁵⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, April 26, 1902.

⁶⁰ *Bournemouth Guardian*, April 19, 1913.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

manfully' against the demon 'alcohol'.⁶² Put even more forcefully, Rev. Samuel Stribling, a guest speaker at Kingsfield's fiftieth anniversary and a past minister of the Church, referred to the 'drink traffic ... as spreading like gangrene throughout the country'.⁶³ While in proposing a toast to "The Local Free Churches" at Phillip Rogers' recognition as East Cliff's minister, Councillor Alfred Lickfold, one of the deacons, highlighted the need for vigilance and resolution in confronting the enemy of alcohol:

There was too much inclination for compromise ... there were people to-day who took a glass of wine and only saw the sparkle and colour ... it would be wiser for ... [them] to look deeper and see the devil underneath and then fight the devil as he should be fought. There were even men and women who would ... let the old gentleman escape – (laughter) – but they did not want anything in the shape of a compromise, and the Free Churches in the future, as in the past, would strive to do their duty (applause).⁶⁴

In keeping with the general tenor of Congregational gatherings, alcohol was considered to be an outward and visible sign of a diabolical foe.

At the 251st anniversary celebrations of Christchurch Congregational Church in 1911, J.D. Jones, in an address entitled, "True Patriotism", and using language of a particularly dramatic kind, claimed 'that strong drink in England was a more alarming foe than Germany need ever be'.⁶⁵ Again, this was undoubtedly exaggeration for effect, but it demonstrated the extreme antipathy towards alcohol which characterised many Edwardian Congregationalists.

⁶² *Hampshire Herald and Alton Gazette*, February 11, 1911.

⁶³ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, October 24, 1903.

⁶⁴ *Bournemouth Guardian*, January 23, 1909.

⁶⁵ *Christchurch Times*, April 29, 1911.

At Alexander Grieve's recognition, mentioned earlier, Professor Alfred Garvie, another of the speakers, linked alcohol with a further evil, gambling, 'a church to be successful must wage war against strong drink, and gambling and betting'.⁶⁶ A few years later the following appeared in the Men's Own column of the church magazine:

Gambling is, unfortunately, not unknown in our little town [Romsey], and as we stand for purity of public life of all kinds, it is our duty to do all in our power to rid the community of one of the most terrible pests of modern times.⁶⁷

Thus, raffles and games of chance were eschewed as a means of fund raising at church bazaars.⁶⁸ Clearly Congregationalists had to practise what they preached or run the risk of being dubbed hypocrites.

Alongside alcohol and gambling, another particularly contentious issue was Sunday observance, seen by many as a proxy for a decline in moral standards more generally. During his address to HCU's autumn gathering in 1907, Rev. William Justin Evans, after amusing delegates with some examples of the extremes to which Puritans had gone to maintain the solemnity of "The Lord's Day", argued that the pendulum had swung too far the other way:

... Sunday was being made a day of pleasure and work. The leisured and idle classes were making it a day for golfing and motoring, and the working classes ... for gardening, loafing, and drinking. The holy day was becoming a holiday; it could not remain a holiday unless it was a holy day ... The Sunday

⁶⁶ *Romsey Advertiser*, June 30, 1905.

⁶⁷ *Abbey Congregational Church Home Messenger*, February 1910, unpaginated.

⁶⁸ For example, two of the rules of the Grand "Reformation Times" Bazaar organised by London Street Congregational Church, Basingstoke, in 1903 were 'no raffles' and 'no obtaining Money under false pretences'. "Reformation Times" Bazaar. Official Handbook.

desecrators were amongst the worst enemies of the country today ... it was more than ever necessary that there should be one day for worship.⁶⁹

Although, as John Wigley points out, the 'Edwardian Sunday had more in common with that of the 1850s' than that of the late twentieth century and 'impressed children and foreign visitors alike as one of the peculiarities of English life', it was under threat on many fronts.⁷⁰ Indeed, in the words of McLeod:

even ... Christians who had somewhat more relaxed ideas about Sunday were likely to agree that religious activity should have first priority, and that the kind of Sunday that was becoming increasingly popular, which was simply a day of relaxation, was part of a worrying trend towards a frivolous and hedonistic way of life.⁷¹

It was the perceived link between attitudes to Sunday and an increasing preoccupation with excitement and pleasure that drove many leading Congregationalists to resist every move to liberalise rules relating to the Sabbath and use belligerent language in doing so, even though, with respect to such sources of pleasure as sport and music, many Sabbatarians were not opposed *per se*. Rather, they argued that such pursuits should not be at the expense of spiritual priorities. However, in seeking to protect the sanctity of the Sabbath, their efforts had the appearance of a rearguard action, thereby giving credence to the view that they were impotent in resisting developments that weakened their position, a point to which further attention is given later in the chapter.

Although seldom stated in these terms, on occasions, Congregationalists, together with many of their fellow Nonconformists, tacitly regarded the Established

⁶⁹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 3, 1907.

⁷⁰ John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 159.

⁷¹ McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 176.

Church, and its allies in the Conservative party, as an incarnation of the enemy.

Notwithstanding a similarity of view, which often existed on such issues as temperance and Sunday observance, there were matters on which they were deeply divided. As will be examined in the next section, one of these was the question of education, in general, and, religious education, in particular.

Whatever else, Hampshire Congregationalists and their leaders saw themselves as confronting a diverse and powerful array of enemies. It is debatable, however, whether collectively they were of sufficient weight to justify the assertion that their faith was 'in crisis'. What can be said is that many were still willing and able to confront them and, in so doing, adopted various tactics.

Tactical considerations

Against the foes identified in the preceding section and what were seen as threats to their moral authority and Christian values more generally, Congregationalists were not inhibited from adopting many worldly tactics as complements to those of a more spiritual nature, such as prayer and proselytising. As indicated in Chapter 6, these included various forms of political action, such as standing for public office; mounting campaigns to pressurise public and judicial bodies; and seeking allies, in addition to a close identification with, and membership of, the Liberal Party. Such tactics were justified by those precepts of the 'social gospel' which focused on the causes of social ills.

Additionally, as mentioned in Chapter 5, legitimacy was derived from historical antecedents, an example of which was the action taken during the church rates controversy of the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, many Hampshire Congregationalists were in the forefront of the campaign of passive resistance against what were perceived as the iniquities of the Education Act 1902, which so offended Nonconformist sensibilities.⁷² In Southampton, the Liberal-leaning local newspaper even headed a report of a protest meeting: “The Education War”.⁷³ While at Jewry Street’s 1902 anniversary celebrations, Rev. Arthur Pringle from Caterham made reference to a momentous struggle and continued:

Even if they did not agree as to the precise weapons by which they were to win, they were unanimous as to the necessity for the fight ... [However] it was often put to him that in spite of all they were doing in this education fight, yet they did not seem to be doing quite enough ... it was not enough that they should be strong fighters against the enemy outside their own gate, but also against the more insidious enemies which came from their own weakness and their own neglect.⁷⁴

Once again, there are echoes here of the point made earlier about inertia within the churches.

In the battle over education there was a reasonably clear divide between Congregationalists and other Nonconformists on one side and Anglicans and Roman Catholics on the other.⁷⁵ As Eaglesham observes, for the latter, education was seen as part of the process whereby children were instructed in, and socialised into, the beliefs and liturgy of their respective denominations. Indeed, Anglicans ‘had become

⁷² For a fuller discussion, Roger Ottewill, “Discord and Concord”.

⁷³ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, May 9, 1903.

⁷⁴ *Hampshire Chronicle*, November 1, 1902.

⁷⁵ There were, however, exceptions on both sides.

more militant in ... [their] attitude to education [... and] had come to believe that religion must permeate the whole life of the school'.⁷⁶ For Nonconformists, education was a civic right with the religious dimension being un-denominational. This principle was seriously compromised by legislation which gave Anglican and Roman Catholic schools access to funding from the local rates while allowing them to retain their denominational ethos. As Rev. William Daniel, minister of Victoria Road, wrote in his church magazine, 'this ultra reactionary measure ... [will drive] sectarian strife ... to the school playground'.⁷⁷ In such a conflict, righteous indignation coupled with evangelical zeal and fighting spirit was a potent mix.

Ironically, in Hampshire one powerful call to arms came from an Anglican, the Earl of Portsmouth, in remarks made when he opened the "Reformation Times" bazaar organised by London Street.⁷⁸ As a staunch Protestant and Nonconformist sympathiser, he considered the legislation 'reactionary' with the 'primary iniquity ... [being] that while the public are to pay, the privileged are to control'.⁷⁹ Even more belligerently, he exhorted his audience to resist:

Never let one of you rest until you get this Act removed from the statute book (applause). Remember this, that if the principles of freedom and ... of Nonconformity are to be respected in this country, Nonconformity must show that it is a political force, a fighting force (hear, hear). If it submits to injustice of this kind all I can say is that I think its religious influence will be considerably reduced, and as regards political and public influence, it will cease to exist (hear, hear).⁸⁰

⁷⁶ E.J.R. Eaglesham, *The Foundations of Twentieth-Century Education in England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 46.

⁷⁷ *Portsmouth Evening News*, June 7, 1902.

⁷⁸ Ottewill, "Aspiring Congregationalism".

⁷⁹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 7, 1903.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Such comments were clearly 'music to the ears' of Nonconformists and by identifying himself with them on this issue, the Earl was undoubtedly distancing himself from the majority of Anglicans who supported the legislation.⁸¹

Directing the passive resistance campaign in Hampshire, as elsewhere, were local citizens' leagues in which Congregational ministers frequently played a leading role.⁸² In Southampton, the president of the Citizen's Passive Resistance League was Rev. Arthur Martin, Avenue's minister, and four others, Revs. David Beynon, Vincett Cook, Henry Perkins and George Saunders, were closely associated with its activities. Moreover, it was not only in the larger towns that Congregational ministers were to the fore.⁸³ In Petersfield, Ernest Thompson 'headed the list of those who were prepared to go the whole length of resistance',⁸⁴ which involved a 'refusal to pay such portion of the rates to be levied under the recent Education Act as may be intended for the maintenance of sectarian schools'.⁸⁵ At the sixth annual meeting of the local Free Church Council he argued that: 'They wanted not favour, but justice and liberty of conscience. It was the children's battle; it was the Church's battle; it was the Lord's battle.'⁸⁶

⁸¹ Many of whom were from the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England.

⁸² 'In sifting the evidence, one is struck by the key role played by Nonconformist clergy from all the Free Church denominations, but especially Congregational pastors from the more militant end of the spectrum, such as Rev. David John from Winchester and Rev. Richard Wells from Havant.' Ottewill, "Discord and Concord," 46.

⁸³ For example, the initiative for the establishment of the Cadnam and District Citizens' League came from Rev. Harry Rose, Cadnam's Congregational minister, and for the Hythe and District Citizens' League, Rev. Richard West, Hythe's Congregational minister.

⁸⁴ *Hants and Sussex News*, August 5, 1903.

⁸⁵ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, June 20, 1903.

⁸⁶ *Hants and Sussex News*, April 5, 1905.

Alongside passive resistance, a tactic intended to ameliorate the implementation of the Act was the sponsorship of Free Church candidates in the 1904 county council elections. One Congregationalist who stood was Overton's James Richards. 'With his crusading zeal, high profile and political experience it was not really surprising that ... [he] was persuaded to be the standard bearer for the Nonconformist cause in this contest.'⁸⁷ Notwithstanding his credentials, however, he was soundly beaten by the incumbent councillor and supporter of the Act.

In view of the earlier references to alcohol, it is not surprising that another issue which generated considerable political activity and with which Congregational leaders were closely identified was that of temperance. As previously mentioned, it was one of Reginald Thompson's 'two great "external" enthusiasms';⁸⁸ Rev. William Bennett at Warsash was 'a great worker in the cause of Temperance';⁸⁹ and Rev. Henry Perkins at Albion 'warmly supported the Temperance movement and Band of Hope'.⁹⁰ For those engaged in the temperance crusade, the objectives were to secure more restrictive legislation and ensure that existing provisions for controlling public houses were rigorously applied.

In this fight Congregationalists sought allies across the denominational divides. Indeed, in certain instances they made common cause with Anglicans, notwithstanding differences of view on the education question. In Basingstoke, for example, in early 1903 a cross-denominational committee was established to

⁸⁷ Ottewill, "James Richards. Part 2," 3.

⁸⁸ *CYB*, 1954, 522.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 1936, 267.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 1913, 182.

campaign for the Sunday closing of public houses. Members, including not only the Congregational minister, Capes Tarbolton, but also the vicar and one of his curates, approved the following resolution:

... as the Sunday Closing of Public Houses has been unquestioningly fraught with much good to the people of Scotland, of Ireland, of Wales and of the Colonies, this meeting deplors the prolonged delay in extending similar beneficent legislation to England. It believes that the present time is particularly opportune for pressing the claims of Sunday Closing upon legislators, and therefore earnestly calls for combined and vigorous action on the part of the Church of England, Nonconformist, Temperance and other philanthropic organisations, and appeals to reformers and politicians of all political parties to unite in a great effort to obtain from Parliament this great boon for the people.⁹¹

Such unanimity confirms Bebbington's assertion that temperance 'was the political question on which there was most cooperation between Church and chapel'.⁹²

On other issues, however, Congregationalists were more likely to seek allies from the other Free Churches. Thus, at Lymington Congregational Church's 201st anniversary in 1901, Alderman Beale from Bournemouth 'spoke of the battle of Nonconformity and the need for more united action amongst the Free Churches, and especially in regard to the insidious attacks being made upon the Sabbath day, and particularly in regard to sport'.⁹³

While at the Church's 205th anniversary celebrations in 1905, Rev. Silvester Horne sought to rally the faithful to this and other causes by proclaiming his belief that:

... a great spiritual revival was coming, and to be ready for that they must have all their forces marshalled, and let the forces of evil know they were

⁹¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, January 24, 1903.

⁹² Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, 51.

⁹³ *Lymington Chronicle*, October 31, 1901.

awake and ready for the fray (applause) ... They were expected to exert themselves, to fight for their faith, for God intended, as a development of moral character, that they should wage unceasing war against the forces of evil ... only by the *closest cooperation* could they make a really effective grand attack upon the opposing evil ... [emphasis added].⁹⁴

Co-operation could be on an ad hoc basis but more often it was through the agency of local Free Church councils.

Again at Phillip Rogers' recognition mentioned earlier, Rev. Alfred

Martindale, minister of Westbourne Congregational Church, spoke in glowing terms of the contribution of the Free Churches to the governance of Bournemouth.

Describing the Free Church Federation as 'the greatest religious movement of their generation' he identified some factors at work in the town. In addition to its natural attractions, these were:

... the spiritual and enlightened government of its rulers ... [a] moral force had been at work, and in that direction he believed the Free Churches had not been the least factor ... [they] had been accused of ... dominating the Council Chamber. If it were true ... it only showed that the Free Churches were not an unknown quantity which had to be looked for. (Hear, hear). They were also charged with being a political body ... so they ought to be ... politicians they must be if they professed to be co-workers with God in building up a civic, social and national life for the city of God. (Hear, hear). They believed that they had been put in trust of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; they believed that Gospel was the truth of God; and they believed that that truth ought to have every field to exploit and conquer the enemy.⁹⁵

Even in Bournemouth, however, the battle to preserve its cherished 'quiet Sunday' was relentless. Although, as reported in 1905, 'visitors and townspeople alike very largely regard Sunday as a day set apart exclusively for religious observance, and public amusement is in almost every form discouraged,' there was a powerful lobby

⁹⁴ Ibid, March 30, 1905.

⁹⁵ *Bournemouth Guardian*, September 12, 1908. Martindale's comments resonate with the precepts of Robert Dale's civic gospel mentioned in Chapter 6.

campaigning for change. A particular bone of contention was that trams were prohibited from running on Sundays.⁹⁶ Seeking to reverse this policy was the Sunday Trams Association. In response, advocates established the Sunday Defence League, which drew support from Nonconformists and Anglicans. The outcome of a local poll on the issue held in 1906 was a victory for those opposed to change. Of the 9753 eligible to vote, 6309 or 64.7 percent did so, with 57.2 percent voting against any change in the existing policy.⁹⁷

Six years later the issue was again to the fore and the Sunday Defence League organised 'its forces for a strenuous campaign to maintain the quiet Sunday for which Bournemouth is renowned, and which we still believe, notwithstanding all that has been stated to the contrary, is one of its greatest assets'.⁹⁸ During the municipal election campaign, readers of East Cliff's church magazine were exhorted 'to VOTE, irrespective of creed or politics, on November 1st, FOR CANDIDATES who are opposed to SUNDAY TRAMS and all that would follow in their train [emphasis in the original]'.⁹⁹ The minister, Phillip Rogers, saw 'the Sunday introduction of trams as an attempt to secularise the Sunday in Bournemouth, and God save Bournemouth from a Sunday like that at Brighton'. Using a non-military, but powerful, metaphor, he argued that: 'Just as the dykes of Holland kept back the

⁹⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, October 6, 1905. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Roger Ottewill, "The Battle to Preserve Bournemouth's 'Quiet Sunday' " (paper presented at Modern Religious History Postgraduate Research Symposium, University of Birmingham, 28 March 2014).

⁹⁷ *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, October 5, 1906.

⁹⁸ *East Cliff Congregational Magazine* 70, Oct 1912, iv. At a mass meeting attended by between 3000 and 4000 people at Westover Palace Skating Rink a motion opposing the introduction of Sunday trams was passed. *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, October 19, 1912.

⁹⁹ *East Cliff Congregational Magazine* 70, Oct 1912, iv.

floods of the ocean, so a sanctified Sunday would act as a bulwark which kept back the floods of wickedness.¹⁰⁰

The outcome of the municipal elections was inconclusive as far as the trams issue was concerned, but the borough council subsequently decided to hold a second poll in January 1913. This time, despite the efforts of the Sunday Defence League, a majority voted for a change in policy. On this occasion the turnout was 70.1 percent, with 52.5 percent voting in favour of changing the existing policy.¹⁰¹ The outcome clearly indicated a shift in public opinion towards a more liberal view of Sunday observance and the increasing strength of the secular 'other'.

Overall, in combating what leading Congregationalists characterised as evil required a variety of tactical responses.¹⁰² Indeed, in fighting their campaigns, they could still draw upon considerable expertise from within their church memberships; forge alliances; and look for support from those in positions of authority. Moreover, as it was put in an article from 1911 on Portsmouth Nonconformity: 'The strength of the Nonconformists has been dependent on the fact that they had to fight hard for every advantage they gained.'¹⁰³ Thus, Congregationalists were battle-hardened and well prepared to make their case forcefully and with passion. That said, by the

¹⁰⁰ *Bournemouth Guardian*, September 14, 1912.

¹⁰¹ Sunday trams commenced running a couple of months later, although only in the afternoons and evenings. Sunday morning trams were not introduced until 1926.

¹⁰² A less dramatic example comes from Basingstoke where, during autumn 1909, Rev. Reginald Thompson took the lead in pressurising members of the borough council, including those who belonged to his church, to take action in respect of what was on offer at the Corn Exchange. This was described as 'a class of entertainment ... of a low standard [with] ... the audience consist[ing] largely of children, lads and girls'. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, September 11, 1909.

¹⁰³ *Hampshire Telegraph*, March 3, 1911.

Edwardian era there were many signs that they were unable to prevent changes in public policy and societal practices of which they disapproved.

A resilient faith?

In their engagement with wider society, Hampshire Congregationalists were faced with many areas of contention, thereby triggering the use of language associated with conflict and combat. Recourse to military metaphors often arose from a mix of frustration and consternation, since in the struggle for the hearts, minds, loyalties and energies of the population at large they were finding it increasingly difficult to hold onto the gains of the past.

While not wishing to overstate the dissonance between Congregationalists and wider society and, on occasions, fellow Christians in other denominations, the frequent calls to arms cannot be ignored. They had to combat what the Mayor of Portsmouth, when speaking at the laying of the foundation stone of Victoria Road Congregational Church, referred to as 'the great social evils of drunkenness, immorality and crime'.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, as Rev. William Miles argued, in a speech 'distinguished by Welsh fervour and eloquence', at the annual meeting of the Petersfield and District Free Church Council in 1912:

... they as Christian people ought to combine, not ... to save their interests, but ... to save the kingdom of God against the encroachment of vice, intemperance and gambling, ritualism and priestly arrogance, and all the powers of evil and of darkness that were fighting against them that day.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, May 5, 1911.

¹⁰⁵ *Hants and Sussex News*, March 27, 1912.

In the eyes of Congregationalists, this was a gospel imperative and a contribution towards what they considered to be a more virtuous society.

Developing a point made earlier, although the frequent resort to belligerent language calls into question the appropriateness of Callum Brown's characterisation of the Edwardian era as a 'faith society', it does resonate with his claim that later in the century secularisation led to 'increasing militancy amongst the shrinking churches'¹⁰⁶ and 'vigorous Christians tended increasingly in the 1990s to adopt the role of combative and minority challengers to what they saw as a dominant secularism and its immoral values'.¹⁰⁷ The latter are sentiments with which many leading Edwardian Congregationalists might well have identified.

That said, arguably his conclusion that 'in the last decade of the twentieth century religions were getting militant through weakness, not strength' and 'religious militancy was a measure of weakness', underestimates the resilience of religion and its capacity for renewal.¹⁰⁸ Then, as now, churches were not about to capitulate, or as Clarke puts it, 'vacate ... some of the psychic space' previously occupied by 'organised mass Christianity'.¹⁰⁹ Congregationalists continued 'to fight the good fight' with the considerable resources, both human and divine, at their disposal. As Rev. Thomas Hooper, the minister of Streatham Congregational Church, argued at the height of the Edwardian era: 'By example and precept, do you fight

¹⁰⁶ Brown, *Religion and Society*, 278.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 301.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 314.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: Penguin, 1996), 53.

against irreligion, immorality, gambling, and drink.’¹¹⁰ To which might be added historical precedent, political acumen and biblical injunctions. As the Secretary of Peartree Green Congregational Church, Charles Inglis, asserted: ‘In these days of materialism ... [the Bible is] the *only weapon* with which to successfully fight our critics [emphasis added].’¹¹¹ Such beliefs might have been misplaced or naive, but they were sufficient to sustain Congregationalists in their ongoing struggle against societal trends, which they considered to be damaging, and the secular ‘other’.

There was also the conviction that they had right on their side and would eventually triumph. Even when a particular battle was lost there remained the expectation that ultimate victory would be theirs. Clearly, from the standpoint of secular historians, this can be dismissed as wishful thinking and as evidence of a ‘crisis’. However, from a religious perspective, it gave Congregationalists and their allies the resolve to continue the fight against both tangible and intangible enemies, even when the odds appeared weighted against them. Rather than facing a ‘crisis’, it is perhaps more accurate to conceive of Edwardian Congregationalism as a component of the ‘church militant’ resolutely upholding the tenets of a faith honed to meet the challenges it faced, through a blending of Evangelical and ethical principles, and led by ministers and deacons who in their public roles, as revealed in Chapters 4 and 6, generally exemplified ‘firm convictions and evangelistic fervour’.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Hooper, *English Congregationalism*, 150.

¹¹¹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 7, 1908. Extract from a report delivered at the Church’s anniversary celebrations.

¹¹² CYB, 1949, 510. From the obituary of Rev. Noah Brewer.

Their resilience was impressive and they could still mobilise considerable numbers of supporters and sympathisers, notwithstanding concerns over the lethargy displayed by some. That said, in assessing their strength one aspect which did not receive the attention it deserved, at least in public, was the fact that many of those engaged in the fight were women. While 'the officers' were invariably men, women comprised the majority of 'other ranks' and consequently had first-hand experience of the enemy. Without their fighting spirit, many churches would have struggled to hold their own, let alone advance. On this, however, many leading Congregationalists remained silent, a missing, or perhaps more accurately, dormant discourse and one to which attention is given in the next chapter.

8. GENDER RELATIONS WITHIN CONGREGATIONALISM: A DORMANT DISCOURSE

Congregationalism and feminism

As Hampshire Congregationalists sought to come to terms with the increasingly turbulent socio-political milieu of the Edwardian era, whether harmoniously or aggressively, there was one aspect that was conspicuously kept at arms length, namely gender relations. This can be contrasted with wider society where they were increasingly being called into question by various factors.

First, there was the emergence of the so-called 'new woman' characterised by a greater degree of self-confidence and freedom than her Victorian predecessors. In an editorial from a January 1913 edition of the *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express* under the by-line "The Girl of Today" reference was made to:

Her mental training ... [that] made of her an entirely different being from the young woman of the previous generation who had received the shallow education of the Victorian period. She has grown up into a changed and changing world; she looks upon life from an independent point of view and realises its wider aspects.¹

For some this greater independence was symbolised by not only her intellectual capacity but also an 'excessive devotion to athletics and gymnastics'.²

A second factor was the campaign for women's suffrage with its moderate and militant wings led respectively by the National Union of Women's Suffrage

¹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, January 18, 1913.

² John Arlott, *The Oxford Companion to Sport and Games* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 32.

Societies [NUWSS], which eschewed violence and adopted peaceful methods of protest, and the Women's Political and Social Union, 'whose commitment to direct ... [action] brought them spectacularly into the public eye and prison cell'.³

Congregationalists took considerable interest in such matters, as evidenced by the topics discussed in their debating societies. In 1908, for example, the members of the Lymington Congregational Literary and Debating Society discussed the issue of women's suffrage and, as reported, this 'aroused the keenest interest, it being the first occasion in the history of the society that a debate had been opened by a lady speaker', Miss Wheeler.⁴ Rather paradoxically, however, the campaign does not appear to have given rise to any questioning, at least in public forums, of the position of women within their churches.

It is therefore noteworthy that in 1913 Boscombe's Congregational minister, Rev. Alfred Clegg, chaired a meeting of the Bournemouth branch of the NUWSS and provided, from a Christian perspective, a closely reasoned justification for giving women the vote. Describing himself as a 'Christian optimist':

... he believed that Christianity stood for the equality of men and women in soul value, in sacredness, and in individual rights as in the sight of God and man ... the apostle Paul had a good deal to answer for in the keeping back of women from taking a prominent part in the Church's life. Unfortunately statements of expediency were advocated by Paul in his time because of peculiar situations, and these expediencies had been made into principles.⁵

³ Krista Cowman, " 'We intend to show what Our Lord has done for women'; the Liverpool Church League for Women's Suffrage 1914-18," in *Studies in Church History 34: Gender and Christian Religion*, ed. R.N. Swanson (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 475.

⁴ *Lymington Chronicle*, March 12, 1908. From the press report there is no evidence of speakers seeking to make connections between developments in wider society and the dominant patriarchal paradigm within Congregationalism. Two years later, the subject was again debated, when 'Rose Helsby was in the chair and the first speaker was Miss Bateson, Secretary of the New Forest Women's Suffrage League'. *Lymington Chronicle*, March 10, 1910.

⁵ *Bournemouth Guardian*, May 25, 1912.

Asceticism in the Medieval Church and Puritanism had also suppressed 'the freedom of women', yet Christianity 'stood for the supreme value of the human soul, and he believed that was the supreme principle behind the women's movement'.⁶ However, nowhere in his reported remarks does he refer to the application of this principle to Congregationalism in general, or his church at Boscombe, where all the deacons were men, in particular.

A final factor was the growing recognition that women should be treated as equals to men and have enlarged opportunities for developing and applying their skills, thereby 'liberating them from stereotyped roles'.⁷ While those who subscribed to these views might still have been in a minority, holding them did represent a marked break with the Victorian era.

Nonetheless, traditional attitudes remained. For example, Dr Ahrens, in a talk given in 1910 to the members of London Street Mutual Improvement Society, began by suggesting:

that the purpose of a woman is to be a mother as the purpose of a fruit tree is to bear fruit. Nature has endowed her with not only the physical properties for having children, but also ... with all the necessary mental requirements for properly looking after and caring for the growth of the child.⁸

Later he attributed to women the virtues of 'loyalty, affection, unselfishness, bravery ... [and the] vices [of] meanness, vanity, love of adulation'. What he had to say was reported at length since the subject was, in the words of the newspaper, 'of

⁶ Ibid, May 25, 1912.

⁷ Brian Heeney, "The Beginnings of Church Feminism: Women and the Councils of the Church of England, 1897-1910," in *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930*, ed. Gail Malmgreen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 262.

⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 5, 1910.

inexhaustible interest'.⁹ The reactions of the audience are not known, but it can be assumed that many women, as well as men, would have been in sympathy with his point of view.

Another example comes from an item in the Avenue church magazine about the Portswood Mission, considered in Chapter 6. An anonymous contributor argued that 'the petrified indifference of the people', which had to be 'attacked', was 'worse among women than among men'.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, the following issue contained a vigorous rejoinder from 'A Woman Worker'. She pointed out that such views were 'very unfair to women' and continued:

As to their attendance at church, the following figures will speak for themselves: On Sunday, October 12th, at the Avenue church, the women and men occupying 28 pews were in the morning as 4 to 1, and in the evening 3 to 1, and on the following Thursday evening service the proportion of women to men was 6 to 1; whilst at Portswood on the succeeding Sunday evening there were present 15 women and 6 men, besides children. Also, two of the most successful branches of the work at Portswood are the Mothers' Meeting and Girls' Guild.¹¹

Although it is not known how far the attitude of the first contributor was common amongst men, this example provides a glimpse into the ongoing misogynistic orientation of males within Congregational churches.

It might also help to explain why Edwardian Congregationalists were little affected by, in a phrase coined in the 1960s, the 'first wave of feminism'. As Jocelyn Murray points out, while women had 'won respect' during the nineteenth century 'through their social involvement ... in the leading Nonconformist denominations ...

⁹ Ibid, March 5, 1910.

¹⁰ *Avenue Free Churchman*, October 1913, 4.

¹¹ Ibid, November 1913, 4.

no woman could hope to obtain a leadership role, except in the Salvation Army'.¹²

Moreover, in the words of Knight, the dominant view of Christian writers and leaders was that although women were 'spiritually equal' to men they were 'socially subordinate'.¹³

There had been, however, one notable attempt to generate debate on the status of women within Congregationalism at national level in the early 1890s. It was triggered by a letter from Frances Hallowes, the wife of a Congregational minister,¹⁴ to a newly launched Congregational newspaper. Headed: "Why are Women ignored by the Congregational Union? A woman's well grounded protest",¹⁵ she argued that women needed to be not only seen but also heard. A series of follow-up 'letters from ladies', mainly supporting her stance, led to her being invited to give a paper at the autumn assembly of the CUEW in 1891.¹⁶ She began by asserting that:

There can be no question of rivalry between the sexes in God's work but, "helpers in Christ Jesus", they partake equally of spiritual gifts. If women are

¹² Jocelyn Murray, "Gender Attitudes and the Contribution of Women to Evangelism and Ministry in the Nineteenth Century," in *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980*, ed. John Wolffe (London: SPCK, 1995), 111.

¹³ F. Knight, "'Male and Female He Created Them': Men, Women and the Question of Gender," in *Religion in Victorian Britain: Part V Culture and Empire*, ed. John Wolffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 1997), 25.

¹⁴ Frances' husband, Rev. J.F.T. Hallowes, was Principal of Hulme Cliff Missionary Training College in Derbyshire from 1895 to 1901.

¹⁵ *Independent*, October 17, 1890. At the time, Hallowes was a member of Carrs Lane Congregational Church in Birmingham. Later she wrote a book entitled, *Women and War: An Appeal to the Women of All Nations*, which was published in 1914. In it she highlighted the sufferings of women in war. She was also the author of a number of books on missionary work and was serving as a missionary in India when her husband died in 1917.

¹⁶ 'As a matter of special interest it should be recorded that not the least successful gathering [at the autumnal assembly] was the first women's meeting held in connection with the Union, over which Miss Mason presided, a paper being read by Mrs J.F.T. Hallowes on "Woman's Mission in the Church".' *CYB*, 1893, 5.

debarred from the exercise of the gift of the Holy Ghost in speaking or praying then the Church must suffer, for it is guilty of quenching the Spirit.¹⁷

In making a Biblical case for a higher profile for women, she quoted from the Creation account in Genesis, arguing that in it 'equality is clearly indicated' and referred to the critical roles which women, such as Mary and Lydia, played at key moments in the New Testament narratives. St Paul's injunction: ' "Let your women keep silence in the church, for it is a shame for women to speak," had merely a local application.'¹⁸ A Biblical emphasis on the equality of men and women took precedence. 'When two-thirds of those present [at services] are women, it cannot but be helpful that the truth should occasionally be presented through the medium of a woman's mind.'¹⁹ Thus, women should be given 'a part in the diaconate'.²⁰ However, she did not challenge the principle of an all-male pastorate.

Her paper prompted more supportive letters and the holding of women's meetings at subsequent autumn assemblies. Moreover, some Congregational leaders, such as Rev. J. Guinness Rogers, expressed their support for the participation of women in services and even ordination, while a number of women were co-opted onto the Council of the CUEW. However, after this auspicious start the vigour of the campaign at national level appears to have waned. Moreover, it would seem to have made little impact within Hampshire and, insofar as is known, elsewhere. Chadwick, for example, captured the frustration to which the exclusion of women from

¹⁷ Frances S. Hallows, "The Place & Service of Women in Our Churches", paper read at the Autumnal Session of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, October 1891 (London: James Clarke & Co, 1892), 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 5-6 and 27.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 33.

leadership positions gave rise by referring to one Yorkshire Congregationalist who lamented the fact that 'openings for women in church organisations were more limited than in other areas':

A woman may be a political lecturer, a social reformer, a trade union leader, a guardian of the poor, a member of the School Board, and may even assemble for Christian conference ... but let any-one suggest that she should sit in the diaconate, or be elected to the pastorate of a Congregational church, and the champions of the proprieties would lift their hands in pious horror.²¹

As late as 1912, a letter appeared in the *British Congregationalist* querying why, apart from a meeting for ministers' wives at the CUEW's spring assembly, there was nothing for women more generally.²² This was deemed to be 'something of an anomaly' and suggests that the women's meetings mentioned earlier had not been held for a number of years.

Although some Hampshire Congregationalists might have been in sympathy with Hallowes, the evidence is hard to find. Primary sources afford many insights into the involvement of women in church life, but there does not appear to have been any public discussion of gender relations within either the HCU or individual churches. That said, the considerable coverage of the activities of women in local newspapers does call into question Ruth Godden's comment that they were 'largely

²¹ *Yorkshire Congregational Yearbook*, 1894, 16, quoted in Chadwick, "Church and People," 166.

²² 'Sir - I see that there is to be again this year a meeting for minister's wives in connection with the Congregational Union Assembly. So far as can be found from the programme published in your issue of this week, this appears to be the only women's meeting arranged for. There is, it seems a meeting for Young People, but women as a class appear to be unrepresented. This has struck me as something of an anomaly for several years and I think that I may claim in this that I speak for many of the women in our churches. Congregationalism has never been lacking in able and devoted women, and is at the present time well represented in the multifarious branches of women's work, in the mission field, in the slum settlement, and in all kinds of social, educational, and evangelical labours. Do our women workers receive quite adequate recognition at our denominational gatherings?' *British Congregationalist*, May 9, 1912, 318.

absent from contemporary press reports of chapel activities'²³ and may indicate a greater appreciation of their worth as well as their increased visibility.

It was also the case that, as Godden does indicate, 'women' were by no means a homogeneous group, but 'what bound them together ... was a commitment ... to a chapel ... with its doctrinal imperatives, religious activities, financial anxieties, and social concerns'.²⁴ Thus, church life helped to shape the identity of many Edwardian women by offering them an outlet for their talents and a release from the constraints of the domestic realm.

The main objective of this chapter is to review various aspects of what is characterised as a dormant discourse of Edwardian Congregationalism. Particular attention is given to the presence and standing of women in Hampshire's Congregational churches; realms of church life in which the contribution of women helped to ensure a fulfilling experience for all concerned; the ministry of ministers' wives; and some reasons as to why, in the main, the discourse remained dormant. As indicated in Chapter 2, the historiography on this subject is extremely limited as far as national studies are concerned.

With respect to local studies, Doyle makes reference to the position of women, but his observations that they only 'fulfilled duties appropriate to their sphere' and 'in general ... were excluded or patronised' are, in the light of the evidence from Hampshire, rather narrow and overly pessimistic.²⁵ They can also be

²³ Ruth Godden, "The Women of Winchester's Chapels 1851-1901" (MA diss., University of Winchester, 2007), 3.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

²⁵ Doyle, "Congregational Culture," 325-6.

contrasted with those of Rimmington who, in asserting that many Congregationalists were 'of strongly independent mind', suggests that 'among the more vociferous [church] members were women who had increased their proportion of the membership'.²⁶ However, he only provides one example to back up his claim and does not explore the issue of gender relations in any detail.

In what follows, the primary focus is on the public roles of women within Congregationalism as opposed to the important part they played in domestic religion. There are occasional sightings of the latter in the source material, but it is largely hidden from view. It is likely, however, that the recollections of J. D. Jones regarding his mother would have been replicated in many Congregational households. Having lost his father when he was five he refers to his mother, Catherine, as having more than average 'natural ability'; 'individuality'; 'amazing courage'; 'a deep, genuine piety'; and a sense of humour.²⁷ She exemplified the virtue of female piety and the sanctification of the home and domesticity more generally, influential legacies of the Victorian era, to which McLeod, Brown and others have drawn attention.²⁸ In the words of Brown, 'piety was pure, undefiled, chaste, soft and homely' and was an antidote to the manly vices of 'temptations to drink, uncouth speech, physical brutishness and dissipation'.²⁹ Thus, it had an important part to play

²⁶ Rimmington, "Congregationalism in Leicester," 37.

²⁷ 'She kept open house and had a genial welcome for all and sundry ... She loved games ... And with all this she united a deep, genuine piety. There was nothing dull or gloomy about our home life, but plenty of fun and laughter ... Every morning mother would gather us together for family prayers. We used to read the verses of chosen scripture in turn and then mother herself would act as priest and commend us all in prayer to Almighty God.' J.D. Jones, *Three Score Years and Ten* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), 15-16.

²⁸ McLeod, *Religion and Society*; and Brown, *Religion and Society*.

²⁹ Brown, *Religion and Society*, 69.

in moulding the respectability associated with churchgoing. Although, in many Congregational families, fathers would have taken the lead in saying grace and leading family prayers, 'the religiosity of women was paramount to the evangelical scheme for moral revolution'.³⁰ Indeed, when speaking at the inaugural services of the 1912/13 session of Fareham Congregational Young People's Society, Rev. James Trebilco argued that having surrendered themselves whole-heartedly to the 'old Gospel of Christ' members 'should follow the best lead available such as that provided by a Godly mother'.³¹

Such observations offer complementary insights into those aspects of gender relations and the contribution of women to church life examined below. Women might not have enjoyed equal status with men in respect of leadership but they sought to compensate for this by exemplifying those Christian values of service, companionship, righteousness and sincerity to which all aspired.

The presence and standing of Congregational women

It was almost certainly the case that during the Edwardian era, as McLeod points out for the nineteenth century, 'women attended church services in greater numbers than men',³² with 'most congregations [being] highly feminised in composition'.³³

Moreover, the preponderance of women was also reflected in the composition of

³⁰ Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 59.

³¹ *Hampshire Post*, September 13, 1912.

³² McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 157.

³³ Brown, *Religion and Society*, 30. These comments confirm the example of the gender mix of Avenue congregations provided earlier in the chapter.

Congregational church rolls. As mentioned in Chapter 3, data from the three Hampshire churches studied in depth confirm David Thompson’s observation that: ‘I have never seen a church membership roll where the number of men exceeded the number of women; and in my experience ratios of 2:1 in favour of women are not uncommon.’³⁴ These ratios are also little different from Field’s findings presented in his extensive work on the membership of the Free Churches.³⁵

Background information on the women members of the three Hampshire churches is provided in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Women members of three Hampshire Congregational churches 1901 and 1911

Category	Avenue		London Street		Victoria Road	
	1901	1911	1901	1911	1901	1911
Married to church members	39	52	60	57	22	21
Married to non church members	14	19	11	17	6	5
Widowed	12	19	14	16	12	8
Single aged 29 and under	35	20	27	22	15	12
Single aged 30 and over	23	51	17	22	15	14
Totals	123	161	129	134	70	60

Data from the 1901 and 1911 censuses confirm that, in keeping with the norms of the period, most married and widowed women members did not have paid occupations. Their principal domain was the home and in keeping with the middle-class ambience of many Congregational churches, they frequently had one or more live-in servants

³⁴ Thompson, *Decline of Congregationalism*, 11.

³⁵ Clive Field, “Adam and Eve: Gender in the English Free Church Constituency, 1650-1980,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44, no.1 (1993): 63-79; and Clive Field, “Zion’s People: Who were the English Nonconformists? Part 1: Gender, Age and Ethnicity,” *Local Historian* 40, no.2 (2010): 91-112.

to bear the brunt of domestic chores.³⁶ Thus, they often had the time and energy, as well as the desire, to devote to church affairs. Of the single women, a substantial number were in paid employment which inevitably restricted the part they could play. That said, the skills required for their jobs, such as teaching and dressmaking, could be put to good use.

Regardless of their backgrounds and employment status, membership afforded women access to the decision-making processes of their church, including the right to attend church meetings and to vote. However, unlike men, there were constraints on their participation. It is probable that, as Godden asserts, women were less likely than men to attend church meetings and to express their views.³⁷ How far this was the case, however, is difficult to assess due to the limited information provided in the relevant sources.³⁸

With respect to the involvement of women in choosing a new minister, there is some evidence to indicate that until the Edwardian era in certain Hampshire churches, women were excluded. For example, in his history of Gosport Congregational Church, John Hern highlights two interesting features of Rev. Robert Teasdale's appointment to the pastorate in 1902. First, women members appear to have been allowed to participate for the first time. Second, unhappy with the number who had voted on the initial resolution to invite him to become minister, Teasdale

³⁶ See Table 3.17.

³⁷ Godden, "Women of Winchester's Chapels," 13.

³⁸ Minute books, for example, simply indicate numbers attending meetings, not the gender mix.

requested a postal ballot of all church members and subscribers (i.e. seat holders, who were not church members), female as well as male.³⁹

In this instance, and in votes elsewhere and on other matters, it is not unreasonable to assume that many women members would have taken their lead from men, with wives deferring to the views of their husbands and unmarried women and widows to those of leading male figures in the church. This, however, must remain a conjecture since no evidence of gender-based voting preferences has come to light.

Turning to the office of deacon, here issue must be taken with Kaye's contention that since 'the way had been prepared when women were admitted to the Congregational Union Assembly in 1892; in many churches they were already serving as deacons' prior to 1914.⁴⁰ As mentioned in Chapter 4, only one example of a female deacon in pre-First World War Hampshire, Edith Sharp of Lymington, has been found. Thus, if deacons wanted a female perspective on particular issues, they had to consult either their wives or the leading members of women's organisations within the church.

Notwithstanding their democratic predilections, albeit qualified by theocratic imperatives, in general Hampshire's Congregational churches still reflected the patriarchal norms which, although increasingly being called into question, continued to prevail in many spheres of Edwardian society. In the words of Hallows: 'We of

³⁹ John Hern, *A History of the Dissenting Independent Congregational: Bury Road United Reformed Church in Gosport 1663-1986* (Gosport: Author, 1989), 21. The postal ballot required the distribution of 271 ballot papers. 261 voted yes; 3 no; 1 was neutral; and 6 were left blank. Unfortunately, there is no indication of the number of women who voted in this poll.

⁴⁰ Kaye, "Ministry of Women," 507. No examples of female deacons are provided.

the Free Churches have great freedom, but in this particular [the status of women] we have not made use of it.⁴¹ How Congregational women and indeed men felt about this can only be surmised in the absence of surveys and public pronouncements or debates on the issue. One suspects that most would not have wished to upset the existing state of affairs by arguing for a higher profile for women.

However, attitudes and practices were changing as the example from Gosport and Sharp's appointment illustrate.⁴² Yet the pace of change was relatively slow by comparison with what was happening within wider society. In this respect at least, there was little difference between Congregationalism and the Established Church which, as Heeney suggests, was 'very reluctant to encourage initiative and independence amongst its female adherents'.⁴³

Nonetheless, nothing could detract from the fact that churches depended for their well-being, and even survival, on the willingness of women to play their part to the full. This applied as much to adherents as church members. Even if the former were debarred from church meetings and their attendance at services was less frequent, they were often prepared to participate in various realms and may well have felt more comfortable in less formal settings. Indeed, there is considerable

⁴¹ Hallowes, "Place & Service of Women," 25.

⁴² Prior to her appointment to the diaconate in 1910, Sharp had been church treasurer, a post almost invariably held by a male deacon, since 1899.

⁴³ Heeney, "Beginnings of Church Feminism," 261.

evidence to support Bebbington's view that in churches 'women of all classes found much to satisfy their aspirations' as committed, practically minded, Christians.⁴⁴

Women's realms

In which realms of church life did women have the greatest opportunity to make their mark? Was it the case that, as Doyle suggests, most women only performed 'duties appropriate to their sphere'?⁴⁵ What did men expect women to contribute to church life? There are at least ten realms that need to be considered in the light of these questions and which go some way towards indicating the potential substance of the discourse of gender relations.

First, women were in great demand as Sunday school teachers. In the words of Clyde Binfield, the Sunday school was 'for women of all ages ... an unassailable sphere of influence, responsibility and development'.⁴⁶ Here they were able to engage in an activity which, as highlighted in Chapter 5, was of great importance for the self-esteem and indeed future of churches. Sunday schools remained high-profile institutions in every community with up to 90 per cent of children receiving religious instruction on a weekly basis and with Congregational churches playing a key part in this provision.⁴⁷ Interestingly, from the partial information regarding the gender mix

⁴⁴ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 129.

⁴⁵ Doyle, "Congregational Culture," 325.

⁴⁶ Clyde Binfield, "The Purley Way for Children," in *Studies in Church History 31: The Church and Childhood*, ed. by Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 462.

⁴⁷ Field, "Quantifying Religious Belonging".

of scholars, there does not appear to have been a bias towards girls, at least in the younger age groups.

As Godden observes, Sunday school teaching brought 'chapel women into significant contact with children ... many of whom may have had no other experience of the culture and beliefs of nonconformity'.⁴⁸ Some leading Congregationalists wanted to extend this contact by making home visits to the parents of scholars. A more radical proposal was to afford Sunday school scholars from so-called 'non-Christian' homes the opportunity of experiencing a Christian home environment where women 'were regarded as having special qualities which placed them at the fulcrum of family sanctity'.⁴⁹ At the HCU's autumn gathering in 1910 Percy Randall, one of Above Bar's deacons, argued in an address on the subject of "The Scholar with no Christian Home", that Christian homes should be thrown open 'for the use of Sunday School teachers and their scholars, while married teachers with no children might receive the children in the same way,' bringing them 'under more constant Christian influence than was possible in existing conditions'.⁵⁰

An impression of the qualities that women brought to Sunday school work can be gained from those highlighted at a presentation made in 1912 to Catherine Edney, a longstanding teacher at London Street Sunday school. As it was put in an address contained in a leather-bound album, with which she was presented for

⁴⁸ Godden, "Women of Winchester's Chapels," 63.

⁴⁹ Callum G Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), 59.

⁵⁰ *Lymington Chronicle*, 6 October 1910. For a fuller discussion of this and related proposals, see Ottewill, "Congregational Sunday Schools"; and Ottewill, "Congregationalism and the Young".

rendering 'faithful and devoted service' for over forty years, her 'genial presence, ... kindly disposition and ... deep interest ... in the welfare of young people' had contributed much to the high standards the school had attained.⁵¹ Clearly, her involvement was exceptional, but it was indicative of what was owed to many women in this realm of church life. This was acknowledged at a meeting to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the small Congregational church at Burton Green, near Christchurch, with the chairman, W.F. Woodcock, a deacon from Boscombe, referring 'to the [positive] influence of women, ... in ... Sunday schools'.⁵²

However, while women's nurturing skills were in great demand this did not always extend to them occupying leadership positions within the Sunday school, even though some taught in day schools and may well have had more to offer in this regard than some men. For example, at Avenue in 1906, although 15 out of 24 teachers were women, the posts of Sunday school superintendent, secretary, treasurer, auditor, organist and librarian were all held by men. Likewise, in places with Sunday school unions, such as Romsey, the roles of inspector and examiner were exclusively male preserves. It would seem that the incongruity, and indeed inequity, of this situation remained unquestioned amongst leading Hampshire Congregationalists. Once again, Edith Sharp proved to be something of a trail-blazer, serving as superintendent of Lymington's Congregational Sunday school during the Edwardian era. However, she was very much 'the exception that proved the rule'.

⁵¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, April 6, 1912.

⁵² *Christchurch Times*, September 17, 1910.

A second realm for women was the plethora of other organisations targeted at children and young people, including the Band of Hope, CE and Young Peoples' Institutes and Guilds. In these women often helped and might even serve as office holders and speak at meetings. At Fareham, for example, the treasurer of the Congregational Band of Hope was Miss Rich and the registrars, Mrs Neville and Miss Fry,⁵³ while at Petersfield the secretary was Miss Street.⁵⁴ At a New Year gathering in 1907, Mrs Boys of Dumpford House delivered 'a stirring address' in which 'she exhorted the children to be true to their pledge and to give their young hearts to the Lord'.⁵⁵

Some churches, having established a local Boys' Life Brigade Company, set up the equivalent for girls. In Basingstoke, for example, a Girls' Guild was started in October 1908 on the grounds that 'there ought to be something for the *Girls* at London Street' [emphasis in the original] since the 'boys seem to have everything!' Intended for girls over the age of 14, the aim was 'to have very happy evenings together and ... particularly ... to brighten the lives of those who do not see much sunshine in their homes'.⁵⁶ By 1909 it had 70 members and in 1914 it was reported to be still 'doing useful work ... [with] classes being started for cooking, hygiene and needlework'.⁵⁷ Here the services of women as leaders as well as assistants were required if the initiatives were to prosper.

⁵³ *Hampshire Post*, April 19, 1912.

⁵⁴ *Hants and Sussex News*, May 13, 1903.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, January 16, 1907.

⁵⁶ *Basingstoke & District Congregational Magazine*, October 1908, 3.

⁵⁷ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, April 11, 1914.

Third, women played an important part in the musical life of churches. This included both membership of church choirs, which Doyle identifies as one of the 'appropriate spheres' for women,⁵⁸ and performing in the many entertainments that churches organised on a regular basis, such as London Street's PSE mentioned in Chapter 5, or at church anniversaries and public recognition meetings. Press reports of these occasions often provide considerable detail as to not only what was performed but also the identities of the performers, both singers and instrumentalists.⁵⁹ Here the evidence confirms Godden's contention that women 'brought musical accomplishments from the home to the chapel'.⁶⁰ Furthermore, such talents enabled women to excel in this realm of church life. As a report of a concert organised by Petersfield Congregational Church in aid of the Manse Fund indicated: 'The ladies played their parts with special distinction and deserve great credit as it was mainly due to their efforts that the entertainment was so well organised and carried to such a successful issue, financially and otherwise.'⁶¹

It is also noteworthy that women were, on occasions, guest singers at gatherings of the Men's Own Brotherhood. For example, in January 1906, at a meeting in Romsey, 'Miss Dora Harvey sang with her accustomed success "I need

⁵⁸ Doyle, "Congregational Culture," 325.

⁵⁹ For example, at Avenue's seventeenth anniversary celebrations in 1910: 'The musical programme opened with a pianoforte duet, "Peer Gynt Suite" (Grieg), which was excellently played by Miss M. Mullins, A.R.C.M., and Mr J.E. Pearson and Madame Grace Hobbs was much applauded for an effective rendering of two songs by Guy D'Hardelot, "I think", and "Until". "The Legend Beautiful" was recited by Mrs J. Eathorne in a manner which elicited the warmest praise ... Miss Cummins, Miss Griffith, Miss Nicholl, Miss Boswell, Miss Douglas, Miss Veal and Mrs Wells sang Mendelssohn's well known composition "Lift Thine Eyes" ("Elijah").' *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 26, 1910.

⁶⁰ Godden, "Women of Winchester's Chapels," 15.

⁶¹ *Hants and Sussex News*, February 25, 1903.

Thee every hour” and “Behold I stand at the door”.’ Moreover, as reported, the Chairman commented that ‘he was sure everybody was pleased to see such a gathering of ladies with them that afternoon’,⁶² an example of an open meeting to which reference was made in Chapter 5.

Fourth, through participation in church-affiliated self-improvement organisations women, as well as men, were able to engage in what today would be called ‘lifelong learning’. For example, in 1902/3, of the 88 members of London Street’s Mutual Improvement Society, 47 were women. The programme for that year comprised ‘one social evening, one evening for holiday papers, six discussions, and nine lectures ... [all] of a high standard’.⁶³ Thus, Doyle’s observation that ‘in most churches female members were offered little in the way of literary, civic or political education’ undoubtedly requires some qualification.⁶⁴ It would seem that in Edwardian Hampshire women were as keen as men to take advantage of the opportunities for personal development that such organisations provided.

Fifth, women played an important part in attending to the catering requirements for church events, another of Doyle’s ‘appropriate spheres’ along with ‘arranging flowers for the church’.⁶⁵ Indeed, one gets the impression that for Congregationalists, feeding the stomach was almost as important as feeding the soul and it was the responsibility of women to ensure that as much attention was lavished on this aspect of outreach as it was on preaching the gospel. Thus, at Avenue’s

⁶² *Romsey Advertiser*, February 2, 1906.

⁶³ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 28, 1903.

⁶⁴ Doyle, “Congregational Culture,” 325.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

seventeenth anniversary celebrations, 'refreshments were served under the direction of the Ladies' Committee'.⁶⁶ Similarly, when a church hosted an HCU gathering the burden of attending to the housekeeping arrangements generally fell on the women. For example, a report of the HCU's 1908 spring meeting at Fareham mentions that:

At 5.30 the committee, ministers and delegates sat down to tea in the Congregational schoolroom, which had been decorated for the occasion by the ladies of the local Congregational Guild ... who also carried out the arrangements for the tea.⁶⁷

This was a two-day event, with women being much in evidence in ensuring that the catering needs of the delegates were met.⁶⁸

Sixth, although women were generally excluded from leadership positions within the church, they still had opportunities for demonstrating their organisational and managerial skills. Most churches had groups run by women for women. These included Bible classes, prayer meetings and sewing circles⁶⁹ and, in the Bournemouth area, organisations modelled on the Men's Own Brotherhood, such as a Congregational Sisterhood at Winton and a Women's Pleasant Monday Afternoon Society at Charminster Road.⁷⁰ Appropriately, they also included overseas missionary support societies, one field in which there was a real need for women, since 'in many parts of the world it was impossible for men to preach to women'.⁷¹

⁶⁶ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 26, 1910.

⁶⁷ *Hampshire Post*, May 1, 1908.

⁶⁸ Similarly, when Havant Congregational Church hosted the spring gathering of the HCU in 1912, the ladies of the church were complimented on the manner in which at 'the public tea ... [they] artistically arranged the tables' and attended to 'the wants of everyone'. *Hampshire Post*, April 26, 1912.

⁶⁹ Godden, "Women of Winchester's Chapels," 61.

⁷⁰ *Bournemouth Guardian*, February 8, 1908.

⁷¹ McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 165.

Such groups enabled women to prove their competence as administrators and leaders.

In some churches this aspect of the ministry of women was overseen by a special committee. For example, in April 1909, Avenue established a Ladies Committee consisting of the deacons' wives; twelve women elected by ballot from the church membership; and interestingly six ladies, who were not church members, co-opted by the elected committee. As explained:

... [it] will then elect all other Committees which concern ladies only, and will be responsible for all church work usually carried on by the ladies. It will, we trust, do the former work more efficiently, and also find new openings for new Committees to develop our resources.⁷²

The equivalent Committee of Gentlemen, however, was 'to deal with all questions of finance', thereby reinforcing the continued exclusion of women from managing the financial affairs of the church. Nevertheless, it was expected that the services of women would be utilised to the full when it came to raising money.

Thus, a seventh realm of women's work was to take responsibility for bazaars and other fund-raising initiatives and to bear the brunt of the effort involved in ensuring their success, another 'appropriate sphere' for women identified by Doyle.⁷³

Godden likewise argues that: 'While the female vote may in reality have been illusory ... actual female power – if not authority – came to the fore by way of the crucial role women played in chapel fundraising activities.'⁷⁴ Indeed, most

Congregational churches had a Ladies Working Party or Meeting, the primary

⁷² *Avenue Free Churchman*, March 1909, unpaginated.

⁷³ Doyle, "Congregational Culture," 326.

⁷⁴ Godden, "Women of Winchester's Chapels," 16.

purpose of which was, as its title suggests, the production of items for sale at fund-raising events.

Although relatively rare, there are tributes in the public domain to the capabilities of women in this sphere. Thus, in reporting London Street's Grand "Reformation Times" bazaar, the *Hants and Berks Gazette* felt moved to comment that:

Assisted by a Committee of gentlemen as far as their comparatively limited capacities enabled them to help in an affair which depends largely for its success upon women's *skill and industry*, the ladies worked at their task with such remarkable enthusiasm and unity that we may safely aver that few undertakings of this kind have had a more brilliant issue [emphasis added].⁷⁵

As well as being a handsome acknowledgement of the part played by women in securing the bazaar's successful outcome, it is noteworthy that a dismissive tone was adopted towards the contribution of men in this regard.⁷⁶

As a second example, at the opening of Peartree Green's annual bazaar in 1906, the church secretary, Mr Henderson, after explaining that the church had lost members through removals and that 'the work of preparation was almost entirely carried out by the Ladies Working Party', praised the ladies for 'nobly' responding 'to the heavier responsibility placed upon them'. He also expressed what was undoubtedly an enlightened opinion for the time that 'men might learn many lessons from' them.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 7, 1903.

⁷⁶ The bazaar raised £366 (or £1500 in today's terms based on the retail prices index or over £7000 based on average earnings) and was such a popular attraction that it was extended for a further day. For additional details, see Ottewill, "Aspiring Congregationalism," 305-17.

⁷⁷ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 24, 1906. A further example was an arts and crafts exhibition organised by Freemantle Congregational Church in 1911 'to endeavour to obtain about £200 to reduce the debt incurred by the building of a new schoolroom'. Women played a central role in producing most of the goods for sale and acting

During an address to the Romsey and District Free Church Council in 1912, Rev. I. Maldwyn Jones, Albion's minister, also made reference to the dependence of churches on women for their financial wellbeing. In dealing with criticisms levelled at the Church by outsiders, he commented that:

They did not get half the men but they got the women; and ... they could not carry on the work but for the women. If he wanted money he turned to the women; he told them some time ago he wanted £100, and they brought him £110. (hear hear).⁷⁸

Such fund-raising related to not only the local church but also bazaars held annually on behalf of the HCU. For example, one of the objectives of the Grand "Reformation Times" bazaar was to raise money to assist 'in the support of the smaller churches which ... [were] unable to stand alone' and the remuneration of evangelists who did 'such good work in the villages of the county'.⁷⁹ Thus, women played an important part in facilitating the continued presence of Congregationalism in rural areas.

An eighth realm was the involvement of women in the vitally important pastoral work of the church. Although, as highlighted in Chapter 4, ministers were expected to undertake home visits, they frequently needed women to be their 'eyes and ears' in identifying when these were required and to assist more generally in this extremely sensitive aspect of Christian ministry. Indeed, they were often the principal providers of personal care and support. At Andover Congregational Church the role was formalised through the appointment of six deaconesses, elected each year by the church members. The innovation dated from 1875 and, *inter alia*,

as stallholders and they were also to the fore in organising the event with the two 'energetic hon. secretaries' both being women. *Ibid*, April 29, 1911.

⁷⁸ *Hampshire Independent*, January 13, 1912.

⁷⁹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, May 25, 1901.

their duties were: 'to visit the sick and the poor of the Church and assist the Pastor in meeting the needs of those necessitous in money or in kind as their condition may require and the Church Funds admit'.⁸⁰ Similarly, London Street had a system of lady visitors, to support the minister in dealing with cases of 'illness or trouble'⁸¹ and at Avenue women took a leading role in the Portswood Mission's Guild of Help, considered in Chapter 6.

Although Doyle acknowledges that such social and philanthropic work enabled 'middle class women ... [to become] involved more directly in the church', unlike Godden he does not point out that it brought them face to face with 'areas of deprivation' and a world with which they would otherwise have had no contact.⁸² Indeed, it can be claimed that without the willingness of women to engage in good works, application of certain precepts of the social gospel would have been, at best, muted and, at worst, non-existent. In this respect at least, as observed by Rev. William Pedr Williams from Lower Clapton, a speaker at Jewry Street's anniversary in 1902, Congregationalists needed to emulate the Roman Catholic Church, which 'through many of her women ... [exhibited] considerable sympathy with human need'.⁸³

⁸⁰ Andover Congregational Church Meeting Book 1871-1890, HRO 42M83/3. They also served as 'a permanent committee to take the initiative in arranging for the social gatherings held in connection with the church in which the services of ladies are particularly required and to supervise the regular duties of the Chapel Keeper and generally to undertake whatever it may be especially appropriate that ladies should do as the Church or the Pastor or deacons may desire from time to time.'

⁸¹ *Basingstoke & District Congregational Magazine*, October 1908, 4. There was one visitor for each of the 20 districts into which Basingstoke was divided. A number of other churches, such as East Cliff, had similar arrangements.

⁸² Doyle, "Congregational Culture," 325; and Godden, "Women of Winchester's Chapels," 63.

⁸³ *Hampshire Chronicle*, November 1, 1902.

Ninth, attention needs to be given to public worship and the existence of the so-called 'sacred partition' establishing parallel religious worlds for men and women.⁸⁴ Although it was still extremely rare in Congregational churches to find women leading services, it was not unknown. For example, in June 1908 at Whitchurch Congregational Church the service was conducted by Mrs Annie Williams. The daughter of James Richards, 'she had an easy and natural way of addressing her hearers, and a thorough understanding of the subject she takes in hand, the result being that her discourse lives in the memory of her hearers'.⁸⁵ On this occasion it was the fall of the walls of Jericho, a metaphor, perhaps, for traditional gender divisions within Congregationalism! In early 1913, Mrs Sydney Watson conducted an eight-day mission in Overton. This was well attended and proved to be 'a time of quickening spiritual refresh[ment], with her visit being 'much appreciated'.⁸⁶ Such examples lend support to Kaye's assertion that: 'During the first decade of the twentieth century, a few women began to preach and undertake other ministerial tasks in Congregational churches.'⁸⁷ They also indicate the direction in which progressive thought within Congregationalism was moving.

Last, alongside their preaching roles, there are examples from Edwardian Hampshire of women's involvement in church extension. In the Basingstoke area, a number were active as village workers, one of whom was Miss Sarah Jane Wallis. A member of a leading family in the town, she did not formally join London Street until

⁸⁴ Godden, "Women of Winchester's Chapels," 37.

⁸⁵ *Andover Advertiser*, June 5, 1908.

⁸⁶ *Basingstoke & District Congregational Magazine*, February 1913, 4.

⁸⁷ Kaye, "Ministry of Women," 509.

1905, but for many years previously she had taken 'a heartfelt interest in ... the good work in the cottage and farm meetings' which generally preceded the erection of a permanent place of worship. Her involvement extended to making donations towards the cost of their construction. In the case of Farleigh Congregational chapel, for example, which was built and opened in 1906, she donated half the cost. As Mayoress of Basingstoke, at the time, she conducted the opening ceremony and indicated that she wished to ensure that it was as easy for 'those who live in villages as well as in towns to hear the Gospel of the grace of God'. She ended by saying: 'May this simple building serve our day and generation and may many learn spiritual lessons within it to prepare them for the time when shall be fulfilled the word spoken "I saw no temple therein."' ⁸⁸ In 1913, having been attentive to the spiritual needs of the village of Ellisfield for a number of years, she paid for 'a wooden building capable of accommodating about hundred people'. At the opening ceremony, a large number 'assembled in front of the building, and after expressing the pleasure it gave her to take this part in the religious life of Ellisfield ... [she] opened the door and the people entered the chapel, when a short dedicatory service was conducted by Mr Gage of Basingstoke'.⁸⁹ Thus, on this occasion, leading the act of worship was still seen as a male preserve.

Another female benefactor was Mrs Cooper who donated £1000 to 'provide the first impetus and encouragement to go ahead' with the re-building of the

⁸⁸ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, September 8, 1906.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, September 27, 1913.

Congregational church in the Winton area of Bournemouth.⁹⁰ She laid the foundation stone and on the opening day 'sent a cheque for £200 to help them along'.⁹¹ As these examples illustrate, the provision of generous financial assistance in the cause of church extension was a sphere in which women could also make their mark.

Furthermore, as in the case of Sarah Wallis, women were sometimes called upon to open new facilities and to speak on such occasions. In 1907, the Mayoress of Southampton, Mrs Richard Andrews, accepted an invitation to open Kingsfield's new class and Dorcas Rooms and used the opportunity to highlight matters of concern to her:

They wanted the work of the Sunday school taken up in a more whole-hearted manner ... for in the present day there was too little of self-sacrificing devotion, because people were against sacrificing their comfort ... [she] went on to speak of the importance of keeping in touch with scholars after they had passed the stage of childhood and referring to the Dorcas Rooms said she could imagine the ladies ... working at their needles for the purpose of wiping off the remainder of the debt. The ladies deserved a comfortable room ... for what would the church, or gentlemen, do without the ladies? (laughter).⁹²

Hence the opening ceremony provided Mrs Andrews with a public platform from which she could take advantage.⁹³

Looked at in the round, as Hallowes argued:

⁹⁰ *Bournemouth Guardian*, September 14, 1912.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, June 28, 1913.

⁹² *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, April 27, 1907.

⁹³ Another example was Mrs John Gammon who in April 1903 laid the foundation stone of East Meon Congregational Church's new schoolroom. She and her husband both donated £10 towards the building fund and 'she sincerely trusted that the children instructed in that building would in early life be led to Christ'. *Hants and Sussex News*, April 22, 1903.

The many forms of service which are already undertaken in connection with our churches by women are acknowledged to be indispensable. These will be greatly enlarged and improved if those who are engaged feel that they are trusted and confided in by the churches, and *expected* to take their part, not only in what we call philanthropical, but also in the spiritual department.⁹⁴

She was also keen to see women serving as church representatives at denominational gatherings. Consequently she would have been pleased that in Hampshire a few women did represent their churches at the HCU's half-yearly gatherings. For example, at the 1903 autumn meetings held in Southampton, the representatives of Above Bar included Miss K. Hawkins and Mrs H.G. Ashdown; of Albion, Miss Barling and Miss Vincent; and of Kingsfield, Mrs Cook, the wife of the minister. The sole representative of Lymington Congregational Church was the redoubtable Edith Sharp. However, it would appear that their presence did not influence the setting of the agenda and 'constantly recurring women's work ... [was] almost unnoticed, if not ignored'.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, attendance at these events would have enabled women to familiarise themselves with issues confronting the denomination at county level. Although the extent to which they participated in discussions is not known, their presence was undoubtedly of symbolic importance.

Alongside the contribution of women in general, in many churches one woman, the wife of the minister, had a very distinctive role to play. Whether or not she chose to be in the limelight depended upon her personality, family commitments, health and expectations of church members. Yet 'behind the scenes' or 'front of

⁹⁴ Hallowes, "Place & Service of Women," 36.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 37.

house' the part she played in her husband's ministry and that of the church more widely could be a substantial one.

Ministers' wives⁹⁶

Although there was little, if any, formal discussion of the role of ministers' wives in Edwardian Hampshire at either county or local level or indeed guidance on how they should conduct themselves, there were frequent references to their involvement in church life at anniversaries and events marking the start and finish of a pastorate by church members or their husbands or both. In 1910, at the end of Alexander Gibson's very successful ministry at Charminster Road, church members passed a resolution which included the following:

We are also deeply indebted to Mrs Gibson who has been such a splendid worker and faithful helpmeet to Mr Gibson in his ministry and work. We cannot estimate the effect of her services and her labours amongst the Women's and other societies have endeared her to all with whom she came into contact.⁹⁷

These sentiments were echoed by her husband, who commented that 'without his wife he should not have been able to do the work he had, for she in the home had done a great deal of Free Church work'.⁹⁸ In Gibson's official obituary it is recorded that his wife, Eleanor, was 'for forty-one years ... his devoted helper'.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ For a more detailed consideration of this topic, see Roger Ottewill, "The Woman of the Manse: Recognising the Contribution of the Wives of Congregational Pastors in Edwardian Hampshire," *Congregational History Society Magazine* 6, no.6 (2012): 309-18.

⁹⁷ Charminster Road Congregational Church Meeting Minute Book. DHC NP26/CM/1/1.

⁹⁸ *Bournemouth Guardian*, December 3, 1910.

⁹⁹ CYB, 1948, 494.

In a similar vein, Lewis Lasseter, the remembrancer of Havant

Congregational Church, wrote in glowing terms of Rev. Edward Kirby's wife:

... [she] was the pastor's ideal wife and helpmeet. Compact of courage, good sense, keen wit and good humour. All wrapped up in the kindest of hearts. Her husband was always the first to pay tribute to her sane Scottish judgement to which he would constantly defer. In all things connected with women's work in the Church she took her rightful place as president and leader.¹⁰⁰

Here the reference to 'women's work' betrays, perhaps inadvertently, the notion of separate male and female spheres of activity within churches, a legacy of Victorian attitudes.

At Rev. Thomas Lee Hutson's recognition as Petersfield's Congregational minister, Rev. Walter Strange, a Presbyterian minister from Birmingham, 'testified to the worth of Mrs Hutson, who had been a great help to her husband in his work at his previous charge, Watery Lane Church. During Hutson's first year at Petersfield, his wife, who had clearly been destined to play a significant role in church affairs, died. Aged only 39 she had already established a Ladies' Guild and her funeral was 'an unmistakable tribute to the place the deceased lady had won in the hearts of those who had been associated with her in any way'.¹⁰¹

As a final example, at Overton, Mary Ann, the wife of James Richards, was frequently praised for her various contributions to her husband's ministry. In 1901 at a gathering to commemorate the ninth anniversary of Richards' pastorate, all the praise applied as much to his 'estimable wife' as himself: 'They have won a well-

¹⁰⁰ Lewis Lasseter, *These Fifty Years 1891-1941 Some Reminiscences of Havant Congregational Church* (Havant: Havant United Reformed Church, 1991), 19, quoted in Ottewill, "Woman of the Manse," 310.

¹⁰¹ *Hants and Sussex News*, June 28, 1911.

merited renown for hospitality, geniality, and, better still, for the sweet words of comfort and faith with which they have solaced the afflicted and troubled.¹⁰² While in 1906 at a meeting to celebrate the fourteenth anniversary of their arrival in the village, one of the speakers, a missionary, Miss Tull, observed that: 'Mrs Richards toiled incessantly for the good of the church, and her influence was always exerted in the direction of peace.' Indeed, she went further and struck a warning note by favourably contrasting her with some ministers' wives who 'were not constructive ... [but] destructive'.¹⁰³ Although she did not elaborate, presumably she had in mind wives who were indiscreet, spread gossip and failed to adhere to the injunction of 'loving their neighbours as themselves'. However, from the source material, no examples have emerged of situations where a minister's wife could be said to have compromised her husband's work.

Miss Tull's remark was an unusual one and, not surprisingly, the emphasis was generally on the positive contribution made by ministers' wives. Nonetheless, on occasions, ministers could damn their wives with faint praise, thereby displaying, probably unintentionally, a degree of male chauvinism. For example, in 1906 at his recognition as Avenue's minister, Rev. George Startup was reported as saying that 'as he looked back upon his ministerial career he could not recollect a single instance in which his work had been made difficult by an injudicious act on the part of his wife'.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, May 4, 1901.

¹⁰³ *Andover Advertiser*, May 11, 1906, quoted in Ottewill, "Woman of the Manse," 310.

¹⁰⁴ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, May 5, 1906.

Much of the support ministers' wives provided their husbands was unseen. Apart from managing the household, it might well have included providing administrative and secretarial help. She might also have been someone in whom her husband confided, serving as a source of encouragement and a sounding board for the tone and content of sermons. In the language of today, she could be described as a 'critical friend'.

In addition, wives were active in more visible ways. One was providing pastoral support especially in matters of a personal kind for which her husband was ill-equipped because of his gender and, however understanding he might be, reluctance on the part of women to confide in him. In addition, they contributed to church life in ways that women did more generally, including Sunday school teaching; helping with fund-raising initiatives; music; and leading organisations specifically for women.¹⁰⁵

In recognition of the complementary nature of their roles, wives were sometimes described as their husbands' partners in ministry and bracketed together with them. At Gosport, where Rev. Ernest Franks, minister from 1908 to 1917, and his wife were both closely involved with Sunday school work, reference was made to the 'much appreciated service [of Mrs Franks] in connection with the training of teachers' and the fact that they had jointly written a text book on 'the Free Church

¹⁰⁵ In 1913, Pokesdown's long-serving Congregational minister, Rev. Harry Schofield, then aged 57 married Miss Cheshire, the leader of the Young Women's Bible Class. During the Edwardian era a number of other Congregational ministers married while serving at Hampshire churches. They included Rev. Reginald Thompson at London Street; Rev. Phillip Rogers at East Cliff; and Rev. Robert Skinner at Ringwood.

History of the eighteenth century' for junior and senior candidates studying for Sunday school examinations.¹⁰⁶

While at a celebration to mark the fifth anniversary of Rev. Vincett Cook's pastorate at Bitterne, one of the speakers 'offered the Pastor and his wife congratulations on the completion of another year's work, thanking them both very heartily for their united and untiring exertions in promoting the harmonious working of the various organisations connected with the church'. This compliment was reinforced by another contributor to the proceedings who referred to 'the "Pastor and Pastoress" ... [and] their splendid work'.¹⁰⁷

The evidence from Edwardian Hampshire suggests that ministers' wives were often a critical ingredient in determining the success or otherwise of a pastorate. However, it does not appear that church members met the wives of prospective ministers as part of the selection process, even though, as indicated, the demands made of them could be many and varied. As Godden observes, a minister's wife was 'expected to support and encourage her husband at home, and also perhaps to work alongside him, taking an active role in the work of the chapel and its many associated groups and endeavours'.¹⁰⁸ To which might be added serving as a role model for wives and mothers in the congregation. This was a gruelling mix of responsibilities, requiring a distinctive blend of domestic, organisational and people

¹⁰⁶ *Hampshire Telegraph*, January 16, 1914.

¹⁰⁷ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 6, 1909. Another example comes from Basingstoke where, in 1913, London Street appointed Rev. and Mrs Gamble from Manchester to take responsibility for its newly acquired branch church in May Street. From contemporary press reports it is clear that they were seen as joint leaders. Indeed, due to the illness of Mr Gamble, Mrs Gamble and Mr Munday divided the first Sunday evening service between them. *Basingstoke & District Congregational Magazine*, December 1913.

¹⁰⁸ Godden, "Women of Winchester's Chapels," 27.

skills if they were to be exercised effectively and sensitively. Yet most, if not all, appear to have risen to the challenge and endeared themselves to all with whom they came into contact.

A glass ceiling?

Although there were no female ministers and leadership positions were generally held by men, by the Edwardian era the presence of women in Congregational church life was both extensive and keenly felt. As has been shown, they performed many different roles within their church and engaged in various philanthropic activities which provided them with not only considerable personal satisfaction but also direct experience of various social problems. In short, they 'served to channel the urge to be useful, recognized, informed and diverted'.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, although 'most women could not preach in public ... they could convert in private'.¹¹⁰

It is noticeable, however, that many contributions closely paralleled their responsibilities in the domestic sphere, such as the raising of children; playing musical instruments and singing; sewing; and running the household. That said, their roles within churches and the community at large were often highly visible, thereby ensuring that women were neither out of sight nor out of mind. Nonetheless, apart from acknowledging what they did and some expressions of gratitude, there were few signs amongst Hampshire Congregationalists of an increased willingness

¹⁰⁹ Knight, "Male and Female," 49.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 52.

to discuss the issue of gender relations and of redressing the balance as far as leadership was concerned. Expressed a little differently, not much heed was taken of Hallowes' plea, couched in language echoing that of the previous chapter, to make full use of what she referred to as 'womanly power':

Granted that we love our Denomination, and desire that it may flourish and spread, shall we not be more likely to accomplish this wish by recognising that the whole of the forces of the human mind, both masculine and feminine, are necessary and proceed to polish up that somewhat rusty weapon, rusty through disuse, of womanly power to help in the fight with the world, the flesh and the devil?¹¹¹

In short, churches were not exploiting their full potential if women continued to be treated as second-class members.

With the questioning of the subordinate status of women and a gradual shift towards values espoused by the 'new woman' within wider society, Congregationalism and other denominations were faced with a situation that was difficult to ignore. As Sean Gill puts it in his study of women and the Church of England, after 1900 'profound and far-reaching social and intellectual changes ... undermined the Victorian Christian synthesis of a hierarchical ordering of gender relationships, and the subordination of women in church and society'.¹¹² Consequently, it is questionable whether 'religious belief and practice strongly shap[ed] gender relations' as Godden and others contend.¹¹³ While there might have been an ebb and flow between societal changes and embedded patterns within the

¹¹¹ Hallowes, "Place & Service of Women," 40.

¹¹² Sean Gill, *Women and the Church of England: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (London: SPCK, 1994), 206.

¹¹³ Godden, "Women of Winchester's Chapels," 60. See also Una King, "Religion and Gender: Embedded Patterns, Interwoven Frameworks," in *A Companion to Gender History*, ed. Teresa Meade and Merry E. Weisner-Hanks (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 72.

churches, even many Congregationalists with their commitment to progressive modes of thought were in the rearguard, rather than the vanguard, when it came to securing greater equality for women within their denomination.

Part of the explanation for this was perhaps an innate conservatism amongst church members and little agreement amongst women, as well as men, as to how far to go in enhancing the status of women and how fast changes should be made. They had been socialised into a particular mode of thought on the issue, which was difficult to shift. Moreover, the notion of distinctive yet complementary roles for men and women based upon what were perceived as innate differences in their psyche was frequently reinforced. Here there may have been an element of what is known in another context as 'false consciousness', with women being conditioned into thinking that their best interests were served by the current state of affairs. There was also what many regarded as the sacrosanct Biblical injunctions that legitimised the existing pattern of gender relations and while some Congregationalists were moving away from a literal interpretation of scripture this does not seem to have extended, to any great extent, to challenging passages which appeared to confirm the subordinate status of women. Finally, there was a concern that any strengthening of the position of women might undermine efforts of Christian propagandists to give, as McLeod observes, 'their faith a masculine image which, it was hoped, might appeal to young men'.¹¹⁴

What the evidence from Edwardian Hampshire does indicate is a growing recognition of the skills of Congregational women as valuable assets in sustaining

¹¹⁴ McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 149-50.

churches during increasingly turbulent times. Indeed, in a 'deeply spiritual address', at a meeting organised by Petersfield and District Free Church Council in 1911, Rev. John Stevens, a Congregational minister from Middlesex, stressed 'the enrichment which had come to all their churches ... not only in the ministry of men but also of women'.¹¹⁵

Thus, during the Edwardian era Congregational women can be said to have secured a hairline fracture rather than a definite crack in what today would be called their 'glass ceiling'. In so doing, they acquired a greater degree of leverage, which enabled them in time to move gradually into leadership roles first as deacons during the First World War and then as ministers.¹¹⁶ In 1923, the editor of the newly launched *Congregational Quarterly* observed that:

But for women many of our Churches would speedily fade away and die, and we should see to it that service carries representation and honour, and show that we believe that there is neither male nor female in Jesus Christ.¹¹⁷

This perhaps is a fitting epitaph for the myriad ways in which women fortified Congregationalism during the Edwardian period in counties such as Hampshire, thereby preparing the ground for the awakening of a dormant discourse.

¹¹⁵ *Hants and Sussex News*, March 15, 1911.

¹¹⁶ The first woman ordained to the Congregational ministry was Constance Todd in 1917.

¹¹⁷ Editorial, *Congregational Quarterly* 1, no.1 (1923): 10-11.

9. THE TURNING OF THE TIDE?

Expressions of optimism and pessimism

Exploration of the primary source material has revealed something of the experiences and preoccupations of Hampshire Congregationalists during the Edwardian era. In this concluding chapter, consideration is given to various questions concerning the state of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire. What do the defining discourses reveal about the state of mind of Hampshire Congregationalists? Did they view their future with confidence or trepidation? To what extent did they take comfort from, or feel threatened by, developments in wider society? What are the historiographical implications of the findings?

Since the situation was, as indicated in Chapter 1, unsettled and characterised by a degree of restlessness, it is necessary to proceed with circumspection, especially with respect to the discourses. Given the uncertainty, it is unsurprising that leading Congregationalists exuded both optimism and pessimism. Optimism was evident in the use of phrases such as 'the best is yet to be';¹ 'a splendid prospect';² 'the future would be more glorious than the past';³ and 'their brightest days were before them'.⁴

¹ *Hants and Berks Gazette*, February 2, 1907. Phrase highlighted in the report of the farewell meetings for Rev. Capes Tarbolton on his departure from Basingstoke.

² *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 26, 1910. Taken from a report of the 11th anniversary of Avenue Congregational Church.

³ *Christchurch Times*, April 16, 1910. A hope expressed by Rev. J.D. Jones at the 250th Anniversary celebration of Christchurch Congregational Church in 1910.

⁴ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 1, 1913. Comment made by Rev. Henry Spencer at the Golden Jubilee of Northam Congregational Church in 1913.

While a more pessimistic view can be seen in references to 'uphill work';⁵ 'peculiar difficulties';⁶ and 'some causes for regret'.⁷ Between these extremes there were various shades of opinion, with many being neither excessively optimistic nor incurably pessimistic.

As Ernest Chaplin commented at the autumn gathering of the HCU in 1910: 'Congregational churches were ... [not] perfect, but he refused to take a despondent view of them and their work. He believed that they had in the men of their church stalwarts who were upholding the true principles of Congregationalism.'⁸ Percy Bright, from Richmond Hill, at a celebratory picnic to mark the fortieth anniversary of Throop Congregational Church in 1912, went further:

Strength, courage, praise were three ... great needs at the present day ... He thought ... [they were] suffering from an attack of nerves ... [due to] the decline in church attendance ... church membership ... [and] Sunday School scholars, the certain amount of unsettlement in belief, the increasing love of pleasure and luxury and ... whilst the Church was gazing ... at these things there was a real danger of their imperilling its safety. But there was no need for the Church to groan, for God had said He would renew their strength in times of trouble and difficulty ... [there were] many reasons the churches had for praise ... the ... great interest that was being taken in social questions, that everyone might have a decent life and a fair share of life's enjoyments ... [and] ... that men and women were being found in the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.⁹

In short, regardless of how one viewed contemporary developments,

Congregationalists should remember that God was on their side.

⁵ *HCU Annual Report*, 1906, 27, HRO 127/M94/62/51. Comment of Rev. James Richards in respect of his additional responsibility for Whitchurch Congregational Church, although he did acknowledge that there were 'evident signs of blessing'.

⁶ Westbourne Congregational Church Minute Book 1902-1914, DHC NP33/Accession 8165d. From the resignation letter of Alfred Martindale at the conclusion of his pastorate.

⁷ Pokesdown Congregational Church Meetings 1909-1923, DHC NP14/CM/1/3. A view expressed by the Secretary of Pokesdown Congregational Church in his report for 1912.

⁸ *Hampshire Independent*, October 8, 1910.

⁹ *Bournemouth Guardian*, June 22, 1912.

What might account for any differences in outlook? One factor was the nature of the occasion. As Rev. J.H. Jowett, at celebrations in 1910 to mark the nineteenth anniversary of the opening of Richmond Hill, observed: '... [at such a] gathering the message presented should be one of good cheer ... [there] never was a time when ... there was a greater need for the herald of cheerful and optimistic ministries'.¹⁰ More pessimistic assessments were likely to surface within the relative privacy of church meetings. That said, members of buoyant churches, such as Richmond Hill, clearly had greater cause to be optimistic than those associated with struggling churches, although this was not always the case.

As indicated in Chapter 1, another factor was the influence of the past, which could be either benevolent or malevolent, with historical trends being invigorating or unnerving. For those whose formative years were in the mid-nineteenth century, the pervasiveness of Christianity - evident in the built environment; family life; the ubiquity of Sunday schools; and public discourse and morality - created a sense of indestructibility. Thus, signs that this was less immutable than previously thought were disconcerting.

Typical of ministers who felt deeply about changes experienced during their lifetime was Rev. Francis Sloper, with whom this thesis began. In 1909, aged 60, he expressed his frustrations concerning 'the present religious condition of the country', implicitly making unfavourable comparisons with the past. According to Sloper, churches were in a parlous state due to:

¹⁰ *Bournemouth Guardian*, November 20, 1910. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Jowett was the minister of the renowned Carrs Lane Congregational Church in Birmingham.

- (1) Lack of family prayer
- (2) Parents and children not [being] so united in a family pew as years ago
- (3) The present love of excitement and pleasure
- (4) Lack of aggression [on the part of the churches]
- (5) Teachers and leaders ... not aim[ing] ... for conversion
- (6) Overmuch comfort in the lives of many
- (7) Neglect of the Bible.¹¹

Although Sloper was not alone in adopting such a critical stance, he was more outspoken than most in doing so.

Such negativity, however, was not universal. For some, what was frequently referred to as a 'noble past' remained a source of inspiration. For example, Rev. George Saunders, as minister-elect of Above Bar and speaking at its anniversary in 1904, having praised the church for achieving much in difficult circumstances, continued:

... what might they not do when they worked shoulder to shoulder, and, above all, looking to the great Head of the Church for that blessing which He never withheld from those who trusted in Him ... they ... had a great tradition, a noble past, and no doubt many of them had sacred and holy memories of the days that had gone ...; of splendid services rendered in the name ... of Christ, and of hearty loyalty to the cause at Above Bar ... Bright, happy and victorious had been the days of the past, but ... greater days were before them, and they hailed the future with hearts full of hope ...¹²

Notwithstanding the exhortatory nature of the occasion, Saunders' comments reflected his belief that the past could motivate and should not be used solely for making adverse comparisons with the present.

Whatever else, such differences serve as a cautionary note when seeking to distil the essence of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire. Thus, while Brown's concept of a 'faith society' and that of a 'crisis of faith', associated with

¹¹. Boscombe Congregational Church Minutes 1905-1918, DHC NP10/CM/1/3.

¹² *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 26, 1904.

Gilbert and others, have a certain appeal and can be said to embrace elements that chime with the findings reported here, they do not represent the complete picture.¹³ Neither fully captures the intricate nature of Edwardian spirituality or the complexity of the socio-cultural milieu that churches had to negotiate. Here it is interesting to note the point made by Robbins that ‘Historians rarely write or speak about Edwardian piety’.¹⁴

For Hampshire Congregationalists the substance and expression of denominational principles and the Christian faith more generally remained of serious concern. As evidenced in earlier chapters, their leaders continued to address what they saw as imperfections at the heart of the human condition. Even pessimists could identify with the cry *at spes non fracta*.¹⁵ Indeed, hope buttressed by spiritual grace and civic responsibility were hallmarks of Edwardian Congregationalism as it battled with the perceived evils of society and encroachments of the secular world. As Hempton puts it, in comments about the nineteenth century, the power of Evangelical pietism ‘lay not so much in its theology and dogma as in its energy and its ability to mobilise the middle-class laity – men, women and children – in an unremitting war against urban vice and irreligion’.¹⁶

In Hampshire, Congregationalists derived strength from their belief in the righteousness of the spiritual and temporal causes they espoused and the dynamic of

¹³ Brown, *Religion and Society*, 40. For ‘crisis of faith’, see various sources highlighted in Chapter 2, including Gilbert, *Church, Chapel and Social Change*; McLeod, *Religion and Society*; and Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales*.

¹⁴ Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity*, 119.

¹⁵ “But hope is not yet crushed.”

¹⁶ David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious Revolution to the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 141.

the Gospel. Something of the latter can be glimpsed in comments made by Rev.

Thomas Lee Hutson at his recognition as Petersfield's Congregational minister in 1910:

... the supreme force, the all-conquering power, was the power of Christ, and there was nothing in the heart of man ... in the whole universe that could withstand the wondrous, gracious love of the Eternal Father as ... manifested in Jesus Christ in that great work of Redemption which culminated at the Cross and at the Open Sepulchre. There was something mightier than sin, and ultimately God's love would win the whole human race to Himself. By the grace of God they with Him would do their part to bring it about.¹⁷

Arguably, the imperatives inherent in Hutson's remarks are unlikely to be privileged by secular historians, amongst whom there is a tendency to underestimate the extent to which faith 'can move mountains' and good works can galvanise even in the face of formidable odds.

Nevertheless, from a religious perspective, it would be erroneous to claim that appeals to the fundamentals of Christianity were sufficient to counteract the sense of unease. Notwithstanding the undoubted strengths of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire there were also serious weaknesses. Moreover, although the external environment afforded Congregationalists opportunities which, if so minded, they could exploit, it also presented undoubted threats. In the sections which follow, these endogenous and exogenous features are reviewed more fully.

¹⁷ *Hants and Sussex News*, November 23, 1910. In the same source, his address was described as 'impressive'.

A propitious outlook

Optimistically minded Congregationalists could point to certain internal strengths as evidence of their ability to maintain and even extend their reach. At the close of the nineteenth century, Congregational churches were as Tudur Jones observes 'centres of considerable spiritual and social vitality'.¹⁸ This continued into the Edwardian era, with Argent claiming that for Congregationalists it was a period of 'unprecedented power and prestige', thereby reinforcing their sense of durability in a changing world.¹⁹

A notable strength was their mode of church governance which, as highlighted in Chapter 5, was seen as being more in tune with a democratic age than the hierarchical structures and authoritarianism associated with the Established Church. Notwithstanding the theocratic apologetics associated with church meetings and greater collaboration between churches, the principles of member involvement in decision-making and local autonomy were seen as offering greater flexibility in responding to the challenges Congregationalists faced.

Furthermore, as indicated in Chapter 4, churches were generally led by ministers and deacons of ability, passion, integrity and creativity. They had the competence and connections to not simply preserve the status quo, but adapt to changing circumstances. Unencumbered by rigid liturgical practices many experimented with different modes of worship, thereby reaching out to those

¹⁸ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 327-8.

¹⁹ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*, 79.

deterred by formality and ritual. They could also capitalise on the skills and commitment of church members and the willingness of female members to undertake crucial maintenance roles of the kind illustrated in Chapter 8. In addition, encouragement could be drawn from the spirit of unity which characterised many Hampshire churches and the close collaboration between ministers and deacons, with there being few examples of a breakdown in the relationship.

Further strength was derived from the widespread distribution of Congregational churches. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the denomination had a substantial presence in the three major urban centres, most market towns and considerable swathes of the countryside and was extending its reach into the newly developing suburbs. With their bias towards the middle class and those aspiring to improve their social status, Congregationalists 'were well-equipped to cater for the suburban civilization' to which the outward expansion of towns gave rise.²⁰ Moreover, Congregational churches were still able to recruit new members who could 'confess to a real spiritual experience',²¹ thereby helping to offset losses due to death, transfer and non-attendance. Even in an increasingly materialistic age, some continued to respond positively to the claims of the personal gospel. At the same time, those with a working-class background were not entirely conspicuous by their absence and in some churches they were a substantial presence.

Congregationalism's reach in Hampshire was sustained by the cross-subsidisation of weaker churches by the stronger. Facilitated by the HCU, this

²⁰ Binfield, *Down to Prayers*, 202.

²¹ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 22, 1913. These were the words of Rev. George Saunders.

enabled a Congregational witness to be maintained in rural areas, thereby mirroring Rimmington's observations concerning the Leicestershire and Rutland Congregational Union, which sought 'to ensure that all people in the countryside had access to Nonconformist worship'.²² Again in parallel with Leicestershire, market town churches provided pastoral oversight of village chapels, ensuring that their pulpits were supplied.²³ Elsewhere, the dedicated ministry of charismatic pastors enabled rural causes to thrive, notwithstanding the vicissitudes of country life. Overall, the continuing presence of Congregationalism in the countryside remained a potent symbol of its resilience during the Edwardian period.

Furthermore, as late as 1914 it was possible for the HCU's secretary, with some degree of pride, to make reference in his annual report to 'the completion of a new church at Winton, at a cost of £7,000; an anonymous gift of £600 for a new schoolroom at Eastleigh; and building schemes in progress at Hythe, Hayling Island and other places'.²⁴ As a local newspaper commented: 'These movements showed that Congregationalism was fully alive to the demands made upon it in all parts of the county.'²⁵

Building projects, incorporating improvements to existing facilities, were frequently required to meet the demands of new approaches to Sunday school work and other provision for young people – a further indication of Congregationalism's

²² Rimmington, "Congregationalism in Rural Leicestershire," 95.

²³ In Hampshire, unlike Leicestershire, it was not always the case that 'rural churches ... [expanded] their membership more than proportional to population increases'. Ibid, 101.

²⁴ *Portsmouth Times*, April 24, 1914.

²⁵ *Portsmouth Evening News*, April 22, 1914.

adaptability and entrepreneurial spirit.²⁶ They also symbolised the enthusiastic embrace by Congregationalists of the institutional principle. As noted in Chapter 5, this was motivated by a desire to meet the social needs of all who identified with Congregationalism, thereby reducing the likelihood that they would succumb to the offerings of secular providers, and to reach out to the wider community, thereby serving as an instrument of evangelism. In so doing, churches were keen to exploit initiatives with a proven track record, such as the Men's Own Brotherhood.²⁷ They sought to emulate each other, thereby contributing to the diffusion of innovation. Moreover, examples from Hampshire indicate that this was by no means a purely urban phenomenon as Tudur Jones implies.²⁸

Congregationalism was further strengthened by a spirit of collegiality within not only the denomination but also the wider Free Church community. As indicated in earlier chapters, Congregationalists were ecumenically minded, enjoying warm relations with other Nonconformists and playing a full part in the Free Church Council movement. In terms of spiritual and temporal endeavour, this removed 'a good deal of that spirit of division and mistrust and mutual jealousy which was ... among churches in the past days ... [and replaced it with] a kindlier, truer, deeper and more Christian feeling'.²⁹

²⁶ See Ottewill, "Congregationalism and the Young".

²⁷ As David Killingray points out, Brotherhood meetings were particularly attractive to working-class men, due to their 'informality'. Killingray, "Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Movement," 274. See also, Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 65.

²⁸ Jones, *Congregationalism*, 315.

²⁹ *Hants and Sussex News*, March 15, 1911. Rev H. Abrahams speaking at a meeting organised by the Petersfield and District Free Church Council 'in connection with the great conference

Thus, for those predisposed to optimism it was not simply a case of self-deception. There were grounds for claiming that their faith was sufficiently resilient and their denomination well positioned to take advantage of opportunities that arose within wider society. Indeed, many of their values, including those of service, earnestness and heartiness, 'resonated with the temper of Edwardian society'³⁰ and especially 'the aims and ideals of the urban middle class'.³¹

In general, Congregationalists were regarded as a force for good and many still looked to their churches for an ethical steer and a lead in inculcating civic virtue as they had done in the Victorian era. This was seen most overtly in work with young people, the purposes of which were not only 'the establishment of a Christlike character ... [and] the training of intelligent church members ... [but also assisting] in the making of good and useful citizens ... [by] ministering to the spiritual, intellectual and social sides of ... [their] nature'.³²

Congregationalists also benefited from the growing sense of 'reverence and dignity' that characterised the later years of Victoria's reign and spilled over into the Edwardian period. Drawing on Wolffe's claim that celebrations associated with the monarchy 'were capable of being interpreted as solemn Christian observances, or affirmation of general religiosity or quasi-religious celebrations of national

of the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches at Portsmouth' and held in Petersfield Congregational Church.

³⁰ Ottewill, "Congregationalism in Edwardian Southampton," 60-1.

³¹ Doyle, "Congregational Culture," 323.

³² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, October 16, 1909. Comments made by Arthur Wilson, Young People's Secretary of the Worcestershire Congregational Union, at the autumn gathering of the HCU in 1909.

solidarity', Griffin suggests that they were 'an ideal time for spiritual reflection'.³³ At local level, one aspect of this was the holding of civic services. In its review of 1902, the *Lymington Chronicle* felt moved to observe that a key feature of the Coronation celebrations was 'the official recognition of the Free Churches ... [with the] attendance of the Mayor, Corporation, Vicar, public bodies, etc., at divine service held at the Congregational Church on the afternoon of August 10th ... [thereby making it a] red letter day for Nonconformity at Lymington'.³⁴ Apart from it being a notable occasion for Nonconformity, it was undoubtedly an accolade for Congregationalists to have their church selected as the venue for the service and symbolised their civic engagement and involvement in good works.

Notwithstanding increased welfare provision by public bodies, both local and national, there remained an iceberg of unmet need within society and therefore many opportunities for Congregationalists to exhibit the altruistic impulse inherent in the social gospel. While easily dismissed as tinkering with the symptoms, rather than addressing the underlying causes, of social distress, it helped to counter accusations that churches were 'too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use'. Indeed, the commitment to voluntarism, which underlay social action, appears to have remained unimpaired in Edwardian Hampshire, unlike the situation in Reading highlighted by Yeo.³⁵

³³ John Wolfe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945* (London: Routledge, 1994), 157; and Griffin, "Ministry of J.H.Jowett," 62.

³⁴ *Lymington Chronicle*, January 1, 1903.

³⁵ Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations*.

Relations between churches and civic authorities were also characterised by a spirit of mutuality. As the Mayor of Portsmouth, a guest speaker at the HCU's 1914 spring gathering, commented: '... the Corporation were assisting the religious bodies in their work ... [by] clearing away insanitary areas ... feeding 800 poor children daily ... and in these and other ways ... tendering the ministers and clergy all the assistance they possibly could (Applause)'.³⁶ Indeed, as explained in Chapter 6, Dale's 'civic gospel' continued to exert an influence in Edwardian Hampshire.

On the economic front, as illustrated in Chapter 4, many leading lay Hampshire Congregationalists were local entrepreneurs, who pursued their business interests in ways that contributed to the well-being of both their employees and the wider community. As yet, there was little sign of the trend evident elsewhere of business leaders withdrawing from religious life.³⁷ Indeed, Rev. I. Maldwyn Jones, Albion's minister, claimed that one of the duties 'of the Church was with regard to the morals of commercial men, as it affected them in being honourable in business'.³⁸

It was also the case that, although relations with the Liberal Party cooled somewhat during the later part of the Edwardian era, they were not completely fractured.³⁹ Moreover, there remained a distinctive Nonconformist political agenda, centred on temperance, restrictions on gambling and Sunday observance. Although

³⁶ *Portsmouth Evening News*, April 22, 1914.

³⁷ McLeod, *Religion and Society*, 196.

³⁸ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 18, 1905. Comments made at Above Bar's 243rd anniversary.

³⁹ For example, in 1910, Rev. Ernest Thompson, Petersfield's Congregational minister and President of the local Free Church Council, at a public meeting about the Constitutional crisis engulfing the country, did not shy away from political partisanship: 'The duty of Free Churchmen at this time seemed to be perfectly clear, to return the Liberal party to power to smash the veto of the Lords.' *Hants and Sussex News*, January 5, 1910.

Congregationalists might have become jaundiced towards party politics, their political sensibilities, in the broadest sense of the term, remained intact.

Much was expected of Congregationalists, with community engagement keeping them in the public eye and generally favourable press coverage sustaining the impression that they were influential and well regarded. Some even felt that the population at large was more receptive than ever to the claims of the Gospel and were keen to tap into what they perceived as the *Zeitgeist* of background religiosity. At Rev. Robert Ashenhurst's recognition as Kingsfield's minister in 1905, James Hamilton, one of Avenue's deacons, claimed that: 'The power of religion was never shown so prominently before ... There had never been so many people waiting to hear the message of truth ... there were great possibilities, and it was for them to realise their responsibilities.'⁴⁰ Although it is unclear on what his assertions were based, he clearly believed there was great potential for churches if they could fully mobilise their resources. Similarly, George Saunders, when asked in 1905 about 'the alleged falling off of attendances at places of worship', argued that:

... the mind of the nation ... is not averse to religion. It is decidedly averse to dogma, but not to the religion of Jesus Christ, as portrayed in the Gospel, and as revealed in the lives of his disciples. While this gives us cause for great thankfulness ... it is a trumpet call to the Church to brace herself ... Men need Christ, they need the truth and the life which Christ only can give, and it will be to the peril of the churches if they do not seize this opportunity and rise to the greatness of the occasion.⁴¹

Since Congregationalists were not tied to any particular dogma, unlike some other denominations, they were well placed to take advantage of this. In a similar vein,

⁴⁰ *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, September 16, 1905.

⁴¹ *Hampshire Independent*, March 11, 1905. Taken from the local religious leaders series mentioned in Chapter 1.

Rev. Reginald Thompson expressed his belief that 'Basingstoke was a godly town on the whole', with many who 'under God's providence must be and would be reached ...'.⁴² Such examples indicate an implicit awareness of the distinction between 'embodied' and 'diffusive' religion, with the latter being seen as offering considerable scope for successful evangelism.

Given the strengths and opportunities outlined above, it is unsurprising that they encouraged a confident mood on the part of some, such as Rev. Henry Spencer, Avenue's minister. As guest speaker at Above Bar's 251st anniversary he challenged the faint-hearted:

What was their present position ... 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 ... [arising from temporary unsatisfactory statistics and finances], and that pessimism should be flung aside. They ... [knew] 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.⁴³

In short, they had little to be pessimistic about apart from pessimism itself.

Such exhortations undoubtedly helped to spur the faithful to greater effort. The outlook was propitious and they could draw strength from the considerable advantages they now enjoyed by comparison with years gone by. Although there was little evidence of a triumphant spirit, optimists expected setbacks to be temporary and expansion to be shortly resumed. That said, there were indications

⁴² *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 5, 1910. Comment made at the recognition of the new minister of Sarum Hill Baptist Church.

⁴³ *Hampshire Independent*, November 22, 1913; and *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, November 22, 1913.

that all was not well and for some these denoted a more daunting future than those of a more sanguine temperament would allow.

A daunting future

Hampshire Congregationalists adopting a more pessimistic or, in their eyes, realistic stance were particularly concerned about various internal weaknesses and external threats which they saw as seriously compromising their position. While these might not constitute an irreversible or fatal set of circumstances, they presented a formidable barrier to further progress and required a shift to a more defensive mode and some retrenchment. One giving voice to the difficulties faced was Rev. Thomas Cynor Evans, minister of Bitterne Park Congregational Church from 1902 to 1914. As guest speaker at Abbey's 249th anniversary in 1911 he expressed views that were disturbingly sombre:

These were great days ... as far as the achievements, and ... the material prosperity of our land were concerned, but, alas, they were not great days as far as the church was concerned. Somehow or other the church seemed to be impotent and helpless. The reason [for] it was that they were neither hot nor cold. They were lacking in zeal and had lost their moral enthusiasm.⁴⁴

While such negativity was less appealing than the optimism outlined earlier, it was intended to be a timely 'wake-up call'. As Evans put it, 'they wanted zeal, enthusiasm and earnestness', which implied that these qualities were in short

⁴⁴ *Romsey Advertiser*, May 12, 1911.

supply.⁴⁵ Indeed, the examples given in Chapter 7 indicate that the enemy of lethargy within was seen as being as formidable as any external foe.

Of the internal weaknesses the one which loomed largest was that of numerical decline. For Congregationalists, continued expansion of membership and, as Tudur Jones documents, of churches and ministers was regarded as a denominational 'fact of life'.⁴⁶ Thus, they were ill-prepared for any reversal. In Hampshire, the best that could be said was that a plateau had been reached. However, given the preoccupation with statistics even this, after a period of relatively steady growth, damaged confidence. Particularly worrying was the erosion of the membership base through lapses in attendance and consequent striking off.⁴⁷ Although churches could still recruit new members, these were often insufficient to compensate for losses and a substantial turnover of members presented its own problems. While larger churches could cope with the resulting disruption, the situation created considerable difficulties for smaller churches. Furthermore, although there is little evidence of unfavourable comparisons being drawn with the situation elsewhere or nationally, as the analysis in Chapter 3 demonstrates, the position of Congregationalism in Hampshire was weaker than that in the country as a whole. It is also probable that, although comprehensive data are not available,

⁴⁵ *Hampshire Independent*, May 13, 1911.

⁴⁶ 'In 1875 the Congregationalists [in England] had 2,980 churches, branch churches and preaching stations. By 1880 they numbered 3,176 and by 1900, 3,433. The 2,028 ministers of 1880 had increased to 2,161 by 1900.' Jones, *Congregationalism*, 319.

⁴⁷ The fall in membership was, of course, by no means unique to Hampshire. As Hargreaves records, in Halifax 'during the first decade of the twentieth century membership started to fall and did not recover before the outbreak of the First World War'. Hargreaves, "High-Victorian Expansion," 102. In Bradford, Congregational 'membership fell sharply from 1904'. Chadwick, "Church and People," 112.

attendance at services was in decline. As indicated in Chapter 5, some attributed this to the joylessness of worshippers, which undermined the efforts of ministers to make services lively and attractive.

There also remained a concern that the perceived middle-class bias of Congregational churches acted as a deterrent. Notwithstanding some working-class engagement with Congregationalism, in many churches memberships were drawn disproportionately from those in white collar occupations and their families. Despite the protestations of ministers who argued that social divisions had no place in their churches, it proved difficult to refute the charge that Congregationalists had little to offer the working class.

A further weakness was the failure 'to construct a durable bridge between the Sunday school and adult membership'.⁴⁸ Despite innovations, the fact that a substantial majority of Sunday school scholars came from 'non-Christian' homes and received little encouragement from parents to maintain contact with churches, particularly after they started work, seriously undermined their effectiveness.⁴⁹ Moreover, as indicated in Chapter 3, even the potential for 'autogenous growth' appears to have been overstated.

With respect to the institutional principle more broadly, as Erdozain argues, by blurring the boundary between the sacred and the secular churches undermined their position.⁵⁰ Although the motivation for providing activities to meet non-

⁴⁸ Roger Ottewill, "A Profile of the Membership of London Street Congregational Church Basingstoke: 1901 to 1911" (working paper, University of Birmingham, 2010).

⁴⁹ Ottewill, "Congregational Sunday Schools".

⁵⁰ Erdozain, *Problem of Pleasure*.

spiritual needs in a Christian setting was understandable, it carried risks. Many ministers were aware of these and sought to counter criticism by ensuring that the spiritual mission of their churches was not compromised. Nonetheless, they could not disguise the fact that in terms of recruiting new church members application of the institutional principle does not appear to have been that successful.

Declining membership inevitably led to financial difficulties. Again this was especially serious for smaller churches, with the HCU struggling to maintain its level of support. Moreover, although the previously mentioned building projects could be interpreted as a sign of confidence in the future, the debt attached to many of them had to be serviced. This, Chadwick asserts, 'limited the amount of time and money available for "outside" charitable, religious or social causes ... [with most churches being] more in need of help than able to dispense it'.⁵¹ However, while debt did preoccupy Hampshire churches, the argument must not be pushed too far since outreach and philanthropic enterprises still remained a priority. Avenue, for example, initiated the Portswood Mission at a time when it was still paying off the substantial debt on the church building erected in 1897/8.

Seeking converts was, of course, directly related to the personal gospel which lay at the heart of Evangelicalism. For some, any retreat from evangelism implied a loss of confidence in the trustworthiness of Evangelical principles which had stood the test of time. As the discussion of doctrinal issues in Chapter 6 illustrated, the Edwardian era was one of theological flux. Arguably, of all the exogenous trends gathering pace during the preceding period, the one that now posed the greatest

⁵¹ Chadwick, "Church and People," 209.

threat was the ‘... pressure of modernity upon traditional theology: science, historical criticism and changing notions of morality applied to traditional doctrine ... [leading to a modification of] traditional beliefs – especially the ones concerning the nature of the biblical text, the ... significance of the Atonement and the propriety of eternal punishment’.⁵² J.D. Jones claimed, at Abbey’s anniversary in 1901, that scientific advances ‘had a two-fold result ... with some people ... tak[ing] refuge in some defined and rigid system of dogma ... [associated with] the Oxford or Anglo-Catholic School ... [and others not being] ... certain what to believe and had ended by believing in nothing at all or a scientific agnosticism’.⁵³ Although the extent to which this rising tide of scepticism impacted upon the public at large is debatable, perceptions could be as important as reality. Moreover, improved education was seen as contributing to the more rigorous questioning of the traditional tenets of the Christian faith. Many Congregationalists responded by moving towards a more ‘progressive’ exegesis of Evangelicalism. This, however, could be a double-edged sword. Although it assisted Congregationalists in aligning their beliefs to contemporary developments, it implied that there was no solidity to the Gospel, which for some was a serious shortcoming.

Furthermore, in their embrace of the social gospel, Congregationalists were in danger of being outflanked by Socialism and other secular creeds and their altruistic *raison d’être* eroded by the emergence of the embryonic welfare state. In addition,

⁵² Parsons, “Dissenters to Free Churchmen,” 111.

⁵³ *Romsey Advertiser*, May 3, 1901.

their hope of exercising political clout on issues, such as temperance and religious education, were frequently dashed.

Thus, the prevailing milieu posed threats to both the Evangelical and ethical strands of the doctrinal stance of Congregationalists. Even more potent, however, were concerns that moral relativism and growing indifference to the claims of religion made it increasingly difficult for churches to engage with those often referred to as 'the lapsed masses'. This, inevitably, calls into question the credibility of those who, as indicated above, saw in the prevalence of 'diffusive' religion hope for the future. Indeed, some were suspicious of the notion of latent religiosity and attempts to equate religion with any belief regardless of content and antecedents, such as the ritualistic customs and practices revealed by Sarah Williams in Southwark.⁵⁴ For them, there remained a clear divide between two adversaries, the sacred and the secular, and in 'fighting the good fight' it was necessary for people to 'nail their colours to a particular mast'. Passive religiosity was no substitute for active religious practice.

For some the most intractable negative indicator was the allure of 'mammon'. As explained in Chapter 7, while this was a far-reaching external threat, it was also one of the more nebulous. Nonetheless, ministers fulminated against it. Even the generally optimistic George Saunders did so in a sermon on the signs of the times, preached in 1909:

... the money spent upon luxuries, amusements, sport, and dress is well-nigh as great as ever ... What value to us is the spread of perishable wares for amusement and adorn[ing] perishable bodies, if the producers of these do not

⁵⁴ Williams, *Religious Belief*.

know how to save ... souls from rack and ruin in the wide seas of sensuousness and mean competition, while irreverence, frivolity and gross materialism are so apparent?⁵⁵

As a response, church members were exhorted to behave in ways which clearly demonstrated the non-materialistic character of their faith. Inevitably, this raised questions and concerns regarding the provision of leisure-time facilities by Congregationalists.

Indeed, churches were finding it increasingly difficult to compete successfully with providers less constrained by considerations of morality and edification. For example, London Street's extremely popular PSE, mentioned in Chapters 5 and 8, ended in 1911 because, although there had 'been some splendid entertainments', attendance had been 'very poor' due to 'various other attractions in the town'.⁵⁶ It was perhaps no coincidence that Basingstoke's first purpose-built cinema, the Electric Palace, opened in October 1910. Throughout Edwardian Hampshire there were many visual reminders of ways in which technological innovations, including the cinema, bicycle and motor car, were presenting churches with additional competition as they sought to retain the loyalty, and strengthen the resolve, of members and adherents alike. Particular concern was expressed over the extent to which the 'cinematograph and other theatres were coming in upon the lives of young people', as Rev. Weaver Evans remarked at the fifteenth anniversary of the Bournemouth and District CE Union in 1912. He warned 'that if they gave

⁵⁵ *Above Bar Free Churchman*, February 1909, unpaginated.

⁵⁶ *London Street Congregational Church Basingstoke Manual*, 1911, 46.

themselves up to the world of pleasure they relaxed the grasp of Jesus Christ – they could not hold the two'.⁵⁷

Emblematic of the declining impact of religion on wider society was the erosion of the special status of Sunday against which, as evidenced in Chapter 7, many leading Congregationalists railed. It was their perception of links between attitudes to Sunday and moves towards more secularised lifestyles which drove their, generally unsuccessful, resistance to any liberalisation of rules relating to the Sabbath and their use of belligerent language in this regard.

Similarly, there was concern that the Victorian ideal of the 'Christian home, ordered by a morality that enshrined piety, chastity, sobriety, filial obedience, and charity, and shunned displays of luxury, sexual transgressions, and all diversions, which were not improving or uplifting' was being weakened.⁵⁸ Since the family was the primary agent of socialisation, the waning of religious practices, such as family prayers and Bible reading, was felt to be especially damaging as Rev. Francis Sloper's earlier strictures indicate. Parents, perhaps lacking in spiritual confidence, increasingly looked to churches to provide their offspring with instruction in Christian faith and ethics. While this could be viewed positively, as previously indicated, few Sunday school scholars went on to become full church members. Thus, although they could be said to have served the needs of wider society, Sunday schools were not very effective recruiting grounds for the churches themselves.

⁵⁷ *Bournemouth Guardian*, February 24, 1912.

⁵⁸ Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, 251.

Underlying many of the challenges faced by Congregationalists was that of reconciling the demands of being 'in the world but not of it'. As Chadwick argues, Bradford's churches were heavily criticised for not paying sufficient attention to the problems of the real world, but when they did so they risked blunting their spiritual cutting edge.⁵⁹ Thus, pessimists could identify many factors to justify their prognosis. Although there were no indications of mass defections at this stage, for them the 'writing was on the wall', and in the longer term this proved to be a more accurate assessment than that of optimists.

Historiography revised

In general, the Congregationalists of Edwardian Hampshire were neither unthinkingly optimistic nor unequivocally pessimistic in their outlook. They recognised that the tide was turning, but differed as to whether or not this was reversible. Some felt the setbacks were temporary and many retained their belief in the efficacy of the Gospel in its various manifestations. Thus, they would have concurred with comments made by J.D. Jones at the 1908 autumn meeting of the HCU: 'He was not a pessimist ... and yet he was not an unreasoning optimist either. There were times when it was good to ... be cheerful under discouraging circumstances; there were other times when such a spirit was to be deprecated in

⁵⁹ Chadwick, "Church and People," 173.

Church matters.’⁶⁰ Arguably, Congregational churches retained their agency and were not simply at the mercy of impersonal forces emanating from the secular world.

From a research perspective, the mix of optimism and pessimism and underlying tensions continue to fascinate and serve as antidotes to generalisations concerning the state of Edwardian Congregationalism. Thus, in seeking to interpret what was happening through recourse to secondary literature there are both resonances and dissonances.

The situation was undoubtedly fluid and changes were occurring. However, these related as much to questions of Congregational leadership, identity, doctrine and practice as to what was revealed by statistical trends and differing modes of engagement with the community at large. Moreover, they were essentially incremental rather than dramatic in nature. Compared to the First World War which unquestionably precipitated crises of confidence and unprecedented soul-searching within the churches, the Edwardian era was a relatively tranquil one.

Nevertheless, there are dangers in over-emphasising the strengths of Edwardian Congregationalism as highlighted by, for example, Argent, Doyle and Rimmington.⁶¹ Likewise, giving undue prominence to the weaknesses to which Chadwick, Cox and others point can be equally misleading.⁶² As the experiences of Congregationalists in Edwardian Hampshire demonstrate, it is not possible to state categorically whether they affirmed or contradicted contrasting viewpoints

⁶⁰ *Lymington Chronicle*, October 8, 1908.

⁶¹ Argent, *Transformation of Congregationalism*; Doyle, “Congregational Culture”; and Rimmington, “Congregationalism in Leicester”.

⁶² Chadwick, “Church and People”; and Cox, *English Churches*.

embedded in the historiography of either a Christian faith that was losing or had lost its grip on society or one that remained firmly rooted in the norms of social intercourse. Neither fully captures the complexity of what was happening as evidenced by the varied discourses replete with affirmations, reformulations, refutations and syntheses.

Whatever else, this thesis demonstrates the need for further local or 'bottom up' studies to complement those which adopt a national or 'top down' perspective and, in so doing, give insufficient weight to what might be described as the 'religiosity of place'. Arguably the principal contribution of such micro-studies to the historiography of religion in Edwardian Britain is what they reveal about the diversity of church life, thereby facilitating the fine-tuning of narratives which seek to provide an overview of the pace and causes of church growth and decline and secularisation more generally. Even within mainland Hampshire there was considerable variation, with Bournemouth and market towns, such as Andover and Basingstoke, still displaying various hallmarks of a 'faith society'. These were also evident in many villages, notwithstanding the challenges churches faced, in particular the loss of key individuals and families as a result of migration to towns. Indicators include a strong cultural affinity between Congregationalism and local elites, buttressed by the institutional loyalty which had characterised Victorian society and on which Edwardian Congregationalists could continue to rely; a widespread application of the institutional principle; the coalescence of doctrinal and community values; and ongoing application of the 'civic gospel', through engagement with institutions of local governance.

Elsewhere, in the large industrial centres of Portsmouth and, to a lesser extent, Southampton, the situation was not dissimilar to that found in parts of West Yorkshire and London, the foci of many local studies reviewed in Chapter 2. Yet even here churches retained their middle-class members, unlike the situation uncovered by Chadwick and Morris in Bradford and Croydon respectively.⁶³ Thus, it remains a moot point whether in such communities the use of the term 'crisis' is justified to describe a challenging, but not necessarily intractable, set of circumstances facing the churches.

It is perhaps more helpful to see the concepts of a 'faith society' and 'faith in crisis' as the opposite ends of a continuum rather than a dichotomy, with communities being located between the two extremes and their position changing over time. Differences can be attributed to various factors including the extent to which communal traditions and self-image sustained a close alignment between the sacred and the secular; and ministers and leading church members engaged in civic affairs, commercial enterprises and initiatives designed to meet social needs.

While the strictures about making microcosmic claims based on local studies continue to apply, the variegated pattern in mainland Hampshire was probably little different from that in other southern counties with a similar socio-economic profile to Hampshire, such as Devon. By focusing on the local and, if possible, individual experiences of those directly involved, a richer picture of the socio-religious and cultural world they inhabited emerges.

⁶³ Chadwick, "Church and People"; and Morris, *Religion and Urban Change*.

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, micro-histories can also incorporate quantitative analyses. Indeed, localisation facilitates the disaggregating of data so that the fortunes of churches and the characteristics of their memberships can be studied in greater depth, with more attention being given to positive indicators than is often the case where the underlying trend is one of decline. It may also point to incidents, interests and initiatives around which to construct the narratives that David Nash sees as the way forward for religious history.⁶⁴ While not going as far as him in completely rejecting the contribution of quantitative data and the secularisation narrative, not least because they were something to which many Congregationalists in Edwardian Hampshire could relate, overdependence on them is to be avoided.

With respect to narrative themes, topics covered in the preceding chapters offer many possibilities. Examples include the resources available to church leaders and the dynamics of the relationship between leaders and the led, highlighted in Chapter 4. From Chapter 5 they embrace aspects of Congregational identity, such as positive and negative freedoms and associated rights and responsibilities; how legacies of the past shaped engagement with the present; the promotion of citizenship and political education, particularly amongst the young; and the cult of self-improvement. While from Chapter 6, philanthropy and altruism, which Nash connects to the parable of the Good Samaritan, afford considerable scope for constructing insightful narratives, as do the ebb and flow of belligerent encounters between churches and the socio-cultural and political milieus they inhabited, from

⁶⁴ Nash, "Reconnecting Religion".

Chapter 7. There is also the perplexing theme of quiescence considered, in Chapter 8, with respect to gender relations and the relative silence concerning the subordinate status of women, notwithstanding their essential contribution to many spheres of church life.

Narratives based on such themes are more likely to reveal the intricacies of Congregational life and witness than those which idolise crises and decline. Their construction can incorporate various genres, including biography; prosopography; case studies of what Ian Jones has characterised as ‘local congregational life’;⁶⁵ assessments of church-affiliated organisations; and issue-driven analyses of the kind to which the discourses, in particular, point. Concerning biography, as Griffin maintains in her study of J.H. Jowett’s pastorate at Carrs Lane, by concentrating on Nonconformist movements and trends, historians frequently overlook how these were experienced by those directly affected. However, their thoughts ‘can still be reclaimed and understood by ... [engaging with] the sermons and addresses ... [they] gave’.⁶⁶ There are many ministers, and indeed deacons, from Edwardian Hampshire who would benefit from such treatment.⁶⁷

That said, while locally focused narrative studies have a contribution to make, there are dangers in being overly parochial and failing to incorporate the detail into a bigger picture. Overall, the findings from the research reported here are microcosmic to the extent that they contribute to an emergent kaleidoscope of

⁶⁵ Jones, *Local Church*, 14.

⁶⁶ Griffin, “Ministry of J.H.Jowett,” 80.

⁶⁷ Such biographical studies do not have to be restricted to those with a national profile. See, for example, Ottewill, “James Richards. Parts 1, 2 and 3”.

religious practice in different parts of the country, with the contours of the past being respected rather than eroded.

One final point: church historians need to be more proactive in determining their lines of enquiry rather than simply reacting, either positively or negatively, to the imperatives of secularisation. In so doing, they might well uncover evidence that has previously remained hidden. Rather than airbrushing out of the picture anything that does not fit with the secularisation thesis, any deviations should receive the attention they deserve. Since much of the literature in which secularisation is to the fore covers a longer time span than the one considered in this thesis, there is a tendency to gloss over the preoccupations, and meanings attached to what was happening, of those directly affected. This is not a plea to abandon the concept of secularisation, simply a call to recognise its limitations and, indeed, its multidimensionality.⁶⁸ Here, Wolffe's comment on the religious history of Britain between 1939 and 1990 that 'a rounded account ... needs to balance the language of decline and secularisation with an awareness of continuity, adaptation and new beginnings' could be equally applied to the experiences of the Congregationalists of Edwardian Hampshire.⁶⁹ Their faith and commitment to good works were robust. In the main, they were tough yet supple enough to respond to challenges arising from the more demanding environment that they had to confront.

⁶⁸ For an exposition of the various dimensions of secularisation, see Hugh McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe 1848-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 285-6.

⁶⁹ John Wolffe, "Religion and Secularisation," 440.

APPENDICES

A. Hampshire Congregational Union

A1. Locations of Spring and Autumn Meetings

Year	Spring	Autumn
1901	Alton (Tues/Wed 14/15 May)	Christchurch (29/30 Oct)
1902	Basingstoke (Tues/Wed 22/23 Apr)	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth (11/12 Oct)
1903	Gosport (21/22 Apr)	Above Bar, Southampton (Tues/ Wed 2/3 Nov)
1904	Christ Church, Southsea (Tues/Wed 26/27 Apr)	Avenue, Southampton (Tues/Wed 11/12 Oct)
1905	Ventnor (10/11 Apr)	Buckland, Portsmouth (26/27 Sept)
1906	Winchester (24/25 Apr)	Romsey (Tues/Wed 30/31 Oct)
1907	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth (9/10 Apr)	Albion, Southampton (Tues/Wed 30/31 Oct)
1908	Fareham (Tues/Wed 28/29 Apr)	East Cliff, Bournemouth (29/30 Sept)
1909	Newport, Isle of Wight (20/21 Apr)	Basingstoke (Mon/Tues 27/28 Sept)
1910	Ryde (5/6 Apr)	Boscombe (4/5 Oct)
1911	Avenue, Southampton (5/6 Apr)	Victoria Street, Jersey (26/27 Sept)
1912	Havant (23/24 Apr)	Gosport (1/2 Oct)
1913	Christchurch (15/16 Apr)	Andover (7/8 Oct)
1914	Buckland, Portsmouth (21/22 Apr)	Not held

A2. Office Holders

General Secretary

Year	Name	Church
1901/2	Rev. Richard J. Wells	Havant
1902/3	Rev. Richard J. Wells	Havant
1903/4	Rev. Richard J. Wells	Havant
1904/5	Rev. Richard J. Wells	Havant
1905/6	Rev. Richard J. Wells	Havant
1906/7	Rev. Willie Lawrence	Lymington
1907	Rev. Willie Lawrence	Lymington
1908	Rev. Willie Lawrence	Lymington
1909	Rev. George Saunders	Above Bar, Southampton
1910	Rev. George Saunders	Above Bar, Southampton
1911	Rev. George Saunders	Above Bar, Southampton
1912	Rev. George Saunders	Above Bar, Southampton
1913	Rev. George Saunders	Above Bar, Southampton
1914	Rev. George Saunders	Above Bar, Southampton

Treasurer

Year	Name	Church
1901/2	Mr John Blake	Gosport
1902/3	Mr John Blake	Gosport
1903/4	Mr John Blake	Gosport
1904/5	Mr John Blake	Gosport
1905/6	Mr John Blake	Gosport
1906/7	Mr John Blake	Gosport
1907	Mr John Blake	Gosport
1908	Mr Henry E. Ludbrook	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth
1909	Mr Henry E. Ludbrook	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth
1910	Mr Alfred Peach	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth
1911	Mr Alfred Peach	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth
1912	Mr Alfred Peach	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth
1913	Mr Alfred Peach	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth
1914	Mr Alfred Peach	Richmond Hill, Bournemouth

Sunday School Secretary

Year	Name	Church
1901/2	Rev. Walter Henry Lovell	Gosport
1902/3	Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson	Abbey, Romsey
1903/4	Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson	Abbey, Romsey
1904/5	Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson	Abbey, Romsey
1905/6	Rev. Robert Teasdale	Gosport
1906/7	Rev. Robert Teasdale	Gosport
1907	Rev. Robert Teasdale	Gosport
1908	Rev. Leonard Dowsett	Havant
1909	Rev. Leonard Dowsett	Havant
1910	Rev. Ernest Franks	Gosport
1911	Rev. Ernest Franks	Gosport
1912	Rev. Edward Kirby	Havant
1913	Rev. Edward Kirby	Havant
1914	Rev. Edward Kirby	Havant

Source: *HCU Annual Reports*, 1900 to 1914 inclusive, HRO 127M94/62/45-59.

B. Size of Places of Worship in Hampshire Relative to Populations c1903

B1. Major Urban Centres

Urban Centre	Pop	Ang	Con	Meth	Bap	Oth	Non	RC	Tot	%
Bournemouth	47003	11720	3950	1820	1100	1290	8160	1000	20880	44.4
Portsmouth	188928	27288	3050	9920	5446	6951	25367	1800	54455	28.8
Southampton	104824	10356	4920	1700	2000	2150	10770	900	22026	21.0

B2. Medium Sized Urban Centres

Town	Pop	Ang	Con	Meth	Bap	Oth	Non	RC	Tot	%
Aldershot	30974	4282		1950	650	2100	4700	2900	11882	38.4
Alton	5479	1200	500	300	200	100	1100		2300	42.0
Andover	6509	1330	700	800	500	100	2100		3430	52.7
Basingstoke	9793	2100	600	830	150	1145	2725	75	4900	50.0
Christchurch	4204	950	800	400	300	100	1600	132	2682	63.8
Eastleigh	9317	1600		850	300	350	1500	100	3200	34.3
Fareham	8246	1300	500	400	300		1200	150	2650	32.1
Farnborough	11500	660		400	200		600	200	1460	12.7
Fleet	2021	330		350	300		650		980	48.5
Gosport	28879	2330	800	650	520	550	2520	400	5250	18.2
Havant	3646	1150	400				400		1550	42.5
Itchen	13097	1951	350	500	200	300	1350	200	3501	26.7
Lymington	4165	1500	480	130	620		1230	200	2930	70.3
Petersfield	3265	920	350	575			925	200	2045	62.6
Pokesdown	4930	510	250	350	200	100	1000		1510	30.6
Romsey	4365	1400	650	500	250		1400	100	2900	66.4
Warblington	3151	500	300	200	200		700		1200	38.1
Winchester	20929	7500	750	700	400	300	2150	100	9750	46.6

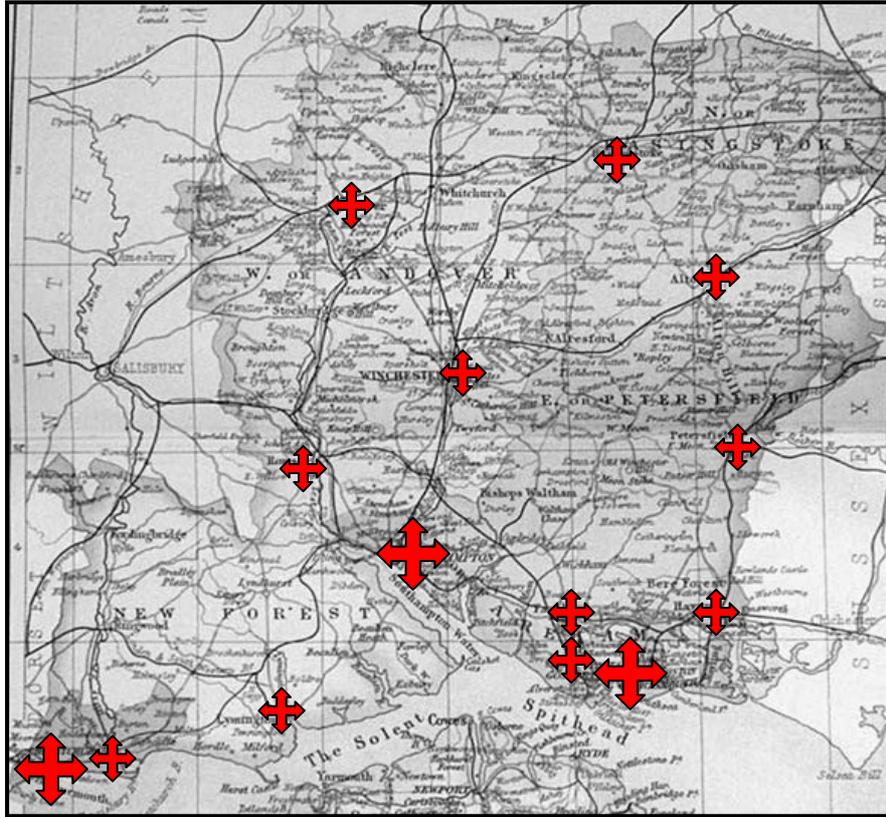


Figure B.1/2: Distribution of larger Congregational churches in Edwardian Hampshire

B3. Selection of Small Towns and Large Villages

Town	Pop	Ang	Con	Meth	Bap	Oth	Non	RC	Tot	%
Alresford	1540	500	200	200			400		900	58.4
Bishop's Waltham	2309	800	350	400		100	850		1650	71.4
Crondall	1505	520	150	100			250		770	51.2
East Meon	1058	400	125	150			275		675	63.8
Fordingbridge	3162	500	250	300		150	700	100	1300	41.1
Odiham	2699	600	300	300	200		800		1400	51.9
Overton	1514	430	200	150			350		780	51.5
Ringwood	4629	1000	550	300	120	100	1070		2070	44.7
Stockbridge	860	420	230	100	160		490		910	105.8
Tadley	1192	400	350	100			450		850	71.3
Titchfield	1569	700	220			80	300		1000	63.7
Whitchurch	2227	410	250	330	200	344	1124	0	1534	68.9

Key

Pop = population as enumerated at 1901 Census; Ang = Anglican; Con = Congregational; Meth = Wesleyan Methodist, Primitive Methodist, Bible Christian; Oth = Other Nonconformist denominations, including Society of Friends, Salvation Army, Countess of Huntingdon's Connection; Non = Total of Nonconformist sittings; RC = Roman Catholic; % = Total number of sittings as a percentage of the population.

Notes

1. Some of the figures are estimates or contain estimates.

Sources: *Kelly's Directory of Hampshire and Isle of Wight*, 1903; and *Census Reports*, 1901.



Figure B.3: Distribution of a selection of smaller Congregational churches in Edwardian Hampshire

C. Results of Surveys of Church Going

C1. Portsmouth

Denomination	Seating	Morning Total	Evening Total
Anglican	27288 (50%)	11997(54%)	15482(50%)
Nonconformist	25367 (47%)	7965(36%)	14227(46%)
Roman Catholic	1800 (03%)	2137(10%)	1053(4%)
Total	54455 (100%)	21899 (100%)	30512 (100%)
Nonconformist Churches:			
Congregationalists	3060 (06%)	982 (04%)	1251 (04%)
Baptists	5335 (10%)	1628 (07%)	2984 (10%)
Wesleyan Methodists	6474 (12%)	2737 (13%)	3164 (10%)
Primitive Methodists	1400 (03%)	492 (02%)	836 (03%)
Bible Christians	2350 (04%)	1035 (05%)	1187 (04%)
Presbyterians	560 (01%)	148 (01%)	128 (00%)
Salvation Army	1730 (03%)	484 (02%)	1192 (04%)
Other	1708 (03%)	440 (02%)	768 (02%)
Unattached	2750 (05%)	19 (00%)	2717 (09%)
Sub-Total	25367 (47%)	7965(36%)	14227(46%)

Congregational Churches

Buckland	750	275	347
Edinburgh Road	560	96	143
Allen's Field	150	50	124
Zion	500	139	188
Christ Church, Kent Road, Southsea	650	259	218
Victoria Road, Southsea	350	163	173
Milton	100	---	58
Congregational Total	3060	982	1251

Source: *Portsmouth Evening News*, December 17, 1902.

C2. Basingstoke

Denomination	Seating	Morning Total	Evening Total
Anglican	2100 (43%)	733 (38%)	954 (37%)
Nonconformist	2725 (56%)	1126 (59%)	1548 (61%)
Roman Catholic	75 (02%)	54 (03%)	45 (02%)
Total	4900 (100%)	1913 (100%)	2547 (100%)
Nonconformist Churches			
Congregational (London Street)	600 (12%)	385 (20%)	486 (19%)
Primitive Methodist	530 (11%)	177 (09%)	197 (08%)
Salvation Army	350 (07%)	118 (06%)	234 (09%)
Wesleyan Methodist	300 (06%)	151 (08%)	163 (06%)
Immanuel (CH)	270 (06%)	90 (05%)	93 (04%)
Baptist	150 (03%)	55 (03%)	60 (02%)
Others	525 (11%)	150 (08%)	315 (12%)
Sub Total	2725 (56%)	1126 (59%)	1548 (61%)

Key

CH = Countess of Huntingdon's Connection

Source: *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 21, 1903.

C3. Whitchurch

Denomination	Seating	Morning Total	Evening Total
Anglican	410 (27%)	263 (46%)	291 (37%)
Nonconformist	1124 (73%)	307 (54%)	487 (63%)
Total	1534 (100%)	570 (100%)	778 (100%)
Nonconformist			
Congregational	200 (13%)	21 (04%)	65 (08%)
Wesleyan Methodist	210 (14%)	89 (16%)	91 (12%)
Primitive Methodist	174 (11%)	67 (12%)	98 (13%)
Baptist	200 (13%)	49 (09%)	48 (06%)
Particular Baptist	80 (05%)	14 (02%)	16 (02%)
Salvation Army	220 (14%)	67 (12%)	156 (20%)
Plymouth Brethren	40 (03%)	0 (00%)	13 (02%)
Sub-Total	1124(73%)	307(54%)	487 (63%)

Source: *Hants and Berks Gazette*, March 28, 1903.

D. Memberships of Hampshire's Congregational Churches 1901 and 1911

D1. Major Urban Centres

Centre and Churches	1901		1911	
	No	Sub-Total	No	Sub-Total
Bournemouth				
Boscombe	203		247	
Pokesdown	106		111	
Westbourne	42		91	
East Cliff	243		361	
Richmond Hill	656		701	
Charminster Road	---		182	
East Howe	33		44	
Longham	46		62	
Southborne	---		63	
Winton ¹	93	1422	160	2022
Portsmouth				
Buckland	506		525	
Christchurch, Southsea	231		191	
Edinburgh Road	150		135	
Milton	---		28	
Victoria Road, Southsea	163		135	
Zion	107	1157	79	1093
Southampton				
Above Bar	353		305	
Bitterne Park	---		134	
Albion	525		415	
Avenue	219		293	
Freemantle	180		188	
Kingsfield	111		84	
Northam	120	1508	82	1531
Total		4087		4646

D2. Medium Sized Urban Centres

Church	HCU District	1901 members	1911 members	Difference
Alton	northern	103	121	+18
Andover	northern	110	134	+24
Basingstoke	northern	211	246	+35
Christchurch	western	260	224	-36
Fareham	eastern	140	106	-34
Gosport	eastern	256	254	-2
Havant	eastern	156	146	-10
Itchen (Pear Tree Green)	middle	91	78	-13
Lymington	western	130	148	+18
Petersfield	eastern	103	106	+3
Romsey	middle	244	231	-13
Winchester	middle	151	160	+9

Note

The totals for Basingstoke, Christchurch, Lymington and Romsey include the members attached to one or more preaching or evangelistic stations for which they acted as the mother church. Details of these stations are to be found in Appendix D3.

D3. Rural Congregational Churches and Chapels in 1904 (in alphabetical order)¹

Name	Year	HCU Dist	Sits ²	Mem ³	SS ⁴	Arrangement ⁵	HCU Fin Sup ⁶
Alderholt	1830	W	80	23	70	Stuckton and District	ES
Alresford	1825	M	200	50	52		---
Awebridge	1819	M	80	R	40	Romsey	---
Bentworth	1896	N	100	S	--	Alton District	ES
Bishop's Waltham	1836	E	350	67	115		ES
Bitterne	1863	M	320	57	172		---
Botley	1860	E	100	18	35	Bishop's Waltham	ES
Braishfield	1819	M	130	R	80	Romsey	---
Burley	1719	W	180	40	52		AC
Burley Street	1880	W	40	Bu	B	Burley	---
Bursledon	1860	M	150	45	60	Pear Tree Green	ES
Burton Green	1875	W	130	C	48	Christchurch	---
Cadnam	1790	M	180	34	46		ES
Cheriton	1868	M	150	22	46	Winchester	ES
Cranemoor	1828	W	180	C	83	Christchurch	---
Cron dall	1798	N	150	35	44		---
East End	1890	W	200	L	38	Lymington	ES
East Meon	1864	E	125	29	101	Petersfield (Linked with Ramsdean)	---
Ellisfield	1894	N	30	Ba	Ba	Basingstoke District	ES
Emsworth	1808	E	300	42	76		ES
Farleigh	1900	N	40	Ba	Ba	Basingstoke District	ES
Finchdean	n.k.	E	70	20	--	Rowlands Castle	---
Fordingbridge	1697	W	250	79	95		---
Frogham	1820	W	90	7	31	Stuckton and District	ES
Godshill	1832	W	80	14	40	Stuckton and District	ES
Hayling North	n.k.	E	60	10	12		ES
Hayling South	1811	E	240	47	90		ES
Headley	1867	N	100	13	30	Alton Distirct	ES
Hook	1816	N	80	O	O	Odiham	---
Hurstbourne Tarrant	1840	N	200	21	30		ES
Hythe	1839	M	200	42	59		ES
Kingsley	1862	N	150	21	7	Alton District	ES
Kingston	n.k.	W		17	30	Ringwood	
Locks Heath	1903	E	250	31	108		ES
Long Sutton	1815	N	60	O	O	Odiham	---
Mapledurwell	1864	N	90	Ba	Ba	Basingstoke District	ES
Marchwood	n.k.	M	100	9	--	Totton	---
Medstead	1850	N	50	20	52	Alton District	ES
Moordown	1860	W	100	Th	Th	Throop	---
Netley Marsh	1901	M	100	To	27	Totton	---

Odiham	1662	N	300	63	163		AC
Overton & White Lane	1838	N	200	43	143		ES
Pilley	1858	W	150	L	61	Lymington District	ES
Prinstead	n.k	E	80	E	E	Emsworth	---
Pyott's Hill	1872	N	90	Ba	Ba	Basingstoke District	ES
Ramsdean	n.k.	E	100	EM	EM	Petersfield , linked with East Meon (EM)	ES
Ripley	1829	W	250	63	64		---
Rowlands Castle	1800	E	140	42	113		ES
Sarisbury Green	1882	E	200	100	200		---
Selborne	1860	N	100	12	30	Alton District	ES
Shortheath	1830	N	100	15	0	Alton District	ES
Stockbridge	1817	M	230	14	27		ES
Stuckton	1827	W	150	41	100	Stuckton and District	ES
Tadley	1662	N	350	49	90		AC
Throop	1828	W	220	67	84		---
Titchfield	1789	E	220	42	186		AC
Totton	1811	M	220	48	133		AC
Warsash	1845	E	300	46	158		AC
Waterditch	1830	W	90	C	56	Christchurch	---
Whitchurch	1658	N	250	22	50		---
Winslade	1887	N	90	Ba	Ba	Basingstoke District	ES
Worting	1872	N	90	Ba	Ba	Basingstoke District	ES

Key and Notes

1. Three more were established between 1904 and 1914, Sopley in 1905; Ropley in 1906; and Purlieu in 1910.
2. Sittings.
3. Members, as shown in the returns to the HCU for 1904. Ba, included in total for Basingstoke; Bu, included in total for Burley; C, included in total for Christchurch; E, included in total for Emsworth; L, included in total for Lymington; O, included in total for Odiham; R included in total for Romsey; S, included in total for Shortheath; Th, included in total for Throop; and To, included in total for Totton.
4. Sunday School scholars, as shown in returns to the HCU for 1904.
5. In this column information about the standing of the church, chapel or station is provided. In most cases the name of the 'mother' church is simply listed. Where there is no entry in this column the church was, as described in the main body of the paper, 'stand alone'.
6. Financial support from HCU. In providing financial support, a distinction was made between an aided church (AC) and an evangelistic station (ES).

Sources: *HCU Annual Reports*, 1901, 1904 and 1911, HRO 127M94/62/46, 49 and 56.

D4. Congregational Churches and Chapels in Places where Landholding Details have been Found

D4a. Classified by landholding

Property in One Hand	Property in a Few Hands	Property Sub-divided	Property Much Sub-divided
Winslade [1887]	Bursledon [1860]	Alresford (New) [1825]	Cron dall [1798]
Worting [1872]	Cadnam [1790] (Minstead)	Bentworth [1896]	East End [1890] and Pilley [1858] (Boldre)
	Ellisfield [1894]	Botley [1860]	Fordingbridge [1697]
	Frogham (Hyde) [1820]	East Meon [1864]	Hayling North [n.k.]
	Headley [1867]	Medstead [1850]	Hayling South [1811]
	Hurstbourne Tarrant [1840]		Ropley [1906]
	Kingsley [1862]		Throop [1828] and Moordown [1860] (Holdenhurst)
	Long Sutton [1815]		Titchfield [1789]
	Mapledurwell [1864]		Totton [1811] (Eling)
	Odiham [1662]		
	Overton [1838]		
	Pyotts Hill [1872] (Old Basing)		
	Ripley [1829] (Sopley)		
	Rowlands Castle [1800] and Finchdean [1830] (Idsworth)		

Notes

1. It has not been possible to find the requisite information for every location in Hampshire where there was a Congregational place of worship.
2. Where the name of the church or chapel differs from that of the parish the latter is shown in brackets

D4b. Classified by year of foundation

Date Established	Property in one or a Few Hands	Property Sub-divided	Property Much Sub-divided
Pre 1800	Cadnam Odiham		Crondall Fordingbridge Titchfield
1800 to 1849	Finchdean Frogham Hurstbourne Tarrant Long Sutton Overton Ripley Rowlands Castle	Alresford	Hayling South Throop Totton
1850 to 1899	Bursledon Ellisfield Headley Kingsley Mapledurwell Pyotts Hill Winslade Worting	Bentworth Botley East Meon Medstead	East End Pilley Moordown
Post 1900			Ropley

Sources: *HCU Annual Report*, 1901, HRO 127M94/62/46; and John M. Wilson, *The Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales*, 6 vols. (London & Edinburgh: Fullarton, 1870-2).

E. Sunday School Statistics for Hampshire's Congregational Churches 1901 and 1911

E1. Major Urban Centres

Centre and Churches	1901		1911	
	No	Sub-Total	No	Sub-Total
Bournemouth				
Boscombe	170		179	
Pokesdown	140		193	
Westbourne	51		59	
East Cliff	348		306	
Malmesbury Park	223		116	
Richmond Hill	383		228	
Charminster Road	97		305	
East Howe	86		86	
Longham	120		101	
Southborne	---		---	
Winton	418	2036	304	1877
Portsmouth				
Buckland	824		745	
Buckland Street	---		160	
Christchurch, Southsea	237		109	
Edinburgh Road	68		73	
Allen's Field	---		69	
Orange Street	---		112	
Victoria Street	---		222	
Milton	---		250	
Victoria Road, Southsea	235		121	
Zion	206	1570	145	2006
Southampton				
Above Bar	536		568	
Bitterne Park	115		159	
Cross Street	80		---	
Lime Street	---		74	
Albion	640		632	
Netley	---		40	
Avenue	366		370	
Portswood			214	
Freemantle	340		390	
Kingsfield	86		77	
Northam	310	2473	330	2854
Total		6079		6737

E2. Medium Sized Urban Centres

Church	HCU District	1901 scholars	1911 scholars	Difference
Alton	northern	169	117	-52
Andover ¹	northern	165	173	+8
Basingstoke	northern	446	612	+166
Christchurch	western	168	160	-8
Fareham	eastern	225	203	-22
Gosport ²	eastern	486	695	+209
Havant	eastern	180	196	+16
Itchen (Pear Tree Green)	middle	178	172	-6
Lymington	western	171	132	-39
Petersfield	eastern	98	93	-5
Romsey	middle	467	376	-91
Winchester	middle	150	140	-10

Notes

1. Including Andover Down (1901 and 1911) and Harroway Road (1911).
2. Including Clay Hill (1901 and 1911) and King Street (1911).

Sources: *HCU Annual Reports*, 1901 and 1911, HRO 127M94/62/46 and 56.

F. Membership Densities

F1. Major Urban Centres

F1a. Population

	1901			1911			Change Den
	Pop	Mem	Den	Pop	Mem	Den	
Bournemouth	59672	1422	2.4	78674	2022	2.6	+0.2
Portsmouth	188133	1192	0.6	231141	1093	0.5	-0.1
Southampton	104824	1508	1.4	119012	1531	1.3	-0.1

F1b. Adult (18+) population

	1901			1911			Change Den
	Pop	Mem	Den	Pop	Mem	Den	
Bournemouth	41134	1422	3.5	57735	2022	3.5	0
Portsmouth	119848	1192	1.0	154144	1093	0.7	-0.3
Southampton	65598	1508	2.3	76372	1531	2.0	-0.3

F2. Medium Sized Urban Centres

F2a. Population

	1901			1911			Change Den
	Pop	Mem	Den	Pop	Mem	Den	
Alton	5479	103	1.9	5555	121	2.2	+0.3
Andover	6509	110	1.7	7596	134	1.8	+0.1
Basingstoke	9793	211	2.2	11540	246	2.1	-0.1
Christchurch	4204	260	6.2	5104	224	4.4	-1.8
Fareham	8246	140	1.7	9674	106	1.1	-0.6
Gosport	28884	256	0.9	33300	254	0.8	-0.1
Havant	3837	156	4.1	4092	146	3.6	-0.5
Lymington	4165	130	3.6	4329	148	3.4	-0.2
Petersfield	3265	103	3.2	3947	106	2.7	-0.5
Romsey	4365	244	5.6	4669	231	4.9	-0.7
Winchester	20929	151	0.7	23378	160	0.7	0.0

F2b. Adult (18+) population

	1901			1911			Change Den
	Pop	Mem	Den	Pop	Mem	Den	
Alton	3509	103	2.9	3669	121	3.3	+0.4
Andover	4056	110	2.7	4863	134	2.8	+0.1
Basingstoke	6103	211	3.5	7397	246	3.3	-0.2
Christchurch	2756	260	9.4	3454	224	6.5	-2.9
Fareham	5519	140	2.5	6775	106	1.6	-0.9
Gosport	17843	256	1.4	21932	254	1.2	-0.2
Havant	2391	156	6.5	2730	146	5.3	-1.2
Lymington	2792	130	5.3	2956	148	5.0	-0.3
Petersfield	2041	103	5.0	2645	106	4.0	-1.0
Romsey	2635	244	9.3	2872	231	8.0	-1.3
Winchester	13523	151	1.1	15632	160	1.0	-0.1

F3. Selection of Small Towns and Large Villages

F3a. Population

	1901			1911			Change Den
	Pop	Mem	Den	Pop	Mem	Den	
Alresford (M)	1540	60	3.9	1706	40	2.3	-1.6
Bishop's Waltham (M) ¹	2309	49	2.1	2488	57	2.3	+0.2
Crandall (N)	1505	38	2.5	1374	30	2.2	-0.3
East Meon (E)	1058	19	1.8	1013	18	1.8	0.0
Fordingbridge (W)	3162	65	2.1	3456	57	1.6	-0.5
Odiham (N)	2699	64	2.4	2674	81	3.0	+0.6
Overton (N)	1514	42	2.8	1616	57	3.5	+0.7
Ringwood (W)	4629	105	2.3	5055	90	1.8	-0.5
Stockbridge (W)	860	14	1.6	915	18	2.0	+0.4
Tadley (N)	1192	43	3.6	1293	48	3.7	+0.1
Titchfield (E)	1569	30	1.9	1608	58	3.6	+1.7
Whitchurch (N)	2227	20	0.9	2370	17	0.7	-0.2

F3b. Adult (18+) population

	1901			1911			Change Den
	Pop	Mem	Den	Pop	Mem	Den	
Alresford (M)	963	60	6.2	1095	40	3.7	-2.5
Bishop's Waltham (M)	1443	49	3.4	1597	57	3.6	+0.2
Cron dall (N)	947	38	4.0	889	30	3.4	-0.6
East Meon (E)	668	19	2.8	681	18	2.6	-0.2
Fordingbridge (W)	2096	65	3.1	2350	57	2.4	-0.7
Odiham (N)	1698	64	3.8	1730	81	4.7	+0.9
Overton (N)	952	42	4.4	1046	57	5.4	+1.0
Ringwood (W)	3069	105	3.4	3437	90	2.6	-0.8
Stockbridge (W)	570	14	2.5	622	18	2.9	+0.4
Tadley (N)	750	43	5.7	837	48	5.7	0.0
Titchfield (E)	990	30	3.0	1081	58	5.4	+2.4
Whitchurch (N)	1401	20	1.4	1533	17	1.1	-0.3

Key and Note

Pop = population; mem = members; and den = density (i.e. number of members as a percentage of the population).

All the population figures in Table F3b are estimates. To calculate the 18+ populations the following percentages have been used: Northern District churches 62.9 per cent of total population in 1901 and 64.7 per cent in 1911; Eastern, 63.1 and 67.2; Middle, 62.5 and 64.2; and Western, 66.3 and 68.0.

Sources: *Census Returns*, 1901 and 1911; and *HCU Annual Reports*, 1901 and 1911, HRO 127M94/62/46 and 56.

G. Demographic Data for Avenue, London Street and Victoria Road
Congregational Churches

G1a. The gender of resident members and of those found in the census returns

Year	Avenue			London Street			Victoria Road		
	Total ¹	Census ²	% ³	Total ¹	Census ²	% ³	Total ¹	Census ²	% ³
1901									
Mr	60	54	90	83	81	98	49	33	67
Mrs	68	65	96	93	86	92	54	40	74
Miss	69	58	84	53	43	81	48	30	63
Total	197	177	90	229	210	92	151	103	68
1911									
Mr	85	75	88	95	92	97	42	37	88
Mrs	95	90	95	96	91	95	43	33	77
Miss	93	72	77	56	44	79	49	27	55
Total	273	237	87	247	227	92	134	97	72

Notes

1. The total number of resident members on the church roll at the beginning of the year.
2. The number of members identified in the national censuses, which were held on Sunday March 31, 1901 and Sunday April 2, 1911 respectively.
3. The percentage of resident church members identified in the census returns.

G1b. Ratio of males to females for all resident members

	Avenue		London Street		Victoria Road	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1901	31	69	36	64	32	68
1911	31	69	38	62	31	69

G2. Age structure of resident members found in census returns

	Avenue		London Street		Victoria Road	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
1901						
-25	32	18	29	14	20	19
26-45	78	44	87	41	38	37
46-65	44	25	70	33	34	33
Over 65	23	13	24	11	11	11
Total	177	100	210	100	103	100
1911						
-25	21	9	24	11	11	11
26-44	99	42	91	40	39	40
45-64	77	32	83	37	31	32
65+	40	17	29	13	16	16
Total	237	100	227	100	97	100

G3. Marital Status

G3a. Length of time couples who were both church members had been married (1911 only)

Number of Years Married	Avenue		London Street		Victoria Road	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
0 to 9 years	10	19	11	19	6	29
10 to 19 years	16	31	16	28	4	19
20 to 29 years	10	19	17	30	6	29
30 to 39 years	8	15	6	11	4	1
40 years plus	8	15	7	12	1	5
Total	52	100	57	100	21	100

Note

In a number of cases the marriage reported is a second one with one partner at least often being rather older than the other.

G3b. Autogenous growth where only one spouse was a church member

Year	Avenue			London Street			Victoria Road		
	Total	Mems	%	Total	Mems	%	Total	Mems	%
1901									
Male	3	0	0	3	0	0	4	0	0
Female	9	6	66	9	4	44	7	7	100
Total	12	6	50	12	4	33	11	7	64
1911									
Male	8	1	13	13	4	31	3	0	0
Female	7	2	29	15	5	33	7	2	29
Total	15	3	20	28	9	32	10	2	20

G3c. Autogenous growth where parent had been widowed

Year	Avenue			London Street			Victoria Road		
	Total	Mems	%	Total	Mems	%	Total	Mems	%
1901									
Male	6	2	33	6	1	17	2	0	0
Female	14	12	86	8	5	63	9	5	56
Total	20	14	70	14	6	43	11	5	45
1911									
Male	8	1	13	8	1	13	1	0	0
Female	19	11	58	10	5	50	6	6	100
Total	27	12	44	18	6	33	7	6	86

Sources: *Avenue Congregational Church Southampton Records, 1901 and 1911*, Avenue St Andrews URC Archive; *London Street Congregational Church Basingstoke Manuals, 1901 to 1911*, London Street URC Basingstoke Archive; *Victoria Road Church Meetings Minute Books 1884–1902 and 1902–1911 and 1911–1915*, PA CHU95/1A/1-2; and *Census Returns, 1901 and 1911*.

H. Ministers and Pastors serving Hampshire Congregational Churches 1901-1914

H1. Ministers (those on List A of the CUEW)

Surname	First Names	Born ¹	College etc ²	Church ³	Start	Finish
Ashenhurst	Robert	n.k.	Edinburgh	Kingsfield	1905	1910
Bage	Albert	1867	Prim.Meth.	Romsey	1909	1914
Bailey	Louis Joseph	1860	Hackney	Fareham	1904	1910
Bennett	William	1843	Nottingham	Warsash	1898	1903
Beynon	David John	1855	Brecon	Freemantle	1901	1916
Brindley	Richard B.	1855	New	Southbourne	1912	1919
Buchan	Peter	1888	New	Kingsfield	1912	1917
Campbell	James	1853	Pres.	Fordingbridge	1910	1919
Clarkson	William F.	1839	New	Above Bar	1896	1902
Clegg	Robert Edgar	1868	Yorkshire	Christchurch, SS	1898	1906
Clegg	Alfred	1876	Various ⁴	Boscombe	1910	1917
Cliffe	Joseph	1863	Nottingham	Lymington	1894	1902
Coley	Henry	1849	Mansfield	Christchurch	1908	1917
Cook	William V.	1855	Wes.Meth.	Kingsfield	1890	1904
				Bitterne	1904	1924
Cooper	Francis Henry	1852	C.o.H.	Sarisbury Green	1906	1916
Curson	Jacob	n.k.	?Wes.Meth.	Bitterne	1897	1903
Cuthbertson	William John	1848	Western	Crondall	1907	1916
Daniel	William	1849	not known	Victoria Rd, SS	1898	1903
Davies	Humphrey	1867	Western	Alton	1904	1910
Davies	John Watkin	1865	New	Edinburgh Rd	1891	1940
Davies	Meredith	1882	Hackney	Avenue	1910	1912
Davies	Thomas O.	1862	Hackney	Crondall	1894	1902
Dixon	Sydney B.	1869	not known	Odiham	1906	1912
Dobbie	Robert	1870	Nottingham	Crondall	1903	1907
Dowsett	Leonard E.	1876	New	Havant	1906	1910
Draper	John Thomas	1862	not known	Andover	1898	1903
Dudley	Ernest Chisnell	1876	Hackney	Pear Tree Green	1899	1911
Eldridge	Samuel	1843	New	Throop	1869	1901
Evans	Ben	1867	Carmarthen	Winton	1897	1908
Evans	Thomas Cynor	1873	New	Bitterne Park	1902	1914
Field	George	1862	Nottingham	Throop	1902	1921
Franks	Ernest William	1874	Mansfield	Gosport	1908	1917
Franks	Richard Lister	1876	Mansfield	Charminster Road	1913	1917
Gibson	Alexander	1872	Nottingham	Charminster Road	1901	1910
Grieve	Alexander J.	1874	Mansfield	Romsey	1905	1909
Harries	Thomas H.	1864	not known	Northam	1910	1923
Hawes	Albert Edward	1865	Cheshunt	Winchester	1913	1917
Hayward	Herbert Jesse	1870	?Wes.Meth.	Burley	1900	1901
				Whitchurch	1901	1902

Henson	Henry	1845	Nottingham	Totton	1899	1913
Hitchcock	Ebenezer	1869	Nottingham	Andover	1903	1910
Hogben	Walter Page	1860	Western	Titchfield	1902	1911
Holt	William Ellis	1839	not known	Fleet	1913	1916
Howarth	Robert	1870	Yorkshire	Ripley	1901	1939
Howell	Henry John	1872	Cheshunt	Freemantle	1895	1901
Hunt	Enoch John	1854	Cheshunt	Fordingbridge	1886	1902
Hutson	Thomas Lee	1865	Meth.N.Con	Petersfield	1910	1923
Hyde	Frederick T.	1864	Nottingham	Fareham	1911	1923
James	Howard Page	1874	Yorkshire	Winton	1908	1918
John	David Daniel	1872	New	Winchester	1901	1906
Jones	Thomas Clare	1861	Hackney	Petersfield	1898	1902
Jones	Thomas	1854	Brecon	Warsash	1905	1910
				East Meon	1914	1915
Jones	I. Maldwyn	1877	New	Albion	1904	1917
Jones	John Daniel	1865	Lancashire	Richmond Hill	1898	1937
Kirby	Edward Tait	1871	New	Havant	1910	1923
Lawrence	Willie James	1862	Cheshunt	Lymington	1903	1909
Learmount	James	1860	?Wes. Meth.	Christchurch	1900	1906
Lewis	Harry G.	1867	Hackney	Alton	1911	1925
Lovell	Walter Henry	1866	Western	Gosport	1891	1901
Lucas	Henry	1860	not known	Andover	1911	1921
Mackintosh	Rocliffe	1869	USA ⁵	London Street	1912	1926
Marler	Arthur Guyan	1872	Western	Fordingbridge	1902	1909
Martin	Arthur Davis	1869	Hackney	Avenue	1894	1905
Martin	Charles John	1881	Nottingham	Titchfield	1913	1915
Martindale	Alfred	1856	Rotherham	Westbourne	1901	1910
Merrill	Herbert	1883	New	Hythe	1912	1913
Miles	William	1864	Owen's	Buckland	1903	1921
Milnes	John Harrison	1876	Mansfield	Westbourne	1911	1917
Moncrieff	William	1872	Edinburgh	East Cliff	1901	1907
Palmer	Ebenezer R.	1846	Cheshunt	Odiham	1913	1914
Palmer	Cyril G. R.	1888	Western	Odiham	1914	1915
Patton	Samuel	1839	CUEW Ex	Titchfield	1887	1901
				Burley	1901	1909
Perkins	Henry John	1855	Hackney	Albion	1895	1903
Philip	John Frederick	n.k.	Cheshunt	Hythe	1909	1910
Rees	David Henry	1862	Western	Fareham	1897	1904
Riceman	Alfred T.	1876	Hackney	Southbourne	1910	1911
Richards	Nicholas	1879	New	Winchester	1907	1910
Robilliard	Thomas W.	1835	not known	Tadley	1879	1916
Rogers	John Phillip	1877	New	East Cliff	1908	1915
Ross	Thomas S.	1853	New	Southbourne ⁶	1911	1919
Rowe	William Baker	1836	not known	Alresford	1902	1913
Rowlands	William John	1875	Bangor	Burley	1911	1915
Sadd	Arthur Joseph	1875	Cheshunt	Richmond Hill asst	1911	1915
Saunders	George S.S.	1866	Hackney	Above Bar	1904	1920

Schofield	Harry	1856	Nottingham	Pokesdown	1894	1916
Skinner	Robert O.	1885	New	Ringwood	1912	1915
Sloper	Francis	1849	New	Boscombe	1894	1909
Smith	Philip Henry	1864	Bapt.	Charminster Road	1910	1913
Spencer	Henry Thomas	1869	Mansfield	Avenue	1913	1929
Startup	George E.	1865	Wes.Meth.	Avenue	1906	1909
Stanley	George H. C.	1883	New	Christchurch, SS	1913	1916
Steen	William	1867	New	Ringwood	1903	1911
Talbot	Walter Charles	1848	Airedale	Buckland	1888	1902
Tarbolton	Alfred Capes	1853	New	London Street	1887	1907
Taylor	Martin Church	1864	Western	Ringwood	1892	1902
Teasdale	Robert	1864	Nottingham	Gosport	1902	1908
Thomas	John Evelyn	1881	Brecon	Richmond Hill asst	1908	1911
Thompson	Reginald W.	1888	New	London Street	1907	1911
Thompson	Ernest James	1875	Nottingham	Petersfield	1903	1909
Thompson	James	1843	not known	Northam	1885	1908
Tolley	John George	1847	Mansfield	London Street asst	1904	1905
Tran	David	1867	not known	Eastleigh	1909	1916
Tubb	William	1841	Wes.Meth.	Odiham	1894	1905
Vine	Walter	1870	Ireland	Lymington	1910	1917
Way	Charles Peter	1852	Pres.	Sarisbury Green	1901	1905
Weatherhead	Henry James	1849	Un.Meth.	Alton	1899	1903
Wells	Richard Joshua	1858	New	Havant	1882	1905
Williams	George Felix	1863	Western	Victoria Rd, SS	1905	1914
Williamson	Hugh Ross	1866	Nottingham	Romsey	1897	1904
Wills	John	1868	Wes.Meth.	Christchurch, SS	1907	1912

Key and Notes

1. The year of birth has been taken from either from the minister's official obituary in the Congregational Year Book, when shown, or census records, indicated by italics.

2. For further details of the theological colleges, see Appendix H3. A number of ministers transferred to Congregationalism from another denomination. In these instances only their denominational background is indicated. Bapt. = Baptist; C.o.H. = Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion; Meth.N.Con = Methodist. New Connexion; Pres. = Presbyterian; Prim.Meth. = Primitive Methodist; Un.Meth. = United Methodists; and Wes.Meth. = Wesleyan Methodist.

3. SS = Southsea; (as) = assistant

4. As explained in his obituary, shortly after commencing his training at Hackney College, Clegg's brother died and 'he returned to Liverpool to carry on his brother's work for a few years. Finally ... he became a regular student at Liverpool University ... He was for four years a lecturer on Elocution and Public Speaking at Bradford Congregational College; Rawdon Baptist College, Belfast Methodist College, the

Methodist New Connexion College, Sheffield, but as it was his declared intention to become a Congregational Minister, he was allowed to attend the theological and sermon classes at these colleges on the days when he gave his own lectures. So although he was not trained at a theological college in the accepted sense, he had a unique training before entering the ministry.' *CYB*, 1964/5, 437-8.

5. Mackintosh studied at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey.

6. Ross assisted during a long period of retirement (1900 to 1938) and what his obituary describes as 'enforced leisure', due to ill health. *CYB*, 1939, 711.

H2. Pastors and evangelists (those on List B of the CUEW)

Surname ¹	First Names ¹	Born ²	Church ³	Start	Finish
Baines	John	1869	Hythe	1899	1903
			Stockbridge	1903	1910
			Stuckton group	1910	1950
Brewer	Noah	1874	East Meon	1901	1905
			Locks Heath	1905	1912
			East End & Pilley	1912	1916
Brown	George	1849	Hurstbourne T	1901	1904
			Cadnam	1904	1910
Cannon	Walter	1859	Medstead	1902	1906
			East End	1906	1908
			Northam	1908	1909
Chapman	James	1852	Medstead	1898	1902
Charrett	George James	1848	Emsworth	1892	1913
Cooper	Henry	1838	Alresford	1885	1902
Drew	Reuben James	1877	Pear Tree Green	1911	1920
Elliott	Walter Albert	1888	Milton, Portsmouth	1913	1921
Ellison	Henry E.	1854	Longham	1903	1922
Fellows	George	1873	Basingstoke Villages	1902	1910
			Kingsley	1910	1914
			Emsworth	1914	1918
Gittings	James ^{LP}	1856	Zion, Portsmouth	1900	1909
			Netley	1909	1912
			Stockbridge	1912	1913
Grant	Thomas A. ^{LP}	1862	Zion, Portsmouth	1910	1914
Hern	Frederick	1871	Rowlands Castle	1901	1936
Hitchings	William W.	1873	Basingstoke Villages	1899	1906
			Headley	1906	1911
Hockham	Frank	1867	East Meon	1908	1910
			Cadnam	1910	
<i>Kendall</i>	<i>Theophilis</i>	n.k.	Milton, Portsmouth	1868	1910
Longmore	Samuel	1848	Bishop's Waltham	1894	1924
Mead	Frank	1875	Stuckton group	1908	1910
			East Meon	1911	1913

Miller	Herbert C.	1872	Stuckton group	1903	1907
Neal	Bentley	1860	Pilley	1908	1912
			Headley	1912	1924
Richards	James ⁴	1835	Overton	1892	1916
Roberts	Gilbert L.	1879	Warsash	1911	1914
			Alresford	1914	1920
Rose	Harry	1870	Cadnam	1899	1904
Rose	H. William	1878	East Meon	1906	1908
			Hayling, South	1908	1914
			Hythe	1914	1916
Smith	Major	1862	East End & Pilley	1899	1906
			Alton District	1906	1917
Snitch	James	1863	Alton District	1899	1910
Spelt	William Lane	1842	Hayling, South	1894	1908
West	Richard A.	1869	Hythe	1903	1908
Williams	Humphrey	1874	Basingstoke Villages	1911	1916

Key and Notes

LP = lay pastor

1. The year of birth has been taken from either from the minister's official obituary in the Congregational Year Book, when shown, or census records, indicated by italics.
2. Those shown in italics were not listed in *CYB*.
3. See Appendix D3 for further details of churches served.
4. In 1910 Richards received full ordination at the spring meeting of the HCU held in Southampton, in recognition of his loyal service and effective ministry and was transferred from List B to List A.

Source: *CYBs*; Surman Index Online, accessed December 5, 2013, <http://www.english.qmul.ac.uk/drwilliams/surman/intro.html>

H3. Colleges

No	Title	Background
1	New College, London	combining – Congregational Fund Board, 1696; Kings Head Academy; Homerton College, 1730; Coward College, 1738; Hoxton College; and Highbury College, 1778.
2	Western College, Bristol	Founded in 1752. Removed to Bristol, 1901.
3	Yorkshire United Independent College, Bradford	Both Airedale and Rotherham were founded in 1756. The amalgamation took place in 1888.
4	Cheshunt College	Founded in 1768. Removed to Cambridge, 1905.
5	Hackney College	Founded in 1803. Removed to Hampstead, 1887.
6	Lancashire Independent College	Formed 1816 at Blackburn, and continued the academic training, given by McQuhae of Blackburn and Roby of Manchester. Removed to Manchester, 1842.
7	Mansfield College	Founded 1838, in Birmingham, as Spring Hill College; removed to Oxford, 1886.
8	Congregational Institute, Nottingham	Founded 1861. Popularly known as Paton College.
9	Carmarthen Presbyterian College	Founded 1719.
10	Congregational Memorial College, Brecon	Established by the Congregational Fund Board in 1755 at Abergavenney and continued at Oswestry (1782), Wrexham (1791), Llanfyllin (1816), and Newtown (1821). The Welsh Churches joined its support and the College was removed to Brecon in 1839. Present building opened 1869.
11	Bala-Bangor Independent College	Founded in 1843. The college was formed, through the amalgamation of Institutions formerly carried on at Bala and Bangor in 1890.
12	Theological Hall of Independent Churches in Scotland	The Academy was founded in 1811, in Glasgow ... but was located in Edinburgh in 1854. In 1843 the Hall of the Evangelical Union was founded in Kilmarnock ... In May, 1897, the two institutions were amalgamated.

Source: *CYB*, 1906, 114-25.

I. Avenue Congregational Church Lecture Programme: Selected Years

1901-02

“Chitral, and the Story of the Siege.” – Sir George Robertson

Elocutionary Recital – Mr Ernest Denny

“Voyage in Cloudland.” – Rev J.M. Bacon, M.A., F.R.A.S.

“Caricature in and out of Parliament.” – E.T. Read of *Punch*

“Lord Macaulay: Historian, Poet, Statesman.” – Rev Charles Clark

“Three Centuries of English Song.” – Madame Bertha Moore

“Stephen Langton: Archbishop and Patriot.” – Rev A.B. Boyd-Carpenter, M.A.

1904-5

“Things we forget to remember.” – Madame Sarah Grand

“Russia and Japan: The Situation in the Far East,” illustrated with unique lantern slides. – Mr Arthur Diosy, F.R.G.S.

“Parliament from the Press Gallery.” – Mr Spencer Leigh Hughes (“Sub Rosa”)

“Folk Songs of the Land.” – Mr A Foxtton Ferguson, B.A. and Miss Beatrice Spencer

Elocutionary Recital – Mr Ernest Denny

“Liquid Air,” with experimental illustrations – Dr W. Hampson

“Tennyson’s ‘Lancelot and Elaine.’ “ – Rev A.B. Boyd-Carpenter

1905-6

“Excavating in Egypt, and its results,” illustrated with unique lantern slides. – Prof. Flinders Petrie, D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S.

“The Wallace Collection: its beauties shown, described and explained,” illustrated with unique lantern slides. – Mr M.H. Spielmann, F.S.A.

“Dibdin’s Sea Songs, and other Naval Ballads.” – Prof. Sir Frederick Bridge, Mus. Doc., M.V.O, assisted by Mr Dan Price (Principal Bass of Westminster Abbey), and by Mr M.G. Conlan.

“Nature’s Armouries – Defences and Devices of Animal Life,” illustrated with unique lantern slides. – Dr Andrew Wilson, F.R.S.E., F.L.S., &c.

“Shakespearian and Miscellaneous Recital.” – Mr Alexander Watson

“Humour: an analysis and illustration.” – Rev John Watson D.D.

“Insect Architects and Engineers,” illustrated with unique lantern slides. – Mr Frederick Enock, F.L.S., F.E.S., F.R.M.S., &c.

1909-10

“The Buddhist Cave Temples of India,” illustrated by a series of most interesting
Lantern Slides – Sir George Watt, C.I.E., M.B., C.M., LL.D., etc

“Queer Beasts and Birds,” illustrated by remarkable Lantern Slides. – Gambier
Bolton

“The Philistine in Art.” – Prof. Sir Hubert von Herkomer

“Tirol and the Dolomites” (the most difficult climbing in the world). Illustrated by a
wonderful series of Pictures on the Bioscope. – Frank Ormiston Smith

Shakespearian and Miscellaneous Recital – Ernest Denny

“Aerial Navigation – Past, Present & Future.” Illustrated by Experiments, Diagrams,
Lantern and Special Kineamatograph Pictures – Dr. H.S. Hele-Shaw, F.R.S., M.I.C.E.,
M.I.M.E., etc

“Milton and Music.” – Prof. Sir Frederick Bridge. Vocal illustrations by Miss Oswyn
Jones and Mr Dan Price. String Quartette under the leadership of Mr J.F. Guyer,
L.R.A.M.

1913-14

“The Peoples of Central Africa.” Fully Illustrated. – Sir Harry Johnston, G.C.M.G.,
K.C.B., D.Sc.

“My Experiences of Russian Poland.” Fully Illustrated. – Miss Kate Maleka

“The Magic Mirror of Japan.” Specially Illustrated. – Prof. Silvanus P. Thompson,
F.R.S., D.Sc.

Dramatic Recital – Mr Alexander Watson

“A Chapter in Animal Symbolism.” Fully Illustrated. – Sir F. Carruthers Gould

“Robert Louis Stevenson in Samoa, and His Native Friends in the South Seas.” Fully
Illustrated. – Frederick W. Christian, B.A.

“On Melody.” – Dr. H. Walford Davies, LL.D., A.R.C.M., F.R.C.O. Illustrations by The
Templars Quartette. (Norman Stone, A.C. Dixon, F.C. Hastwell, J. Halford).

Sources: *Avenue Free Churchman*, July 1901, vi; September 1904, xvii; September 1905,
iii; October 1909, 3; and September 1913, 4.

J. Portswood Mission Guild of Help

Examples of those receiving assistance

Mr S ... suffering from cataract on both eyes, has been a dock labourer until loss of sight made it dangerous for him to go into the Docks; is now to undergo an operation in the Hospital; wife and 2 children destitute in consequence; found foodless and fireless on late Saturday afternoon.

Mrs M ..., a young woman, aged 30, with 8 children, husband at present in Winchester Jail for inability to pay poor rate; getting very small relief from the Parish; in state of [little] more than semi-starvation.

Mrs G ... , a deserted wife, 4 children; husband in Canada; only means an occasional day's charring; most hard-working and deserving woman; cannot go into service because the Workhouse will not admit the children "unless she also becomes a pauper".

Source: *Avenue Free Churchman*, December 1909, 11-12.

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